



An exploration into the prevalence of the “Ben 10” trend in a South African decolonial context

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ABSTRACT

It is evident that African marriage has been under severe stress and decline for different reasons within the democratic dispensation. Factors like migrant workers, cultural change and other civil developments have not been innocent in this challenge. The authors of this article selected the Ben 10 practices for a study towards seeking ways to retain the dignity and respect which the African marriage once had before. The practical and traditional challenges that are observed when young boys get involved in relationships with older mothers who may even be the same age as their mothers are studied, unveiled and evaluated in the light of both cultural evolution and the developmental changes like human rights and so forth. This will not ignore the African values which helped sustain marriage even before colonial changes came. This is a conceptualised desktop study that will check if the current practices are not undermining African marriage. The study is an awareness that new practices that come during cultural change do not merely change the identity and the dignity that the African marriage ought to have. Decolonizing also implies that Africans must understand their roots in terms of the value within marriage practices.

Keywords: Dating, African Marriage, Sugar Daddies, Ben Ten, Cohabitation, Relationships.

INTRODUCTION

In most African countries, marriage and sex-related matters used to be topics confined to adults, behind closed doors. Recent developments in South Africa indicate that even primary school learners are not afraid to talk about sex related matters to the extent of making marital promises. For both marriage and elderly women in most African societies, when younger girls have an affair with older men (especially those who are economically sound), these men are often called ‘sugar daddies.’ This is vividly explored by Gerald West and Beverley G Haddad, where the scholars indicate different reasons used to support this view.¹ When an older woman gets involved in an intimate relationship with a younger man, the man is called “Ben 10”. This study agrees with Casterline, Williams and McDonald on the fact that the age difference between spouses is one of the issues that has received very little attention within many

¹ Gerald O West and Beverley G Haddad, “Boaz as ‘Sugar Daddy’: Re-Reading Ruth in the Context of HIV in Southern Africa,” *THE FIVE SCROLLS*, n.d., 39.

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PUBLICATION HISTORY - Received : 24th July, 2025 | Accepted: 30th January, 2026 | Published: 31st March, 2026.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Baloyi, Magezi Elijah & Lilian Cheelo Siwila. “An exploration into the prevalence of the “Ben 10” trend in a South African decolonial context.” *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 7, no.2 (2026): 620 - 630. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267215>

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cultures.² Barbieri, Hertrich and Grieve contend that a large age difference between spouses is one of the features of traditional African systems, which opt for early marriage.³

A certain 27-year-old Mduduzi from Pimville in Soweto explained how the relationship between him and his 52-year-old mother went sour after he was embarrassed when she introduced him to her 30-year-old boyfriend. He argued that he would never accept a boy of his age to be his mother's boyfriend.⁴ In the same vein, *Sowetan* spoke to a 40-year-old divorced mother (Soxaka) of two, who was said to be expecting the third child from a boyfriend 11 years younger than her (Vuyo). Another recorded story is of an 80-year-old gogo, Flora, in Mohlakeng, near Harrismith in the Free State, who commented on her happiness with her new lover (Morena, aged 34) saying: "I have been alone ever since my husband died, but now, I'm happily in love. My Ben 10 gives me life, and I feel young again because of him." This was the expression of an 80-year-old woman about how she feels about her 46-year-old boyfriend or partner. In his address to the 2016 Eastern Cape Moral Regeneration elective conference, Fr Smangaliso Mkhathshwa listed, amongst other challenges, Ben 10s as one of the serious challenges that South Africa is facing. Even though some people did not regard it as a problem, the fact that the practice is listed amongst "serious challenges" makes it a researchable issue, particularly in the African context. Kekana stated that her view received what he calls "tongue wagging" from the community members. Zodwa's response to critics was: "I am not dating a Ben 10 because I need attention or looking for love. I know what love feels and looks like, but that is not what I am after. I am after happiness, being in a free space and living my best life."⁵ Kekana went on to report that police chief, Lieutenant General Johannes Phahlane, urged police officers to avoid the rapidly spreading phenomenon of "Blessers and Ben 10's" when he said: "I have been reading things, and sisters, you must pardon me: This thing of yours, the Ben 10s and the Blessers,... Can we make it foreign to ourselves? Can you make it foreign to the South African Police Service?"⁶

In a few cases, the Ben 10s want their marriages to be legalised, but in most cases, they just want to live a "vat-en-sit" life without being married legally. Baloyi has discussed the dangers of living together without being married.⁷ The article opened avenues to the importance of accepting and following African ways of cementing marital relationships. It is from this background that this article aims to analyse the practice of Ben 10 and its acceptability in the South African context. Goxtranews argues that the name Ben 10 has been borrowed from a popular Disney cartoon character, Ben, who used a special watch device to turn into ten different personalities.⁸ Madisa, however, argues that the name is derived from Ben Tennyson, who fights evil monsters. Although many people joked about it when it started, some women ended up associating the name with youngsters whom they would like to copulate.⁹ In other contexts, according to Lawton, Callister and Street, the term "cougar", which was coined by a Canadian ice hockey team, the Vancouver Canucks, during the 1980s, is used to describe an older woman who gets involved in an intimate relationship with a younger man.¹⁰ In that context, single women went to the team's games to pursue players sexually. One of the popular examples of this kind of relationship, which attracted high levels of media attention, was that of the songwriter Sheryl Crowe (47) and Tour de France cycling champion Lance Armstrong (37).

The statements above represent different views of South Africans, which demand research, not with the intention of getting everyone to agree, but to find out ways in which such situations could be addressed in a more objective manner. Some researchers feel that the topic of age difference between

² John B Casterline, Lindy Williams, and Peter McDonald, "The Age Difference between Spouses: Variations among Developing Countries," *Population Studies* 40, no. 3 (1986): 353-74.

³ Magali Barbieri and Véronique Hertrich, "Age Difference between Spouses and Contraceptive Practice in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Population* 60, no. 5 (2005): 617-54.

⁴ K. Disetlhe, "Dating a Ben T10 Contentious- Will Your Children Accept Your Young Lover?," *Sowetan*, October 25, 2014.

⁵ C. Kekana, "Zodwa Wabantu Compares Dating Ben 10's to Dating Older Men," Timeslive blog, January 23, 2018, www.timeslive.co.za.

⁶ ENCA, "SA Police Chief Speaks against Blessers and Ben 10's.," May 10, 2016, www.enca.com.

⁷ M. E. Baloyi, "Paying Lobola When My Wife Dies: An African Pastoral Study about the Practice of Forcing People to Pay Lobola after Their Wives Passed Away," *Journal of Human Ecology* 48, no. 1 (2014): 135-43.

⁸ Goxtranews, "Do's and Don'ts for All the Ben 10s' out There," October 9, 2013, www.goxtranews.com.

⁹ K. Madisa, "I Am Not Your Ben 10," *Sowetan*, February 10, 2014.

¹⁰ Zoe Lawton, Paul Callister, and B Street, *Older Women-Younger Men Relationships: The Social Phenomenon of 'cougars': A Research Note* (Institute of Policy Studies Wellington, 2010).

spouses is important because it is associated with the risk of dissolution of marriage through widowhood before the end of a woman's reproductive years.¹¹ It also needs to be acknowledged that the age difference between spouses varies within and between societies. While some men want their identity documents to be changed so that their age can be older than that of their wives, some women ask for theirs to be given a younger age to be considered younger than their husbands.

Abidde reported: "A few years ago, Kenyans were shocked when Wambui Otieno-Mbugua, at 67, married Peter Mbugua, a man 42 years her junior. If their ages were reversed, very few people would have wagged their tongues."¹² The fact that this became a recorded story typically shows that kind of concern about the age gap in marriage.

The practice of Ben 10 seems not to be received well within the African culture and marriage. The main headline of the front page of the *Daily Sun* dated 23 October 2014 was entitled "Mam Ruby's big ben 10 kiss." The picture in which the 42-year-old woman was kissing a 25-year-old musician can be summed up by the words of the woman who said: "You know I go for Ben 10's, ne. They are humble and understanding, not like our peers." This took place at the Icons Cultural Festival, in full view of the attendants. She went on to argue that older women should not listen to people who criticise them for dating younger boys.¹³ In the programme *Mahlambandopfu* hosted by Morris Mdawu Sibuyi (Popularly known as Maningi wa Ntamu) between 03h00 and 06h00 on 20 January 2017, a slot for people to phone in and give their views about "Ben 10s" was opened from 05:00 to 05:15. The majority of the callers on line for the programme argued that the practice of young boys having affairs with older people, to be their mothers, did not demonstrate African *ubuntu* and respect. This article problematises the traditional understanding that African marriage is based on dignity, respect, communal and *ubuntu values*, being regulated by African regulations and taboos. Another important aspect is that African marriage is not a marriage for the couple alone, but the extended family members are also directly or indirectly part of it. It is not easy to enjoy a marriage which is not supported by the family, especially within the African context.¹⁴ It is, in fact, not only a problem, but also a taboo that an old woman is married to a young boy.¹⁵

METHODOLOGY

The research employed conceptual analytical methods, relying heavily on desktop as secondary sources. It analysed the already available information in the form of books, articles, newspapers and other media reports like Radio and TV news reports. These scientific theoretical readings were analysed to make a meaning which is useful for contemporary people. It was noted that although this topic is one of the very least researched ones, a few analogies could be drawn from day-to-day life experiences of the people through media and other sources, as indicated.

Narratives Around the Concept of Ben 10s

As an opening example, a certain Teboho Tshello from Botshabelo in Bloemfontein was worried about a Ben 10 having sexual relations with his wife. This started when the couple allowed this young man to stay with them since he could fix a refrigerator, without knowing that he would turn into his wife's Ben 10. The man's suspicions were confirmed when the woman argued that, since her husband did not regularly have intercourse with her, she decided the young man would do better.¹⁶ This kind of behaviour can potentially harm the hospitality of men or husbands who may doubt whether accommodating strangers in their homes may end up destroying their marriages.

Leclerc-Madlala argues: "Studies have revealed that age-disparate relationships are meaningful and perceived as beneficial at several levels, including social, physical, psychological, as well as

¹¹ Casterline, Williams, and McDonald, "The Age Difference between Spouses: Variations among Developing Countries."

¹² Sabella Abidde, "How Healthy Are Old-Young Marriages," *The African executive*, 2016, www.africanexecutive.com.

¹³ M. Nxumalo, "Mam Ruby's Big Ben Ten Kiss," *Daily Sun*, October 23, 2014.

¹⁴ Abidde, "How Healthy Are Old-Young Marriages."

¹⁵ Lawton, Callister, and Street, *Older Women-Younger Men Relationships: The Social Phenomenon of 'cougars': A Research Note*; E. Afolabi, "Women Marrying Younger Men: Providing a Biblical Evidence," *The Lord's Business Blog*, January 22, 2014.

¹⁶ K. Tlhabamelo, "Ben Ten Poked My Wife," *Daily Sun*, November 23, 2013.

economic and symbolic.¹⁷ In the context of growing economic inequalities and cultural expectations for men to give and women to receive compensation for sex, relationships with older men are a common and readily available way through which young women gain materially, affirm self-worth, achieve social goals, increase longer-term life chances, or otherwise add value and enjoyment to life.” According to her, the age gap refers to a relationship with ten or more years of disparity between the two people involved. Much of her discussion throughout her research from Zimbabwe, Botswana and other parts of the continent argues about the women being younger than the males in the relationship, and not males being younger than women. From this framework, one can understand the difficulty that cultures have with regard to the age gap differences between couples.

On the other hand, Laura Grant’s report indicates that, although most men marry younger women, there are exceptions, and hence she argues: “In fact, in 2013, 24000 men married older women, that is 15% all the grooms. Bachelors seem to be likely to marry older divorced women, for example, 44% of bachelors who married divorcees were younger than their brides.”¹⁸ It is from this perspective that this study takes its focus, to explore the cultural dynamics when coming to age-gaps where the male is the younger one in the relationship. Ndenze’s report on the wedding of South African parliamentary speaker Baleka Mbete that took place in Mqanduli (a village in the Eastern Cape) was entitled “I recognize you. Baleka gives the matrimonial nod to her Ben10.”¹⁹

In this report, the actual age gap was not mentioned, but in another report of a similar occasion by Feni, it was mentioned that the “Free State-based businessman Khomo is 10 years younger than Mbete.”²⁰ That wedding was also confirmed by Ngcukana in a separate newspaper report, “Baleka Ties the Knot.”²¹ This, however, was not the first time on South African soil to hear of an older woman getting married to a younger husband. The widely known story of a nine-year-old schoolboy who married a 62-year-old woman went viral in the media, and it sparked a lot of mixed feelings and responses from people in Ximhungwe, Mpumalanga. That was when Sanele Masilela became the world’s youngest groom, marrying Hellen. The two exchanged vows in a well-attended wedding.²² Although this marriage was said to be an ancestral pleasure, there is a growing trend of older mothers falling in love with younger men, fit to be their sons, in South Africa. “Age is just a number” is becoming a popular saying amongst many people, particularly where marriage is concerned. This was also mentioned in the report about the relationship between Morena Hlantswayo (30) and his sweetheart, Zelda Storoud (38), who is eight years older than him. Their relationship seems to be happy, because they are said to have moved in together somewhere in the northern suburbs of Joburg. They are also engaged, wearing their rings, and Storoud even mentioned she hoped to have children as soon as Ben 10 gets a permanent job. Those involved in Ben 10 relationships have reasons to defend them. “Older women have had relationships with younger men since history began. But in the past, only aristocratic, rich, famous, or powerful women were able to do so and survive the condemnation from society.”²³ Ladies have since taken the name and associated it with youngsters with whom they would like to copulate.²⁴

In the African context, it is expected that once a person is born, he or she is obliged to get married one day, and after marrying, the expectation is that children will be born. But if a young man marries an 80-year-old postmenopausal woman, the challenge will be the expectation of a child by the family. Marriages for Africans have been protected at all costs. Moreover, an African marriage is only approved once it has been subjected to certain practices and ceremonies. For instance, without lobolo being agreed upon by the two families, the marriage will not be deemed fit. Thus, the communal character of marriage plays an important role. It is therefore not easy for an African marriage to be accepted without the

¹⁷ Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, “Age-Disparate and Intergenerational Sex in Southern Africa: The Dynamics of Hypervulnerability,” *AIDS* 22, no. Suppl 4 (December 2008): S17–25, <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.aids.0000341774.86500.53>.

¹⁸ L. Grant, “10 Things about Marriage in South Africa,” *Mail & Guardian*, May 19, 2015.

¹⁹ B. Ndenze, “I Recognize You. Baleka Gives the Nod to Her Ben 10,” *Sunday Times*, September 26, 2016.

²⁰ L. Feni, “I Recognize You, Hubby’ - Mbete Ties the Knot.,” *Sowetan*, September 26, 2016.

²¹ L. Ngcukana, “Baleka Ties the Knot,” *City Press*, September 25, 2016.

²² J. Kelly, “South African Schoolboy Aged Nine Marries as 62 Year Old Woman for the Second Time,” *Mirror blog*, June 18, 2014, www.mirror.co.uk.

²³ Valerie Gibson, *Cougar: A Guide for Older Women Dating Younger Men* (Firefly Books, 2002).

²⁴ Madisa, “I Am Not Your Ben 10.”

approval of the two families concerned. The biggest question will be whether the family approves of this kind of relationship. Zawn Villines, indicates that one must be able and ready to handle generational as well as traditional criticism that comes with the challenge.²⁵

Some of the possible reasons and challenges for age gaps in dating

According to West and Haddad, it took the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government to put 89 billboards across the province as a campaign against cross-generational sex as well as staying away from sugar daddies through national television.²⁶ Some of the reasons mentioned for younger girls dating older men were economic benefits and material gain.²⁷

Khuzani was quoted by Nxumalo as saying: “When a Ben 10 comes your way, just say yes because they are humble and understanding, not like our peers.”²⁸ This view is a reminder that, amongst other things, the targeted young husband will be expected to be humble and calm and should not even think about arguing with the older woman. It is against this background that the author articulates that, since African husbands are expected to take a lead in decision-making in the home, the husband in this context is expected to be different. The negative experiences that older women have had in previous marriages play a big role in their decision to go out with younger boys. It should be noted that women who have had bad relationships previously are likely not to repeat them in future. This view receives support from Sekandari and Mojaddidi, who, in one of their “ten ways to avoid marrying the wrong person”, included humility, kindness, responsibility, and happiness as some of the needs one must crave for a good partner.²⁹ This confirms that some women want Ben 10s because they are not controversial and do not cause them problems. This can be true in some instances in the sense that there will not be a good reason for a very young boy to argue or pick a fight with someone who is perhaps ten years older than him. This means the respect that was instilled in them does not fade away in a marriage. But this cannot always be the case, as some Ben 10s are violent. A case was reported by Khambule where a woman was found lying dead in a pool of blood after being attacked and killed by her own Ben 10.³⁰

Another woman, Puseletso Motselebane, was quoted as saying that she chose to have a Ben 10 to avoid cheating. This was when she was found living with her Ben 10 in an RDP house in Khotsong, Bothaville, in the Free State.³¹ It is doubtful whether the age of the person plays a role in their cheating ways. Evidence suggests that both younger and older persons are usually caught cheating, regardless of whether they have partners or not. According to Makhoba, Hlantswayo admitted that he found young women rather fickle, hence he preferred dating “oldies”.³² Research indicates that by marrying a bride 15 to 17 years his junior, a man can reduce his risk of premature death by 20%.³³ It is also important to mention that, although the Ben 10 practice does exist, criticism against marrying an older woman is rife. In an African context, some parents do not approve of such unions since it is taboo for them. Afolabi mentions several reasons for this opposition, such as culture, religion, biological or psychological aspects, attitudinal factors, and social aspects.³⁴

Faeza also adds: “A younger guy will be more youthful. He might introduce you to some exciting new recreational activities and open a whole new world of social opportunities. A younger guy may be more willing to accept change. As we get older, we often resist change, but dating a younger man may help add a new perspective on this, allowing you to accept change more readily. A younger guy may give you more attention. Men often like dating older women because it makes them feel more youthful.

²⁵ Zawn Villines, “Liberating Motherhood,” 2020, <https://www.zawn.net/feminist-mothering>.

²⁶ West and Haddad, “Boaz as ‘Sugar Daddy’: Re-Reading Ruth in the Context of HIV in Southern Africa.”

²⁷ West and Haddad, “Boaz as ‘Sugar Daddy’: Re-Reading Ruth in the Context of HIV in Southern Africa.”

²⁸ Nxumalo, “Mam Ruby’s Big Ben Ten Kiss.”

²⁹ N. Sekandari and H. Mojaddidi, “10 Ways to Avoid Marrying the Wrong Person,” Muslim Village, October 27, 2011, www.muslimvillage.com.

³⁰ L. Khambule, “Ben 10 Murdered Our Sister,” *Daily Sun*, August 5, 2019.

³¹ N. Michaels, “I Live with My Ben 10 and My Hubby,” *Daily Sun*, March 12, 2015.

³² N. Makhoba, “How Ben 10 Danced into My Heart,” *City Press*, May 31, 2015.

³³ V. Lambert, “Why Marrying a Younger Woman Can Save Your Life (Even If It Sends Her to an Early Grave),” Mail Online, June 30, 2009, www.dailymail.co.uk.

³⁴ Afolabi, “Women Marrying Younger Men: Providing a Biblical Evidence.”

They also like the attention from someone who is more sophisticated and has more life experience.”³⁵ It appears some of those older women who date younger boys cite previous bad experience with a man of their age or even older as a reason. In this context, it is out of having been frustrated in the first place to try the Ben 10s.

Vicky Larson argues that marriages in which a wife is much older than the husband are more likely to be troubled, hence the age difference doesn't have to be all that big. While other couples are stigmatised by others, some receive social sanctions because they have violated social norms.³⁶ Although the community later accepted the relationship between the 80-year-old Flora and the 34-year-old Morena, the fact that they were initially concerned and talked about it indicates that such unions are not only unusual, but they are problematic too. It is important to note that marriage in an African context does not only involve the two people, but the family and community as well. Any union that does not receive approval and acceptance from the community has slim chances of survival.

In an African context, it is often difficult for children to accept a young person as their stepfather. In the report by Disetlhe, a child reacted as follows: “When my mom introduced her 30-year-old boyfriend to me, I was livid. I made no secret of the fact that I did not trust him, nor will I ever accept him. My mom is 52 and has no business dating a man who is in my age group.”³⁷ The reality is that many children want to have a father figure in the house, but that figure should be relatively old enough to be their father. It is for that reason that many single mothers may face many challenges. This longing for a father figure is evidenced by the fact that many children look for their absent fathers when they grow up. Ratele et al. argue that the absence of biological fathers in South Africa has been constructed as a problem for children of both sexes, but more so for male children. It is not the intention of this research to discuss absent fathers, but it is good to relate how the absence of biological fathers lures single women into having Ben 10s. In this context, the absence of the father is felt even more when a young person is seen to be trying to replace the father in the home, which will usually be difficult for the children to accept.³⁸ For Africans, a father figure is regarded as an older person, fitting for the age of other fathers in the village.

The Ben 10s are often suspected of being after the money of the widows. According to Mashaba, the provincial legislature speaker, Thandi Shongwe, sent a strong warning to widows against Ben 10s when saying: “There are widows who inherited money and other things. But there are those who have nothing. Widows give their husbands' cars to Ben 10s, who then fetch their young girlfriends ... they just want to finish the money your husband left for you.” This was said to the widows who attended the Widows Forum at the Kabokweni Community Hall in Mpumalanga.³⁹ Although this cannot be generalised to all Ben 10s, in this case, they are reported to be preying on older women because they are after policies left by the women's dead husbands. Ben 10s can also be abusive. In the report entitled “Her panties bust Ben 10”, the reporter states how the younger husband was arrested for kidnapping Hlulekile, who went missing for some time before the bust.⁴⁰ This contradicts the notion that older ladies want younger boys because they are harmless.

One young man is said to be living in fear since his love with the old woman triggered the real husband to threaten him with deadly sickness and death, saying: “U slut *uzoyeka ukuthatha abafazi babantu*. U hv pushd me 2far.” *Kudala ndikucenga ndisithi* leave my wife alone *sifebe*, *Ukuba ndingubani* u don't mess *namabhaca uzayibamba ngesandla lo pipi yakho*.”⁴¹ These are the messages the young lover had been receiving from the husband of the woman since it was found that he was involved with her. These young men are not only afraid due to threats they receive, but there is always a danger that those who take people's wives could be killed at any time. Of course, this can be argued,

³⁵ M. Faeza, “The Good and the Bad When Dating a Ben10,” Drum blog, June 14, 2016, www.sn1124.com.

³⁶ V. Larson, “He's Younger, She's Older—Can This Marriage Last?,” August 10, 2011, www.huffingtonpost.com.

³⁷ Disetlhe, “Dating a Ben T10 Contentious- Will Your Children Accept Your Young Lover? .”

³⁸ Kopano Ratele, Tamara Shefer, and Lindsay Clowes, “Talking South African Fathers: A Critical Examination of Men's Constructions and Experiences of Fatherhood and Fatherlessness,” *South African Journal of Psychology* 42, no. 4 (2012): 553–63.

³⁹ S. Mashaba, “Speaker Warns Widows against the Ben 10s,” Sowetan Live, November 22, 2014, www.sowetanlive.co.za.

⁴⁰ M. Dlungwana, “Her Panties Bust Ben 10!,” *Daily Sun*, September 18, 2015.

⁴¹ P. Saul, “Ben 10 Lives in Fear,” *Daily Sun*, December 15, 2015.

that even when an older man takes someone's wife, it would be a fight: in the case of this article, the focus is on the young boys trying to be involved with older women.

According to Monaghan in Tzeng, since the difference in age between spouses can affect the longevity of the marriage, women are traditionally expected to marry men who are at least 2 or 3 years older.⁴² It has also been argued that marriages in which wives are older than their husbands have a higher possibility of marital disruptions due to the imbalance in the family power structure.⁴³ It is not necessary to provide proof or evidence of this claim, the reason being that these cultural or traditional traits are not recorded, but can be traced from the ways in which many African communities behave when someone marries an older person. There can often be a stigma to the couple.

Proulx, Caron and Logue articulated: "The age difference did raise some issues of insecurity for the women surrounding their attractiveness when it came to intimacy. (Proulx, 2006). "Even: 44 women who considered themselves to be in good shape reported that they wondered if they could compare with the beauty that is associated with youth and still capture their younger partner's attention."⁴⁴ This implies that women who get involved with younger men realise that they are competing with young girls who are attracted to their partners. It will be normal for the Ben 10s to be attracted to their peers and former classmates at times.

African families and traditions related to the age difference in marriage

Opoku's notion that the discarding of what is indigenous and crucifying African culture in an attempt to Europeanize Africans is an undeniable fact.⁴⁵ This kind of move did not exempt African marriage taboos and regulatory measures. The confinement of this research is within Africa, hence African traditions may not be ignored, particularly those which talk to and build African marriages. The very first important thing to remember in African marriage is that the union is not only of the two people, but it involves the two families and often extends to the clan. Marriages without the approval of the two families have very slim chances of acceptance and survival amongst Africans. It is for that reason that the negotiation of lobolo amongst many African tribes does not involve the marrying husband, but his family representatives and those of the woman, while the two are left out. This kind of tradition cannot be ignored or undermined when they think about the new trend of older women having relationships with younger men, fitting to be their sons. The communal life is not excused when it comes to marriage issues. Opoku has a saying to indicate the strong bond between Africans and communalism when he says, "When a thorn gets into a toe, the whole body bends to remove it."⁴⁶

Even though there is no rule amongst black South Africans on the marital age for both sexes, there is evidence that, traditionally, the African man was expected to marry someone who was younger than himself. It was for that reason that young boys were expected to grow up and find employment before thinking of marriage. Although age does not necessarily imply responsibility, it was believed that a certain amount of responsibility and maturity would also be accompanied by a number of years. According to Casterline et al., in five African countries, fewer of the women are older than their partners.⁴⁷ Tertilt and Gunga agree that many African men would prefer to marry younger women.⁴⁸ Tertilt argues that this has been influenced, amongst other things, by the patriarchal belief that women must be subordinated. Tertilt believes that younger women tend to be more submissive to their husbands than older ones.⁴⁹ This sentiment is shared by Barbieri and Hertrich, who argue: "By reinforcing gender domination with age domination, the age difference establishes an inequality of status within the couple,

⁴² Meei-Shenn Tzeng, "The Effects of Socioeconomic Heterogamy and Changes on Marital Dissolution for First Marriages," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1992, 609–19.

⁴³ Larry L Bumpass, Teresa Castro Martin, and James A Sweet, "The Impact of Family Background and Early Marital Factors on Marital Disruption," *Journal of Family Issues* 12, no. 1 (1991): 22–42.

⁴⁴ J. Seskin and B. Ziegler, *Older Women/Younger Men* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979).

⁴⁵ Kofi Asare Opoku, "The Church in Africa and Contemporary Sociological Challenges," *Ecumenical Review* 40, no. 2 (1988).

⁴⁶ Opoku, "The Church in Africa and Contemporary Sociological Challenges." 245.

⁴⁷ Casterline, Williams, and McDonald, "The Age Difference between Spouses: Variations among Developing Countries."

⁴⁸ Michele Tertilt, "Polygyny, Fertility, and Savings," *Journal of Political Economy* 113, no. 6 (2005): 1341–71; Samson O Gunga, "The Politics of Widowhood and Re-Marriage among the Luo of Kenya," *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya* 1, no. 1 (2009): 165–78.

⁴⁹ Tertilt, "Polygyny, Fertility, and Savings."

as the wife is doubly subordinated to her husband, both as a woman and as his junior.”⁵⁰ This view is shared by some scholars who argue that research indicates that most African women accept that their husbands play an important, if not predominant, role in fertility and contraceptive decisions, since they are seniors.⁵¹

This view receives support from Akujobi, who argues: “The second factor responsible for this high rate of widows in Africa is the age difference between husbands and wives, especially in the traditional societies. Usually, wives are far younger than their husbands and polygamy, which is fostered by the traditions and some religious practices, also encourages this great difference in age.”⁵² Biello confirms that, in general, men marry younger women, while women prefer marrying older men. To maximise their chances of having the most offspring that survive, men in Finland marry women who are 15 years younger, while in Sweden, men marry women who are at least six years their junior for reproductive reasons.⁵³

Critical Evaluation

Decolonization demands that citizens find themselves and take pride in their own culture and tradition, which was rendered as barbaric and pagan by the colonial masters. Being an African comes with regulations like taboos and so forth, and if citizens do not want to understand these traditional demands, they may get stuck in the process of decolonizing or Africanizing.

It would be practically difficult for the mother of Ben 10s to accept having an older woman of her age or even older for a daughter-in-law. It is an expectation of the family, clan, and community that the mother-in-law should be excused from many activities which are taken over by the daughter-in-law, while she only takes the lead in ensuring that relevant house rules and taboos are respected. This would mean that the leader must be older to lead the young, but that cannot be imaginable in a situation where the daughter-in-law is equal to or even older than the house mother. The family’s hierarchical respect is affected. In Tsonga, the parents-in-law may call their daughter-in-law “*N’wananga or N’wingi*.” The first word is the same word that is used and means “my child.” It is therefore going to be difficult, if not impossible, for the in-laws to call someone of their age or even older in that way.

In the Munghana Lonene television programme “Tiko axi etleri”, which was broadcast live between 06:00 and 07:00 on 22 September 2016, the MEC of Health in Limpopo (Phophi Ramatuba) confirmed that, in terms of causes of sex-related illnesses like HIV/AIDS, not only the young girls who go out with older “blessers” are at risk, but also the young boys who go out with older women, the Ben 10s.⁵⁴ The author is of the opinion that, without blindly believing the health professionals on the issue, the fact that they indicate the risk should inspire us to try to persuade people to stay away from such practices. The truth is that teenagers are still maturing; hence, for them to fall in love with older women who have already been in love with one or even more than one ex-boyfriend or husband, the risk is higher for the boy than for the woman. A certain Janeth Lestwalo (aged 56) in the Sebokeng area confirmed that she did not know she was heading for trouble when she took a Ben 10, aged 35 years, into her ten-roomed house.⁵⁵ When the relationship went sour, the man set fire to her house. One cannot deny that even old men could do that, but the lady is convinced that this behaviour was a result of childish reasoning. Most older men would not automatically resort to using fire to correct an ugly relationship.

The SABC 2 programme entitled “Vusaseki”, hosted by Tintswalo Mushwana on 30 March 2016 between 20:00 and 21:00, had guests condemning Ben 10s, citing that there was no future in such

⁵⁰ Barbieri and Hertrich, “Age Difference between Spouses and Contraceptive Practice in Sub-Saharan Africa.”620.

⁵¹ S., Watkins, N., Rutenberg, and Wilkinson., “ Orderly Theories, Disorderly Women,” in *The Continuing Transition*, ed. G.W. Jones et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 213–45.

⁵² REMI Akujobi, “‘Yesterday You Were Divorced. Today I Am a Widow’: An Appraisal of Widowhood Practices and the Effects on the Psyche of Widows in Africa,” *Gender and Behaviour* 7, no. 2 (2009): 2457–68.

⁵³ D. Biello, “What Is the Best Age Difference for Husband and Wife,” *Scientific American* blog , December 5, 2007, www.scientificamerican.com.

⁵⁴ Munghana Lonene Vusaseki, “SABC 2 Live Programme Hosted on Wednesdays between 20h00 and 21h00.,” 2016.

⁵⁵ S. Molobi, “Ben Ten’s Revenge. I Dumped Him so He Set Fire to My House,” *Daily Sun*, April 18, 2017.

practices.⁵⁶ During the relaunch of the SAPS Women's Network in Pretoria, one of the speakers.⁵⁷ These are things that characterize society today. The authors of this article do not think that this is in line with African culture and marriage. "Moral regeneration should be part and parcel of societal programme."⁵⁸ This statement was met with applause from the attendants as a sign that people are against this kind of behaviour. In the Sowetan dated 10 February 2015, Madisa reports about a 24-year-old who is in denial when saying, "I am not your Ben 10."⁵⁹ Meanwhile, he was considerably younger than the woman he was dating. This is an indication that even some men who are involved in this practice do not want to be called that. The author is concerned about the fact that, even though people do things they regret straightaway, they continue doing these things, not because they really want to be part of it, but for other reasons. This resonates with Romans 7:19 in which Paul says: "I do not do the good that I want to do, instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do."

From all the arguments above, one point one can make is that most of the African contexts do not accommodate relationships or marriages where the male is younger than the female. Regardless of any argument that people can make to support this new trend, being African goes hand in hand with the behaviour, as well as cultural and traditional practices that make one African. In the African context, it is vital that the family and the community approve of a marriage. If marriage is not approved by the family and clan or even the community, through their regulations, rules, and traditions, such a union or marriage will have a slim chance of survival. That is why no human being in Africa should live in isolation and, hence, marriages are shaped by communal life. Marriage, amongst other traditions, tends to conform to the norms and values of the culture. In other words, marriage should be able to transmit and extend what the community intends with its people. That means, if the marriage is not accepted by the community, it cannot do what it is intended to do. Happy Ngwenya (aged 54) was beaten and almost killed by the community after they found the body of Betty Majola (80+ years old), almost decomposing, as she died after he left her alone in the shack. This confirmed people's suspicion that Happy was only interested in Betty's pension. Consequently, when she died, he left her. The question of moral regeneration, which different cultures should also address, should not be ignored when dealing with challenges like Ben 10s, which we are already facing in our society.

CONCLUSION

As much as the trend of sugar daddies is practiced, the trend of Ben 10 seems to be taking its toll amongst the Africans. The question of the acceptability of Ben 10's union obviously receives much criticism because of the practical expectations of the African marriage. It is not easy to determine what the age gap between a couple that decides to marry should be. Similarly, it is difficult to think of an African marriage which is not accepted by either of the two families for whatever reason. This calls for parents to use their moral compass to be not only aware of, but also teach their children and ensure that the values of their traditions and culture are accounted for in the raising of their children. Most importantly, a marriage should conform to the norms and values of a particular culture, which is challenging because of the diverse cultures in South Africa. Lastly, since the Bill of Rights protects everyone and their culture, families should be able to make their own choices regarding this.

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