

2011

May-December Paradoxes: An Exploration of Age-Gap Relationships in Western Society

Justin Lehmler

Colorado State University - Fort Collins, justin.lehmler@colostate.edu

Christopher Agnew

Purdue University, agnew@purdue.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/psychpubs>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lehmler, Justin and Agnew, Christopher, "May-December Paradoxes: An Exploration of Age-Gap Relationships in Western Society" (2011). *Department of Psychological Sciences Faculty Publications*. Paper 27.
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/psychpubs/27>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

To appear in:

W. R. Cupach & B. H. Spitzberg (Eds.), *The Dark Side of Close Relationships*
II. New York, NY: Routledge.

May-December Paradoxes:

An Exploration of Age-Gap Relationships in Western Society

Justin J. Lehmiller

Colorado State University

Christopher R. Agnew

Purdue University

Correspondence regarding this chapter should be sent to Justin J. Lehmiller,
Department of Psychology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, 80523-
1876, justin.lehmiller@colostate.edu.

May-December Paradoxes:

An Exploration of Age-Gap Relationships in Western Society

In the cinematic classic *The Graduate*, 21-year-old Benjamin Braddock (played by Dustin Hoffman) is seduced by the much older, but very attractive Mrs. Robinson (played by Anne Bancroft), the wife of one of his father's friends. This seduction results in an ongoing affair that lasts for an entire summer. As the film progresses, the plot becomes a bit convoluted as Benjamin falls madly in love with Mrs. Robinson's daughter, Elaine (played by Katherine Ross), who then becomes the target of his romantic pursuits. Although Benjamin and Elaine wind up together in the end, the relationship most often remembered and mentioned by viewers of this film is that initial affair between Benjamin and Mrs. Robinson. This is partly due to the extra-marital nature of the relationship, which was somewhat scandalous at the time of the film's release in 1967. The bigger reason why this romance sticks out in people's minds, however, is because it violated societal conventions with regard to partner age differences in romantic involvements. That is, in Western societies, and most other societies throughout the world, heterosexual men tend to be older than their female partners, and it is not uncommon for them to be significantly older. Relationships that follow this pattern typically attract relatively little attention and scrutiny. In contrast, heterosexual romances involving a woman who is older than her male partner are

relatively rare and people usually take notice of them. This has been the case throughout history. Even today, more than 40 years after the release of *The Graduate*, the sheer pairing of an older woman with a younger man in Hollywood is considered newsworthy by the popular media. In fact, such relationships are so novel that they have now become the primary focus of multiple television shows. Society does not tend to look favorably upon relationships in which the older partner is female, though, and the women involved are often judged in an especially harsh manner. In fact, rather than seeing them as women looking for true love, they are assumed to share Mrs. Robinson's desire to seduce or sexually prey upon young men, being stereotyped as "cougars."

One of the goals of this chapter is to account for this seeming paradox—that is, why heterosexual age-gaps only seem to be socially acceptable when the older partner is a man. To that end, we will consider a variety of social psychological theories relevant to romantic relationships that speak to the circumstances under which people are likely to desire younger or older romantic partners. In addition, this chapter will explore the relatively limited body of research that exists with regard to age-gap (also known as age-discrepant or 'May-December') romances, giving due consideration to other interesting paradoxes that have emerged as well as discussing the general effects that being in such a relationship has on various romantic outcomes. Finally, we will present an agenda for future research on this topic.

We begin by discussing the ubiquity of age discrepancies in people's romantic involvements as well as how age-gap relationships are defined. Before doing so, we should note that essentially all research conducted to date in this area has focused exclusively on age differences as they occur in heterosexual romantic involvements. For this reason, the primary focus of this chapter concerns heterosexual partnerships. Where possible, however, we also address age-gaps as they are relevant to homosexual romances. Additionally, we should clarify that our interest is only in accounting for age-gap relationships as they pertain to consenting adults. We are therefore not concerned here with age-gap relationships that are abusive, illegal, or nonconsensual in nature (e.g., child seduction, statutory rape).

Age Differences in Heterosexual Romantic Relationships

In Western societies, adult men generally prefer female partners who are somewhat younger than themselves, while adult women generally prefer male partners who are somewhat older than themselves (e.g., Buss, 1989; Kenrick, Gabrielidis, Keefe, & Cornelius, 1996; Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). Such findings have been noted across numerous studies using a variety of methods (e.g., asking participants how likely they would be to date targets of various ages, analyzing the content of personal advertisements placed in newspapers). On average, men prefer partners approximately three years younger, in contrast with women, who prefer partners approximately three years older (Buss, 1989). Consistent with

these preferences, United Nations (2000) data indicate that the average marital age-gap is just under three years in North America (2.7 years on average in both the United States and Canada), with the direction of the discrepancy favoring men as the older partners. Marital age-discrepancies throughout Europe and South America are fairly similar.

Although the focus of this chapter is on age-gap relationships in Western societies, the general tendency for older men to pair with younger women is a worldwide phenomenon that has been documented in virtually all human societies, both past and present (see Ni Bhrolchain, 2006). There is some variability, however, in terms of the size of the average marital age difference across cultures (United Nations, 2000). For instance, in some African countries, the average age difference between married partners is three times the size of that in most Western countries, approaching almost 10 years in some cases. This suggests that in non-Western countries, partner age preferences might be vastly different given variations in cultural norms. As some demonstration of this variability, average age differences between husbands and wives in selected regions throughout the world are presented in Table 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Within Western societies, though, both men and women appear willing to consider partners who fall outside of the desired ± 3 year window. Specifically, men's minimum acceptable age for a female partner is several years below their

own age (5 to 15 years, with older men willing to consider relationships with larger age differences). In comparison, women's maximum acceptable age for a male partner is approximately 10 years above their own age, with this number remaining relatively constant as women age (Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). Thus, although there appears to be a general preference for small age gaps in Westerners' relationships, they appear to remain open to somewhat larger age gaps.

Openness to larger age gaps is moderated by multiple factors, however, including one's sex, chronological age, as well as whether one is on their first or a later marriage (for an extensive discussion of these and other moderators, see Ni Bhrolchain, 2006). For instance, the older a man is at the time of marriage, the younger his female partner is likely to be. In other words, as men get older, their tendency to partner with someone younger actually increases. The converse is true for women—the older a woman is at the time of marriage, the smaller the size of the relational age-gap (Ni Bhrolchain). Another interesting paradox is that when men remarry, that union is likely to carry a greater age difference than the first marriage. For remarrying women, though, they tend to be closer in age to the new husband than their original partner (Ni Bhrolchain).

Taken together, the above findings indicate that at least some age difference is normative in heterosexual romantic involvements, but clearly the relative size of this difference varies depending upon numerous factors. This

makes defining what constitutes a truly age-discrepant relationship (i.e., one that is perceived by society as anomalous) somewhat subjective. Complicating matters further, the social significance ascribed to a given age difference will vary depending upon where the partners involved currently are in the lifespan. For instance, a five year age-gap likely means little when the younger partner is 50-years-old. In contrast, however, a five year age difference likely means much more when the younger partner is only 16 or 17, which meets the age of sexual consent in most Western countries, but just barely. Thus, it is difficult to pinpoint the minimum age-gap threshold that would consistently be perceived as violating social conventions.

In the social psychological literature, age-gap relationships have recently been defined as romantic involvements in which there is a difference of greater than 10 years in age between the partners (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006, 2007, 2008). It is proposed that an age difference of more than 10 years is likely to carry some meaning for partners in any relationship, regardless of the actual age of the individuals involved. Moreover, when people are asked to consider how much of an age difference they would be willing to accept when selecting a romantic partner, 10 years appears to be the maximum acceptable difference on average, particularly for women (Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). Because differences beyond 10 years appear to be regarded as non-normative by most everyone except for much older men, it seems especially informative to consider this as a general starting

point for defining an age-gap romance. Of course, however, this definition might fail to capture certain individuals who consider a smaller age discrepancy to be meaningful depending upon their idiosyncratic social circumstances.

Additionally, this cutoff might need to be revised in cross-cultural studies, given the aforementioned variability in age-gap size that has been documented in some African countries (United Nations, 2000).

With this operational definition for age-gap relationships in mind, one might wonder just how common such romances are in Western society. Not surprisingly, although small age discrepancies are common, true age-gap relationships are in the minority, but they certainly are not insignificant in number. For instance, United States census data indicate that 8.5% of married couples are involved in age-gap relationships (7.2% involve an older man, 1.3% involve an older woman; U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). For enhanced perspective, Table 2 provides a complete breakdown of age differences between husbands and wives in the United States. Canadian census data are virtually identical, with 8% of male-female unions classified as age-gap (7% involve an older man, 1% involve an older woman; Boyd & Li, 2003). The Canadian data are particularly interesting in that they suggest age-gaps are more prevalent among same-sex partners (26% of male same-sex couples, 18% of female same-sex couples) compared to heterosexual couples. Although it is not clear what accounts for this difference, together, these data indicate that age-gap relationships certainly do

exist in Western society, but having a substantial (i.e., greater than 10 year) age discrepancy does not appear to be the norm.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Theoretical Perspectives on Age-Gap Relationships

The preceding discussion suggests that age differences in heterosexual romantic relationships are relatively common and that, in general, men tend to be the older partners. With that in mind, the real question then becomes how best to explain this pattern of findings. We now turn our focus to several social psychological perspectives that can potentially explain the existence of relational age-discrepancies and that would make specific predictions about (a) the consequences of being involved in an age-gap partnership and (b) how outside observers might perceive such relationships. These perspectives fall into two broad classes: those derived from evolutionary theory, and those derived from socio-cultural theories.

Evolutionary Perspectives on Age-Gap Relationships

The evolutionary perspective (e.g., Buss, 1989; Kenrick & Keefe, 1992) argues that modern day men's and women's partner age preferences can be explained as a function of selective processes that occurred in our evolutionary history. Because men and women invest different resources in order to produce offspring, they should have evolved preferences for different characteristics in potential sexual and romantic partners. In producing children, men tend to invest

resources such as food, shelter, and security. As a result, women should be more attracted to men who possess those resources or have demonstrated potential at obtaining such resources in order to ensure survival for themselves and any potential offspring produced. Because men are likely to accumulate more of these resources as they age, women should prefer male partners who are older than themselves.

In comparison, due to the nature of human sexual reproduction, women invest much more in the way of bodily resources in producing children. Men consequently should be more attracted to women who appear to be healthy and fertile, thus improving the chances of successful sexual reproduction. Age is an important visible cue of a woman's fertility, given that women have a limited reproductive window. Because women are only capable of reproduction from puberty until the onset of menopause (which is currently between ages 51 and 52 on average in the United States; Gold et al., 2001) and have peak reproductive capability in their twenties, men should generally have a preference for younger female partners, particularly those who are in their reproductive years. This helps to explain why younger men's age preferences are not as pronounced as those of older men. That is, preferring partners much younger than oneself is not necessarily advantageous for an already youthful man to successfully reproduce (and, in fact, may actually harm his chances); as men age, however, preferring younger and younger partners is more likely to result in successful reproduction.

Also, because men need to expend few bodily resources to produce children and do not experience a precipitous drop in fertility as they age (Menken & Larsen, 1986), male youth is less likely to be valued by women. Certainly, men's health does decline with age and reproduction may become somewhat more difficult, but this is likely to be offset in terms of how they are viewed by the other sex due to the fact that men's resources may continue to build even when they are no longer in the prime of their lives.

Thus, from the evolutionary perspective, the pairing of an older man with a younger woman is one that tends to favor reproductive success because younger women are more fertile and older men are more likely to possess the resources necessary to support any potential offspring. This is consistent with the research presented above demonstrating that, throughout the world, men seem to desire and marry younger female partners, while women typically desire and marry older male partners.

From this standpoint, one might expect that age-gap relationships in which the woman is younger than her male partner will result in greater relationship satisfaction and commitment relative to relationships in which the female partner is older because both partners' procreative needs are being met in this case (assuming, that is, that we are talking about women who are potentially of childbearing age). One might also expect that such relationships will be perceived as more normative by society and that age-gaps that occur in the opposite

direction (i.e., when the female partner is older) will be greater targets of social disapproval because they run contrary to our evolved tendencies.

Although the evolutionary perspective fits well with the above data on partner age preferences and marital age-gaps, it is not without its limitations (for a detailed discussion, see Ni Bhrolchain, 2006). For example, an analysis of personal advertisements placed in newspapers by homosexual individuals revealed that they exhibit very similar age preferences to heterosexual individuals, particularly when looking at data from men (e.g., Hayes, 1995; cf. Sprecher, this volume). It is unclear why this would be the case, given that an age preference one way or the other has no bearing on reproductive potential for homosexual persons. As a further limitation, heterosexual men seem open to potential partners within a relatively wide age range (Kenrick et al., 1996; Ni Bhrolchain, 2006). If reproductive potential truly is the driving force behind men's age preferences, it would seem more logical for heterosexual men, regardless of age, to largely prefer women in their peak reproductive years.

Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Age-Gap Relationships

In contrast to the evolutionary perspective, a variety of socio-cultural perspectives also provide compelling accounts of age-related preferences and make quite different predictions about the implications of being involved in an age-gap romance. In particular, we address in detail two major perspectives: the equity and social exchange views, and the social role view. We also give

consideration to a few other socio-cultural possibilities that have emerged in the literature.

The equity and social exchange perspectives. Another way to explain men and women's partner age preferences is to think of heterosexual relationships in social exchange terms. At the most basic level, social exchange theory (Homans, 1961; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) proposes that how we feel about a given social interaction or relationship fundamentally depends upon the perceived outcomes (i.e., costs and benefits) associated with it. Specifically, when rewards are high and costs are seen as low, we tend to feel good about a relationship and will stay in it. If perceived costs increase and/or perceived benefits decrease, however, satisfaction with the relationship will decline and we are more likely to end it.

In the context of an age-gap relationship, an older man providing resources for a young, attractive woman can be viewed as a social exchange. That is, he provides shelter, food, and security in exchange for her providing sex and, thereby, an opportunity for procreation (for a more elaborated discussion on the idea of sex as a form of social exchange, see Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). It is likely that such an arrangement would be perceived as carrying a favorable cost-to-benefit ratio for all involved because it meets important needs for both partners. From this perspective, one might reasonably deduce that older men and younger women will be drawn toward one another because the circumstances are likely to promote an optimal social exchange.

An important caveat to this, however, is that people's perceptions of their relationships depend upon whether the social exchanges that occur are equitable (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Equitable or fair exchanges are necessary in order to avoid conflict between relationship partners. Although the exchange of sex for resources might carry benefits for both men and women, women typically hold less social power and status compared to men in Western society and thus might not be receiving as good of a deal as men in such exchanges. From this perspective, one could make the case that age-gap relationships involving an older woman with a younger man might actually produce more equitable outcomes and, consequently, greater relationship satisfaction compared to relationships in which the woman is the younger partner. That is, perhaps woman-older relationships are more egalitarian than woman-younger relationships because women have more power when they are older than their male partners. For example, they may be more established in their life circumstances and/or more financially secure. To the extent that woman-older relationships are more equal than those in which the woman is younger, woman-older partners may find themselves to be more satisfied and committed, given that perceived relationship equality tends to be positively associated with both relationship satisfaction (e.g., Donaghue & Fallon, 2003) and commitment (e.g., Winn, Crawford, & Fischer, 1991). Such a prediction stands in stark contrast to what might be expected based on the evolutionary perspective.

Social role perspective. Another plausible socio-cultural explanation for men and women's partner age preferences can be derived from social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 1999). From this perspective, the traditional division of labor between the sexes has resulted in women typically fulfilling the social role of homemaker (domestic labor) and men typically fulfilling the social role of provider (wage labor). As a consequence of occupying these different social roles, men and women have developed distinct psychological tendencies, particularly when it comes to mate preferences. If women are more likely to anticipate that they will be staying home to raise children and men are more likely to anticipate being responsible for paying the bills (which is not difficult to imagine, given the well known facts that men are not only more likely to be employed in the labor force, but also to make more money; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007), it would make sense that women would attempt to seek male partners who are successful wage earners, while men would attempt to seek female partners who are competent at domestic tasks. As a result, pairings between older men and younger women seem logical because they are consistent with the traditional provider-homemaker marital arrangement.

As some evidence for the social role view, experimental research demonstrates that when participants are asked to envision themselves in the future role of either homemaker or provider, participants who imagine themselves as future homemakers emphasize the importance of the provider qualities of their

future mate, including the desire for an older spouse; participants who imagine themselves as future providers emphasize the importance of the homemaker qualities of their future mate, including the desire for a younger spouse (Eagly, Eastwick, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2009). Importantly, these findings hold for both men and women. This suggests that sex-specific age preferences are not completely static and may very well depend upon the social role one envisions fulfilling in the future. Thus, men who do not anticipate being the primary provider in the future should be more open and willing to consider female partners who are older than themselves.

This perspective implies that people's perceptions of age-gap relationships may be largely a function of the degree to which they subscribe to traditional gender role beliefs. In particular, among those who are strong proponents of traditional gender role ideology, woman-younger relationships should be perceived as more socially normative and likely to carry greater chances of relationship success. Among those who possess non-traditional gender role beliefs, the direction of the age-gap may not be perceived as being of much consequence. In fact, for them, woman-older relationships may be perceived as more empowering and, thus, more likely to be successful. Again, the predictions derived from this perspective stand in sharp contrast to those based on the evolutionary standpoint. Moreover, this perspective suggests that traditional gender role beliefs may be an extremely important moderator variable to consider

when examining perceptions of age-gap couples as well as relational processes within age-gap involvements.

Other socio-cultural perspectives. Of course, there are other ways of explaining age-gap relationships from a socio-cultural perspective. For instance, perhaps younger women are more likely to pair with older men because this results in greater psychological similarity between the partners (Ni Bhrolchain, 2006). A mountain of social psychological studies indicate that similarity is one of the driving forces behind romantic attraction (e.g., Byrne, Clore, & Smeaton, 1986; Newcomb, 1978). Although people often seek romantic partners who are similar to themselves in terms of age, this is not a universal trend. Some have argued that because girls tend to grow up faster than boys, they may find boys their own age to be immature and, consequently, not particularly good long-term romantic prospects. As a result, women may need to look for older male partners in order to find someone who matches them in terms of maturity level, social skills, or desire for a long-term commitment. In other words, the pairing of an older man and a younger woman may be one way of finding a partner who provides a good match with respect to level of psycho-social development.

Yet another possibility is that older man-younger woman relationships are more likely to occur because this type of pairing represents an important means of uncertainty reduction for female partners (Ni Bhrolchain, 2006). This perspective builds upon several of the theories discussed above, including the evolutionary,

social exchange, and social role views. Most of these theories would suggest that a woman's economic standing is dependent upon the future success of her male partner. To the extent that this is true, women may be motivated to carefully consider the economic potential of any prospective mate very carefully in order to reduce uncertainty about their future. Because older men are likely to have accomplished more and may have already achieved economic success, women who select older partners are likely to find that this yields more predictable economic results. When women choose younger partners or someone their own age, this may be a risky bet because the future earning prospects of such men are unclear.

Both this and the preceding perspective clearly have more to say about age-gap relationships that occur in the more common direction of older man-younger woman. As a result, they are somewhat limited in that regard. Nonetheless, they reflect intriguing and viable accounts of at least one important age-gap subtype.

As should be evident from this discussion, there are certainly a variety of plausible explanations for the existence of age-gap romances. It should be noted, however, that although one could derive different sets of predictions from the evolutionary and socio-cultural perspectives regarding preferences for age-gap relationships and which types of romances (i.e., woman-older or woman-younger) are likely to be most successful, this is not to say that these theoretical viewpoints

are inherently incompatible with one another. It could very possibly be the case that elements from each perspective provide different pieces of the puzzle, a point that we return to later in this chapter.

The Empirical View of Age-Gap Relationships

Despite extensive theorizing on the topic of age-gap relationships, very few studies explicitly addressing such relationships have been conducted, and most published work in this area has been somewhat atheoretical. We review the documented findings below and synthesize them with the relevant perspectives discussed above, but as will soon become clear, much more research is needed in this interesting, but understudied area.

In the sections that follow, we first consider research addressing societal perceptions of age-discrepant couples and the degree to which age-gap partners perceive their romances as being socially marginalized. Next, we move on to consider research that addresses what it is that keeps age-gap involvements going. In the process, we address both the ups and downs of being part of an age-discrepant relationship, with particular emphasis on implications for romantic commitment.

Societal Perceptions of Age-Gap Relationships

An interesting paradox emerges when considering perceptions of age-gap couples: Although men and women typically report a preference for and openness to age gaps in their own relationships (Buss, 1989; Kenrick & Keefe, 1992), they

typically disapprove of age gaps in others' romantic involvements. For instance, using data from a community sample, Banks and Arnold (2001) found that participants of both sexes generally disapproved of age-gap relationships, regardless of whether the male or female partner was older, though women-older relationships were more likely to be the targets of opposition. In this work, they considered age gaps ranging anywhere from 5 to 50 years and found that disapproval ratings increased substantially as the age difference between the partners increased.

Using data obtained from both adult and adolescent samples, Cowan (1984) likewise found that participants rated age-gap relationships as less likely to succeed than relationships in which no partner age discrepancy was present. Age-gap involvements in which the woman was older were perceived as even more likely to fail. Results of these studies would seem to suggest that at least some degree of bias exists against all age-gap couples, but particularly those in which the woman is older. This seems at least partially consistent with the evolutionary perspective in the sense that relationships that are inconsistent with evolved tendencies (i.e., male preferences for younger women and female preferences for older men) are more likely to be socially rejected.

Regardless of the direction of the age-gap, another interesting paradox is that women tend to bear the brunt of the social criticism levied against age-discrepant couples, while the men involved seem to be ignored for the most part.

For instance, it is commonplace for women who are older than their male partners to be stereotyped as “cougars,” a label suggesting that such women are more likely to be seen as sexual predators rather than individuals seeking true love (Voo, 2007). Likewise, younger women paired with older male partners are often stereotyped as well, frequently being labeled as “gold-diggers.” Again, this label suggests that such women are not in the relationship for true love, but rather, in this case, a desire for material things (Turner, 2008). Negative stereotypes do not seem to exist for men involved in age-gap relationships, regardless of whether they are the younger or older partners. Although an older man who pairs with a younger woman may sometimes be referred to as a “cradle robber,” this term is not nearly as ubiquitous in modern society as the term applied to his female partner (“gold-digger”). Socially speaking, men seem to get a free pass. In fact, older men who pair with much younger women may even receive praise and admiration for having done so, particularly from other men. Thus, when men apply the “cradle robber” title to one another, it may actually have positive connotations. This is consistent with the notion of the sexual double standard (e.g., Milhausen & Herold, 1999), the idea that women (unlike men) are socially denigrated for behaving in sexually permissive ways. Indeed, the stereotypes for women involved in age-gap relationships are suggestive of sexual permissiveness. That is, the women involved are either seen as being in it for sex (cougar) or they are essentially perceived to be trading their bodies for money (gold-digger). Any

way you look at it, the women involved tend to be judged more harshly by society compared to the men.

Finally, it is important to note that this bias against age-gap relationships does not go unnoticed by partners involved. Indeed, age-gap couples (defined as partners separated in age by more than 10 years) perceive substantially more social disapproval regarding their relationship than do couples with only a minimal or no age gap. In fact, in one study, age-discrepant couples reported experiencing significantly more social disapproval than individuals involved in gay or interracial relationships (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006). In another study, age-gap partners reported possessing normative beliefs that were less supportive of their partnerships compared to similarly aged partners (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2008). In other words, compared to people who were similar in age to their partners, age-gap partners were more likely to believe that the people they care about (i.e., their family and friends) would prefer that they end their current romantic relationship. Thus, it seems that age-gap partners are well aware of the social hurdles they face as a result of their romantic involvement.

Relationship Outcomes in Age-Gap Involvements

Until recently, age-gap relationships were assumed to have relatively negative consequences for the partners involved (Berardo, Appel, & Berardo, 1993). It was thought such involvements would encounter problems as a result of significant power imbalances and clashes in personal values stemming from the

fact that the partners grew up in different generations. Given the largely negative societal perceptions of age-gap couples discussed above, one might also assume that difficulties would simply be inherent in such relationships as a result of their reduced likelihood of social acceptance. Empirical research conducted over the past decade, however, would seem to suggest that this is not entirely true. That is, although the low esteem in which age-gap relationships are held by society does have negative implications for commitment and stability in such partnerships, there do seem to be many positive elements to these romances as well.

The dark side of age-gap relationships. An obvious dark side of age-gap relationships implied by the research discussed above is the social marginalization that can result. Individuals involved in age-gap relationships often perceive their partnerships as the targets of social bias from both their own social networks as well as society at large (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006), which has negative consequences for such romances. For instance, Lehmiller and Agnew (2006) found that greater levels of perceived marginalization were associated with lower levels of relational commitment in a cross-sectional study that included a respectably sized sub-sample of age-gap partners. It also appears that the negative effects of perceived marginalization on commitment have implications for the future stability of those involvements. In a longitudinal follow-up study, Lehmiller and Agnew (2007) found that perceived marginalization significantly predicted breakup status assessed approximately seven months later. The nature

of this effect was such that those individuals who perceived more social disapproval at Time 1 were more likely to have broken up at Time 2. Commitment to the relationship mediated this association, indicating that perceived marginalization appears to increase likelihood of relationship dissolution as a result of reducing commitment to the partnership. It was also documented that perceived marginalization by one's social network appeared to be more damaging to the relationship than perceived marginalization by society. This suggests people may have better ability to ignore society's harsh views of their relationship compared to the views of their family and friends.

None of these findings were moderated by type of relationship, and in these particular studies, age-gap, interracial, and same-sex partners were all included in the samples. This suggests that it is not the presence of an age gap *per se* that might harm commitment in age-discrepant romances, but rather it is the perception of social disapproval that is the key. In other words, age-gap relationships are not doomed to fail simply because of the age discrepancy that exists between the partners. Indeed, the theoretical accounts proffered would generally tend to predict such relationships as potentially more functional and stable because of the forces moving people to make such mating choices. Instead, the social network in which such relationships are embedded appears to have extremely important consequences for the future success of such relationships (see Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004). This suggests that age-gap partners who are

surrounded by more support may have better relationship outcomes than those who find themselves in less supportive social environments.

As some final additional evidence for the key role that social perceptions play in the success of age-gap partnerships, Lehmillier and Agnew (2008) found that normative beliefs (i.e., the beliefs one has regarding what others think about one's relationship) predict relationship commitment in a sample composed exclusively of partners involved in age-gap romances. The more that age-gap partners believe others around them want their current relationship to end, the less committed the partners tend to be to that relationship. Although this finding held more strongly for woman-older compared to woman-younger partners in this study, these results provide additional evidence that social support seems to have major implications for whether age-gap relationships are likely to stand the test of time.

The silver linings of age-gap relationships. Despite perceiving a general lack of approval and support for their romantic involvements, age-gap partners seemingly find that there is much to like when it comes to their relationships. For instance, Groot and Van Den Brink (2002) examined the association between life satisfaction and marital age gaps (in this study, a continuous rather than a dichotomous age-gap measure was used). Their results revealed that an age gap in which the husband was older than the wife was associated with increases in life satisfaction for both men and women. In other words, both men and women were

generally happier with their lives to the extent that their household consisted of a husband who was older than the wife, compared to households in which spouses were of the same age or the wife was older than the husband. This finding can be interpreted as consistent with the evolutionary perspective, which posits that relational age gaps are advantageous to the extent that the direction of the age gap maximizes each partner's potential for reproductive success (Buss, 1989).

In addition to increased life satisfaction, research suggests age-gap relationships fare well in other regards. For instance, age-gap partners appear to be more trusting, less jealous, and less selfish in their relationships compared to persons who are more similar in age to their romantic partners (Zak, Armer, Edmunds, Fleury, Sarris, & Shatynski, 2001). Age-gap relationships were somewhat arbitrarily defined in this study, however, with discrepancies of four or more years considered as "age-dissimilar" and less than four years as "age-similar." This is likely attributable to the fact that most participants were college students, meaning that there was relatively little variability when it came to partner age differences. Despite these limitations, however, one can interpret these findings as supportive of the socio-cultural view, particularly the notion that women may be attracted to older male partners because they are more similar in terms of psycho-social development (Ni Bhrolchain, 2006). In other words, to the extent that both partners are more mature in an age-gap relationship, it could lead them to be more trusting of one another and less jealous.

Finally, there is also some research to suggest that age-gap partners may be more committed to one another than similarly-aged partners, at least in some cases. For instance, in a study of women involved in age-gap relationships, levels of relationship commitment tended to be higher among age-gap partners relative to similarly-aged partners (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2008). In this study, the sample was broken down into women who were older than their male partners by more than 10 years (22 years on average), women who were younger than their male partners by more than 10 years (17 years on average), and women who were similar in age to their partners (i.e., 10 or less years apart in age; approximately 3 years on average). The sample was restricted to women age 52 (the average age of menopause onset; Gold et al., 2001) and younger to ensure that all women were at least potentially of reproductive age. Results indicated women-older partners were the most committed to their relationships, and significantly more so compared to women who were similar in age to their partners. Commitment levels for women-younger partners fell in between those of the other two groups and did not significantly differ from either one.

These results seem to be more supportive of the socio-cultural view rather than the evolutionary view. Recall that the evolutionary view might suggest that commitment would be highest among women-younger partners because such an arrangement maximizes reproductive potential for both men and women (Buss, 1989). In this study (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2008), however, woman-older partners

were the most committed, despite the fact that the sample was restricted only to women who were potentially capable of reproduction. One plausible socio-cultural interpretation of these findings is that woman-older relationships are more equitable for the partners involved and, thus, more satisfying compared to relationships in which the woman is younger than or similar in age to her male partner. Thus, greater equality between partners may underlie the enhanced commitment observed among those involved in women-older partnerships.

The investment model in age-gap relationships. One final aspect of age-gap relationships that has received some empirical attention is the degree to which traditional models of interpersonal commitment are relevant in the case of such partnerships. Lehmiller and Agnew (2008) explored the applicability of Rusbult's (1980, 1983) investment model of commitment in a sample of women involved in age-gap relationships. The investment model posits that commitment to a given relationship arises from three related, but distinct factors: satisfaction level, perceived quality of alternatives, and investment size. Satisfaction level refers to one's subjective evaluation of the relationship, particularly one's assessment of how positively or negatively things are going. Quality of alternatives refers to the degree to which one's alternatives to the current relationship are viewed as attractive, or the degree to which one's needs could be met easily outside of their current partnership. Last, investments refer to all of those things tied to one's relationship that would be lost or diminished in value were the relationship to end.

Investments can include both tangible (e.g., children, shared possession) and intangible elements (e.g., time, effort) already sunk into the relationship, or things that individuals plan to invest into the partnership at some point in the future (Goodfriend & Agnew, 2008).

Satisfaction, alternatives, and investments have each been shown to be unique and reliable predictors of relationship commitment and, together, explain the lion's share of the variance in this construct (see Le & Agnew, 2003 for a meta-analysis). Moreover, this model has been successfully applied to several different types of relationships, including friendships (Rusbult, 1980) and abusive relationships (Rusbult & Martz, 1995).

In the case of age-gap relationships, however, Lehmiller and Agnew (2008) encountered some limits to the generalizability of the investment model. Specifically, among women-older partners, only satisfaction emerged as a significant commitment predictor, with greater satisfaction being associated with stronger commitment. Among women-younger partners, only satisfaction and investments were unique predictors, with higher satisfaction and investments being associated with greater commitment. These findings stand in contrast to results typically obtained in investment model research, in which all three variables are usually found to independently predict commitment. Furthermore, the explained variance in commitment was much lower among both types of age-gap partners compared to what is usually observed. That is, the investment model

variables explained only one-sixth of the variance in commitment among women-older partners and about one-half among woman-younger partners. In comparison, in their meta-analysis of the investment model, Le and Agnew (2003) found that that these three variables explained about two-thirds of the variance in commitment on average in more traditional (i.e., not age-discrepant) romantic relationships.

These results would seem to suggest that when it comes to studying commitment to age-gap relationships, it is important to consider variables that fall beyond the scope of those considered by the investment model. For instance, in age-gap and other socially marginalized types of romantic relationships, variables such as social support, perceptions of relationship approval/disapproval, or perceived prejudice/discrimination might be especially strong contributors to commitment (e.g., Lehmiller & Agnew, 2007). More specific to age-gap partnerships, another possibility is that variables specified by the evolutionary and socio-cultural perspectives discussed above might emerge as potent commitment predictors (e.g., perceived equity, similarity). This raises the possibility that the variables underlying commitment might differ depending upon the direction of the age gap. For instance, based on both the evolutionary and social role perspectives, one might anticipate that woman-younger partners would find investments (particularly those of a financial nature) to be more powerful inducements to stay in their relationship compared to woman-older partners.

Indeed, this would be consistent with Lehmiller and Agnew's (2008) results, which indicated that investments were a unique commitment predictor for women-younger but not women-older partners. In comparison, from the socio-cultural perspective, one might anticipate that among women-older partners, perceptions of equity would be strongly tied to feelings of commitment, whereas it would likely be less important among woman-younger partners. Thus, understanding the bases of commitment to different kinds of age-gap relationships is a topic that warrants further study.

Directions for Future Research

With our review of the literature on age-gap relationships complete, we now present a detailed agenda for future research on this topic that builds upon existing work and attempts to bridge the various theoretical perspectives discussed earlier.

First and foremost, it is imperative that future research examines relational age-gaps in a consistent manner. In past studies, researchers have approached this issue in quite different ways, with some employing continuous age-gap measures and others employing dichotomous measures. Although more studies have employed dichotomous measures, there has not been consistency in terms of how an "age-gap" relationship is defined. For example, some have considered four or more years to be an age-gap (Zak et al., 2001), whereas others have drawn the line at 10 years (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006, 2007, 2008). As noted above, the 10 year

mark is the current social psychological convention, and this makes sense given that such a difference seems to be regarded as a normative cutoff point in Westerners' preferences for relational age gaps (Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). It is important to keep in mind, however, that cross-cultural variations in terms of what is perceived to be an acceptable relational age gap (United Nations, 2000) suggest that age-discrepant relationships may need to be defined differently for research conducted in non-Western societies.

We propose that research exploring the effects of relational age-gaps may benefit from approaching this issue in more than one way. Past studies have shown effects based on both categorical and continuous age-gap measures. Thus, in order to provide a richer perspective, we suggest that future researchers analyze their data using both a continuous measure, as well as a dichotomous measure that is based on normative cutoffs for the specific culture from which the sample is obtained. This would provide better insights into whether the simple presence of a relational age-gap is important, or whether the type of effects that an age gap has on the partners involved is a function of the relative size of the age discrepancy. Researchers should also take into account the added effects of the direction of the age-gap (i.e., woman-older vs. woman-younger), because it is possible that direction may moderate the effects of age-gap size. For example, perhaps the size of an age gap matters more when the woman is the older partner compared to when the man is older.

Second, research on age-gap relationships needs to be more driven by psychological and interactional theory. In particular, researchers should design their studies to explicitly address predictions generated by the evolutionary and socio-cultural perspectives. Although both perspectives have received some empirical support to date, much more research is needed to determine whether the weight of the evidence more strongly supports one perspective over the other. As discussed above, however, it is entirely possible that both perspectives are at least partially correct. For example, the evolutionary perspective may be best suited to explain the tendency for younger women to pair with older men, as well as why people tend to perceive woman-younger relationships as more socially normative than those in which the woman is older. In contrast, the socio-cultural perspective may be best suited to explain why woman-older relationships sometimes emerge, as well as why the partners involved might be more committed to such romances than persons involved in woman-younger relationships.

On a related note, it is worth pointing out that both of these perspectives are complementary in a number of ways and generate many of the same predictions. For example, the evolutionary, social role, and social exchange views would all seem to suggest that the pairing of a younger woman with an older man makes a lot of sense. In fact, these different perspectives may all work together to explain why men generally tend to be older than their female partners.

Evolutionary drives may have resulted in a tendency for women and men to adopt

different social roles (i.e., homemaker vs. provider, respectively). As a result of men and women adopting and envisioning themselves in these general roles, they may have developed tendencies to make certain types of social exchanges in their romantic relationships (i.e., sex and children for resources). Future research that attempts to fuse these different perspectives together in such a way would be useful.

Third, although we have some sense as to what the consequences of involvement in an age-gap relationship are on various relational outcomes, such as satisfaction and commitment, we know relatively little about the impact on relationship processes. In particular, the topics of communication, power, and conflict are ripe areas for exploration in such relationships, given the generational differences that exist between partners. Taking a step back from relationship processes, however, studies that addresses what it is that actually brings partners together in age-gap involvements is also needed. Research that addresses the topic of attraction in such relationships and what keeps them going over time would speak volumes about the viability of the evolutionary and socio-cultural perspectives discussed earlier. Thus, researchers should assess the extent to which individuals involved in age-gap relationships report that factors such as desire for sex/children/resources, belief in traditional gender roles, and perceived similarity were important in initial attraction to their current partner and play a role in relationship maintenance. Of course, those involved in such relationships may not

be conscious of the actual factors at play or may purposely misrepresent them to researchers, but the absence of self-reports on perceived factors leading to age-discrepant involvements needs to be rectified.

Future research must attempt to recruit more diverse samples of persons involved in age-gap romances. In particular, we know relatively little about the male partners from age-gap relationships of greater than 10 years because most work has focused primarily on women (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2008). Thus, we need data from men who are significantly older and men who are significantly younger than their partners. This would allow for a better sense of the degree to which men and women differ in terms of their motives for beginning age-gap relationships, and also whether commitment to such relationships is based on different things for partners of each sex.

Future research would likewise benefit from addressing the issue of age-gaps in same-sex relationships. It is clear that gay and lesbian individuals are just as open to relational age-gaps as heterosexual persons (Hayes, 1995). Perhaps even more interesting, however, is the fact that Canadian census data seem to indicate that significant age-gaps may be even more prevalent in same-sex compared to other-sex partnerships (Boyd & Li, 2003). Exactly what attracts gay and lesbian individuals to age-gap relationships, though, is unclear. One possibility worth exploring in future research is whether gay and lesbian individuals perceive a smaller “field of eligibles” (i.e., the overall group of

persons with whom one could potentially partner; Wincher, 1958) compared to heterosexuals. If so, this might increase the latitude of acceptance when it comes to a potential partner's demographic characteristics among gays and lesbians. Other explanations are certainly possible, but obtaining a better understanding of the degree to which the motives for entering age-gap relationships are similar or different for heterosexual and homosexual individuals would provide even greater insight into the theoretical perspectives discussed above.

More broadly, the degree to which the presence of an age-gap overlaps with the presence of another marginalized category (e.g., a same-sex or interracial relationship) is a topic that merits study. For instance, when a relationship is marginalized on multiple levels, it is unclear what categories outside perceivers pay attention to and what their evaluations of the relationship are based upon. It could be the case that relationships that violate social norms in several ways are subject to increasingly negative evaluation. It could also be the case, however, that there is no such additive effect and that violating one social norm is perceived as being just as bad as violating several of them. Thus, it is unclear how such relationships are viewed by others and, even more importantly, we do not know whether such relationships fare differently from romances that are marginalized based on only one category.

Conclusions

Unlike what the popular media and classic films such as *The Graduate* might suggest, age-gap relationships are more than just Hollywood fiction. According to census estimates, 1 in 12 married couples in the United States are involved in an age-gap relationship (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999). Such numbers indicate that these romances certainly are neither rare empirically nor in social awareness. Nonetheless, social psychologists and other researchers have been slow to address this topic in the relationships literature. The minimal research that does exist suggests that there are both ups and downs to being involved in an age-discrepant romance. In particular, such relationships are subject to social disapproval and stereotyping by society at large, especially in cases where the older partner is a woman. At the same time, however, age-gap partners are often more satisfied and committed to one another than partners who are more similar in age. Thus, it is clear that despite the potential downsides, many of these relationships do in fact stand the test of time. Future research on this topic is essential, however, to help fill the gaps in our knowledge and to better understand the paradoxical implications of involvement in an age-discrepant romance.

References

- Banks, C. A., & Arnold, P. (2001). Opinions towards sexual partners with a large age difference. *Marriage & Family Review, 33*, 5–18.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2004). Sexual economics: Sex as female resource for social exchange in heterosexual interactions. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 8*, 339-363.
- Berardo F., Appel, J., & Berardo, D. (1993). Age dissimilar marriages: Review and assessment. *Journal of Aging Studies, 7*, 93-106.
- Boyd, M., & Li, A. (2003). May-December: Canadians in age-discrepant relationships. *Canadian Social Trends, 70*, 29-33.
- Buss, D. M. (1989). Sex differences in human mate preferences: Evolutionary hypotheses tested in 37 cultures. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 12*, 1–49.
- Byrne, D., Clore, G. L., & Smeaton, G. (1986). The attraction hypothesis: Do similar attitudes affect anything? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*, 1167-1170.
- Cowan, G. (1984). The double standard in age-discrepant relationships. *Sex Roles, 11*, 17–23.
- Donaghue, N., & Fallon, B. J. (2003). Gender-role self-stereotyping and the relationship between equity and satisfaction in close relationships. *Sex Roles, 48*, 217–230.

- Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social role interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Eagly, A. H., Eastwick, P. W., & Johannesen-Schmidt, M. (2009). Possible selves in marital roles: The impact of the anticipated division of labor on the mate preferences of women and men. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 35*, 403-414.
- Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (1999). The origins of sex differences in human behavior: Evolved dispositions versus social roles. *American Psychologist, 54*, 408-423.
- Etcheverry, P. E., & Agnew, C. R. (2004). Subjective norms and the prediction of romantic relationship state and fate. *Personal Relationships, 11*, 409-428.
- Gold, E. B., Bromberg, J., Crawford, S., Samuels, S., Greendale, G. A., Harlow, S. D., et al. (2001). Factors associated with age at natural menopause in a multiethnic sample of midlife women. *American Journal of Epidemiology, 153*, 865–874.
- Goodfriend, W., & Agnew, C. R. (2008). Sunken costs and desired plans: Examining different types of investments in close relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 34*, 1639-1652.
- Groot, W., & Van Den Brink, H. M. (2002). Age and education differences in marriages and their effects on life satisfaction. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 3*, 153–165.

- Hayes, A. F. (1995). Age preferences for same- and opposite-sex partners. *Journal of Social Psychology, 135*, 125-133.
- Homans, G. C. (1961). *Social behavior and its elementary forms*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World.
- Kenrick, D. T., Gabrielidis, C., Keefe, R. C., & Cornelius, J. S. (1996). Adolescents' age preferences for dating partners: Support for an evolutionary model of life-history strategies. *Child Development, 67*, 1499–1511.
- Kenrick, D. T., & Keefe, R. C. (1992). Age preferences in mates reflect sex differences in human reproductive strategies. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 15*, 75–133.
- Le, B., & Agnew, C. R. (2003). Commitment and its theorized determinants: A meta-analysis of the Investment Model. *Personal Relationships, 10*, 37-57.
- Lehmiller, J. J., & Agnew, C. R. (2006). Marginalized relationships: The impact of social disapproval on romantic relationship commitment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 32*, 40–51.
- Lehmiller, J. J., & Agnew, C. R. (2007). Perceived marginalization and the prediction of romantic relationship stability. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 69*, 1036-1049.

- Lehmiller, J. J., & Agnew, C. R. (2008). Commitment in age-gap heterosexual romantic relationships: A test of evolutionary and socio-cultural predictions. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *32*, 74-82.
- Menken, J., & Larsen, U. (1986). Fertility rates and aging. In L. Mastroianni, Jr. & C. A. Paulsen (Eds.), *Aging, reproduction, and the climacteric* (pp. 147-165). New York: Plenum.
- Milhausen, R. R., & Herold, E. S. (1999). Does the sexual double standard still exist? Perceptions of university women. *Journal of Sex Research*, *36*, 361-368.
- Newcomb, T. M. (1978). The attraction process: Looking mainly backward. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *36*, 1075-1083.
- Ni Bhrolchain, M. (2006). The age difference between partners: A matter of female choice. In C. Sauvain-dugerdil & H. Leridon (Eds.) *Human clocks: The bio-cultural meanings of age* (pp. 289-312). New York: Peter Lang.
- Rusbult, C. E. (1980). Commitment and satisfaction in romantic associations: A test of the Investment Model. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *16*, 172-186.
- Rusbult, C. E. (1983). A longitudinal test of the Investment Model: The development (and deterioration) of satisfaction and commitment in heterosexual involvements. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *45*, 101-117.

- Rusbult, C. E., & Martz, J. M. (1995). Remaining in an abusive relationship: An Investment Model analysis of nonvoluntary dependence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21, 558–571.
- Thibaut, J. W., & Kelley, H. H. (1959). *The social psychology of groups*. New York: Wiley.
- Turner, L. (2008). *Rise of the gold-digger: The young women who shamelessly pursue older men for their money*. Retrieved April 7, 2009 from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1026116/Rise-gold-digger-The-young-women-shamelessly-pursue-older-men-money.html>
- United Nations. (2000). *World Marriage Patterns 2000*. Retrieved April 17, 2009 from: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/worldmarriage/worldmarriage.htm>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2007). *Women in the labor force: A databook*. Retrieved July 2, 2009, from <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook2007.htm>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (1999). *America's families and living arrangements*. Retrieved April 8, 2009 from: http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/p20-537_99.html
- Voo, J. (2007). *Older women and younger men: Can it work?* Retrieved September 17, 2007 from <http://www.cnn.com/2007/LIVING/personal/09/07/olderwomen/index.html>

- Walster, E., Walster, G. W., & Berscheid, E. (1978). *Equity: Theory and research*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Winch, R. (1958). *Mate selection: A study of complementary needs*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Winn, K. I., Crawford, D. W., & Fischer, J. L. (1991). Equity and commitment in romance versus friendship. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 6, 301–314.
- Zak, A., Armer, E., Edmunds, K., Fleury, T., Sarris, M., & Shatynski, B. (2001). Age-discrepant relationships: Do these romances fare well? *North American Journal of Psychology*, 3, 119-122.

Table 1

Average Age Difference between Husbands and Wives in Selected Worldwide Regions

<i>Continent/Region</i>	<i>Average Age Difference</i>
Africa (Eastern)	4.31
Africa (Western)	6.59
Asia (Eastern)	2.44
Asia (Western)	3.48
Australia/New Zealand	2.15
Europe (Eastern)	3.11
Europe (Western)	2.70
North America	2.30
South America	2.89

Note: Age differences were calculated by subtracting the wife's age from the husband's age. Positive numbers therefore indicate that husbands tend to be older than wives. Data obtained from United Nations (2000).

Table 2

Age Differences between Husbands and Wives in the United States

<i>Age Difference</i>	<i>Percentage of All Married Couples</i>
Husband 20+ Years Older	0.8
Husband 15-19 Years Older	1.5
Husband 10-14 Years Older	4.9
Husband 6-9 Years Older	12.3
Husband 4-5 Years Older	13.8
Husband 2-3 Years Older	22.1
Husband and Wife within 1 Year	32.4
Wife 2-3 Years Older	5.9
Wife 4-5 Years Older	2.9
Wife 6-9 Years Older	2.2
Wife 10-14 Years Older	0.9
Wife 15-19 Years Older	0.2
Wife 20+ Years Older	0.2

Note: Data obtained from U.S. Census Bureau (1999).