



Issues & Debates

Gender & Culture Bias

Gender

Universality believes that underlying characteristics apply to everyone, regardless of experience and upbringing.

Gender bias results when one gender is treated less favourably than the other.

There are three main types of gender bias; alpha, beta and androcentrism.

Alpha bias refers to the exaggeration of differences between genders, often leading to the promotion of stereotypes and the belief in inherent superiority or inferiority of one gender over the other.

Alpha bias occurs when the differences between men and women are exaggerated. Therefore, stereotypical male and female characteristics may be emphasised.

Sometimes differences heighten the value of women, but more often they put women lower than men in society.

Alpha bias can favour women in some cases, like in the psychodynamic approach. **Chodorow (1968)** suggested that daughters have greater connections with their mothers because of their similarities, compared to mothers and sons.

Alpha bias has led to healthy criticism of cultural values that praise certain male qualities such as aggression as being desirable.

Alpha bias can sustain prejudices and stereotypes.

Beta bias refers to the tendency to downplay or ignore differences between genders, assuming that what applies to one gender applies equally to the other. It can contribute to gender bias by overlooking the unique experiences and needs of different genders.

Beta bias occurs when the differences between men and women are minimised. This often happens when findings obtained from men are applied to women without additional validation.

Beta bias has made people see men and women as the same, which has led to equal treatment in legal terms and equal access to, for example, education and employment.

Beta bias draws attention away from the differences in power between men and women.

Androcentrism refers to the belief or practice that places men or masculinity as the central or superior focus, often resulting in gender bias against women.

Androcentric bias is taking findings from men and applying them to women.

Freud's theories are androcentric and much of his supporting research comes from case studies like Little Hans.

Gender bias can affect the interpretation of research results by leading to skewed conclusions, as it may overlook or downplay the experiences and perspectives of certain genders, resulting in a limited understanding of the topic being studied.

Brescoll & Uhlmann (2008) suggest men's anger is seen as a rational response to external pressure, whereas women's anger is deemed hormonal.

Gender bias can impact the reliability of psychological findings by skewing the results and limiting the generalisability of the findings to both men and women.

Also gender bias can impact the validity of psychological findings by skewing the results and limiting the generalisability of the findings to both men and women.

Gender bias can limit the generalisability of research findings by excluding or underrepresenting certain genders, leading to findings that may not apply to the entire population.

Some strategies to reduce gender bias in psychological research include using diverse samples that include both men and women, using gender-inclusive language in research materials, and considering gender as a variable in data analysis.

Kitzinger (1998) argued that questions about sex differences are very political, and suggested gender differences are often distorted to maintain the status quo of male power.

Kohlberg (1958) based his stages of moral development around male moral reasoning and had an all-male sample. He then inappropriately generalised his findings to women (beta bias).

Gilligan (1988) highlighted the gender bias inherent in Kohlberg's work and suggested women make moral decisions in a different way to men.

Freud's ideas are seen as inherently gender biased, as he explained gender development in terms of the psychosexual stages and focused more on male development through the Oedipus complex.

Men and women might respond differently to research situations, so research should not always assume standardised procedures.

Research into attachment has misrepresented men, as psychologists like **Bowlby** suggest women are usually the primary caregiver.

One limitation of gender bias is that gender differences are often viewed as fixed, when they are not.

Maccoby & Jacklin (1974) presented the findings of several gender studies which concluded that girls have superior verbal ability whereas boys have superior spatial awareness. They claimed these skills were innate and were reported as facts.

Joel et al (2015) found no sex differences in the brain structure or processing of males and females, criticising Maccoby & Jacklin (1974).

Ingalhalikar et al (2014) suggested that psychologists should not avoid studying gender differences in the brain.

Ingalhalikar et al (2014) argues that the popular social stereotype that women are better at multitasking may have some truth. There is some evidence that women have better connections between the left and right hemisphere. This study provides support for the biological differences but caution should be taken when exaggerating these differences.

Another limitation of gender bias is that it can promote sexism.

Gender bias can lead to implications when interpreting the findings and conclusions from psychological research; this could create or reinforce prejudice and stereotypes in society.

Formanowicz et al (2008) analysed more than 1000 articles for gender bias and found that the research is less likely to be funded and is often published in less prestigious journal articles.

Culture

Culture can be described as all the knowledge and values shared by a society.

Cultures may differ from one another in many ways, so that the findings of psychological research conducted in one culture may not apply directly to another.

In order to fulfil its aspiration of explaining human thinking and behaviour, Psychology must address the huge diversity in people around the world.

Behaviour is shaped by many factors, including genetics, upbringing and individual experiences.

Psychological research is predominantly a western cultured discipline, and many studies are conducted in the USA and UK. This can result in biased findings.

Cultural bias in psychological research refers to the tendency for research findings to be influenced by the cultural values, beliefs, and norms of the researchers or the culture in which the research is conducted.

Henrich et al (2010) reviewed hundreds of studies in leading Psychology journals and found that 68% of participants came from the USA, and 96% from industrialised nations.

Arnett (2008) found that 80% of research participants were undergraduates studying Psychology.

The results from many psychological studies have a cultural bias, which may have skewed our understanding of human behaviour.

Cultural bias is also called ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism is judging other cultures by the standards and values of one's own, in the belief it is superior.

IQ tests developed in the West contain assumptions about intelligence, but what counts as 'intelligent' behaviour varies from culture to culture.

Non-westerners may be disadvantaged by the content of modern IQ tests and could subsequently be viewed as inferior when they fail to perform as most westerners do.

Brislin (1976) claims that IQ tests are illustrations of ethnocentrism and adopt etic approaches.

Gould (1982) highlighted the cultural bias of IQ testing by Yerkes in America during the first world war.

Gould explained how the findings from biased IQ testing resulted in social eugenics, like the American immigration restriction act (1924) preventing all non-Americans from seeking nationality.

In ethnocentric research the experimenters use their own ethnic group to evaluate and make judgments about individuals from other ethnic groups.

Cross-cultural studies aim to reduce ethnocentric bias by including findings from other cultures.

Van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg (1988) conducted a meta-analysis to investigate cross-cultural variation in attachment types.

Takahshi (1990) aimed to see whether the strange situation was a valid procedure for cultures other than the original American sample.

Cross-cultural studies are less ethnocentric, however, often do not represent all cultures around the world.

Cultural relativism is the idea that norms and values can only be understood with specific cultures, what is normal in one society may not be acceptable in another.

Cultural relativism is the principle of regarding the beliefs, values, and practices of a culture from the viewpoint of that culture itself.

Cultural bias has also made it difficult for some psychologists to separate the behaviour they have observed from the context in which they observed it.

Smith & Bond (1993) highlighted how differences were seen between collectivist and individualist cultures (like the USA) when performing Asch-type experiments on conformity.

Nobles (1976) argues that western Psychology has been a tool of oppression and dominance.

According to **Howitt & Owusu-Bempah (1994)** equal opportunity legislation aims to rid Psychology of cultural bias and racism.

There are different theoretical constructs for understanding cultural bias, such as emic and etic approaches.

Berry (1969) drew a distinction between emic and etic approaches in the study of human behaviour.

An emic approach functions from inside a culture and identifies behaviours that are specific to that culture.

An emic construct is one that is applied to only one cultural group, so they vary from place to place (differences between cultures).

An emic approach refers to the investigation of a culture from within the culture itself.

An etic approach looks at behaviour from outside a given culture and sees behaviour as universal.

An etic approach does not consider individual or cultural differences.

Etic constructs are considered universal to all people and are factors that hold across all cultures (similarities between cultures).

Etic constructs assume that most human behaviour is common to all humans but that cultural factors influence the development or display of this behaviour.

Ainsworth's research using the strange situation is an example of an etic approach, as she only studied American children and assumed their attachment types could be applied universally.

Most of the research in Psychology adopts an etic approach, assuming most behaviours are universal, when in fact they are culturally specific.

Culture bias can occur when emic constructs and etic constructs get mistaken for each other.

Psychologists may overlook the importance of cultural diversity in understanding human behaviour, resulting in theories that are scientifically inadequate.

Some psychologists may also privilege their own worldview over those that emerge from other cultures, leading to research that either intentionally or unintentionally supports racist and discriminatory practices in the real world.

Ethical Implications and Socially Sensitive Research

Ethical Implications

Ethics are standards of conduct that distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, justice and injustice.

Ethical guidelines are in place to protect both participants and researchers.

The BPS have a code of conduct which governs ethical research in Psychology in the UK.

The BPS stands for the British Psychological Society.

Research psychologists have a duty to respect the rights and dignity of participants and must follow ethical guidelines set by the British Psychological Society (BPS).

Following BPS guidelines does not guarantee ethical concerns are addressed in research.

There are several ethical guidelines for psychological research, including;

Informed Consent: All participants must be fully informed of the nature of the study and information must be provided for them to make an informed decision whether or not to agree to participate.

Deception: This should be avoided in research, but in some cases, it may be unavoidable and must be revealed to participants after the research is completed, usually in the debriefing.

Confidentiality: This is important to protect participants, and their personal information should be treated in confidence. They have the right to remain anonymous.

Right to Withdrawal: Participants should have the right to withdraw from an investigation at any time, with no further obligations.

Protection from Harm: Participants must be protected from physical and mental harm during research, and risks should not be greater than those in their normal lives.

Debriefing: Participants have the right to a debriefing session after the investigation. This is where they are informed of the true nature of the study.

Ethical issues arise when there are ethical dilemmas, such as whether or not to deceive research participants.

Cost/benefit analysis is assessing the ethical balance between the costs and benefits of research.

Ethical implications are the consequences of any research study which has an impact on the participants taking part.

In the USA, the American Psychological Association (APA) make decisions about the ethical nature of research studies.

Socially Sensitive Research

Socially sensitive research (SSR) is gathering data on issues which may be more sensitive or controversial or may be in areas where people hold more privacy.

Sieber & Stanley (1988) suggest that researchers should not avoid researching socially sensitive issues but should take certain precautions.

Socially sensitive research is where there are implications for individuals or wider society based on the results of a study. This may lead to stereotypes and discrimination.

Examples of socially sensitive research include studies on daycare and cognitive testing in middle-class children, and IQ tests and racial stereotypes.

Socially sensitive research can affect various groups, including the social group being studied, friends and relatives of participants, the research team, and the institution.

Psychologists have an important role to play in providing high quality research on socially sensitive issues.

In some studies, problems in the methodology or design could result in misleading outcomes, especially if their findings are used in the public arena.

Socially sensitive research can impact society by shedding light on important social issues, influencing public policy and decision-making, and promoting social justice and equality. However, it can also raise ethical concerns regarding privacy, confidentiality, and potential harm to vulnerable populations.

Socially sensitive research can lead to negative implications and discrimination against certain groups, which may be detrimental for society.

Socially sensitive research can lead to greater acceptance and reduced prejudice and has benefited society in areas like eyewitness testimony.

Some potential ethical concerns related to the interpretation and application of findings in socially sensitive research include privacy invasion, stigmatisation, and potential harm to vulnerable populations.

Ethical concerns in socially sensitive research include the research question or hypothesis, treatment of individual participants, institutional context, and interpretation and application of findings.

Ethical guidelines protect participants in socially sensitive research by ensuring their rights, privacy, and well-being are respected. They also protect researchers by providing clear standards and procedures to follow, reducing the risk of legal and professional consequences.

The role of informed consent in socially sensitive research is to ensure that participants are fully aware of the purpose, risks, and benefits of the study, and voluntarily agree to participate without coercion or deception.

The role of debriefing in socially sensitive research is to provide participants with information about the study's purpose, address any potential harm or discomfort experienced, and ensure their understanding and consent for their involvement.

The right to withdrawal allows participants in socially sensitive research to withdraw from the study at any time without facing negative consequences or penalties.

Many policymakers rely on the findings from SSR, with the hope of making situations better for the future.

One strength of SSR is that it can have benefits for the group it is studying, this could lead to successful practical applications.

Researchers must be aware of the implications of their findings and how they may impact on people in society.

In some cases of SSR the outcomes can lead to negative effects for those being studied, which may result in prejudice or discrimination.

Much of the research in Clinical Psychology could raise issues which are socially sensitive.

Idiographic & Nomothetic Approaches

Psychologists interested in taking an idiographic approach want to discover what makes each of us unique.

The idiographic approach looks at how our behaviours are different to each other (individual differences).

Idiographic approaches collect more qualitative data.

Case studies, informal interviews, unstructured observation and other qualitative methods are idiographic approaches.

Idiographic approaches tend to be more valid as they give a true insight into that behaviour.

The idiographic approach focuses more on the subjective experience of the individual, which can have more useful applications in real life.

The idiographic approach is very time consuming when compared to the nomothetic approach.

Nomothetic approaches are the study of people in groups.

Nomothetic approaches aim to establish laws or generalisations for all human behaviours.

The Nomothetic approach looks at how our behaviours are similar to each other as human beings.

Nomothetic approaches collect more quantitative data.

Experiments, correlation, psychometric testing and other quantitative methods are favoured from a nomothetic point of view.

Nomothetic approaches tend to be more reliable as they focus more on making objective, generalisations based on observable or measurable factors.

The nomothetic approach is seen as far more scientific than the idiographic approach.

The nomothetic approach uses more scientific methods, standardisation and control, giving the approach more scientific credibility.

The nomothetic approach may not be as valid as the idiographic approach as it fails to consider individual differences.

Behaviourist, cognitive and biological psychologists tend to focus on discovering laws or establishing generalisations, so take a nomothetic approach. Whereas humanistic Psychology is very interested in the individual and their free will, so adopts an idiographic approach.

The idiographic approach contributes to the nomothetic approach by providing information about the individuals within the groups.

Millon & Davis (1996) suggest research should start with a nomothetic approach and once general 'laws' have been established, research can then move to a more idiographic approach.

Holism & Reductionism

Holism is an approach where behaviour is studied through analysing the person as a whole without breaking down their behaviours into distinct, separate parts.

Gestalt psychologists suggested that the 'whole is greater than the sum of its parts'. This is the view of holism in Psychology.

One strength of the holism debate is that it encapsulates the influences of several variables on human behaviour and considers their effect as a whole.

Adopting a holistic view of mental illness helps us to understand how that particular individual is affected and how we could treat them.

By taking a holistic approach, we cannot establish very clear specific cause and effect around behaviour.

The holistic approach does not lend itself to the scientific method and empirical testing.

Reductionism analyses behaviour by breaking it down into its constituent parts.

Reductionism states that in order to understand why people behave the way they do; it is best to break the behaviours down into smaller parts so that we can see the underlying causes for that behaviour in its constituent parts.

Reductionism is based on the scientific idea of parsimony, that all behaviour should be explained using the most basic principles.

Parsimony Psychology is generally defined as finding the simplest accurate explanation for cognitive processes and behaviours.

One strength of the reductionism side of the debate is that it holds scientific credibility.

The reductionist approach allows us to break behaviours down into constituent parts, meaning we can draw more reliable and therefore arguably more accurate conclusions.

By manipulating independent variables in lab-based research, we are able to get a reductionist view of the cause of the behaviour.

One weakness of the reductionist approach is that it oversimplifies complex phenomena.

Reductionist explanations can be criticised for ignoring psychological, social and cultural factors.

The reductionist approach suggests that there are different levels of explanation.

The notion of 'levels of explanation' suggests that there are different ways of viewing the same phenomena in Psychology.

The lowest level of reductionism considers physiological (biological) explanations, where behaviour is explained in terms of neurochemicals, genes and brain structure.

The middle level of reductionism considers psychological explanations (e.g. cognitive and behavioural).

The highest level of reductionism considers social and cultural explanations, where behaviour is explained in terms of the influence of social groups.

If we imagine a funnel shape, reductionism would be at the bottom (narrow) whereas holism would be at the top (open).

Explaining behaviour in a reductionist manner is seen as a low-level explanation, whereas more holistic explanations are high-level explanations.

Biological reductionism is the idea that all behaviour can be explained by reducing down biological influences such as genetics or biochemistry.

Biological reductionism refers to the way that psychologists try to reduce behaviour to a physical level and explain it in terms of neurons, neurotransmitters, hormones and brain structure.

An example of biological reductionism might suggest that elevated levels of dopamine are implicated in the increase in positive symptoms for Schizophrenia.

Environmental reductionism is the idea that all behaviour can be explained by reducing external factors to simple causes or influences.

Environmental reductionism is also known as stimulus-response reductionism.

Behaviourists assume that all behaviour can be reduced to the simple building blocks of S-R (stimulus-response) associations and that complex behaviours are a series of S-R sequences.

Psychic determinism uses the principles of the psychodynamic approach to reduce behaviour down into more simpler parts.

Cognitive Psychology with its use of the computer analogy reduces behaviour to the level of a machine, mechanistic reductionism.

Free Will & Determinism

The free will/ determinism debate outlines the extent to which our behaviour is the result of forces over which we have no control or whether people decide for themselves whether to act or behave in a certain way.

The free will/ determinism debate explores whether our behaviour is by choice or controlled by other factors.

Determinism is the belief that all events are determined by previous causes, while free will is the belief that individuals have the ability to make choices independent of external influences. These two concepts are often seen as incompatible, as determinism suggests that free will is an illusion.

Free will suggests that we all have a choice and can control and choose our own behaviour.

Psychologists who take the free will view suggest that determinism removes freedom and dignity and devalues human behaviour.

The concept of free will suggests that humans have the ability to make choices and decisions, which influences their behaviour and the value of their actions.

Free will suggests that we have the ability to control and choose our own behaviour.

Free will emphasises the importance of the individual and studying individual differences.

Some critics suggest it is impossible to scientifically test the concept of free will.

Few people would agree that behaviour is always completely under the control of the individual, so free will alone, cannot determine behaviour.

The determinist approach proposes that all behaviour is pre-determined by specific factors and is therefore predictable.

The main arguments for determinism are the principle of causality, the scientific understanding of cause and effect, and the idea that all events have prior causes.

The principle of causality states that every event has a cause. It is closely related to determinism, which is the belief that all events are determined by previous causes.

Some see the source of this determinism as being outside the individual (environmental determinism) whereas others see it from coming inside such as unconscious motivation or genetic determinism (biological determinism).

Environmental determinism is the idea that our behaviour is caused by some sort of outside influence e.g. parental influence.

Biological determinism suggests our biological processes, like the nervous system, govern our behaviour.

Psychic determinism uses ideas from the psychodynamic approach and Freud, who believed childhood experiences and unconscious motivations governed behaviour.

Hard determinism sees free will as an illusion and believes that every event and action has a cause.

Soft determinism represents a middle ground; people do have a choice, but that choice is constrained by external factors.

Determinism is scientific and allows cause and effect relationships to be established.

Determinism take a reductionist approach to explaining behaviour.

Determinism does not account for individual differences. By creating general laws of behaviour, deterministic Psychology underestimates the uniqueness of human beings and their freedom to choose their own destiny.

Deterministic explanations for behaviour reduce individual responsibility.

Determinism reduces individual responsibility by suggesting that all actions and choices are predetermined by external factors, such as genetics or environment, and therefore individuals have no true control over their actions.

Deterministic explanations for behaviour have limitations because they overlook the influence of free will and individual agency and fail to account for the complexity and variability of human behaviour.

Nature & Nurture

Nature is the view that all our behaviour is determined by our biology, such as our genes.

In the nature debate some genetic characteristics only appear later in development as a result of the process of maturation.

Evolutionary explanations of human behaviour exemplify the nature approach in Psychology.

An assumption underlying the nature debate is that behaviour has evolved because of its survival value.

In the nature debate evolutionary psychologists assume that behaviour is a product of natural selection.

Heredity is the genetic transmission of both mental and physical characteristics from one generation to another.

Nestadt et al (2010) suggested a heritability rate of 0.76 for OCD, which is a relatively strong correlation. This suggests it is likely to run in families.

A figure of 0.1 (1%) for heritability suggests that genes have little to no influence over behaviour, whereas a figure of 1.0 (100%) means genetic explanations are the only reason for that behaviour.

Early nativists such as **Descartes (1596-1650)** claimed that all human characteristics are innate.

In the field of Psychology, nativism is the view that certain skills or abilities are "native" or hard-wired into the brain at birth.

Some psychologists view the nature debate as more of an approach as there is clear evidence for the argument of its existence.

Bowlby (1958) suggested that an infant's attachment was biologically pre-programmed. This is supported by animal studies such as **Lorenz (1935)**.

Twin studies can be used to support the nature debate, especially as MZ twins share 100% of their DNA.

The degree to which two people are similar on a particular characteristic can be expressed using a correlation coefficient, called the concordance.

Concordance rates show statistical levels of agreement when looking at genetic similarity.

Twin studies with high concordance rates suggest there is a strong genetic link, supporting the nature debate.

Most concordance rates fall far from 100% suggesting that environmental factors must also play a part in behaviour.

Adoption studies can help us see the influence of nature on behaviour.

If adopted children are more similar to their adoptive parents, we can say that is down to nurture, but if they develop significantly different characteristics, it may be because they have different genes.

A meta-analysis by **Rhee & Waldman (2002)** found that genetic influences accounted for 41% of the variance in aggression.

Nurture refers to the influence of the external environment on behaviour.

Support for the nurture view come from 'empiricists' who hold the view that all knowledge is gained through experience.

Empiricists argue that all behaviour is shaped by the environment.

Empiricists like **Locke (1635-1704)** argued that the mind was a blank slate, which is then shaped by the environment.

Empiricists suggest that any behaviour can be changed by altering the environment, e.g. behaviour shaping.

Empiricists believe that the environment plays a significant role in shaping behaviour and that knowledge is primarily acquired through sensory experiences and observations.

Lerner (1986) proposed different levels of the environment and claimed that development is influenced postnatally (after birth), such as in the social conditions in which a child is raised.

The behaviourist approach is the clearest example of the nurture debate in Psychology, which assumes that all behaviour is learned through the environment.

Bandura (1961) demonstrated the influence of nurture in his experiments using the Bobo doll. This shows how social learning explains aggression in children.

Empirical evidence shows that behaviour is learnt and can be modified through conditioning. This supports the nurture debate.

The nurture debate does not account for any biological influences on behaviour.

Instead of defending extreme nature or nurture views, most psychological researchers are now interested in investigating the ways in which nature and nurture interact.

It is limiting to describe behaviour solely in terms of either nature or nurture and attempts to do this underestimate the complexity of human behaviour.

The interactionist approach assumes there are a combination of both nature and nurture influences on behaviour.

Bowlby (1958) also suggested that attachment types can be determined by parental interaction, which is an external, environmental factor. This shows that attachment may be a combination of nature and nurture.

Kagen (1984) proposed that an infant's innate personality, can affect the attachment it forms with a primary caregiver. This also combines influences from nature and nurture on behaviour.

An example of the interactionist approach is the diathesis-stress model, which argues that behaviour occurs when there is a biological predisposition triggered by an environmental stressor.

According to **Plomin (1994)** people can create their own 'nurture' influences by actively seeking different environments. This could in time have a beneficial outcome on the following generations and their 'nature'.

In some cases people choose certain environments, which are appropriate for their 'nature' For example, children who are more naturally aggressive may seek other children or situations which allow them to act more aggressively.

This is called niche picking. Niche picking is a psychological idea that people choose environments that complement their heredity.

The nature nurture debate is accepted as more of an approach to explaining behaviour and most psychologists accept the interaction of both sides.

