

## ***Discuss Psychological Explanations of Relationship breakdown (25)***

One renowned theory on the breakdown of romantic relationships is Duck's Dissolution model. The main hypothesis of this model was that all relationships have the same systematic and periodic method to breaking up to which there are four different stages: intrapsychic (focus on the partner e.g. "I can't stand it anymore"), dyadic (focus on the relationship e.g. "I'd be justified in withdrawing"), social (facing the public consequences e.g. "I mean it"), and grave dressing (establishing the break up and recalling what truly happened and tidying up accounts). The different phases all have specific repair focuses that try and avoid the break up, but the model generally states that by the time someone has reached the social stage, the break up is inevitable.

The evidence for this model is mainly seen from Duck himself (e.g. Duck 1992 which is his statement that people within disrupted relationships suffer greater levels of depression). But the Duck model also shows some ideas based around La Gaipa (1982) stating that we attempt to get social credit at the end of the relationship to make their reputation seem intact at the end of the relationship (which is linked in with the grave dressing phase of the break up that agrees with the trying to dignify their side of the break up).

Though a large criticism of Duck's work itself is that there is very little evidence for it. Almost all evidence for Duck's dissolution model was conceived by his own research and thus leads to the issue of circular science. Like Gardner supporting his own theory with his theory himself is it logical to support your own theory with your own evidence? Especially when there is very little other evidence supporting the theory itself. Another criticism could be the nature at which this research looks at the relationship, seems to base its analysis on the individuals and not the relationship as a whole; this is a problem seeing as looking at relationships requires you to see how it functions as a unit as well as looking at the specific requirements of the individuals; what of the emotions of the said person breaking up? This may greatly affect this person's break up issues. What's more we have some contradictory evidence from Duck himself, Duck (1986) found that the phases were just a typical pattern and there were many exceptions to the model (e.g. break ups could be considered positive to some when this creates a very solemn manner to the whole process); showing that there isn't a solid systematic foundation to everyone's relationship breakdown.

A large theoretical issue of this model is its cultural relativity. All samples used to support the dissolution model around were American samples. Thus can we really generalise this to the whole of the world? Some parts of the world are more patriarchal (e.g. Middle Eastern Culture) and it is more likely that the break up will be more based on the male's desires as the female may play a more submissive role. Hence without a larger sample that can look at the whole of the world's sample we can not clearly accept this dissolution model as universal.

Duck described three main reasons for relationship breakdown. These were a lack of skills, a lack of stimulation and maintenance difficulties. Duck also believed that relationship breakdown followed a pattern and created a Model of Dissolution. This has 4 phases; the first is the Intrapsychic phase. Here people reflect on the deficiencies of their relationship, perhaps in terms of costs and benefits. There will be very little outward show of dissatisfaction and there may even be a determination to 'put things right'. This stage may also include indirect hints to their partner about how they feel. The second is the Dyadic phase. Here the person decides that the problems need airing and confronts the other person in the relationship. This usually includes an argument, with both sides unwilling to take responsibility for the problem. There may even be some consideration about how a relationship can be put 'back on track'. The third phase is the *Social phase*. Now the dispute spills over into social networks of friends and family. This can be both good and bad. We need these networks for support if we spilt up... but they

can speed up the decision for final break down with revelations about one or other of them. Finally there is the *Grave-dressing phase*. Having left the relationship the each person attempts to save-face. They will justify the role they played in the breakdown in order to portray themselves in a light that makes them still appear loyal and trustworthy to new partners (two important factors). This may mean that they make excuses about how the other person has 'changed' in order to justify their original commitment to the relationship and its subsequent breakdown.

A second explanation comes from Lee's 'sequences of separation'. He carried out a survey of 112 romantic break-ups and discovered evidence for five distinct stages: Dissatisfaction, Exposing the dissatisfaction, Negotiating, attempting Resolution of the problem, and Termination of the relationship (DENERT). He found that stages of exposure of the dissatisfaction and negotiation were the most intense and exhausting parts of this process and that not all couples went through all five stages. Those who went straight from dissatisfaction to termination (e.g. they just walked out) reported having felt less intimate with their partner even when the relationship was going well. For those whose journey was particularly long and drawn out they reported more attraction for their former partner and the greatest loneliness following the break-up.

One strength of both Duck and Lee's research into relationship breakdown is that it can lead to *practical applications*. The models and theories set out provide a clear set of processes that people go through during relationship breakdown. This therefore means that counsellors can help couples to identify areas where their relationship has started to go wrong and help the couple to tackle these issues. For example if the couple are in the intrapsychic phase (Duck 1999) repair should aim to re-establish liking for the other partner rather than trying to correct behavioural faults. This suggests that research and models into relationship breakdown are useful in their *application to real life settings*.

One weakness of Duck model and Lee's research into relationship breakdown is that they are *culturally specific*. Factors identified by Duck may apply only to certain groups of people, such as western individualistic cultures. Non-western relationships (e.g. arranged marriages) may be formed differently and it is therefore likely that different pressures will function in their dissolution. Here things like family pressure and societal rules may mean that relationship breakdown is affected by different factors not identified by Lee and Duck. This suggests that the theories of relationship breakdown described above *cannot be applied reliably to all cultures*.

Furthermore a weakness of Duck's model and Lee's research into relationship breakdown is that they are *reductionist*. The different models and research focus entirely on one aspect of relationships, for example both looked at romantic relationships. By specifying one type of relationship psychologists are failing to account fully for relationship breakdown as a whole. Research into relationship breakdown also fails to recognise the unique experiences of the people involved and instead describes just a basic set of processes that an individual will encounter. For example, in a study of students experiences of breaking up Akert found that the more both partners were involved in decisions that had to be made, the fewer physical symptoms they experienced. This suggests that breakdown theories and research are an *oversimplification* as one model or theory cannot account for the relationship dissolution of another, or the experiences of the individual.

In contrast to Lee and Duck's theories into romantic relationships Argyle and Henderson instead favour the idea of rule violation as an explanation of friendship breakdown. They did this by asking participants to think of a specific friendship that had lapsed for reasons that could be attributed to the relationship itself (rather than other factors such as moving away). They then asked them whether rule violations had affected that relationship breakdown and to what extent this was true. Rule violations found to be the most critical included jealousy, lack of tolerance for

third party relationships, disclosing confidences, not v olunteering help when needed and publicly criticising the person. This suggests that the explanations of Duck and Lee above cannot be complete as they do not account for these types of relationship breakdown and as a consequence it can be argued that they are limited in their usefulness.