

Jane Wilson a.k.a. **Weekend Post Advice Lady** "To me the perfect man would be the character Ken Olin played on *thirtysomething*, Michael Stedman. (Hmm, Steady Man?). He was the perfect husband, father and provider plus sexy, gorgeous and soulful. At the end of the day, I guess those old-fashioned images still hold a lot of appeal. I am *such* a yuppie! In real life, I like Jimmy Carter's integrity, loyalty and honesty."



Alecia Bell, president, **Elite Model Management**

"I don't really have a specific ideal, probably because I haven't been lucky enough to meet the ideal man. But if I had to pick, I'd say the James Bond image minus the womanizing. And so that would leave you with a Clint Eastwood type of guy."



His grace.



A SOCIATED PRESS

His money.



TORSTEN BLACKWOOD/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

His butt.



RHONA WISE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

His charm.



The Perfect

Susan Musgrave, writer “My Perfect Man lives for the moment; he doesn’t know the meaning of the word ‘safety’ unless it’s on a machine gun. A man with a killer instinct — like Pablo Escobar — who died trying to make the world a safer place for crime.”



Tricia Helfer, Canadian supermodel “I would have to say that I don’t believe there is A Perfect Man. For me to say someone is perfect, he would have to be ambitious, proud, have made his own money and taken care of it. He would have to have a heart of gold, [be] humorous, caring, monogamous, passionate, active and sporty. He would have to love his family deeply, be able to be a wonderful father, love cats, be open to suggestions and experiences and would have to want all the same from me. He’d also have to look like a Greek god, so if there is a man like that I’d like to know.”

BY ANTONY ANDERSON

ary Grant’s charm. Fred Astaire’s grace. Ricky Martin’s butt. Bill Gates’s bank account. In your dreams. You know that. Your therapist knows that. But you’re still going to look for Him. Nothing wrong with this. The search for The Perfect Man is your destiny and your inheritance. It is both primordial and enslaved to fashion, shaped by the universal and the specific. And it is totally baffling.

I remember a woman friend at university who was smitten with a guy who was brilliant, kind, funny, boyishly attractive. My friend would pine dreamily, “I can just see him getting the kids ready for hockey practice on Saturday mornings.” After months of circling, they finally kiss. But somehow the kiss is all wrong. My friend is horrified. How does she remove her tongue from his with a measure of decorum and diplomacy? How does she retreat from months of tactical manoeuvring? It was not a pretty sight. My friend defended herself with an age-old plea: The chemistry just wasn’t right.

No female jury of her peers would convict her. When you want perfection, everything has to be just right. And that’s why if you are looking for perfection, nothing will ever be right. Fortunately, very few adults still believe they will find the perfect mate.

Based in Toronto, Madeleine Byrnes is a therapist specializing in sexual and erotic healing. She rejects the whole notion of The Perfect Man as unhealthy. “There’s no such thing. We have a cultural delusion that if we find The Perfect Man or Woman we will get perfect love; if we become perfect we will get perfect love. [This is like saying] I’m still looking for Mother and Father to do all the things they promised and to love me unconditionally. I don’t believe we really want that. This is unfinished business with our previous lovers and frustration in our search for some kind of spiritual connection to the universe.”

While most women do not believe in The Perfect Man, they still have a fairly precise idea of who they’re looking for. What makes the search so complex is that it unfolds, consciously and unconsciously, on multiple and parallel playing fields. Who can really say whether

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you’re thinking with your clitoris or your ovaries (and some might argue that ultimately there’s no difference) or responding to some Oedipal psychodrama that you can’t even remember?

Now you economically empowered 21st-century gals may sniff at the idea of being influenced by biological umbilical cords, but the search for The Perfect Man is unavoidably intertwined with the hard facts of female reproduction. James Pfaus is an associate professor of psychology and neuroscience at Concordia University in Montreal: “If you’re a rat with a litter of 16, who cares who you mate with? Even if only eight are healthy, your litter is still viable. But we [humans] tend only to have one child at a time.”

Given that those ancestral choices were life-and-death decisions, choosing a champion hunter was a better choice than getting stuck with the slackers. To

all you boys out there practising air guitar, perfecting your Monty Python imitations, reading liner notes on obscure Bob Dylan bootlegs released only in Norway — too bad.

If there is any doubt about female financial preferences, just reread Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and recall exactly when the prejudiced Elizabeth Bennet fell for the proud Mr. Darcy. As the good lady admits: “It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley.”

If the search for The Perfect Man were strictly a financial and physical issue, the journey would be fairly straightforward. But the biological prime directive to mate with the strongest, most resourceful protective mate is always complicated and spiced by the psychological, what some psychologists call the “love map.”

This map is an emotional and sexual template that influences who you fall in love with. Its contours and borders are drawn by the various events and characters that flow in and out of our lives. It is thought to take shape in childhood and become fairly fixed by adolescence. Our “love maps” distill and define our ideas of The Perfect Man or Woman.

Dr. Eileen Alexander is a marital therapist who practices in Burlington, Ont. “There are some women who have a specific image [of The Perfect Man] and that will depend on culture, background, developmental stages, peer influences and media influences. And it will vary during various stages of life.”

According to one set of studies from Scotland and Japan, some women are even attracted to different types of men at different points in their menstrual cycle. The research revealed that test subjects who were shown photographs of men indicated a preference for tougher-looking guys when they were ovulating and then softer-looking men during the other half of their cycle. One theory suggests that women want tougher he-man genes when they are fertile but prefer Mr. Sensitive to nurture the offspring. Pretty crafty.

But barring such fluctuations, your core preferences can’t be rewired overnight. According to Pfaus: “You’ve got an ideal and that ideal is amenable to change and experience, but at any one

time what you do like is set in stone. The change comes like stalactites being made. It’s so slow you don’t see it. It tends to take years, possibly even decades.”

Someone who watches the fluctuation of female mating habits from the front lines is Brigitte Casper, co-ordinator for the singles service Speed Dating Toronto: “If you’re a 23-year-old woman, you’ve just finished college, you’ve just started your career. You seem to have plenty of time.” And you seem to have plenty of options, Casper says: “In the 20-to-30 age group, I have more guys than women. The younger women can easily meet guys. Often they’re much more picky and pass on a lot more opportunities. They grow up thinking they’re going to meet Mr. Perfect. They pass up opportunities to meet men who don’t match up to their expectations. Then they hit 30 and they become more flexible.”

THE CATEGORIES

In their polling, Compas Inc. researchers found there are basically six types of Canadian “mate-seekers,” ranging from the Good Citizen (the closest to what people look for in a mate) to the Tribalist. The numbers in brackets represent the mean scores each category received.



1. GOOD CITIZEN (6.4) *This is a faithful type of person who would make a good parent and who manages money well. Women are more inclined to look for men with Good Citizen characteristics: 92% of women score these qualities a 7 compared with 69% of men. Overall, the mean scores of our poll suggest that Good Citizen qualities are closest to exactly what people look for in a mate.*



2. SOCIAL CLIMBER (5.4) *Women are more likely to value Social Climber characteristics in their Perfect Man: They want economic achievement, a particularly respected job, financial success and a high level of education. Thus, 54% of women score “a particularly respected job” as a 6 or 7 compared with 33% of men.*



3. CAPTAIN OF THE FOOTBALL/VOLLEYBALL TEAM (5.2) *Irrespective of age or gender, there’s a persistent demand for A Perfect Someone who smiles and laughs a lot, plays a lot of sports with friends and is considered sexually desirable.*

Clarisse (my friend chose her own pseudonym) is a 39-year-old policy analyst with a provincial government. In her teens, her ideal man was “the captain of the hockey team — obviously good-looking; every other girl wanted him; super self-confident; intelligent; lots of alpha-male testosterone.”

Twenty years later, Clarisse’s current and final man plays hockey but he’s not the captain. In fact, he’s a lot quieter than the extroverted captain she used to date. She sighs with real pleasure when she tells me: “My guy has the quiet confidence of a man who likes who he is, who knows he’s going to make a pile of money some day. Now that signals to me alpha-male energy. At some point in life, he started to develop a self-confidence that had to do with what he thinks of himself and nothing to do with what others think of him. That’s what attracts me so much about him. No one can take that away from him. Whereas they can always retire the captain of the hockey team.”

Television producer Phyllis Newman, mid-30s, has gone through a similar shift: “To some degree I’ve been attracted to the same guy since I was six. In my 20s and early 30s, I was really looking for intelligent and charismatic men. They had to be funny, outgoing and lively. Initially they were very fun and exciting but in the long run they weren’t stable or consistent, and at my age I need someone who is solid.”

Like countless women before her, Newman is beginning to discover new types of potential Mr. Rights: “In my mid-30s, I’m starting to look at men differently. I’m starting to date guys I would never have considered a few years ago. They’re a little bit more conservative and subdued. They’re not boring. They have a greater sense of calm. I think what’s important is that I’m open to his world and he is open to mine and we meet somewhere in the middle.”

Perhaps the greatest challenge and illusion in this labyrinthine search is thinking that we’re looking for the perfect mate. This is only partly true. Some therapists argue that we’re really looking for the perfect drama that will allow us to revisit and, we hope, transcend childhood wounds and adult dysfunctions. According to Eileen Alexander, “Part of what drives us in being attracted to certain people is the reliving of whatever the parental relationship was. There are many layers operating that influence our decision-making and our attractions. Some of it is re-enacting what didn’t get completed.”

Like that wise family therapist Mick Jagger once observed, “You can’t always get what you want, but if you try sometimes you just might find you get what you need.” And what most of us seem to need isn’t always that pleasant. Your current adulterous boyfriend or cold aloof husband may wreak havoc on your immediate self-esteem and happiness but these cad are ultimately perfect for your long-term emotional growth.

For years, I watched one friend go through endless circles of discontent because no matter what she did, she was always attracted to and attracted charming freelance (i.e. underemployed) artists. She loved their sensitivity, but she hated their insolvency. She tried to help them manage their limp careers. They came to resent her domineering tendencies. These perfectly arranged duets allowed her to deal with one of her greatest fears (financial insecurity) and one of her

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HOW YOU RATE THE PERFECT MATE

So what do women want in The Perfect Man? Are they the same qualities and physical characteristics a man looks for in The Perfect Woman? Would you — whether you are male or female — rather have a mate who is an excellent parent or an excellent lover? And where do you rank physical attractiveness in the great scheme of things? Do you put a higher value on outstanding lovemaking than outstanding intelligence? Is your perfect person someone who laughs and smiles a lot? Or would you prefer someone with a fat bank account and success on the job or in the community?

Burning questions all. To get some answers, *Weekend Post* asked polling firm Compas Inc. to investigate, and between Jan. 10 and 12 interviews were conducted with a cross-section of 400 Canadian men and women. Samples of this size are normally deemed accurate to within 5 percentage points 19 times out of 20. In this instance, the margin of error is larger because francophones were over-sampled to permit an exploration of possible English-French differences (there weren’t any).

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IDEAL MATE

We asked respondents to rate a number of qualities on a 7-point scale, where 7 means it’s exactly what that person wants in A Perfect Man or Perfect Woman.

The numbers were crunched and a mean score was computed for each of the attributes we asked about.

The Perfect Man (according to women)

1.	Faithful	6.9
2.	Good father	6.7
3.	Smiles and laughs a lot	6.6
4.	Manages money well	6.2
5.	Well-educated and intelligent	6.0
6.	Well-groomed	5.8
7.	Has respected job	5.5
8.	Financially successful	5.5
9.	Skilled at practical things around the house	5.4
10.	Good-looking face	5.1
11.	Good-looking body	4.8
12.	Shares views on religion	4.5
13.	Considered desirable by other women	4.2
14.	Above average interest in sex	3.9
15.	The “boy next door” type	3.6
16.	Same ethnic background	3.3

The Perfect Woman (according to men)

1.	Faithful	6.4
2.	Good mother	6.3
3.	Smiles and laughs a lot	6.2
4.	Well-educated and intelligent	5.9
5.	Manages money well	5.7
6.	Good-looking face	5.6
7.	Well-groomed	5.5
8.	Good-looking body	5.4
9.	Above average interest in sex	5.1
10.	Skilled at practical things around the house	5.0
11.	Has respected job	4.8
12.	Considered desirable by other men	4.6
13.	Financially successful	4.6
14.	Share views on religion	4.1
15.	The “girl next door” type	4.1
16.	Same ethnic background	3.6

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Man

Survival of our species no longer depends on a female choosing The Perfect Man. But that doesn’t make the search any less compelling — or less interesting. Today, *Weekend Post* examines what women want in a man. (Be patient, guys — next week we feature The Perfect Woman)

