



Gender and Culture in Psychology

Gender Bias

AO1

Gender bias results when one gender is treated less favourably than the other, often referred to as sexism and it has a range of consequences including:

- Scientifically misleading
- Upholding stereotypical assumptions
- Validating sex discrimination

Avoiding gender bias does not mean pretending that men and women are the same.

There are three main types of gender bias:

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

Beta bias -this 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.

Androcentrism - taking male thinking/behaviour as normal, regarding female thinking/behaviour as deviant, inferior, abnormal, 'other' when it is different.

Positive Consequences of Gender Bias

Alpha Bias:

- Has led to some theorists (Gilligan) to assert the worth and valuation 'feminine qualities'.
- Has led to healthy criticism of cultural values that praise certain 'male' qualities such as aggression and individualism as desirable, adaptive and universal.

Beta Bias:

- Makes 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.

Negative Consequences of Gender Bias

Alpha Bias:

- Focus on differences between genders leads to the implication of similarity WITHIN genders, thus this ignores the many ways women differ from each other.
- Can sustain prejudices and stereotypes.

Beta Bias:

- Draws attention away from the differences in power between men and women.
- Is considered as an egalitarian approach but it results in major misrepresentations of both genders.

Consequences of Gender Bias

Kitzinger (1998) argue that questions about sex differences aren't just scientific questions – they're also political (women have same rights as men). So gender differences distorted to maintain the status quo of male power.

- Women kept out of male-dominant universities.
- Women were oppressed.
- Women stereotypes (Bowlby).

Feminist argue that although gender differences are minimal or non-existent, they are used against women to maintain male power.

Judgements about an individual women's ability are made on the basis of average differences between the sexes or biased sex-role stereotypes, and this also had the effect of lowering women's self esteem; making them, rather than men, think they have to improve themselves (Tavris, 1993).

Examples of Gender Bias in Research AO3

Kohlberg & Moral Development

Kohlberg based his stages of moral development around male moral reasoning and had an all-male sample. He then inappropriately generalized his findings to women (**beta bias**) and also claimed women generally reached lower level of moral development (**androcentrism**).

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

However, her research is, arguably, also (alpha) biased, as male and female moral reasoning is more similar than her work suggests.

Freud & Psychosexual Development

Freud's ideas are seen as inherently gender biased, but it must be remembered that he was a product of his time. He saw 'Biology as destiny' and women's roles as prescribed & predetermined.

All his theories are **androcentric**, most obviously: -'Penis envy' – women are defined psychologically by the fact that they aren't men.

But Freud's ideas had serious consequences/implications they reinforced stereotypes e.g. of women's moral Inferiority, treated deviations from traditional sex-role behaviour as pathological (career ambition = penis envy) and are clearly androcentric (phallocentric).

Biomedical Theories of Abnormality

In women, mental illness, especially depression, is much more likely to be explained in terms of neurochemical/hormonal processes, rather than other possible explanations such as social or environmental (e.g. domestic violence, unpaid labour, discrimination).

The old joke 'Is it your hormones, love?' is no joke for mentally ill women!

Gender Bias in the Research Process AO1

Institutional sexism

- Although female psychology students outnumber male, at a senior teaching and research level in universities, men dominate. Men predominate at senior researcher level.
- Research agenda follows male concerns, female concerns may be marginalised or ignored.

Use of standardised procedures in research studies

- Most experimental methodologies are based around standardised treatment of participants. This assumes that men and women respond in the same ways to the experimental situation.
- Women and men might respond differently to research situation.
- Women and men might be treated differently by researchers.
- Could create artificial differences or mask real ones.

Dissemination of research results through academic journals

- Publishing bias towards positive results.

- Research that finds gender differences more likely to get published than that which doesn't.
- Exaggerates extent of gender differences.

Reducing Gender Bias in Psychology (AO3)

Equal opportunity legislation and feminist psychology have performed the valuable functions of reducing institutionalised gender bias and drawing attention to sources of bias and under-researched areas in psychology like childcare, sexual abuse, dual burden working and prostitution.

The Feminist perspective

- Re-examining the 'facts' about gender.
- View of women as normal humans, not deficient men.
- Skepticism towards biological determinism.
- Research agenda focusing on women's' concerns.
- A psychology for women, rather than a psychology of women.

Learning Check AO2

This activity will help you to:

- Identify gender biases in psychological theories
- Discuss the impact of biased research on society
- Critically assess gender-biased theories

Below are two examples of research that could be considered gender biased. Working in pairs or small groups, you need to do the following:

1. Identify aspects of the research that could be considered gender biased

2. Identify and explain the type of gender bias that is present
3. Suggest the impact that these research examples could have on society

You could look, for example, at how the research might uphold or reinforce gender stereotypes, or be used to disempower women in society.

The Psychodynamic View of Personality and Moral Development

Freud and many of his followers believed that biological differences between men and women had major consequences for psychological development. In their view, 'biology is destiny'.

Freud believed that gender divergence begins at the onset of the phallic stage, where the girl realises that she has no penis, and starts to feel inferior to boys (penis envy). Penis envy becomes a major driving force in the girl's mental life, and needs to be successfully sublimated into a desire for a husband and children if it is not to become pathological.

This view of gender divergence in personality development has implications for other aspects of development. For example, Freud's view of morality was that it was regulated by the superego, which is an internalisation of the same sex parent that regulates behaviour through the threat of punishment. In boys, immoral behaviour is regulated through the mechanism of castration anxiety – men obey the rules because of an unconscious fear that their father will take away their penis.

In the Freudian view, the girl has already had to accept her castration as a *fait accompli*, which raises important questions about the relative moral strength of men and women.

The Biological View of Mental Illness

The biomedical view of mental illness, which approaches behavioural and psychological abnormality as a manifestation of underlying pathological processes on the biological level, dominates discussion of mental illness.

In the **biomedical view**, illnesses such as depression can be explained in terms of chemical imbalances causing malfunction in the parts of the brain associated with emotion.

When explaining why twice as many women as men are diagnosed with depression, adherents of the biomedical view tend to suggest that this is due to hormonal differences, and point to the existence of, for example, post-natal depression to show how fluctuations in female sex hormones can lead to abnormalities of mood.

Similarly, sex differences in hormonal processes can be used to explain the existence of disorders that are 'gender bound', such as pre-menstrual syndrome.

Culture Bias

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.

General Background

In order to fulfil its aspiration of explaining human thinking and behaviour, psychology must address the huge diversity in people around the globe. Each individual's behaviour is shaped by a huge number of factors, including their genes, their upbringing and individual experiences.

At the same time, people are affected by a range of factors that are specific to the cultural group in which they developed and within which they live. Psychologists should always attempt to account for the ways in which culture affects thinking and behaviour.

However, this has not always been the case. Psychology is a discipline that evolved within a very specific cultural context. Psychology is predominantly a white, Euro-American enterprise: - (i) 64% of psychological researchers from US; (ii) in some texts, 90% of studies have US Participants; (iii) samples predominantly white middle class.

Consequently, it has incorporated a particular world-view (that of the industrialised West) into the ways it tries to understand people. This can have consequences. For

example:

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

We will be looking at how cultural bias can affect psychological theories and research studies, and the sorts of things psychologists can do to avoid the worst effects of cultural bias.

Types of Theoretical Constructions for Understanding Cultural Bias AO1

Emics

An **emic construct** is one that is applied to only in 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. This means that research of European society from a European perspective is emic, and African society by African researchers in Africa is also emic. An emic approach is more likely to have ecological validity as the findings are less likely to be distorted or caused by a mismatch between the cultures of the researchers and the culture being investigated.

Culture bias can occur when a researcher assumes that an emic construct (behaviour specific to a single culture) is actually an etic (behaviour universal to all cultures).

For example, emic constructs are likely to be ignored or misinterpreted as researchers from another culture may not be sensitive to local emics. Their own cultural 'filters' may prevent them from detecting them or appreciating their significance.

Etics

An **etic construct** is a theoretical idea that is assumed to apply in all cultural groups. Therefore, 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 humans but that cultural factors influence the development or display of this behaviour.

Culture bias can occur when emics and etics get mistaken for each other.

Making the assumption that behaviours are universal across cultures can lead to **imposed etics**, where a construct from one culture is applied inappropriately to another. For example, although basic human emotional facial expressions are universal there can be subtle cultural variation in these.

Bias can occur when emics and etics get mistaken for each other.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism occurs when a researcher assumes that their own culturally specific practices or ideas are 'natural' or 'right'. The individual uses their own ethnic group to evaluate and make judgments about other individuals from other ethnic groups. Research which is 'centred' around one cultural group is called 'ethnocentric'.

When other cultures are observed to differ from the researcher's own, they may be regarded in a negative light e.g. 'primitive', 'degenerate', 'unsophisticated', 'undeveloped' etc.

This becomes racism when other cultures are denigrated or their traditions regarded as irrelevant etc.

The antidote to ethnocentrism is cultural relativism, which is an approach to treating each culture as unique and worthy of study.

Cultural Relativism

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

The principle is sometimes practiced to avoid cultural bias in research, as well as to avoid judging another culture by the standards of one's own culture. For this reason, cultural relativism has been considered an attempt to avoid ethnocentrism.

Culturally Biased Research AO3

Ainsworth's Strange Situation for Attachment

The **strange situation procedure** is not appropriate for assessing children from non-US or UK populations as it is based on Western childrearing ideals (i.e. ethnocentric).

The original study only used American, middle-class, white, home-reared infants and mothers therefore the generalisability of the findings could be questioned as well as whether this procedure would be valid for other cultures too.

Cultural differences in child-rearing styles make results liable to misinterpretation e.g. German or Japanese samples.

Takahshi (1990) aimed to see whether the strange situation is a valid procedure for cultures other than the original. Takashi found no children in the avoidant-insecure stage, this could be explained in cultural terms as Japanese children are taught that such behaviour is impolite and they would be actively discouraged from displaying it. Also because Japanese children experience much less separation, the SSC was more than mildly stressful.

IQ testing and Research (e.g. Eysenck)

An example of an etic approach which produces bias might be the imposition of IQ tests designed within one culture on another culture. If a test is designed to measure a European's understanding of what intelligence is it may not be a valid measurement of an African's, or Asian's intelligence.

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

Non-Westerners may be disadvantaged by such tests – and then viewed as ‘inferiour’ when then don’t perform as Westerners do.

Task: Try the [Chittling IQ Test](#)

Consequences of Culture Bias AO3

Nobles (1976) argues that western psychology has been a tool of oppression and dominance. Cultural bias has also made it difficult for psychologists to separate the behaviour they have observed from the context in which they observed it.

Reducing Culture Bias AO3

Equal opportunity legislation aims to rid psychology of cultural bias and racism, but we must be aware merely swapping old, overt racism for new, more subtle forms of racism (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994)

Free Will & Determinism

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

Free Will

AO1

Free Will suggests that we all have a choice and can control and choose our own behaviour. This approach is all about personal responsibility and plays a central role in Humanist Psychology.

By arguing that humans can make free choices, the free will approach appears to be quite the opposite of the deterministic one. Psychologists who take the free will view suggest that

determinism removes freedom and dignity, and devalues human behaviour.

To a lesser degree Cognitive Psychology also supports the idea of free will and choice. In reality, although we do have free will it is constrained by our circumstances and other people. For example, when you go shopping your choices are constrained by how much money you have.

Strengths (AO3)

- It emphasises the importance of the individual and studying individual differences.
- It fits society's view of personal responsibility e.g. if you break the law you should be punished.
- The idea of self-efficacy is useful in therapies as it makes them more effective.

Limitations (AO3)

- Free will is subjective and some argue it doesn't exist.
- 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.

Determinism

AO1

The determinist approach proposes that all behaviour is determined and thus predictable. Some approaches in psychology see the source of this determinism as being outside the individual, a position known as environmental determinism.

Others see it from coming inside i.e., in the form of unconscious motivation or genetic determinism – biological determinism.

- **Environmental (External) Determinism:** This is the idea that our behaviour is caused by some sort of outside influence e.g. parental influence.

Skinner (1971) argued that freedom is an illusion. We may think we have freewill but the probability of any behaviour occurring is determined by past experiences.

Skinner claimed that free will was an illusion – we think we are free, but this is because we are not aware of how our behaviour is determined by reinforcement.

- **Biological (Internal) Determinism:** Our biological systems, such as the nervous system, govern our behaviour.

For example, a high IQ may be related to the IGF2R gene (Chorney et al. 1998).

- **Psychic (Internal) Determinism:** Freud believed childhood experiences and unconscious motivations governed behaviour.

Freud thought that free will was an illusion, because he felt that the causes of our behaviour is unconscious and still predictable.

There are different levels of determinism.

Hard Determinism

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

Soft Determinism

Soft Determinism represents a middle ground, people do have a choice, but that choice is constrained by external factors e.g. Being poor doesn't make you steal, but it may make you more likely to take that route through desperation.

Strengths (AO3)

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

- It gives plausible explanations for behaviour backed up by evidence.

Limitations (AO3)

- Determinism is reductionist.
- 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.
- Hard determinism suggests criminals cannot be held accountable for their actions. Deterministic explanations for behaviour reduce individual responsibility. A person arrested for a violent attack for example might plead that they were not responsible for their behaviour – it was due to their upbringing, a bang on the head they received earlier in life, recent relationship stresses, or a psychiatric problem. In other words, their behaviour was determined.

Essay Question: - Discuss free will & determinism in psychology (16 marks)

Nature & Nurture

The central question is the extent to which our behaviour is determined by our biology (nature) and the genes we inherit from our parents versus the influence of environmental factors (nurture) such as home school and friends.



Nature

AO1

Nature is the view that all our behaviour is determined by our biology, our genes. This is not

the same as the characteristics you are born with, because these may have been determined by your pre-natal environment.

In addition, some genetic characteristics only appear later in development as a result of the process of maturation. Supporters of the nature view have been called 'nativists'.

Evolutionary explanations of human behaviour exemplify the nature approach in psychology. The main assumption underlying this approach is that any particular behaviour has evolved because of its survival value.

E.g., Bowlby suggested that attachment behaviours are displayed because they ensure the survival of an infant and the perpetuation of the parents' genes. This survival value is further increased because attachment has implications for later relationship formation which will ultimately promote successful reproduction.

Evolutionary psychologists assume that behaviour is a product of natural selection. Interpersonal attraction can, for example, be explained as a consequence of sexual selection. Men and women select partners who enhance their reproductive success, judging this in terms of traits that 'advertise' reproductive fitness, such as signs of healthiness (white teeth) or resources.

Physiological psychology is also based on the assumption that behaviour can be explained in terms of genetically programmed systems.

Strengths (AO3)

Bowlby's explanation of attachment does not ignore environmental influences, as is generally true for evolutionary explanations. In the case of attachment theory, Bowlby proposed that infants become most strongly attached to the caregiver who responds most sensitively to the infant's needs.

The experience of sensitive caregiving leads a child to develop expectations that others will be equally sensitive, so that they tend to form adult relationships that are enduring and trusting.

Limitations (AO3)

Problem of the transgenerational effect. behaviour which appears to be determined by nature (and therefore is used to support this nativist view) may in fact be determined by nurture! e.g. if a woman has poor diet during her pregnancy, her unborn child will suffer.

This means that the eggs with which each female child is born will also have these negative effects. This can then affect the development of her children a whole generation later.

This means that a child's development may in fact be determined by their grandmother's environment (transgenerational effect). This suggests that what may appear to be inherited and in born is in fact caused by the environment and nurture.

Nurture

AO1

Nurture is the opposite view that all behaviour is learnt and influenced by external factors such as the environment etc. Supports of the nurture view are 'empiricists' holding the view that all knowledge is gained through experience.

The behaviourist approach is the clearest examples of the nurture position in psychology, which assumes that all behaviour is learned through the environment. The best known example is the social learning explanation of aggression, using the Bobo doll.

SLT proposes that much of what we learn is through observation and vicarious reinforcement. E.g., Bandura demonstrated this in his Bobo doll experiments. He found that children who watched an adult role model being rewarded for aggression towards an inflatable doll, tended to imitate that behaviour when later on their own with a Bobo doll.

This supports the idea that personality is determined by nurture rather than nature. This provides us with model of how to behave. However, such behaviour becomes part of an individual's behavioural repertoire through direct reinforcement – when a behaviour is imitated, it receives direct reinforcement (or not).

Another assumption of the nurture approach is that there is the double bind hypothesis

which explains schizophrenia. They suggest that schizophrenia develops because children receive contradictory messages from their parents.

Strengths (AO3)

Empirical evidence shows that behaviour is learnt and can be modified through conditioning.

Limitations (AO3)

behaviourist accounts are all in terms of learning, but even learning itself has a genetic basis. For example, research has found that mutant flies missing a crucial gene cannot be conditioned (Quinn et al., 1979).

Conclusion (AO3)

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.

For example, in psychopathology, this means that both a genetic predisposition and an appropriate environmental trigger are required for a mental disorder to develop. Therefore, it makes more sense to say that the difference between two people's behaviour is mostly due to hereditary factors or mostly due to environmental factors.

The Diathesis-stress model of Schizophrenia suggests that although people may inherit a predisposition to Schizophrenia, some sort of environmental stressor is required in order to develop the disease. This explains why Schizophrenia happens in the late teens or early adulthood, times of considerable upheaval and stress in people's lives e.g. leaving home, starting work, forging new relationships etc.

Essay Question: - Describe & evaluate the nature-nurture debate in psychology (16 marks)

Reductionism & Holism

Holism

AO1

Holism is often referred to as Gestalt psychology. It argues that behaviour cannot be understood in terms of the components that make them up. This is commonly described as 'the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.'

Psychologists study the whole person to gain an understanding of all the factors that might influence behaviour. Holism uses several levels of explanation including biological, environment and social factors.

Holistic approaches include Humanism, Social and Gestalt psychology and makes use of the case study method. Jahoda's 6 elements of Optimal Living are an example of a holistic approach to defining abnormality.

Imagine you were asked to make a cake.

If I simply told you that you needed 3 eggs, 75 grams of sugar, and 75 grams of self-raising. Would that be enough information for you to make a sponge cake? What else would you need to know?

In this way a cake is more than the sum of its parts. Simply putting all the ingredients into a tin and sticking in the oven would not result in a sponge cake!

Strengths (AO3)

- Looks at everything that may impact on behaviour.
- Does not ignore the complexity of behaviour.
- Integrates different components of behaviour in order to understand the person as a

whole.

- Can be higher in ecological validity.

Limitations (AO3)

- Over complicates behaviours which may have simpler explanations (Occam's Razor).
- Does not lend itself to the scientific method and empirical testing.
- Makes it hard to determine cause and effect.
- Neglects the importance of biological explanations.
- Almost impossible to study all the factors that influence complex human behaviours

Reductionism

AO1

Reductionism is the belief that human behaviour can be explained by breaking it down into smaller component parts. Reductionists say that the best way to understand why we behave as we do is to look closely at the very simplest parts that make up our systems, and use the simplest explanations to understand how they work.

In psychology, the term is most appropriately applied to biological explanations (e.g. genetics, neurotransmitters, hormones) of complex human behaviours such as schizophrenia, gender and aggression. Such reductionist explanations can be legitimately criticised as ignoring psychological, social and cultural factors.

Cognitive psychology with its use of the computer analogy reduces behaviour to the level of a machine, mechanistic reductionism. behaviourist psychology sees behaviour in terms of simple stimulus/response relationships. And finally, the psychodynamic perspective reduces behaviour to unconscious motivation and early childhood experiences.

Strengths (AO3)

- The use of a reductionist approach to behaviour can be a useful one in allowing scientific study to be carried out. Scientific study requires the isolation of variables to make it possible to identify the causes of behaviour. For example, research into the genetic basis on mental disorders has enabled researchers to identify specific genes believed to be responsible for schizophrenia. This way a reductionist approach enables the scientific causes of behaviour to be identified and advances the possibility of scientific study.
- A reductionist approach to studying mental disorders has led to the development of effective chemical treatments

Limitations (AO3)

- The disadvantage is that it can be over simplistic. Humans and their environments are so complex that the reductionist explanation falls short of giving the whole explanation of the behaviour. Thus, it lacks ecological validity
- Does not address larger societal issues e.g. poverty.

Conclusion

Reductionism in psychology is useful, as sometimes the simplest explanation is the best. Physiological approaches do tend to be reductionist, but as long as we bare these limitations in mind. It is difficult, if not impossible, to take a completely holistic approach to psychology, as human behaviour is so complex. Case studies come closest to taking a holistic approach.

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

Essay Question: - Discuss holism and reductionism in psychology (16 marks)

Idiographic & Nomothetic approaches

Nomothetic Approach

AO1

The Nomothetic approach looks at how our behaviours are similar to each other as human beings. The term “nomothetic” comes from the Greek word “nomos” meaning “law”.

Psychologists who adopt this approach are mainly concerned with studying what we share with others. That is to say in establishing laws or generalizations. Tend to use quantitative methods.

Personality: - A Nomothetic Approach

The psychometric approach to the study of personality compares individuals in terms of traits or dimensions common to everyone. This is a nomothetic approach and two examples are Hans Eysenck's type and Raymond Cattell's 16PF trait theories.

The details of their work need not concern us here. Suffice to say they both assume that there are a small number of traits that account for the basic structure of all personalities and that individual differences can be measured along these dimensions.

Strengths (AO3)

The nomothetic approach is seen as far more scientific than the idiographic approach, as it takes an evidence based, objective approach to formulate causal laws.

This enables us to make predictions about how people are likely to react in certain circumstances, which can be very useful e.g. Zimbardo's findings about how prisoners and guards react in a prison environment.

Limitations (AO3)

Predictions can be made about groups but these may not apply to individuals.

Approach has been accused of losing sight of the 'whole person'.

Idiographic Approach

AO1

The Idiographic or individual differences approach looks at how our behaviours are different to each other. The term "idiographic" comes from the Greek word "idios" meaning "own" or "private". Psychologists interested in this aspect of experience want to discover what makes each of us unique. Tend to use qualitative methods.

Personality: - An Idiographic Approach

At the other extreme Gordon Allport found over 18,000 separate terms describing personal characteristics. Whilst some of these are common traits (that could be investigated nomothetically) the majority, in Allport's view, referred to more or less unique dispositions based on life experiences peculiar to ourselves. He argues that they cannot be effectively studied using standardised tests. What is needed is a way of investigating them idiographically.

Carl Rogers, a Humanist psychologist, has developed a method of doing this, a procedure called the "Q-sort". First the subject is given a large set of cards with a self-evaluative statement written on each one. For example "I am friendly" or "I am ambitious" etc. The subject is then asked to sort the cards into piles. One pile to contain statements that are "most like me", one statements that are "least like me" and one or more piles for statements that are in-between.

In a Q-sort the number of cards can be varied as can the number of piles and the type of question (e.g. How I am now? How I used to be? How my partner sees me? How I would like to be?) So there are a potentially infinite number of variations. That, of course, is exactly as it should be for an idiographic psychologist because in his/her view there are ultimately as many different personalities as there are people.

Strengths (AO3)

A major strength of the idiographic approach is its focus on the individual. Gordon Allport argues that it is only by knowing the person as a person that we can predict what the person will do in any given situation.

Limitations (AO3)

The idiographic approach is very time consuming. It takes a lot of time and money to study individuals in depth. If a researcher is using the nomothetic approach once a questionnaire, psychometric test or experiment has been designed data can be collected relatively quickly.

Conclusion

From these examples we can see that the difference between a nomothetic and an idiographic approach is not just a question of what the psychologist wants to discover but also of the methods used. Experiments, correlation, psychometric testing and other quantitative methods are favoured from a nomothetic point of view. Case studies, informal interviews, unstructured observation and other qualitative methods are idiographic.

There are also broad differences between theoretical perspectives. Behaviourist, cognitive and biological psychologists tend to focus on discovering laws or establishing generalizations: - Nomothetic. The humanists are interested in the individual: - Idiographic.

As always, it is best to take a combined approach. 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. Thus, getting the best of both worlds!

Essay Question: - Discuss idiographic and nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation (16 marks)

Ethics & Socially Sensitive Research

AO1

There has been an assumption over the years by many psychologists that provided they follow the BPS guidelines when using human participants and that all leave in a similar state of mind to how they turned up, not having been deceived or humiliated, given a debrief, and not having had their confidentiality breached, that there are no ethical concerns with their research.

But, consider the following examples:

- a) Caughy et al 1994 who found that middle class children put in daycare at an early age generally score less on cognitive tests than children from similar families reared in the home.

Assuming all guidelines were followed, neither the parents nor the children that participated would have been unduly affected by this research. Nobody would have been deceived, consent would have been obtained, and no harm would have been caused. However, think of the wider implications of this study when the results are published, particularly for parents of middle class infants who are considering placing their young charges in day care or those who recently have!

- 2. IQ tests administered to black Americans show that they typically score 15 points below the average white score.

When black Americans are given these tests they presumably complete them willingly and are in no way harmed as individuals. However, when published, findings of this sort seek to reinforce racial stereotypes and are used to discriminate against the black population in the job market etc.

Sieber & Stanley (1988) (the main names for Socially Sensitive Research (SSR)) outline 4 groups that may be affected by psychological research: It is the first group of people that we are most concerned with!

- 1) Members of the social group being studied such as racial or ethnic group. For example early research on IQ was used to discriminate against US Blacks.

- 2) Friends and relatives of those taking part in the study, particularly in case studies, where individuals may become famous or infamous. Cases that spring to mind would include Genie's mother.
- 3) The research team. There are examples of researchers being intimidated because of the line of research they are in.
- 4) The institution in which the research is conducted.

Sieber & Stanley (1988) also suggest there are 4 main ethical concerns when conducting SSR:

- The research question or hypothesis.
- The treatment of individual participants.
- The institutional context.
- The way in which the findings of research are interpreted and applied.

Ethical Guidelines For Carrying Out SSR

AO1

Sieber and Stanley suggest the following ethical guidelines for carrying out SSR. There is some overlap between these and research on human participants in general.

Privacy: This refers to people, rather than data. Asking people questions of a personal nature (e.g. about sexuality) could offend.

Confidentiality: This refers to data. Information (e.g. about H.I.V. status), leaked to others, may affect the participant's life.

Sound & valid methodology: This is even more vital when the research topic is socially sensitive. Academics are able to detect flaws in method but the lay public and the media often don't. When research findings are publicised, people are likely to take them as fact and policies may be based on them. Examples are Bowlby's maternal deprivation studies and

intelligence testing.

Deception: Causing the wider public to believe something, which isn't true by the findings, you report (e.g. that parents are totally responsible for how their children turn out).

Informed consent: Participants should be made aware of how taking part in the research may affect them.

Justice & equitable treatment: Examples of unjust treatment are (i) publicising an idea, which creates prejudice against a group, & (ii) withholding a treatment, which you believe is beneficial, from some participants so that you can use them as controls. E.g. The Tuskergee Study which withheld treatment for STIs from black men to investigate the effects of syphilis on the body.

Scientific freedom: Science should not be censored but there should be some monitoring of sensitive research. The researcher should weigh their responsibilities against their rights to do the research.

Ownership of data: When research findings could be used to make social policies, which affect people's lives, should they be publicly accessible? Sometimes, a party commissions research with their own interests in mind (e.g. an industry, an advertising agency, a political party, the military). Some people argue that scientists should be compelled to disclose their results so that other scientists can re-analyse them. If this had happened in Burt's day, there may not have been such widespread belief in the genetic transmission of intelligence. George Miller (Miller's Magic 7) famously argued that we should give psychology away.

The values of social scientists: Psychologists can be divided into 2 main groups: those who advocate a humanistic approach (individuals are important and worthy of study, quality of life is important, intuition is useful) and those advocating a scientific approach (rigorous methodology, objective data). The researcher's values may conflict with those of the participant/institution. For example, if someone with a scientific approach was evaluating a counselling technique based on a humanistic approach, they would judge it on criteria which those giving & receiving the therapy may not consider important.

Cost/benefit analysis: If the costs outweigh the potential/actual benefits, it is unethical. However, it is difficult to assess costs & benefits accurately & the participants themselves rarely benefit from research.

Sieber & Stanley advise: Researchers should not avoid researching socially sensitive issues.

Scientists have a responsibility to society to find useful knowledge.

- They need to take more care over consent, debriefing, etc., when the issue is sensitive.
- They should be aware of how their findings may be interpreted & used by others.
- They should make explicit the assumptions underlying their research, so that the public can consider whether they agree with these.
- They should make the limitations of their research explicit (e.g. 'the study was only carried out on white middle class American male students', 'the study is based on questionnaire data, which may be inaccurate', etc.
- They should be careful how they communicate with the media and policymakers.
- They should be aware of the balance between their obligations to participants and those to society (e.g. if the participant tells them something which they feel they should tell the police/social services).
- They should be aware of their own values and biases and those of the participants.

Arguments for SSR (AO3)

- Psychologists have devised methods to resolve the issues raised.
- SSR is the most scrutinised research in psychology. Ethical committees reject more SSR than any other form of research.
- By gaining a better understanding of issues such as gender, race and sexuality we are able to gain a greater acceptance and reduce prejudice.
- SSR has been of benefit to society, for example EWT. This has made us aware that EWT can be flawed and should not be used without corroboration. It has also made us aware that the EWT of children is every bit as reliable as that of adults.
- Most research is still carried out on white middle class Americans (about 90% of research quoted in texts!). SSR is helping to redress the balance and make us more aware of other cultures and outlooks.

Arguments against SSR (AO3)

- Flawed research has been used to dictate social policy and put certain groups at a disadvantage.
- Research has been used to discriminate against groups in society such as sterilisation of people in the USA between 1910 and 1920 because they were of low intelligence, criminal or suffered from psychological illness.
- The guidelines used by psychologists to control SSR lack power and as a result are unable to prevent indefensible research being carried out.

About the Author

[Deb Gajic](#) is head of Psychology at The Polesworth School (an 'outstanding' school, where Deb is an 'outstanding teacher!'), an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society (AFBPsS) and a Chartered Psychologist.

She has been a member of the ATP committee for many years and her latest role is Treasurer, previously having held the posts of Magazine Editor and Chair.

She is passionate about teaching and regularly runs training workshops for teachers of Psychology, recently for the ATP, Keynote Educational, the Higher Education Academy and Resourced webinars. Deb is currently teaching the new AQA specification to her students.

Exam Question Guides

Revision Resources

[How To Write AQA Psychology Essays for 16 Marker Questions](#)

[How To Answer AQA Psychology Short Context Questions](#)

[How to Answer 'Design a Study' Research Methods Questions](#)

[Research Methods Exam Questions and Answers](#) □

Research Methods Exam Questions and Answers (48 marks) ☐

Research Methods Exam Questions and Answers (24 marks) ☐

How to Revise for Psychology A-level

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Memory

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Psychopathology

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2017 Mark Scheme

2017 Examiner Report

Assessment Objectives

AO1

Demonstrate knowledge

(a) demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures.

(b) show a knowledge and understanding of psychological theories, terminology, concepts, studies and methods.

AO2

Application of knowledge

(a) apply knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures:

in a theoretical context

in a practical context

when handling qualitative data

when handling quantitative data

This skill area tests knowledge of research design and data analysis, and applying theoretical understanding of psychology to everyday/real-life examples.

AO3

Analyse, interpret and evaluate

(a) analyse, interpret and evaluate scientific information, ideas and evidence, including in relation to issues, to:

make judgements and reach conclusions

develop and refine practical design and procedures.

Examples of how you can score AO3 marks

Whether or not theories are supported or refuted by valid research evidence.

After describing a theory go on to describe a piece of research evidence saying, 'X's study supports/refutes this theory...' and then describe the research study.

Contextualising how the topic in question relates to broader debates and approaches in Psychology.

For example, would they agree or disagree with a theory or the findings of the study?

Animal Research - This raises the issue of whether it's morally and/or scientifically right to use animals.

The main criterion is that benefits must outweigh costs.

Animal research also raises the issue of extrapolation. Can we generalize from studies on animals to humans as their anatomy & physiology is different from humans?

General criticisms and/or strengths of theories and studies.

E.g. 'Bandura's Bobo Doll studies are laboratory experiments and therefore criticisable on the grounds of lacking ecological validity'.

To gain marks for criticising study's methodologies the criticism must be contextualised: i.e. say why this is a problem in this particular study.

'Therefore, the violence the children witnessed was on television and was against a doll not a human'.