

They're the Alpha females: clever, confident, well-off. So what's their problem?

By Andrew Johnson and Jonathan Thompson, 27 February 2005

The higher their IQ, the less chance they have of finding a partner, that's the problem. And guess what? The rule doesn't apply to men

They have been dubbed the "Alpha female" and they have it all: good looks, successful careers, sharp minds and bulging bank accounts. But they have one problem: men do not want to marry them.

Research at four British universities shows that women with high IQs are less likely to get married than those with lower ones.

Researchers from Aberdeen, Bristol, Edinburgh and Glasgow universities discovered that high-IQ women saw their marriage prospects fall dramatically, but that men with high IQs had little trouble finding a partner. They found that for each 16-point rise in a girl's IQ, her marriage prospects declined by 40 per cent. But the boys' chances of marriage increased by 35 per cent with each 16-point rise.

The marital prospects of the so-called Alpha female last night prompted a debate among academics and feminists about why men are steering clear of a generation of female high achievers. Despite the emergence of the so-called new man those at ease with modern womanhood the research has revealed that Alpha females are being shunned because men are scared that they will not be in control.

Another theory is that Alpha females are being avoided because men are biologically wired to avoid successful partners because of the threat of infidelity, one that could leave them bringing up a child who is not their own.

"The pattern is consistent with the possibility that there were reproductive advantages for males who preferred to form long-term relationships with relatively subordinate partners," said

Stephanie Brown, a social psychologist researching the subject.

"These findings support the widespread belief that powerful women are at a disadvantage in the marriage market because men may prefer to marry less-accomplished women."

The trend follows US studies that showed the problems high-earning New York women had finding partners.

Dr Linda Papadopoulos, a behavioural psychologist and relationships expert, said that Alpha females should carry some of the blame for their unwanted single status.

"If women have invested a certain amount in their career, it's going to take a hell of a lot for Mr Right to sweep them off their feet, because they've got more to lose," she said. "Women in this situation need to be honest with themselves and know what they're really looking for. Maybe they should be looking for someone who complements them, rather than hoping for someone who completes them."

But such comments last night prompted a furious row among experts on the subject. Beatrix Campbell, a feminist writer, poured scorn on the theory that men were worried about bringing up the wrong baby.

"It's nothing to do with biology," she said. "Men's expectation of a marriage is that they will be taken care of. The idea that men will care for and protect their partner is a great trick on women."

"They assume that men want to protect them. But their experience is that men want to be taken care of. Even now if a man is living with a successful partner, the woman will be doing all of the child care and housework."

Marcelle d'Argy Smith, broadcaster and ex-Cosmopolitan editor, was not surprised that high-flying

women had difficulties. "Of course men don't want to marry Alpha females: it means they might not get looked after. Equality was only ever a female ideal. What's wrong with the single life?"

And the author Kathy Lette said: "I've always suspected a man's ideal wife is his secretary as we know how men love a woman they can dictate to. And now this his research backs up this theory."

However, Professor Lisa Jardine, an academic and broadcaster who has been married for 22 years, poured cold water on the suggestions that somehow Alpha women were losing out on love.

"I truly, truly, don't believe it," she said. "I'm an Alpha female and I feel fortunate to have been immensely successful with my career and earnings, and to have found that that has no impact whatsoever on the fabulous nature of my partnership."

'Men are scared of a strong woman'

Bibi Lynch, 38, is a successful journalist and TV presenter who describes herself as a "card-carrying Alpha female".

She has a flat "I love" in London and what she describes as a more-than-healthy social life, but has been single for five years.

"There are a lot of men that are scared and intimidated," she says. "At first they seem to like that you're an Alpha female - you're smart, with a great job and have an opinion. But that also seems to be the deal-breaker. I know an awful lot of women who have great jobs and homes. They are everything that our mothers told us to strive for. But a lot are single, and they could walk into any

bar and attract all the men in there."

Ms Lynch's dating experience supports the theory that some men can't cope with a successful woman. "I had someone say 'you're in a different league to me', and now he's going out with a student," she says. "I didn't meet that many men that I wanted to go out with, but the men I did liked me in the early stages. They were enjoying what I had to offer and showing me off to their friends. Then it would start to be too much. One man I spoke to said he enjoyed bantering with Alpha females, but added that you only banter for the first few weeks of a relationship."

But there is hope in a younger generation of men. "Some men may find Alpha women hard work. They are not going to take any rubbish. The socialising role for men to be breadwinners and protective is still in place. And they want women like their mums. That doesn't reflect well on certain men, although I do think younger men have a different mindset.

"It doesn't put me off men. It's better to be on your own than with the wrong person. I'd always be prepared to wait for someone special. Alpha females are a great thing. It's great that we are equal, clever and funny."

Interview by Andrew Johnson