

## PARENT-OFFSPRING CONFLICT OVER THE AGE OF PROSPECTIVE SPOUSES

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*Keywords:* parent, offspring, prospective spouses, age, conflict.

Parents and their offspring are not genetically identical as, although all of the offspring's genes come from their parents, not all of the parents' genes are present in the offspring. The offspring make mate choices which maximize their own fitness, but because the two parties are not genetically identical these choices do not necessarily maximize the genetic fitness of their parents. Thus, conflict will arise between parents and offspring over the offspring's mating decisions, as they present each party with unequal benefits (Apostolou, 2008; Buunk, Park, & Dubbs, 2008).

Based on this premise, Apostolou (2007) hypothesized that parents and offspring are likely to disagree over the genetic quality of a mating candidate, with genetic quality being valued more in a spouse than in an in-law. Consistent with this hypothesis, Apostolou (2008) found that individuals value beauty, an indicator of genetic quality, more in a spouse than in an in-law. Researchers have found that parents and offspring also disagree over family background, personality traits, and religious background (Apostolou, 2008; Buunk et al., 2008).

Disagreement between parents and offspring is also expected to arise over the age of the prospective spouse. The hypothesis in the present study was that parents will prefer as spouses for their offspring individuals who are older than the offspring prefer for themselves.

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Appreciation is due to anonymous reviewers.

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As they age, individuals' resource acquisition capacity increases but reproductive capacity decreases. Consequently, mate seekers are expected to prefer mates who are old enough to be capable of providing resources, but young enough to have many reproductive years ahead of them. However, parents may prefer to trade-off the number of reproductive years in order to get an in-law with a higher resource acquisition capacity. Accordingly, it was hypothesized that individuals will prefer younger spouses for themselves than they would prefer for their offspring.

A total of 266 British participants, 135 women and 131 men, who were parents, completed an online survey. Sexually mature individuals who had children were selected as participants in this study because they could act as both parents and mate seekers.

The survey consisted of two parts. Participants were first asked to assume that they had two children, one male and one female, who had recently entered puberty. Participants had then to indicate whether they would prefer their sons-in-law and their daughters-in-law to be older than, younger than or the same age as their daughters and sons respectively. In the case that participants chose either the older or younger options, they were asked to indicate the preferred age difference in years. Participants were then asked to assume that they were not married and they had recently entered puberty and to indicate whether they would prefer their spouses to be older than, younger than or the same age as themselves and in the older/younger case to indicate the preferred age difference.

Male participants who selected a preference for an age difference, preferred wives who were younger than themselves and daughters-in-law who were younger than their sons. A paired samples *t* test indicated that male parents preferred wives who were younger than the wives they preferred for their sons [ $t(39) = 6.75, p < .001$  (two-tailed)]. Similarly, when female participants selected a preference for an age difference, they chose to have spouses who were older than themselves and sons-in-law who were older than their daughters. However, comparisons in the preferred age difference between female participants and daughters produced no significant results.

The preference for youth found in the survey may reflect a preference for genetic quality as indicated by beauty since younger women are perceived as more beautiful than older women and individuals ascribe more value to the genetic quality of their spouses, than to the genetic quality of their in-laws.

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