Couple’s age difference affects marriage over time, according to CU Boulder study

Terra McKinnish

It’s not uncommon to see married couples with a significant age gap. But new research suggests that while in the beginning men and women both report greater marital satisfaction with younger spouses that satisfaction fades over time, says Terra McKinnish, a professor of economics at CU Boulder and co-author of the new study.

CUT 1 “If you look at marriages over time people who are married to much older or younger spouses tend to have larger declines in marital satisfaction compared to those who are married to spouses who are similar in age.” (:13)

For the study, McKinnish examined 13 years of data from married couples in Australia, asking how satisfied each partner is in their marriage.

CUT 2 “We find that men who are married to younger wives are the most satisfied and men who are married to older wives are the least satisfied and that’s pretty consistent with what popular culture tells us we should expect to find.” (:13)

But McKinnish also looked at the flip side of that equation - a younger wife with an older husband.

CUT 3 “The second finding, though, was more surprising because we found that women actually are particularly dissatisfied when they’re married to older husbands and particularly satisfied if they’re married to younger husbands.” (:11)

And, she says, when financial troubles are added to the age-gap equation then things can go south pretty fast.

CUT 4 “We find that when couples have a large age difference, that they tend to have a much larger decline in marital satisfaction when faced with an economic shock than couples that have a very small age difference.” (:13)

A possible explanation for this, says McKinnish, is that couples who are similar in age may be more in sync on major life decisions, such as spending habits or when to have children. In large-age-gap couples, however, any unexpected downturn may expose tensions that lead to more dissatisfaction overall.

For more information about this study, go to [www.colorado.edu/today](http://www.colorado.edu/today) and search marital satisfaction.