

AQA Psychology A-level

Option 1: Relationships Example Answers/Essays

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Question : Outline an evolutionary explanation for partner preferences. Explain one limitation of an evolutionary explanation for partner preferences. (6 marks)

One evolutionary explanation for partner preference is the intrasexual selection theory. This theory is the preferred strategy of males and suggests that they compete within their sex to be the one that is chosen by females so that their genes can be passed on. This strategy looks at quantity rather than quality as it suggests males are likely to mate with many females to increase the likelihood of their characteristics being passed on to their offspring. **AO1**

One limitation of this sexual selection theory is that it can only be applied to heterosexual couples. Within same sex (homosexual) couples, passing on genes does not impact their choice of partners hence the evolutionary theory lacks ecological validity. **AO3**

Marks : 5

Teacher's comments :

Could be improved by including a sentence on intersexual selection too.

Discuss physical attractiveness as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships (16 marks)

Physical attractiveness has been found to be an important factor in the formation and development of relationships. It describes the physical appealing features of someone's face. One reason why this has been shown to be an important factor is due to an evolutionary explanation. This is that symmetrical facial features are an honest signal of reproductive success. Another explanation which is more valuable to females as they are looking for someone to produce offspring with, is that neotenous features trigger a protective and caring instinct in people. **AO1**

There are theories that have been derived from the factor- physical attractiveness. Firstly, there is the halo effect. This is when one distinguishable feature (in this case physical attractiveness) affects a person's judgement on another irrelevant feature. In terms of physical attractiveness, more physically attractive people are associated with being more sociable, kind and successful. Another theory is the matching hypothesis proposed by Walster et al (1966). This is whereby a compromise is made when looking for a partner between pursuing someone who is very physically attractive and taking into account your own physical attractiveness. This is to prevent rejection from a potential partner that is more attractive than you. **AO1**

Research has been undertaken to investigate these theories. For the matching hypothesis, Walster et al carried out a study which involved 752 students at Dukes university in America. 50% were males and other 50% females. Each participant was randomly allocated to a partner of the opposite sex to attend a dance. However, the participants were informed that they were given ideal matches which fit their personality from the personal data that they had provided being fed into a computer. The results of the study showed that after the dance, the partners actually liked their partners if they were physically attractive. This presents supportive evidence as it emphasizes that physical attractiveness is an important factor when forming relationships. **AO3**



However, one limitation to this study is that physical attractiveness is a subjective phenomenon. This means that it differs between different people. Also there was an unexpected result found that contradicted the matching hypothesis. This was that all the men asked their partners out after the dance, regardless of their own physical attractiveness. This result contradicts the theory which states that partners do take into account their own value. **AO3**

A further limitation of the explanation of physical attractiveness is that it has beta bias. Meltzer et al (2014) surveyed men and women. Results showed that men thought of physical attractiveness as very important and it made them more satisfied in a relationship. On the other hand the women felt that physical attractiveness did not contribute to their satisfaction level. This expresses that the theory suffers from beta bias as it fails to exaggerate the differences between how important physical attractiveness is to men and women. **AO3**

A strength of these theories is that they have cross cultural support. Towhey et al found that both Americans and Koreans consider physical attractiveness important for relationships. This means that physical attractiveness is a feature of relationships that has universality hence generalisability to various cultures. **AO3**

These theories do ignore other factors that contribute to the formation of relationships. When looking into relationships, it is better to take an idiographic approach and look at what makes each couple unique, studying them in more detail. Other factors that have been shown to be of vital importance are self-disclosure, social demographic factors and similarity in attitudes. Therefore it may be more realistic to account for all of these factors when studying the formation and development of relationships, not just look at physical attractiveness alone. AO3

Marks: 13

Teacher's comments:

- **Nice structure.**
- **Even better if you add an evaluation point considering other factors in relationships like self-disclosure, social demographics etc.**

Note :- Corrections from responding to teacher's comments in green.

