

Why parents never approve of their daughter's partner



By [The Bristol Post](#)

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Scientists have finally discovered why parents never approve of their daughter's choice of partner.

Researchers say the age-old conflict over the suitability of a boyfriend is rooted in an "evolutionary conflict over resources".

They found that parents invest more resources into a daughter whose partner is skint or uncaring - eventually leading to conflict.

And the study also found that crafty daughters often exploit their parent's generosity by finding males who did not meet their expectations.

The research was carried out by Dr Tim Fawcett - a research fellow at the University of Bristol's School of Biological Sciences - and scientists at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

Dr Fawcett said: "The conflict over parental resources is central to understanding why parents and children disagree in mate choice.

"Parents are equally related to all of their children, whereas children value themselves more than their siblings - so each child wants to get more than their fair share of parental resources."

The study showed that parents invested most in daughters whose mates provide few resources.

As a result daughter then evolves to exploit this allocation, by choosing a partner who is not in the parents' best interests.

In turn, this leads to conflict over mate choice between parents and their offspring.

The team undertook the research by building a computer model to simulate the evolution of parental behaviour when their daughter is searching for a partner.

The model showed that parents would typically want a son-in-law who is more supportive than they would otherwise choose.

Parents show a stronger preference than their offspring for attributes such as social class, family background, ethnic background and educational level.

Whereas daughters show a fondness for qualities such as physical attractiveness, smell, sense of humour and creativity.

Piet van den Berg, lead author on the study, said: "Our model predicts that the conflict will be stronger when fathers rather than mothers control resources, but this remains to be tested.

"Surveys show that children tend to place more importance on physical attractiveness, smell and sense of humour, whereas parents care more about social class and family background.

"We don't yet understand the reason for this difference, but it probably has something to do with our evolutionary history."

The scientists now plan to investigate preferences for different aspects of quality.