

A Review of Age-Discrepant Relationships Involving Younger Women: Couples Therapy Not A “One Size Fits All”?

Kristi A. Barnes
Ohio University - Southern

Abstract

This paper provides a review of the literature on factors linked to relationship quality and how these may relate to the experiences of couples in age-discrepant marriages (ADMs) and relationships. Particular attention is given to how differences in age may exacerbate issues commonly negotiated by marriage partners, or even create new challenges. Given that research has established a link between marital quality and well being, the importance of developing therapies that consider the unique experiences of individuals in age-discrepant relationships is addressed.

Changing Social Trends and Family

According to a review by Greeff and DuToit (2009), as demographic trends change the family structure continues to evolve. The prevalence of second marriages often results in unique relationships between partners who differ significantly in age and challenge the norm (Bonds & Nicks, 1999; Davis, 1998; Watson, Klohnen, Casillas, Simms, Haig, & Berry, 2004). Statistics from recent years indicate that an estimated 50% of marriages result in divorce (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, & Mosher, 2012), with rates that are more pronounced for those who marry multiple times (Kreider & Ellis, 2011).

The gender composition of the workforce is also changing and the increasingly disproportionate number of advanced degrees conferred to women (Edwards, 2009) indicates that women will likely continue to start families at an older age than previous generations. According to statistics on the median age of marriage, the current cohort of both men and women are older when they marry (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Kreider and Ellis (2011) indicate that the median age at first marriage has increased by more than five years for men and women in comparison to their counterparts in the 1950s. More specifically, the median age at first marriage for men is 28 years, while the median age for females is 26 years. Further, the shifting focus on educational attainment and professional goals among women has impacted romantic relationships (Johnson & Dye, 2006). By placing a higher

priority on education and suspending marriage, the availability of men their own age shrinks as the percentages of older men who are divorced increases (Bonds & Nicks, 1999; Winston & Klepfer, 2000). These trends contribute to a growing number of age-discrepant marriages (ADMs; Bonds & Nicks, 1999; Davis, 1998; Watson et al., 2004).

Interestingly, the same demographic changes that encourage ADMs may perpetuate the challenges that these couples face as a result of age-related differences (e.g., Knox & Britton, 1997). Findings regarding the viability of these marriages are less than clear. In a review of the literature by Boyd & Li (2003), it is noted that researchers disagree about whether these marriages are more or less volatile than marriages involving partners who are similar in age. Regardless of whether these marriages are prone to more challenges, it is important to recognize that current demographic trends suggest that these types of couples do exist and should not be overlooked (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Therefore, it is important to identify the types of challenges and relational distress that these couples face so that the appropriate therapeutic practices can be utilized.

Female-older ADMs: A Unique Case

According to Veevers (1984), data in the mid-1980s indicated that the population of ADMs was shrinking. Contrary to expectation, recent statistics suggest that the proportion of age-discrepant couples is palpable (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Although age-discrepant relationships involving older women have received more attention in the media, the frequency of ADMs defined by an older female is comparatively smaller (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Census (2011) figures indicate that just over 4% of marriages include a woman who is at least 6 years older than her husband. Nearly five times as many relationships between couples who are not married involved a woman who was at least six years older (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2011). If the potential exists that individuals involved in ADMs may be more vulnerable to specific types of stressors (Agurcia, Vaughn, Berenson, Volk, & Wiemann, 2001; Knox & Britton, 2007), then those couples including an older wife may be particularly susceptible to stressors reflecting less favorable attitudes about aging among women (e.g., Cowan, 1984). As noted in a review of the literature by Barnes (2003), it is critical to recognize that the dynamics of these types of age-discrepant relationships may be different from those experienced by couples involving an older husband.

Relationship Dynamics and Life Stage Differences

Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990) suggests that couples who are age-discrepant would experience inherent challenges to relationship satisfaction. SST states that individual goals are predicated by life stage and that needs and motivations change accordingly. The lack of experience and understanding that define youth may motivate individuals to maintain relationships that render less emotionally satisfying outcomes simply because the relationship serves to increase their knowledge.

Motivations shift as a function of age and the accumulation of knowledge (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990). As such, the social network becomes smaller, but is dominated by relationships that are emotionally beneficial and stronger (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999). Barnes (2003) suggests that while the impact of dissimilar needs and goals may not be evident at the inception of age-discrepant relationships, as both partners age it is likely that the couple will be faced with the consequences of increasingly divergent developmental tasks. These life stage issues relate to changes in physical well-being, employment status (Kulik, 2001), and the emphasis on emotional needs (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990; Carstensen et al., 1999), and cohort differences (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003). Although all couples have the potential for facing these issues at different times throughout the course of their marriage, for couples in ADMs it is nearly inevitable that one partner will be dealing with at least one of the aforementioned issues sooner than the other.

There is considerable evidence that illness can compromise the quality of marital satisfaction (e.g., Ward & Spitze, 1988; Yee & Schulz, 2000), especially for those marriages in which one partner assumes the responsibility of providing care to a spouse (e.g., Hooker, Manoogian-O'Dell, Monahan, Frazier, & Shifren, 2000; Wright & Aquilino, 1998). Caregiving may be more antagonistic to relationship quality among age-discrepant couples who are coping with the effects of caregiver burden and a salient reminder of differences in life stage. If the younger wife is at the pinnacle of her professional career, juggling the responsibilities of caring for a sick spouse can be particularly devastating. Women today are part of “the sandwich generation” (Pierret, 2006). In addition to their strong presence in the workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011), many of these women assume caregiving responsibilities for their parents and children, which may add to their experience of stress (e.g., Kim, Baker, Spillers, & Wellisch, 2006). Those women in “the sandwich generation” involved in ADMs who

are juggling the responsibilities of caring for a young child, a parent, and an older spouse with a health condition may be especially vulnerable to the effects of stress.

It is well documented that adjusting to retirement can create issues for both partners in a marriage (e.g., Kulik, 2001). Work is an important part of an individual's identity and upon retirement individuals are faced with renegotiating their time and redefining their sense of self (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2001). Within the context of the marriage this may involve a shift in domestic responsibilities that can lead to greater potential for conflict (Kulik, 2001). More specifically, one partner may be dissatisfied with the contributions of the other. Also, the recently retired spouse may feel a lack of competence in his domestic skills and in his ability to satisfy the other partner by increasing his contributions on the home front (Kulik, 2001). Again, these are issues that aren't specific to age-discrepant couples, but may be more common among this group because of the age difference that defines them.

Based on SST (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990; Carstensen et al., 1999), the focus on emotional needs becomes stronger for individuals as they grow older. For individuals in ADMs one partner may be more focused on personal goals related to professional accomplishments, while the other is focusing on emotional needs. Barnes (2003) contends that these differences in goals and motivations may leave partners feeling isolated and ultimately give rise to disagreements and growing negativity. Given that approximately 72% of women that work outside of the home are mothers to children 18 years old or younger (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011), this may be especially true for women involved in age-discrepant relationships. In fact, research suggests that balancing work and family commitments may lead one partner to harbor resentment while the other feels neglected (Rogers & Amato, 2000).

Yet, the potential for emotional intimacy that a spouse can provide becomes even more critical for the older partner, as the social network becomes smaller (Lang & Carstensen, 1994). Therefore, in ADMs the husband may be more dependent on his wife as he ages than she is on him, adding to the potential for feelings of isolation. In fact, research indicates that older adults demonstrate a stronger need for connectedness (Rabin & Rahav, 1995). Given the potential for cohort differences between age-discrepant partners, there is reason to believe that generational differences may compound changing motivations precipitated by different life stages.

Research on attraction and compatibility has long supported the importance of similarity as a predictor of relationship success (e.g., Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001). Based on this research, similarity in attitudes is critical to relationship satisfaction. ADMs and age-discrepant couples may be subject to cohort differences in gender socialization (Byrne & Murnen, 1988) and may experience struggles related to these differences. Kerpleman and Schvaneveldt (1999) note that male and female attitudes about gender roles are different, with men having more distinct ideas about what roles are relegated feminine duties. Cohort differences in these attitudes have been reported, suggesting that time has moderated rigid gender role socialization (Amato et al., 2003). Yet, research indicates that these attitude changes fail to translate into any tangible differences in behaviors among husbands on the domestic front (Braun & Scott, 2009; Brooks, 2000; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Therefore, it is conceivable that differences in attitudes about gender appropriate behavior and inequitable distribution of power and responsibility (Faulkner, Davey, & Davey, 2005) may exacerbate adjustment issues associated with retirement and changing developmental goals. It is important to recognize that although the link between attitude similarity and relationship outcomes is well-established (e.g., Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001), more recent research challenges these findings and suggests that similarity develops across the course of a relationship and may not be as strong a predictor of relationship success (Watson et al., 2004).

Limitations of Existing Research and Consequences for Therapy

Knox and Britton's (1997) review of the research indicates that the needs of couples in age-discrepant relationships are unclear because of the lack of well-controlled research studies examining this population. One of the most obvious limitations in the existing research relates to the lack of consistency in definitions of "age-discrepant" (Shehan, Berardo, Vera, & Carley, 1991). Some research studies use definitions of age-dissimilar that label relationships or marriages where there is as small a difference as four years (e.g., Zak, Armer, Edmunds, Fleury, Sarris, & Shatynski, 2001). Although this does represent an age-discrepant relationship, it is important to consider that those couples who have age differences as large as 20 years may face challenges that are different than do those with less pronounced age differences. Without a clear understanding of the issues that ADMs face, it is impossible to develop and implement couples therapy that effectively addresses their specific needs. There is overlap in the types of

issues that all couples face; however, the larger marital context likely contributes to how these issues are resolved (Karney & Bradbury, 2005). Grouping all age-discrepant couples into the same category, despite inconsistencies in the criteria used to define them (Shehan et al., 1991), makes it difficult to understand the specific issues these couples face and the larger context of their relationships.

Finances and informal caregiving are both issues that many married couples face (Kim et al., 2006; Pierret, 2006). However, the context of age-discrepant relationships may provide these individuals with different resources for appraising and coping with these stressors (Karney & Bradbury, 2005). In fact, research suggests that one coping resource, the social support network, may be negatively affected by the age differences between partners (Agurica et al, 2001; Knox & Britton, 1997). Social support is particularly relevant to families that are blended, which may be more likely to be defined as ADMs, and is linked to improved outcomes between partners in these types of families (Greeff & Du Toit, 2009). According to Knox and Britton (1997) individuals in ADMs also were more likely to report conflicts related to leisure. Specifically, the findings suggest that age-related changes in physical well-being experienced by the older partner may interfere with participating in activities that interest the younger partner and result in less time shared together.

Differences in physical well-being linked to age also may contribute to relationship difficulties linked to sexual satisfaction (e.g., Rowland, Incrocci, & Slob, 2005). In fact, Ashdown, Hackathorn, and Clark's (2011) review of the literature provides considerable evidence that satisfaction with the sexual component of the relationship is important to overall relationship quality. Clearly, erectile dysfunction is not unique to relationships that are defined by age differences. However, it is important to recognize that although often there are effective treatments for erectile dysfunction (e.g., Atwood, Klucinec, & Neaver, 2006; Rowan et al., 2005), the lack of age-congruence between partners may pose a greater challenge to the initial adjustment for the younger partner who is at a different life stage and whose motivation may differ considerably.

Marriage and Well Being: The Need for Effective Therapy for Distressed Age-Discrepant Couples

In an overview of the research, Wood, Goessling, and Avilar (2007) note that research indicates higher levels of physical and psychological well-being among married adults. Marital status is related to more favorable perceptions of physical well-being among men and linked to a decrease in

the frequency of physical manifestations in women. Gender may differentially affect attitudes about marital satisfaction and the potential benefits to well being that have been linked to marriage (Cohen, Geron, & Farchi, 2009). Specifically, findings indicate gender discrepancies in reports of marital satisfaction, with wives reporting less satisfaction. This suggests that women in age-discrepant relationships may experience additional stressors (Rogers & Amato, 2000) and less support (Knox & Britton, 1997), leaving them more susceptible to diminished relationship quality and thus more vulnerable to compromised physical and psychological well-being (Cohen et al., 2009; Wood et al., 2007). These implications are especially critical given the bidirectional link between marital satisfaction and affect among women and the impact that this may have on the dynamics of the relationship and the subsequent satisfaction reported by husbands (Cohen et al., 2009).

A clear understanding of the challenges and strengths that individuals bring to their marriage is one of the components most critical to the successful implementation of any form of couples therapy (Faulkner et al., 2005; Karney & Bradbury, 2005; Rose-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004). The rapport among the couple and the therapist is contingent upon open communication and the therapist's sensitivity to the issues specific to that marriage (Rose-Grandon et al., 2004). Rose-Grandon et al. (2004) note that in order for relationships to grow, one of the primary functions of a therapist is to foster interpersonal communication skills that enable couples to constructively express their feelings and perceptions. For those ADMs and age-discrepant couples in therapy, the lack of research examining these types of relationships (e.g., Knox & Britton, 1997), creates an even greater need for these couples to be able to clearly articulate their feelings and perceptions regarding their marital struggles.

The influence of attitudes about gender roles on the dynamics of the relationship and relational outcomes also is repeatedly addressed in the counseling literature (e.g., Faulkner et al., 2005; Rose-Grandon et al., 2004). Faulkner et al. (2005) suggest that a failure to effectively address divergent attitudes about gender roles can erode the relationship. According to Norris, Snyder, and Rice (1997) this may be especially relevant to age-discrepant couples who have to reconcile cohort differences in gender socialization.

Findings by Karney and Bradbury (2005) suggest that therapists treating age-discrepant

couples may face added difficulties that further complicate the effectiveness of therapy (Karney & Bradbury, 2005). For example, data indicate these couples report more pronounced economic burdens (e.g., Agurcia et al., 2001; Boyd & Li, 2003; Knox & Britton, 1997). Karney and Bradbury (2005) note that effectively addressing the relational distress precipitated by financial burdens can be complicated by the fact that these couples often have less time to share with each other. More specifically, time spent together may be compromised because these couples often juggle multiple work responsibilities in attempts to shrink their financial burdens (Karney & Bradbury, 2005).

The proportion of age-discrepant relationships in the United States is tangible (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Despite this, there is limited research focusing on these types of relationships (Knox & Britton, 1997). Furthermore, the meaning of findings based on the existing research is convoluted by a failure to examine well-defined populations of age-discrepant couples (Bonds & Nicks, 1999; Shehan et al., 1991). SST (Carstensen et al., 1999; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990) suggests that these individuals will face challenges that are endemic to relationships comprised of individuals coping with different developmental needs. Given the potential physical and psychological benefits of marriage (Wood et al., 2007), it is imperative that researchers identify the challenges that these couples face so that therapies sensitive to their relationship dynamics can be identified and delivered effectively.

References

- Agurcia, C.A., Vaughn, R.I., Berenson, A.B., Volk, R.J., & Wiemann, C.M. (2001). The behavioral risks and life circumstances of adolescent mothers involved with older adult partners. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, 155*, 822-830. Retrieved from <http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/reprint/155/7/822?maxtoshow=&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=Agurcia&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&resourcetype=HWCIT>
- Amato, P. R., Johnson, D. R., Booth, A., & Rogers, S. J. (2003). Continuity and change in marital quality between 1980 and 2000. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 65*, 1-22. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2003.00001.x
- Ashdown, B.K., Hackathorn, J., & Clark, E. (2011). In and out of the bedroom: Sexual satisfaction in the marital relationship. *Journal of Integrated Social Sciences, 2*(1), 40-57. Retrieved from http://www.jiss.org/documents/volume_2/issue_1/JISS_2011_Sexual_Satisfaction_in_Marriage.pdf
- Atwood, J., Klucinec, E., & Neaver, E. (2006). A combined-constructionist therapeutic approach to couples experiencing erectile dysfunction: Part I. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal, 28*(4), p393-402. doi: 10.1007/s10591-006-9017-8.
- Barnes, K.A. (2003). *Examining predictors of marital satisfaction among age-similar and age-discrepant older couples*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences & Engineering, 65(8-B). (AAT 3142891)
- Bouchard, T. J. Jr., & Loehlin, J. C. (2001). Genes, evolution, and personality. *Behavior Genetics, 31*(3), 243-273. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?hid=12&sid=dca0ca77-9880-4b5c-aeb3-da698e5bbbd9%40sessionmgr13&vid=15>
- Bonds, J. M., & Nicks, S. D. (1999). Sex by age differences in couples applying for marriage. *Psychological Reports, 84*, 42-44.
- Boyd, M., & Li, A. (2003). May-December: Canadians in age-discrepant relationships. *Canadian Social Trends, 70*(11), 29-33. Retrieved from http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~boydmon/research_papers/miscellaneous/Boyd_Li_CST_2003.pdf

- Braun, M., & Scott, J. (2009). Gender role egalitarianism-Is the trend reversal real? *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 21(3), 362–367. doi:10.1093/ijpor/edp032
- Brooks, G. R. (2000). The role of gender in marital dysfunction. In R. M. Eisler & M. Hersen (Eds.), *Handbook of gender, culture, and health* (pp. 449-470). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Byrne, D., & Murnen, S. K. (1988). Maintaining loving relationships. In R. J. Sternberg & M. L. Barnes (Eds.), *The Psychology of Love* (pp. 293-310). New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.
- Carstensen, L. L., Isaacowitz, D. M., & Charles, S. T. (1999). Taking time seriously: A theory of socioemotional selectivity. *American Psychologist*, 54, 165-181. Retrieved from http://journals.ohiolink.edu/ejc/pdf.cgi/Carstensen_Laura_L.pdf?issn=0003066x&issue=v54i0003&article=165_tts
- Cohen, O., Geron, Y., & Farchi, A. (2009). Marital quality and global well-being among older adult Israeli couples in enduring marriages. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 37, 299-317. doi: 10.1080/01926180802405968
- Copen, C.E., Daniels, K., Vespa, J., & Mosher, W. D. (2012). *First marriages in the United States: Data from the 2006-2010 national survey of family growth* (49). Retrieved from the Centers for Disease Control website: www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr049.pdf
- Cowan, G. (1984). The double standard in age-discrepant relationships. *Sex Roles*, 11, 17-23. Retrieved from http://journals.ohiolink.edu/ejc/pdf.cgi/Cowan_Gloria.pdf?issn=03600025 &issue=v11i1-2&article=17_tdsiar
- Davis, A. (1998). Age differences in dating and marriage: Reproductive strategies or social preferences? *Current Anthropology*, 39, 375-380. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3031093>
- Edwards, T. (2009). Census Bureau releases data showing relationship between education and earnings. U.S. Census Bureau News. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/education/013618.html>
- Faulkner, R. A., Davey, M., & Davey, A. (2005). Gender-related predictors of change in marital satisfaction and marital conflict. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 33, 61-83. doi: 10.1080/01926180590889211

- Frederickson, B. L., & Carstensen, L. L. (1990). Choosing social partners: How old age and anticipated endings make people more selective. *Psychology and Aging, 5*, 335-347. Retrieved from http://journals.ohiolink.edu/ejc/pdf.cgi/Fredrickson_Barbara_L.pdf?issn=08827974&issue=v05i0003&article=335_csp
- Greeff, A. P., & Du Toit, C. (2009). Resilience in remarried families. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 37*, 114-136. doi: 10.1080/01926180802151919
- Hooker, K., Manoogian-O'Dell, M., Monahan, D. J., Frazier, L. D., & Shifren, K. (2000). Does type of disease matter? Gender differences among Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease spouse caregivers. *The Gerontologist, 40*, 568-573. doi:10.1093/geront/40.5.568
- Johnson, T. & Dye, J. (2006). Indicators of Marriage and Fertility in the United States from the American Community Survey: 2000 to 2003. *U.S. Bureau of the Census*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/fertility/mar-fert-slides.html>
- Karney, B.R., & Bradbury, T.N. (2005). Contextual influences on marriage: implications for policy and intervention. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 14*(4), 171-174. doi: 10.1111/j.0963-7214.2005.00358.x
- Kerpelman, J. L., & Schvaneveldt, P. L. (1999). Young adults' anticipated identity importance of career, marital, and parental roles: comparisons of men and women with different role balance orientations. *Sex Roles, 41*, 189-217. Retrieved from http://journals.ohiolink.edu/ejc/pdf.cgi/Kerpelman_Jennifer_L.pdf?issn=03600025&issue=v41i3-4&article=189_yaaiiowwdrbo
- Kim, Y., Baker, F., Spillers, R.L., & Wellisch, D.K. (2006). Psychological adjustment of cancer caregivers with multiple roles. *Psycho-Oncology, 15*, 795-804. doi: 10.1002/pon.1013
- Knox, D., Britton, T., & Crisp, B. (1997). Age discrepant relationships reported by university faculty and their students. *College Student Journal, 31*, 290-293.
- Kreider, R.M., & Ellis, R. (2011). *Number, timing, and duration of marriages and divorces: 2009* (P70-125). Retrieved from the United States Census Bureau website: www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p70-125.pdf

- Kulik, L. (2001). Marital relationships in late adulthood: Synchronous versus asynchronous couples. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 52, 323-339. doi: 10.1111/j.0022-2445.2005.00123.x
- Lachance-Grzela, M., & Bouchard, G. (2010). More on the gendered division of household labor: A response to commentators. *Sex Roles*, 63, 801-806. doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9885-0
- Lang, F. R., & Carstensen, L. L. (1994). Emotional relationships in late life: Further support for proactive aging in the social domain. *Psychology and Aging*, 9, 315-324. Retrieved from http://journals.ohiolink.edu/ejc/pdf.cgi/Lang_Frieder_R.pdf?issn=08827974&issue=v09i0002&article=315_cerill
- Norris, M. P., Snyder, D. E., & Rice, J. L. (1997). Marital satisfaction in older adults: A comparison of community and clinic couples. *Journal of Clinical Geropsychology*, 3, 111-122.
- Papalia, D. E., Olds, S. W., & Feldman, R. D. (Eds.). (2001). Psychosocial Development in Late Adulthood. In *Human Development* (8th ed., pp.674-708). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Pierret, C. R. (2006). The 'sandwich generation': Women caring for parents and children. *Monthly Labor Review*. Retrieved November 15, 2009, from: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2006/09/art1full.pdf>
- Rabin, C., & Rahav, G. (1995). Differences and similarities among younger and older marriages across cultures: A comparison of American and Israeli retired nondistressed marriages. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 23(3), 237-249.
doi: 10.1080/01926189508251354
- Rogers, S. J., & Amato, P. R. (2000). Have changes in gender relations affected marital quality? *Social Forces*, 79(2), 731-753. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?hid=12&sid=dca0ca77-9880-4b5c-aeb3-da698e5bbbd9%40sessionmgr13&vid=73>
- Rose-Grandon, J. R., Myers, J. E., & Hattie, J. A. (2004). The relationship between marital characteristics, marital interaction processes, and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 84, 58-68. Retrieved from <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-113856973.html>
- Rowland, D.L., Incrocci, L., & Slob, A.K. (2005). Aging and sexual response in the laboratory in patients with erectile dysfunction. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 31, 399-407. doi:10.1080/00926230591006520

- Shehan, C. L., Berardo, F. M., Vera, H., & Carley, S. M. (1991). Women in age-discrepant marriages. *Journal of Family Issues*, 12, 291-305. Retrieved from http://journals.ohiolink.edu/ejc/pdf.cgi/Shehan_Constance_L.pdf?issn=0192513x&issue=v12i0003&article=291_wiam
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2011). *America's families and living arrangements: 2011*. Retrieved from U.S. Census Bureau website: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2011.html>
- U.S. Department of Labor. (2011). *Women in the labor force: A databook* (Report No. 1034). Retrieved from U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics website: <http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook-2011.pdf>
- Veevers, J. E. (1984). *Age-discrepant marriages: Cross-national comparisons of Canadian-American trends*. *Social Biology*, 31(1-2), 18-27. Retrieved from <http://www.biomedsearch.com/nih/Age-discrepant-marriages-cross-national/6544000.html>
- Ward, R.A., & Spitze, G. (1988). Sandwiched marriages: The implications of child and parent relations for marital quality in midlife. *Social Forces*, 77(2), 647-66. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3005542>
- Watson, D. Klohnen, E.C., Casillas, A. Simms, E., & Haig, J. (2004). Match makers and deal breakers: Analyses of assortative mating in newlywed couples. *Journal of Personality*, 72(5), 1029-1068. doi: 10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00289.x
- Winston, N. A., & Klepfer, G. J. (Fall, 2000). Patterns of mate selection among the elderly: Do the homogamous norms apply? *Perspectives: Electronic Journal of the American Association of Behavioral and Social Sciences*. Retrieved November 14, 2009, from: <http://www.aabss.org/journal2000/f26winston.jmm.html>
- Wood, R.G., Goessling, B. & Avilar, S. (2007). *ASPE Research Brief. The effects of marriage on health: A synthesis of recent research evidence*. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Human Services Policy website: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/marriageonhealth/rb.pdf>
- Wright, D. L., & Aquilino, W. S. (1998). Influence of emotional support exchange in marriage on caregiving wives' burden and marital satisfaction. *Family Relations*, 47, 195-204. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/585624>

- Yee, J. L. & Schulz, R. (2000). Gender differences in psychiatric morbidity among family caregivers: A review and analysis. *The Gerontologist*, 40, 147-164. doi: 10.1093/geront/40.2.147
- Zak, A., Armer, E., Edmunds, K., Fleury, T., Sarris, M., & Shatynski, B. (2001). Age-discrepant relationships: Do these romances fare well? *North American Journal of Psychology*, 3(1), 119-121. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/ehost/detail?hid=12&sid=dca0ca77-9880-4b5c-aeb3-da698e5b5bd9%40sessionmgr13&vid=92&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=pbh&AN=111436>

Biographical Information

Kristi A. Barnes, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Ohio University Southern where she has been a member of the faculty since 2005. Kristi is a 1998 graduate of Marietta College and earned both her master's degree (2000) and her doctorate (2003) in lifespan developmental psychology at West Virginia University. Her research interests focus on family process as these relate to marriage and informal caregiving among middle-aged and older adults. Kristi's research examines the link between social support and reports of subjective well-being among men and women as a spouse or in their role as caregiver. She is especially interested in how gender influences the experiences of husbands and wives and translates into differences in their physical and psychological well-being. Kristi's research interests have expanded to include an examination of cultural factors endemic to Appalachia and how these influence the educational experiences of adult learners in the region.