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**What Men Like in Men: An Argument from 1902**



*Editor’s Note: The following article appeared in a 1902 issue of Cosmopolitan Magazine (which started out as a quality family magazine before becoming a women’s rag). I think it raises an interesting question: What do men like or admire in other men? Lots of articles these days are about what men find attractive in women or what women find attractive in men, but rarely discussed are the qualities that men respect and admire in each other. It seems like men sort of intuitively know what traits we respect in other men, but we often cannot articulate them. This article attempts to put such thoughts into words.*

*I’d be curious to know if you think the same traits that the author found noteworthy in men over 100 years ago are still ones that modern men admire in each other. What traits would you leave out or add in? Share in the comments!*

*Please remember as you read this article that****it was written in 1902.*** *So the author has some opinions that might offend modern sensibilities. Though in my opinion men admire men who do not get offended by things, but are able simply to voice their disagreement and support their dissent through well-reasoned arguments.*

**“What Men Like in Men”**
**By Rafford Pyke**
***Cosmopolitan Magazine*, August 1902**

If you were to ask the average man to tell you offhand just what qualities he likes in other men, he would probably boggle a good deal over his answer. His first impulse would be to say, “Oh, I don’t know!” which is with men a convenient formula for avoiding thought upon unexpected or (to them) uninteresting topics. A little later, after turning the matter over in his mind, he would give you a catalogue of qualities to which he would be willing to swear. His list, however, would bear a strong resemblance to the “hundred-best-book” lists made my persons who sincerely believe that they are expressing their own literary preferences, but who are actually indulging in a bit of intellectual pose. Just as these individuals mention the books which they feel they ought to enjoy reading rather than those which they really read, so the average man will name a number of qualities which he thinks he likes, rather than those which in his heart of hearts he actually does like.

In the case of one who tries to enumerate the characteristics which he admires in other men, this sort of answer is not insincere. Although it is defective, and essentially untrue, the man himself is quite unconscious of the fact. The inaccuracy of his answers really comes from his inability to analyze his own preferences. The typical man is curiously deficient in a capacity for self-analysis. He seldom devotes any serious thought to the origin of his opinions, the determining factor in his judgments, the ultimate source of his desires, or the hidden mainsprings of his motives. In all that relates to the external and material world he observes shrewdly, reasons logically, and acts effectively; but question him as to the phenomena of the inner world – the world of his own Ego – and he is dazed and helpless. This he never bothers his head about, and when you interrogate him closely and do not let him put you off with easy generalities, he will become confused and at last contemptuous, if not actually angry. He will begin so suspect that you are just a little “queer”; and if he knows you well enough to be quite frank with you, he will stigmatize your psychological inquiries as “rot.”…

So when you ask a man just what it is that he most likes in other men you find him utterly unable to give you any satisfactory reply. …

[I]t will clear the ground a little if we first discover what it is that men dislike in men.

I suppose that every man who *is* a man would readily agree that he dislikes a “Sissy”; but it is doubtful whether most persons could give off-hand a really comprehensive definition of what a Sissy really is…

The subject of Sissyism is really very interesting – first because there are so many Sissies in the world, and in the second place because only a very small number of them are usually recognized as being such. Hence it may be worthwhile to give a little space to Sissyism here and to regard it in a scientific spirit, since, negatively at least, it has a definite bearing upon the subject of this paper.

Most persons when they think of Sissies, have a mental picture before them which is easily described. A slender, youthful figure, smooth-faced, a little vacuous in the expression of the countenance, with light hair and rather pale blue eyes a little wide apart; a voice not necessarily weak, but lacking *timbre*, resonance, carrying-power. The mouth is wavery and the lips are imperfectly closed. The chin tapers away a little. The shoulders slope, not with that peculiar slope and droop which often accompany great physical strength, as shown in the famous statue of the Farnese Hercules, but slanting straight down, so that unless they are scientifically padded by the Sissy’s tailor, they scarcely give you the effect of being shoulders. The neck is usually long, and the *pomum Adami* or Adam’s apple is very likely to be noticeable. The hands and feet are often large; or if not large, not very well compacted and put together, but giving one a general feeling that they are more or less imperfect. Such are the main physical attributes of one particular kind of Sissy.

In other respects his traits may easily be sketched and recognized. He is polite and rather anxious to please. He wishes always to do the thing which happens to be the proper thing at any given time. He never would think of initiating anything novel or starting out in a new and unexpected course. He likes very much to be with ladies, and ladies like him – in a way. He is a most useful creature and absolutely harmless, intended by Providence to carry wraps and rugs, to order carriages, to provide theater-tickets, flowers, bon-bons, opera-boxes and four-in-hands, according to his means and the position which he holds. He will call regularly upon a girl and in fact upon all the girls he knows, and he will keep it up for years, and it will never mean anything to him or to them, for he is essentially a tame cat…He is really an indispensable person in our modern life; for it is desirable that young women should have some male creature about them to fetch and carry – one who will do it all for the mere pleasure of the service, and who will never agitate them and disquiet them or make them feel it necessary to be on their guard. The best picture of a this especial type of Sissy, perhaps a little bit idealized, is that which is drawn by Henry James in his delicious story, “An International Episode.” Turn to its pages and you will find there a sublimated portrait of a Sissy, in the character who bears the subtly felicitous and expressive name of Willie Woodley.

But the Sissy of this sort is of no particular interest to philosophical students of human life. He is merely a somewhat effeminate young person who does not count. Men laugh at him, perhaps; yet he is not of sufficient consequence to be actively disliked. The true Sissy, who has never yet been classified as such, is the man of any age or any external appearance who for certain physical reasons always inspires you with a vague yet insurmountable feeling of *malaise.* He need not be a physical weakling at all. The most perfect specimen of this type that I have ever seen was a man over six feet in height, of powerful build, and with the torso of a gladiator. When you first saw him you said to yourself, “Here is a man!” Yet he was a Sissy all the same. Nature had merely mocked him in giving him a presence such as his. Back of his thews and sinews, back of his broad chest and massive head, there dwelt a Sissy-soul, and every man and woman who came to know him felt it by an unerring instinct. I never encountered so striking an illustration of the relative importance of mind and body. When he spoke, he uttered nothing but inanities. When he laughed, the sound concealed a giggle. When he was angry, he scolded like a peevish woman. When he was hurt, he whined. When he was pleased, he simpered. Whatever he did or said or thought, he was always flat. This kind of Sissy is the kind that men dislike – and women too; and the reason for it when you get down to the last analysis, is that in everything he is somehow incomplete. He tries to do as others do, and yet he never rings quite true. With men he endeavors to assume an air of manliness, and they laugh at him or else avoid him. He is always groping for something that he never finds. With women he endeavors to ingratiate himself, and they resent it. He is chicken-hearted, cold, and fearful. He would like to be considered dangerous – a rake, a man of the world, a *gaillard,* a *viveur* – and when he nerves himself up to some piece of petty vice, he runs about the cackles over it, though all the while he quakes internally lest the wrong persons should ever hear it. He has no daring, but he ventures on all sorts of odious little familiarities – the furtive squeezing of hands, the pressure of arms, the ogling and leering which he considers safe and yet conducive to a reputation for gallantry. He is of the class of the street masher, only with him it all means nothing, for his blood is water. How women hate him! They will always, in their heart of hearts, pardon a man who is impetuously overbold, even though they ever after shut him from their presence; but a Sissy with his flabby, feeble, mawkish imitation of an ardor which he never felt, affects them with a sort of moral nausea. Nothing that he tries to be can he succeed in being. He tries to be witty and is only flat; he tries to be profound and is only platitudinous; he tries to be daring and is only impudent; he tries to be ardent and is only offensive. As I said before, he represents a certain intellectual and spiritual incompleteness, in the presence of which the normal man experiences a most intense repulsion.

The traits in which this type of Sissy is most lacking are the traits which men most like in men. And yet this is a very negative description. Moreover we must distinguish between the man who is merely “popular” with others, and the man who is really liked, the man to whom other men will go not only in their jovial moods but in their serious ones as well, the man for whom they will make sacrifices and of whose friendship they are really proud. Many a man with easy manners, with a reckless, careless, hearty air, is popular. He has the gift of picking up acquaintances at every turn, of entertaining them, of making himself known as a “good fellow.” Yet all this sort of thing is superficial. Deep down there must be something more fundamental in order that a man may grasp and hold the hearts of other men. These vital attributes are few in number, and with the exception of just one they do not need much more than a mere mention.

First of all, a man must be what other men call “square” – which implies that he must have a sense of honor. This means so much in the relations of men with men. From women they do not expect it, at least in the fullest sense – a man’s sense; but it is the very corner-stone of friendship among men. For it does not mean that one must be merely true to his friends, but, in a sense, to those who are not his friends, who are even, possibly, his enemies. Fair play and the rigor of the game is a masculine ideal; and men will trust and like and honor those who live up to its strict requirements. The foundation of it all is justice – the most masculine of virtues, and the only one in which no woman ever had a share. Some women have been generous, and many have been brave and wise and self-denying, but there has never lived a woman who was absolutely just. Justice, even-handed, clear-eyed, supreme over prejudice and passion – this is God’s gift to man alone, and man alone can feel how splendid and sublime a thing it is.

Allied to it is reasonableness, another virtue that appeals to men when found in other men. It involves a number of related qualities, and most of all a sense of humor which throws a clear light of its own upon so many difficulties, and sets things in their true proportions, and shows how small the small things really are. Reasonableness is the lubricant of life, as the lack of it is the irritant. No other virtue can quite compensate for the absence of this reasonableness; and he who has the quality is one to whom all men will be drawn as by a magnet.

Then there is courage, without which man is not a man; and generosity, which really is an element of reasonableness; and with these, modesty, which, while it quietly conceals the other traits, does in the end enhance their value and increase the charm which they possess. And dignity, which many would not name or think of, is a most important element in the character of the man whom other men most like. For dignity is not to be confounded with its counterfeits – with stiffness or pomposity, or even with reserve. It is the touch of self-respect which exists in every fine character and which is never consciously assertive but which even the most careless spirit can feel and recognize. No really great man ever lacked it; and no human being ever felt it to be other than a claim upon his liking. For it means that somewhere there exists a barrier which none can pass, a barrier which shuts the way to the sanctuary of a human soul. And men respect this, and without respect there is no liking that endures.

The last of all the qualities which men like most in men is one of which but few are conscious even when they feel its influence. We have seen that men dislike effeminacy. They do. Yet in the nature of men whom other men like best there is always to be traced a touch of something that is feminine. It is like a thread of silver woven in some useful fabric, gleaming amid the plain, strong texture of the web, not very noticeable and yet imparting just a hint of beauty to the whole. This feminine quality in man gives fineness to the character. Intellectually it means intuition, sensitiveness to all impressions, and the imaginative element which illumines the dark places of the mind and shows the way to great achievement. Temperamentally it denotes gentleness, and the tenderness which is the perfect complement to strength. It is to men who have this last and finest gift, that other men, since history began, have given not alone their liking but their service, their devotion, and their very lives.

What then is the conclusion? Men like in men these traits: the honor that ennobles; the justice that insures the right; the reasonableness that mellows and makes plain; the courage that proclaims virility; the generous instinct that disdains all meanness; the modesty that makes no boast; the dignity that wins respect; the fineness and the tenderness that know and feel. But when one thinks of it more carefully, may he not sum it up in just a single sentence, and accept it as truth, that all men like a gentleman?

Brett
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