9.2 Factors in Attraction: Self-Disclosure and Physical Attractiveness

AQA 7182 · about 60 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

At least three of the short-answer questions require full sentences. Complete the whole pack in about 50 minutes.

1 Explain three ethical issues a researcher should consider when studying intimate self-disclosure in new couples, and give a practical safeguard for each.

(Total for Question 1 is 6 marks)

2 Outline Walster et al.'s (1966) matching hypothesis and briefly name the experimental test they used to investigate it.

(Total for Question 2 is 3 marks)

3 Identify two ways in which the halo effect could bias research measures of attractiveness and briefly suggest how a researcher could reduce this bias in a study of first impressions.

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 State two findings or features from Altman and Taylor's model that support the idea that self-disclosure builds intimacy, and give one limitation of the model.

(Total for Question 4 is 3 marks)

5 Explain how online dating apps might affect the temporal validity of findings about physical attractiveness and matching from the 1960s and 1970s research literature.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Evaluate the role of self-disclosure and physical attractiveness in romantic attraction. In your answer, discuss relevant theories and evidence, consider methodological strengths and weaknesses, and comment on the extent to which findings remain valid given modern practices such as online dating.

(Total for Question 6 is 16 marks)

7 A short vignette: Kwame meets Erin at university. Erin is rated by others as very attractive, while Kwame considers himself average in looks. After a month, Kwame acts more confidently around Erin and she reciprocates with friendly disclosure. Using the matching hypothesis, explain two reasons why Kwame and Erin might still form a relationship despite differing attractiveness ratings.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

8 The social penetration model emphasises reciprocity of self-disclosure. Describe an empirical method a researcher could use to test whether reciprocal disclosure predicts relationship satisfaction in new couples, including one operationalised IV and DV.

(Total for Question 8 is 6 marks)

Mark scheme · 9.2 Factors in Attraction: Self-Disclosure and Physical Attractiveness

Question 1

identifies issue: risk of distress from discussing sensitive personal topics oe **M1**

gives safeguard: provide full informed consent, allow withdrawal at any time and offer information about support services oe **A1**

identifies issue: confidentiality and privacy concerns when storing sensitive disclosures oe **M1**

gives safeguard: anonymise data, store securely and limit access to authorised researchers only oe **A1**

identifies issue: power imbalance or coercion if partners feel pressured to disclose oe **M1**

gives safeguard: ensure separate consent from each partner and verify that participation is voluntary without partner pressure oe **A1**

Answer: Issues and safeguards: discussing sensitive topics can cause distress, so obtain informed consent, allow withdrawal and provide support contacts. Confidentiality is vital, so anonymise and securely store disclosures. Finally, partners may feel pressured, so collect separate voluntary consent and ensure no coercion.

Question 2

states the matching hypothesis: people form relationships with others of similar levels of physical attractiveness oe **M1**

explains the proposed reason: to avoid rejection and to maximise chances of a successful partnership oe **M1**

names the computer dance study (computer dance or 'dance partner' experiment) as Walster et al.'s test of the idea oe **A1**

Answer: The matching hypothesis says individuals pair with partners who match their own physical attractiveness to reduce rejection risk; Walster et al. tested this using the computer dance study where participants were paired for a dance and attractiveness ratings were compared to partner choices.

Question 3

identifies a halo effect bias, e.g. attractive people rated higher on unrelated positive traits such as intelligence or kindness oe **M1**

explains that this can inflate correlations between attractiveness and other judged qualities, confounding conclusions oe **A1**

identifies a second bias, e.g. researcher or rater expectations influence ratings (expectancy effect) oe **M1**

suggests reduction: use blinded raters or objective measures and separate attractiveness ratings from trait ratings to reduce halo influence oe **A1**

Answer: Halo bias can cause attractive people to be rated higher on unrelated traits and can create expectancy effects from raters; using blind rating procedures and separating attractiveness from other trait measures reduces these biases.

Question 4

supports: increasing depth leads to greater trust/intimacy oe **B1**

supports: reciprocity of disclosure accelerates relationship development oe **B1**

limitation: model is descriptive and may not account for cultural differences in acceptable disclosure or the fact that disclosure can sometimes harm relationships oe **B1**

Answer: Support: greater depth of disclosure tends to increase trust and intimacy; reciprocal disclosure accelerates closeness. Limitation: the model is descriptive and may not account for cultural variation or situations where disclosure damages rather than builds a relationship.

Question 5

identifies temporal validity issue: modern online dating changes how people meet and the salience of visual cues oe **M1**

explains that profile pictures increase the speed and dominance of appearance-based judgements, potentially strengthening attractiveness effects compared with earlier face to face contexts oe **A1**

identifies that algorithms and filters can match people on many dimensions beyond physical attractiveness oe **M1**

explains that these technologies may weaken pure matching on looks and increase assortative pairing on interests or values, reducing the direct applicability of early matching-hypothesis findings oe **A1**

Answer: Online dating emphasises quick visual judgements via profile pictures, which may strengthen the role of attractiveness compared with the 1960s context, but matching algorithms and filtering for interests may reduce the simple effect of matching on looks, so early findings may not fully apply today.

Question 6

Level 4 Knowledge is comprehensive and accurate. Evaluation is balanced and perceptive, integrating theory, empirical evidence and methodological critique. There is well developed discussion of real world implications and temporal validity, with coherent and effective use of examples. Specialist terminology is used precisely. **13-16**

Level 3 Knowledge is generally accurate with some detail. Evaluation is clear and covers strengths and limitations, with some integration of theory and evidence. There is reasonable comment on applications and modern contexts. The answer is organised and uses appropriate terminology. **9-12**

Level 2 Knowledge is present but limited in detail. Evaluation is present but may be superficial or one sided. Connections to modern contexts or evidence may be brief or underdeveloped. The answer lacks depth and precision in terminology. **5-8**

Level 1 Limited knowledge and little or no evaluation. Response may be a list of unsupported points. Specialist terminology is largely absent and the answer lacks organisation. **1-4**

Level 0 No creditworthy material. **0**

Indicative content:

- AO1 points: social penetration theory (Altman and Taylor 1973) proposes development of intimacy through increasing breadth and depth of self-disclosure and reciprocity; reciprocity of disclosure builds trust and perceived intimacy.
- AO1 points: physical attractiveness plays a role via the halo effect, where attractive individuals receive positive trait attributions; matching hypothesis (Walster et al. 1966) suggests people pair with partners of similar attractiveness to minimise rejection.
- AO1 evidence: Walster et al.'s computer dance study provided experimental evidence about attractiveness and partner choice, though results are open to multiple interpretations.
- AO3 methodological critique: much evidence for matching is correlational, so causal claims are weak; Walster et al.'s experimental context had low ecological validity and student samples limit generalisability.
- AO3 methodological critique: measures of attractiveness are culturally and temporally specific and vulnerable to halo bias; ratings should be blinded and separated from other trait measures to avoid confounding.
- AO3 theoretical critique: social penetration is descriptive and may not apply equally across cultures where norms about disclosure differ; disclosure can sometimes reduce attraction or cause harm if too rapid.
- AO3 supporting evidence: research shows reciprocal self-disclosure predicts relationship development and satisfaction, supporting the theory's core claim about intimacy building.
- AO3 challenging evidence: not all relationships follow matching on looks; compensating assets such as status or personality can lead to asymmetrical pairings, and longitudinal research sometimes finds appearance similarity emerges over time rather than driving initial choice.
- AO3 ethical and practical considerations: studies of intimate disclosure raise confidentiality and distress issues; researchers must ensure consent and support.
- AO3 temporal validity and application: online dating increases the salience of visual cues and quick attractiveness judgements, which may strengthen the role of looks; conversely, algorithms and profile information emphasise other matching criteria, so early findings may not map neatly onto modern contexts.
- AO3 conclusion: both self-disclosure and physical attractiveness are important, but their relative influence depends on stage of relationship, cultural context and modern meeting methods. Strong evidence supports a role for reciprocal disclosure in developing intimacy, whereas attractiveness effects are robust for first impressions but complex in predicting long-term pairings.

Question 7

suggests that non-physical factors (e.g. mutual self-disclosure, shared interests) can outweigh exact matching in attractiveness oe **M1**

explains that reciprocity and growing intimacy through disclosure can make perceived overall attractiveness or compatibility more similar, reducing the impact of initial mismatch oe **A1**

offers that people sometimes pursue higher attractiveness partners if they have other compensating assets, such as confidence or social status oe **M1**

explains that Kwame's increased confidence and Erin's friendly disclosure may function as compensatory traits, making a relationship more likely despite differences in looks oe **A1**

Answer: Matching is not purely physical: strong reciprocal self-disclosure and shared interests can make partners feel more compatible, and compensating traits such as Kwame's confidence can offset a physical attractiveness gap, so the pair may form a relationship despite initial differences.

Question 8

describes a suitable method, e.g. a longitudinal questionnaire study of new couples over several weeks oe **M1**

operationalises the IV: level of reciprocity, measured by coding the number and intimacy level of disclosures reciprocated by each partner during structured conversations oe **M1**

operationalises the DV: relationship satisfaction score from a validated scale, given at multiple time points oe **M1**

explains data collection procedure: couples recorded brief conversations or completed disclosure logs and completed satisfaction scales at 1 week, 1 month and 3 months oe **A1**

notes an appropriate analysis: correlate reciprocity scores with later satisfaction or use regression to predict satisfaction controlling for initial closeness oe **A1**

mentions ethical safeguards such as informed consent, confidentiality and support if disclosures raise distress oe **A1**

Answer: Example: a longitudinal study where new couples take part in structured conversations that are coded for reciprocal disclosures (IV: reciprocity score) and complete a validated relationship satisfaction scale at 1 week, 1 month and 3 months (DV). Correlations or regression could test whether higher reciprocity predicts later satisfaction, with informed consent and debriefing included.