

# AQA Psychology A-level

## Option 1: Relationships Essay Plans

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**Question : Describe and evaluate Rusbult's investment model of romantic relationships (16 marks).**

<b>AO1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model was proposed by Rusbult et al in 2011 and emphasizes the central importance of commitment in a relationship.</li> <li>• Three factors which are satisfaction level, comparison with alternatives and investment size influence a partner's level of commitment.</li> <li>• Explain what each of those three factors are and how they influence commitment, investment being the most important factor.</li> <li>• Describe how relationship maintenance mechanisms are carried out by a partner to show that they are committed.</li> </ul>
<b>AO3</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is culturally relative research support. Le and Agnew (2003) did a meta analysis of 52 studies of 11,000 participants from % countries. Results showed that all the three factors proposed by Rusbult's model do affect commitment levels. Outcomes were true for both men and women, all cultures and both heterosexual and homosexual couples.</li> <li>2. Rusbult's investment model is able to explain abusive relationships. Rusbult &amp; Martz (1995) asked refugees why they stayed with abusive partners and they said that they felt they had a large investment into the relationship and that the economic alternatives were poor. This shows that the model has good explanatory power for real life issues.</li> <li>3. The model has been criticised for oversimplifying the factor of investment. Goodfriend &amp; Agnew (2008) points out that what is more important is the investment that includes plans for the future. This is as partners will feel motivated to commit to the relationship and see these plans through. Therefore the model fails to recognise the complexity of investment.</li> <li>4. Furthermore , another limitation is that a lot of the model's research is based on correlational research. These correlations do not equal causality, it may be that as you become more committed, you decide to invest more into a relationship.</li> </ol>



**Question : Discuss what psychological research has told us about virtual relationships in social media (16 marks).**

<b>AO1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are two theories which research has proposed for how virtual relationships are. First is that less self-disclosure is involved which is explained by the reduced cues theory proposed by Sproull &amp; Kiesler (1986). Second involves more self-disclosure - the hyperpersonal model which proposed by Walther (1996,2011).</li> <li>• Explain these two models and what's involved with each.</li> <li>• Then can explain what research has shown us about absence of gating in virtual relationships like how lack of gates means partners are able to focus more on self-disclosure.</li> </ul>
<b>AO3</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research for absence of gating. McKenna &amp; Bargh (2000) -found that socially anxious people feel they are able to express themselves more in social media than in face to face relationships and that 70% of these survived more than two years which is longer than most relationships in the offline world.</li> <li>2. Research for the hyperpersonal model. Whitty &amp; Johnson (2009) showed from lots of evidence that online conversations can be very intimate and probing, which supports more self-disclosure is taking place.</li> <li>3. However these theories have been criticised for lacking temporal validity. Psychological research struggles to keep up with the fast-paced changes of computer mediated communication and technology.</li> <li>4. A limitation is presented whereby research has been criticised of suffering from alpha bias. Researchers tend to overemphasise the differences between females and males where actually it could be that virtual relationships are similar for both men and women.</li> </ol>



**Question : Read the item and answer the question that follows.**

Teddy is discussing his girlfriend, Sasha. He says, 'We were in the same year at university, both studying marketing. She was really good at the theoretical side and I was better when it came to practical work. We specialise in different areas now. I'm always proud to be seen out with Sasha. Other guys are really jealous when they see her. We tell each other everything though, no secrets in our relationship.'

**Discuss factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships. Refer to Teddy's comments in your answer. [16 marks]**

<b>AO1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are three factors that affect attraction in romantic relationships : self-disclosure, physical attractiveness and the filter theory.</li> <li>• Describe self-disclosure.</li> <li>• Describe physical attractiveness.</li> <li>• Describe the filter theory which consists of three levels- social demography, similarity in attitudes, complementarity and these narrow down the pool of potential partners.</li> </ul>
<b>AO2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When Teddy says 'We were in the same year at university' '- this shows that the 1st level of the filter theory- social demography' worked out for them.</li> <li>• As they were both 'studying marketing' this shows that has a similarity in attitudes - 2nd level of filter theory.</li> <li>• When Teddy says that Sasha was better at the theoretical side whereas he was better at practical work, this shows their relationship had complementarity- the 3rd level of the filter theory.</li> <li>• When Teddy says 'I'm always proud to be seen out with Sasha. Other guys are really jealous when they see her'- this expresses that Sasha is physically attractive so physical attractiveness was a factor that affects Teddy's attraction to her.</li> <li>• When Teddy says 'we tell each other everything though, no secrets in our relationship'- this expressed that self-disclosure is an important factor of attraction in their relationship.</li> </ul>
<b>AO3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can give examples of research support for any of the factors e.g. for the filter theory study done by Kerchoff and Davis.</li> <li>• Explain how some factors have been found to be crosscultural by researchers whilst others haven't. Physical attractiveness was found to be important in Koreans and Americans by Wheeler &amp; Kim (1957) whereas Tang et al (2013) found cultural differences in self-disclosure- individualist cultures disclose mores sexual thoughts than in collectivist cultures.</li> <li>• Describe how all factors can be involved like in Teddy's case. It is not a matter of taking a reductionist approach and saying that only one of the factors is important for each person. Each of the factors are important to varying degrees in each person. The holistic approach is better.</li> </ul>



**Question : Describe and evaluate the social exchange theory (16 marks).**

<b>AO1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The social exchange theory (SET) was proposed by Thibaut &amp; Keppy (1959) and claims that partners in relationships strive to maximise rewards and minimise costs.</li> <li>• Commitment is dependent on profitability in terms of these costs and rewards which is assessed by levels of comparison.</li> <li>• Describe the 1st level which is 'Comparison level' (CL)- the expectations of the amount of reward a person feels they deserve in a relationship.</li> <li>• Describe the 2nd level which is 'Comparison level for alternatives' (CLalt)- perception of whether other relationships look like they will be more profitable.</li> <li>• Then these levels influence the partners commitment to their relationship.</li> </ul>
<b>AO3</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A strength of the theory is that it has real life application .Christensen et al (2004) found that Integrative Behavioural Couples Therapy improved ⅔ of couples' relationships. The therapy used techniques that increased positive exchanges and decreased negative ones, supporting that SET principles can help distressed couples.</li> <li>2. The SET accounts for free will. In the comparison level for alternatives a partner can choose to leave the relationship for alternatives or stay. Also in terms of costs and rewards a person is able to choose what is most profitable for them.</li> <li>3. However, a limitation is that the SET concepts are difficult to measure. This is as rewards and costs vary too much between people and it is unclear what values of CL and CLalt result in a relationship breakdown.</li> <li>4. Research has methodological problems. Most involves artificial tasks like two strangers playing a game where costs and rewards are exchanged in artificial scenarios. This lacks mundane realism so casts doubt on the validity of results.</li> </ol>



**Question : Describe and evaluate Duck's phase model (16 marks).**

<p><b>AO1</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was proposed by Duck in 2007 and explains the stages that people go through when their relationship is not working and eventually they break up.</li> <li>• The stages consist of 'intrapsychic phase, dyadic phase, social phase, grave-dressing phase'.</li> <li>• Describe each of these stages.</li> <li>• Explain how the model was criticised to be incomplete, so the last stage known as 'resurrection phase' was added and describe this stage too.</li> </ul>
<p><b>AO3</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The model has real life application. In couples counselling, there are different strategies which are fit for different phases for example when in the intrapsychic phase it is useful to try get the dissatisfied partner to notice the positive aspects of the other partner whereas in the social phase help from the couple's social networks can be sought.</li> <li>2. The model has good face validity. Many couples have reported experiencing these phases when their relationships have not worked and come to an end.</li> <li>3. On the other hand, a limitation to the model is that it involves ethically sensitive research. This is as it involves reminding people of the stressful and emotional times involved in their relationship breakup which likely caused them pain. This means it makes it difficult for psychologists to make sure they protect their participants from psychological harm</li> <li>4. Moreover, research has culture bias as the model is based on western cultures. Moghaddam et al (1993) points out that individualist cultures consist of voluntary relationships which usually frequently come to an end whereas collectivist cultures largely involve obligatory relationships which are therefore less easy to end. This difference is important and means that it is unlikely the process of relationship breakdown will be the same for both cultures.</li> </ol>



**Question : Discuss evolutionary explanations for partner preferences (16 marks).**

<p><b>A01</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sexual selection theory states how behaviours and attributes in partners that increase their chance or reproductive success become exaggerated in the next generations.</li> <li>• Such attributes are youthful characteristics which expresses an honest sign of reproductive fitness.</li> <li>• Describe inter-sexual selection- which is the method that females use to select partners. Women prefer quality rather than quantity.</li> <li>• Describe intra-sexual selection - which is the method that males use to select partners whereby they compete for females, which has even led to dimorphism. Men prefer quantity rather than quality.</li> </ul>
<p><b>A03</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for the sexual selection theory which explains partner preferences. Buss (1989) did a survey of over 10,000 adults in 33 countries. From the survey, it was found that females preferred traits related with resources like financial prospects whilst males seemed to prefer youthful characteristics.</li> <li>• Cannot be applied to homosexual relationships. This is as passing on genes to offspring serves no value in homosexual couples.</li> <li>• Another limitation of this theory is that it lacks temporal validity. The ease of being able to now obtain contraception means that evolutionary pressures are less relevant. This available contraception allows females to also take part in promiscuous behaviour and not worry as much about getting pregnant.</li> <li>• Moreover the theory suffers from alpha bias, it exaggerates the differences between males and females yet it may be that both males and females look for similar traits that are not necessarily about resources or physical traits. These traits could cover a middle ground and be important for both sexes e.g. kindness, loyalty.</li> </ul>

