

There's a 14-Year Age Gap Between Bachelor Arie and Contestant Bekah M. Experts Weigh in on Whether It Can Work

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Is dating someone way younger or older a recipe for relationship problems?

By [Jacqueline Andriakos](#)

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During last night's episode of ABC's *The Bachelor*, Bekah Martinez (you know her as the coquettish, pixie cut-rocking "Bekah M.") finally revealed her age to this season's star, Arie Luyendyk Jr. The revelation? Martinez is 22, making her 14 years younger than the 36-year-old race-car driver. (Cue [this face](#).)

But while fans may have been squirming on their couches, Luyendyk Jr. didn't appear to stay in shock for too long, and he decided to "proceed with caution" and see where the relationship goes. But their budding romance begs the question: Is a relationship with a sizeable age gap doomed to fail?

As you might expect, the answer isn't black and white. "It really comes down to whether your lifestyles, goals, and maturity levels sync up," says Holly Richmond, PhD, a Los Angeles-based sex and relationship therapist. "And the bigger the age gap, the more challenging this can be, though not all couples are the same."

Several studies have looked at the correlation between [age differences in a relationship and marital success](#) and point to the same very-general conclusion: The [bigger the age gap](#), the more likely a marriage will eventually erode. That being said, there is no hard-and-fast rule to determine what size age gap is your safest bet for marital bliss.

"From my experience, an age gap of seven years and under is usually pretty inconsequential," says Richmond. "When you get to an age gap of a decade or more, then it's time to ask some questions to help you and your partner determine whether this is going to work as a long-term thing."

Luyendyk Jr. has already begun asking some of the necessary questions to determine his long-term compatibility with Martinez. During Monday's episode, he described himself as someone who likes to get up early and live a quieter, more mellow lifestyle. He asked Martinez if it's still important to her to go out and party with friends.

Martinez, too, tiptoed around the subject of their compatibility, admitting to Luyendyk Jr. that she has already wondered whether he will get along with her close pals. If the two continue to work on their relationship, it will be essential to figure out whether each

person feels the other can mesh with their lifestyle, as well as their family and social circle.

"With some couples where there is a large age difference, energy levels may differ," says Rachel Needle, a psychologist at the Center for Marital and Sexual Health of South Florida in West Palm Beach. "It can create a challenge when one partner cannot keep up with the other who wants to do and experience more." Also, if you cannot see your partner interacting with your family and the people closest to you, it might be a red flag, she adds.

Other questions that need to be covered when one person is in her 20s and the other is in his 30s: Do you want to get married? Do you want to have children, and if so, how soon? "Many men absolutely have an emotional clock," Richmond notes. "I can't even tell you how many of my male clients in couples have said things like, 'I really want to be married and have a child before I am 40.'"

A relationship with a large age difference can also evolve over time—potentially prompting new challenges when you hit different life stages. In other words, "dating a 54-year-old when you're 40 is different than dating a 36-year-old when you're 22," Richmond says.

"What I've witnessed is that an age gap typically feel significant when you are young, like in your 20s and 30s; it feels insignificant when you've both reached your 40s to 50s. But then it feels noticeable again when someone has hit their 60s, 70s, and onward," explains Richmond. Why? "The older person may no longer be able to do the same physical activities as the younger person anymore, or they may not be able to travel as much, for example," Richmond says. "You may start to feel the physical and emotional burdens of your age difference once again when you exit that sort of general phase of adulthood during your 40s and 50s."

Points of contention can even arise in a couple's sex life. "For partners with a large age gap between them, the amount and type of sex they each want can create issues," says Needle. "As we age, we also tend to have more health problems and may potentially be on more medications, which can both impact sexual desire and response."

How to make an age gap work

Not all couples with an age difference are ill-fated, of course. But it's important to address the age-related elephant in the room right away. "Conversations like this can be ongoing," Needle says, "but it's important to know if you are on the same page from the beginning."

So should you break it off immediately if your answers don't align perfectly? Not necessarily. "If the younger person shares she isn't ready to settle down or get married and have kids right away, at least both parties are now aware of that and can decide if they are both interested in riding it out for the time being," Richmond explains. On the other hand, if one person has the attitude that it's a waste of time to date anyone whose life goals don't match their own, then it's probably best to end it sooner rather than later.

Couples with a large age difference whose relationships last tend to have one major thing in common: "They honor each other's autonomy outside of the relationship," Richmond notes.

Richmond works with a couple with a 17-year age gap; the wife is in her 50s, while her husband is in his 70s. "They make concessions for each other that allow them to really be themselves both inside and outside of their relationship, and it makes them stronger together," Richmond explains. For example, the husband encourages his younger wife to travel frequently to Europe, where she has friends and family. "She goes alone," Richmond says. "She gets that time to be active and go exploring and socializing by herself."

In return, she makes a real effort to do lots of stuff at home with her husband to accommodate some of his health issues that have developed over the years. "They take their dogs for a walk, they paint together—things that he can comfortably do at home, where he is most happy."

Now back to *The Bachelor*: We (of course) know that the reality show is not the best dose of, well, reality. But we're curious to see where Luyendyk Jr. and Martinez's relationship heads. Martinez did in fact snag a rose in Monday's episode—so we'll have to keep watching this season to see if the couple continues to question their long-term compatibility.