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Pure Sex, Pure Love

Men DO want to Marry Their Mothers

By Dr. Christine B. Whelan

If the old saying is true that men want to marry a woman like their mother, then this Mother's Day, let's thank moms for leading the way toward gender equality for a younger generation.

New York Times' columnist Maureen Dowd has long complained that today's men are a bunch of insecure wimps who are intimidated by smart—high achieving women and, she argues only want to marry their mother or some intellectually inferior woman to avoid their masculinity being threatened.

The Dowd pronouncements have caused millions of today's high achieving women to fret over their probabilities of ever getting married. It turns out that Ms. Dowd is correct: Today's men do want to marry someone just like that mother—but the stereotype has completely changed in the last generation. The mother-figure guiding young men's marriage decisions is much more likely to be a smart, successful woman in her own right.

Sons of Pioneers

Modern, successful men in their 20s and 30s today are the sons of pioneering generations of high-achieving career women. Their mothers serve as role models for how a woman can be nurturing and successful at the same time.

The typical mother in the 1950s Norman Rockwell domestic portraits is at home in her apron, surrounded by her children as she sets out the feast she spent all day preparing. Her role was one-dimensional: ensuring domestic harmony for her husband and children. Hubby brought home the bacon—and she cooked it.

Today's mothers could not be more different. The love of family is as strong as ever, but multi-tasking has become a required job skill: According to U.S. Census data, more than

two-thirds of women with children under the age of 18 are in the workforce, and 58% of mothers with children under the age of three are in the labor force.

And this is having ripple effects as young-adults choose our marriage partners. In a study I began for my book, *Why Smart Men Marry Smart Women*, and that I'm continuing to work on at the University of Iowa, whether a young man's mother earned a college degree and whether she worked outside the home while he was growing up seems to have an effect years later when he considers his ideal wife.

Here are some of my findings:

- 68% of high-achieving men agree with the statement, "Smart women make better mothers."
- 72 percent of mothers of high-achieving men worked outside the home when they had children.
- Among those high-achieving men whose mothers worked outside the home, 75 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Men are more attracted to women who are successful in their careers," as opposed to 57 percent of men in the larger survey who said they felt the same way.
- Among married high-achieving men, their mom's employment status while they were growing up and wife's current income are significantly related statistically: Men whose mothers were employed were almost twice as likely to marry women who earned \$50,000 or more a year as men whose mothers were not employed when they were growing up.
- Among married high-achieving men, their mom's education level and their wife's education level are significantly related: 78 percent of men whose mothers had college degrees married women with college degrees, and 19 percent of those men married women with graduate degrees. Of men whose mothers had graduate degrees, 62 percent married women with graduate degrees and 27 percent married women with college degrees.

Of course, it's important to remember that being smart isn't always measured by whether you have a degree or a big paycheck. This Mother's Day, let's thank all our moms for their love and effort. The lessons they taught us can't be measured by degrees or salaries, and for those immeasurable gifts of the heart, we're truly blessed.