



PSY.OPT3 Filter Theory of Relationship Formation

AQA 7182 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Show all your working.

- 1** Define the filter theory of relationship formation as proposed in social psychology, naming its originators and the basic idea about how partners are selected in stages.

Define the filter theory of relationship formation and name the originators.

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

- 2** Identify the three main filters in Kerckhoff and Davis's filter theory as used to explain relationship formation in the early and later stages.

Identify the three main filters in the filter theory.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Outline how social demography functions as the first filter in Kerckhoff and Davis's model, including examples such as proximity and religion, and why it reduces the pool of potential partners.

Outline social demography as a filter and give examples.

(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)

- 4** Outline the role of similarity in attitudes as a filter in the early stage of relationship formation, and explain why attitude similarity matters according to the theory.

Outline similarity in attitudes as an early-stage filter and why it matters.

(Total for Question 4 is 3 marks)

- 5** Outline complementarity of needs as the third filter in Kerckhoff and Davis's theory, describing what complementarity means in longer-term relationships.

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

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

- 6** Explain how the relative importance of the three filters in Kerckhoff and Davis's theory is said to change over time from the formation to later stages of relationships.

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

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

- 7** Case study: Amelia and Kwame meet at university, live in the same college, and both enjoy debating and film nights. After two years they decide to move in together; Amelia values a calm home while Kwame enjoys planning social events. Using Kerckhoff and Davis's filter theory, explain which filters are likely to have been important at the start of their relationship and why. Apply filter theory to explain which filters mattered at the start for Amelia and Kwame.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

- 8** Continuing the same case: after two years Amelia and Kwame decide to move in together. Apply the filter theory to explain which later-stage filter(s) might help explain their decision to cohabit, referring to their differing preferences about a calm home and social planning. Apply filter theory to explain which later-stage filters matter when Amelia and Kwame decide to live together.

(Total for Question 8 is 4 marks)

- 9** Identify one methodological limitation of the evidence supporting Kerckhoff and Davis's filter theory, focusing on the correlational nature of much supporting research, and explain why this is a problem for causal claims. Identify and explain a methodological limitation of the evidence for filter theory related to correlation.

(Total for Question 9 is 3 marks)

- 10** Sprecher and Duck and other researchers have questioned the temporal sequence proposed by Kerckhoff and Davis. Identify one empirical finding from the literature that challenges the strict sequence of filters and explain its implication for the theory. Identify a finding that challenges the temporal sequence of filters and explain its implication.

(Total for Question 10 is 3 marks)

- 11** Explain how the rise of online dating and social media may reduce the explanatory power of social demography as the first filter in Kerckhoff and Davis's theory. Give one concrete example. Explain how online partner selection affects the role of social demography as a filter.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

- 12** Identify one empirical strength of filter theory, such as its intuitive descriptive power or support from longitudinal studies, and explain why this strengthens the theory as a model of relationship formation. Identify and explain one empirical strength of filter theory.

(Total for Question 12 is 4 marks)

- 13** Discuss filter theory as an explanation of relationship formation. In your answer, describe the main features of the theory and evaluate it with reference to empirical evidence and relevant criticisms such as the correlational nature of supporting studies, Sprecher and Duck's challenges to the temporal sequence, and the impact of online partner selection on the role of social demography. You should offer a balanced conclusion.

Discuss filter theory as an explanation of relationship formation.

(Total for Question 13 is 16 marks)

Mark scheme · PSY.OPT3 Filter Theory of Relationship Formation

Question 1

- **B1** states that filter theory was proposed by Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) or Kerckhoff and Davis 1962 oe
- **B1** states the basic idea that people pass through filters, such as social demography, similarity in attitudes and complementarity, when forming relationships oe
- **Answer: Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) proposed filter theory: potential partners are screened through successive filters, such as social demography, similarity in attitudes early on, and complementarity of needs later, determining who becomes close.**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies social demography (proximity, social class, religion, etc.) oe
- **B1** identifies similarity in attitudes and complementarity of needs oe
- **Answer: The three main filters are social demography, similarity in attitudes, and complementarity of needs.**

Question 3

- **M1** states that social demography includes factors such as proximity, social class, religion and ethnicity oe
- **A1** 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
- **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 4

- **M1** states that similarity in attitudes is the second filter and is important in early stages of a relationship oe
- **A1** explains that shared attitudes make communication easier and increase liking, facilitating the development of a relationship oe
- **A1** gives an example such as similar political or leisure interests encouraging closeness in the early phase oe
- **Answer: Similarity in attitudes is the second filter and is central early on because shared beliefs and values make interaction smoother, increase mutual liking and provide common ground for a developing relationship.**

Question 5

- **M1** states that complementarity is the third filter and becomes more important in established, longer-term relationships oe
- **A1** 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
- **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 6

- **M1** states that social demography is most important early because it determines who meets whom oe
- **A1** states that similarity in attitudes matters in early development, promoting initial attraction and mutual understanding oe
- **M1** states that complementarity becomes more important later as partners seek to meet each others longer-term needs oe
- **A1** explains why this shift matters, for example because initial attraction relies on shared views while long-term stability relies on functional, complementary roles oe
- **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 7

- **M1** identifies social demography factors that brought them together, e.g. same university college and proximity oe
- **A1** explains that proximity increased chances of meeting and interacting, reducing the partner pool oe
- **M1** identifies similarity in attitudes/interests, e.g. both enjoy debating and film nights oe
- **A1** explains that shared interests would have facilitated early attraction and helped them form a close bond oe
- **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 8

- **M1** identifies complementarity of needs as relevant in later stage, e.g. Amelia wanting calm while Kwame plans social events oe
- **A1** 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
- **M1** notes that similarity in some deeper values may still matter for long-term compatibility oe
- **A1** explains that both complementarity and residual similarity together can support moving in together and relationship stability oe
- **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.**

Question 9

- **M1** identifies correlational evidence or cross-sectional studies as a limitation oe
- **A1** 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
- **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 10

- **M1** identifies Sprecher and Duck or similar research showing that similarity can be found at different stages, or that complementary may appear early oe
- **A1** 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
- **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 11

- **M1** states that online platforms increase contact across distances and social groups, weakening proximity and some demographic barriers oe
- **A1** explains that this means social demography is less effective in limiting the partner pool because algorithms and virtual spaces connect people who would not otherwise meet oe
- **M1** gives a concrete example such as people meeting partners from other regions, religions or social classes through dating apps or niche online forums oe
- **A1** explains the implication, that the theory may need updating to account for reduced importance of physical proximity in modern partner selection oe
- **Answer: Online dating reduces the impact of social demography because apps and social networks connect people across geographical and social boundaries; for example, a person might find a partner from a different city or faith group through a dating app, so proximity is no longer the main limiter of the partner pool.**

Question 12

- **M1** identifies a genuine strength, e.g. predictive or descriptive usefulness, or longitudinal support that shows changing correlates over time oe
- **A1** 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
- **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 13

- **Level 4** (13-16): 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.
- **Level 3** (9-12): 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.
- **Level 2** (5-8): 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.
- **Level 1** (1-4): 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.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **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