

Abstract

Research on happiness in romantic relationships is important in preparing for an aging society. This study explores whether attributional bias may affect adults' happiness in romantic relationships throughout their lifetime. The sample consists of couples aged 18 years and above. Participants' happiness was measured by the Oxford Happiness Survey, and the levels of dispositional and situational biases were accessed. Two items had a positive correlation with happiness: age and optimism bias. There was a negative correlation between happiness and distress-maintaining attributional bias. Lastly, optimism bias was found to be a moderator of age and happiness with the length of the relationship as a covariant using multiple regression.

1. Introduction

Heider (1958) developed the attribution theory that distinguished between dispositional and situational attributions. Dispositional attributions are attributions related to stable characteristics of traits, attitudes, and desires that are trans-situational (Miller & Smith, 1981). Situational attributions are attributions identified with stimuli that elicit situation-specific responses. Since then, attributional biases have been measured in children and adults, particularly among married couples. Most research that focused on attributional bias in couples investigated communicational and adaptability differences. (Noller & Venardos, 1986; Schriber, Larwood & Peterson, 1985; Schüutz, 1999). Other research looked into the age differences in respect to attributional bias (Horhota & Blanchard-Fields, 2004; Stanley & Blanchard-Fields, 2011). However, there are few studies tackling the interrelationship between age, attributional bias and happiness in romantic relationships. My main goal of this study is to integrate these literatures and address this interrelationship. I will first aim to replicate previous studies to demonstrate the relationship between age and happiness, and then test the relationship between attributional bias and marital happiness.

1. 1 Relationship among age, attributional bias and happiness

1.1.1. Age differences in attributional biases

Most prior studies have shown that older adults are more likely to show dispositional bias