

AQA

Approved

AQA PSYCHOLOGY

FOR A LEVEL

YEAR 2

CARA FLANAGAN

DAVE BERRY

MATT JARVIS

ROB LIDDLE

Illuminate

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Doing psychology consists of three skills: describing what you know, applying your knowledge and analysing/evaluating this knowledge. This applies to all students – AS students and A level students.

From page 387 onwards we give you an overview of practice questions, which will help you to see why we have designed our spreads as they are.

Describing what you know

Assessment objective 1 (AO1) is concerned with your ability to report detailed descriptions of psychological knowledge and demonstrate your understanding of this knowledge.

On most spreads in this book we have presented all the AO1 material on the left-hand side.

We have divided the text up with subheadings to help you organise your understanding. Each heading should act as a cue for material to recall and matches the material in the summary at the end of each chapter.

Applying your knowledge

Assessment objective 2 (AO2) is concerned with being able to apply your psychological knowledge.

It is a really good way to assess whether you do understand psychological knowledge.

On every spread we usually have two or three 'Apply it' questions which give you a chance to practise this AO2 skill of application in relation to both concepts and research methods.

Research methods topics are covered in Chapter 3 but we have given you a chance to apply them throughout the book.

Analysing and evaluating

Assessment objective 3 (AO3) is concerned with your ability to evaluate the concepts and studies you have learned about.

On most spreads in this book we have presented the AO3 material on the right-hand side.

Generally we have focused on three criticisms, each one clearly elaborated to demonstrate the skill of evaluation.

Three criticisms is sufficient for reasonable performance. For excellent performance you may need to add the **evaluation extra**. It is better to do three that are well elaborated than five that are mediocre. It is best to do five that are elaborated.

What is an 'assessment objective'?

It is something that is used to assess your ability.

You can demonstrate what you know by describing it but there is more to knowledge than that. There is the further skill of being able to use your knowledge in new situations (applying your knowledge). And a further skill is to be able to judge the value of your knowledge (evaluation).

All three of these skills are part of your studies.

WAYS OF INVESTIGATING THE BRAIN

THE SPECIFICATION DAYS

Ways of studying the brain: scanning techniques, including functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), electroencephalograms (EEGs) and event-related potentials (ERPs); post-mortem examinations.

Advances in science and technology have brought with them ever more sophisticated and precise methods of studying the brain. Some modern scanning techniques are able to record global neural activity through the assessment of brainwave patterns whilst others are able to home in on activity in specific parts of the brain as the brain performs certain tasks and processes.

Another more traditional way of investigating the brain – the post-mortem – is also considered.

KEY TERMS

Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) – A method used to measure brain activity while a person is performing a task that uses MRI technology (detecting radio waves from changing magnetic fields). This enables researchers to detect which regions of the brain are rich in oxygen and thus are active.

Electroencephalogram (EEG) – A record of the tiny electrical impulses produced by the brain's activity. By measuring characteristic wave patterns, the EEG can help diagnose certain conditions of the brain.

Event-related potentials (ERPs) – The brain's electrophysiological response to a specific sensory, cognitive, or motor event can be isolated through statistical analysis of EEG data.

Post-mortem examinations – The brain is analysed after death to determine whether certain observed behaviours during the patient's lifetime can be linked to abnormalities in the brain.

STUDY TIP

The term 'event-related potential' refers to the method used for studying the brain as well as what is examined (related to a recall of that technique, i.e. a specific form of brainwave. In effect, the ERP technique produces the ERP).

Apply it **Concepts: Match the picture to the techniques**

Do the pictures (A, B, C and D) relate to fMRI, EEG, ERPs or post-mortems?

Evaluation

Functional magnetic resonance imaging

Strengths – One key strength of fMRI is, unlike other scanning techniques such as PET, it does not rely on the use of radiation. If administered correctly it is a virtually risk-free, non-invasive and straightforward to use. It also produces images that have very high spatial resolution, depicting detail by the millimetre, and providing a clear picture of how brain activity is localised.

Weaknesses – fMRI is expensive compared to other neuroimaging techniques and can only capture a clear image if the person stays perfectly still. It has poor temporal resolution because there is around a 5-second time-lag behind the image on screen and the initial firing of neuronal activity. Finally, fMRI can only measure blood flow in the brain, not the home in on the activity of individual neurons and so it cannot be used to exactly what kind of brain activity is being represented on screen.

Electroencephalogram

Strengths – EEG has proved invaluable in the diagnosis of conditions such as epilepsy, a disorder characterised by random bursts of activity in the brain that can easily be detected on screen. Similarly, it has contributed much to our understanding of the stages involved in sleep (see research into **ultradian rhythms** – page 48). Unlike fMRI, EEG technology has extremely high temporal resolution. Today's EEG technology can accurately detect brain activity at a resolution of a single millisecond (and even less in some cases).

Weakness – The main drawback of EEG lies in the generalised nature of the information received (that of many thousands of neurons). The EEG signal is not useful for pinpointing the exact source of neural activity, and it does not allow researchers to distinguish between activities originating in different but adjacent locations.

Event-related potentials

Strengths – The limitations of EEG are partly addressed through the use of ERPs. These bring much more specificity to the measurement of neural processes than could ever be achieved using raw EEG data. As ERPs are derived from EEG measurements, they have excellent temporal resolution, especially when compared to neuroimaging techniques such as fMRI, and this has led to their widespread use in the measurement of cognitive functions and deficits. Researchers have been able to identify many different types of ERP and describe the precise role of these in cognitive functioning. For instance, the P300 component is thought to be involved in the allocation of attentional resources and the maintenance of working memory.

Weaknesses – Critics have pointed to a lack of standardisation in ERP methodology between different research studies which makes it difficult to confirm findings. A further issue is that, in order to establish pure data in ERP studies, background noise and extraneous material must be completely eliminated, and this may not always be easy to achieve.

Post-mortems

Strengths – Post-mortem evidence was vital in providing a foundation for early understanding of key processes in the brain. Paul Broca and Karl Wernicke (see page 38) both relied on post-mortem studies in establishing links between language, brain and behaviour decades before neuroimaging ever became a possibility. Post-mortem studies improve medical knowledge and help generate hypotheses for further study.

Weaknesses – Causation is an issue within these investigations, however. Observed damage to the brain may not be linked to the deficits under review but to some other unrelated trauma or decay. A further problem is that post-mortem studies raise ethical issues of consent from the patient before death. Patients may not be able to provide **informed consent**, for example in the case of fMRI who lost his ability to form memories and was not able to provide such consent – nevertheless post-mortem research has been conducted on his brain.

Apply it **Concepts: fMRI and lie detection**

One innovative and recently emerging application of fMRI has been in the field of lie detection. Many have claimed that fMRI is an ideal tool for detecting truthfulness (or more pertinently, the lack of it) due to its ability to effectively see inside the brain. Supporters of its use argue that the analysis of neural blood flow is preferable to tracking peripheral measures of anxiety – such as changes in pulse, skin temperature or respiration – that would be recorded by more traditional lie detectors or polygraphs (such as those employed by police detectives or on daytime talk shows). Traditional lie detectors are widely acknowledged as 'testable', but neural activity is much more difficult to fake!

Two US companies, Cephus (in Pepperell, Massachusetts) and the catchily-named No Lie MRI (in Tarzana, California), claim to predict with over 90 percent accuracy whether its clients are 'spinning a line'. No Lie MRI suggests that the technique may even be used to 'risk reduction in dating'.

Many neuroscientists and legal scholars doubt such claims – and some even question whether brain scans for lie detection will ever move beyond the research lab into the real world.

Question

What are the strengths and limitations of using fMRI as a method of lie detection?

Will neuroimaging techniques such as fMRI ever replace the traditional polygraph on entertainment programmes such as the Jeremy Kyle Show?

Apply it **Methods: Memory lane**

A researcher used an fMRI scan to investigate whether different types of long-term memories are located in different parts of the brain. Participants were asked to think about family holidays they had been on as a child and their brain activity was recorded. The same participants were then asked to mentally 'list' European capital cities and their brain activity was again recorded to see if there was a difference.

Question

The investigation described above could be considered to be a lab experiment. Briefly discuss strengths and limitations of lab experiments with reference to the investigation above. (6 marks)

CHECK IT

- Outline one difference between EEGs and ERPs as ways of investigating the brain. [2 marks]
- Briefly evaluate post-mortem examinations as a way of investigating the brain. [4 marks]
- Describe and evaluate scanning techniques as a way of investigating the brain. [16 marks]

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Extra features on each spread

What the specification says

The spread begins (top left) with an excerpt from the specification showing you what is covered on the spread. There is also a brief analysis of what the specification entry means.

Definition of specification terms

The specification terms are explained, mirroring what you might be expected to know if you were asked to explain the terms. These key terms are emboldened in blue in the text.

Other important words are emboldened in the text and explained in the **glossary**, which forms part of the index.

Study tips

This book has been written by very experienced teachers and subject experts. When there is room they give you some of their top tips about the skills necessary to develop your understanding of psychology. They may also include pointers about typical misunderstandings.

Check it

A sample of practice questions to help you focus on how you will be using the material on the spread.

The final question is an extended writing question. A level students need to answer 16-mark questions. Extended writing skills are discussed on pages 396–397.

Extra features in each chapter

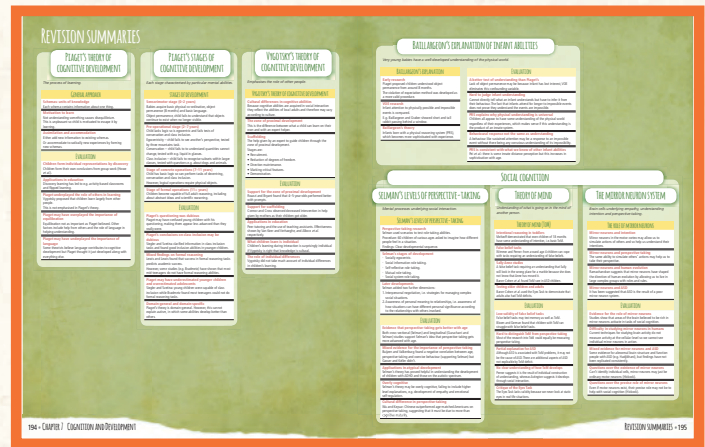
Chapter introduction

Each chapter begins with discussion points that might help you start thinking about the topic.

Chapter summary

Each chapter ends with a useful spread summarising the key points from each spread.

These summaries should help you revise. Look at each key point and see what you can remember. Look back at the spread to remind yourself. Each time you do this you should remember more.

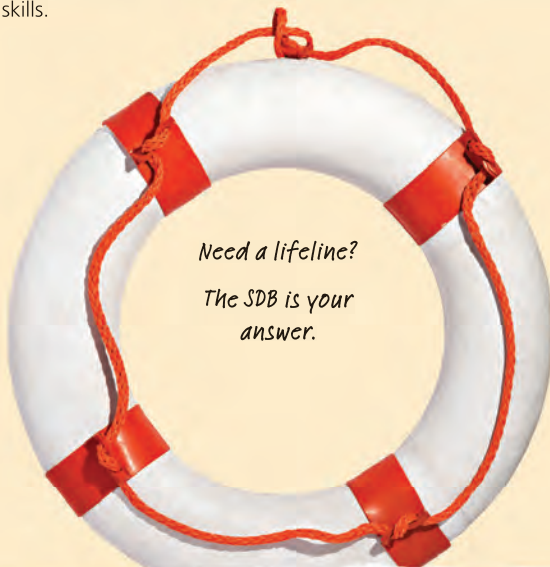


Student digital book

A digital version of this student book is also available if your school has access to our Digital Book Bundle of student and teacher resources. You can view this digital version via a tablet or computer at school, home or on the bus – wherever it suits you.

There are extra features in the student digital book that support your studies. For every spread in this book there are:

- **Lifelines:** Very straightforward, easy-to-digest key descriptive points for the spread topic.
- **Extensions:** Extra information, studies or activities to challenge and stretch you further.
- **Web links** to YouTube videos or other sites.
- **Answers** to the **Apply it** and **Evaluation extra** questions in this book (invaluable!).
- **Quizzes:** Interactive, self-marking quizzes that help to check and reinforce your understanding of a topic.
- **Practice questions:** Extra questions to help you practise your skills.



Practical corner

Questions on research methods account for a minimum of 25% of the assessment, therefore you should devote a lot of time to understanding how psychologists conduct research. There is no better way to do this than being a researcher yourself. We offer some ideas for research activities and provide additional opportunities to practise mathematical skills.

Practice questions, answers and feedback

Learning how to produce effective question answers is a SKILL. On this spread in each chapter we look at some typical student answers to practice questions. The comments provided indicate what is good and bad in each answer.

Multiple-choice questions (MCQs)

Here's a chance to test your new-found knowledge. Questions on each spread in the chapter, with answers at the bottom right of each spread. Keep trying until you get 100%.



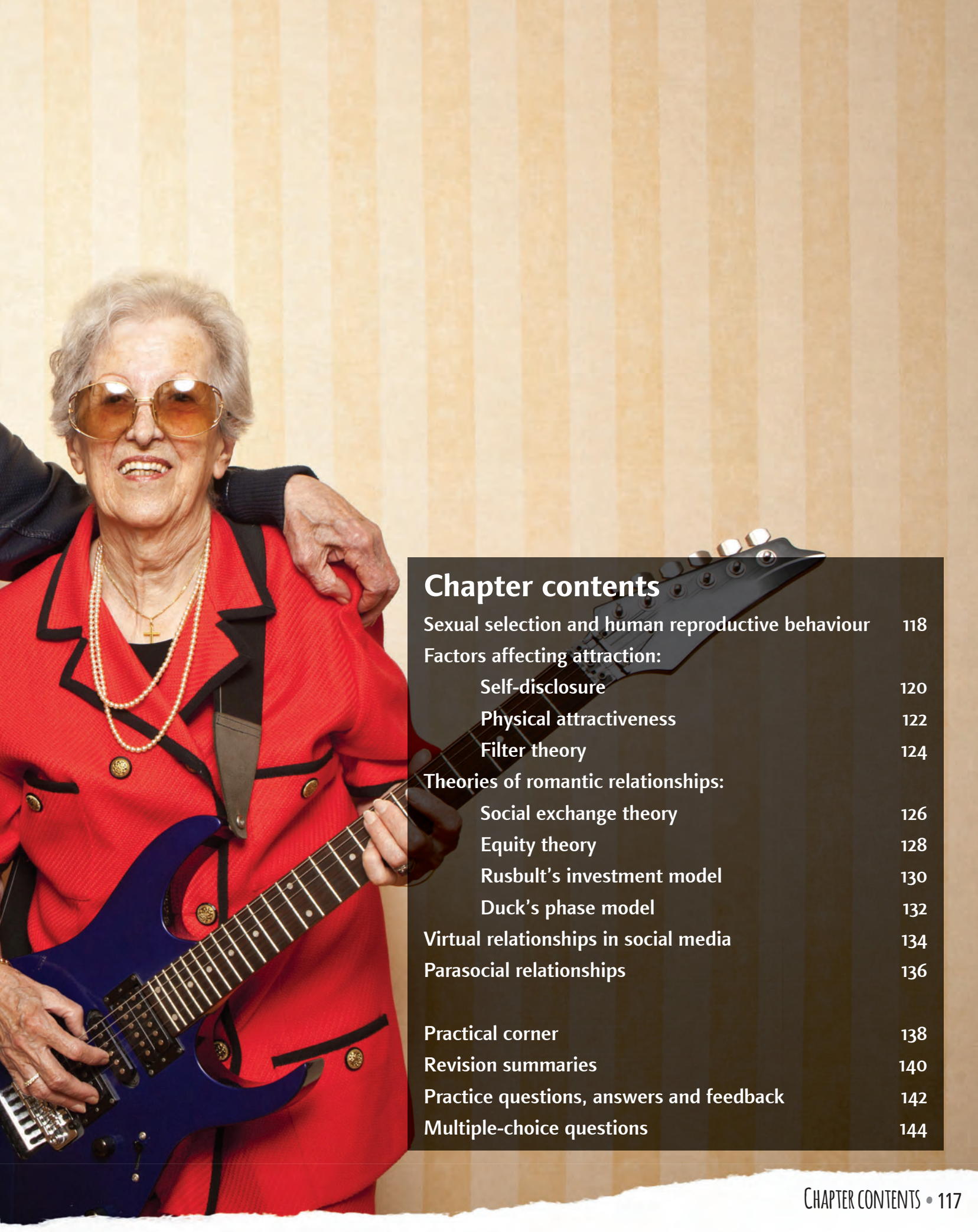
CHAPTER 5 RELATIONSHIPS

What are the ingredients of a relationship that can keep a couple together for half a century or more?

'The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.'

Carl Gustav Jung, psychologist (1933)





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SEXUAL SELECTION AND HUMAN REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOUR

THE SPECIFICATION SAYS...

The relationship between sexual selection and human reproductive behaviour.

Charles Darwin noticed that evolution favours the development of some features that are attractive to the opposite sex. These favourable features make it more likely that the possessor will attract a mate and reproduce to pass on their genes. In other words, these features increase the reproductive fitness that is central to evolutionary success.

KEY TERMS

Sexual selection – An evolutionary explanation of partner preference. Attributes or behaviours that increase reproductive success are passed on and may become exaggerated over succeeding generations of offspring.

Human reproductive behaviour – This refers to any behaviours which relate to opportunities to reproduce and thereby increase the survival chances of our genes. It includes the evolutionary mechanisms underlying our partner preferences, such as mate choice and mate competition.



There is famously a 15-year age difference between actors Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher. They were together for eight years.

Apply it Concepts: Three relationships

Kaley is an attractive 25-year-old woman who has recently married Ryan, a 60-year-old man who owns five successful businesses. They have no children yet, but are hoping to start a family soon.

Nicole and Keith have been together for just over five years. There is an age gap between them – Keith is 29 and Nicole is 53, but this doesn't seem to make any difference to their relationship or their feelings for each other. Nicole has three children from a previous marriage.

Benedict and Eddie have been in a civil partnership for nearly eight years. They are both in their thirties and looking to adopt a child in the near future.

Question

Use evolutionary explanations of human reproductive behaviour to explain these relationships. Are there any which the evolutionary explanation cannot account for? Explain your answer.

Sexual selection

Sexual selection explains why some characteristics that might appear disadvantageous actually confer an advantage in **human reproductive behaviour** because the characteristics are attractive to potential mates. Either that or they provide an advantage over competitors for reproductive rights (examples in humans include greater height, secondary sexual characteristics, certain facial and bodily features).

Anisogamy

Anisogamy refers to the differences between male and female sex cells (gametes). These are very obvious in humans (and other animals too). Male gametes (sperm) are extremely small, highly mobile, created continuously in vast numbers from puberty to old age, and do not require a great expenditure of energy to produce. In complete contrast, female gametes (eggs or ova) are relatively large, static, produced at intervals for a limited number of fertile years and require a huge investment of energy. A consequence of anisogamy for mate selection is that there is no shortage of fertile males but a fertile woman is a rare 'resource'. Anisogamy is also important in partner preference because it gives rise to two different mating strategies, which in turn means there are two types of sexual selection: inter- and intra-sexual selection. **Inter-sexual selection** is between the sexes – the strategies that males use to select females or females use to select males. **Intra-sexual selection** is within each sex – such as the strategies between males to be the one that is selected.

Inter-sexual selection

This is the preferred strategy of the female – quality over quantity. Ova are rarer than sperm and require greater energy to produce. Also, as Robert Trivers (1972) emphasises, the female makes a greater investment of time, commitment and other resources before, during and after the birth of her offspring. Both sexes are choosy, because both stand to lose if they invest resources in substandard partners. But the consequences of making a wrong choice of partner are much more serious for the female than for the male. So it pays for her to be especially choosy. Therefore, the female's optimum mating strategy is to select a genetically fit partner who is able and willing to provide resources. This leaves the males competing for the opportunity to mate with the fertile female.

It is this female preference for a fit male which determines which features are passed on to the offspring. For example, if height is considered an attractive trait then, over successive generations of females, it would increase in the male population because females would mate with tall males and, over time, produce sons who are taller with each generation and produce daughters who have a greater preference for tall partners. This is known as a *runaway process*, encapsulated by Ronald Fisher (1930) in his *sexy sons hypothesis* – a female mates with a male who has a desirable characteristic, and this 'sexy' trait is inherited by her son. This increases the likelihood that successive generations of females will mate with her offspring.

Intra-sexual selection

This is the preferred strategy of the male – quantity over quality. It refers to the competition between (intra) males to be able to mate with a female. The winner of the competition reproduces and gets to pass on to his offspring the characteristics that contributed to his victory. It is this strategy that has given rise to *dimorphism* in humans, the obvious differences between males and females. For example, in any physical competition between males, size matters. Larger males have an advantage and are therefore more likely to mate. On the other hand, females do not compete for reproductive rights so there is no evolutionary drive towards favouring larger females.

Intra-sexual selection also has behavioural and psychological consequences, although these are more controversial. For example, for males to acquire fertile females and protect them from competing males, they may benefit from behaving aggressively and perhaps even thinking in a certain way.

Anisogamy dictates that the male's optimum reproductive strategy is to mate with as many fertile females as possible. This is because of the minimal energy required to produce enough sperm to theoretically fertilise every woman on earth, and the relative lack of post-coital responsibility the male carries (i.e. it's the woman left 'holding the baby'). A behavioural consequence of this competition for fertile mates is a distinct preference for youth and a sensitivity to the indicators of youth (e.g. certain facial features) as well as fertility (e.g. a certain body shape).

Evaluation

Research support for preferences related to anisogamy

David Buss (1989) carried out a survey of over 10,000 adults in 33 countries. He asked questions relating to age and a variety of attributes that evolutionary theory predicts should be important in partner preference. He found that female respondents placed greater value on resource-related characteristics, such as good financial prospects, ambition and industriousness, than males did. Males valued reproductive capacity in terms of good looks and chastity, and preferred younger mates, more than females did.

These findings reflect sex differences in mate strategies due to anisogamy. They support predictions about partner preference derived from sexual selection theory. Furthermore, the findings can be applied across vastly different cultures, reflecting fundamental human preferences which are not primarily dependent upon cultural influences.

Research support for inter-sexual selection

Russell Clark and Elaine Hatfield (1989) showed that female choosiness is a reality of heterosexual relationships. Male and female psychology students were sent out across a university campus. They approached other students individually with this question: 'I have been noticing you around campus. I find you to be very attractive. Would you go to bed with me tonight?'. Not a single female student agreed to the request, whereas 75% of males did, immediately.

This supports evolutionary theory because it suggests that females are choosier than males when it comes to selecting sexual partners and that males have evolved a different strategy to ensure reproductive success.

Ignores social and cultural influences

Partner preferences over the past century have undoubtedly been influenced by rapidly changing social norms of sexual behaviour. These develop much faster than evolutionary timescales imply and have instead come about due to cultural factors such as availability of contraception.

Women's greater role in the workplace means that they are no longer dependent on men to provide for them (despite the ongoing inequality in earning power). Bereczkei *et al.* (1997) argue that this social change has consequences for women's mate preferences, which may no longer be resource-oriented. Chang *et al.* (2011) compared partner preferences in China over 25 years and found that some had changed but others remained the same, corresponding with the huge social changes in that time.

Mate preferences are therefore the outcome of a combination of evolutionary and cultural influences. Any theory that fails to account for both is a limited explanation.

Evaluation eXtra

Support from waist-hip ratio research

Evolutionary theory makes several predictions about partner preference that can be tested empirically. One is that males will show a preference for a female body shape that signals fertility. Devendra Singh (1993, 2002) studied this in terms of waist-hip ratio (WHR). What matters in male preference is not female body size as such, but the ratio of waist to hip sizes. Up to a point, males generally find any hip and waist sizes are attractive so long as the ratio of one to the other is about 0.7. This combination of wider hips and narrower waist is attractive because it is an 'honest signal' (it is hard to fake) that the woman is fertile but not currently pregnant.

Consider: Why is it adaptive for males to be able to detect female fertility? What does this tell us about males' partner preferences?

Support from lonely hearts research

David Waynforth and Robin Dunbar (1995) studied lonely hearts advertisements in American newspapers. These slightly quaint historical documents were opportunities for men (usually) and women to describe the qualities they desired in a potential partner, whilst cataloguing what they had to offer. The researchers found that women more than men tended to offer physical attractiveness and indicators of youth ('flirty, exciting, curvy, sexy'). Men, on the other hand, offered resources more than women did ('successful, fit, mature, ambitious') and sought relative youth and physical attractiveness.

Consider: Which predictions from sexual selection theory do these findings support?



Voulez-vous coucher avec moi, ce soir? Direct and to the point. But which one is likely to be disappointed?

Apply it Concepts: Young, free, single

Shakira and Gerard are young and single people who seem to have a new partner almost every night. They make no bones about the fact that they are out to have a good time while they're still young.

Question

How do you think society generally would view Shakira's and Gerard's behaviour? Is there an evolutionary explanation for why one of their behaviours might be considered acceptable and the other not? Explain your answer.

Apply it Methods: Replicating Buss

An evolutionary psychologist wanted to replicate the study by Buss (1989) by using an interview method. He carried out face-to-face interviews with 82 participants, 45 of them male and 37 female. He asked various questions about their preferences for certain evolutionarily-important characteristics in a partner. Physical attractiveness was preferred by 40 of the males and 28 of the females. Good financial prospects was an attribute preferred by 25 of the males and 32 of the females.

Questions

1. The study produced a lot of **quantitative data**. Explain what is meant by this term. (2 marks)
2. Write a question that could gather quantitative data. (2 marks)
3. Explain **two** differences between a **structured** and an **unstructured interview**. (2 marks + 2 marks)
4. Explain **one** reason why the psychologist thought interviews might be better than **questionnaires** in this study. (2 marks)
5. Calculate the preferences of males and females as percentages (four percentages). (4 marks)

CHECK IT

1. Explain what is meant by the term **sexual selection**. [2 marks]
2. Briefly outline **one** evolutionary explanation of partner preference. [4 marks]
3. Describe and evaluate evolutionary explanations of partner preference. [16 marks]
4. Discuss the relationship between sexual selection and human reproductive behaviour. [16 marks]

FACTORS AFFECTING ATTRACTION: SELF-DISCLOSURE

THE SPECIFICATION SAYS...

Factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships: self-disclosure.

'The course of true love never did run smooth', Shakespeare tells us in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But how can it run smoother? How can it get started at all in the first place?

Psychologists have identified several factors that influence whether or not (and how much) we are attracted to a potential romantic partner. We will be looking at three in total, beginning with *self-disclosure*.

KEY TERM

Self-disclosure – Revealing personal information about yourself. Romantic partners reveal more about their true selves as their relationship develops. These self-disclosures about one's deepest thoughts and feelings can strengthen a romantic bond when used appropriately.

Apply it

Concepts: Hollywood couples still together

The actors Felicity Huffman and William H Macy have been happily married since 1997. When asked the secret of their longevity, Huffman said, 'Once a week we sit down and make sure we get half an hour – each of us gets 15 minutes – just to talk, with no crosstalk. I talk, then you talk. You kind of just deeply check in with the other person.'

Question

Explain how research into self-disclosure confirms Huffman and Macy's experience of a satisfying relationship. What sort of things would you disclose? Why do you think it needs to be a two-way process?

Self-disclosure

In the early days of a relationship, we love to learn as much as we can about our new partner, and the more we learn about them the more we seem to like them. By revealing ourselves to another person, we share our likes and dislikes, our hopes and fears, our interests and attitudes. We share what really matters to us. Our partner understands us better, and we them.

So **self-disclosure** has a vital role in a relationship beyond the initial attraction. But most people are careful about what they disclose, at least to begin with. Used wisely and effectively it really can help the course of true love run smoother.

Social penetration theory

Self-disclosure is a major concept within Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor's (1973) *social penetration theory* of how relationships develop. It is the gradual process of revealing your inner self to someone else, of giving away your deepest thoughts and feelings. In romantic relationships, it involves the reciprocal exchange of information between intimate partners. When one partner reveals some personal information they display trust; to go further the other partner must also reveal sensitive information. As they increasingly disclose more and more information to each other, romantic partners 'penetrate' more deeply into each other's lives, and gain a greater understanding of each other.

It is a basic feature of romantic relationships. After all, it's difficult to 'bear one's soul' to a relative stranger. Doing so means that a relationship has reached a certain stage where such self-disclosure will be welcomed and – hopefully – reciprocated.

Breadth and depth of self-disclosure

According to Altman and Taylor, self-disclosure has two elements – breadth and depth. As both of these increase, romantic partners become more committed to each other. The researchers use the metaphor of the many layers of an onion to illustrate this process. We disclose a lot about ourselves at the start of a relationship, but what we reveal is superficial, mostly 'on the surface', like the outer layers of an onion. It is the kind of 'low-risk' information we would reveal to anyone, friends, co-workers, even acquaintances. Breadth of disclosure is narrow because many topics are 'off-limits' in the early stage of a relationship. If we were to reveal too much too soon, we might get the response 'too much information', possibly even threatening the relationship before it's had a chance to get going.

However, as a relationship develops, self-disclosure becomes deeper, progressively removing more and more layers to reveal our true selves and encompassing a wider range of topics, especially concerning those things that matter most to us. Eventually we are prepared to reveal intimate, high-risk information – painful memories and experiences, strongly-held beliefs, powerful feelings, perhaps even secrets (and maybe the odd lie).

Reciprocity of self-disclosure

As Harry Reis and Philip Shaver (1988) point out, for a relationship to develop, as well as an increase in breadth and depth there needs to be a *reciprocal* element to disclosure. Once you have decided to disclose something that reveals your true self, hopefully your partner will respond in a way that is rewarding, with understanding, empathy and also their own intimate thoughts and feelings. So there is a balance of self-disclosure between both partners in a successful romantic relationship, which increases feelings of intimacy and deepens the relationship.

*'But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
... It is my lady, O, it is my love!
O that she knew she were!'*

The most basic self-disclosure in any romantic relationship – telling someone you love them.



Evaluation

Support from research studies

Several predictions about self-disclosure derived from social penetration theory have been supported by research. Sprecher and Hendrick (2004) studied heterosexual dating couples and found strong **correlations** between several measures of satisfaction and self-disclosure (both theirs and their partner's). In short, men and women who used self-disclosure and those who believed their partners did likewise were more satisfied with and committed to their romantic relationship.

Laurenceau *et al.* (2005) used a method that involved writing daily diary entries. They found that self-disclosure and the perception of self-disclosure in a partner were linked to higher levels of intimacy in long-term married couples. The reverse was also true – less intimate couples self-disclosed less often.

Such supportive research findings increase our confidence in the **validity** of the theory that self-disclosure leads to more satisfying relationships.

Real-life applications

Research into self-disclosure can help people who want to improve communication in their relationships. Romantic partners probably use self-disclosure deliberately and skillfully from time to time to increase intimacy and strengthen their bond. Hass and Stafford (1998) found that 57% of gay men and women in their study said that open and honest self-disclosure was the main way they maintained and deepened their committed relationships. If less-skilled partners, for example, those who tend to limit communication to 'small-talk', can learn to use self-disclosure then this could bring several benefits to the relationship in terms of deepening satisfaction and commitment.

Such real-life application demonstrates the value of the psychological insights.

Cultural differences

The prediction that increasing depth and breadth of self-disclosures will lead to a more satisfying and intimate romantic relationship is not true for all cultures. To a large extent it depends on the type of self-disclosure. For example, Tang *et al.* (2013) reviewed the research literature regarding sexual self-disclosure (that is, disclosures related to feelings about specific sexual practices). They concluded that men and women in the USA (an **individualist culture**) self-disclose significantly more sexual thoughts and feelings than men and women in China (a **collectivist culture**). Both these levels of self-disclosure are linked to relationship satisfaction in those cultures.

Self-disclosure theory is therefore a limited explanation of romantic relationships, based on findings from Western (individualist) cultures which are not necessarily generalisable to other cultures.

Evaluation eXtra

Self-disclosure and satisfaction

Social penetration theory claims that romantic relationships become more intimate as self-disclosures deepen and broaden. Using the onion metaphor, relationship breakdown is accompanied by a reduction in self-disclosures, as partners wrap themselves up once again in layers of concealment. However, theories of relationship breakdown (such as Duck's theory on page 132) often recognise how couples discuss and negotiate the state of their deteriorating relationship in an attempt to save it or return to an earlier level of satisfaction. These discussions frequently involve deep self-disclosures of very intimate thoughts and feelings, and yet these may not be enough to rescue the relationship. They may even contribute to its breakdown.

Consider: *Do you think the onion metaphor can account for this behaviour? Does that make it a weakness of the theory? Explain your answer.*

Correlation versus causation

Much self-disclosure research is correlational (e.g. Sprecher and Hendrick's study, above). Although it is usually assumed that greater self-disclosure creates more satisfaction, a correlation does not tell us if this is a valid conclusion to draw.

Consider: *Are there any alternative explanations for this correlation? Briefly describe them, and then explain how they relate to self-disclosure theory. Which are supportive and which contradictory?*

Thinks: 'I like babies too, but we've only been going out with each other for three days'.

Self-disclosure is a skill. If you reveal too much too early in a relationship, it might not go down too well.



Apply it Concepts: Public disclosures

People disclose a lot more in front of strangers in a television studio than we would usually consider publicly acceptable. For example, episodes of *The Jeremy Kyle Show* have included, 'Were you having an affair when you told me you were on holiday?' and 'Was my fiancée lying about being pregnant to avoid a lie detector test?'

Question

Explain some of the pitfalls of excessive and poorly timed self-disclosure. Give some examples of 'too much information!' at the start of a promising romantic relationship.

Apply it Methods: Tell me what you feel

Two psychologists recruited 100 married couples for a study of relationship satisfaction. They asked the participants to keep a daily diary of their self-disclosures to their partner over a one-month period. The researchers used **content analysis** to analyse the data from the diaries.

They found that 15% of the self-disclosures related to sex, 10% to experiences in previous relationships, 25% to family matters, 30% to hopes and fears about the future, and 15% to health concerns;. 5% of self-disclosures could not be categorised.

Questions

1. Explain how the psychologists could have carried out their content analysis. (4 marks) (See page 64)
2. The study gathered a lot of **qualitative data**. Explain what is meant by qualitative data. (2 marks)
3. Outline *one* strength of gathering qualitative data in this study. (2 marks)
4. Outline *one* **sampling** method the psychologists could have used to recruit the participants. (2 marks)
5. Explain *one* limitation of this method. (2 marks)

CHECK IT

1. In relation to factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships, explain what is meant by the term *self-disclosure*. [2 marks]
2. Briefly outline self-disclosure as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships. [4 marks]
3. Describe research into self-disclosure as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships. [6 marks]
4. Describe and evaluate self-disclosure as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships. [16 marks]

FACTORS AFFECTING ATTRACTION: PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS

THE SPECIFICATION SAYS...

Factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships: physical attractiveness including the matching hypothesis.

Physical attractiveness is probably the one feature of an individual we notice as soon as we meet them, even before we've spoken or interacted with them in any meaningful way. It is the basis of online dating agencies – the first encounter you have with a potential date is a photograph of their face. On this spread, we look at just how important it really is.

KEY TERMS

Physical attractiveness – An important factor in the formation of romantic relationships. The term usually applies specifically to how appealing we find a person's face. There is general agreement within and across cultures about what is considered physically attractive. There exists an assumption that we seek to form relationships with the most attractive person available.

Matching hypothesis – The belief that we do not select the most attractive person as a prospective partner but, instead, are attracted to people who approximately 'match' us in physical (i.e. facial) attractiveness. This implies that we take into account our own attractiveness 'value' to others when seeking romantic partners.



Well-matched in the looks department? The matching hypothesis would suggest so. But how true is it?

STUDY TIP

All the explanations in this section focus on the initial stage of a relationship - attraction. Make sure you always focus on this when discussing, for example, physical attractiveness. This is not a theory of relationships, it is an explanation of attraction.

Physical attractiveness

Explaining the importance of physical attractiveness

Psychologists have wondered why **physical attractiveness** seems to be quite so important in forming relationships. One promising explanation draws upon evolutionary theory (see the previous spread). Shackelford and Larsen (1997) found that people with symmetrical faces are rated as more attractive. This is because it may be an honest signal of genetic fitness (it's difficult to fake facial symmetry).

People are also attracted to faces with *neotenous* (baby-face) features such as widely separated and large eyes, a delicate chin, and a small nose – because these trigger a protective or caring instinct, a valuable resource for females wanting to reproduce.

Physical attractiveness is not only important at the start of a relationship. McNulty *et al.* (2008) found evidence that the initial attractiveness that brought the partners together continued to be an important feature of the relationship after marriage, for at least several years.

The halo effect

Physical attractiveness may also matter because we have preconceived ideas about the personality traits attractive people must have, and they are almost universally positive. This is the *physical attractiveness stereotype*, a widely-accepted view of attractive people neatly summed up in a phrase coined by Karen Dion and her colleagues (1972): 'What is beautiful is good'. For example, Dion *et al.* found that physically attractive people are consistently rated as kind, strong, sociable, and successful compared to unattractive people. The belief that good-looking people probably have these characteristics makes them even more attractive to us, so we behave positively towards them – a good example of a *self-fulfilling prophecy*.

Psychologists use the term *halo effect* to describe how one distinguishing feature (physical attractiveness, in this case) tends to have a disproportionate influence on our judgements of a person's other attributes, for example, their personality.

The matching hypothesis

Although we find physical attractiveness desirable (and there is surprising agreement about what is considered attractive), common-sense tells us that we can't all form relationships with the most attractive people. Obviously there just aren't enough of us to go round (see the photos of the authors at the back of the book if you want proof)! Is it possible that our assessment of our own attractiveness may play a role in our choice of romantic partner? The **matching hypothesis** proposed by Elaine Walster and her colleagues (1966) suggests it does.

The hypothesis states that people choose romantic partners who are roughly of similar physical attractiveness to each other. To do this we have to make a realistic judgement about our own 'value' to a potential partner.

In other words, our choice of partner is basically a compromise. We desire the most physically attractive partner possible for all sorts of evolutionary, social, cultural and psychological reasons. But we balance this against the wish to avoid being rejected by someone 'out of our league', that is someone who is very unlikely to consider us physically attractive. Apologies, by the way, if you are highly physically attractive yourself; we're speaking here on behalf of the rest of us. In terms of physical attractiveness at least, there's a difference between what we would like in an ideal partner and what we are prepared to settle for.

Apply it Concepts: Is my halo slipping?

Rob is generally agreed to be a very good looking chap. In fact, he would by most assessments be described as stunningly handsome. Women – and men – find him physically very attractive and he has received a lot of 'offers' down the years. He has also found that people smile at him everywhere he goes, are very polite and friendly towards him and assume he must be very intelligent as well as handsome (which he is of course, but that's not the point).

Question

Using your knowledge of the halo effect and the physical attractiveness stereotype, explain Rob's experiences. Can you think of any other ways Rob's devastating good looks might prove beneficial? Could there be some drawbacks as well?

Evaluation

Practical activity
on page 138

Research support for the halo effect

Palmer and Peterson (2012) found that physically attractive people were rated as more politically knowledgeable and competent than unattractive people. This halo effect was so powerful that it persisted even when participants knew that these 'knowledgeable' people had no particular expertise. This has obvious implications for the political process. Perhaps there are dangers for democracy if politicians are judged as suitable for office merely because they are considered physically attractive by enough voters.

The existence of the halo effect has been found to apply in many other areas of everyday life, confirming that physical attractiveness is an important factor in the initial formation of relationships, romantic or otherwise.

Individual differences

Some people just do not seem to attach much importance to physical attractiveness. For example, Towhey (1979) asked male and female participants to rate how much they would like a target individual based on their photograph and some biographical information. The participants also completed a questionnaire – the MACHO scale – designed to measure sexist attitudes and behaviours. Towhey found that the participants who scored highly on the scale were more influenced by the physical attractiveness of the target when making their judgement of likeability. Low scorers were less sensitive to this influence.

This shows that the effects of physical attractiveness can be moderated by other factors, and so challenges the notion that it is a significant consideration in relationship formation for all potential partners.

Research support for the matching hypothesis

Ironically the original research study that attempted to confirm the matching hypothesis failed to do so (Walster *et al.* 1966). However, this may be because the measurement of attractiveness was not reliable. The raters who had to judge the attractiveness of the participants only had a few seconds to do so.

However, it is fair to say that there is some support for the hypothesis in its narrow form as referring to physical attractiveness only. Feingold (1988) carried out a **meta-analysis** of 17 studies and found a significant **correlation** in ratings of attractiveness between romantic partners. This is especially supportive of the matching hypothesis because the studies looked at actual partners, which is a more realistic approach.

Evaluation eXtra

Role of cultural influences

Research shows that what is considered physically attractive is remarkably consistent across cultures. Cunningham *et al.* (1995) found that female features of large eyes, prominent cheekbones, small nose and high eyebrows were rated as highly attractive by white, Hispanic and Asian males. The physical attractiveness stereotype is also culturally pervasive. Wheeler and Kim (1997) found that Korean and American students judged physically attractive people to be more trustworthy, concerned for other people, mature and friendly. It seems that the stereotype is just as strong in **collectivist cultures** as it is in individualist ones.

Consider: What do you think is the significance of these cross-cultural findings? Do they add support to the view that physical attractiveness is crucial in forming a romantic relationship?

Research contradicting the matching hypothesis

Taylor *et al.* (2011) studied the activity logs of a popular online dating site. This was a real-life test of the matching hypothesis because it measured actual date choices and not merely preferences. This is in keeping with the original hypothesis which concerned realistic as opposed to fantasy choices. Online daters sought meetings with potential partners who were more physically attractive than them. It seems they did not consider their own level of attractiveness when making decisions about who to date.

Consider: Can you explain how this finding relates to the matching hypothesis? In what way is it a valid test of the hypothesis?

Apply it Concepts:

Celebrity mismatch?

Charlize is very interested in celebrities, and over the years she has noticed that many celebrity couples seem to be very well matched in attractiveness. There's Kanye West and Kim Kardashian, as well as Elton John and David Furnish. But Charlize's friend Sean disagrees: 'What about Catherine Zeta-Jones and Michael Douglas? She's so much more attractive than him.'

Question

Explain how research into the matching hypothesis can help us to decide whether Charlize or Sean is right.



Online dating may have changed forever the way some people form relationships. But it arguably makes physical attractiveness even more important.

Apply it Methods: Match me up!

A psychologist was interested in testing the matching hypothesis. She recruited 44 female participants by using an **opportunity sampling** method. Each participant was individually introduced to two men. The three of them had a 10-minute discussion about what they found attractive in a partner. One of the men had been rated by independent judges as attractive and the other unattractive. Each female participant was rated in the same way. Each participant then had to choose which of the men she would prefer to go on a date with. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of attractive and unattractive females choosing a date with the attractive or unattractive male

	Attractive male	Unattractive male
Attractive female	17	14
Unattractive female	8	5

Questions

1. Identify and explain the type of **experimental design** used in this study. (1 mark + 2 marks)
2. Suggest **one extraneous variable** in this study and explain how it might have affected the results. (3 marks)
3. Name a suitable **statistical test** to analyse the data in Table 1. (1 mark) (See page 70)
4. Explain **two** reasons why you have chosen this test. (2 marks + 2 marks)
5. A friend of the researcher disagreed with this result. She has been in many relationships and, in her experience, people always want the best-looking partners. Explain why the friend's personal opinion is no substitute for scientific evidence. (4 marks)

CHECK IT

1. In relation to factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships, explain what is meant by the **matching hypothesis**. [2 marks]
2. Outline physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships. [4 marks]
3. Outline the matching hypothesis as an explanation of factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships. [4 marks]
4. Discuss physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships. [16 marks]

FACTORS AFFECTING ATTRACTION: FILTER THEORY

THE SPECIFICATION SAYS...

Factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships: filter theory including social demography, similarity in attitudes and complementarity.

‘So many men, so little time.’ Not Shakespeare on this occasion, but old-time Hollywood star Mae West, who knew a thing or two about relationships. Fortunately (or unfortunately) for most of us, the number of men or women available as potential partners is not as huge as it apparently was for Mae West. That’s because several factors drastically reduce the size of the ‘pond we fish in’. So your partners are likely to come from a surprisingly limited group. At least, that’s the claim made by filter theory, our final look at what influences that initial attraction (and beyond).

KEY TERMS

Filter theory – An explanation of relationship formation. It states that a series of different factors progressively limits the range of available romantic partners to a much smaller pool of possibilities. The filters include social demography, similarity in attitudes and complementarity.

Social demography – Demographics are features that describe populations; social demographics include geographical location and social class. Such factors filter out a large number of available partners. This means many relationships are formed between partners who share social demographic characteristics.

Similarity in attitudes – We find partners who share our basic values attractive in the earlier stages of a relationship, so we tend to discount available individuals who differ markedly from us in their attitudes.

Complementarity – Similarity becomes less important as a relationship develops, and is replaced by a need for your partner to balance your traits with opposite ones of their own.



‘I go for two kinds of men: those with muscles and those without.’

That certainly increased Mae West’s field of desirables.

Filter theory

Alan Kerckhoff and Keith Davis (1962) compared the attitudes and personalities of student couples in short-term (defined as less than 18 months) and long-term relationships. They devised a **filter theory** to explain how such romantic relationships form and develop.

In terms of partner choice, we all have a *field of availables*, the entire set of potential romantic partners, all the people we could realistically form a relationship with. But, of course, not everyone who is available to us is desirable. According to Kerckhoff and Davis, there are three main factors that act as filters to narrow down our range of partner choice to a *field of desirables*. Each of these factors assumes greater or lesser importance at different stages of a relationship.

Social demography (1st level of filter)

Social demography refers to a wide range of factors all of which influence the chances of potential partners meeting each other in the first place. They include geographical location (or *proximity*), social class, level of education, ethnic group, religion, and so on. You are much more likely to meet people who are physically close and share several demographic characteristics. Although we might frequently encounter people who live further away, our most meaningful and memorable interactions are with people who are nearby. The key benefit of proximity is *accessibility*. It doesn’t require much effort to meet people who live in the same area, go to the same school or university, and so on.

Although there is a vast range and variety of potential partners, the realistic field is much narrower because our choices are constrained by our social circumstances. Effectively, anyone who is too ‘different’ (too far away, too middle class) is discounted as a potential partner. The outcome of this filtering is *homogamy*, meaning you are more likely to form a relationship with someone who is socially or culturally similar. You will probably have a fair bit in common with someone who shares, for example, your ethnicity, religious beliefs, and educational level and most of us find such shared similarities attractive.

Similarity in attitudes (2nd level of filter)

Partners will often share important beliefs and values, partly because the *field of availables* has already been narrowed by the first filter to those who have significant social and cultural characteristics in common. Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) found that **similarity of attitudes** was important to the development of romantic relationships, but only for the couples who had been together less than 18 months. There is a need for partners in the earlier stages of a relationship to agree over basic values, the things that really matter to them. This encourages greater and deeper communication, and promotes **self-disclosure** (see page 120).

There is considerable evidence that most of us find this similarity attractive, at least to begin with. Donn Byrne (1997) has described the consistent findings that similarity causes attraction as the *law of attraction*. If such similarity does not exist, for example, it turns out the partners have little in common after all, then they may go out together a few times, but the relationship is likely to fizzle out with a ‘I’ll call you sometime’.

Complementarity (3rd level of filter)

The third filter concerns the ability of romantic partners to meet each other’s needs. Two partners complement each other when they have traits that the other lacks. For example, one partner may enjoy making the other laugh, and in turn this partner enjoys being made to laugh. Or perhaps one partner is more dominant in the relationship than the other. Or one likes to nurture and the other to be nurtured. Kerckhoff and Davis found that the need for **complementarity** was more important for the long-term couples. In other words, at a later stage of a relationship, opposites attract. Complementarity is attractive because it gives two romantic partners the feeling that together they form a whole, which adds depth to a relationship and makes it more likely to flourish.

Apply it Concepts: Still loving after all these years

Pat and Phil first met when they were both 13 years old, on Pat’s paper round. Two years after that they started going out with each other and were madly in love, until they broke up three years later. They lost touch, but 44 years later these childhood sweethearts rediscovered each other and finally got married.

Question

Explain how relationships like the one between Pat and Phil are formed in terms of (a) social demographics, (b) similarity of attitudes, and (c) complementarity.

Evaluation

Support from research evidence

Filter theory assumes that the key factors in a relationship change over time. This makes sense and agrees with most people's experience of romantic relationships, so the theory has **face validity**. More importantly, however, it also benefits from some research support. For example, Peter Winch (1958) found evidence that similarities of personality, interests and attitudes between partners are typical of the earliest stages of a relationship.

This echoes the **matching hypothesis**, but not just in terms of physical attractiveness. Between partners happily married for several years, complementarity of needs is more important than similarity, according to Winch.

Failure to replicate

George Levinger (1974) pointed out that many studies have failed to **replicate** the original findings that formed the basis of filter theory. He put this down to social changes over time and also to the difficulties inherent in defining the depth of a relationship in terms of its length. Kerckhoff and Davis chose an 18-month cut-off point to distinguish between short-term and long-term relationships. They assumed that partners who had been together longer than this were more committed and had a deeper relationship.

This highlights the problems in applying filter theory even to other heterosexual couples in the **individualist** culture, never mind to homosexual partners or relationships in another culture.

Direction of cause and effect

Filter theory suggests that people are initially attracted to each other *because* they are similar (demographically of course, but also attitudinally and in other ways too). But there is evidence that this direction of causality is wrong. Anderson *et al.* (2003) found in a **longitudinal study** that cohabiting partners became more similar in their emotional responses over time, a phenomenon they called *emotional convergence*.

Furthermore, Davis and Rusbult (2001) discovered an *attitude alignment effect* in longer-term relationships. Romantic partners over time bring their attitudes into line with each other's, again suggesting that similarity is an effect of initial attraction and not the cause.

These findings are not predicted by filter theory.

Evaluation eXtra

Lack of temporal validity

The rise of online dating in recent years has changed beyond recognition the process of beginning a romantic relationship. It has reduced the importance of some **social demographic** variables. Technology such as the Internet and mobile apps like Tinder have made meeting potential partners easier than ever, to the extent that we might well pursue a date with someone outside the usual demographic limits (e.g. different culture or social class) than would have applied, say, 30 years ago.

Consider: Do you think this change in dating patterns has made the filter theory invalid? Explain your answer.

Similarity or complementarity?

Some research has challenged the claim of filter theory that complementarity becomes more important than similarity later in a relationship. The fact that Anderson *et al.* (2003) found that similarity increases over time suggests that complementarity is not necessarily a common feature of longer-term relationships. Gruber-Baldini *et al.* (1995) carried out a longitudinal study of married couples. They found that the similarities between spouses in terms of intellectual abilities and attitudinal flexibility increased over a 14-year period.

Consider: What effect does this finding have on the **validity** of the filter theory?



A variety of men. Different ages, ethnicities, education levels, But filter theory claims we're attracted to those who are similar to us – 'birds of a feather flock together', at least to begin with.

Apply it Concepts: Growing together

Katie and Peter have been together for 12 years. They had lots in common when they first met. But even after all that time, they still agree with each other over most matters, have similar interests and do a lot of things together.

Question

Do Katie's and Peter's experiences of their relationship support or challenge filter theory? Explain your answer.

Apply it Methods: You and me, the same?

A psychologist investigated the similarity of attitudes between romantic partners in the early stages of a relationship. He recruited a volunteer sample of ten couples who had been together for less than six months. Each partner completed a questionnaire to measure their attitudes to a variety of issues, each one yielding a score between 1 and 20.

Questions

1. Write a **directional hypothesis** for this study. (2 marks)
2. Explain how the psychologist could have checked the **reliability** of the attitude **questionnaire**. (3 marks)
3. Explain why a **volunteer sample** was used in this study. (2 marks)

The results of the study are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Attitude scores for 10 romantic couples

Couple	Partner 1	Partner 2	Couple	Partner 1	Partner 2
1	17	14	6	8	10
2	8	5	7	15	12
3	11	14	8	10	13
4	14	18	9	7	4
5	4	2	10	12	9

4. Identify an appropriate **statistical test** the researcher could use to analyse the data. (1 mark) (See page 70)
5. Give **two** reasons why this would be an appropriate test to use. (2 marks) (See page 70)

CHECK IT

1. In relation to the filter theory of romantic relationships, explain what is meant by the terms **social demography** and **complementarity**. [2 marks + 2 marks]
2. Outline the filter theory of romantic relationships. [4 marks]
3. Briefly explain **two** limitations of the filter theory of romantic relationships. [2 marks + 2 marks]
4. Describe and evaluate the filter theory of romantic relationships. [16 marks]

THEORIES OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

THE SPECIFICATION SAYS...

Theories of romantic relationships: social exchange theory.

Social exchange theory (SET) is one of a number of *economic theories* of relationships, so-called because they are based on the assumption that people in romantic relationships (like all others) both seek *exchange*.

Such theories recognise that people in a relationship both seek to give and receive valuable 'goods' and assume that we act out of self-interest though there is mutual interdependence.

KEY TERM

Social exchange theory – A theory of how relationships form and develop. It assumes that romantic partners act out of self-interest in exchanging rewards and costs. A satisfying and committed relationship is maintained when rewards exceed costs and potential alternatives are less attractive than the current relationship.

Apply it

Concepts: Love is ... never counting the cost?

Anushka and Ranveer are a couple who have been married for over 30 years. Anushka is terminally ill, but Ranveer decided he would care for her at home rather than see her put into a nursing home. He has been looking after Anushka virtually round the clock for several months, and she now has just days to live.

Kareena works in an office with 11 other people. Each year without fail, everyone gives each other a Christmas card. Kareena can remember how embarrassed she was the year she first joined the company, when she accidentally left one of her co-workers off her list.

Question

What do you think these scenarios tell us about the rewards and costs involved in relationships? Can they be explained by social exchange theory? Explain why or why not.

Social exchange theory (SET)

Rewards, costs and profits

John Thibault and Harold Kelley (1959) contend that behaviour in relationships reflects the economic assumptions of exchange. Most importantly, they say we try to minimise losses and maximise gains (the *minimax principle*). We judge our satisfaction with a relationship in terms of the profit it yields, defined as the rewards minus the costs.

Because such rewards and costs are subjective, there exists a very wide range of possible outcomes. What one person considers a significant reward might be viewed by someone else as less valuable. For example, you might consider receiving praise from your partner as a prized reward, but your partner can take it or leave it. Also, the value of rewards and costs might well change over the course of a relationship. What is seen as rewarding or costly in the early stages, for instance, might become less so as time goes on (the converse is also true, of course).

Rewards include such beneficial things as companionship, sex and emotional support. But a romantic relationship is not always 'a bed of roses'. It can involve negative and unpleasant emotions as well as pleasurable ones. In the economic language of Peter Blau (1964) relationships can be 'expensive', so costs include time, stress, energy, compromise, and so on. Also in economic terms, a relationship incurs another kind of cost, an *opportunity cost*. Your investment of time and energy in your current relationship means using resources that you cannot invest elsewhere.

Comparison level (CL)

There are two ways in which we measure the profit in a romantic relationship. The first, the *comparison level* (CL), is essentially the amount of reward that you believe you deserve to get. It develops out of our experiences of previous relationships which feed into our expectations of the current one. It is also influenced by **social norms** that determine what is widely considered, within a culture, to be a reasonable level of reward. This is often reflected in the media, in books, films, and TV programmes such as soap operas. Over time, we get more relationships 'under our belt' and more experience of social norms, so our CL changes as we acquire more 'data' to set it by.

We consider a relationship worth pursuing if our CL is high. There is an obvious link with **self-esteem** here. Someone with low self-esteem will have a low CL and will therefore be satisfied with gaining just a small profit (or even a loss) from a relationship. Someone with higher self-esteem will believe they are worth a lot more.

Comparison level for alternatives (CLalt)


The second measure of profit provides a wider context for our current relationship. Do we believe we could gain greater rewards and fewer costs from another relationship (or from being on our own)? Given that romantic relationships in our culture are usually exclusive, we ask ourselves, 'Could I do better? Is the grass greener elsewhere?'. SET predicts that we will stay in our current relationship only so long as we believe it is more rewarding than the alternatives.

According to relationships researcher Steve Duck (1994), the CLalt we adopt will depend on the state of our current relationship. There are usually 'plenty more fish in the sea', so if the costs of our current relationship outweigh the rewards, then alternatives become more attractive. Being in a satisfying relationship means that you may not even notice that alternatives could be available.

Stages of relationship development

Another feature of Thibault and Kelley's **social exchange theory** concerns the four stages through which relationships (and the social exchanges which underpin them) develop:

- *Sampling stage*: We explore the rewards and costs of social exchange by experimenting with them in our own relationships (not just romantic ones), or by observing others doing so.
- *Bargaining stage*: This marks the beginning of a relationship, when romantic partners start exchanging various rewards and costs, negotiating and identifying what is most profitable.
- *Commitment stage*: As time goes on, the sources of costs and rewards become more predictable and the relationship becomes more stable as rewards increase and costs lessen.
- *Institutionalisation stage*: The partners are now settled down because the norms of the relationship, in terms of rewards and costs, are firmly established.



'I'll give you the world, but I want it back.' Are even our deepest loving relationships no more than a series of reward and cost exchanges?

Evaluation

Inappropriate assumptions underlying SET

Many researchers do not accept the economic metaphor underlying SET. Margaret Clark and Judson Mills (2011) argue that the theory fails to distinguish between two types of relationship. They suggest that *exchange relationships* (for example, between work colleagues) do involve social exchange as SET predicts. But *communal relationships* (such as between romantic partners) are marked by the giving and receiving of rewards without keeping score of who is ahead and who is behind.

SET claims that relationship partners return rewards for rewards, costs for costs, and that these reciprocal activities are monitored. But if we felt this kind of exchange monitoring was going on at the start of a promising relationship, we would probably question what kind of commitment our partner wanted. It is clear from some research that SET is based on faulty assumptions and therefore cannot account for the majority of romantic relationships.

Direction of cause and effect

SET argues that dissatisfaction sets in when we suspect that costs outweigh rewards or that alternatives are more attractive. Michael Argyle (1987) points out that we don't measure costs and rewards in a relationship, nor do we constantly consider the attractiveness of alternatives. That is, not until we are dissatisfied with the relationship.

Research supports this view that dissatisfaction comes first. For example, Rowland Miller (1997) found that people who rated themselves as being in a highly committed relationship spent less time looking at images of attractive people. What's more, less time spent looking was a good predictor of the relationship continuing two months later. So people in committed relationships ignore even the most attractive alternatives. SET cannot account for the direction of causation in this outcome.

SET ignores equity

The central concern of SET is the comparison level, the ratio of perceived rewards and costs. But this focus ignores one crucial factor that may be an overwhelming consideration for romantic partners – fairness or *equity*. The next spread explains how this shortcoming of SET has been addressed by another theory (**equity theory**).

There is much research support for the role of equity in relationships, and the view that this is more important than just the balance of rewards and costs. Neglect of this factor means that SET is a limited explanation which cannot account for a significant proportion of the research findings on relationships.

Evaluation eXtra

Measuring SET concepts

SET deals in concepts that are difficult to quantify. Rewards and costs have been defined superficially (e.g. money) in order to measure them. But psychological rewards and costs are more difficult to define, especially when they vary so much from one person to another. The concept of comparison levels is especially problematic. It is unclear what the values of CL and CLalt must be before dissatisfaction threatens a relationship. How attractive do alternatives need to be, or by how much should costs outweigh rewards?

Consider: *Is it possible to measure rewards and costs in a valid and reliable way? How does this limit SET?*

Artificial research

The majority of studies supporting SET use artificial tasks in artificial conditions. For example, one common procedure involves two strangers working together on a game-playing scenario in which rewards and costs are distributed. The two 'partners' know nothing about each other and their so-called 'relationship' depends entirely on the task they are performing together. More realistic studies using participants in real relationships have been less supportive of SET, especially noting that **snapshot studies** cannot account for the properties that emerge from a relationship over time, such as trust.

Consider: *How realistic do you think these research 'relationships' are? Can you explain how this limitation of the studies weakens the theory itself?*

Apply it Concepts: You scratch my back

Eric and Arianna found each other on an online dating site, and have just spent their first day together in the real world. They are both very keen on each other, and both think the other is very attractive. But everywhere they went together, Arianna was totting up how much each of them had spent. It was her idea they split the bill in the restaurant. And every time Eric said something nice to her, she had to do the same to him. But Eric just can't be doing with all that, so now he isn't sure he wants to continue the relationship.

Question

Which of Eric and Arianna is behaving in ways predicted by social exchange theory? Explain which concepts described by SET are particularly important in this scenario and why.



Dodgy first date? Too much exchange monitoring at the start of a relationship and we might wonder if our partner would rather be 'just friends'.

Apply it Methods: Players of games

A psychologist decides to test the social exchange theory of relationships by using a game-playing scenario. He recruits two groups of romantic partners – some who have been together for less than two months and others for more than two years. One partner in each couple is Player A and the other is Player B. Player A gives £10 to Player B. The experimenter triples this amount and gives it all to Player B. Player B then has to decide how much to give back to player A, from nothing to £30. The psychologist found that in couples who had been together less than two months, the mean amount returned by Player B was £17.50. The corresponding figure for couples who had been together for more than two years was £12.40.

Questions

1. Write a **non-directional hypothesis** for this **experiment**. (2 marks)
2. What **experimental design** is used in this study? (1 mark)
3. The researcher assigned the roles of Player A and Player B randomly. Explain how he could have done this and why it was necessary. (2 marks + 2 marks)
4. Explain why this experiment might be lacking in validity. (3 marks)

CHECK IT

1. Explain what is meant by the term *social exchange* in relation to romantic relationships. [2 marks]
2. Briefly outline the social exchange theory of romantic relationships. [4 marks]
3. Outline **one** study of social exchange theory. [4 marks]
4. Describe and evaluate the social exchange theory of romantic relationships. [16 marks]

PRACTICAL CORNER

THE SPECIFICATION SAYS...

Knowledge and understanding of ... research methods, practical research skills and maths skills. These should be developed through ... ethical practical research activities.

In both a correlational study and a quasi-experiment, there's no manipulation of variables like you find in a true experiment. Sometimes, ethical or practical reasons mean that we can only measure variables and analyse how they relate to each other. These two investigations give you the opportunity to use questionnaires and participants' ratings.

Ethics check

We suggest strongly that you complete this checklist before starting:

1. Do participants know participation is voluntary?
2. Do participants know what to expect?
3. Do participants know they can withdraw at any time?
4. Are individuals' results anonymous?
5. Have I minimised the risk of distress to participants?
6. Have I avoided asking sensitive questions?
7. Will I avoid bringing my school/teacher/psychology into disrepute?
8. Have I considered all other ethical issues?
9. Has my teacher approved this?

Practical idea 1: The matching hypothesis

The **matching hypothesis** is an explanation of relationship formation that puts physical attractiveness very much at the forefront of partner selection. However, in choosing romantic partners we generally don't go for the most attractive person available. We compromise partner choice by taking into account our assessment of our own level of attractiveness.

So the aim of this practical is to test the prediction that most partners in a couple have a similar level of attractiveness to each other. A **correlational** research method is ideally suited to this aim. We expect to find a **significant positive correlation** between ratings of physical attractiveness given for each partner in a couple.

The practical bit

Designing your study

You will need to find images of 10 romantic couples. There are many available on the Internet, but your selection needs to follow some strict criteria. Don't use images of celebrities or any other couples your participants are likely to know. You need to be able to divide the images into separate individuals, in such a way that it's not obvious which ones go together. Ideally, there should be no cues for participants to work out which individuals belong together. For example, one potential **extraneous variable** is image backgrounds.

Because you are aiming to **standardise** your procedure, the images need to be as similar to each other as possible, for example, in terms of size and direction of pose. Images of couples getting married fit most of these criteria so are well worth considering. Limit your selection to heterosexual couples, within a narrow age range and all of same ethnic grouping. This is purely for the sake of standardisation and because you are testing the original matching hypothesis. Once you have prepared the images of individual partners, they are well-suited to being presented to whole classes of students, for instance in a PowerPoint slideshow on an interactive whiteboard. But make sure you present them in a random order.

You should also construct a response sheet on which participants can note their ratings for each individual. Indicate on the sheet the numbers of each individual image. Keep a careful record of which partners belong to which couples. Finally, decide on a rating scale of physical attractiveness, such as 1 to 10 (from 'not at all attractive' to 'extremely attractive'). Include the scale in your **standardised instructions** with a detailed explanation of what the participants need to do.

Ethical issues

Some participants might object to the whole business of rating physical attractiveness as shallow or degrading. You need to make it clear that anyone who does object for this or any other reason has the **right to withdraw** before the procedure begins. You should also obtain **informed consent**, so that participants can make a decision about whether or not to proceed. The ethical matters will be reflected in your standardised instructions and **debriefing** statement.

Selecting your participants

You could, with the co-operation of a teacher, select whole classes **randomly** from the school or college register. But it's more likely that you will use an **opportunity sample** of available classes.

Analysing and presenting your data

You need to calculate a **measure of central tendency** to represent the average attractiveness ratings for each male and female partner (i.e. 20 calculations in all if you have 20 pictures). You can present these in a table, with the figures for the partners in each couple alongside each other. You could then draw a **scattergram**. Each data point represents the average attractiveness ratings for each couple, with the male on one axis and the female on the other (i.e. 10 data points).

For **inferential analysis**, apply a statistical test to assess the relationship between the two sets of attractiveness ratings. Answering the questions in The maths bit 1 will give you some idea of which test you need to use.

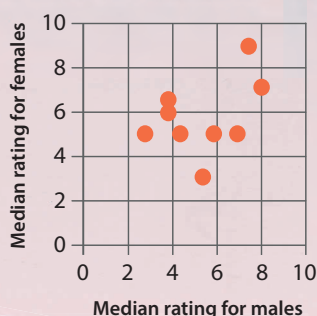


You need images of romantic partners to test the matching hypothesis. But don't make it too easy to guess who the couples are.

Apply it

Methods:

The maths bit 1



1. What conclusions can you draw based on the **scattergram**? (3 marks)
2. Explain why the **median** was used to calculate average attractiveness. (2 marks)
3. Which **statistical test** would you use to analyse the significance of the relationship in the scattergram? Give **two** reasons for your choice. (1 mark + 2 marks) (See page 70)
4. The appropriate statistical test was calculated and the result was **significant** at $p \leq 0.05$. What does this mean? (2 marks) (See page 72)

Practical idea 2: Testing the absorption-addiction model

The **absorption-addiction model** has been used to explain how people form parasocial relationships (McCutcheon 2002). These are unreciprocated relationships, often formed with celebrities.

Our aim is to test the prediction that people form parasocial relationships as an escape from the reality of everyday living. To do this, we need to assume that people with stressful lives welcome some escape. Therefore we would expect that the degree of parasocial involvement is linked with how much stress a person experiences in their everyday lives; greater stress is associated with a more intense level of relationship.

The practical bit

Designing the study

This practical is a **quasi-experiment**, because the **independent variable (IV)** is pre-existing and not manipulated by you. The IV is the degree of life stress experienced by your participants, low or high. The **dependent variable (DV)** is the level of parasocial involvement: either social-entertainment (lower) or intense-personal (higher). You will need two questionnaires to establish the conditions of the IV and measure the DV.

The questionnaires

Fortunately there are standardised measures readily available on the Internet. These are the *Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS)* and the *College Student's Stressful Events Checklist (CSSEC)*. You can find both of these using your Internet search engine of choice. However, both of them will need some alterations to make them more useful for this practical.

The CAS measures not only the two levels of parasocial involvement we are investigating, but a third called *borderline pathological*. There is a risk that a degree of stress could be caused by asking participants to fill in items relating to this third level. So for ethical reasons, it would be advisable to remove them altogether. Use the scoring key provided with the scale to find out which items these are.

The CSSEC has been devised for use with American participants. There's no need to remove any items, but it would be useful to change some of the language to terms that would be more recognisable to UK students (e.g. *course for major, teacher for instructor, term for semester*). You should also remove any text that indicates how the scale is scored.

Ethical considerations

You will have removed the most risky items on the CAS. But you should consider that the questions on the CSSEC are somewhat personal and potentially invasive. There is a chance that some participants could experience indignity or embarrassment. On the other hand, this is a standard **questionnaire** which has been used in countless research studies. Nevertheless, think about how you can counteract any potentially negative effects of such personal questioning. For instance, is there any need to collect participants' names? As each participant is going to complete two questionnaires, you need some way of matching them up. But this does not have to involve names. You should certainly think very carefully about how you are going to obtain informed consent and ensure that your participants are aware of their right to withdraw.

Analysing your data

You need to identify 'low stress' and 'high stress' participants on the basis of their CSSEC scores. The most straightforward way to do this is to use a cut-off point to divide the set of scores into two groups: high stress participants are those who score 225 or more; low stress is a score of 224 or less. You should have two parasocial involvement scores for each participant, one for *social-entertainment* and one for *intense-personal*. For each participant, take the highest of these two scores to indicate level of parasocial relationship.

Once you have classified each participant into their appropriate stress level group and parasocial level group, you should be able to complete a 2 × 2 contingency table like the one on the right.



Deep parasocial involvement can mean a lot of time spent dressing up as your favourite fictional character. But is this behaviour an attempt to escape from a stressful life?

The maths bit

Overall, at least 10% of the marks in assessments for Psychology will require the use of mathematical skills and at least a further 15% will be related to research methods.

Don't avoid it!

Apply it Methods: The maths bit 2

The table below shows the number of participants in each category based on their CAS and CSSEC scores.

- Using the table below, calculate the totals for each row and each column and the overall total. (5 marks).
- Draw a suitable graph to represent the data in the categories. Label the axes carefully and give the graph an appropriate title. (3 marks)
- What type of graph have you drawn? Explain why you made this choice. (1 mark + 2 marks)
- Calculate the frequencies in each cell as a percentage of the total frequency. (4 marks)
- What would you conclude from these figures about the effect of stress on parasocial involvement? (2 marks)
- Name the **statistical test** you think would be appropriate to analyse the data. Give *two* reasons why you have chosen this test. (1 mark + 2 marks) (See page 70)

Table: Number of participants in each stress/parasocial involvement category

		Parasocial involvement	
		Social-entertainment	Intense-personal
Stress	Low	18	7
	High	11	14

REVISION SUMMARIES

EVOLUTIONARY EXPLANATION OF PARTNER PREFERENCES

How our preferences for mates have evolved.

SEXUAL SELECTION AND HUMAN REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Anisogamy

Male gametes are produced in large numbers at little cost, in contrast with female gametes. This gives rise to two mating strategies.

Inter-sexual selection

Females prefer quality and are especially choosy. Males compete to be chosen.

Intra-sexual selection

Males prefer quantity but must compete for access to fertile females.

EVALUATION

Research support for preferences related to anisogamy

Buss found that males want fertility and looks; females want resources.

Research support for inter-sexual selection

Clark and Hatfield found that female students are choosier than males.

Ignores social and cultural influences

Social changes occur much faster than evolutionary timescales.

Support from waist-hip ratio research

Singh: Males find a WHR of 0.7 attractive because it's an honest signal of fertility.

Support from lonely hearts research

Waynforth and Dunbar: Women tend to offer attractiveness and youth, men offer resources.

FACTORS AFFECTING ATTRACTION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

SELF-DISCLOSURE

Revealing personal and sensitive information.

SELF-DISCLOSURE

Social penetration theory

Partners penetrate more deeply into each other's lives as they self-disclose (Altman and Taylor).

Breadth and depth of self-disclosure

Layers of an onion metaphor, start with breadth but little depth and then move deeper.

Reciprocity of self-disclosure

Successful relationship needs a balance in self-disclosure (Reis and Shaver).

EVALUATION

Support from research studies

Sprecher and Hendrick found that couples in satisfying relationships disclose more and believe their partners do too.

Real-life applications

Self-disclosure is a communication skill that can be learned and developed.

Cultural differences

Cultural differences in sexual self-disclosure in individualist and collectivist cultures (Tang *et al.*).

Self-disclosure and satisfaction

Social penetration theory is wrong in predicting that relationship breakdown means less self-disclosure.

Correlation versus causation

More self-disclosure does not necessarily cause satisfaction.

PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS

Physical good looks increase the liking people have for you.

PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS

Explaining the importance of physical attractiveness

Shackelford and Larsen: Symmetrical face is attractive because it's an honest sign of genetic fitness; neotenous female faces trigger caring instinct in males.

The halo effect

We have positive stereotypes of attractive people that influence our judgements of them (Dion *et al.*).

The matching hypothesis

We choose partners who are of a roughly similar level of physical attractiveness (Walster *et al.*).

EVALUATION

Research support for the halo effect

Palmer and Peterson found that attractive people rated as more politically competent.

Individual differences

Towhey found that some people are less sensitive to physical attractiveness when making judgements of personality and likeability.

Research support for the matching hypothesis

Feingold: Meta-analysis shows correlation between attractiveness of real-life partners.

Role of cultural influences

Attractive female features and the physical attractiveness stereotype both exist across cultures.

Research contradicting the matching hypothesis

Taylor *et al.*: Online dating choices tend to be for more physically attractive people.

FILTER THEORY

Because you can't go out with everyone!

FILTER THEORY

Social demography (1st filter)

Kerckhoff and Davis proposed that factors such as proximity and education level reduce the field of availables.

Similarity in attitudes (2nd filter)

Byrne described the law of attraction as being due to similarity, produces a field of desirables.

Complementarity (3rd filter)

Each partner being able to contribute a trait the other lacks becomes more important than similarity later in a relationship.

EVALUATION

Support from research evidence

Winch found similarity in early stages of the most satisfying relationships, and complementarity came later.

Failure to replicate

Times have changed and also original theory wrongly assumed depth was related to duration of the relationship.

Direction of cause and effect

Anderson *et al.* found that partners in satisfying relationships become more similar as time goes on (emotional convergence).

Lack of temporal validity

Online dating has reduced the importance of the first filter.

Similarity or complementarity?

Similarity in long-term couples may be more important than the third filter.

THEORIES OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

The 'give and take' of romance.

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY (SET)

Rewards, costs and profits
Thibault and Kelley's economic theory, predicting that people want a net profit and try to maximise rewards and minimise costs.

Comparison level
Amount of reward you think you deserve from a relationship compared to the costs, informed by social norms.

Comparison level for alternatives
We consider whether we could get more rewards and fewer costs elsewhere.

Stages of relationship development
Sample, bargaining, commitment and institutionalisation stages.

EVALUATION

Inappropriate assumptions underlying SET
Clark and Mills suggest that not all relationships involve exchange of rewards and comparison with costs (e.g. communal relationships).

Direction of cause and effect
Contrary to SET, research shows that dissatisfaction comes before consideration of alternatives (e.g. Miller).

SET ignores equity
Both partners' profits need to be roughly similar; equity theory suggests this is more important than the amount of rewards and costs for each.

Measuring SET concepts
Real-life rewards, costs and comparison levels are difficult to define and measure.

Artificial research
Snapshot studies using game-playing scenarios do not resemble real-life exchange relationships.

EQUITY THEORY

Perceived fairness rather than equal profits.

EQUITY THEORY

The role of equity
Both partners' level of profit needs to be roughly similar, otherwise one overbenefits and the other underbenefits.

Equity and equality
What matters is the ratio of rewards to costs: A high level of costs with a high level of rewards is seen as fair.

Consequences of inequity
Underbenefited partner is motivated to make the relationship more equitable. The perception of inequality matters.

EVALUATION

Supporting research evidence
Utne *et al.* found that couples in an equitable relationship are more satisfied than those who underbenefit or overbenefit.

Cultural influences
Aumer-Ryan found that in collectivist societies partners are more satisfied when they are overbenefiting, so equity is not universally satisfying.

Individual differences
Not everyone is concerned about equity – benevolents tolerate underbenefit and entitlements believe they deserve overbenefit.

Types of relationship
Clark and Mills: Equity matters more in non-romantic relationships, less important to romantic satisfaction.

Contradictory research evidence
Not all relationships become more equitable over time, other factors are more important.

RUSBULT'S INVESTMENT MODEL

Partners stay because of commitment.

RUSBULT'S INVESTMENT MODEL

Satisfaction and CLalt
A satisfying relationship has many rewards and few costs, and compares well with alternatives.

Investment size
Consider the resources that have been put into a relationship which we would stand to lose if it broke down.

Satisfaction versus commitment
The main psychological factor maintaining relationships is commitment, which explains why dissatisfied partners sometimes do not leave.

Relationship maintenance mechanisms
Committed partners act to promote their relationship through accommodation, willingness to sacrifice, forgiveness, etc.

EVALUATION

Supporting research evidence
Le and Agnew meta-analysis showed all three factors of the model predicted relationship commitment.

Explains abusive relationships
Rusbult and Martz found that abused partners who were committed reported greatest investment and lowest CLalt.

Oversimplifies investment
Goodfriend and Agnew extended the theory to include the importance of future plans as part of investment.

Methodological strengths
Self-report measures are useful because what matters in relationships is perception rather than reality.

Based on correlational research
Many correlations between different parts of the model, but this doesn't mean that satisfaction, comparison or investment cause commitment.

DUCK'S PHASE MODEL

How romantic relationships end.

DUCK'S PHASE MODEL OF RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

Intra-psycho phase
Dissatisfied partner considers the dissatisfactions privately and possibly with close friends.

Dyadic phase
Both partners start talking about the relationship, resulting in arguments, negotiations, recriminations, etc.

Social phase
Partners involve their social networks in an attempt to save the relationship and also muster support.

Grave-dressing phase
The now ex-partners tidy up the loose ends of the relationship by constructing a favourable public and private story.

EVALUATION

An incomplete model?
Rollie and Duck added the resurrection phase, and emphasised the processes within the model.

Methodological issues
Understanding the very early stages of breakdown requires retrospective recall and is also unethical (may hasten end of relationship).

Useful real-life applications
The model identifies strategies for relationship rescue that could be used in relationships counselling at different points in the breakdown process.

Description rather than explanation
Other explanations are better at identifying the factors that create breakdown, e.g. Felmlee's fatal attraction hypothesis.

Cultural bias
Research underlying the model is mostly from individualist Western cultures, relationships in collectivist cultures are different.

VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Relationship formation in CMCs compared to FtF.

VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Reduced cues theory
CMC relationships lack the cues of FtF interaction so there is greater de-individualisation and less self-disclosure.

The hyperpersonal model
CMC presentation gives more control over disclosure and can be manipulated to promote intimacy, so relationships can become more intense than FtF.

Absence of gating in virtual relationships
Certain characteristics act as a barrier to relationship formation when FtF but not in CMCs, e.g. facial disfigurement, social anxiety.

Relationship maintenance mechanisms
Committed partners act to promote their relationship through accommodation, willingness to sacrifice, forgiveness, etc.

EVALUATION

Lack of research support for reduced cues theory
Walther and Tidwell: CMC involves different cues rather than a lack of them (e.g. timing, emojis), so emotional states can be expressed.

Research support for the hyperpersonal model
Whitty and Joinson found that CMC is more direct, blunt, hyperhonest and hyperdishonest than it is FtF, supporting the model.

Types of CMC
Extent of self-disclosure online depends on the type of CMC and nature of the relationship.

Relationships are multimodal
Most of our relationships are conducted both online and offline, and each influences the other.

Support for absence of gating
A higher proportion of relationships formed online than offline survive at least two years.

PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

One-sided relationships with celebrities or other distant figures.

PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Levels of parasocial relationships
Entertainment-social; intense-personal; borderline pathological.

The absorption-addiction model
A fan absorbs themselves in the celebrity's world, then needs to increase their involvement in the same way that addicts do.

The attachment theory explanation
Insecure-resistant individuals have emotional unfulfilled needs; parasocial relationships avoid the threat of rejection.

EVALUATION

Support for the absorption-addiction model
Maltby *et al.* demonstrated correlations between level of celebrity worship and poor psychological functioning (e.g. anorexia).

Problems with attachment theory
McCutcheon *et al.* found no correlation between insecure attachment type and parasocial involvement.

Methodological issues
Most research uses self-report measures and correlational analysis, thus the support for the model lacks validity.

Problems with absorption-addiction model
Model describes characteristics of absorbed/addicted people, but doesn't explain how they form.

Cultural influences
Schmid and Klimm: Tendency to form parasocial relationships occurs across very different cultures.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND FEEDBACK

Question 1 Kaley is an attractive 25-year-old woman who has recently married Ryan, a 60-year-old man who owns five successful businesses. They have no children yet, but are hoping to start a family soon.

Outline the relationship between sexual selection and human reproductive behaviour. Refer to the information above in your answer. (4 marks)

Morticia's answer

Sexual selection is an explanation for our partner choices based on evolutionary theory. The fact that men produce large numbers of sperm means that their reproductive success is best ensured by mating as often as they can and with women who are fertile. Therefore, men like Ryan are programmed to be attracted to young women so his offspring will be strong and more likely to survive.

For women it is different. They do best reproductively if they are choosy about a mate because each pregnancy is costly in terms of the amount of time and energy required. Women are particularly interested in a man who can provide resources because that will protect the survival of each infant. That explains why Kaley may have fallen for a rich businessman.

Luke's answer

Kaley and Ryan are examples of sexual selection in action because Kaley went for a man with resources and Ryan went for a young fertile mate.

Anisogamy is a key factor in sexual selection. It is the differences between male and female sex cells, which means that there are plenty of males but a female is a rare resource.

Females go for inter-sexual selection – they choose between available males and go for quality rather than quantity.

Males go for intra-sexual selection – they have to compete with other males to be selected.

Vladimir's answer

Human reproduction is basically driven by the same factors as for all mammals. Males produce vast numbers of sperm at little cost whereas women produce only a few eggs. There are two kinds of selection, either selection within one sex or between sexes. For women the better strategy is intra-sexual selection because they choose a man. For men the better strategy is inter-sexual selection because there are lots of them. This doesn't take into account the fact that humans may make conscious decisions and not be driven by their biology, though an example such as Kaley and Ryan might suggest that they are because biology explains why a young woman would go for an older man, because of his resources.

Morticia's outline for male reproductive behaviour is clear and well informed. The application to the question stem could have been a little clearer.

In the second paragraph, the outline is well written here and again the application – albeit brief – will suffice.

Luke's first sentence is a brief acknowledgement of the stem but this is not really linked to appropriate background theory so does not qualify as application.

Although there is material on the differences in sexual selection, it is not really made relevant to the stem described or linked effectively to behavioural strategies.

Vladimir's answer is confused, containing some relevant ideas but these are poorly expressed and not appropriately applied. There is attempted application within the final sentence but this is rather weak.

Question 2 Briefly outline the equity theory of romantic relationships. (4 marks)

Morticia's answer

Equity theory is an economic explanation for how relationships form and are maintained. It is called 'economic' because it suggests that the key to a relationship is fair trading. Equity theory was developed out of social exchange theory and, in contrast, suggests that relationships are not just about profits and losses but about each partner thinking the inputs and outputs are fair.

One problem with this theory is that it may only apply to individualist cultures who are more concerned with what each person gets whereas collectivist societies are more focused on the needs of others and actually may prefer relationships where their partner overbenefits (Aumer-Ryan et al.).

Luke's answer

Equity theory, proposed by Walster et al., is concerned with fairness. A partner who is overbenefitted would feel uncomfortable. What is important is the ratio of rewards and costs rather than their size. A lack of equity leads a partner to feel distressed and dissatisfied, the greater the perceived inequity the greater the dissatisfaction. In the early days of a relationship inequity may matter less but, as the relationship progresses the partners in a successful relationship will work at maintaining equity. Actually what may be adjusted is the perception of the rewards and costs rather than the rewards and costs themselves so nothing may change it's just that partners adjust their perceptions.

Vladimir's answer

Equity theory is about equality in a relationship. Partners like to feel a sense of balance in what they have, in the same way a business feels about their partners. It should be fair so that no one is getting more than the other. Partners consider their losses and gains and weigh these up in order to decide whether the relationship is worth pursuing. People dislike being overbenefitted as well as being underbenefitted though this may vary with individual differences – in other words some people prefer one or the other.

Morticia's outline of equity theory is accurate and reasonably detailed. The comparison with social exchange theory is useful as a way of demonstrating understanding of equity theory. The rest of the answer is only evaluative. This underlines the importance of understanding the command words within questions – 'outline' is a descriptive term.

Luke has focused on a slightly different aspect of the theory than Morticia and demonstrated a thorough understanding.

Vladimir's answer is less well articulated than Luke's but the understanding is still there. Most of the key aspects of equity theory are explained.

On this spread we look at some typical student answers to questions. The comments provided indicate what is good and bad in each answer. Learning how to produce effective question answers is a SKILL. Read pages 387–397 for guidance.

Question 3 Describe and evaluate Duck's phase model of relationship breakdown. (16 marks)

Luke's answer

Duck's phase model has four phases. In the first phase, which is the intra-psychoic phase, the dissatisfied partner considers the dissatisfactions privately and possibly with close friends.

In the second phase, the dyadic phase, both partners start talking about the relationship, resulting in arguments, negotiations, recriminations, etc.

In the social phase, partners involve their social networks in an attempt to save the relationship and also muster support.

And finally in the grave-dressing phase the now ex-partners tidy up the loose ends of the relationship by constructing a favourable public and private story.

At any point the partners may exit and repair the relationship but each phase has a tipping point where things have gone too far and then it is time for the next phase.

Duck himself criticised this phase model saying that it was too simple. He added a fifth phase, the resurrection phase, where partners start thinking ahead to new relationships. In the new model Duck also said that people may return to earlier phases – it's not a simple linear progression. The earlier model lacked the dynamic nature of the newer one.

A good theory should have research support and one of the issues with this theory is that the research is inevitably retrospective – you find couples who have broken up and then ask them to recall what happen. It may be that they don't remember things exactly. In fact their later experiences may affect the way they remember the early phases.

A good theory should also have real-life relevance and this theory offers assistance to relationship counsellors who can see what phase a couple is in and recognise strategies that may help at this time to avoid the tipping point. Duck suggests, for example, that people in the intra-psychoic phase could focus on the positive aspects of their partner.

An important criticism is that this theory really is more of a description than an explanation of why breakdown happens. For example, Felmlee's fatal attraction theory explains that the reason relationships breakdown is the thing you found initially attractive becomes very annoying. Such as having a partner who is very outgoing, which you admire initially but then come to dislike. Duck's theory just describes the process of that breakdown and therefore doesn't offer insights into breakdown.

Like many theories, this theory has an individualist bias, describing relationships from the standpoint of one kind of culture. Relationships in collectivist cultures are much more difficult to end because other people are more involved and in fact in such cultures romantic issues wouldn't be important at all. This means the theory has a limited application.

(428 words)

Vladimir's answer

In this essay I am going to describe and evaluate one of the most important theories of relationship breakdown, Duck's phase model of romantic breakdown – so this shows it is just about the breakdown of romantic relationships though of course there are other relationships too that breakdown, but romantic ones are quite different. Duck described this breakdown in terms of four stages or phases because he could see that there are particular steps in the process, it doesn't all happen at once. The theory was based on research with couples who experienced relationship breakdown and Duck identified thresholds that occur when one partner is dissatisfied. The first threshold is right at the beginning when one partner is distressed about the relationship and feels they can't stand it any more. This starts the intra-psychoic phase of thinking about what's wrong in the relationship. The person may discuss their feelings with someone else. The person finally feels they are right to end the relationship. Many people stay in this phase for a very long time. The next phase is the dyadic phase when the two partners start talking to each other. The partners may decide to make things better or that it is time to end. This leads into the social phase where they involve other people in the breakup discussions such as close family and friends. People are likely to take sides and this makes it hard to turn back. Nasty secrets may be revealed. It's really inevitable that the break up will occur. The final phase is grave-dressing where both partners work out their 'story' – their account of what really happened. Such a story is important for future relationships because each partner wants to look 'good'.

Duck's account is culturally biased as it is based in individualist cultures like America and the UK and doesn't relate well to collectivist societies. So we can't generalise it to all people all over the world. It really is for just one group of people. It's also quite determinist because it suggests that this is what will happen to you if your relationship starts to go wrong. It could also be described as reductionist because it reduces a complex relationship to some very simple elements. A more holist approach might look at the whole relationship and that might be better.

Not much research has been done to support the theory because it is quite difficult to ask people about what happens when their relationship breaks down. People don't want to talk about it and they may not tell the truth anyway. Research might involve interviews and these are very subjective anyway and there may be interviewer bias so we can't necessarily trust what people say, though you could check interviewer reliability with test-retest. So it isn't very scientific research. There are other theories that are more explanatory.

(471 words)

Luke's outline of the phase model is concise but accurate and sufficient for the descriptive content within this question.

This paragraph ('Duck himself criticised ...') could be read equally as further description or evaluative commentary but, either way, is relevant and well phrased.

The remaining paragraphs all contain good, clear, well-elaborated criticisms of the theory. They all illustrate the skill of sustained commentary.

The most striking thing about this response is that Luke has managed to maintain the appropriate balance between descriptive and evaluative elements for an A level essay.

An awkward beginning from Vladimir which tends not to go anywhere initially. A clear outline of the theory – as Luke – would have been preferable.

When Vladimir does begin to tackle the main features of the model, some of the points are a little laboured and there is a lack of conciseness, which will affect the overall balance of the essay.

The cultural point is not well made – why does the theory prioritise Western experience? Determinism and reductionism are 'thrown in' as issues but not really made relevant and there is vague, speculative methodological evaluation at the end.

Overall, Vladimir has focused too much on description rather than evaluation which the question also requires.

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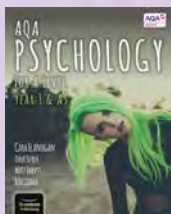
About the authors:

Cara Flanagan is a well-known and respected author for A Level Psychology. She has a wealth of experience in the field with examining experience and a track record of presenting at conferences. Cara has a passion for creating resources that students love to use.

Dave Berry is a practiced psychology teacher and regularly leads examining centres and training courses for a number of training providers in psychology at awarding bodies. He is Head of Psychology at Oldham Hulme Grammar School.

Matt Jarvis currently teaches psychology at a sixth form college in Hampshire. An experienced teacher of psychology from GCSE through to postgraduate level, Matt has authored numerous psychology textbooks. Matt is Honorary Research Fellow at Keele University and also has examining psychology textbooks experience.

Rob Liddle has more than twenty years' teaching experience in psychology from GCSE to postgraduate level. A psychology graduate with a Master's in Organisational Psych, Rob is established in the examining community. He writes psychology books and resources for A Level at a sixth form college in Southport, Merseyside.



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