Method: A meta-analysis was carried out on research on married couples and the attributions they make.

Findings:
Spouses in happy relationships tended to focus on their partner’s positive behaviour as part of the person’s character. They were more likely to make attributions that locate the cause of
- positive events to dispositional factors in the partner (i.e. positive things happen because of the partner)
- negative events to situational factors (i.e. the partner is not to blame).

Example:
Spouses in unhappy relationships tended to see their partner’s negative behaviour as part of his or her character and downplay the partner’s positive behaviour. They were more likely to make attributions that locate the cause of
- positive events to situational factors (i.e. positive events do not happen because of the partner)
- negative events to dispositional factors (i.e. the partner is to blame).

Example:
- Individuals employ a stable and global attribution to partner’s behaviour. The stable part means they believe the partner does that all the time.
- This attribution style is stable across all situations and the language used in these attributions is often universal. This means that words such as ‘never’ and ‘always’ are used. This could be in a positive light e.g. ‘he’s always on time’ and ‘he never lets me down’ OR alternatively it could be used in a negative light e.g. ‘he’s never on time’ and ‘he always thinks about himself’.
Consistent negative attributions like this do not contribute to the maintenance of a relationship and could lead to the eventual breakdown of the relationship.

Conclusion: Therefore, it would seem to suggest that the quality of the relationship influences the communication style in that relationship, which determines whether or not the relationship is successful and maintained. In this study, happy relationships are maintained by positive attribution styles, where a spouses positive behaviour is attributed to their disposition and negative behaviour is put down to the situation. These are attributions which would maintain most interpersonal relationships.

Critical thinking:
- Study only used married couples. Does this type of communication maintain relationships in non-married couples?
- How long had the couples been married for? The length of their marriage could have influenced the attributions they made. E.g. if couples married for less time were the ones making the positive attributions, then this type of communication may only maintain relationships which are relatively fresh.
- Real world application – This may explain problems in highly dysfunctional relationships - for example, cases of domestic violence – where a pattern of seeing the negative behaviours of a partner as only situational and not potentially dispositional can lead to excusing violent behaviours.
- Meta analysis: Publication bias: it’s possible that the researcher chose to include articles in the analysis which supported what they wanted to find
- However makes the results more generalizable because it allows researchers to analyse larger sets of data taken from lots of studies.

In addition, there have been concerns about the direction of the relationship between variables. Is it marital satisfaction which influence attribution style or is it attribution style which influences marital satisfaction? Karney and Bradbury (2000) attempt to decipher this tangle.

Karney and Bradbury (2000)