

4.3.2 Relationships

- The evolutionary explanations for partner preferences, including the relationship between sexual selection and human reproductive behaviour.
- Factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships: self-disclosure; physical attractiveness, including the matching hypothesis; filter theory, including social demography, similarity in attitudes and complementarity.
- Theories of romantic relationships: social exchange theory, equity theory and Rusbult's investment model of commitment, satisfaction, comparison with alternatives and investment. Duck's phase model of relationship breakdown: intra-psychic, dyadic, social and grave dressing phases.
- Virtual relationships in social media: self-disclosure in virtual relationships; effects of absence of gating on the nature of virtual relationships.
- Parasocial relationships: levels of parasocial relationships, the absorption addiction model and the attachment theory explanation.

Factors affecting *attraction*

- Self disclosure
- Physical attractiveness (including the matching hypothesis)
- Filter theory



Factors affecting *attraction*

Partner choice in romantic relationships is influenced by many factors. It seems that one of the most important factors for the development of relationships is feeling secure enough around the partner to gradually reveal personal information.

Has anyone revealed personal information to you before? How did it make you feel?



Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure is the idea that relationship formation is built on trust with another person, which is demonstrated by **gradually revealing personal information**, such as thoughts, feelings and experiences that they might not share with anyone else.

Disclosing thoughts and feelings and allowing a partner to reveal their 'true selves' **leads to greater intimacy** in romantic relationships, and ultimately to **more satisfaction**.

In the **initial stages of a relationship**, couples often seek to learn as much as they can about their new partner and feel that this sharing of information brings them closer together.

What type of information might you share initially?

Can too much sharing early on scare your partner away?

Is not sharing very much information intriguing or frustrating?

Social Penetration Theory

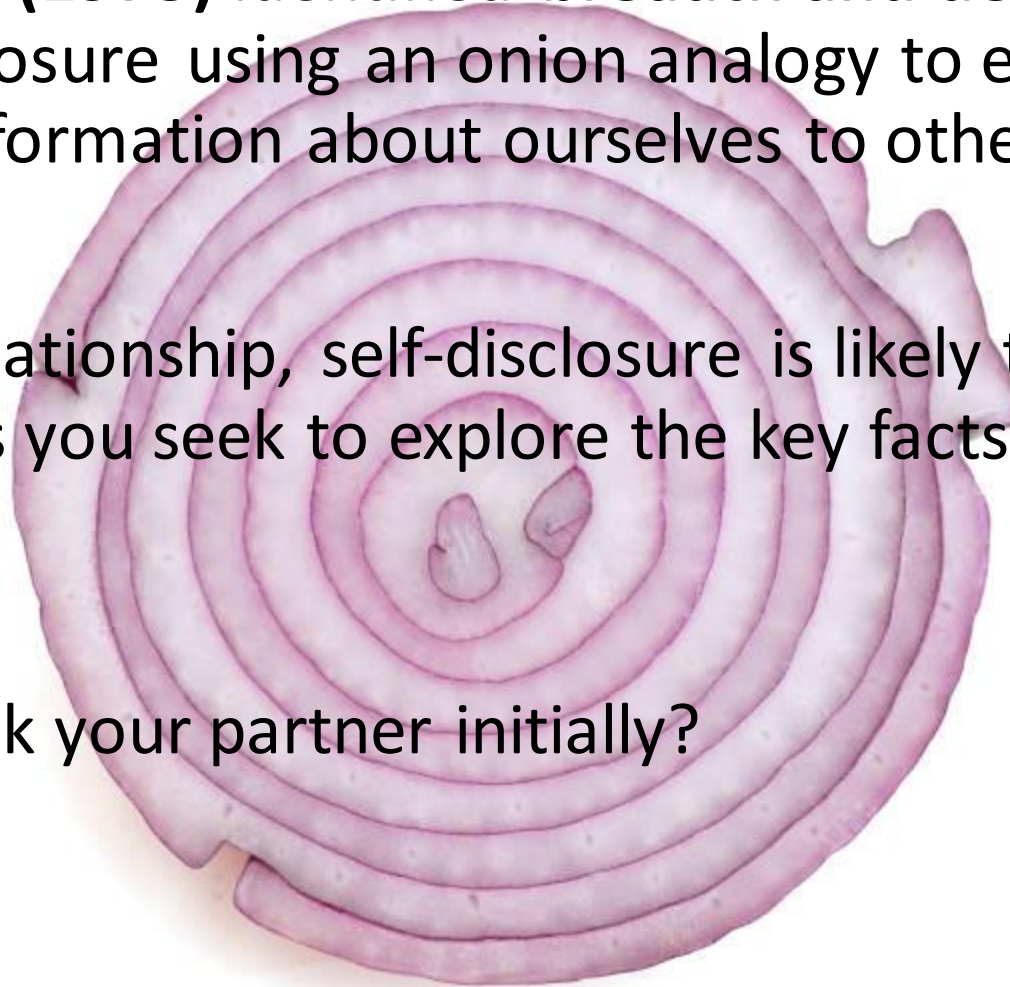


- Altman & Taylor's (1973) **social penetration theory** says that self-disclosure is the gradual process of revealing your inner self to someone else.
- Revealing too much straight away might be **inappropriate**.
- In romantic relationships we give away our deepest thoughts and feelings in a **reciprocal exchange**.
- By revealing personal information we are displaying trust. For the relationship to go further the other person must also reveal sensitive information, thereby penetrating more deeply into each other's lives.

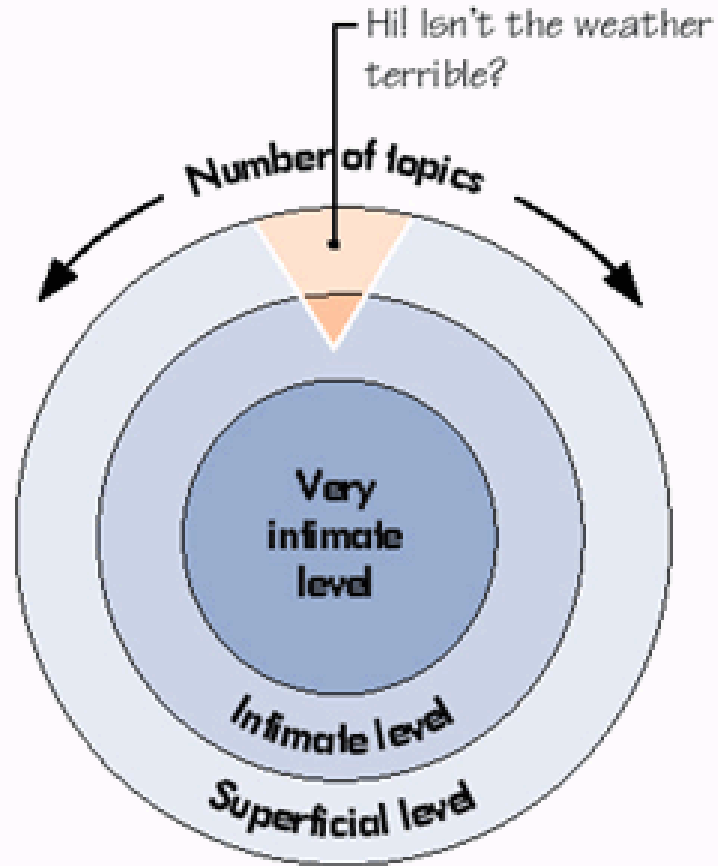
Altman and Taylor (1973) identified **breadth and depth** as important factors of self-disclosure using an onion analogy to explain how we can choose to share information about ourselves to others.

At the start of a relationship, self-disclosure is likely to cover a range of topics (**breadth**) as you seek to explore the key facts about your new partner.

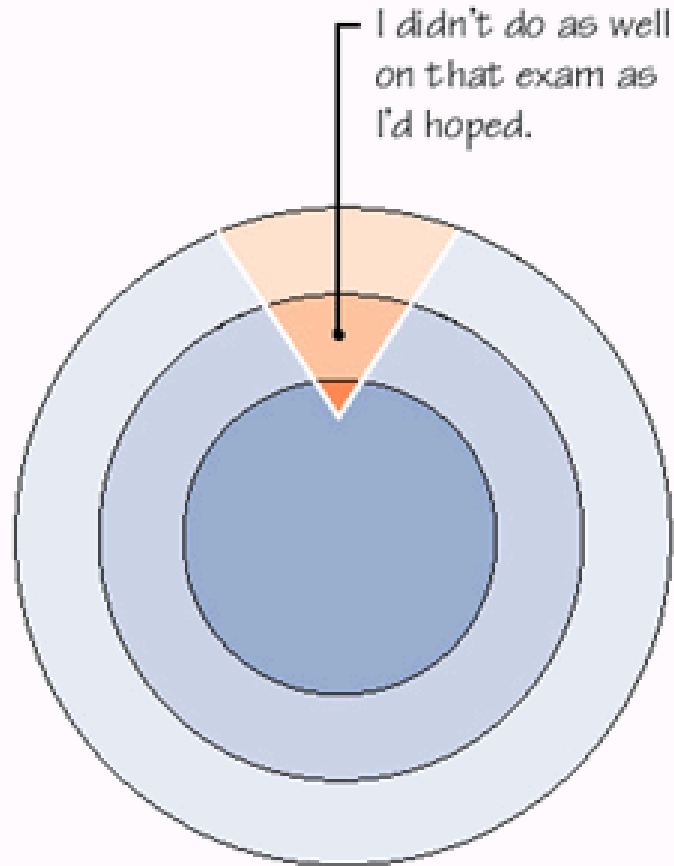
What might you ask your partner initially?



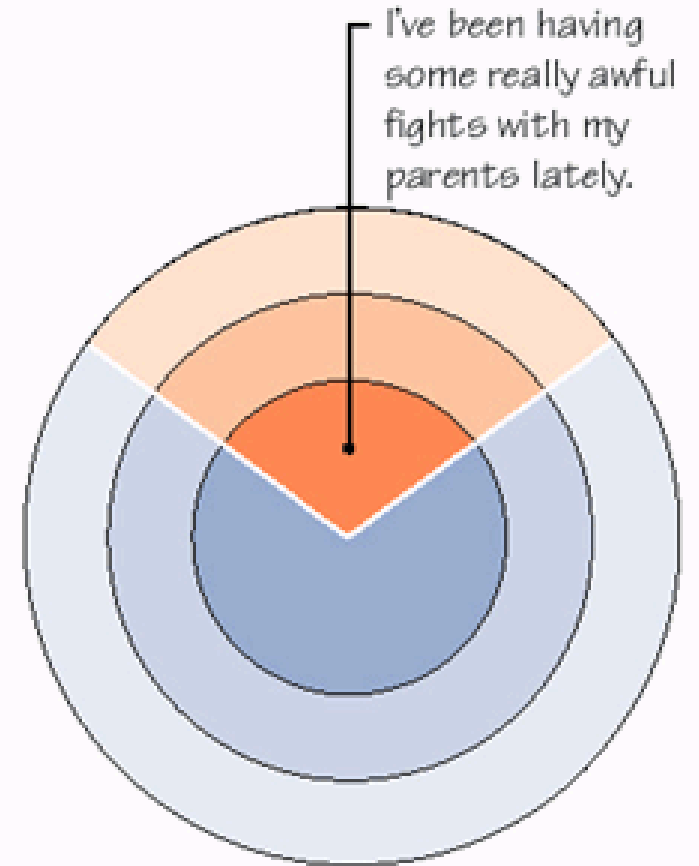
Beginning Relationship



Developing Relationship



Close Relationship



As the relationship develops, people tend to share more detailed and personal information, such as past traumas and desires for the future (**depth**).

If this sharing happens **too soon** however, an **incompatibility may be found before the other person has reached a suitable level of investment in the relationship.**

Importance of Reciprocity

A woman with curly hair and a man in a white shirt are sitting at a table. Both have their hands on their chins and are looking off to the side with thoughtful or perhaps skeptical expressions. The woman is on the left, and the man is on the right. The background is dark and out of focus.

An important aspect of this is the **reciprocity** of the process, if one person shares more than the other is willing to, there may be a **breakdown of trust** as one person establishes themselves as **more invested** than the other.

Imagine you shared with an individual about a difficult past experience and they then shared what their favourite food was.

How would you feel?

- **Reis & Shaver (1988)** assert that breadth and depth are **not** sufficient for a relationship to develop. There **must** be a reciprocal element to disclosure.
- Once you have disclosed something that **reveals your true self**, hopefully your partner will respond in a way that is rewarding, with understanding, empathy, and their own intimate thoughts and feelings.
- This lead to a **balance of self-disclosure** between both partners, deepening the relationship.

Factors involved in *self-disclosure*

Self-disclosure is not always seen as rewarding or leading to a positive perception of those who are doing the disclosing.

Factors involved include:

1. Appropriateness of the disclosure
2. Attributions for the disclosure
3. Gender differences
4. Content of the disclosure

Appropriateness

- Sometimes disclosing personal information is inappropriate.
- Is what is being said going against **social norms**?
- Those who contravene social norms will be seen as **maladjusted** and lacking in social skills.
- Attractiveness increases when the other person is sensitive to social norms.

Attributions *for the disclosure*

- The **reasons** we believe a person is self-disclosing are important to us.
- Less attraction occurs if an individual is seen as the kind of person who discloses personal information to **everyone**, or if the situation is not appropriate.
- More attraction occurs if we believe an individual sees us as someone they especially want to disclose **intimate** information to.

Gender *differences*

- **Women** are generally seen as **better communicators** of and more interested in intimate information, therefore intimate self-disclosure by males may be seen as less appropriate than those by females.
- Alternatively self-disclosure by a male may be seen as **very rewarding** by a female, as it indicates he especially wants to disclose personal information to her.
- Males may not be used to this and so feel **threatened** by females self-disclosing intimate details.

Content of the disclosure

- Generally intimate disclosures are seen favourably.
- However, disclosure of **highly intimate information** may be seen as inappropriate and as violating social norms, especially if the relationship is in its early stages.
- This could decrease attraction, as the recipient of the information may feel threatened and unsure of how to respond.
- Attraction is stronger when self-disclosure is of **moderate intimacy** rather than low or high intimacy.

Topic summary (AO1)

Paul and Jane are on their first date. During their meal, Paul tells Jane all about his ex-girlfriend, their sex life together and details about how they broke up. Jane keeps the conversation neutral and talks about the restaurant and news headlines. The next day, they both tell their friends that they aren't interested in a second date.

Explain why using your knowledge of self-disclosure and attraction (4 marks).

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Paul

What does the theory say? (A01)

Why doesn't Paul want a second date? (A02)

Jane

What does the theory say? (A01)

Why doesn't Jane want a second date? (A02)

Social penetration theory states that for an attraction to grow stronger then the self disclosure must be reciprocated (A01). Paul might not want a second because he revealed deep information about his previous relationship, whereas Jane talked about superficial topics such as the news headlines (A02).

For self disclosure to lead to more intimacy then the content of the disclosure needs to be appropriate (A01). Jane may find the content of Paul's ex and their sex life over sharing for a first date and may feel they are incompatible before she has invested in the relationship (A02).

A03: Supportive evidence

A strength of the explanation that self-disclosure increases the strength of attraction is that there is supporting empirical evidence.

Sprecher & Hendrick (2004) studied heterosexual dating couples and found strong correlations between several measures of satisfaction and self-disclosure (from both their own and their partner's perspectives). Regardless of whether they were male or female, those who believed their partners' self-disclosed more were more satisfied with their relationship.

What does this tell us?

A03: Supportive evidence

However, much self-disclosure research is correlational. What are the issues with this?

A03: Supportive evidence

- Laurenceau et al. (2005) used a method involving writing daily diary entries. They found that self-disclosure and the perception of self-disclosure in a partner were linked to higher levels of intimacy in long-term married couples.
- The reverse was also true – **less** intimate couples self-disclosed **less** often.
- Such research findings increase the **validity** of the theory that self-disclosure leads to more satisfying relationships.

A03: Real life application

A strength of the theory that self-disclosure enhances the quality of relationships is that it has good real-life application.

Hass & Stafford (1998) found that 57% of gay men and women in their study said that open and honest self-disclosure was the main way they maintained and deepened their committed relationships.

How is this useful?

A03: Cultural differences

A limitation in the prediction that increasing depth and breadth of self-disclosures will lead to a more satisfying and intimate romantic relationship is that it does not consider cultural relativism.

Tang et al (2013) reviewed the research literature regarding sexual self-disclosure (feelings about specific sexual practices). They found that men and women in USA (an individualistic culture) self-disclosed significantly more sexual thoughts and feelings than men and women in China (a collectivist culture).

What does this show?

A03: Incomplete explanation

A limitation of the explanation that self-disclosures deepen and broadens romantic relationships through intimacy is that it cannot explain all stages of a relationship.

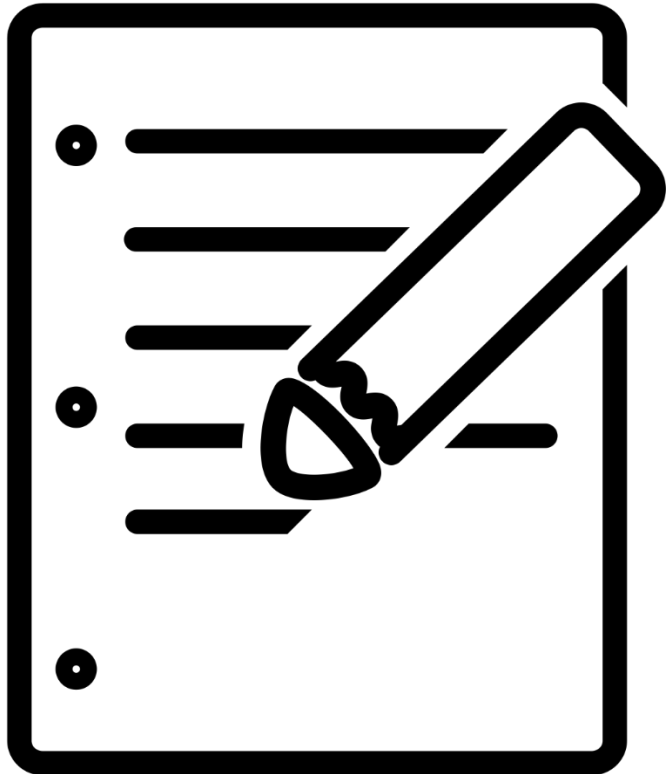
For example, using the onion analogy, relationship breakdown should be accompanied by a reduction in self-disclosures, as partners wrap themselves up once again in layers of concealment.

However, theories of relationship breakdown, such as Duck's theory, often recognise how couples discuss and negotiate the state of their deteriorating relationship in an attempt to save it or return to an earlier level of satisfaction.

These discussions often involve deep self-disclosures of very intimate thoughts and feelings, and yet clearly satisfaction is low and these disclosures may even contribute to relationship breakdown. This questioning the validity of the theory.

Essay Plan

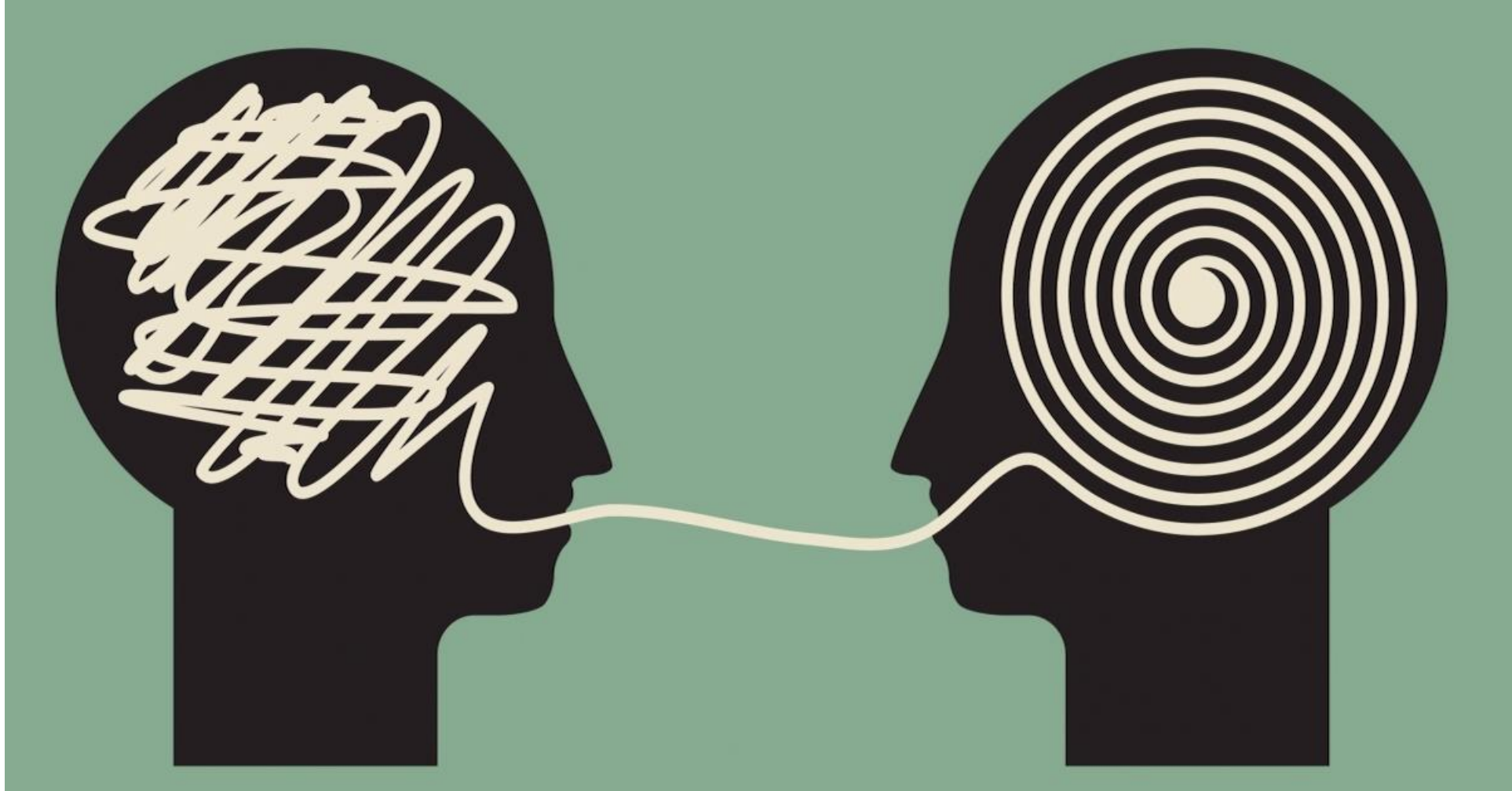
Describe and evaluate self-disclosure as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships (16 marks).



A01

A03

Knowledge *Organiser*



Describe and evaluate self-disclosure as a factor affecting attraction in romantic relationships (16 marks).