

5. Internal characteristics such as compassion and empathy were more valued than physical characteristics such as muscularity or good looks, and aggression less valued as either a parent or partner attribute.

The Phase III interviews and Phase II questionnaire both support the importance to this sample of positive, internal attributes over negative and/or physical attributes. The scoring of the Phase I interview narratives (generated based on the researcher's request for participants to describe themselves and their partners), called the Object Relations Inventory ("ORI")¹ also supports these findings. The mean scores of the ORI Conceptual subscales placed the sample well above the low range of scores and would tend to support a finding that *the sample was more internally focused than externally or physically focused.*

On the heels of "extremely stable," the three characteristics that the greatest number of participants identified in the Phase II questionnaire as what they wanted most in an ideal partner were empathy or being "understanding of others" (117 participants, 96.0% of 122), compassion (116 participants, 95.1% of 122) and affection (112 participants, 91.8% of 122). What the lowest number of participants identified as attributes that they wanted most in an ideal partner were aggression (15 participants, 12.3%), forcefulness (19 participants, 15.6%) and muscularity (20 participants, 16.39%). Good looks were most important to 31 participants (25.4%).

Participants in this study sample maintained long lasting relationships with men whose top rated attributes were, as stated before, compassion, stability, career accomplishment, self-sufficiency and predictability. Participants who deemed their real partners to be extremely muscular (19, 15.6%), aggressive (21, 17.2%), athletic (22, 18.0%) or good looking (38, 31.2%) were a significantly smaller subset of the study sample than those who deemed real partners to be compassionate, stable, career accomplished, self-sufficient and predictable.

In U.S. culture, the attributes of aggression and aggressiveness are usually associated with masculinity and often frequently deemed a contributor—both for men or for women—to career success and accomplishment. The Phase II online questionnaire indicated that the top four attributes that participants used in describing their actual (not their ideal) partners were extremely compassionate (103 participants, 84.4%), extremely stable (100 participants, 82.0%) and extremely accomplished in his career (93 participants, 76.2%), followed by extremely self-sufficient (87 participants, 71.31%). In contrast, only 21 participants described their partners as being extremely aggressive, with this attribute receiving the lowest ranking of any partner attribute. Even fewer participants (15 participants, 12.3%) deemed aggression an extremely important attribute of an ideal partner. It is interesting that the attributes abutting career accomplishment did not include aggression, but rather compassion, stability and self-sufficiency.

¹ For a quick overview of the Object Relations Inventory, please click on the "About the ORI" link.