A-level Psychology Relationship Revision for Paper 3

SimplyPsychology

Relationships

A-level Revision Notes AQA(A)

by Will Goulder, updated 2016

Exam Paper Advice

In the exam, you will be asked a range of questions on the topic of relationships, which may include questions about research methods or using mathematical skills based on research into relationships.

As in Paper One and Two, you may be asked a 16-mark question, which could include an item (6 marks for AO1 Description, 4 marks for AO2 Application and 6 marks AO3 Evaluation) or simply to discuss the topic more generally (6 marks AO1 Description and 10 marks AO2 Evaluation).

There is no guarantee that a 16-mark question will be asked in this topic though so it is important to have a good understanding of all of the different areas linked to the topic.

There will be 24 marks for relationship questions, so you can expect to spend about 30 minutes on this section, but this is not a strict rule.

The evolutionary explanations for partner preferences

The relationship between sexual selection and human reproductive behavior

Anisogamy AO1

Anisogamy means two sex cells (or gametes) that are different coming together to reproduce. Men have sperm cells, which are able to reproduce quickly with little energy expenditure and once they start being produced they do not usually stop until the man dies.

Female gametes (eggs or ova) are, in contrast, much less plentiful; they are released in a limited time frame (between puberty and menopause) and require much more energy to produce. This difference (anisogamy) means that men and women use different strategies when choosing their partners.

Inter-sexual Selection (AO1)

Females lose more resources than men if they choose a sub-standard partner, so are pickier about who they select. They are more likely to pick a partner who is genetically fit and willing to offer the maximum resources to raise their offspring (a man who will remain by her side as the child grows to protect them both and potentially provide more children).

If they have made a good choice, then their offspring will inherit the positive features of their father and are therefore also more likely to be chosen by women or men in the next generation.

Intra-sexual Selection (AO1)

Whilst females prefer quality over quantity, anisogamy suggests that men's best evolutionary strategy is to have as many partners as possible.

To succeed, men must compete with other males to present themselves as the most attractive mate, encouraging features such as muscles which indicate to the opposite sex an ability to protect both them and their offspring.

AO3

Buss (1989) conducted a survey of over 10,000 adults in 33 countries and found that females reported valuing resource-based characteristics when choosing a male (such as their jobs) whilst men valued good looks and preferred younger partners more than females did.

This was supported by research conducted by Waynforth and Dunbar (1995) who found that women tended to list physical characteristics when seeking a partner in personal ads and men promoted their wealth or resources.

Clark and Hatfield (1989) conducted a now infamous study where male and female psychology students were asked to approach fellow students of Florida State University (of the opposite sex) and ask them for one of three things; to go on a date, to go back to their apartment, or to go to bed with them.

About 50% of both men and women agreed to the date, but whilst 69% of men agreed to visit the apartment and 75% agreed to go to bed with them, only 6% of women agreed to go to the apartment and 0% accepted the more intimate offer.

Factors Affecting Attraction

Self Disclosure

AO1

Self-disclosure in the context of a relationship refers to how much information someone is willing to share. In the initial stages of a relationship, couples often seek to learn as much as they can about their new partner and feel that this sharing of information brings them closer together. But can too much sharing scare your partner away? Is not sharing very much information intriguing or frustrating?

Altman and Taylor (1973) identified breadth and depth as important factors of self-disclosure. At the start of a relationship, self-disclosure is likely to cover a range of topics as you seek to explore the key facts about your new partner “What do you do for work”, “Where did you last go on holiday”, but these topics are relatively superficial.

As the relationship develops, people tend to share more detailed and personal information, such as past traumas and desires for the future. If this sharing happens too soon however, an incompatibility may be found before the other person has reached a suitable level of investment in the relationship. Altman and Taylor referred to this sharing of information as **social penetration**.

An important aspect of this is the **reciprocity** of the process, if one person shares more than the other is willing to, there may be a breakdown of trust as one person establishes themselves as more invested than the other.

(AO3)

Aron et al. (1997) found that by providing a list of questions to pairs of people which start with superficial information (Who would be your perfect dinner party guest) and moving over 36 questions to more intimate information (Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find the most disturbing) people grew closer and more intimate as the questions progressed. Aron’s research also included a four-minute stare at the end of the question sequence, which may have also contributed to the increased intimacy.

Sprecher and Hendrick (2004) observed couples on dates and found a close correlation between the amount of satisfaction each person felt and the overall self-disclosure that occurred between the partners.

However, much of the research into self-disclosure is correlational which means that a causal relationship cannot be easily determined; in short it may be that it is the attraction between partners which leads to greater self-disclosure, rather than the sharing of information which leads to greater intimacy.

Physical attractiveness: including the matching hypothesis

AO1

Physical attractiveness is viewed by society as one of the most important factors of relationship formation, but is this view supported by research?

Physical appearance can be seen as a range of indicators of underlying characteristics. Women with a favourable waist to hip ratio are seen as attractive because they are perceived to be more fertile (Singh, 2002), people with more symmetrical features are seen to be more genetically fit.

This is because our genes are designed to make us develop symmetrically, but diseases and infections during physical development can cause these small imperfections and asymmetries (Little and Jones, 2003).

The halo effect is a cognitive bias (mental shortcut) which occurs when a person assumes that a person has positive traits in terms of personality and other features because they have a pleasing appearance.

Dion, Berscheid and Walster (1972) asked participants to rate photographs of three strangers for a number of different categories including personality traits such as overall happiness and career success.

When these results were compared to the physical attraction rating of each participant (from a rating of 100 students), the photographs which were rated the most physically attractive were also rated higher on the other positive traits.

The matching hypothesis (Walster et al., 1966) suggests that people realise at a young age that not everybody can form relationships with the most attractive people, so it is important to evaluate their own attractiveness and from this, partners which are the most attainable.

If a person always went for people "out of their league" in terms of physical attractiveness, they may never find a partner which would evolutionarily foolish. This identification of those who have a similar level of attraction, and therefore provide a balance between the level of competition (intra-sexual) and positive traits is referred to as matching.

AO3

Modern dating in society is increasingly visual, with the rise of online dating, particularly using apps such as Tinder.

In Dion et al.'s (1972) study, those who were rated to be the most physically attractive were not rated highly on the statement "Would be a good parent" which could be seen to contradict theories about inter and intra-sexual selection.

Landy and Aronson (1969) show how the Halo effect occurs in other contexts. They found that when victims of crime were perceived to be more attractive, defendants in court cases were more likely to be given longer sentences by a simulated jury. When the defendants were unattractive, they were more likely to be sentenced by the jury, which supports the idea that we generalise physical attractiveness as an indicator of other, less visual traits such as trustworthiness.

Feingold (1988) conducted a meta-analysis of 17 studies and found a significant correlation between the perceived attractiveness of actual partners rated by independent participants.

The Filter Theory

AO1

Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) suggested that when selecting partners from a range of those who are potentially available to them (a field of availables), people will use three filters to "narrow down" the choice to those who they have the best chance of a sustainable relationship with. The **filter model** speaks about three "levels of filters" which are applied to partners.

The first filter proposed when selecting partners was **social demography**. People are far more likely to have access to people who come from a similar background to themselves. This could relate to geographical proximity, social class, ethnic group or level of education for example.

The second filter that Kerckhoff and Davis suggested was **similarity in attitudes**. This was supported by their original 1962 longitudinal study of two groups of student couples (those who had been together for more or less than 18 months).

Over seven months, the couples completed questionnaires based on their views and attitudes which were then compared for similarities. Kerckhoff and Davis suggested that similarity of attitudes was the most important factor in the group who had been together for less than 18 months. This is supported by the self-disclosure research described elsewhere in this topic.

The third filter was **complementarity** which goes a step further than similarity. Rather than having the same traits and attitudes, such as dominance or humour, a partner in who complements their spouse has traits which the other lacks. For example one partner may be good at organisation, whilst the other is poor at organisation but very good at entertaining guests.

Kerchoff and Davis found that this level of filter was the most important for couples who had been together for more than 18 months. This may be the origins of the classic phrase "opposites attract", though we may add the condition "although not for the first 18 months of the relationship.

AO3

This theory may be interpreted as similar to the matching hypothesis but for personality rather than physical traits.

Some stages of this model may now be seen as less relevant, for example as modern society is much more multi-cultural and interconnected (by things such as the internet) than in the 1960s, we may now see social demography as less of a barrier to a relationship. This may lead to the criticism that the theory lacks temporal validity.

This lack of temporal validity is supported by Levinger (1978) who, even only 16 years after the study, pointed out that many studies had failed to replicate Karchkoff and Davis' original findings, although this may be down to methodological issues with operationalising factor such as the success of a relationship or complementarity of traits.

Again, the investigating the second and third levels of the filter theory look at correlation which cannot easily explain causality. Both Davis and Rusbult (2001) and Anderson et al.

(2003) found that people become more similar in different ways the more time that they spend in a relationship together.

So it may be that the relationship leads to an alignment of attitudes, and also a greater complementarity as couples assign each other roles: “He does the cooking and I do the hoovering”.

Theories of Romantic Relationships

Social Exchange Theory

AO1

Psychologists Thibault and Kelley (1959) proposed the Social Exchange Theory which stipulates that one motivation to stay in a romantic relationship, and a large factor in its development, is the result of a cost-benefit analysis that people perform, either consciously or unconsciously.

In a relationship people gain rewards (such as attention from their partner, sex, gifts and a boost to their self-esteem) and incur costs (paying money for gifts, compromise on how to spend their time or stress). There is also an opportunity cost in relationships, as time spent with a partner that does not develop into a lasting relationship could have been spent with another partner with better long-term prospects.

How much value is placed on each cost and benefit is subjective and determined by the individual. For example, whilst some people may want to spend as much time as possible with their partner in the early stages of the relationship and see this time together as a reward of the relationship, others may value their space and see extended periods spent together as more of a necessary investment to keep the other person happy.

Thibault and Kelley also identified a number of different stages of a relationship which progress from the sampling stage, where couples experiment with the potential costs and rewards of a relationship through direct or indirect interactions, through the bargaining and commitment stages as negotiations of each partner’s role in the relationship occur and the rewards and costs are established and become more predictable, and finally arriving at the institutionalisation stage where the couple are settled and the norms of the relationship are heavily embedded.

Comparison Levels (CL) and (CLalt)

The comparison level (CL) in a relationship is a judgement of how much profit an individual is receiving (benefits minus costs). The acceptable CL needed to continue to pursue a relationship changes as a person matures and can be affected by a number of external and internal factors.

External factors may include the media (younger people may want for more from a relationship after being socialised by images of romance on films and television), seeing friends and families in relationships (people who have divorced or separated parents may have a different CL to those with parents who are still married), or experiences from prior relationships, which have taught the person to expect more or less from a partner. Internal perceptions of self-worth such as self-esteem will directly affect the CL that a person believes they are entitled to in a relationship.

CLalt stands for the Comparison Level for Alternatives and refers to a person's judgement of if they could be getting fewer costs and greater rewards from another, alternative relationship with another partner. Steve Duck (1994) suggested that a person's CLalt is dependent on the level of reward and satisfaction in their current relationship. If the CL is positive, then the person may not consider the potential benefits of a relationship with another person.

AO3

Operationalising rewards and costs is hugely subjective, making comparisons between people and relationships in controlled settings very difficult. Most studies which are used to support Social Exchange Theory account for this by using artificial procedures in laboratory settings, reducing the external validity of the findings.

Michael Argyle (1987) questions whether it is the CL which leads to dissatisfaction with the relationship, or dissatisfaction which leads to this analysis. It may be that Social Exchange Theory serves as a justification for dissatisfaction rather than the cause of it.

Social Exchange Theory ignores the idea of social equity explained by the next relationship theory concerning equality in a relationship – would a partner really feel satisfied in a relationship where they received all of the rewards and their partner incurred all of the costs?

Equity Theory

AO1

Equity theory builds upon the assumption of Social Exchange Theory that romantic relationships can be viewed as economic models (loss, risk, benefits etc.), but factors in people's desire for equality in relationships. If one partner is benefiting from more profit (benefits-costs) than the other, then both partners are likely to feel unsatisfied.

Walster et al. (1978) makes the distinction between an uneven level of rewards or costs between partners which may be balanced out over time or be perceived to have different values (perhaps one partner receives less rewards, but also suffers fewer costs from the relationship; they may not help with as much of the housework but treat their partner more for their effort) and the imbalance of profit, where one partner suffers from greater costs but does not receive a higher benefit for their trouble. They are under-benefiting whilst their partner over-benefits, which is likely to make both people feel uncomfortable.

What may be more damaging than initial inequity, which can be identified and dealt with (or perceived as normal) at the beginning of a relationship, is a change in equity over time. One partner may lose interest in the relationship or what is initially perceived as fair (perhaps one partner "chasing" the other) may be viewed as unfair if it continues to develop.

A partner who feels that they are receiving less profit in an inequitable relationship may respond by either working hard to make the relationship more equitable, or by shifting their own perception of rewards and costs to justify the relationship continuing.

AO3

Huseman et al. (1987) suggested that individual differences are an important factor in equity theory. They make a distinction between entitleds who feel that they deserve to gain more than their partner in a relationship and benevolents who are more prepared to invest by worker harder to keep their partner happy.

Clark and Mills (2011) argue that we should differentiate between the role of equity in romantic relationships and other types of relationships such as business or casual, friendly relationships. They found in a meta-analysis that there is more evidence that equity is a deciding factor in non-romantic relationships, the evidence being more mixed in romantic partnerships.

Social Equity Theory does not apply to all cultures; couples from collectivist cultures (where the group needs are more important than those of the individual) were more satisfied when over benefitting than those from individualistic cultures (where the needs of the individual are more important than those of the individual) in a study conducted by Katherine Aumer-Ryan et al. (2007).

Some cultures have traditions and expectations that one member of a romantic relationship should benefit more from the partnership. The traditional nuclear family, typical in the early to mid-20th century, was patriarchal, and the woman was often expected to contribute to more tasks, such as housework and raising the children, than the man for whom providing money to the family was perceived to be the primary role.

Rusbult's Investment Model

AO1

Rusbult et al.'s (2011) model of commitment in a romantic relationship builds upon the Social Exchange Theory discussed above and proposes that three factors contribute to the level of commitment in a relationship.

Satisfaction and Comparison with Alternatives (discussed above), are the first two factors. They are the extent to which a partner feels a relationship is worthwhile for them when comparing other possible relationships and their investment against the rewards offered by the pairing. The third factor is an addition to the model, investment size, which explains why relationships do not all breakdown when the CL or CLalt are low.

Investment in relationships can be measured as a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic investments which have been made over the course of the relationship. Intrinsic investments are those which have been added by a single partner such as money towards a date or a gift, time spent with the person and any self-disclosures which have been made. Extrinsic investments are those which have been created or developed over the course of the relationship which are shared by both partners, such as large purchases (a house or car) or even children.

Rusbult's model proposes that commitment occurs when the CL and CLalt are high and the investment level is high. We can observe this in a relationship through relationship maintenance mechanisms, or behaviors which only couples who are committed to a relationship will exhibit. These include behaviors such as forgiveness, willingness to sacrifice, and being overly positive about their partner.

AO3

Le and Agnew's (2003) meta-analysis of studies relating to similar investment models found that satisfaction, comparison with alternatives and investment were all strong indicators of commitment to a relationship. This importance was the same across cultures, genders, and also applied to homosexual relationships.

Many of the studies relating to investment in relationship rely on self-report technique. Whilst this would be perceived as a less reliable and overly-subjective method in other areas, when looking at the amount an individual feels they are committed to a relationship, their own opinion and the value that they place on behaviors and attributes is more relevant than objective observations.

Again, investment models tend to give correlational data rather than causal, it may be that a commitment established at an earlier stage leads inevitably to the partner viewing comparisons more favourably and investing more into the relationship.

Duck's Phase Modell

AO1

Duck's (2007) phase model suggests that the breakdown of a relationship is not a single event, but rather a system of stages or phases which a couple progress through which incorporate the end of the relationship.

Intra-Psychic Phase

In this phase, one of the partners begins to have doubts about the relationship. They spend time thinking about the pros and cons of the relationship and possible alternatives, including being alone. They may either internalise these feelings or confide in a trusted friend.

Dyadic Phase

The partners discuss their feelings about the relationship; this usually leads to hostility and may take place over a number of days or weeks. Over this period the discussions will often focus on the equity in the relationship and will either culminate in a renewed resolution to invest in the relationship, or the realisation that the relationship has broken down.

Social Phase

Other people are involved in the process; friends are encouraged to choose a side, and may urge for reconciliation with their partner, or may encourage the breakdown, through expression of opinion or hidden facts ("I heard they did this…"). Each partner may seek approval from their friends at the expense of their previous romantic partner. At this point, the relationship is unlikely to be repaired as each partner has invested in the breakdown to their friends, and any retreat from this may be met with disapproval.

Grave-Dressing Phase

When the relationship has completely ended, each partner will seek to create a favourable narrative of the events, justifying to themselves and others why the relationship breakdown was not their fault, thus retaining their social value and not lowering their chances of future relationships. Their internal narrative will focus more on processing the events of the relationship, perhaps reframing memories in the context of new discoveries about the partner, for example an initial youthfulness may now been seen as immaturity.

AO3

Duck's model may be a relevant description of the breakdown of relationships, but it does not explain what leads to the initial stages of the model which other models of relationships discussed earlier attempt to do.

Duck's phase model has useful real-life applications. When relationship therapists can identify the phase of a breakdown that a couple are in, they can identify strategies which target the issues at that particular stage. Duck (1994) recommends that couples in the intra-psychic phase should be encouraged to think about the positive rather than the negative aspects of their partner.

Rollie and Duck (2006) added a fifth stage to the model, the resurrection phase where people take the experiences and knowledge gained from the previous relationship and apply it to future relationships that they have. When Rollie and Duck revisited the model, they also emphasised that progression from one stage to the next is not inevitable and effective interventions can prevent this.

Virtual Relationships in Social Media

Self-Disclosure

AO1

Sproull and Kiesler's (1986) reduced cues theory, proposes that we are less likely to self-disclose personal information in a Computer-mediated Communication (CmC) as people online are likely to be more disinhibited due to an increased deindividuation caused by the inability to access cues which many Face to Face (FtF) interactions rely upon such as facial expressions and verbal intonation. This means that people in online communications are more likely to be aggressive and rude in response to any personal disclosures made.

Walther's (1996, 2011) hyper personal model, argues that actually CmC relationships encourage self-disclosure much earlier than FtF interactions, due in part to the sender of messages' ability to alter and manipulate exactly how they come across to the other party. Walther says that this selective self-presentation means that the lack of cues serves to increase the speed and intensity of relationships as people are able to portray themselves in the best possible light. The deindividuation which occurs in CmC relationships can make people feel less accountable for their actions and therefore less inhibited, making disclosure much more likely.

Absence of Gating

Gating in relationships refers to a peripheral feature becoming a barrier to the connection between people. This gate could be a physical feature, such as somebody's weight or a disfigurement, or a feature of one's personality such as introversion or shyness. It may be that two people's personalities are very compatible, and attraction would occur if they spoke for any length of time, but a gate prevents this from happening.

McKenna and Bargh (1999) propose the idea that CmC relationships remove these gates and mean that there is little distraction from the connection between people that might not otherwise have occurred. Some people use the anonymity available on the internet to compensate for these gates by portraying themselves differently than they would do in FtF relationships. People who lack confidence may use the extra time available in messaging to consider their responses more carefully, and those who perceive themselves to be unattractive may choose an avatar or edited picture which does not show this trait.

AO3

Walther and Tidwell (1995) point out that although some cues are absent, such as facial expressions, people can correctly use other cues, such as the length of time that it takes someone to write a response, to gauge their true feelings. Emoticons are often used as substitutes for facial expressions in CmC relationships, although these are more easily manipulated by the sender than their true reactions to stimuli.

The relevance of research into CmC relationships changes rapidly as more technology is released and the way that we interact with technology changes. Much of the research cited in this article took place before the year 2000. The way we interact with people over facetime®, emoticons and tinder® could be completely different to the technologies which were the inspiration for the theories outlined here.

The majority of relationships, especially romantic relationships, do not take place entirely online, but rather are a mixture of FtF and CmC, reducing the deindividuation effect required for the reduced cues and hyper personal theories.

McKenna and Bargh (2000) found that lonely and socially anxious people felt more-able to express their "true- selves" in CmC relationships, and the percentage of lasting relationships which began as CmC for these people were higher than for those formed in the offline world.

Parasocial Relationships

Levels of Parasocial Relationships

AO1

Levels of Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial relationships may be described as those which are one-sided, Horton and Wohl (1956) defined them as relationships where the 'fan' is extremely invested in the relationships but the celebrity is unaware of their existence. Parasocial relationships may occur with any dynamic which elevates someone above the population in a community, making it difficult for genuine interaction; this could be anyone from fictitious characters to teachers.

Maltby et al. (2006) used the Celebrity Attitude Scale (McCutcheon et al., 2002) in a large scale survey and classified responses into three levels of behaviors and beliefs linked to relationships with celebrities.

> - Entertainment-Social is the least extreme relationship type. The person sees the celebrity as a source of entertainment and may speak about them often with like-minded friends. Examples could be discussions about soap operas or reality television stars.
>
> - Intense-Personal relationships occur when people connect aspects of the celebrity to their own identity. They may have a strong feeling that they should have a real life relationship with the celebrity and believe that they share a kinship.
>
> - Borderline pathological relationships are used to describe the actions of someone who displays obsessive behaviors relating to a celebrity. They may invest a large number of resources in meeting or attempting to befriend the celebrity, for example by sending them personal gifts.

The Attachment Theory Explanation

Bowlby's theory of attachment suggests that those who do not have a secure attachment earlier in life will have emotional difficulties and attachment disorders when they grow up. Parasocial relationships are often associated with teenagers and young adults who may have had less genuine relationships to build an internal working model which allows them to recognise parasocial relationships as abnormal.

For example it may be that those with insecure resistant attachment types are drawn to parasocial relationships because they do not offer the threat of rejection or abandonment.

The Absorption-Addiction Model

McCutcheon (2002) proposed that parasocial relationships form due to deficiencies in people's lives. They look to the relationship to escape from reality, perhaps due to traumatic events or to fill the gap left by a real-life attachment ending.

Absorption refers to behavior designed to make the person feel closer to the celebrity. This could be anything from researching facts about them, both their personal life and their career, to repeatedly experiencing their work, playing their music or buying tickets to see them live, or paying for their merchandise to strengthen the apparent relationship.

As with other Addictions, this refers to the escalation of behavior to sustain and strengthen the relationship. The person starts to believe that the 'need' the celebrity and behaviors become more extreme, and more delusional. Stalking is a severe example of this behavior.

AO3

The absorption-addiction model can be viewed as more of a description of parasocial relationships than an explanation; it states how a parasocial relationship may be identified and the form it may take, but not what it is caused by.

Methodologically, many studies into parasocial relationships, such as Maltby's 2006 survey, rely on self-report technique. This can often lack validity, whether this is due to accidental inaccuracies, due to a warped perception of the parasocial relationship by the participant, or genuine memory lapses, or to more deliberate actions.

For example the social desirability bias making the respondents under-report their abnormal behavior. There is often competition between fans of celebrities to see who is the 'biggest' fan, which may lead to an exaggeration of the behaviors and attitudes when reporting the relationship.

McCutcheon et al. (2006) used 299 participants to investigate the links between attachment types and attitudes towards celebrities. They found no direct relationship between the type of attachment and the likelihood that parasocial relationship will be formed.

About the Author

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Assessment Objectives

AO1
Knowledge and understanding
(a) recognise, recall and show understanding of scientific knowledge
(b) select, organise and communicate relevant information in a variety of forms

AO2
Application of knowledge
(a) analyse and evaluate scientific knowledge and processes
(b) apply scientific knowledge and processes to unfamiliar situations including those related to issues
(c) assess the validity, reliability and credibility of scientific information

AO3
How Science Works (Research Methods)
(a) describe ethical, safe and skilful practical techniques and processes, selecting appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods
(b) know how to make, record and communicate reliable and valid observations and measurements with appropriate precision and accuracy, through using primary and secondary sources
(c) analyse, interpret, explain and evaluate the methodology, results and impact of their own and others’ experimental and investigative activities in a variety of ways.