

Paper 3: Issues and Debates



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- Androcentrism
- Alpha and beta bias

Culture Bias

- Universality and bias
- Ethnocentrism
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Free will and determinism

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Ethical implications of research studies and theory, including reference to social sensitivity

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Gender Bias

A01:

Gender Bias

- Psychological research or theory may offer a view that does not represent the experience and behaviour of men or women.
- The differential treatment or representation of men and women based on stereotypes rather than real differences.

Androcentrism

- Almost all psychologists were and are men and therefore the theories they produce tend to represent a male world-view.
- Androcentrism- may result in ALPHA or BETA bias

Alpha Bias	Beta Bias
<p>EXAGGERATE the difference between men and women and, as a consequence of this theories that are alpha biased tend to devalue one gender in comparison to the other.</p> <p>Example - Freud In his alpha biased theory of psychoanalysis Freud viewed femininity as failed masculinity - he exaggerated the difference between men and women.</p>	<p>MINIMISE the differences between men and women.</p> <p>The consequence is that the needs of one gender (usually women) are ignored.</p> <p>Example - Fight or flight stress response Biological research is usually conducted with male animals because the females the variations in hormone levels would make the research more difficult. It is assumed that male-only samples wouldn't matter because what is true for males is true for females.</p>

Evaluation

- ⊗ Gender-based research may create misleading assumptions about female behaviour and fail to challenge the negative stereotypes. Gender bias in research which affect the lives and prospects of real women - for example the statistic that females are around twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression in comparison to males.
- ⊗ A lack of women appointed at senior research level means that female concerns may not be reflected in the research questions asked. Male researchers are more likely to get their work published and studies which find evidence of gender differences are more likely to appear in journal articles. This means that psychology may be guilty of supporting a form of institutional sexism that creates bias in theory and research (Denmark et al, 1988)
- ⊗ Feminist psychologists such as Worrell (1992) have put forward criteria that should be followed to avoid gender bias in research. Women should be studied within meaningful real - life contexts and genuinely participate in research, rather than be the objects of study. Diversity within groups of women should be studied rather than the comparisons between women and men.
- ⊗ The methods used to test or observe them are biased, so males and females appear to be different. Rosenthal (1966) found that male experimenters are more pleasant, and friendly and encouraging to female participants than to male participants. The result was that male participants performed less well on the tasks that were assigned.
- ⊗ Gender bias in many theories continue to be unchallenged. For example Darwin's theory of sexual selection portrays women as choosy but males as being the ones who compete to be chosen.

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Culture Bias

A01:

Culture Bias: The tendency to judge all people in terms of your own cultural assumptions. This distorts or biases your judgement.

Ethnocentrism: Is the belief in the superiority of one's own cultural group.

- **Example** - Ainsworth's Strange Situation - showcased the norms and values of American culture and showed the ideal attachment type as being secure. Child rearing practices in other cultures were seen to deviate from the norm (American) for example German mothers were seen as cold and rejecting rather than encouraging independence in their children.

Cultural Relativism: All cultures are worthy of respect and that in studying another culture we need to try and understand the way a particular culture sees the world. Berry (1969) drew distinctions culturally between etic and emic approaches.

- **Imposed etic** (Ainsworth's study) whereby behaviour from outside of a particular culture are then describes those behaviour as universal.
- **Emic** is where behaviour within or inside of a particular culture and certain behaviours are said to be specific to that culture.

Universality: Psychology has ignored culture as an important influence on human behaviour and has assumed that findings from western cultures can be applied all over the world

- **Examples:** Asch & Milgram - The studies on conformity and obedience were originally conducted with US participants and revealed very different results when they were replicated in other parts of the world.

Evaluation

☉ Critics have argued that the simplistic distinction between cultures no longer applies. Individualistic cultures is associated with western cultures. Collectivist cultures is associated with India and China. Studies have found that there is no distinct difference between the USA and Japan between individualism and collectivism and perhaps suggest that cultural bias in research is less of an issue than it once was.

☉ Researchers in Psychology travel much more than they did 50 years ago and therefore have an increased understanding of different cultures. This increased understanding is on a professional and personal level with academics attending conferences in different countries and cultures who meet regularly to discuss and exchange ideas.

☉ Indigenous psychology is the development of different groups of theories in different countries. Afrocentrism is a movement whose central proposition is that all black people have their roots in Africa and that psychological theories concerning such people must be African - centred and express African views. Argues that European values are not universally appropriate descriptions of behaviour and should not be applied to non - European people.

☉ Negative consequences of cultural bias - An example of damage done through cultural bias was the US Army IQ test used just before the first world war. The tests showed that European immigrants fell slightly below white Americans in terms of IQ and African - Americans were at the bottom of the scale with the lowest mental age. The data led to enduring stereotypes concerning certain ethnic groups and their IQ as attitudes held by Americans towards certain groups of people (black people and people from south-eastern Europe) (Gould, 1981).

☉ Bias in research methods Psychology findings are not only not unrepresentative on a global scale but also within a western culture. Henrich et al (2010) found that 67% of research studies used American Psychology students. The researchers calculated that a randomly selected American student was 4,000 times more likely to be a participant in a psychology study than a non - westerner.

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Free Will and Determinism Debate

A01:

Free Will: The idea that humans can make choices and are not controlled by biological or external forces. This implies that behaviour has no cause and is entirely unpredictable and random, however this isn't supported by everyday experience. The lack of an operational definition of free will means that it cannot be tested scientifically and that without precise definitions research is vague and replication impossible.

Determinism: The view that an individual's behaviour is shaped or controlled by internal or external forces rather than an individual's will to do something.

- **Environmental Determinism:** behaviour is under the control of features in the external environment such as reinforcement and punishment i.e. social forces. Example: The behaviourist approach sees behaviour is the product of reinforcements and punishment.
- **Biological Determinism:** behaviour is under the control of hormones, brain activity (localisation) and genetic. Example: mental illnesses such as depression caused by low levels of serotonin.
- **Psychic Determinism:** thoughts and feelings are determined by life or death instincts and by repressed conflicts.
- **Hard Determinism:** behaviour is caused by events entirely outside a person's control. According to this view behaviour is totally predictable and determined.
- **Soft Determinism:** people have a choice (free will) yet at the same time behaviour is to some extent predictable and does have a cause
- **The scientific emphasis on causal explanations:** the basic principles of science is that every event in the universe has a cause and that causes can be explained using general laws. Knowledge of causes and the formulation of laws are important as they allow scientists to predict and control events in the future.

Evaluation - Free Will

- ☺ Everyday experience 'gives the impression' that we are constantly exercising free will through the choices we make on any given day. This gives face validity to the concept of free will - it makes cognitive sense. Research suggests that people who have an internal locus of believing that they have a high degree of influence over events and own behaviour, tend to be more mentally healthy.
- ☹ Neurological studies of decision making have revealed evidence against free will. Studies by Benjamin Libet (1985) and more recently Chun Siong Soon et al. (2008) have demonstrated that the brain activity that determines the outcome of simple choices may predate our knowledge of having made such a choice.

Evaluation - Determinism

- ☺ Determinism is consistent with the aims of science. The idea that human behaviour is orderly and obeys laws places psychology on equal footing with more established sciences. It had led to the development of treatments, therapies and behavioural interventions that may benefit people (e.g. treatment for schizophrenia).
- ☹ The hard determinist stance - that individual choice is not the cause of behaviour - is not consistent with the way in which our legal system operates. In a court of law, offenders are held morally accountable for their actions.
- ☹ Determinism as an approach is unfalsifiable. It is based on the idea that causes of behaviour will always exist, even though they may not yet have been found. As a basic principle, this is impossible to prove wrong! This suggests that the determinist approach to human behaviour may not be as scientific as it first appears.

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Nature-Nurture Debate

A01:

Nature: Behaviour is seen to be a product of innate (biological or genetic) factors

- **Genetic explanations:** Family, twin and adoption studies show that the closer two individuals are genetically, the more likely that both of them will develop the same behaviours.
- **Evolutionary explanations:** Is based on the principle that a behaviour or characteristic that promotes survival and reproduction will be naturally selected. This is because such behaviours/characteristics are adaptive and the genes for that behaviour / characteristic will be passed down to future generations.

Nurture: Behaviour is a product of environmental influences.

- **Behaviourism:** Assume that behaviour can be explained in terms of experience alone. Behaviourists suggested that attachment could be explained in terms of classical conditioning (who feeds them) and operant conditioning (food reduced hunger and therefore is rewarding).
- **Social learning theory:** Bandura believed behaviour was due to vicarious reinforcement but he also did accept that biology had a role to play in terms of people having the urge to behave aggressively might be biological but if the person learns to express that anger it is through environmental influences (direct and indirect reinforcement).

Interactionist Approach: The idea that nature and nurture are linked to an extent that it doesn't make sense to separate the two so researchers instead study how they interact and influence each other. **Example** - Structural MRI scans of the brains of licensed London taxi drivers were compared with controls who did not drive taxis. Hippocampal volume correlated with the amount of time spent as a taxi driver. It appears the brain has the capacity for plasticity (the ability to change)- the structure of the brain can alter in response to environmental demands.

Evaluation

- ☺ There are practical applications for the nature side of the debate. For example, drug therapies can be developed to treat behavioural or psychological problems that have a physiological origin. E.g. SSRI's can be used to treat depression, Ritalin- ADHD.
- ☺ There are practical applications for the nurture side of the debate. For example, If behaviour is susceptible to environmental influences we need to consider how we adapt our environment. E.g. How can we plan interventions for criminal behaviour and reduce aggression?
- ⊗ It is difficult to separate nature and nurture as one influences the other. For example, there is an inherited disorder known as Phenylketonuria which causes brain damage as a baby. However, if the condition is detected at birth, an infant can be given a restricted diet which prevents brain damage. If we can achieve this through environmental changes, is this condition a result of (nature or nurture)?
- ⊗ The nature- nurture debate is reductionist and deterministic. For example, the nature side of the debate suggests we are predetermined to develop behaviours from birth and ignores free will. It does not account for the environment in its explanation. This therefore makes it reductionist. Equally the nurture debate is reductionist as it suggests all behaviours displayed are as a result of the environment therefore ignoring nature/genetics.
- ⊗ Research attempting to separate the influence of the environment is complicated by the fact siblings raised within the same family may not have experienced the same upbringing. the idea of shared and unshared environments suggests that individual differences mean that siblings may experience life events differently. For example age/temperament to a particular life event such as divorce may have different meanings to different siblings. This would explain the finding that even MZ twins reared together do not show perfect concordance rates.

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Holism and Reductionism Debate

A01:

Holism: With respect to a behaviour such as a memory or mental disorder, perceiving the whole experience rather than the individual features and or the relations between them.

- **Humanistic Psychology:** They believe that the individual reacts as an organised whole, rather than a set of stimulus - response links. What matters is a person's sense of unified identity.
- **Cognitive Psychology:** Memory is a complex system which is understood through connectionist networks (the idea that other neurons are linked to others.) Connectionist networks are described as holist because the network as a whole behaves differently than the individual parts.

Reductionism: An approach that breaks complex phenomena into more simple components, implying that It is desirable because complex phenomena are best understood in terms of a simpler level of explanation.

- **Biological Reductionism:** attempts to explain social and psychological phenomena at a lower biological level (in terms of the actions of genes, hormones). **Example** - The effects of psychoactive drugs on the brain have contributed to our understanding of neural processes and how it is possible to explain serious mental disorders such as OCD, depression and schizophrenia.
- **Environmental Reductionism:** explain all behaviour in terms of stimulus - response links that have been learned through experience. **Example** - The behaviourist approach is built upon environmental reductionism. As they study only observable behaviour through learning which is broken into stimulus response.

Levels of Measurement:

Highest Level - Cultural and social explanations of how our social groups affect our behaviour	Memory - can be explained at a social level in how cultural expectations affect what we remember
Middle Level - Psychological explanations of behaviour	Memory - can be explained at psychological level in terms of episodic memories (memories of events in a person's life).
Lowest Level - Biological explanations of how hormones and genes etc - affect our behaviour.	Memory - can be explained at a biological level in terms of the areas of the brain where the memories are stored and the neurotransmitters involved in forming memories.

Evaluation - Holism

☺ provides a more complete and global understanding of behaviour than the reductionist approaches. The effects of conformity to social roles and the deindividuation of the prisoners and guards in the Stanford prison experiment could not be understood by studying the participants as individuals.

Evaluation - Reductionism

- ☺ an explanation can be tested as there are fewer factors to consider. This means that empirical work can be conducted on an explanation and this gives it academic weight.
- ☺ can help facilitate development of a biological therapy such as drugs. These do help people suffering from mental health problems.
- ☹ other explanations are ignored and underplayed. In the case of mental illness this could lead to reoccurrence of the issue as all the factors have not been considered.
- ☹ The complexity involved in every behaviour means that a purely reductionist explanations is rarely accepted as sufficient.

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Idiographic and nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation

A01:

Idiographic Approach: Attempts to describe the nature of the individual. People are studied as unique entities, each with their own subjective experiences, motivations and values. There may be no attempt made to compare these to a larger group, standard or norm. It is generally associated with those methods in psychology that produce qualitative data, such as case studies, unstructured interviews and other self-report measures.

This reflects one of the central aims of idiographic research: to describe the richness of human experience and gain insight into the person's unique way of viewing the world.

Examples

- **Humanistic:** Were interested only in documenting the conscious experience of the individual or 'self'. In describing themselves as 'anti-scientific', humanistic psychologists were more concerned with investigating unique experience 'on its own merits' than producing general laws of behaviour.
- **Psychodynamic:** Labelled 'idiographic' because of Sigmund Freud's use of the case study method when detailing the lives of his patients. However, Freud also assumed he had identified universal laws of behaviour and personality development.

Nomothetic: The main aim is to produce general laws of human behaviour. These provide a 'benchmark' against which people can be compared, classified and measured, and on the basis on which likely future behaviour can be predicted and/or controlled. Uses methods that would be regarded as 'scientific' within psychology such as experiments and gathering quantitative data. These involved the study of larger number of people in order to establish ways in which people are similar.

Examples

- **Behaviourists:** studied the responses of hundreds of rats, cats, pigeons etc. in order to develop the laws of learning
- **Cognitive:** psychologists have been able to infer the structure and processes of human memory by measuring performance of large samples of people in laboratory tests
- **Biological:** psychologists have conducted brain scans on countless human brains in order to make generalisations about localisation of function.

Evaluation - Idiographic

- ☺ The use of qualitative methods provide an in depth and arguably more complete account of an individual.
- ☹ Offers a very narrow perspective. This means that the ideas may struggle to generalise beyond the individuals studied, thus reducing ecological validity. .
- ☹ the methods utilised (e.g. case studies) often lack scientific rigor as they rely heavily on subjective interpretation. This is a problem as this means conclusions are open to bias

Evaluation - Nomothetic

- ☺ Methods used are very scientific. This is important as it increases the internal validity. It means results and conclusions are not influenced by researcher bias.
- ☺ Enables psychologists to easily establish general law as which can be used for comparison, prediction and even control of future behaviour (e.g. it can be used to predict the impact of certain treatments for people suffering from psychological illness).
- ☹ May overlook the richness of human behaviour, which many argue is crucial when trying to understand human behaviour. It could be that human behaviour is too complex to establish general laws - people have to be viewed as individuals!

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Ethical implications of research studies and theory, including reference to social sensitivity

A01:

Ethical Implications: The impact psychological research may have in terms of the rights of other people especially participants.

Socially Sensitive: Any research that might have direct social consequences for the participants in the research or the group they represent.

The research process

- The research question - some questions can be damaging to members of a particular group (e.g. is homosexuality inherited).
- Conduct of research and treatment of participants - confidentiality of the information collected (e.g. if a participant confesses to a crime, should confidentiality be maintained).
- The institutional context - research may be funded by private institutions who may misuse the data.
- Interpretation and application of findings - research findings may be used for purposes that were originally not intended - (e.g. IQ tests used to demonstrate inferiority in certain groups and were then sterilised in the US in the 20th century).

Ethical issues in socially sensitive research (Sieber & Stanley)

- Privacy - more information could be taken and used to inform social policy.
- Confidentiality - participants may be less willing to divulge information in the future if confidentiality is breached and further research would be compromised.
- Valid methodology - studies with poor methodology may shape important social policies.
- Deception - research may lead people to form untrue stereotypes which affect their performance.
- Informed consent - participants may not always comprehend what is involved.
- Equitable treatment - all participants should be treated in the same manner.
- Scientific freedom - scientist has a duty to engage in research but has an obligation not to harm participants.

Evaluation

- The wider impact of research - There are always social consequences to participation in research, but with socially sensitive research there is also the increased potential for more indirect impact on the participant's family. It is not sufficient to safeguard the interests of the individual in research - there must be some consideration of the likely impact of the research on the larger groups.
- May disadvantage marginalised groups . Many groups in society have suffered the consequences of having been excluded from research or being misrepresented when they have been included. The failure to accurately represent and research such groups carries with it an additional ethical issue - the fact that these groups then miss out on any of the potential benefits of research.
- The ethical guidelines set for research permission are seen by some as be too strict. There are areas of research which could elicit helpful findings that could benefit a lot of people. However, the research cannot be conducted due to the research process potentially causing issues for the participants or the researcher. Reaching a balance is therefore problematic.
- Sometimes it is not possible to see what the effects of research might be on the researcher, the participants and society. This makes it hard to judge. It is also not an objective decision, so there is potential for bias from within the decision makers. This means that socially sensitive research still causes problems from time to time.
- Stringent guidelines are in place to protect all people who may be involved in the process. The guidelines have become more careful as time has passed so the chances of research causing problems have been reduced.