Charlie cooper

DISCUSS RESEARCH INTO THE FORMATION OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS   (8 + 16 marks)

The **filter model** argues that relationships develop through three filters that become important at different times so that the 'field of availables' are ultimately narrowed down to the 'field of desirables'. The three filters include Similarity of social or demographic variables, similarity of attitudes and values and lastly the complementary of emotional needs.

The first filter determines the likelihood that two people will meet in the first place, the second happens once two people have entered a short-term relationship and enables easier communication and lastly, the third filter happens once the relationship becomes established as fairly long term and relates to the couples' ability to meet and complement each other's needs.

The model was tested by **Kerkhoff and Davis** in their longitudinal study of student couples as they found that attitude similarity (the second filter) was most important in the first 18 months of the relationship but after this time the ability to meet the partners' needs became more important. This study therefore supports the model by showing that each filter becomes important at different times of the relationship. The study can be commended for being a longitudinal study as it can therefore show the patterns of attitudes to relationship formation over a period of time, however its main downfall comes from the use of questionnaires; the couples may have been subjected to social desirability bias or demand characteristics which would have reduced its effectiveness in supporting the study.

In addition, **Willis** concluded from his study that as a relationship progresses couples becomes more similar in attitudes. This is an example of 'attitude alignment' and serves to show that similarity of attitudes is an important factor in relationship formation with partners actually changing their own views to become more similar.

However there are also several criticisms of the model. Firstly the division into stages does not capture the fluid nature of relationships as real-life relationships flow seamlessly; some may develop faster and others slower than the model suggests.

The model is also subjected to both gender bias and cultural bias. It can be argued to be gender biased as evidence, such as research by **Buss**, have shown that men and women filter out different things and so the model cannot generalise its ideas to both genders as it does.

Furthermore it suffers from ethnocentrism as the ideas and research behind the concepts were developed in an individualistic, western society and so there is problems in generalising to non-western societies where, for example, arranged marriages are more common and so people may have different priorities when filtering out potential partners.

The research behind this model may also suffer from low ecological validity due to studying relationships in a laboratory setting and then automatically assuming that it applies to real-life situations.

A second theory is the **reward/need satisfaction theory**. Like the filter model, this theory argues that long-term relationships are more likely to occur if it meets to needs of partners and provides rewards. People enter relationships with biologically based needs such as sex and emotionally based needs such as a sense of belonging. It directly focuses on the concepts of classical and operant conditioning.

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With underline classical conditioning, it is believed that people become attracted to people who are associated with positive events so that a previously neutral stimulus becomes positively valued. With operant conditioning, it states that we become attracted to people who reward us directly. In essence, if positive feelings outweigh negative feelings the reward/need satisfaction model believes a relationship will commence.

To conclude the reward/need model it is essential to note that this model acknowledges that rewards and needs are unique to individuals and so, to some extent, it does take account of individual differences.

It is also supported by several studies. Firstly, a study was carried out by *Griffit and Guay* in which participants who were highly evaluated (and thus directly rewarded) by the experimenter rated their liking of that him as higher than if he did not reward them. This supports the aspect of operant conditioning. Their study also found evidence for classical conditioning as it was found that they also highly evaluated an onlooker even though he was only associated with the reward. In fact, the participant liked both individuals as much which suggests that direct and indirect reinforcement are equally influential on our liking of a person. However there are issues with this study regarding ecological validity as studying relationships in a lab may not be representative of real-life situations and the liking of an unknown experimenter may not be representative or demonstrate how the 'liking' turns to 'loving' in romantic relationships.

Criticising research, however, comes from **Hays** who claims that the model focuses too much on rewards, whereas people may not be so selfish and can also get satisfaction from giving as well as receiving. This is not accounted for by the theory and therefore Hay's claim could highlight the fact that the theory is reductionist by reducing complex relationships to a desire for rewards.

There is also the issue with cultural bias as many non-western relationships and collectivist cultures do not prioritise rewards or needs of the individual but rather focus on the needs of the wider family. It therefore may not apply to arranged marriages where individuals often marry for family, economic and/or class reasons. It is also criticised for being beta biased as **Lott** found that women in many cultures are socialised to attend the needs of others (e.g. husbands) and so the model may apply more to men. Lastly, it is rather deterministic by attempting to determine who we find attractive and thus not allowing for a sense of free will in our partner choice.