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| **Factors Affecting Attraction: Filter Theory AO1** | | | |
| Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) compared the attitudes and personalities of student couples in short-term (defined as less than 18 months) and long-term relationships. They devised a filter theory to explain how such romantic relationships form and develop.  In terms of partner choice, we all have *fields of availables*, the entire set of potential romantic partners, and all the people we could realistically form a relationship with. But, of course, not everyone who is available to us is desirable. According to Kerckhoff and Davis, there are 3 main factors that act as filters to narrow down our range of partner choice to a *field of desirables*. Each of these factors assumes greater or lesser importance at different stages of the relationship… | | | |
| **1st Level of filter: Social Demography**   * Wide range of factors including geographical location (or proximity), social class, level of education, ethnic group, religion etc. * You are much more likely to meet people who are physically close to you and share several demographic characteristics * Our most meaningful and memorable interactions are with people who are nearby, even if we do sometimes encounter people who live further away * The key benefit of proximity is accessibility * In doesn’t take much effort to meet people who live in the same area, go to the same school or university etc. * So there might be a vast range and variety of different partners, but the realistic ‘dating field’ is much narrower due to choices constrained by social circumstance * Anyone who is too ‘different’ (e.g. too far away or too middle class) is discounted as a potential partner * This result in homogamy; forming relationships with someone who is socially or culturally similar * You will probably have a fair bit in common with someone who shares your ethnicity, religious beliefs, and educational level for example – these shared similarities are seen as attractive to us | | | |
| **2nd Level of filter: Similarity in Attitudes**   * Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) found that similarity of attitudes was important in the development of romantic relationships * BUT only for couples who had been together less than 18 months * In the early stages of a relationship, there is a need for partners to agree over basic values, the things that really matter to them * This encourages greater and deeper communication and promotes self-disclosure (re-cap here what this means…) * Byrne (1997) describes how similarity causes attraction as the law of attraction. If such similarity does not exist e.g. it turns out the partners have little in common after all, then they may go out together a few times, but the relationship is likely to fizzle out with a ‘I’ll call you sometime…’ | | | |
| **3rd level of filter: Complementarity**   * This filter concerns the ability of romantic partners to meet each other’s needs * Two partners complement each other when they have traits the other lacks * For example, one partner may enjoy making the other laugh, and in turn this partner enjoys being made to laugh. Or perhaps one partner is more dominant in the relationship than the other. Or one likes to nurture and the other likes to be nurtured. * Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) found that the need for complementarity was more important for long-term couples * In other words, in later stages of relationships, opposites do attract * Complementarity is attractive because it gives two romantic partners the feeling that together they form a whole, which adds depth to a relationship and makes it more likely to flourish | | | |
| **Factors Affecting Attraction: Filter Theory AO3** | | | |
| **Supportive Evidence**  P: One strength of the filter theory as an explanation of factors affecting attraction in adult romantic relationships.  E: For example, Winch (1958) found evidence that similarities of personality, interests and attitudes between partners are typical of the earliest stages of a relationship.  E: This is a strength because the filter theory assumes that key factors in a relationship change over time. This makes sense and agrees with most people’s experience, as well as being supported by Winch’s findings. Between partners happily married for several years, complementarity of needs is more important than similarity.  L: As a result, the credibility of the filter theory as an explanation of factors affecting attraction in adult romantic relationships is increased. | **Lacks Replicability**  P: However, one weakness of the filter theory as an explanation of factors affecting attraction in adult romantic relationships is that there is research which has struggled to replicate the view of the theory.  E: For example, Levinger (1974) pointed out that many studies have failed to replicate the original findings that formed the basis of filter theory. He put this down to social changes over time and also to the difficulties inherent in defining the depth of a relationship in terms of its length.  E: This is a weakness because Kerckhoff and Davis chose an 18 month cut-off point to distinguish between short-term and long-term relationships. They assumed that partners who had been together longer than this were more committed and had a deeper relationship. This highlights the problem in applying the filter theory even to other heterosexual couples in the same individualist culture, never mind to homosexual partners or relationships in another culture.  L: As a result, the credibility of the filter theory as a factor affecting romantic relationships overall is weakened. | **Contradictory Evidence**  P: One weakness of the filter theory as an explanation of factors affecting attraction in adult romantic relationships is that there is contradictory evidence.  E: For example Anderson et al (2003) found in a longitudinal study that cohabiting partners became more similar in their emotional responses over time, a phenomenon they called emotional convergence.  E: This is a weakness because the filter theory suggests that people are initially attracted to each other because they are similar, but the evidence from Anderson suggests that the direction of this causality is wrong. Furthermore, Davis and Rusbalt 92001) discovered an attitude alignment effect in longer-term relationships. Romantic partners over time bring their attitudes into line with each other’s, again suggesting that similarity is an effect of initial attraction and not the cause. These findings are not predicted by filter theory.  L: As a result, the explanatory power of the filter theory as a factor affecting attraction in adult romantic relationships is weakened. | **Lack of Temporal Validity**  P: One issue with the filter theory as an explanation of factors affecting attraction in adult romantic relationships is that it lacks temporal validity.  E: For example, this theory was proposed by Kerckhoff and Davis, supported by their research conducted in 1962 (54 years ago).  E: This is an issue because the rise of online dating in recent years has changed beyond recognition the process of beginning a romantic relationship. It has reduced the importance of some social demographic variables. Technology such as the internet and mobile apps like Tinder have made meeting potential partners easier than ever, to the extent that we might tell well pursue a date with someone outside the usual demographic limits (e.g. different culture or social class) than we would have 30 years ago for example.  L: This weakens the overall credibility of the filter theory as a factor affecting attraction in adult romantic relationships. |