RELATIONSHIPS
REVISION
EVOLUTIONARY EXPLANATIONS FOR PARTNER PREFERENCES
PROCEDURE

- Over 10,000 participants from 37 different cultures
- Asked to rate importance of each of 18 characteristics (e.g. physical attractiveness etc) when choosing a mate
- A four-point scale was used

FINDINGS

- Resources = women, more than men, desired mates with good financial prospects
- Physical Attractiveness = men place more importance in this
- Youth = men universally want mates younger than them (men value increased fertility in potential mates)
- Other important characteristics = both sexes wanted mates who were intelligent and kind
INTRASEXUAL SELECTION

• Individuals of one sex (usually males) must outcompete other members of their sex in order to gain access to members of the other sex
• Successful individuals are able to mate and so pass on their genes
• Losers do not mate and so do not pass on their genes
• Whatever characteristic leads to success in these same-sex contests, becomes more widespread in the gene pool
INTERSEXUAL SELECTION

• Members of one sex evolve preferences for desirable qualities in potential mates
• Members of the opposite sex who possess these characteristics will then gain a mating advantage over those who do not
• These preferences determine the areas in which the other sex must compete (e.g. status, resources, attractiveness, etc)
Before mating sexual selection may take the form of:

- **Intrasexual selection** - usually between males - may take the form of male-to-male combat

- **Intersexual selection**, or mate choice, occurs when females choose between male mates
SEXUAL SELECTION AND LONG-TERM MATE PREFERENCES

• Being choosy requires time and energy
• Random mating is essentially stupid mating
  • It pays to be choosy, as the genetic quality of a mate will determine half the genetic quality of any offspring
• Low-quality mates (e.g. unattractive, unhealthy) will be more likely to produce unattractive, unhealthy offspring
  • Vice versa for high-quality mates
SEXUAL SELECTION AND LONG-TERM MATE PREFERENCES

• Females = this means being attracted to males who:
  • Are able to invest resources in her and her children
  • Are able to physically protect her and her children
  • Show promise as a good parent
  • Are sufficiently compatible to ensure minimal costs to her children

• Males do not give away their resources aimlessly and so are most attracted to females who display signals of fertility (reproductive value)
EVALUATION OF THE EVOLUTIONARY EXPLANATIONS FOR PARTNER PREFERENCES
Cultural traditions may be just as important as evolutionary forces

+ Bernstein (2015) – gender differences in mate preference patterns might stem from cultural traditions
  - Women being denied economic and political power in many cultures might account for their reliance on men’s security and resources
+ Analysis of 37 cultures found that women valued potential mate’s access to resources more in cultures where women’s status and opportunities were limited
  - Suggesting that we should not underestimate the role of social and economic factors in establishing mate preference patterns

Female preferences for high-status men may not be universal

+ Buller (2005) – most studies on female mate preferences use undergraduate female students. These women expect to achieve high educational status and high expected income levels, therefore expect the same in a mate
+ The evidence for a universal female mating preference for high-status men is weak or non-existent
Mate choice in real life

- Buss’ study could have validity issues as preferences are not always how things happen in real life
- Real life studies support mate-choice hypothesis
- Buss’ (1989) study on actual marriages in 29 cultures confirmed that men tend to choose younger women
- Questionnaires used in Buss’ study may be more valid measures of partner preferences than real-life marriage statistics, especially in cultures where arranged marriages are the norm

Mate choice and the menstrual cycle

- Penton-Voak et al (1999) suggest that women choose a slightly feminised version of a male face for a long-term relationship because it suggests kindness and cooperation in parental care
- However, they prefer a more masculine face shape for a short-term sexual relationship, when conception is most likely
Is there a human equivalent of the peacock’s tail?

Some human traits serve no survival purpose but have evolved purely as a result of sexual selection (e.g. preference for highly creative partners has been a characteristic of mate choice throughout evolutionary history).

Nettle and Clegg (2006) found that males in creative professions, such as poets and artists, had more sexual partners than males in non-creative professions. Their creative output is positively linked to the amount of sexual partners.

This suggests that females are motivated to choose creative males due to the adaptive values of creativity that they will pass on to their offspring.
Buss’s research on partner preferences in different cultures show that men in particular place great importance on physical attractiveness when choosing a mate.

- Physical appearance is an important cue to a woman’s health and so fertility and reproductive value.

- Despite the long-standing belief that partner physical attractiveness is more important to men, more recent research (e.g. Eastwick et al, 2011) suggests that it may be just as important to women as it is to men, when choosing a romantic partner.
However, these researchers suggest that women may rely on physical attractiveness when choosing males for short-term relationships (i.e. one-night stands), physical attractiveness was less important in what they describe as “serious relationships”

Men were more likely than women to rely on physical attractiveness in long-term relationships
THE “MATCHING HYPOTHESIS”

- Individuals seek out partners whose social desirability roughly matches their own.
- When choosing a partner, individuals must first assess their own “value” in the eyes of a potential romantic partner and then select the best available person who would be most likely to be attracted to them.
- By opting for partners of similar social desirability (those “in their league”), they can maximise their chances of a successful outcome.
The matching hypothesis initially proposed that people would pair up with someone as “socially desirable” as themselves. However, over time matching has come to be associated specifically on physical attractiveness alone. Which would mean people would match with someone similar in terms of physical attractiveness.

Walster et al referred to these mating choices as “realistic” choices (as each person is influenced by the changes of having their affection reciprocated).

Realistic choices must consider a number of different factors (e.g. personal desires, etc).

In real life, therefore, people have to settle for mating “within their league” whether they like it or not.
Walster et al advertised a “computer dance” for new students at the University of Minnesota. From those who purchased tickets, 177 males and 170 females were randomly selected to participate. When they came to pick up their tickets, four student accomplices covertly rated each of them for physical attractiveness. Participants were asked to complete a lengthy questionnaire and told that the data gathered would be used to allocate their ideal partner for the evening of the dance. In fact, the pairing was done completely randomly. During the intermission part of the dance, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire about their dates, with a follow-up questionnaire distributed six months after the dance.
The findings from this study did not support the matching hypothesis. Once participants had met their dates, and regardless of their own physical attractiveness, they responded more positively to physical attractive dates and were most likely to subsequently try to arrange dates with them if they were physically attractive. Other factors, such as personality and intelligence, did not affect liking the dates or any subsequent attempts to date them.
EVALUATION OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS
Eastwick and Finkel (2008) suggest that men may value physical attractiveness more than women when stating their ideal partner preference.

- These differences may not predict real-life partner choice.

Eastwick and Finkel used evidence from speed dating and backed this up with longitudinal follow-up procedures 30 days later.

- Prior to speed dating participants showed traditional sex differences in the importance of characteristics of an ideal partner.

However, their ideal preferences failed to predict what inspired their actual behaviour at the speed dating event.

- No significant sex differences emerged.
- Participants’ actual partner preferences were more likely to reflect their evaluation of a specific speed-dating partner’s characteristics and their romantic attraction to them.
Sprecher and Hatfield (2009) suggest the reason why research fails to find evidence of matching in terms of physical attractiveness is that **this is only one of the many characteristics that people come into the relationship with**.

A person may compensate for a lack in physical attractiveness with other desirable qualities (e.g. kindness, money, etc).

Sprecher and Hatfield referred to this as **“complex matching”**. So people can attract partners who are more physically attractive than themselves by offering compensatory assets.
If physical attractiveness in long-term partners is more important for males, then research should show that males with physically attractive partners are more satisfied with their relationship – **this is exactly what Meltzer et al (2014) found**

- They found that objective ratings of wives’ attractiveness were positively related to levels of husbands’ satisfaction at the beginning of the marriage and over at least the first four years.

- It was also found that female importance for physical attractiveness was also supported.
  - They found that the objective ratings of husbands’ physical attractiveness were not related to wives’ marital satisfaction (initially or over time).
MATCHING MAY NOT BE THAT IMPORTANT IN INITIAL ATTRACTION

+ Taylor et al (2011) cast doubt on the value of the matching hypothesis in attraction
  - They found (in a study of online dating patterns) there was no evidence that daters’ decisions were driven by a similarity of physical attractiveness
  - They did find evidence of an overall preference of attractive partners, suggesting that people do not take into account their own physical attractiveness in the initial stages of attraction, but aim for someone more desirable than themselves
  - However, they did find that those individuals who targeted people with similar attractiveness were more likely to receive responses to their messages
Meltzer et al (2014) claim that if physical attractiveness plays a stronger role in men’s long-term relationship satisfaction than in women’s, then women may experience increased pressures to maintain their physical attractiveness to successfully maintain a long-term relationship.

However, physical attractiveness is not the only predictor of marital satisfaction for a man. Both men and women also desire partners who are supportive, trustworthy and warm; and those with partners who demonstrate these qualities tend to be more satisfied with their relationship (Pasch and Bradbury, 1998).
SELF-DISCLOSURE

- This refers to the extent to which a person reveals personal information about themselves
  - Their intimate thoughts, feelings and experiences to another person
- Self-disclosure is an important process in the development of romantic relationships, with greater disclosure leading to greater feelings of intimacy
- **People tend to prefer those who disclose intimate details** to those who disclose themselves to a lesser extent
- People reveal more intimate information to those they like and also tend to like those who have revealed intimate information (Collins and Miller, 1994)
RESEARCH ON SELF-DISCLOSURE

- There is a distinction between self-disclosure giving (i.e. disclosing one’s own personal information) and self-disclosure received (information disclosed by the other).
- Research (e.g. Sprecher et al, 2013) has typically show that the level of self-disclosure received in a romantic relationship was a better predictor of liking and loving than the level of self-disclosure that is given.
  - Sprecher’s research also found that self-disclosure was positively related to relationship stability.
  - Sprecher found that in 50 dating couples, that the amount of overall disclosure in the relationship was predictive of whether the couples stayed together for longer than four years.
DIFFERENT TYPES OF SELF-DISCLOSURE

- Self-disclosure takes many forms
  - E.g. disclosing one’s taste in music or one’s inner fears and fantasies are quite different
- Researchers have found that it is not self-disclosure so to speak that predicts relationship satisfaction, but the type of self-disclosure
- Sprecher (1987) found that disclosure of, for example experiences of personal disappointments and accomplishments, and information about previous sexual relationships, have a greater influence on relationship satisfaction than more “neutral” types of self-disclosure
NORMS OF SELF-DISCLOSURE

- There is a **norm** that people should engage in only a moderately personal level of self-disclosure in the early stages of a relationship.
- Derlega and Grzelak (1979) suggest that **these should be neither so personal** that the discloser appears indiscriminate for disclosing them to a relative stranger, **nor so impersonal** that the listener is unable to know the discloser better as a result.
- The norm of reciprocity governs much of our social behaviour, i.e. **people expect others to return the services they provide**, be it money, favours or, in romantic relationships, self-disclosure.
- There is considerable evidence (e.g. Berg and Archer, 1980) that people possess a norm of reciprocity concerning self-disclosure.
- **The more one person discloses to another, the more disclosure is expected in return.**
SPRECHER ET AL (2013)

PROCEDURE

• Participants were 156 undergraduate students at a US university paired into two-person dyads (pair of persons in an interactional situation, e.g. a patient and therapist, a woman and her husband)
• Around two-thirds of these dyads were female-female and one third male-female
• Each dyad of unacquainted individuals engaged in a self-disclosure task over Skype
• In the **reciprocal condition** dyad members immediately took turns asking questions and disclosing
• In the **non-reciprocal condition**, one person asked questions in the first interaction while the other person disclosed
• Then the two switched roles for the second interaction (i.e. extended reciprocity)
• After each interaction, the researchers assessed liking, closeness, perceived similarity, and enjoyment of the interaction
FINDINGS

• Individuals in the reciprocal condition dyads reported more liking, closeness, perceived similarity and enjoyment of the interaction than did those in the non-reciprocal dyads after the first interaction.

• This difference remained after participants in non-reciprocal dyads switched disclosure roles during the second interaction.

• This showed that turn-taking self-disclosure reciprocity is more likely to lead to positive interpersonal outcomes than is extended reciprocity.
EVALUATION OF SELF-DISCLOSURE
Collins and Miller’s (1994) meta-analysis supports the role that self-disclosure plays in the development and maintenance of romantic relationships. They found that people who engage in intimate disclosures tend to be more liked than people who disclose at lower levels. They also found that the relationship between disclosures and liking was stronger if the recipient believed that the disclosure was shared only with them.
Researchers have suggested that relationships formed over the Internet involve higher levels of self-disclosure and attraction than in face-to-face relationships. As individuals are communicating over the Internet are often anonymous, this greater psychological comfort may lead them to reveal more information about themselves. Cooper and Sportolari (1997) refer to this as the “boom and bust” phenomenon. When people reveal more about themselves earlier than they would in a face-to-face interaction, relationships get intense very quickly (boom). However, as the underlying trust and true knowledge of the other person are not there to support the relationship, it becomes difficult to sustain (bust).
Tal-Or and Hershman-Shitrit (2015) showed that the relationship between gradual self-disclosure and attraction applies not only to real-life romantic relationships, but also to liking reality TV contestants.

- Such shows (like Big Brother) tend to be characterised by the very intimate self-disclosure of contestants early on in the show.
- This rapid self-disclosure appears to conflict with what happens in everyday interactions (where they would evolve gradually).
- They also discovered that although viewers liked characters who make early intimate disclosures, they still preferred this to evolve gradually and become more intimate, as in real relationships.
Knop et al (2016) challenges the assumption that people self-disclose more in online relationships than in face-to-face relationships.

- They found that members of a social group disclose personal information more often in face-to-face than online interactions and also disclose more intimate information.
- It seems that people do not reveal personal information online as much as expected.
- They suggest that this may be due to the relative lack of intimacy on the Internet as a context for personal disclosures.
- A person who is disclosing appreciated non-verbal cues such as eye contact and attentive silence of someone they are disclosing to (which are both absent in the online environment).
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN PATTERNS OF SELF-DISCLOSURE

- In the **West**, people generally engage in more intimate self-disclosure than non-Westerners
  - E.g. Americans disclose more than Chinese or Japanese (Chen, 1995)

- Cultural norms also shape how comfortable people are in self-disclosing
  - E.g. Nakanishi (1986) found that **Japanese women prefer a lower level of personal conversations** than Japanese men
  - This is opposite to the self-disclosure patterns typically found in the West, where **women prefer more disclosure than men**

  **This suggests** the importance of self-disclosure as an aspect of attraction is moderated by the influence of culture
ATTRACTION: FILTER THEORY
The “filter theory” of attraction (Kerckhoff and Davis, 1962) suggests that we choose romantic relationships by using a series of filters that narrow down the “field of availables” from which we may choose from:

- This theory says that different filters are important at different stages of partner selection.
  - During the early stages = demographic similarities (e.g. class, religion, where they live) are likely to be most important in initiating a relationship.
  - As the relationship develops = similar attitudes and underlying values become more important in deciding if the relationship continues.
  - Lastly, partners are assessed in their compatibility (e.g. whether their personality traits complement their own traits).
SociaL Demography

• This refers to variables like age, social background and geographical location which determine the likelihood of individual’s meeting in the first place.

• Social circumstances reduce the range of people that are realistically available for us to meet.

• The range is already fairly restricted as we are more likely to come into contact with people from our own ethnic, social and educational groups, and those that live near us.
  • These are the people we feel similar to and so more at ease with.

• Therefore, we find them more attractive because we have more in common with them.

• In this first filtering stage, attraction has more to do with social rather than individual characteristics.
The second filter involves individuals’ psychological characteristics, specifically their agreement on attitudes and basic values.

Kerckhoff and Davis found that similar attitudes and values was of central importance at the start of a relationship and the best predictor of the relationship becoming stable.

Through their disclosures to each other, individuals are able to weigh up their decisions about whether to continue or terminate their relationship.

Those who are very different are not considered suitable for a continuing relationship, and so are “filtered out” from the field of possible long-term partners.
The final filter involves the assessment of complementarity of needs. People who have different needs like each other because they provide each other with mutual satisfaction of these opposed needs. This is important in finding a partner as a person who complements them ensures that their own needs are likely to be met. E.g. young women who may lack economic resources may feel attracted to older men who are a good financial prospect and therefore may be good providers.
FILTER THEORY

COMPLEMENTARITY OF NEEDS

• Winch’s (1958) investigation of 25 married couples in the US suggested that “social needs” (like dominance and respect) should be complimentary rather than similar if marriages are to work.
• If one partner was low in a particularly attribute then the other should be high.
• This is not the same as suggesting that “opposites attract”, but rather that in long-term relationships people are attracted to others whose needs are matching their own rather than conflicting them.
Kerckhoff and Davis (1962)

Procedure

- A longitudinal study of 94 dating couples at Duke University in the US
- Each partner in the couple completed two questionnaires assessing the degree to which they shared attitudes and values and the degree of need complementarity
- 7 months after the initial testing, the couples completed a further questionnaire assessing how close they felt to their partner compared to how they felt at the beginning of the study
- The researchers believed that this would indicate “progress toward permanence” in the relationship
FINDINGS

- In the initial analysis of the results, only similarity seemed to be related to partner closeness.
- However, when they divided the couples into short-term (dated for less than 18 months) and long-term (dated for more than 18 months) a difference was found:
  - Short-term = similarity of attitudes and values was the most significant predictor of how close they felt to their partner.
  - Long-term = complementarity of needs was predictive of how close each individual felt to their partner.
EVALUATION OF FILTER THEORY
Levinger et al (1970) failed to replicate the results of the Kerckhoff and Davis study.

- They carried out the same procedures but found no evidence that either similarity of attitudes and values or complementarity of needs influenced progress towards permanence in relationships.
- They also found no significant relationship between the length of couples’ relationships and the influence of these different variables.
- Levinger et al suggested the reason why they failed to replicate the findings of Kerckhoff and Davis was that the questionnaires used in the original study would not have been appropriate given the changes in social values and courtship patterns that had occurred between the two studies (8 years apart).
Duck (1973) suggests that the real value of the filtering process is that it allows people to predict their future interactions and so avoid investing in a relationship that “won’t work”.

Duck claims that people use a variety of different strategies to gather information about each other (from encouraging a partner’s self-disclosure by questioning through to provoking disagreement about a topic to “get at” a person’s real feelings).

- Based on these exchanges, partners may decide to continue with the relationship or decide that it won’t work and so end it before becoming too deeply involved with the other person.

Filtering, therefore, stops people making the wrong choice and then having to live with the consequences.
Research has generally supported the importance of attitudinal similarity in attraction (i.e. sharing common attitudes) (Byrne et al, 1970).

Some researchers have found that perceived similarity predicts attraction more strongly than does actual similarity (Hoyle, 1993).

Tidwell et al (2013) tested this claim in a speed-dating event, where decisions were made over a shorter time span. After measuring the actual and perceived similarity using a questionnaire, the researchers found that perceived but not actual similarity predicted romantic liking for these couples.
Research by Dijkstra and Barelds (2008) found that although initially participants indicated that they desired a complementary partner rather than a similar one, there were strong correlations between individual’s own personality and their ideal partner’s personality

+ Suggesting they preferred partners to be similar

This lends support to the similarity-attraction hypothesis rather than the complementarity of needs hypothesis
Kerckhoff and Davis’ filter theory assumes that relationships progress when partners discover shared attitudes and values with their partner and the possession of needs that complement their own.

However, these are constantly changing over time and, in many instances, people are not aware of their partners’ values, needs or role preferences.

- E.g. Thornton and Young-DeMarco (2001) found evidence of changing attitudes toward relationships in young American adults over a period of a few decades.
- This included a weakening of the normative imperative to marry, to stay married and to have children; a more relaxed attitude towards cohabitation and more open attitudes toward gender roles in marriage.
SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY
There is an assumption that all social behaviour is a series of exchanges (individuals attempt to maximise their rewards and minimise their costs).

In our society, people exchange resources with the expectation (or hope) that they will earn a “profit” (i.e. that rewards will exceed the costs incurred):

- Rewards in a relationship may be companionship, being cared for, sex, etc.
- Costs in a relationship may be effort, financial investment, time wasted, etc.

Rewards minus costs equal the outcome (profit or loss) for that relationship.

Social exchange, in line with other “economic” theories of human behaviour, stresses that commitment to a relationship is dependent on the profitability of this outcome.
In order to judge whether one person offers something better or worse than we might expect from another, Thibaut and Kelley (1959) proposed that we develop a comparison level (a standard against which all our relationships are judged).

Our comparison level (CL) is a product of our experiences in other relationships together with our general views of what we might expect from this particular exchange.

If we judge that the potential profit in a new relationship exceeds our CL, then that relationship will be judged as worthwhile and the other person will be seen as attractive as a partner.

If the final result is negative, then the relationship with that person will be seen as less attractive.
• Someone who has previously had unpleasant/unsatisfying relationships, may have very low CL and so may be happy in a poor relationship.

• Someone who has previously had very rewarding relationships (high CL) would have high expectations for the quality of future relationships (and so would leave any relationship that does not meet these high expectations).

• A romantic relationship is likely to have a greater degree of solidarity if both partners’ outcomes or perceived profits are above their CL.
Assessed profit received from a relationship relative to the CL is not the only factor that determines the likelihood of them staying in that relationship.

A related concept is the comparison level for alternatives (CLA), where the person weighs up a potential increase in rewards from a different partner, minus any costs associated with ending the current relationship.

A new relationship can take the place of the current one if its anticipated profit level is significantly higher.
COMPARISON LEVEL FOR ALTERNATIVES

- An individual will be committed to their current relationship when the overall benefits and costs are perceived as being greater than what might be possible in an alternative relationship (or having no relationship).
- If these alternative options are more appealing, there will be a temptation for the individual to leave their current relationship and start a new one elsewhere.
- The more rewarding a partner’s alternatives, the less is that individual’s dependence on their current relationship.
- Relationships may then become less stable if one (or both) of the partners has a low level of dependence on that relationship (Kurdek, 1993).
- As a result, partners who differ in their degree of dependence may experience distress because one or both of them lacks commitment to that relationship.
They investigated the importance of social exchange factors in determining relationship quality in 185 couples:

- 44 heterosexual married couples
- 35 co-habiting heterosexual couples
- 50 same-sex male couples
- 56 same-sex female couples

Each couple lived together and did not have children living with them.

Each couple completed a questionnaire without discussing their answers with each other.
KURDEK AND SCHMITT (1986)

FINDINGS

- For each of the four different types of couple, greater relationship satisfaction was associated with:
  1. The perception of many benefits of the current relationship (CL)
  2. Seeing alternatives to the current relationship as less attractive (CLA)

- These findings show that the factors that predict satisfaction in same-sex relationships are the same ones that predict satisfaction in heterosexual relationships
EVALUATION OF SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY
Sprecher’s (2001) study showed that the presence of alternatives was consistently and negatively correlated with both commitment and relationship satisfaction for both genders.

In other words, in relationships where the comparison level for alternatives was high; commitment to, and satisfaction with the current relationship tended to be low.

Sprecher suggests that it is not surprising as **those who lack alternatives are likely to remain committed (and satisfied), but those who are satisfied and committed to their relationship are more likely to devalue alternatives**.
THE PROBLEM OF COSTS AND BENEFITS

What might be considered rewarding to one person (e.g. constant attention and praise) may be punishing to another (e.g. it may be perceived as irritating).

Also, **what might be seen as a benefit at one stage of the relationship may be seen as a cost at another stage** (as partners may redefine something previously seen as rewarding as now being punishing).

This suggests that it is **difficult to classify all events in such simple terms as “costs” or “benefits”,** and challenges the view that all romantic relationships operate in this way.
Nakonezny and Denton (2008) argue that, for social exchange to be relevant to personal relationships, individuals must have some way of quantifying the value of the costs and benefits in order to assess whether benefits received outweigh costs incurred.

They point out that not only is value difficult to determine but so is the relative value of costs and benefits (as they tend to be different).

So the Social Exchange Theory is less accurate in explaining more personal relationships.
OVEREMPHASIS ON COSTS AND BENEFITS

A reliance on profitable outcomes as an indication of relationship satisfaction ignores other factors.

An individual’s own relational beliefs may make them more tolerant of a relatively low ratio of benefits to costs within their relationship.

They may recognise the costs but put up with them and continue to provide benefits for their partner.

So, social exchange alone cannot explain relationship satisfaction without also considering individual differences in relational standards and benefits.
Gottman and Levenson (1992) found that, in successful marriages, the ratio of positive to negative exchanges was 5:1, but 1:1 or less in unsuccessful marriages.

A primary goal of Integrated Behavioural Couples Therapy (IBCT) is to increase the proportion of positive exchanges within a relationship and decrease the negative ones.

Christensen et al (2004) found two-thirds of couples reported significant improvements in the quality of their relationships after using IBCT.
EQUITY THEORY
INEQUITY AND DISSATISFACTION

- All social behaviour is a series of exchanges, with individuals attempting to maximise their rewards and minimise their costs.
- Equity theory suggests that people are most comfortable when they perceive that they are getting roughly what they deserve from any given relationship.
- **So an equitable relationship should be one where one partner’s benefits minus their costs equals their partner’s benefits less their costs.**
- Relationships that lack equity are associated with distinct types of dissatisfaction:
  - If people feel over-benefited, they may experience pity, guilt and shame.
  - If people feel under-benefited, they may experience anger, sadness and resentment.
- The greater the inequity, the greater the dissatisfaction and stress, and the more they are motivated to do something about it.
Schafer and Keith (1980) surveyed hundreds of married couples of all ages, noting those who felt their marriages were inequitable because of an unfair division of domestic responsibilities.

During the child-rearing years, wives often reported feeling under-benefited and husbands over-benefited.

As a result, marital satisfaction tended to dip.

During the honeymoon (when newly married) and after children had left home, both husbands and wives were more likely to perceive equity and to feel satisfaction with their marriages.
Hatfield and Rapson (2011) suggest that how couples are concerned with reward and equity depends on the stage of their relationship.

- When couples are in the initial stages, considerations of reward, fairness and equity are important.
- Once they become deeply committed to each other, they become less concerned about day-to-day reward and equity.

They suggest that happily married people tend not to keep score of how much they are giving and getting.

Couples in equitable relationships are also less likely to risk extramarital affairs than their peers, and their relationships are generally longer lasting than those of their peers (Byers and Wang, 2004).
They were interested in how equity and satisfaction predicted the use of maintenance strategies typically used in marriage.

They asked over 200 married couples to complete measures of equity and relationship satisfaction.

In addition, each spouse was asked questions about their use of maintenance strategies like assurances (emphasising affection and commitment to the relationship), sharing tasks (sharing household responsibilities and chores), and positivity (communicating in an upbeat and optimistic manner).
Satisfaction was highest for spouses who perceived their relationship to be equitable, followed by over-benefited partners and then under-benefited partners.

Under-benefited husbands reported significantly lower levels of relationship maintenance strategies compared to equitable or over-benefited husbands.

The relationship between equity and marital happiness appeared to be complementarity.

Spouses who were treated equitably tended to be happier and so were more likely to engage in behaviours that contributed to their spouse’s sense of equity and happiness.
DEALING WITH INEQUITY

• If people perceive inequity in their relationships, then they are motivated to restore it
• Hatfield and Rapson (2011) suggest that this can be achieved in three different ways:
  1. Restoration of actual equity – Individuals can restore equity by voluntarily setting things right or by urging their partners to do so
  2. Restoration of psychological equity – Couples in inequitable relationships can distort reality and convince themselves that things are perfectly fair just the way they are
  3. If couples are unable to restore equity in their relationship, they can leave it – This can be physically (i.e. divorce) or emotionally (i.e. no longer having feelings for their partner)
EVALUATION OF EQUITY THEORY
Not everyone is equally sensitive to equity and inequity, nor do they experience the same level of tension when they perceive inequity.

Huseman et al (1987) developed the idea of equity sensitivity (the extent to which an individual will tolerate inequity).

Huseman identified 3 categories of individuals: benevolents, equity sensitives and entitleds.

- Are “givers” and more tolerant of inequity.
- Experience tension when faced with inequity.
- Prefer to be over-rewarded and feel that they are owed and so entitled. So are dissatisfied when under-rewarded.
GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUITY

DeMaris et al (2010) suggest that **women** tend to perceive themselves as more under-benefited and less over-benefited in relationships, compared to men.

**Women** are more disturbed by being under-benefited than men.

Sprecher (1992) found that **women** feel more guilt than men in response to being over-benefited.

DeMaris suggest reasons for these gender differences include **women’s** greater relationship focus may make them more sensitive to injustices and more likely to act negatively to being exploited.

An increased emphasis on gender equality in modern marriage may lead to **women** being more reactive to relationship inequity.
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUITY

Most research on equity has been carried out in Western cultures and so may not be as important in non-Western cultures.

Aumer-Ryan et al (2006) found that, in all the cultures they studied, people considered it important that a relationship/marriage should be equitable (but cultures differed in terms of how equitable they considered their relationship to be).

Men and women from the US claimed to be in the most equitable relationships. Both men and women from Jamaica (especially women) claimed to be in the least equitable relationships.
Brosnan and de Waal (2003) found that, in capuchin monkeys, females became very angry if they were denied a highly prized reward of grapes in return for playing a game. If another monkey (who had not played the game) received the grapes instead, the capuchins grew so angry that they threw food at the experimenter. 

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KSryJXDpZo

Brosnan et al. (2005) found that chimpanzees were more upset by injustice in casual relationships than in close, intimate relationships.

These studies replicate the findings in human relationships and suggest that the perception of inequity has ancient origins.
Clark (1984) argues that, in most relationships, couples do not think in terms of reward and equity. If they do, it is a sign that their marriage is in trouble. According to this perspective, dissatisfaction with a relationship is the cause, not the consequences of inequity (i.e. dissatisfaction causes inequity).

However, Van Yperen and Buunk (1990) found that people in inequitable marriages became less satisfied over the course of a year (i.e. inequity causes dissatisfaction).

When marriages are faltering, partners become preoccupied with the inequities of the relationship, and this can then lead to relationship ending.
THE INVESTMENT MODEL OF RELATIONSHIPS
SATISFACTION LEVEL

• This refers to the positive vs negative emotions experienced within a relationship and is influenced by the extent to which the other person fulfils the individual’s most important needs

• E.g. a partner may feel satisfied to the degree that the other partner gratifies their domestic, companionate and sexual needs.
QUALITY OF ALTERNATIVES

- This refers to the extent to which an individual’s important needs might be better fulfilled outside the current relationship.
- Perceiving that an attractive alternative might provide superior outcomes to those experienced in the current relationship might lead an individual toward that alternative and away from the current relationship.
- However, if alternatives are not present, an individual may persist with a relationship because of a lack of better options.
- Attractive alternatives do not have to be other people, as in some cases, having no relationship may be seen as a more attractive option than staying in the current relationship.
INVESTMENT SIZE

- Rusbult proposed that investment size also contributed to the stability of a relationship.
- Investment size is a measure of all the resources that are attached to the relationship, and which would diminish in value or be lost if the relationship ended.
  - E.g. partners invest time and energy into a relationship, they share each other’s friends, take on shared possessions or give things of value to each other.
- Partners make these investments expecting that by doing so, it will create a strong foundation for a lasting future together.
- Investments increase dependence on the relationship as they increase connections with the partner that would be costly to break.
- As a result, investments create a powerful psychological incentive to persist with a relationship.
COMMITMENT LEVEL

• Commitment is used to describe the likelihood that an involvement will persist

• **Commitment is high** in romantic partners who are happy with their relationship
  • I.e. they have high levels of satisfaction
  • They anticipate low levels of gain and high loss if they left the relationship (so the quality of alternatives is low and investment is high)

• **Commitment is low** when satisfaction levels and investment in the relationship are both low and the quality of alternatives is high

• When people are satisfied with their relationship, feel tied to it due to investments or have no suitable alternatives; they become dependent on that relationship

• **Commitment, therefore, is a consequence of increasing dependence**
KEY STUDY: LE AND AGNEW (2003)

PROCEDURE

• Meta-analysis of 52 studies conducted between the late 1970s and the late 1990s
• Each of these studies had explored the different components of the investment model and the relation between them
• Total sample of over 11,000 participants (54% male; 46% female) from 5 countries (USA, UK, Netherlands, Israel and Taiwan)
KEY STUDY: LE AND AGNEW (2003)

FINDINGS

• Across all the studies, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives and investment size were highly correlated with relationship commitment.

• The correlation between:
  • Satisfaction level and commitment (0.68)
  • Quality of alternatives and commitment (-0.48)
  • Investment size and commitment (0.46)

• So satisfaction level and commitment was found to be significantly stronger than the other measures.

• The correlation between commitment and stay or leave behaviours was also significant, with individuals showing higher levels of commitment being more likely to stay in the relationship and those with lower levels more likely to leave.
**Key Terms**

- **Commitment** = The likelihood that an individual will persist with their current relationship. It is a product of high satisfaction and investment in the relationship and low quality of alternatives.

- **Investment** = A measure of all the resources attached to the relationship (e.g. financial, shared children), which would be lost if the relationship were to end.

- **Investment Model** = An explanation of relationship stability that emphasises the importance of three factors (satisfaction, investment size and quality of alternative) in determining relationship commitment, which in turn predicts relationship stability.

- **Quality of Alternatives/Comparison with Alternatives** = An individual’s assessment of whether their needs might be better fulfilled by somebody other than their current partner.

- **Satisfaction** = A measure of the degree to which the current partner gratifies/fulfils a person’s important needs.
EVALUATION OF THE INVESTMENT MODEL OF RELATIONSHIPS
**RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR THE INVESTMENT MODEL**

- Le et al’s (2010) meta-analysis supported the importance of commitment as an indicator in relationship stability
  - 38,000 participants analysed in 137 studies over 33 year-period
  - They looked at the staying or leaving behaviour in non-marital romantic relationships
- **Commitment (or lack of it) was a strong predictor of whether a relationship would break up** (in line with Rusbult’s investment model)
- Satisfaction, quality of alternatives and investments were reasonable predictors of staying in or leaving the relationship
PROBLEMS IN MEASURING THE VARIABLES OF THE INVESTMENT MODEL

• One problem with the investment model is that it is difficult to measure commitment and the other variables (satisfaction level, investment size and quality of alternatives)

• Rusbult et al (1998) developed the “Investment Model Scale” to overcome this problem

• They showed this scale to be high in both reliability and validity in the measurement of these variables and have shown it to be suitable for a wide variety of different populations

  • One potential problem is that the scale relies on self-report measures, which often have problems with respondents wanting to present themselves in good light

  • Although this raises the concern of biased findings from using these methods, it would be very difficult to measure such a subjective state as commitment in any other way
REAL-WORLD APPLICATION: EXPLAINING ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

• The investment model is able to explain why individuals may persist in a relationship with an abusive partner.
• Victims of partner abuse experience low satisfaction, which would lead us to predict that they would leave the abusive partner, but they stay.
• The investment model highlights features of the relationship that would explain why a victim of abuse might remain in the relationship.
  • E.g. due to a lack of alternatives, too much invested with that partner, making ending it too costly.
• Rusbult and Martz (1995) revealed that alternatives and investments were a strong indication of whether battered women at a shelter remained committed to and returned to their partner.
Goodfriend and Agnew (2008) elaborated on the original investment model. They suggest that the notion of “investment” should include not only things that have already been invested in the relationship, but also any plans that partners have made regarding the relationship (e.g. having children). As a result, some relationships persist, not because of the current balance of investments made, but due to motivation to see cherished future plans being achieved. This provides evidence that future plans were strongly predictive of commitment in romantic relationships, over and above past investments.
A strength of Rusbult’s investment model is that its main claims have been shown to be true across many different populations and in many different types of relationship:

- E.g. that commitment is positively associated with satisfaction level and investment size and is negatively associated with quality of alternatives

- For example, research has supported the relevance of the investment model across different cultures (e.g. USA, Netherlands and Taiwan), and in a variety of different participant populations (e.g. marital and non-marital relationships, gay and lesbian relationships, friendships and abusive relationships)
RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN
A MODEL OF BREAKDOWN (Duck, 1982)

1. BREAKDOWN
2. INTRAPSYCHIC PHASE
3. DYADIC PHASE
4. SOCIAL PHASE
5. GRAVE-DRESSING PHASE
A MODEL OF BREAKDOWN (Duck, 1982)

BREAKDOWN
• Dissatisfaction with the relationship
• Threshold = I can’t stand this anymore

INTRAPSYCHIC PHASE
• Social withdrawal, “rumination” resentment (reflection of dislike)
  • Brooding on a partner’s “faults” and relational “costs”
  • Re-evaluation of alternatives to relationship
  • Threshold = I’d be justified in withdrawing

DYADIC PHASE
• Uncertainty, hostility, anxiety, complaints
  • Discussion of issues
• Talk about “our relationship”; equity, roles
  • Reassessment of goals, possibilities, commitments
  • Threshold = I mean it
A MODEL OF BREAKDOWN (DUCK, 1982)

SOCIAL PHASE
- Going public, seeking support from third parties
  - Criticism of partner, alliance building
  - Social commitment, outside forces create cohesion
    - Threshold = It’s now inevitable

GRAVE-DRESSING PHASE
- Tidying up memories, making relational histories
  - Stories prepared for different audiences
    - Saving face
  - Threshold = Time to get a new life
BREAKDOWN

• This begins when one of the partners becomes distressed with the way the relationship is conducted
• Inequitable relationships are more likely to create dissatisfaction than equitable relationships
• So this realisation that the person is no longer willing or able to stand this dissatisfaction may be the first step in the eventual breakdown of the relationship
INTRAPSYCHIC PHASE

- Dissatisfaction leads to this phase and is characterised by a worrying focus on the relationship and a consideration of whether they might be better off out of this relationship.
- The individual feels burdened by feelings of resentment and a sense of being under-benefitted.
- During this phase, the individual may not say anything about their dissatisfaction to their partner, but may express their discontentment in other ways (e.g. personal diary, social withdrawal).
- Some people will end relationships without ever discussing this dissatisfaction with their partner.
- The promises of “I’ll call you” or “let’s stay friends” often disguise a deeper dissatisfaction with the other person as a romantic partner.
DYADIC PHASE

Here, individuals confront their partners and begin to discuss their feelings, their discontentment and the future of the relationship.

- Feelings of guilt and anger are likely to surface as part of these discussions.
- They may well discover that the partner also has concerns to air.

At this point, couples may become aware of the forces that bind them together (e.g. children and other investments made in the relationship) and the costs that would be incurred (e.g. the social and economic costs) should the relationship end.

At this stage, the relationship might be saved if both partners are motivated to resolve the issues and so avoid a breakup.

- At this point many couples seek marital therapy in the hope that it may save their relationship.
- Alternatively, the partners begin to involve others in their dissatisfaction with the relationship.
SOCIAL PHASE

• Up to this point, partners might have kept their dissatisfaction fairly private, but now it spills over to a network of friends and family.

• This is a crucial psychological moment, as the distress experienced by one or both partners is now made public.

• This makes it harder for the two partners to deny that there really is a problem with their relationship and also harder for them to subsequently bring about a reconciliation/resolution.

• Others may take sides, offer advice and support, or may help in mending any disputes between the two sides.

• The involvement of others may even speed the partners toward dissolution through revelations about one or other of the partners’ behaviour.
**GRAVE-DRESSING PHASE**

- Once they have left the relationship, partners attempt to justify their actions.
- This grave-dressing is important, as each partner must present themselves to others as being trustworthy and loyal (key attributes if they are to attract a new partner).
- Partners try to paint a representation of the failed relationship that does not show their contribution to it in unfavourable terms.
- La Gaipa (1982) says that every person who leaves a relationship has to leave with their “social credit” intact for future use.
  - At this point, individuals may also strategically reinterpret their view of the partner (e.g. they may have initially been attracted to their “rebellious” nature, but now label that characteristic as “irresponsible”).
- Topics in grave-dressing are likely to be stories about the betrayal of one partner by the other, or telling the story of two people who worked hard on a relationship but eventually found that it simply wasn’t worth the effort.
EVALUATION OF RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN
Duck (2005) acknowledged that his 1982 model failed to reflect the possibility of relational growth following breakdown.

A new model was introduced with a final phase, the “resurrection processes” (Rollie and Duck, 2006).

Duck stressed that this was an opportunity to move beyond the distress associated with the ending of the relationship and engages in the process of personal growth.

Tashiro and Frazier (2003) supported this with 92 undergraduates who had recently broken up with a romantic partner.

Respondents typically reported that they had not only experienced emotional distress but also personal growth (as predicted by Rollie and Duck’s updated model).
THE IMPACT OF THE SOCIAL PHASE VARIES BY TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP

- Duck (2005) suggests that the nature and impact of the social phase experienced during breakup depends on the sort of relationship that is involved
  - E.g. for teenagers and young adults, romantic relationships are seen as more unstable than long-term adult relationships and are also seen by others as being “testing grounds” for future long-term commitment
  - As a result, individuals may receive sympathy but no real attempt at reconciliation from their friends as there are “plenty more fish in the sea”
- Older people in longer-term relationships, however, have lower expectations of being able to find a replacement for the present partner (Dickson, 1995)
- The consequences of a breakup in such cases are more significant
  - Therefore, the social processes phase may be characterised by more obvious attempts by others to rescue the current relationship
**BENEFITS OF THE GRAVE-DRESSING PHASE**

- Research supports the importance of the grave-dressing phase in dealing with the after-effects of relationship breakdown.
- **Monroe et al (1999)** found that students who experienced the end of a romantic relationship in the previous year had a greater risk of developing a major depressive disorder for the first time.
- However, **Tashiro and Frazier (2003)** found that individuals are able to feel better about ending a relationship when they focus on how the situation, rather than their own flaws, was responsible for the break up.
- The benefit of this phase therefore, is that the individual is able to create stories that play down their role in the breakup and so do not threaten their psychological well-being.
Carrying out research in this sensitive area raises particular issues of vulnerability (feeling distressed thinking about the breakdown of a relationship), privacy (many issues are intensely personal) and confidentiality (especially for victims of an abusive relationship).

Here the benefits of undertaking such research must outweigh the risks, especially with the participants involved.

This is very difficult when dealing with vulnerable individuals trying to cope with trauma and emotional distress linked to a breakup.
REAL-WORLD APPLICATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTION

• Duck’s model stresses the importance of communication in relationship breakdown

• Paying attention to the things that people say, the topics that they discuss and the way they talk about their relationship offers both an insight onto how they are thinking about their relationship and also suggests appropriate interventions by friends and family

• If the relationship was in the intrapsychic process phase, repair might involve re-establishing liking for the partner, maybe by re-evaluating their behaviour in a more positive light

• In the later phases of the model, different strategies of repair are appropriate
  • E.g. in the social processes phase, people outside the relationship may help the partners to patch up their differences
VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS IN SOCIAL MEDIA
SELF-DISCLOSURE IN VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Jourard (1971) proposed the concept of “broadcasting self-disclosure” to explain the difference between disclosure to a romantic partner and the sharing of personal information in a public situation.
- Self-disclosure in the public domain involves the individual presenting an “edited” version of the self to others.
- Individuals using social networks (e.g. Facebook) exercise different levels of self-disclosure depending on if they are presenting information publically or privately.
- People feel more secure about disclosing intimate and sensitive information in private as they have control over the disclosure to a selected individual.
- However, when sharing self-disclosures in more visible ways with a wider audience, people are more selective over the content, revealing information that is less private and less intimate.
- Therefore, people compensate for the lack of control over the target audience by exercising increased control on what information the audience has access to.
SELF-DISCLOSURE IN VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

WHY DO PEOPLE SELF-DISCLOSE MORE ON THE INTERNET?

• The reason why people self-disclose more on the internet than face-to-face is largely due to the psychological effects of anonymity.

• Individuals tend not to self-disclose with one another until they are confident that the information will remain confidential.
  • The dangers with this are that confidentiality may be violated or the other person may respond negatively to the disclosure, leading to ridicule or rejection.

• The relative anonymity of the internet reduces the risks of such disclosure as people can share their inner thoughts and feelings with much less fear of disapproval from the other person.
  • So self-disclosures with online acquaintances are similar to the “strangers on a train” phenomenon (Rubin, 1975).
  • We are more likely to disclose personal information to people we don’t know and will never see again.
  • And the stranger does not have access to an individual’s social circle.
AGENCE OF GATING IN VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

GATING IN FACE-TO-FACE RELATIONSHIPS

- In face-to-face relationships, personal factors (e.g. physical appearance, mannerisms) tend to determine whom we approach (and so whom we develop romantic relationships with).
- We use available features (e.g. attractiveness, age, ethnicity, etc) to categorise potential partners before making a decision about if we would like a relationship with them.
- In online relationships there are no barriers or “gates” that normally limit the opportunities for less attractive, shy or less socially skilled to form relationships in face-to-face situations.
ABSENCE OF GATING IN VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

ABSENCE OF GATING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

• Online, the barriers to interaction are not initially evident due to anonymity and so are less likely to stop potential relationships from getting off the ground

• A consequence of removing the traditional gating features is that a person’s true self is more likely to be active in internet relationships than in face-to-face interactions
  • I.e. they are not judged before someone gets to know them
ABSENCE OF GATING IN VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

ABSENCE OF GATING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

• Zhao et al (2008) found that online social networks can empower “gated” individuals to present the identities that they hope to establish but are unable to in face-to-face situations.

• The reduction of gating obstacles in the online environment also enables people to “stretch the truth a bit” in their efforts to project a self that is more socially desirable than their real “offline” identity.

• Yurchisin et al (2005) interviewed 11 online daters and found that they tended to give accounts to both their real and better selves in dating profiles as a way to attract potential partners.
  • Some even admitted that they would steal other daters’ ideas or copy other people’s images to make themselves more popular.

• Yurchisin did, however, find that most online identities were still close to a person’s true identity in order to avoid unpleasant surprises in a possible real-life encounter.
EVALUATION OF VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS IN SOCIAL MEDIA
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERNET FOR ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

- Rosenfield and Thomas (2012) demonstrated the importance of the internet and social media in helping individuals to form and maintain relationships.
  - In 4,000 US adults, they found that those with internet access at home were far more likely to have a partner.
  - Of these 4,000 individuals, 71.8% of those who had internet access at home had a spouse/romantic partner.
  - Those who did not have internet access at home the figure was 35.9%.
  - Even after controlling other important variables (e.g. age, gender, education, sexual preference, religion), individuals with internet access were twice as likely to have a partner.

- This research suggests that the internet may be displacing rather than simply complementing the traditional ways of meeting a romantic partner.
VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS CAN BE AS STRONG AS OFFLINE RELATIONSHIPS

- It is often claimed that the nature of internet communication is such that it can only lead to superficial relationships that cannot compare with the richness of face-to-face relationships (Putnam, 2000)
  - E.g. it is believed that relationships formed online are of lower quality and more temporary than relationships formed in more traditional ways
- However, Rosenfield and Thomas (2012) found no evidence to support this claim
  - They found no difference in the quality of online and offline relationships, nor did they find that online relationships were more fragile than those offline
Tamir and Mitchell (2012) found evidence of a biological basis for the motivation to self-disclose on social media. They found an increased MRI activity in two brain regions that are associated with reward (nucleus accumbens and ventral tegmental area).

- These areas were strongly activated when people were talking about themselves, and less so when talking about others.

They also found that participants in their study experienced a greater sensation of pleasure when sharing their thoughts with a friend or family member, and less pleasure when they were told their thoughts would be kept private.

These findings suggest that the human tendency to share our personal experiences with others over social media may arise from the rewarding nature of self-disclosure.
A BIOLOGICAL BASIS FOR SELF-DISCLOSURE ON FACEBOOK
Baker and Oswald (2010) argue that virtual relationships are particularly helpful for shy people. Through social media sites they are able to overcome the barriers they face when trying to form relationships in real life. Baker and Oswald surveyed 207 male and female students about their shyness, Facebook usage and the quality of their friendships. For students who scored high for shyness, greater use of Facebook was associated with higher perceptions of friendship quality. For those who scored low for shyness, Facebook usage was not associated with the perception of friendship quality. This demonstrates that shy individuals find particular value in virtual relationships.
VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS HAVE CONSEQUENCES FOR OFFLINE RELATIONSHIPS

- Zhao et al (2008) claim that we **should not think of the online and offline worlds as being separate**, as relationships formed online do have consequences for people’s offline lives
  - E.g. the development of virtual relationships online allows some individuals to bypass gating obstacles and create the sort of identity that they are unable to establish in the offline world
  - Zhao et al claim that **these “digital selves” can then enhance the individual’s overall self-image** and as a result, may increase their chances to connect to others in their offline world
PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
These are one-sided relationships where one person expends considerable emotional energy, interest and time, although the other person (usually a celebrity) is completely unaware of their existence.

The extensiveness of mass media like TV and the internet gives the viewer the illusion of having a face-to-face relationship with that person/celebrity.

This association is so strong that the celebrity becomes a meaningful figure in the individual’s life and can produce a much more complex set of responses than just simple imitation.
ATTACHMENT THEOREY EXPLANATION

ATTACHMENT BEHAVIOURS IN PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Parasocial relationships may function similarly to “real-life” relationships in terms of attachment behaviours, as relationships with TV personalities exhibit to some degree the three fundamental properties of adult attachment as identified by Weiss (1991)

- **Proximity Seeking** – by reducing the distance between themselves and their attachment figure. This is exhibited by fans as part of their PSR (by collecting trivia about them, contacting them through fan letters or in person, Leets et al, 1995)

- **Secure Base** – The presence of the attachment figure provides a sense of security for the individual that allows them to explore the world. With PSR, the individual has little or no chance of rejection from the attachment figure as they are able to create a secure base where they can explore other relationships in a safe way

- **Protest at Disruption** – The best marker of an attachment may be the presence of prolonged distress following separation or loss of the attachment figure (e.g. BBC axing of Jeremy Clarkson from Top Gear in 2015)
ATTACHMENT THEORY EXPLANATION

ATTACHMENT STYLE

Cole and Leets (1999) explain why some people are more likely to develop PSRs through the concept of attachment style:

- Individuals with an **insecure-resistant attachment were most likely to enter into PSRs** with their favourite TV personalities.
- Insecure-resistant attachment is characterised by a concern that others will not reciprocate one’s desire for intimacy.
- Cole and Leets argued that those with an insecure-resistant style turn to TV character as a means of satisfying their “unrealistic” and often unmet relational needs.
- **Insecure-avoidant individuals were the least likely to enter into PSRs** with TV personalities.
- People with avoidant attachment style find it difficult to develop intimate relationships and so are less likely to seek real-life relationships or PSRs.
- They appear to avoid not only relational intimacy but imagined intimacy as well.
The reasons why people form PSRs are as varied as the reasons for forming face-to-face relationships in real life.

- E.g. this may be due to a lack of real relationships in their own life, shyness, loneliness, etc.

PSRs may be appealing for some individuals as the relationship makes few demands.

As the fans do not have a “real” relationship with the celebrity, there is little risk of criticism or rejection, which might be present in a real relationship (Ashe and McCutcheon, 2001).

Parasocial relationships are more likely to form with characters who are considered attractive by the viewer (perception of attractiveness) and are viewed as similar to the viewer (perception of homophily – a tendency to associate and bond with similar others).
THE ABSORPTION ADDICTION MODEL
THE NATURE OF PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

- According to the absorption addiction model and levels of PSR, most people never go beyond admiring celebrities; however, some go much further.

- Using the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS), Giles and Maltby (2006) identified 3 levels in this process:
  
  1. **Entertainment-social** – Fans are attracted to a favourite celebrity and will watch, keep up with, real and learn about them for the purpose of entertainment and gossip (e.g. learning the life story of their favourite celebrity is fun).
  
  2. **Intense-personal** – This involves a deeper level of involvement and reflects intensive and compulsive feelings about the celebrity, similar to the obsessive tendencies of fans often referred to in the literature (e.g. like to talk to others who admire the same favourite celebrity).
  
  3. **Borderline-pathological** – This is characterised by empathy with the celebrity (identifying with the celebrity’s success and failures), but also overidentification with the celebrity and uncontrollable behaviours and fantasies about their lives (e.g. believing that the celebrity would be pleased to see them).

Misery - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E55ni_xc4ww
Lange et al suggest that for some adolescents who are introverted in nature, a difficult set of social circumstances and a lack of meaningful relationships may lead them to become increasingly “absorbed” by the lives of these “parasocial friends”.

Absorption involves an “effortless focusing of attention” which leads to fans believe they have a special relationship with that celebrity, motivating them to learn more about them.

If the level of absorption is high enough, the person may move on to higher levels of parasocial interaction, which may lead to it becoming addictive and so leading to more extreme (and even delusional) behaviours to satisfy the parasocial relationship they have developed with the celebrity.

The PSR becomes “addictive” because of the progressively stronger involvement that is now required to remain “connected” with the celebrity.

Lange et al suggest that initially interest in celebrities and the development of a PSR is via absorption; this interest is subsequently maintained by means of psychological addiction.
EVALUATION OF PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Schiappa et al (2007) carried out a meta-analysis of studies that had explored factors that were instrumental in the formation of PSRs.

- People with higher levels of PSRs also watch more TV.
- There was a significant positive relationship between the degree to which a person perceives TV characters as being real and their tendency to form PSRs.
- The likelihood of forming PSRs with TV characters was linked to those characters’ perceived attractiveness and their similarity to the viewer.
ARE PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS LINKED TO LONELINESS?

- PSRs were initially believed to be a substitute for “real” social relationships and therefore linked to feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

- Some research (Greenwood and Long, 2009) showed that individuals may develop PSRs as a way of dealing with feelings of loneliness or loss. Other research (Chory-Assad and Yanen, 2005) found no relationship between intensity of loneliness and intensity of PSRs.

- Eyal and Cohen (2006) found a link between PSRs and intensity of loneliness experienced in a parasocial “breakup” (e.g., experienced by students following the final episode of friends).

- This suggests that PSRs may not only compensate for feelings of loneliness, but their loss can also create feelings of loneliness.
Maltby et al (2003) used the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) to assess the relationship between PSR level and personality. They found:

- **Entertainment-social level** was associated with extraversion
- **Intense-personal level** was associated with neuroticism (*as this is related to anxiety and depression, this explains why higher levels of PSR are associated with poorer mental health*)

Maltby et al suggest that future research might explore the implications of a reported connection between the **borderline-pathological level** and psychoticism as measured by the EPQ.
Cohen (2004) lends support to the claim that viewers would show the same negative response to loss of a parasocial relationship as they would to the loss of a real relationship.

- 381 adults completed questionnaires.
- Viewers expecting to lose their favourite characters anticipated negative reactions similar to those experienced after the loss of close personal relationships.
- These reactions were related both to the intensity of the PSR with the favourite character and to the viewers’ attachment style, with anxious-ambivalently attached (insecure individuals who seek approval and reassurance from others) participants anticipating the most negative response.
CULTURAL SIMILARITIES IN PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

• When watching a film or reading a book, viewers must interpret and evaluate the content based on their own cultural background.

• Schmid and Klimmt (2011) investigated whether there would be differences in the PSRs formed with the fictional character Harry Potter in two contrasting cultures (Germany – an individualist culture; and Mexico – a collectivist culture).

  • Despite the differences between these cultures, they found fans from Mexico and fans from Germany displayed very similar patterns of PSRs with Harry Potter and the other characters.

  • Their online survey showed that fans from both cultures admired Harry Potter and found commonalities between their own lives and relationships and those portrayed in the films/books.

  • This demonstrates the universal influence of mainstream media characters.