

# Sorry daughters, your parents will never approve of your partner

**Parents who never seem to approve of their daughter's partner are not just being awkward or overly picky, scientists have discovered.**



Each child wants to get more than their fair share of parental resources, scientists said. Photo: ALAMY

By Rosa Silverman and agencies

18 Sep 2013

The reason is rather more primal, and is rooted in an “evolutionary conflict over resources”, it appears.

The researchers found that parents invest more resources in a daughter whose partner is hard up or uncaring, eventually leading to conflict.

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

This in turn leads to conflict over the choice of mate between parents and their offspring.

Scientists from Bristol and the University of Groningen in the Netherlands carried out 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 their daughter would otherwise choose.

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

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

The conflict over the suitability of a daughter's partner was likely to be greater when fathers rather than mothers controlled resources, the study found.

Dr Tim Fawcett, a research fellow at the University of Bristol's School of Biological Sciences, said: "We were interested in the fact that in many societies there appears to be a conflict between parents and children about the most suitable partner.

"We were keen to look at it from an evolutionary point of view because we would expect that parents and children should prefer exactly the same thing.

"As we know, genes go from parents to offspring so what's good for the child should be good for the parents. But as we investigated we realised this was not the case.

"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."

Piet van den Berg, lead author on the study, added: "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."