9.3 Filter Theory of Relationship Formation

AQA 7182 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Identify and explain one empirical strength of filter theory.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Outline social demography as a filter and give examples.

(Total for Question 2 is 3 marks)

3 Outline complementarity of needs as a later-stage filter and describe its meaning.

(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)

4 Identify and explain a methodological limitation of the evidence for filter theory related to correlation.

(Total for Question 4 is 3 marks)

5 Identify a finding that challenges the temporal sequence of filters and explain its implication.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

6 Discuss filter theory as an explanation of relationship formation.

(Total for Question 6 is 16 marks)

7 Explain how filter importance shifts from early to later stages of relationships.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

8 Apply filter theory to explain which filters mattered at the start for Amelia and Kwame.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

9 Apply filter theory to explain which later-stage filters matter when Amelia and Kwame decide to live together.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · 9.3 Filter Theory of Relationship Formation

Question 1

identifies a genuine strength, e.g. predictive or descriptive usefulness, or longitudinal support that shows changing correlates over time oe — **M1**

explains how the strength supports the theory, for example longitudinal data that shows attitude similarity predicts early closeness but different factors predict later stability oe — **A1**

explains why this increases confidence in the model, such as its ability to account for changing influences as relationships mature oe — **A1**

may note practical usefulness, for example informing relationship counselling about which factors to explore at different stages oe — **A1**

Answer: A strength is that some longitudinal studies support the idea that different factors predict different stages, for example attitude similarity predicting early closeness and other factors predicting later stability, which strengthens the theory by showing it can describe changing influences over time and has practical application for relationship advice.

Question 2

states that social demography includes factors such as proximity, social class, religion and ethnicity oe — **M1**

explains these factors limit the possible pool of partners because people are more likely to meet and interact with similar others oe — **A1**

gives an example such as neighbours, same workplace, or same faith group reducing choice oe — **A1**

Answer: Social demography refers to factors like proximity, social class and religion that determine who we meet; these factors limit the pool of potential partners because people tend to encounter and interact with others who are geographically or socially close.

Question 3

states that complementarity is the third filter and becomes more important in established, longer-term relationships oe — **M1**

explains complementarity as partners providing what the other lacks, for example one partner being nurturing while the other is more independent oe — **A1**

explains that complementarity can increase relationship stability by meeting partners' needs over time oe — **A1**

Answer: Complementarity refers to partners having needs or traits that fit together, such as one partner being more dominant and the other more submissive, and becomes important in longer-term relationships because it helps partners meet each others needs and sustain the relationship.

Question 4

identifies correlational evidence or cross-sectional studies as a limitation oe — **M1**

explains that correlation does not establish causation, so similarity may be a consequence rather than a cause of closeness oe — **A1**

explains that other variables could account for the association, reducing confidence in the filter sequence oe — **A1**

Answer: Much evidence is correlational, which is problematic because correlations cannot prove that filters cause relationship formation; similarity might develop after people become close, or a third variable could explain the association.

Question 5

identifies Sprecher and Duck or similar research showing that similarity can be found at different stages, or that complementary may appear early oe — **M1**

explains the finding, for example that attitude similarity is sometimes stronger in established relationships or that online contacts bypass social demography oe — **A1**

explains implication: this challenges the strict sequential ordering of filters proposed by Kerckhoff and Davis and suggests a more flexible model oe — **A1**

Answer: Research such as Sprecher and Duck finds that similarity and complementarity do not always follow the proposed order; similarity can be important beyond the early stage and complementary patterns can appear sooner, which undermines the rigid temporal sequence in Kerckhoff and Davis's model and suggests the filters operate more flexibly.

Question 6

Level 4 Detailed knowledge of filter theory is accurate and wellorganised, including the three filters and the proposed temporal shift in importance. Evaluation is thorough and balanced, addressing empirical support and clear limitations. Relevant studies and criticisms are used interactively to support judgement, including discussion of Sprecher and Duck, correlational limitations and modern online contexts. The answer is coherent and uses appropriate specialist terminology. — **13-16**

Level 3 Knowledge of the theory is accurate with some development. Evaluation is clear and includes some relevant evidence and limitations. There is some use of studies and application to modern issues, but analysis may be less comprehensive. The answer is mostly wellstructured and uses appropriate terminology. — **9-12**

Level 2 Basic knowledge of filter theory is present but may be incomplete or partially inaccurate. Evaluation is limited or descriptive, with few specific studies and limited linkage to the theory. Reasoning is sometimes unclear and specialist terminology may be used inconsistently. — **5-8**

Level 1 Very limited knowledge of the theory, or mostly irrelevant content. Little or no meaningful evaluation. The answer lacks structure and specialist terminology is largely absent or misused. — **1-4**

Level 0 No relevant content. — **0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: Core description of the theory, Kerckhoff and Davis (1962), three filters: social demography (proximity, social class, religion), similarity in attitudes (important early), complementarity of needs (important later), and the idea that the filters narrow the field and shift in relative importance over time.
- AO1: Mechanisms: social demography increases meeting probability and opportunity to interact; similarity increases liking and communication; complementarity meets longerterm needs and provides functional roles.
- AO3: Empirical support includes studies that find attitude similarity predicts initial attraction and that complementarity correlates with longerterm stability; longitudinal data provides some descriptive backing for changing predictors over time.
- AO3: Critical point, correlational evidence: many supporting studies are correlational or crosssectional, so causation is uncertain; similarity could be a consequence of closeness, or third variables could explain associations.
- AO3: Sprecher and Duck and other empirical challenges show the sequence is not always strict; similarity and complementarity can appear at different times, undermining a rigid temporal ordering and suggesting the model is more flexible than originally proposed.
- AO3: Modern context limitation: online dating and social media weaken social demography as a first filter because people meet across distances and social groups; algorithms may prioritise similarity on selected characteristics rather than proximity.
- AO3: Methodological critiques: sample biases, cultural and temporal validity issues since original studies were often USbased and from earlier decades; also operationalisation problems, for example how to measure complementarity reliably.
- AO3: Strengths and usefulness: the theory is parsimonious and intuitively plausible, it organises multiple influences into a coherent sequence and has practical value in guiding research and relationship counselling about which factors matter at different stages.
- AO3: Balanced conclusion might note that filter theory remains a useful descriptive model that highlights changing influences across relationship development, but it needs updating to accommodate flexible timing of filters and the impact of online partner selection, and stronger longitudinal and experimental evidence is required to support causal claims.

Question 7

states that social demography is most important early because it determines who meets whom oe	**M1**
states that similarity in attitudes matters in early development, promoting initial attraction and mutual understanding oe	**A1**
states that complementarity becomes more important later as partners seek to meet each others longer-term needs oe	**M1**
explains why this shift matters, for example because initial attraction relies on shared views while long-term stability relies on functional, complementary roles oe	**A1**

Answer: Initially social demography restricts who can meet; then similarity in attitudes determines who becomes attracted and forms a close relationship; over time complementarity of needs gains importance as partners seek to satisfy long-term needs and keep the relationship functioning.

Question 8

identifies social demography factors that brought them together, e.g. same university college and proximity oe	**M1**
explains that proximity increased chances of meeting and interacting, reducing the partner pool oe	**A1**
identifies similarity in attitudes/interests, e.g. both enjoy debating and film nights oe	**M1**
explains that shared interests would have facilitated early attraction and helped them form a close bond oe	**A1**

Answer: Early on social demography, such as being in the same college, made meeting likely; similarity in attitudes, shown by shared interests in debating and film nights, promoted attraction and closeness in the early stages.

Question 9

identifies complementarity of needs as relevant in later stage, e.g. Amelia wanting calm while Kwame plans social events oe	**M1**
explains how their differing preferences could be complementary if they balance each others needs, such as Kwame organising social life while Amelia provides stability oe	**A1**
notes that similarity in some deeper values may still matter for long-term compatibility oe	**M1**
explains that both complementarity and residual similarity together can support moving in together and relationship stability oe	**A1**

Answer: At the later stage complementarity matters: Amelia and Kwame may complement each other, with one providing calm and the other organising social life, which can help them balance needs and decide to cohabit, while continued similarity in core values still supports long-term compatibility.