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Parent-offspring conflict in Japan and parental influence across 6 cultures

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Parent-offspring Conflict and Parental Influence

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Abstract

Previous research has demonstrated that parents and children often have conflicting mate preferences. The present research was conducted among 443 Japanese university students. Using an existing scale designed to uncover parent-offspring conflict over mate choice, the results revealed that children perceived having a potential partner with traits connoting poor genetic quality as being more unacceptable to themselves, and having a potential partner with traits connoting low parental investment and cooperation with the ingroup as being more unacceptable to their parent. A number of sex differences emerged. The highest potential for parent-offspring conflict existed between female offspring and their father, and female offspring also rated traits connoting low social status as being more unacceptable to their parents, particularly to the father.

Key Words: Parent-offspring conflict, Parental influence, Japan, Mate choice, Mate preferences

Introduction

Imagine for a moment your ideal long-term partner; what traits would that person possess? Most likely you would desire a person who is intelligent, kind, and trustworthy. Additionally, you may also prefer a mate that is physically attractive. When examining individual mate preferences, traits such as these are often valued in a partner (Buss, Abbott, Angleitner, Asherian, Biaggio, Blanco-Villasenor, Bruchon-Schweitzer, Ch'U, Czapinski, Deraad, Ekehammar, El Lohamy, Fioravanti, Georgas, Gjerde, Guttman, Hazan, Iwawaki, Janakiramaiah, Khosroshani, Kreitler, Lachenicht, Lee, Liik, Little, Mika, Moadel-Shahid, Moane, Montero, Mundy-Castle, Niit, Nsenduluka, Pienkowski, Pirtila-Backman, De Leon, Rousseau, Runco, Safir, Samuels, Sanitioso, Serpell, Smid, Spencer, Tadinac, Todorova, Troland, Van Den Brande, Van Heck, Van Langenhove, & Yang, 1990; Li, Kenrick, Bailey, & Linsenmeier, 2002). However, human mating decisions are not made in a vacuum. Many factors can play a decisive role in determining one's actual mate choice, including influence from one's parents. Cross-cultural investigations of marriage customs reveal that an individual's mate choice is frequently subject to parental discretion. For example, arranged marriages are still common in many countries, including China and India (Madathil & Benschhoff, 2008; Pimentel, 2000), and continue to occur in modern-day hunter-gatherer groups (Apostolou, 2007a).

Parent-offspring conflict over mate choice

The fact that parents attempt to influence their children's mate choices suggests that parents and children are not in complete agreement over what type of a person would make the most suitable mate choice of the child (Apostolou 2007b; 2008a,b; Buunk, Park, & Dubbs, 2008). Two evolutionary theories—parent-offspring conflict theory

(Trivers,1974) and the theory of evolutionary trade-offs (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000)—give insight into the type of mate the parents would like for their child as well as the type of mate children would ideally prefer for themselves. Parent-offspring conflict theory states that parents and their offspring sometimes employ different strategies in order to maximize the benefits (and minimize the costs) towards themselves. The theory of evolutionary trade-offs suggests that individuals high in genetic quality will tend to be poorer quality parents, as they tend to invest effort into seeking and obtaining mates. Extending these theories to human mate choice, we can predict that a child, compared to their parents, benefits more by mating with an individual of high genetic quality because genetic benefits will be delivered to the resulting offspring and, if the partner is a poor quality parent, then the child can rely on their parents for extra support in raising any resulting offspring. However, if the child opts for a partner with traits indicating high parental investment and lower genetic quality, then the parents would not need to invest extra resources into their child and grandchildren that might then be diverted to other children and grandchildren (for a more thorough explanation please see, Schlomer, Giudice, & Ellis, 2011).

In addition, parents can also gain benefits for themselves by preferring their child's mate to have traits that signal status and cooperation, particularly with the in-group (e.g., having the same ethnicity and the same religious beliefs). Such features might help parents to increase their own social status (Ertem & Kocturk, 2008; Riley, 1994; Shadle, 2003), to ensure that their grandchildren are socialized in a culturally appropriate manner, and to ensure that they will receive care in old age (Riley, 1994).

In accordance with this these predictions, Buunk et al. (2008) found that individuals rated what was assumedly a lack of genetic quality in a potential romantic partner, such

as being physically unattractive, lacking a sense of humor, and lacking creativity, as being more unacceptable to themselves compared to their parents. Conversely, these individuals also rated a lack of parental investment and cooperation with the ingroup in a potential romantic partner, such as having a different ethnicity, being divorced, and being from a low social class, as more unacceptable to their parents relative to themselves. This parent-offspring conflict over mate choice was demonstrated in samples of young adults from the USA, the Netherlands, Kurdistan (Buunk et al., 2008), Argentina (Buunk & Castro Solano, 2010), and Uruguay (Park, Dubbs, & Buunk, 2009). Similarly, a study among Dutch parents, who indicated that a lack of parental investment in their child's mate would be more unacceptable to themselves while a lack of genetic quality would be more unacceptable to their children, also supported these results (Dubbs & Buunk, 2010). Likewise, other researchers have found congruent results, namely, that children prioritize physical attractiveness in a mate choice, while parents prefer a child's mate to come from a good family background and to have traditional values (Apostolou 2007b; 2008a,b; Hynie, Lalonde, & Lee, 2006).

It is important to emphasize that parents and children often experience conflict in everyday interactions (Meichenbaum, Fabiano, & Fincham, 2002), such as disagreements over doing chores or homework. Mundane conflicts such as these are not the sort of conflicts that we are interested in, as they are not likely to directly influence the genetic fitness of a child. Instead, we propose that the source of parent-offspring conflict over mate choice stems from both the parents and the child attempting to maximize their genetic fitness. Using the evolutionary theories as a basis, we are able to make specific predictions about which traits in a child's mate are going to be relatively

more important to the parent and which are going to be relatively more important to the child.

Thus, in a Japanese sample of young adults, we intended to replicate the findings from previous investigations of parent-offspring conflict using the methodology developed by Buunk et al. (2008). For our first hypothesis, we predicted that young adults (children) from Japan will find traits associated with a lack of genetic quality, such as *physically unattractive, physically unfit, considerably shorter or taller than self, fat, bad smell, lacks a sense of humor, lacks creativity, lacks artistic abilities, and unintelligent* as being relatively more unacceptable to themselves. Conversely, we predicted that children will perceive traits indicative of a lack of parental investment and cooperation with the ingroup, such as *lacks good family background, different ethnic background, different religious beliefs, lower social class than self, divorced, poor, not respectful and obedient, low education, and does not like children* as being more unacceptable to their parent.

Second, and more notably, we intended to expand the research by Buunk et al. in an important respect. That is, in all previous research done by Buunk and colleagues among young adults (Buunk et al., 2008; Buunk & Castro Solano, 2010; Park et al., 2009), the effect of the parent's sex was not considered. In this research we examined how the sex of the participant and that of the parent influenced the nature and the degree of perceived conflict over mate choice. While our investigation of sex differences concerning parent-offspring conflict is exploratory with no specific predictions made with respect to the relative acceptability of the traits, we did, as our second hypothesis, predict that children would perceive more conflict between themselves and their father, and that this conflict would be more intense for female

rather than male participants. This prediction is based on evidence that suggests that mothers tend to influence their children's mate more indirectly than fathers (Apostolou, 2007a), and that fathers tend to be more authoritarian than mothers (Bates, 1942), and on a plethora of research which indicates that parents are more restrictive in allowing female children to date or engage in other activities that might lead to sexual behaviors (Faulkner & Schaller, 2007; Perilloux, Fleischman, & Buss, 2008; Wight, Williamson, & Henderson, 2006).

Parental Influence in Japan

Along with replicating and extending the previous results related to parent-offspring conflict over mate choice, we were also interested in the perceptions Japanese young adults have about parental influence over mate choice. That is, do young adults from Japan think that their parents will play a relatively large or small role in determining their actual mate choice? While evolutionary theory leads us to predict that the nature of the parent-offspring conflict will be universal (i.e., parents will relatively prefer a child's mate to have traits indicative of parental investment and cooperation with the ingroup whereas children will relatively prefer traits indicative of genetic quality), the level of parental influence is known to vary considerably between cultures (Buunk, Park & Duncan, 2010). For example, in North America most young adults expect to find their marriage partners without the help of their parents, whereas young adults from Kurdistan expect their parents to play a relatively larger role in determining their marriage partner.

In order to make predictions about the strength of parental influence in Japan, it is important to understand how Japanese marriage customs have evolved over time. In

Japan, parental influence was historically quite strong. Under the Meiji code (1898), it became necessary for men under the age of 30 and women less than 25 to obtain consent from the head of the household (the patriarch) in order to marry (Beillevarie, 1996; Murstein, 1974). Interestingly, parents would often seek the services of a *nakodo* (a “go-between”; see Murstein, 1974 for an extensive description) to help select a spouse for their child. However, during a *miai*, a meeting in which the *nakodos* (one representing family), the parents, and the prospective bride and groom would come together, the parents were largely responsible for deciding whether or not a marriage between their children would ensue. During the *miai* the children had little or no say in the matter (Appelbaum, 1995).

Following World War II, with the adoption of a new constitution which stipulated that marriage rested on the individual and mutual consent of both sexes, the atmosphere became increasingly more favorable towards free mate choice (see Beillevarie, 1996; Murstein, 1974). Since then, the occurrence of arranged marriages has been continuously decreasing (Blood, 1967; Dunn, 2004; Iwao, 1993; National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2007). Nevertheless, Japanese parents still seem to exert some influence over the mate choice of their children. To begin with, while most young people in Japan today insist that love is a necessary condition for marriage (Dunn, 2004; LeVine, Sato, Hashimoto, & Verma, 1995), Simmons, Vom Kolke and Shimizu (2001) found that young people in Japan valued romantic love less positively than those in West Germany. The fact that across cultures an emphasis on romantic love tends to correlate negatively with the occurrence of arranged marriages (Williams, White, & Ekaidem, 1979), suggests that Japanese parents still influence their offspring's mate choice more than in Western cultures.

Thus, to establish the relative strength of parental influence in Japan, it is essential to compare the perceptions young adults from Japan have about parental influence to those from other cultures. Due to Japan's history of high parental influence over mate choice, for our third hypothesis we predicted that young adults from Japan would perceive, and endorse, a higher level of parental influence over mate choice than those from cultures where free mate choice is normative, such as Canadian and Dutch Caucasians. However, due to the recent and dramatic shift in the freedom to choose one's own marriage partner, in our fourth hypothesis, we predicted that young adults from Japan would perceive, and endorse, less parental influence than young adults from cultures where free mate choice is not normative, such as people in Kurdistan and Canadians with an East Asian background.

Lastly, we will also be able to explore whether young adults in the Japanese sample perceive that they have more or less control over their mate choice compared with other young adults from Japan.

Method

Participants

The original sample included 443 participants (male: $n = 217$; female: $n = 226$). Participants who reported a homosexual or bisexual orientation and one female participant who reported being 48 years old were excluded from the analysis. This left a total of 440 participants (male: $n = 215$, mean age = 18.84 years, $SD = 0.97$; female: $n = 225$, mean age = 18.62 years, $SD = 0.77$) for our analysis. The questionnaire was originally constructed in English and translated into Japanese by a Japanese professor and an interpreter. The questionnaires were then administered to Japanese university students, in a psychology class, in the form of a paper and pencil task. This

study was carried out after receiving permission from the Institutional Review Board at their university. Participation in this study was completely voluntary; students were informed that there would be no penalty for not participating and that they could skip any questions that they were uncomfortable answering. The students were also instructed that if they chose to participate they could respond and turn in the questionnaires within 1 week after the class. In order to maintain anonymity, participants returned their questionnaires in collection boxes and provided no identifying information on the questionnaire. The participant's area of study varied, with the most common areas of study being commerce (46.6%), culture and information science (13.4%), education (8.4%), health and sports science (5.9%), and psychology (5.5%).

Measures

Nature of parent-offspring conflict. We used a variant of the 22-item questionnaire from Buunk et al. (2008) to assess the relative unacceptability of negative mate traits to children compared with their father or mother. Of the 22 items in the questionnaire, nine represent traits indicative of a lack of genetic quality (i.e., physically unattractive, lacks creativity), and nine other traits are indicative of a lack of parental investment and cooperation with the ingroup (i.e., divorced, different ethnic background). All traits were formulated to represent the undesirable variant of trait variables (i.e., physically unattractive, divorced). Each question was posed in the following manner: “If my potential partner was [physically unattractive], this would be ...” followed by a 7-point scale on which the possible answers ranged from 1 = “Much more unacceptable to myself [participant]” through 4 = “Equally unacceptable to both myself and my father [mother]” to 7 = “Much more unacceptable to my father [mother]”. The instructions on

the questionnaire made it explicit that the potential partner was a long-term mate: “a potential partner with whom you would want to spend your life”. This questionnaire was embedded in a larger questionnaire on related issues. To obtain a more detailed picture of the nature of the conflict between fathers and mothers on the one hand, and sons and daughters on the other hand, a factor analysis was conducted on all 22-items, and mean scores were created for each of the components.

Degree of parent-offspring conflict. The degree of parent-offspring conflict, based on the measurement in Buunk et al. (2010), was calculated by subtracting the score for each individual trait from the scale midpoint of 4 and then taking the absolute value. By doing this, we could look at how each individual trait varied from the scale midpoint. A higher value indicates that a given trait deviates more from the middle of the scale, and that the trait therefore may represent a greater source of conflict between parents and offspring. Next, a mean parent-offspring conflict score was calculated for the 22 traits combined.

Level of parental control. The 10-item Parental Influence on Mate Choice (PIM) scale (Buunk et al., 2010) was used to assess the level of parental control over mate choice. The PIM scale consists of items that express parental control, such as, “It is the duty of parents to find the right partner for their children, and it is the duty of children to accept the choice of their parents,” and items that express individual choice, such as, “Children have the right to select their own partner without any interference by their parents” (reversed scored). Participants could select responses that ranged from 1 = “I disagree completely” to 5 = “I agree completely.” Higher scores on the PIM scale indicate a higher endorsement of parental control over mate choice. Two additional questions also from Buunk et al. (2010) followed the PIM scale, that is, “In general,

how do people end up with a marriage partner in your country” and “How do you think you will end up with a marriage partner?” To answer the first question, participants could choose from seven possible multiple-choice answers ranging from, “The parents decide this completely on their own” to, “The children decide this completely on their own.” An answer in the middle of the scale stated, “My parents and I will decide this jointly.” The second question was followed by the same multiple-choice answers with the nouns appropriately changed (“I” and “my parents”). The percentage of participants that selected each of the multiple-choice responses will be reported.

Results

Nature of parent-offspring conflict over mate choice

A nondirectional one-sample t-test was carried out to examine if the mean for the nine traits that represented a lack of genetic quality ($M = 3.39, SD = 0.79$) and the mean for the nine traits that represented a lack of parental investment and cooperation with the ingroup ($M = 4.15, SD = 0.86$) differed significantly from the sample mean for the 22 items ($M = 3.76, SD = 0.30$; a value lower than the mean of 3.76 is in the direction of the child, while a higher value is in the direction of the parent). The mean of the nine traits that represented a lack of genetic quality was found to be more unacceptable to the participants, $t(411) = -9.65, p < .001$, and the mean of the nine traits that represented a lack of parental investment and cooperation with the ingroup was perceived to be more unacceptable to their parents, $\dagger t(412) = 9.05, p < .001$. These results supported our first hypothesis, that young adults perceive a lack of genetic quality in a mate choice as more unacceptable to themselves, whereas a lack of parental investment and cooperation with the ingroup was perceived as being more unacceptable to their parents.

Next, a nondirectional one-sample t-test was carried out on each of the individual 22 items in order to examine whether the traits differed significantly from the sample mean of 3.76 in either the direction of the participants themselves or their parents. Of the nine traits that represented a lack of genetic quality, seven were in the predicted direction of the child. Of the nine traits that represented a lack of parental investment and cooperation with the ingroup, eight were in the predicted direction of the parents (see Table 1). The traits found to be most unacceptable to their children included bad smell, physically unattractive, and fat. The traits participants perceived to be the most unacceptable to their parent included: lacks a good family background, different ethnic background, and lower social class than self. Once again, our first hypothesis was supported.

Table 1

Sex differences in the nature of parent-offspring conflict

A MANOVA was conducted on the mean of the 22 traits using the participant's sex and the sex of the parent as fixed factors. The MANOVA revealed a main effect of the participant's sex. The female offspring had a significantly higher mean for the combined 22 items than the male, $F(1, 392) = 4.34, p < .05$ (male $M = 3.69, SD = 0.73$; female $M = 3.83, SD = 0.64$). This result, although exploratory, suggests that overall, female children perceived negative traits as being more unacceptable to their parents than the male children did. There was no main effect of the sex of the parent or an interaction effect.

Factor analysis over the traits. A factor analysis using varimax rotation was conducted on the 22 traits. The factor analysis yielded six components. Of these, only four components are discussed, as the other two components either had Eigenvalues of less than 1.5 or were difficult to interpret. The four components explained a total of 33.99%

of the variance, and only loadings higher than .40 were focused on. The first component, *low social status*, explained a total of 12.11% and included the traits different ethnic background, different religious background, lacks a good family background, and lower social class than self. The second component, *low intelligence*, explained a total of 7.54% of the variance, and included the traits unintelligent and low education. The third component, *physical unattractiveness*, also explained 7.54% of the variance, and included the traits fat, bad smell, and physically unattractive. The fourth component, *lack of creativity*, explained a total of 6.79% of the variance, and included the traits lacks artistic ability, has no sense of humor, and lacks creativity.

The means and the reliabilities of scales based on the components were as follows: *low social status* ($M= 4.36$, $SD=1.08$, $\alpha=.79$), *low intelligence* ($M= 4.11$, $SD=1.43$, $\alpha=.81$), *physical unattractiveness* ($M= 2.80$, $SD=1.11$, $\alpha= .69$), and *lack of creativity* ($M= 3.49$, $SD= 1.03$, $\alpha=.65$). A MANOVA conducted on the mean of each scale using the participant's sex and the sex of the parent as fixed factors revealed some sex differences. There was a significant main effect of sex of the parent on the component *physically unattractive*, $F(1, 403)= 6.21$, $p<.05$ (fathers= 2.67, $SD=1.15$; mothers= 2.93, $SD=1.06$), and a marginally significant effect for the component *low intelligence*, $F(1, 403)= 3.44$, $p <.10$ (father $M= 4.00$, $SD= 1.50$; mother $M= 4.23$, $SD= 1.34$), indicating that these two components were perceived to be more unacceptable to the mother than the father. There was also a marginally significant effect of the sex of the parent on the component, *low social status*, $F(1, 403)= 2.98$, $p<.10$ (father $M= 4.45$, $SD=1.11$; mother $M= 4.26$, $SD=1.04$), indicating that individuals perceived traits associated with low social status as being more unacceptable to their father than to their mother.

There was a significant main effect of the participant's sex on the component *low social status*, $F(1, 403) = 4.38, p < .05$ (male $M = 4.22, SD = 1.13$; female $M = 4.49, SD = 1.02$). This indicated that females offspring perceived having a partner with cues of low social status as being even more unacceptable to their parents than did male offspring.

There was a marginally significant interaction between the participant's sex and the sex of the parent for the component *low social status*, $F(1, 403) = 2.57, p = .10$. This result indicates that female participants were more likely to perceive traits related to low social status as being particularly unacceptable to their fathers (father $M = 4.66, SD = 1.08$; mother $M = 4.31, SD = .91$), whereas the means for male on this component did not differ (father $M = 4.25, SD = 1.12$; mother $M = 4.24, SD = 1.14$).

Sex differences in the degree of parent-offspring conflict

The mean degree of parent-offspring conflict score for the 22 items was 1.17 ($SD = .55$). The MANOVA on the degree of parent-offspring conflict using the sex of the participant and the sex of the parent as fixed factors revealed a significant sex difference. There was a main effect of the sex of the parent indicating that participants perceived a higher degree of parent-offspring conflict between themselves and their father, $F(1, 392) = 12.90, p < .001$ (fathers $M = 1.27, SD = .55$; mothers $M = 1.07, SD = .52$). Thus our second hypothesis, that children would perceive a higher degree of parent offspring conflict over mate choice between themselves and their father was supported. There was no main effect of the sex of the participant.

There was however, a significant interaction between the participant's sex and the sex of the parent for the degree of parent-offspring conflict, $F(1, 392) = 8.39, p < .01$. Overall, the female participants a significantly higher degree of parent-offspring conflict

between themselves and their father compared to their mother (father $M= 1.33$, $SD=0.54$; mother $M=.99$; $SD=0.54$), whereas male participants did not (father $M=1.21$, $SD= 0.56$; mother $M=1.15$; $SD= 0.55$). Also in line with our second hypothesis, female, more than male participants, perceived a higher degree of conflict between themselves and their father.

Parental control of mate choice

The mean of parental control as measured with the PIM scale was $M = 2.09$ ($SD=0.55$). A series of independent-sample t -tests were used to compare the level of parental control in the present sample to the means of the five samples reported in Buunk et al. (2010). The results are listed in Table 2. The Japanese expressed significantly higher levels of parental control than did the Dutch and Caucasian Canadians, but significantly lower levels than did Kurdish and than did East Asian Canadians. The Japanese did not differ significantly from the sample of international students studying in The Netherlands. These results supported our third and fourth hypotheses, that Japanese individuals would perceive more parental influence over mate choice compared with Dutch and Caucasian Canadian individuals and less compared to Kurdish and East Asian Canadian individuals.

Next, we compared the mean of the question, “How do you think you will end up with a marriage partner?” from the Japanese sample to the five other cross-cultural samples. The mean of this question for the Japanese sample was $M = 5.94$ ($SD = 0.79$), indicating that on average the participants believed that they themselves ultimately had control over whom they would choose to marry, but that their parents would still have some influence. Using independent-sample t -tests, it was found that the Japanese sample perceived a significantly greater amount of parental control over their marriage

Table 2

partner than Dutch people, $t(791) = 9.03, p < .001$, and than international students in the Netherlands, $t(500) = 3.14, p = .001$, and a marginally significant greater amount of parental control compared with the Caucasian Canadians, $t(445) = 1.63, p = .10$. Additionally, the Japanese sample perceived a significantly lower amount of parental control than did the East Asian Canadians, $t(484) = 3.20, p = .001$, and the Kurdish, $t(617) = 15.54, p < .001$. Thus, once again, our third and fourth hypotheses were supported.

Next, in an exploratory analysis, we compared Japanese participant's responses to the question "*How do you think you will end up with a marriage partner?*" to the question "*In general, how do people end up with a marriage partner in your country?*" The mean for the latter question was $M = 5.56 (SD=.86)$, indicating again that on average participants believed that individuals in Japan ultimately have control over whom they choose to marry, but that parents still have an considerable degree of influence. Interestingly, only 5.3% of the participants believed that individuals within their country find mates with no parental involvement at all. A paired sample t -test revealed that participants perceived that they would have greater control over their own mate choice compared with other individuals in their culture, $t(432) = -9.95, p < .001$. An ANOVA also revealed that there was a tendency for male offspring to perceive that they would have more freedom to choose their own marriage partners than female offspring, which approached the level of statistical significance, $F(1, 433) = 6.51, p = .11$ (males = 6.04, $SD = .85$; females = 5.85, $SD = .71$).

Discussion

This study adds to the growing body of evidence that parents and children have conflicting preferences for the mate choice of the child. That is, young Japanese adults found traits connoting a lack of genetic quality as being more unacceptable to themselves, while a lack of parental investment and cooperation with the ingroup was perceived as being more unacceptable to their parents. These results replicate those found in previous studies (Buunk et al., 2008; Buunk & Castro Solano, 2010; Park et al., 2009), and underline that cross-culturally parents and children tend to disagree in the same way over which traits are most important in the mate of the child. For example, it seems that all over the world, relative to their parents, children would find it particularly disconcerting to have a potential mate who is physically unattractive and has a bad smell. Conversely, parents, relative to their children, might find a child's mate who was divorced and who came from a bad family to be a particularly unappealing in-law. Taken together, these findings suggest that parent-offspring conflict over mate choice is universal and represents an evolved strategy in which parents and children attempt to manipulate one another to best suit their own needs.

Novel to this study is that we examined if participants perceived negative traits be more unacceptable to either their father or mother. In line with our predictions, we found that the offspring, in particular the female, perceived more conflict with their father than with their mother. In addition, overall, the female participants perceived negative characteristics as being more unacceptable to their parents than did the male. These results are interesting for two reasons. First, they are congruent with the notion that female children tend to experience higher levels of parental monitoring and are more likely to be restricted from engaging in certain behaviors that could lead to sexual

intercourse than are male children (Faulkner & Schaller, 2007; Perilloux et al., 2008; Wight et al., 2006). Second, they suggest that, as predicted, daughters may be more likely to clash over mate choice with their father than they are with their mother, and more so than sons are to clash with either of their parents.

In addition, our exploratory analyses of sex differences revealed that female participants perceived traits related to a low social status as being more unacceptable to their father than to their mother. This is in line with accounts of fathers gaining status, building alliances and acquiring resources through the marriages of their children, such as through a dowry or bridewealth (Chagnon, 1992; Shadle, 2003). As men are more interested in status than women, it might be particularly upsetting to a father if his child decided to marry someone who was of low social status. Similarly, research has also shown that parents value wealth more highly in a son-in-law than in a daughter-in-law (Apostolou, 2007b).

Remarkably, *low intelligence*, which included the traits unintelligent and low education, was perceived as being more unacceptable to the mother. This may seem counterintuitive as a low intelligence may also signal a low status, and it thus might be predicted to be perceived as more unacceptable to the father. In Japan, however, women seem to be especially attuned to a man's level of education. A study in a Japanese sample noted that women were twice as likely as men to cite educational attainment as either important or as a consideration when choosing a spouse (Nemoto, 2008). Furthermore, there is a common notion in Japan that women should strive to marry a man who has the 3Hs or "three highs" (high income, physical height, and high education; Nemoto, 2008). This could possibly explain why participants believed that having a partner with a low level of education would be more unacceptable to their

mother rather than to their father. Whether or not this would hold cross-culturally deserves investigation. In addition, *physical unattractiveness* was found to be more unacceptable to the mother than to the father. This suggests that a poor quality mate choice is less acceptable to a mother relative to a father.

It should be noted that sex differences between fathers and mothers and sons and daughters in the realm of parent-offspring conflict over mate choice have only recently received attention. Apostolou (2007b), who asked individuals to rank which traits they preferred for an in-law, did not find a difference between mothers and fathers with regard to their in-law preferences. Thus it is important not to over-generalize the results from the present study. Cultural factors may explain some of our results. In Japan, the mother-child bond is exalted, particularly the mother-daughter bond (Tsuge, 2005). Japan also has more strict gender roles than individualistic societies such as the USA, the Netherlands, and Sweden; fathers are typically the breadwinners, while mothers stay at home to take care of their children and the housework (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2006). In general, greater conflict may exist between children and their father only in countries where the father is seen as the head of the household. In such societies, fathers may tend to make important decisions and may be more interested in using their children's marriages to boost social status or form alliances with other families. Conversely, in societies where gender roles are more equalitarian, fathers may play a lesser role in their children's mating decisions compared with the mother. If this is true, then perhaps children perceive more conflict between themselves and their mother, simply because their mother is more interested in their mating decisions.

While the traits that children and parents tend to prefer for their child's mate appear to be highly similar across different cultures, the degree to which parents influence their

children's mate choice varies highly, with collectivistic cultures tending to exhibit higher levels of parental influence than individualistic cultures (Buunk et al., 2010). Our results revealed that Japanese individuals endorse more parental influence over mate choice than cultures assumed to be individualistic (Dutch and Caucasian Canadians) and less parental influence than those assumed to be collectivistic (Kurdish and East Asian Canadians). Japanese individuals also expected that their parents would have more influence on the actual choice of their own marriage partners than did Dutch, and to a lesser extent Caucasian Canadians, but less influence than did Kurdish and East Asian Canadians. Interestingly, in this respect, the Japanese sample appeared to be more similar to the Caucasian Canadians than to the East Asian Canadians. This result is in line with that of the East Asian Social Survey (Iwai & Yasuda, 2009), which showed that Japanese participants reported less parental control over mate choice than Koreans, Chinese, and Taiwanese. These results make sense considering Japan had a history of strong parental control over mate choice, from which it has dramatically shifted away in the mid-20th century. Even so, only a few Japanese participants reported that people within their country choose marriage partners without any input from their parents, and less than a fifth of the participants thought they themselves would make the choice of their marriage partner without any parental influence. There was a slight sex difference, with female more than male offspring tending to indicate that they expected their parents to play a larger role in determining their marriage partner.

This study reveals how an evolutionary approach, taken together with a socio-cultural perspective, can lead to important insights into human behavior. In this case, in line with our predictions based on evolutionary theory, Japanese young adults, much like young adults in other cultures, tend to desire a romantic partner who has traits indicative

of genetic quality, while they feel that their parents would prefer for them to have a romantic partner who would be a good parent and a cooperative member of the ingroup. We like to emphasize that, while we suggest that the divergent preferences between young adults and their parents can be explained from an evolutionary point of view, we are not at all implying that young people and their parents *should* select marriage partners based on the results of this study. This study is merely a description of the relative preferences young adults tend to display compared with their parents, and does not have any moral or prescriptive implications. For example, the results suggest that parents might have more reservations about their child marrying an individual who is of a different ethnicity than would their child. This does, of course, not at all mean that we advocate that parents should treat the romantic partner of their child differently based on this criterion or even that such actions would somehow benefit the child.

A limitation of this study is that we did not ask the fathers and mothers directly which traits would be most unacceptable in a child's potential partner. Instead, we had to rely on the perceptions of the children. While future research should include responses from parents, we believe this research is still of value. Parental influence is often subtle, and parents may transmit their attitudes and beliefs about appropriate mate choices to their children indirectly. Thus, the perceptions children have of what traits are likely to be unacceptable to their parents are likely accurate. People are often aware that some romantic partners would be met with parental approval while others would not, hence the phrase "someone I can bring home to meet mom and dad." Studies conducted by Buunk et al. (2008) and Dubbs and Buunk (2010) support the idea that young adults' perceptions of their parents' opinions at least with respect to mate choice do seem to be accurate. Children report that traits such as being divorced, having a different ethnicity,

and having a different religious background would be more unacceptable to their parents, and indeed, parents also report that these traits (in their child's mate) would be more unacceptable to themselves. Likewise, several studies show that there is concordance between parental attitudes and children's behaviors, which again suggests that children are well aware of their parents' opinions (Aspey, Vesely, Oman, Rodine, Marshall, & McLeroy, 2007; Axinn & Thornton, 1993; Baier & Wampler, 2008).

In this study, multiple t-tests were used to test our hypotheses, which could have increased the likelihood of committing a Type 1 Error. Thus it is possible that some of our findings may potentially be false positives. Regarding the parent-offspring conflict questionnaire, we conducted 22 t-tests; however, the significance level for most of our results was $p \leq .001$. In addition, the results obtained from this questionnaire are highly consistent with those found in previous studies (Buunk et al., 2008; Buunk & Castro Solano, 2010; Park et al., 2009). Similarly, when we compared the Japanese sample to the five cross-cultural samples found in Buunk et al. (2010) on the PIM scale and the question "How do you expect to find a marriage partner?" only one of the results had a value greater than $p \leq .001$. Thus we feel confident that, on the whole, our results are more likely to represent true effects rather than false positives.

A third limitation of the study is that the participants in the study were university students who were on average between the ages of 18 and 19 years old. A report from Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2011) reveals that the average age of first marriage in Japan is 30.5 years and 28.8 years for men and women, respectively. It is quite possible, due to the young age of our sample, that the participants were not as concerned about finding a marriage partner and, similarly, were not completely aware of the level of influence that their parents would have in

determining their mate choice. Admittedly, the sample obtained for this study was one of convenience. However, we still believe that the data collected give a valuable insight into the nature of parent-offspring conflict over mate choice, as well as the relative level of influence Japanese parents have over their children's mate choice. The cues that parents subtly, or even directly, transmit to their children concerning dating and romantic relationships occur over a long period of time (Bates, 1942). Thus, it seems unlikely that parents start to relay their ideas about the type of person their child should marry only when the child has reached an age at which it is normative to get married. Likewise, the participants had probably experienced going on a date or even having a boyfriend or a girlfriend, and thus have some experience with how their parents reacted to these individuals. While we hope that other researchers will test our hypotheses in a sample of individuals who are preparing to get married, we feel that the present results are a first step in understanding how in the present day the mating decisions of Japanese people are influenced by their parents.

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Table 1
 Parent-offspring conflict over mate choice

Trait hypothesized to be more unacceptable to children	<i>M</i>	Traits hypothesized to be more unacceptable to parents	<i>M</i>	Traits for which no specific hypotheses were made	<i>M</i>
Physically unattractive	2.79***	Lacks good family background	4.57***	Unfriendly and unkind	4.05***P
Considerably shorter/taller than self	3.47***	Different ethnic background	4.32***	Very different attitudes than self	2.80***C
Physically unfit	4.06***P	Different religious beliefs	4.23***	Physical or mental illness	4.02***P
Fat	2.84***	Lower social class than self	4.28***	Not a virgin	3.90*P
Bad Smell	2.77***	Divorced	4.22***		
Lacks sense of humor	3.24***	Poor	4.27***		
Lacks artistic abilities	3.60**	Not respectful and obedient	3.96*		
Lacks creativity	3.60*	Low education	4.18***		
Unintelligent	4.05***P	Does not like children	3.17***C		
Total	3.39***	Total	4.15***		

Note. Lower values indicate greater unacceptability to the child (C), and higher values indicate greater unacceptability the parents (P). Asterisks indicate significant differences from the mean score for all 22 items (3.76)

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed).

Table 2
Parental Influence over mate choice (PIM) scale

Sample	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Japan	2.09	0.55
The Netherlands	1.45*** ^{a)}	0.49
International Students in The Netherlands	1.98 ^{a)}	0.68
Kurdistan, Iraq	2.72*** ^{a)}	0.67
Caucasian Canadians	1.86* ^{a)}	0.49
East Asian Canadians	2.76*** ^{a)}	0.75

Note. A higher score on the PIM scale indicates that children more highly endorse parental influence over mate choice.

^{a)} The mean of the PIM scale from the Japanese sample was compared to the means from the other samples.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed).