

Discuss research (theories and/ or studies) relating to the formation of relationships.

Physical attractiveness is an important area when considering the formation of relationships. It is the first thing we notice when we meet someone and it is this, which determines whether we decide to get to know him or her further. If we find a person physically attractive it is likely that we will find other things about them attractive also, this is described by Brigham as the halo effect. Feingold considered physical attractiveness and believed it to be more important to men than to women, having analysed results from questionnaires in other studies. However in reality it may have been that women rate physical attractiveness equally as important but were less willing to admit it. Walster et al wanted to prove the importance of physical attractiveness in the formation of relationships, using the 'blind date study'. He found that partners liked the more physically attractive students more than the less attractive students, therefore this would suggest that physical attractiveness is very important in the formation of relationships. However attractiveness is subjective and what is deemed attractive varies between people, and only students were used therefore we cannot generalise it to other settings. In addition the students based their judgements on fellow students without having got to know them and therefore judgements were based on superficial characteristics. However it is plausible as this does support the belief that the level of attractiveness has an important impact on the initial impression and therefore whether a person decides to develop a relationship. In his follow up study Walster found that students were more likely to continue their relationship if they were similar in physical attractiveness. This suggests that in order for a relationship to develop we feel the person needs to be of a similar level as it makes us feel more comfortable. Thus we may, on our first impression, prefer the more attractive people but desire a longer lasting relationship with those more like ourselves. An explanation for this may be our desire for reinforcement of our own confidence and in order to feel that the relationship is balanced and therefore we do not feel indebted or outdone by the person with whom we are in a relationship with. Murstein supported this theory and named it the matching hypothesis. He found that when rating the attractiveness of couples there was a tendency that participants would rate them similarly. It is important to consider the role of physical attractiveness; it is this which determines our initial impression of someone and on which we ground our whether we desire to develop a relationship with them or not, therefore it has an important role to play. However some people are more influenced by this than others which suggests that individual differences are an important factor to be considered and thus attractiveness can not be the only consideration in the formation of relationships.

Proximity also has an important role to play in the formation of relationships, If we come in to contact with someone regularly we are more likely to form a relationship with them. Festinger et al interviewed married students in residential blocks, and found that they were more likely to have friends in the same block and equally the most popular lived near staircases where they would regularly see people going up and down the stairs. Therefore this suggests that not only physical attraction was important but also proximity of the people aided the formation of a relationship and that the more regular the contact the more popular that person will become. Segal supports this theory he studied police

cadets who sat in classrooms in alphabetical order and found friendships were formed between those whose surnames were closer together in the alphabet. This presents us with a convincing theory and yet surely this is an obvious statement, and is it necessarily universally the case? Perhaps an alternative explanation for why these cadets formed close relationships with those whom they are closer to in name is that the similarity between them encouraged the development of the relationship and the proximity encourages the relationship to become closer. Had they not all had the desire to enter the police force in common they would not have formed the relationship and therefore it was the similarity that brought them together. Bossard further supports this theory in his research of addresses of couples before they were married and found that most lived within walking distance of one another. However this seems less plausible in the age of Internet dating and chat rooms, wider use of telephones and increased mobility as we have a broader range of methods with which to form relationships and so we are not restricted to our postal area. However it may still be true that we are more comfortable with those whom we are more familiar with and have more in common with and this being more relaxed we form a more firm relationship. However in contrast being close can bring those who are very dissimilar in to conflict, think of the neighbours from hell! It seems rather an obvious observation that proximity plays a role in the formation of relationships as we are more likely to meet them and yet long distance relationships are widespread. In addition if that person were not physically attractive as close as they are would we be interested? If the person were completely different to us would the relationship be able to develop? Perhaps more than proximity it is important to consider the role those who are similar to us in our beliefs, attitudes and social class have to play in the way in which and with whom we form a relationship.

‘Birds of a feather flock together’ a cliché but its true. We are more likely to form relationships with those who are the same age, class, ethnicity, intelligence and attitude to ourselves. Kendod supported this in his analysis of friendships he found they we are more likely to develop a relationship with those of a similar age, class, attitude and income to ourselves. Buss provides more evidence in support of this theory, when he investigated similarities in married couples, who tended to be of similar age, class, and attitude. Therefore this suggests that rather than ‘opposites attract’ it is fairer to say that those who are similar have more stable relationships and that we feel more comfortable in the company of those with whom we have important things in common. Byrne further considered this and found in his analysis of questionnaires people were more likely to be interested in those whose answers more closely corresponded with their own attitudes. Thus he developed the law of attraction, which states that the closer, the attitudes of people, the more they agree on and thus the deeper the friendship. However plausible the research may seem it lacks ecological validity, and yet when Byrne conducted field experiments he found bank managers were more generous when they came in to contact with people more similar to themselves. However there are exceptions to this rule, Leonard found that if an individual had a low self-esteem then they were unlikely to like people whom they are similar to. Equally in times of confusion we cling to those who are dissimilar to ourselves. Therefore this suggests that similarity has an important role to play in that we are more relaxed and comfortable in those situations in which the people are similar to ourselves. However, if we feel we are in a situation in which we are unable

to cope we desire those most different from ourselves to be close to us in order to feel safe.

In conclusion, it is important to note that all three areas are important in the formation of relationships, however, each works in partnership with the others. As a result it is clear that it is the combination of the three which aid the formation of relationships rather one area alone being more significant than the others in the formation and development of a relationship.