

## Discuss and research theories/ studies relating to the formation of relationships

There are many theories relating to formation of relationships. These include the filter theory, the matching hypotheses, social -biological theory and the reinforcement-affect theory.

Kerckhoff and Davis came up with the filter model of attraction. They believed that we rely on social and personal factors to filter potential relationships from the field of eligibles. There are five criteria; proximity, similarity, physical attractiveness, complementarity of needs and competence. We narrow down the people whom we may form a relationship with, through a series of selection filters. The criteria tend to be used a different stages.

In initial attraction, proximity is the obvious filter; we form relationships with those who live close by, this is how we may become aware of the person. Similarity is important because the people who we share the same ethnicity, background and occupation we are more likely to talk and come in contact with. Once this stage of filtering has taken place, people then consider whether we share the same attitudes as the other person. Duck and Gillmor believed if we do share similar attitudes then the relationship is more likely to be pursued. Caspi and Herbener carried out a survey which found that married couples who were more similar were more satisfied with their marriage.

People may have been initially drawn together because of their similarity, but it may become apparent that one person has characteristics that the other lacks, for example someone who is domineering may be attracted to someone who is submissive.

Physical attraction plays an important role when forming relationships. Many studies have supported this, for example in Walters computer dance study; couples were randomly selected and assigned to each other for an evening dance, Walster found that physical attractiveness was the single best predictor of how much person liked their assigned 'date'. However this study has been criticised as it lacks relevance to real life relationships.

In Initial attraction, physical attraction has been said to be important. However people are not attracted by the most attractive person. The Matching hypothesis said that we are more likely to form a relationship with someone who has a similar level of attractiveness; a possible reason for this is a fear of rejection.

The matching hypothesis has been supported by Murstein. In his study people were asked to rate photos of couples and rate them in terms of physical attractiveness. Murstein summarized his findings "individuals with equal market value for physical attractiveness are more likely to associate in an intimate relationship such as engagement, than individuals with disparate values."

However this is not always the case as some couples may be seen to be physically 'miss matched'. It is argued though that those who are miss matched balance out in other areas problems can occur in miss matched couples, the less attractive person might feel insecure or jealous of the attention given to their partner, this could also effect the less attractive person self-esteem; which could threaten the long term success of the relationship.

Another theory in formation of relationships is the socio-biological theory. Wilson argued that human sexual attraction and behaviour may be explained through an understanding of 'survival efficiency.' The theory suggests that men like to impregnate many women as it increases their chances of their genes to be carried down to generations. However a woman's best chance of her genes surviving is to ensure that her offspring is healthy and caring for them.

There are problems with this theory, its overemphasis on reproduction, not all couples want children and it also excludes homosexual couples. The theory raises an ethical concern as it can be seen to be supporting gender stereotypes, allowing men sexual 'privileges' and freedoms which women are denied. Another criticism of this theory is it lacks relevance in the modern world, the socio-biological theory may once have been relevant but not suit those today.

The reinforcement-affect model suggests that we like people because we find them rewarding, we associate them with some pleasant. May and Hamilton carried out a study to support this theory; female students were asked to look at photographs of males, some looked at the photos while pleasant music was played while others looked at the same photos while unpleasant music was played. A comparison also looked at the photos but no music was played. They found that students who looked at the photos while listening to the pleasant music rated and liked the males in the photos best. This study and many others have shown positive feelings can lead to attraction.

A lot of the theories and studies in formation of relationships have been criticised. Much of the research is seen as artificial and 'leaves out most of the things people do in everyday life' Duck 1999.

Another reason they have been criticised is research focuses on romantic relationships and leaves platonic friendships.

Theories and studies also have not taken into account the influence of others such as family and friends as they can have an effect on relationships we form. Also in polygynous cultures, a man may have several wives at the same time.

No characteristics are absolute, all are relative. We may like a characteristic in someone attractive at some point in relationship but find it negative at another time, for example; as we fall in love with someone we may like someone's unpredictability but as we fall out of love with them we may see it as irresponsibility.

Other questions have also been raised; does familiarity always lead to liking? Do we like people more because we spend time with them? Or do we spend more time with them because we like them? Frequency of interaction does not always result to greater liking. It was demonstrated by Warr that it can produce more disliking.