AQA Psychology A-level

Option 1: Relationships

Notes

Part 1 — Sexual Selection and Human Reproductive Behaviour:

- Sexual selection explains why certain seemingly disadvantageous characteristics (from an evolutionary point of view) are still passed on. This is because these characteristics may be advantageous for sexual selection, such as males who behave aggressively (and so have a greater chance of protecting their female from competing males) and females with characteristic traits of fertility (such as a narrow waist and large hips). This process determines which genes are passed onto offspring, through the process of heredity.
- There are differences between male and female gametes, and the term 'anisogamy' describes this. Differences may be in terms of the size of the gametes, the energy invested into their production, whether they are static or mobile, and the intervals at which they are produced. This is reflected in the two types of sexual selection, and which is preferred by each gender i.e. intra-sexual selection and inter-sexual selection.
- Inter-sexual selection describes the strategies that each sex uses to attract the other. This is the 'quality over quantity' approach and is favoured by females because they invest more energy into the development of ova, which are produced in limited numbers at intervals across their lives, and the fact that females experience more post-coital responsibility compared to males. Therefore, a female will be more 'choosy' as to who she mates with, due to her limited reproductive resources. This, from an evolutionary standpoint, enables the high quality of her offspring.
- An example of inter-sexual selection would be Fisher's 'sexy sons hypothesis'. This suggests that, through a female choosing to mate with an attractive male, her offspring will also grow up to be attractive or 'sexy', and so are themselves likely to attract females to mate with. This ensures that the female's genes are passed on through several generations, thus increasing the likelihood that these genes will remain in the gene pool.
- Intra-sexual selection describes the strategies used within sexes to attract males. This is the 'quantity over quality' approach and is favoured by males because they produce sperm continuously throughout their lifetime, with little energy investment and limited post-coital responsibility. Therefore, from an evolutionary perspective, it is most effective to impregnate as many women as possible, in order to ensure the survival of their genes.
- Examples of intra-sexual selection strategies would be males behaving aggressively and being protective of their female (reducing the likelihood that she will be impregnated by another competing male), being larger (and so more sexually desirable to women), as well as possessing certain facial and physical characteristics (e.g. strong jawlines and broad shoulders).
- These differences in mating strategies and anisogamy results in dimorphism i.e. the physical differences between the male and female sexes.

— Evidence suggests that it is incorrect to assume that current reproductive patterns still have a strong evolutionary basis, but rather an interactionist approach would be more accurate, where the influences of both culture and evolution are combined together, as suggested by Chang et al (2011). Changing social and cultural norms means that women no longer place a large emphasis on resource-availability when looking for a new partner, as suggested by Bereczkei et al (1997) because women are now more financially independent, with the average age of marriage currently exceeding 30. This suggests that some evolutionary pressures for inter-sexual selection no longer apply in the modern climate.

\+ However, research has suggested that there are some sexual selection pressures which have been constant in terms of evolution and in terms of modern times, such as the hip to waist ratio, as suggested by Singh (1993). If this ratio is around 0.7, then this demonstrates to potential mates that the female is fertile and able to carry children over a long period of time, with birth being easier when the female has larger hips and a narrower waist. Therefore, this suggests that some evolutionary pressures are still relevant in modern times.

\+ There is also evidence supporting the idea that females are more selective when it comes to potential mates, due to their greater energy and genetic input into the pregnancy and care for the child, as suggested by Clark and Hatfield (1989). These researchers found that 75% of college males, compared to 0% of females, would be willing to sleep with a stranger if this stranger had approached them and complimented them! This supports the idea that men have an evolutionary predisposition to want to impregnate as many women as possible, due to the high rates of sperm production and little energy/resources required to do so, and so also supports the differences in mate selection strategies used by females and males i.e. intra- and inter-selection.

Part 2 — Factors Affecting Attraction: Self-Disclosure:

- Self-disclosure refers to the information we choose to reveal about ourselves within a romantic relationship. The aim of self-disclosure is to increase the intimacy, understanding and empathy between two individuals. This is under the condition that the self-disclosure is reciprocal.
- Altman and Taylor have proposed the 'social penetration' theory, which suggests that the process of self-disclosure allows one person to penetrate deeper into the life of their partner, thus increasing intimacy and trust. However, it is important to be selective with what one chooses to disclose.
- The researchers have used an onion analogy to illustrate this. As the relationship progresses, more layers of the onion are removed, representing deeper and more meaningful information being disclosed. This is only likely to occur if the exchange of such information is reciprocal i.e. the other person showing empathy, understanding and revealing personal details about themselves. Such exchanges represents a stage in the relationship which is serious and characterised by trust.
- Revealing intimate details about oneself at the beginning of a relationship may be detrimental effects e.g. revealing 'too much information'. This demonstrates to the other person that at least one person in the relationship does not trust the other.
- Reis and Shaver (1988) suggest that there are two elements of the social penetration theory - depth and breadth. There is a positive correlation between the increasing quality and trust within a relationship, coinciding with increasing depth and breadth of revealed information.
- For example, high levels of breadth result in low levels of depth due to many topics being 'off limits', thus reducing the emotional impact and empathy shown by the other person. This is the kind of information we would disclose to strangers, colleagues etc.
- Therefore, the key to maintaining a developing and intimate relationship is a balance between depth and breadth, through the reciprocal self-disclosure of information from both parties.

+ An increased understanding of the importance of self-disclosure in building and maintaining intimacy within relationships can have a real-life practical advantage, as suggested by Hass and Stafford (1998). These researchers found that for couples with high levels of intimacy and commitment within their relationships, 57% reported the use of self-disclosure as a way to maintain it. Therefore, this supports the use of therapies which focus on increasing the depth and breadth of self-disclosure for couples who struggle with intimacy, as well as increasing trust within the relationship. These are the predictions made by social penetration theory, thus further increasing the validity of this theory!

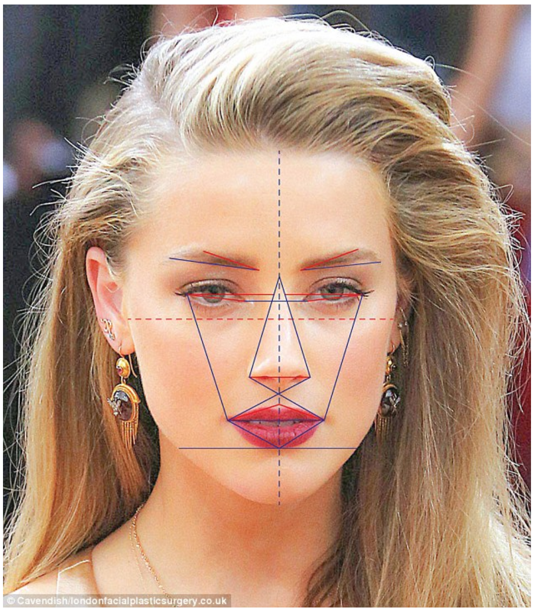
— A key methodological issue with the use of correlational studies, such as Sprecher and Hendrick (2004), is that causal conclusions cannot be made. For example, simply because there is a correlation between satisfaction and self-disclosure does not necessarily mean that the former causes the latter. Correlational studies can never establish 'cause and effect' relationships between two variables because they may also be affected by the 'third variable problem'. This occurs when a third, unstudied variable can affect both outcomes e.g. the age difference between each couple. Therefore, this means that correlational studies cannot be relied upon to demonstrate the mechanism of self-disclosure in relation to the quality of relationships.

+ However, there is research support for the predictions made by social penetration theory, as suggested by Laurenceau et al (2005). These researchers found that, on the basis of daily diary entries, high levels of intimacy and trust were strongly associated or correlated with high levels of self-disclosure, in married couples. This suggests that the depth and breadth of self-disclosure is strongly predictive of the intimacy and quality of romantic relationships, which again supports the validity of the social penetration theory as an indicator of relationship quality.

Part 3 — Factors Affecting Attraction: Physical Attractiveness:

- From an evolutionary perspective, there are certain physical traits which we are pre-disposed to find attractive (Shackleford and Larsen 1997). For example, females with neotenous (child-like) faces are more likely to be viewed as attractive by males because their facial features (e.g. a soft chin and large eyes) trigger an aggressive and protective trait in men, which gives the female an evolutionary advantage (i.e. increasing her risk of survival and reproduction). This, alongside facial symmetry, signifies a high-quality mate due to their displayed genetic fitness.

- The halo effect suggests that we have a tendency to associate highly attractive people with pre-conceived disproportionately positive characteristics, including personality and wealth, even though these factors may not be linked. Therefore, we are more likely to view attractive people as trustworthy, honest, successful and more sociable compared to their unattractive counterparts i.e. 'what is beautiful is good' (Dion et al). These beliefs increase the likelihood that such attractive people develop these traits, and so displays the process of a self-fulfilling prophecy.
- The key to a successful relationship, according to the Matching Hypothesis, is striking a balance between the attractiveness of a mate and the realistic chances of attaining such a mate. This relies on an accurate assessment of one's own attractiveness and 'value', meaning that we are more likely to have a mate who is of a similar attractiveness level to us. Such a method reduces the likelihood of rejection by a seemingly unattainable individual (in terms of attraction) and the potential disappointment of a disproportionately less attractive mate.
- The idea of physical attractiveness being important to a relationship is not restricted to the 'early' stages. For example, McNully et al (2008) found that physical attractiveness was still an important determinant of a successful relationship, even after marriage.



— The halo effect and physical attractiveness may vary in its importance as a predictor of the quality of early relationships depending on the individual, as suggested by Towhey (1979). This researcher found that participants with low scores on the MAHCO scale (which measures underlying sexist beliefs about others) were less likely to be attracted to an individual as a potential partner based purely on their physical attractiveness. This suggests that physical attractiveness, from an evolutionary perspective, does not provide the same selection pressure for all individuals, and so may explain the cases of couples were one is significantly more attractive than the other. Therefore, the halo effect has a good theoretical value.

+ Although physical attraction is a relatively broad term, it is not affected extensively by cultural relativism, with both individualist and collectivist cultures finding similar features attractive, as suggested by Cunningham et al (1995). These features include large eyes, high eyebrows and sharp cheekbones, and this is applicable across both Asian and Western male respondents, as demonstrated by Wheeler and Kim (1997). Therefore, this means that although the influence of physical attractiveness varies between individuals, what is considered 'attractive' is relatively consistent.

+ There are important real-life, practical applications associated with an increased understanding of the halo effect and its influence on individual perceptions of others. For example, Palmer and Peterson (2012) found that even when participants were informed that the images of physically attractive people represented those of people with little knowledge of political matters, respondents still judged these images as representative of people who were highly politically-skilled, mature and trustworthy. This has important implications on the state of politics, where the success of some politicians or political parties may be more easily or accurately explained as a result of the halo effect, rather than actual political expertise. Therefore, this knowledge could be used to the advantage of some parties when selecting candidates!

Part 4 — Factors Affecting Attraction: Filter Theory:

- Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) proposed the filter theory of attraction. We are initially exposed to a 'field of availables' but, in order to form relationships, we must narrow down this field into a 'field of desirables', using the 3 filters of social demography, similarity in attitudes and complementarity. The importance of each filter depends on whether the relationship is short-term or long-term.
- The first filter is social demography, and describes the factors which can make potential partners attractive to us. Key to this is the idea of similarity in terms of these factors which include religion, sexuality, ethnicity, social class, educational attainment and proximity. Two people sharing similar social demographic features are more likely to find each other attractive. Nevertheless, proximity is key because it provides accessibility, which makes communication and relationship formation between both parties easier, as the two individuals have regular access to each other. Therefore, close proximity between two individuals may 'trump' dissimilarities in other social demographic features.
- The second filter is similarity in attitudes, which is particularly important in short-term relationships i.e. less than 18 months in duration. This describes basic similarities in terms of core beliefs about significant topics, such as love, sex and religion. Large dissimilarities in the attitudes expressed between two partners may cause the relationship to end, because of the incompatability that would result in the long-term.
- The third and final filter, which is particularly important in long-term relationships, is the idea of complementarity. A relationship is more likely to be successful if two people feel that they 'complete' each other to form a 'whole', therefore supporting the common belief that opposites attract e.g. a sociable individual will enjoy encouraging their partner to partake in more activities, which in turn means that the partner will enjoy and benefit themselves from improved social skills.

— Filter theory may have been considered a valid explanation for relationship formation, but only before the increased use of the Internet and online dating. Such technological advances mean that our 'field of desirables' is further increased because we are not restricted by certain social demographics, such as proximity and social class or culture, because we have the ability to communicate with potential partners before meeting them and potentially starting a relationship. This means that filter theory may lack temporal validity because it can only explain dating phenomena which have been restricted to the era before the Internet. Nonetheless, the majority of individuals can still use the three filters outlined in the theory, and so it is not completely invalid as an explanation for relationship formation.

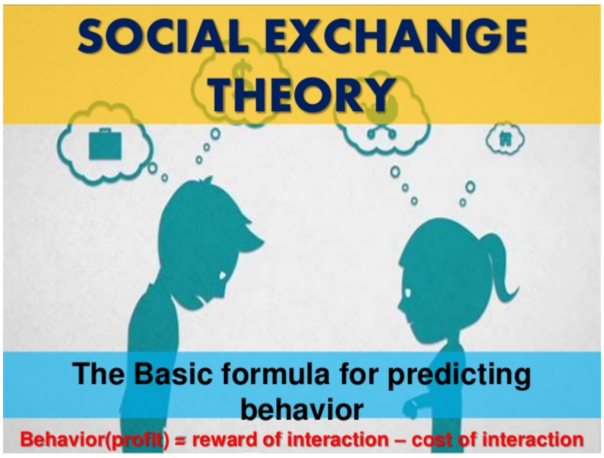
+ There is evidence to support that filter theory is an important predictor of the progression and initial development of a relationship, as suggested by Winch (1958). He found that initial similarities in beliefs and attitudes were cited as one of the main attractive features in the partners of respondents, which is in line with the predictions made by the matching hypothesis, as well as increasing the validity of filter theory as a way of narrowing the field of availables down to a field of desirables. Therefore, this suggests that even in the modern age, filter theory and the matching hypothesis are still valid explanations of relationship formation.

— However, there is evidence to refute the idea that initial similarities are important in the early stages of relationship formation, as suggested by Anderson et al (2003). These researchers demonstrated the idea of emotional convergence (where over time, a couple's emotional responses and attitudes will become more similar, and so can be considered as a type of adaptation in response to living together), whilst the 'attitude alignment effect' (where over time, a couple's attitudes will become more similar) was demonstrated by David and Rusbult (2001). This means that there exist individual differences in the ways in which filter theory affects different individuals, and that the importance of initial similarities between romantic partners is not always concrete.

Part 5 — Theories of Romantic Relationships: Social Exchange Theory:

- Thibault and Kelley (1959).
- The Social Exchange Theory for relationship formation takes an 'economical' approach, viewing relationships as worthwhile based on their relative costs and benefits, with the 'minimax' principles suggesting that we all aim to increase our rewards and decrease our benefits. We invest time, energy and money into each relationship and so we want to 'get our worth'. This relates to the

opportunity cost, which suggests that we must choose whether to invest these resources into our current relationship, or in other opportunities.



- In order to assess the potential profits we gain from a relationship (i.e. rewards — cost), we can use comparison levels and comparison of alternatives.
- Comparison levels (CL) refer to our perception of what we are worth and so what we can get out of a relationship. This perception becomes more sophisticated, and potentially more accurate, with experience because we can base our CL off of a larger number of relationships and experiences. Our CL is also influenced by social and cultural factors, such as what novels and TV programs depict as a good or bad relationship.
- Our CL determines the quality of the relationship we are looking for, and hence the quality of our partner. For example, a person with feelings of worthlessness may 'settle' for relationships which yield little profit.
- This links into the second method of assessing profit - comparison of alternatives. Individuals may consider ending a relationship if they can see that there are other alternatives which would give them a larger return on the investment they are making towards their current relationship. However, this is a sign of an unstable relationship, and a couple who are satisfied will not be looking for alternatives.
- There are 4 stages of assessing the quality and profit of a relationship: sampling (rewards and costs are determined through trial and error), bargaining (as a couple become more committed, compromises are made in terms of cost and rewards), commitment (such standards of cost and rewards are known to both parties) and institutionalisation (these standards and expectations are well-established).

— SET may be more useful as a retrospective explanation as to why relationships break down, rather than an explanation of their initial development. This is because many of the concepts in SET cannot be objectively and quantitatively measured, such as comparison levels and the comparison levels of alternatives. It is for this reason that it is difficult to establish 'thresholds' for each of these concepts i.e. what type and value of a discrepancy between two comparison levels is needed to trigger the breakdown of a relationship? This means that SET is a subjective theory and reflects each individual's perception of what is 'worthy' in a relationship, in terms of the comparison levels.

— SET makes the incorrect assumption that considerations of alternatives triggers dissatisfaction. This makes sense because people in committed, loving relationships are unlikely to look towards other attractive people as alternatives because they are satisfied in their own relationship, and have their own perception of suitable comparison levels, as suggested by Argyle (1987). It therefore should follow that satisfied individuals in long-term relationships will spend less time looking at other highly attractive people because the benefits of their current relationship exceeds the associated costs, as demonstrated by Miller (1997). Therefore, this suggests that SET is likely to be an accurate explanation for comparison levels as a mechanism for relationship breakdown after dissatisfaction appears, as opposed to the opposite.

— The overemphasis of SET on the role of comparison levels ignores the importance of equity - even if the benefits of a relationship exceed the costs for an individual, if this excess is not equal to that of their partner's, then this inequity is likely to be a major cause of dissatisfaction in the relationship, even if the two partners have similar perceptions of their comparison levels. This idea has been supported by equity research, such as that conducted by Utne et al (1984).

Part 6 — Theories of Romantic Relationships: Equity Theory:

- Equity theory, unlike social exchange theory, suggests that striking a balance between the ratio of cost and reward that each individual has is the key to a successful relationship. Therefore, couples

are not always looking to maximise their gains, but simply to have a ‘fair’ relationship. This is not the same as equality where this ratio, alongside levels of cost and reward, would be the same for both partners.
- Rewards may include feelings of intimacy, love, sex, support and encouragement, whereas costs may include infidelity and even abuse.
- Therefore, equity is largely a subjective perception. However, differences in these perceptions can lead to one person being overbenefitted, whilst the second is underbenefitted. This disparity causes the overbenefitted individual to feel guilty and not worthy of the other, whereas the underbenefitted individual feels envious and disappointed that their input into the relationship is not reciprocal.
- The degree of difference between the two ratios, belonging to each individual, determines the likelihood that the relationship will be salvaged and the effort required to do so. This can result in a behavioural or cognitive outcome. The behavioural outcome means that one partner will increase their own cost in order to increase the reward of the other individual, in an attempt to achieve equity. The cognitive outcome is one or both individuals making their expectations or perceptions of equity more realistic, such as accepting certain ‘costs’ as standards/norms. This may include abuse, tardiness, messiness and even unfaithfulness.
- This ‘ratio’ often does not remain the same throughout the entire course of the relationship. The ‘input’ or cost of the relationship is often significantly larger in the early stages, in order to secure the other partner, but decreases as a standard of equity has been established between the couple.

— There is evidence contradicting the idea that the idea of equity is universal across all relationships and crucial to upholding the quality of all relationships, as suggested by Huseman et al (1987). This influence varies depending on the individual and whether they are happy to disproportionately give to the relationship (‘benevolents’) or disproportionately thrive off of the relationship (‘entitleds’). In both cases, individuals do so without worry and are aware of their actions, as well as their partner’s attitudes. This means that equity is essentially a perception and is not universal across all people.

+ However, there is evidence supporting the link between equity theory and the satisfaction or commitment in a relationship, as suggested by Utne et al. Satisfied couples (out of a sample of 118, and who’d been dating for 2 or more years before marriage) valued equity as a key component of the success of their relationship, and preferred this balance compared to one or both members being benevolents or entitleds. Therefore, this suggests that equity has greater ecological validity than SET because it can explain the quality and satisfaction associated with real-life couples, as opposed to simply being theoretical.

— It has been suggested by Clark and Mills (2011) that equity theory may be a better or more valid explanation for friendship and business/non-personal relationships, as opposed to simply romantic relationships. This is because the researchers emphasised that it is important to draw distinctions between different types of relationships, and the different expectations that go with each, which may impact on the perceived equity levels. Hence, this suggests that SET is a limited explanation for only some types of relationships.

Part 7 — Theories of Romantic Relationships: Rusbult’s Investment Model:

- Rusbult et al (2011), in an extension of social exchange theory, suggested that commitment and investment are both more important than satisfaction in determining the likelihood of a successful relationship. The three factors which determine the level of commitment shown within a relationship are satisfaction levels, comparison with alternatives (a similar concept to SET) and investment size.
- She argues that satisfaction occurs when each partner sees large profits (i.e. rewards — costs) and that there are fewer plausible or profitable alternatives, in which they can invest their resources.
- Comparison levels play a major part in this. If one partner feels that their profits are decreasing, such as through costs increasing throughout the course of the relationship (e.g. discovering that their partner is untidy, abuse or is cheating on them), then they shall start looking for alternative relationships or even consider having no relationship at all.
- However, there are many couples who have small profits but still remain together because they have made large investments in the relationship. This refers to the loss of tangible (intrinsic) or intangible

(extrinsic) resources after the end of a relationship. Therefore, there are two types of investment - intrinsic and extrinsic.

- Intrinsic investments describe resources which were we have added to the relationship, both at the beginning and throughout e.g. money, time, energy, opportunities etc. However, extrinsic investments describe 'resources' which have come about as a result of the relationship e.g. a shared mortgage, children, strong expectations from others of staying together.
- The size of the investment dictates how hard each partner will work to salvage their relationship, and thus demonstrate commitment. From an economic viewpoint, this commitment is almost selfish in that it is carried out purely not to lose the investment. Rusbult suggested that there are mechanisms which facilitate commitment: ridiculing alternatives, positive illusions, forgiveness, willingness to sacrifice and accommodation.

+ Rusbult's Investment Model features high ecological validity because it can easily explain abusive relationships, by shifting the focus from relationship satisfaction to that of investment and viable alternatives, as demonstrated by Rusbult and Martz (1995). These researchers found that the predictions based off of Rusbult's model can explain why 'battered women' often return to their abusive partners, and explained this in terms of making significant investments and having few alternative partners, rather than satisfaction (which is obviously not present in an abusive relationship, featuring intimate partner violence, for both partners). Therefore, this shift of focus may be considered refreshing and a more valid explanation of abusive relationships compared to SET or equity theory.

+ Although self-report measures are usually criticised as lacking objectivity and creating qualitative data, this is not the case with Rusbult's model. The key elements of his model focus on an individual's perception of their investments, resources and energy, as opposed to a quantitative value. This makes sense and has high ecological validity when considering that an individual's perception of their investments is often different to their partner's perception in the instance of relationship breakdown. Therefore, Rusbult's investment model has used the correct methodology to accurately reflect the subjective nature of the model's features.

— Rusbult's Investment Model sees the motivation to continue with a relationship according to the investments, time and energy which an individual has contributed. However, the motivation to see a couple's future plans come to fruition may be a bigger predictor of relationship success, as opposed to initial investments which are often very low in the early stages of romantic relationships. This was suggested by Goodfriend and Agnew (2008). Therefore, Rusbult's model may have oversimplified the concept of investment and its future implications on the plans that couples make together.

Part 8 — Theories of Romantic Relationships: Duck's Phase Model:

- Duck (2007) suggested that there is a process of relationship breakdown, which occurs in 4 distinct stages, each marked by a 'threshold' or a change in each partner's perception of the relationship, which leads them to enter the next stage.
- The first stage is the intra-psychic stage, which focuses upon cognitive elements. One or both partners have reached the point/threshold that they are evaluating the costs and rewards of their relationship, and reconsidering the profitability as compared to the investments. However, most of these processes are private, and are unlikely to be shared, unless potentially with a trusted friend.
- The second stage, after the first threshold has been reached, is the dyadic phase. The previously private thoughts about the future of the relationship are now openly discussed between the partners, who may voice concerns over inequity, jealousy, increasing costs of the relationship etc. This may either provoke the partners to work to salvage the relationship, or may trigger the beginning of a public breakdown.
- The third stage is the social phase, where the break-up has been made public. This triggers friends of the couple to evaluate the relationship to either give reassurance/support or place blame on one of the partners, which inevitably results in the majority of the mutual friends having to take sides. A final attempt at salvaging the relationship may be made by these friends, perhaps by offering their advice or helping resolve equity issues etc.

- The fourth and final stage is the grave-dressing stage, which confirms the end of the relationship and signifies both members to 'move on'. Key to this face is 'keeping good face' and maintaining a positive social image. This may involve fabricating false stories about the cause of the end of the relationship to make it more socially-acceptable (e.g. the infidelity of one partner may be blamed on the unattractiveness of the other). Both partners make new plans to carry on with their lives, taking with them valuable lessons learnt from the previous relationship.

— There may be a fifth stage of the model, as suggested by Rollie and Duck (2006), called the resurrection phase where individuals learn from the experiences of their previous relationships. However, these researchers also suggest that a relationship breakdown model should be a dynamic progression as opposed to a set sequence of stages through which all people pass through. The social dynamics within each stage can also affect the chances of ex-partners reuniting, such as the spreading of rumours during the dyadic or social phases. This means that Duck's model may be oversimplified and has little ecological validity because it cannot represent the progression of real-life relationships.

— Flemlee's 'fatal attraction hypothesis' (1995) may be a better and more valid explanation of relationship breakdown compared to the Phase Model. This is because the fatal attraction hypothesis, which suggests that the initially desirable characteristics become less so as the relationship progresses, actually explains the cause of relationship breakdown as opposed to simply the progression of the breakdown (as the Phase Model does). This means that Duck's model may lack ecological validity because it is a general description of a universal sequence of stages involved in relationship breakdown, as opposed to a concrete explanation.

— There are also serious methodological issues associated with the research upon which Duck's Phase Model was based upon. For example, much of the research features self-report measures which are completed retrospectively after the end of the relationship. This means that the data may rely too much on the respondents' accuracy of memory and a realistic perception of the relationship. In addition, since researchers are unwilling to intervene at the early stages of relationship breakdown, this means that these early stages are mostly speculative and their workings inferred from the later stages. Therefore, these methodological issues draws doubts over the validity and accuracy of Duck's Phase Model as an explanation for relationship breakdown.

Part 9 — Virtual Relationships in Social Media:

- Differences in self-disclosure between face-to-face and computer-mediated communications (CDC) means that the rate of progression of the relationship and intimacy with also be different.
- For example, Keisler and Sproull (1986), through their Reduced Cues theory, suggests that CDC relationships may have poorer levels of intimacy and delayed self-disclosure because some of the vital cues present in face-to-face relationships, such as facial expressions and voice intonation, are not present in CDC relationships, leading to the de-individuation of each partner. Therefore, to act as a compromise for the lack of cues, one or both individuals are likely to be excessively blunt or impersonal, which also reduces the likelihood of future self-disclosure and early intimacy within the relationship.
- On the other hand, the hyperpersonal model suggests that online relationships develop and end at a much higher rate than face-to-face relationships, as suggested by Cooper and Sportolari (1997) through their idea of a 'boom and bust phenomenon'. Initial self-disclosure is high because partners can be selective about what information they choose to display or disclose i.e. selective self-penetration. However, a lack of personal cues means that trust and intimacy is not built at the same rate as self-disclosure, so these exchanges are not reciprocal. The anonymity associated with online dating, as suggested by Bargh et al (2002), means that each individual takes less responsibility for their behaviour and so the break-up and build-up of the relationship is less personal.
- Gating refers to the reasons as to why we may choose one person over another as a potential partner, as suggested by McKenna and Bargh (1999). An absence of gating may explain why the rate of progression of online relationships is greater than relationships in real-life: if each individual is selective about how they present themselves online, then there are fewer 'gates' and so effectively fewer reasons not to choose a particular individual to start a relationship with!

+ There is research evidence supporting some of the core principles/assumptions of the hyperpersonal model, as suggested by Whitty and Johnson (2009). Online communications, due to the apparent lack of nonverbal cues, often feature 'direct' questions, as opposed to the small-talk which features in face-to-face relationships. Therefore, this suggests that we are actually more likely to self-disclose in virtual relationships because we can be selective as to what information we reveal about ourselves, and so use self-disclosure to further improve the way that a potential partner views us. Hence, the central principle of selective self-presentation and the importance on anonymity are demonstrated in such studies.

— The theories of self-disclosure and absence of gating in virtual relationships may lack ecological validity because they may not be able to explain all the course of modern-age relationships, which is often a mixture of virtual and face-to-face elements, as suggested by Walther (2011). Individuals often feel the pressure to portray themselves in the same way as they have online as in real-life, and so this interaction may offset the effects of fewer gates and self-disclosure in virtual relationships.

— Although virtual relationships are intrinsically different to face-to-face relationships, they may still share the similarity of featuring nonverbal signals, as suggested by Walther and Tidwell (1995). This includes the use of emojis, acronyms (e.g. LOL and OMG) and nonverbal cues which are specific to online communications, such as the length, timing and tone of the messages sent. This refutes the central assumption of the reduces cues theory that online communication relationships may suffer due to being impersonal and featuring few cues, especially considering that an increasing number of successful modern relationships begin online.

Part 10 — Parasocial Relationships:

- Maltby et al (2006) used the Celebrity Attitude Scale (developed by McCutcheon et al, 2002) to establish three different stages of parasocial relationships, each increasing with emotional intensity and commitment towards the celebrity. The three stages are entertainment-social, intense-personal and borderline pathological. The first stage suggests that celebrity news is used as a source of gossip (Giles, 2002) and so can strengthen real-life relationships with friends due to having more common interests. The second stage is characterised by obsessive thoughts about the celebrity and an advanced emotional connection with them, whilst the third stage is associated with more pathological behaviours such as stalking and/or resentment against anyone who may prevent the individual from carrying out these behaviours.
- An individual is more likely to develop abnormal, pathological parasocial relationships if they are unfulfilled in their current relationship, have low self-esteem or have experienced traumatic, life-changing events e.g. a mid-life crisis. This is in line with the absorption-addiction model, where absorption indicates the individual's initial interest and developing obsession with the celebrity, whilst the addiction model indicates the individual's need to increase the intensity and commitment of their parasocial relationship, through increasingly pathological behaviours.
- In line with Bowlby's theories of maternal deprivation and monotropic attachment, an individual with an insecure-resistant attachment type is more likely to be involved in a parasocial relationship (due to lowering the risk of rejection and pain, alongside unfulfillment associated with real-life relationships), as well as those with an insecure-avoidant attachment type (but with an emphasis on avoiding the feelings above, rather than being exposed to them in the first instance).

— Bowlby's attachment theory may be a better explanation for the development of pathological traits in parasocial relationships, compared to the absorption-addiction model. This is because the latter model accurately describes the acquirement and maintenance of parasocial relationships (i.e. in terms of the initial absorption and then consequent addiction to fulfill the original desires), whereas Bowlby's attachment theory can explain why some people are more likely to begin parasocial relationships than others. Therefore, Bowlby's attachment theory has a greater practical explanatory value.

+ There is evidence to support the idea that different psychological states are associated with each of the three stages of parasocial relationship formation, as suggested by Maltby et al (2003). For example, the final borderline-psychotic stage is associated with psychotic traits, whilst the second stage is associated with neuroticism. This, alongside previous evidence from Maltby et al (2005) which found a positive correlation between increasing body dissatisfaction and an increasing likelihood of developing a parasocial relationship, supports the idea that abnormal psychological functioning is heavily implicated in the formation of parasocial relationships. This is in line with McCutcheon's original theory and predictions, increasing the validity of such ideas!

— However, the methodology of research studies which have formed the basis of theories of parasocial relationships may be flawed. The first problem is that of correlational research, which can only demonstrate a link between two variables and so cannot establish a 'cause and effect' relationship between, for example, personality type and the likelihood of forming a parasocial relationship. Such correlational studies also do not take into account the 'third variable problem', where a third, unstudied variable may be affecting both outcomes. The second problem is the reliance on self-report measures, which depend on the accuracy of the respondent's memory and their honesty. Such data is particularly susceptible to acquiscience bias and social desirability bias (both types of demand characteristics). This therefore reduces the reliability of the Celebrity Attitude Scale and McCutcheon's stages as explanations of parasocial relationships.