9.4 Social Exchange Theory and Equity Theory of Romantic Relationships: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Explain one way individual differences and one way cultural differences can affect whether people adopt an exchange oriented approach to relationships, and why these differences matter for applying SET and Equity Theory.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Design a simple cross cultural questionnaire study to test whether perceived equity predicts relationship satisfaction more strongly in individualist than in collectivist cultures. State the independent variable, dependent variable, sampling method, one control, and one ethical issue with how you would address it.

(Total for Question 2 is 6 marks)

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3 Discuss Social Exchange Theory and Equity Theory as explanations for relationship maintenance. Compare, evaluate and reach a conclusion.

(Total for Question 3 is 16 marks)

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Mark scheme · 9.4 Social Exchange Theory and Equity Theory of Romantic Relationships: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies an individual difference, e.g. some people are more exchange oriented or have higher needs for equity, or differ in tolerance for inequality oe	**M1**
explains effect, e.g. exchange oriented individuals monitor costs and rewards more closely and may end relationships faster when dissatisfied oe	**A1**
identifies a cultural difference, e.g. collectivist cultures emphasise family and duty, so individuals may tolerate inequity more to preserve group harmony oe	**M1**
explains why this matters, e.g. both SET and Equity Theory predictions may not generalise across cultures because expectations and tolerances for equity and alternatives vary oe	**A1**

Answer: Individual differences: some people are exchange oriented and closely track rewards and costs, so they are likelier to end unfair relationships. Cultural differences: in collectivist cultures people may accept unequal exchanges to preserve family or group harmony, so SET and Equity predictions about leaving or distress are less applicable across cultures.

Question 2

identifies the independent variable, e.g. cultural group (individualist versus collectivist) or perceived equity level if treated as IV oe	**M1**
identifies the dependent variable, e.g. relationship satisfaction score from a standardised questionnaire oe	**M1**
states a sampling method, e.g. matched stratified sampling from two countries, using online panels to obtain similar age and relationship-duration distributions oe	**M1**
states one control, e.g. control for relationship length or age by matching or statistically partialling it out oe	**M1**
identifies one ethical issue, e.g. confidentiality of personal relationship data oe	**M1**
explains how to address the ethical issue, e.g. anonymise responses, store data securely, and provide debrief and local support contacts oe	**M1**

Answer: IV: cultural group (individualist vs collectivist). DV: relationship satisfaction score from a validated questionnaire. Sampling: matched stratified sampling using online panels in two countries to match age and relationship duration. Control: control for relationship length or age by matching or statistical partialling. Ethical issue: confidentiality of sensitive relationship information, addressed by anonymising data, secure storage, and providing debrief and local support contacts.

Question 3

Level 4 Knowledge of both theories is accurate, detailed and well focused. Evaluation is thorough and well developed, including clear methodological critique, evidence for and against, and consideration of individual and cultural differences. Comparison between theories is effective and used to reach a balanced, supported conclusion. Specialist terminology is used correctly and the answer is coherent.	**13-16**
Level 3 Knowledge of both theories is generally accurate with some detail. Evaluation is clear but may be less developed in places, including some methodological points and discussion of differences. Comparison is present and a reasoned conclusion is given, though some points may not be fully linked to evidence.	**9-12**
Level 2 Knowledge of the theories is present but limited or partial. Evaluation is superficial or one sided, with limited consideration of methodological issues or individual and cultural differences. Comparison is attempted but not well developed, and the conclusion is brief or not well supported.	**5-8**
Level 1 Knowledge is minimal and answers are superficial. Evaluation is very limited or absent. Comparison and conclusion are not credible. Specialist terms may be missing or used incorrectly.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditable content.	**0**

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Indicative content:

- AO1: Social Exchange Theory (Thibaut and Kelley) explains maintenance via rewards and costs, comparison level and comparison level for alternatives; satisfaction and commitment depend on profit and alternatives.
- AO1: Equity Theory (Walster et al.) explains maintenance via perceived fairness in partners' rewards to costs ratios; inequity causes distress and motivates attempts to restore fairness.
- AO1: Both are economic in orientation, modelling relationships in terms of costs and benefits, but Equity Theory focuses on proportional fairness rather than absolute profit.
- AO3: Strength of SET is parsimony and clear testable concepts like CL and CLalt, and supportive correlational evidence linking perceived rewards and alternatives to commitment.
- AO3: Strength of Equity Theory is the psychological insight that perceived fairness affects wellbeing, with some empirical support showing distress in under-benefited partners.
- AO3: Limitation common to both is difficulty operationalising and measuring rewards, costs and equity, reducing ecological validity, and risking reductionism by ignoring emotions, meaning and moral factors in relationships.
- AO3: Methodological issues include reliance on self report questionnaires, correlational designs that limit causal inference, and problems of social desirability and partner differences in perception.
- AO3: Individual differences matter, for example exchange orientation varies between people, affecting how rewards and costs are monitored. Some partners tolerate inequity for reasons such as altruism or dependency.
- AO3: Cultural differences matter, collectivist cultures may prioritise family duty and tolerate inequity, challenging universal predictions of both theories.
- AO3: Theories assume rational economic actors, which may underplay emotion, altruism, investment and identity; this is why Rusbult's investment model adds explanatory power but is outside this question.
- AO3: Empirical evidence is mixed, some studies support SET and equity effects, but replications vary by sample and era, suggesting limited temporal and cultural generalisability.
- AO3: A balanced conclusion might say both theories contribute useful frameworks for understanding some aspects of relationship maintenance, particularly decision processes and perceived fairness, but they are incomplete on their own and need to be integrated with broader psychological models that include emotion, investment and cultural context.

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