

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



Duck developed a ***four-stage model*** into relationship dissolution which states that people move from one phase of breakup to another when a certain threshold is reached.

The first phase is the *Intra-Psychic* phase which begins when one member is unhappy and the threshold is "I cannot stand it anymore". They may then voice their concerns to their partner and so will begin the next stage; the *Dyadic* stage. The threshold here is "I would be justified in leaving". The relationship then enters the *Social* phase in which the relationship problems are aired publicly and friends can offer support or take sides. The threshold being "I mean it". Finally, the last stage is the *Grave Dressing* phase which takes place after they have split up. Both parties will create their own version of what went wrong and who is to blame to place themselves in a good light.

The model can be commended as it views dissolution as a process rather than just a single event and therefore it appreciates the fluid nature of relationships. It also takes the social context into account and can have practical real-life applications; it can allow counsellors to identify where a relationship has gone wrong and repair that individual stage.

However, it does not account for individual differences as not all the stages may apply in every breakup or they may occur in a different order, this would therefore lower the external validity of the model. Similarly, **Akert** found that instigators of breakups suffer fewer negative effects than non-instigators which further highlights the idea that the model ignores individual differences and circumstances.

It must also be noted there is the issue of gender bias as women are more likely to state incompatibility as reasons for breakup whereas for men it is more likely to be sexual withholding and the model does not allow for a distinction between genders so it is not generalizable. A further type of bias may include cultural bias as it was developed in individualistic cultures and so may not fully reflect cultures which emphasise arranged marriages as these marriages are usually not so easy to break and so may suffer from different dissolution pressures.

The issue of determinism is also a problem. This is because the model attempts to determine whether a break-up is likely depending on the reaching of certain thresholds and thus fails to appreciate the sense of free will that many people believe they have. Furthermore, reductionism is relevant to the model because it does not actually show why the dissatisfaction has arisen in the first place, thus failing to provide a complete account of relationships. Due to this reason Duck later proposed his theory into the reasons as to why people break up.

This second theory by Duck into the ***reasons for dissolutions*** identifies three reasons as to why breakups occur. The first is Lack of *Interpersonal Skills*. This results if the relationship is not perceived as being mutually satisfying and may indicate to the other partner that they're not interested and so the relationship may break down before it has even got started. The second factor is *Lack of Stimulation*. Stimulation is one of the rewards that we expect in relationships as according to the social exchange theory and so it could lead to dissatisfaction and boredom. The final reason is *Maintenance Difficulties*. Although maintenance is easier now with the use of the internet, it still remains that difficulties in maintenance can lead to breakups as partners may feel that the relationship is not rewarding enough.

This second theory has been supported by **Boekhout** who found that students rated boredom as a reason for a partner to be unfaithful. This would suggest that people believed that a lack of stimulation is a significant reason in the dissolution of a relationship. The problem with this study, however, is that it used university students who generally have had relatively short-term relationships compared to aged couples and so it may not be representative of all relationships and thus lacks population validity. It also used retrospective self-reporting data which again may decrease the study's reliability and decrease the support it provides for the theory.

Duck's theory also has practical real-world applications in counselling as found in a study by **Cina** who concluded that couples who undertook training to improve communication did in fact report higher relationship satisfaction. This then suggests that improving the area Duck identified as a *lack of interpersonal skills* can help resolve relationships.

The problem, however, is that there are issues with the factor of maintenance difficulties as research by **Holt and Stone** found that there was little decrease in satisfaction with maintenance difficulties as long as lovers were able to reunite regularly. This therefore suggests that a distanced relationship can be maintained as long as regular reunions are provided and so this criticises Duck's original theory.

Lastly, the theory has also been criticised for being cultural biased as it is based around individualistic ideals whereas in collectivist cultures the emphasis is focused on the family and so relationships are not so easy to break. For example, if one partner feels the relationship lacks stimulation, they may still be motivated to continue for the sake of the family's status-quo and not actually begin to breakup.