Sample Answer:

Evolutionary explanations for partner preference suggest that relationships are formed on the basis of reproductive success. This proposes that as a species adapts to its environment through natural selection, reproduction is based on identifying characteristics in a mate which aid survival. This ensures that genetic material from one generation is passed on to the next. Evolutionary theory states that males and females differ in their strategies to attract a mate and in their biological reproductive capabilities. This is explained by anisogamy, which is a form of sexual reproduction involving the fusion of two gametes that differ in size or form, and help define the biological distinction between males and females. Males produce numerous sperm cells which reproduce throughout their lifetime, while females produce few eggs, which are released in a limited period (puberty to menopause). A consequence of anisogamy is that there is no shortage of fertile males, whereas a fertile female is a rare resource. This difference is considered the root of sexual selection and means that males and females use different strategies when choosing their partners. Sexual selection refers to characteristics which increase the chances of reproduction. A male's best chance of reproducing is to have sex as often as possible with as many different females to increase his opportunity to reproduce. On the other hand, a female increases her chances of reproductive success by choosing mates who show evidence of genetic advantage (e.g. physical strength) and display signs they can provide resources to support her and her offspring. If females make good choices, then their offspring will inherit the positive features of their father and are therefore also more likely to be chosen by others to reproduce in the next generation. Whilst females prefer quality over quantity, anisogamy suggests that the best evolutionary strategy for a male is to have as many partners as possible. **Noë and Hammerstein (1995)** developed the 'biological market theory', which applies economic principles of supply and demand to biological interactions such as partner preference. This theory emphasises that partners are chosen based on the value they offer, with competition and trading often influencing evolutionary outcomes and social behaviours. This highlights inter-sexual differences in partner preference, through mate choices. In addition, to increase chances of reproduction, evolutionary theory suggests that males and females adopt different strategies for partner preference. Males use mate guarding to protect their partner from other males, whereas females are more likely to use courtship rituals, forcing males to spend time or resources building up a suitable relationship. When applied to human relationships, evidence of evolutionary theory can be seen in behaviour. Females will often select partners based on their suitability to provide for her and potential offspring. Whereas males may demonstrate more jealousy over other males competing for their partners attention. **Davis (1990)** found in personal adverts males tend to seek out health and attractiveness and females look for higher status and resources. Other evidence to support evolutionary theories for partner preferences comes from **Buss (1989)** who conducted a survey of over 10,000 adults across 33 countries. He found that females reported valuing resource-based characteristics when choosing a male (such as their jobs) whilst men valued good looks and preferred younger partners more than females did. This was also supported by research conducted by **Waynforth and Dunbar (1995)** who found that women tended to list physical characteristics when seeking a partner in personal ads and men promoted their wealth or resources. These findings reflect sex differences in mate strategies due to anisogamy. There are also some explanations for female mate choice from animal studies which seem contrary to evolutionary ideas, for example **Fisher (1930)** suggested a 'good-taste hypothesis'. This proposed that female preferences can drive the evolution of arbitrary male traits that do not increase survival, such as exaggerated plumage. This means that female preference can evolve for traits that do not provide information about the male's quality and therefore do not reinforce the effects of natural selection. If

females evolve a preference for a particular trait (not genetically advantageous), males bearing that trait will be selected as mates. In addition, evidence from biological studies with animals suggest that biochemistry may be responsible for mate choice. For example, **Henley et al (2011)** found that regions of the brain involved in olfaction and sexual behaviour, as well as sexually dimorphic regions (amygdala and hypothalamus), seem to play a role in mate choice in rats and mice. However, there are extrapolation issues when using animal studies to form generalisations to human relationships, as humans report more emotional connection in relationship formation and animal studies place too much emphasis on sexual reproduction in relationships. Evolutionary theories may also be outdated when considering human relationships as partner preference has changed over time and some people choose not to have children and some choose to remain single.