

# Hagmaxxing - How Our Generation is Breaking the Age-Gap Discourse

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Jake met Melissa in the quiet glow of a museum exhibit, the air thick with the solemn beauty of 18th-century Gothic art. Melissa, a 44-year-old office worker who could navigate Excel sheets like a concert pianist handles keys, was staring at an engraving of Mary Shelley's imagined tomb. Jake's been living on his own for almost two years, working full-time to pay rent, bills, and saving when he can. He's got a plan: in a few years, he'll go to school and get his English degree. He can already picture the kind of literary deep dives he'll finally have time for—Shelley, Lovecraft, even Thoreau if he's feeling indulgent. But for now, he's grinding. Balancing the line between survival and aspiration. He spoke with an ambition that Melissa found refreshing, even as he laughed about how he survived on instant noodles more often than he'd like. For Jake, Melissa's insights into navigating life, coupled with her irreverent humor, made her magnetic.

They started talking at the exhibit, an impromptu debate about what really happened before Poe died (Melissa hadn't seen the critical video essay on the topic) turned into coffee and then hours of conversation. A shared love of the gothic turned into something deeper. Jake and Melissa became lovers. Their relationship wasn't scandalous, or sordid, or any of the things people might assume. It was...normal. Easy. They liked each other's company. They laughed at each other's dumb jokes. They cared about each other's lives.

If you strip their story down to its bones, it's simple. Two adults with full lives, consenting and deciding to be together. But, of course, the story doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's wrapped in layers of societal expectations, outrage, and moral policing. Jake and Melissa aren't just Jake and Melissa; they're a *scenario*, a lightning rod for "the discourse".

Why? What makes Melissa and Jake so threatening to the moral framework of this discourse?

Let's be honest: age-gap relationships make people squirm. The liberal millennial discourse surrounding them has entrenched itself in a rigid framework—as inherently predatory, age differences as insurmountable gulfs, younger adults as helpless victims unable to navigate relationships with autonomy. But what if the reality is far more complex? What if Melissa isn't a predatory cougar and Jake isn't a naïve child? What if they're just two consenting adults who met at a museum because they both love Gothic art and literature?

Millennials, especially those steeped in neoliberal ideals, have a habit of infantilizing Gen Z. Their rhetoric often positions itself as progressive, yet it drips with puritanical condescension. "Jake's too young to understand," they say, infantilizing a grown man who's been fending for

himself. The judgment isn't about protecting Jake; it's about control, about asserting dominance over a younger generation that's challenging their narratives. They call us reckless, naïve, incapable of understanding the consequences of our choices. But maybe the truth is simpler: they're envious. Envious that we are experimenting, autonomously, with our bodies and our relationships. Envious that we are reshaping cultural narratives and questioning their rules.

These narratives don't exist in a vacuum. They come from a society deeply invested in maintaining certain power structures. Who benefits when we divide adults based on arbitrary qualifiers like age, or when we infantilize younger adults? Who profits when working-class people—who already face enough alienation—are told that their relationships are suspect, that their choices are invalid? The capitalist class thrives on this kind of division. Keeping people isolated, suspicious of one another, and second-guessing their autonomy only reinforces the social hierarchies that keep systems of power intact.

And here's the twist: the gendered double standard in these situations is glaring. A younger man like Jake is framed as pathetic, emasculated, or the victim of some Freudian complex. A younger woman in his position, however, is treated as inherently powerless, unable to navigate power dynamics. Both narratives are dehumanizing. They deny autonomy to the younger partner while reducing the older partner to predatory stereotypes. When Jake is shamed for his sexuality, it's a denial of his agency. When Melissa is dismissed as a "hag" or reduced to an archetype of desperation, it's a regressive policing of women's sexualities. The same liberal progressives who claim to stand for empowerment, agency, and open-mindedness often wear their discomfort with male sexuality like a badge, as though shaming young men is somehow an act of moral superiority. They'll cheer "sex positivity" for everyone else, but when it comes to young men? The rhetoric becomes about discipline, distrust, and denial. Ironically this perpetuates toxic stereotypes about masculinity—namely, that men's desires are inherently dangerous or that they are incapable of engaging with their own sexuality in a thoughtful, ethical way.

Toxic masculinity thrives in the silence shame creates. Repression breeds confusion, and confusion creates an opening for those who prey on it. By failing to address young men's sexuality with nuance and care, liberal progressives unwittingly hand ammunition to the very forces they claim to oppose.

Think about the terms themselves: "hag," "cougar," "boy toy", "cradle robber", "mommy issues". When a younger man and an older woman are involved, the narrative swerves into comedy, as if the pairing is so inherently ludicrous that it cannot be taken seriously. Zoomers, of course, have leaned into this absurdity with the term "hagmaxxing," an ironic, tongue-in-cheek reclaiming of a label meant to strip older women of their desirability and humanity.

"Hagmaxxing" isn't just about younger men chasing older women for kicks. It's a middle finger to the idea that older women should somehow "expire," that their worth vanishes as they age out of their twenties. It's a rejection of the notion that a woman like Melissa is either a desperate

predator or a sexless shadow. By co-opting the word, we're subverting the narrative, holding up a mirror to society's regressive policing of women's sexuality.

But let's step back for a moment and think about how this plays out differently depending on the genders involved. If Jake were Jasmine and Melissa were Mike, what would change? The older man-younger woman trope has been beaten into our cultural consciousness to the point of exhaustion—the judgments are sharper, crueler. Where Jake might face shaming for his sexuality—questions of emasculation, jokes about “having mommy issues”—Jasmine's autonomy would be erased altogether. “She doesn't know what she's doing,” the moralizers would cry. “She's being taken advantage of!” And there it is: the implicit denial of her agency, her ability to consent, her power over her own body. Society tells her she's both too young to navigate desire and too foolish to see manipulation coming. This infantilizes young adults and perpetuate the idea that women, both younger and older women, can't be fully autonomous sexual beings. This isn't to say power imbalances don't exist—they absolutely do—but to assume they dominate every relationship is to reveal a shallow understanding of human connection.

No one really talks about the flipside of age-gap relationships. We're so busy painting them with the broad brush of suspicion that we ignore the intricate dynamics that often make them thrive. Consider the teacher-student, master-apprentice energy that can naturally emerge—not in a paternalistic way, but in a collaborative one. Relationships like Jake and Melissa's aren't about one partner wielding their life experience like a cudgel; they're about using that experience to steer the ship together, to avoid the rocks one of them has already crashed into.

It's not hard to imagine Melissa helping Jake sidestep some of the pitfalls she stumbled into as a young adult. Maybe she talks him through how to negotiate a raise, or shares hard-won wisdom about which coworkers to trust and which to avoid. Maybe she listens to his dreams of pursuing an English degree and offers insights into balancing school and work, insights born of her own struggles in a job market that doesn't reward passion. This isn't about her playing “mommy” or infantilizing him—it's about recognizing that relationships, especially those with an age gap, can leverage differences in experience to benefit both partners.

We don't even need to stretch our imaginations too far to see this dynamic play out in reverse. Take the example of a 19-year-old OnlyFans creator, fiercely independent and carving out her own space in the world, but also navigating the minefield of sudden income and societal judgment. Enter her 27-year-old boyfriend—not her “caretaker,” not her boss, but someone who's been around the block a few more times. He knows the seductive pull of shiny things, like the Camaro she's considering buying with her first big payout. He's the one who gently points out that a massive car loan might not be the best move, sharing his own story of spiraling into debt in his early twenties because he couldn't resist a brand-new ride.

For a generation that came of age under neoliberalism, with its moralistic overtones and obsession with optics, it's no surprise that millennials have developed a particular knack for paternalism. Gen Z, meanwhile, has responded to this with a defiant shrug. We aren't asking for their approval, but their inability to grant it burns through the subtext of their critiques. Why are millennials, especially the self-proclaimed progressive ones, so obsessed with this? Is it envy? Are they grappling with the fact that Gen Z now holds the cultural reins? Or is it something deeper—a fear of what happens when young adults refuse to let the older generation set the moral parameters of their lives? There's a persistent belief among older generations that young adults today are somehow less equipped to handle life than their predecessors. It's laughable. Our generation is navigating economic precarity, a never-ending stream of crises, and a digital world that demands constant adaptability. We aren't interested in their outdated frameworks of morality, rooted in fear and shame. Consent is our generation's moral bedrock—clear, mutual, and inviolable.

Jake didn't consent to the conditions that forced him to work full-time instead of going to school right away. Melissa didn't consent to a society that tells her she's undesirable after forty. But they did consent to each other. They're two adults navigating the complexities of connection in a world determined to complicate it further. To claim otherwise is to deny Jake's agency, to infantilize him in ways that run counter to the very foundation of consent. When we start declaring which adults are "allowed" to consent to relationships with one another, we aren't protecting anyone. We're enforcing arbitrary stratifications that serve to divide and conquer. The result? A more isolated, distrustful society where the working class is too busy turning on itself to demand better.

So let's stop pretending we know better than the people actually living these dynamics. Let's stop shaming young men for their desires and older women for embracing theirs. Let's stop denying agency to adults just because their choices make us uncomfortable. Because when we do that, we're not protecting anyone. We're just reinforcing the same tired hierarchies that keep us all alienated and divided.

The next time you see a Jake and a Melissa, or a Jasmine and Mike, ask yourself: Who are people "helping" when they clutch pearls over their relationship? Is it Jake? Is it Melissa? Or is it the systems that thrive on our division, our alienation, our moral panic? Because in a bar somewhere, a 21-year-old and a 38-year-old are laughing over drinks, connecting across the supposed chasm of their ages. And maybe the real question isn't, "Should they be together?" but "Who profits from keeping them apart?"