

A relationship psychologist studied what people say about themselves in descriptions on dating websites. Here is one description.

"My name is Joy. I am a teacher and I have a degree in economics. I live in Essex. I cycle to work because I care about the environment. I enjoy walking and like to cook in my spare time. I am looking for a partner who enjoys good food and is good at doing repairs around the house because I'm not very practical."

Discuss the filter theory of romantic relationships. Refer to Joy in your answer.

[16 marks]

Mark Scheme

Marks for this question: AO1 = 6, AO2 = 4, AO3 = 6

Level	Marks	Description
4	13–16	Knowledge of filter theory is accurate with some detail. Application is effective. Discussion is effective. Minor detail and/or expansion of argument is sometimes lacking. The answer is clear, coherent and focused. Specialist terminology is used effectively.
3	9–12	Knowledge of filter theory is evident but there are occasional inaccuracies/omissions. Application/discussion is mostly effective. The answer is mostly clear and organised but occasionally lacks focus. Specialist terminology is used appropriately.
2	5–8	Limited knowledge of filter theory is present. Focus is mainly on description. Any application/discussion is of limited effectiveness. The answer lacks clarity, accuracy and organisation in places. Specialist terminology is used inappropriately on occasions.
1	1–4	Knowledge of filter theory is very limited. Application/discussion is limited, poorly focused or absent. The answer as a whole lacks clarity, has many inaccuracies and is poorly organised. Specialist terminology is either absent or inappropriately used.
	0	No relevant content.

Possible content:

- Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) proposed we use filtering to reduce the field of availables to a field of desirables
- when we meet people we engage in three levels of filtering: social demography, similarity in attitude, complementarity
- social demography – at the outset we screen out people who are different in terms of age, sex, education etc so we end up with people similar to ourselves
- then we choose people who have similar attitudes to our own, eg social, moral and political values
- in the longer term, we choose people who complement our own traits to enable the two people to work well together as a couple.

Possible application:

- Joy gives details of her work as a teacher and her economics degree because she would be more attracted to people of similar social demography and filter out those whose backgrounds are too different – demographic first level filtering
- Joy states she lives in Essex to filter out any potential partner who lived too far away as proximity would be important for any face-to-face meeting – demographic first level filtering
- Joy cycles because she cares about the environment – an attitude she might expect a potential partner to share because it is important to her – attitude second level filtering
- Joy says she likes walking and cooking as she wants to filter out anyone whose attitudes/interests are different – attitude second level filtering
- Joy is looking for someone who enjoys food because she cooks, and someone who is good at doing repairs around the house to make up for her lack of practical skill – complementarity third level filtering.

Possible discussion points:

- use of evidence to support/contradict filter theory, eg Taylor (2010) – people tend to marry someone from their own ethnic group; Kerckhoff and David (1962) – attitude similarity is an important factor in staying together; Gruber-Baldini (1995) – found similarities between spouses
- filter theory is consistent with the matching hypothesis
- cannot establish causality – maybe partners are not that similar at the start of a relationship but similarity increases over time
- temporal validity – modern society is highly mobile and diverse; technology reduces/eliminates physical constraints to the establishment of relationships, eg with internet relationships
- discussion of conflicting importance of similarity and complementarity
- discussion of gender differences and cultural differences in filtering.