

**Culture:** the 'values, beliefs and patterns of behaviour shared by a group of people'.

**Universal:** when a theory can apply to all people, irrespective of gender and culture.

**Cultural Relativism:** when behaviour can only be understood if the cultural context is taken into consideration.

**Ethnocentrism:** seeing the world only from one's cultural perspective and believing this perspective is normal/correct.

Cultural bias is the tendency to judge people in terms of one's cultural assumptions. For example, by having an ethnocentric approach to investigating behaviour or interpreting research.

Researchers (predominantly Western) impose Western norms in cross-cultural research, assuming Western standards of behaviour can be used as a benchmark to compare others to.

### Example

Definitions of abnormality vary from culture to culture.

Rack (1984) claims that African-Caribbeans in Britain are sometimes diagnosed as 'mentally ill' based on behaviour which is perfectly normal in their subculture, and this is due to the ignorance of African-Caribbean subculture on the part of white psychiatrists.

### Evaluation

- Culturally biased research can lead to negative effects in the real world, such as validating damaging stereotypes. For example, the US Army used an IQ test before WWI which was culturally biased toward the dominant white majority. It showed that African Americans were at the bottom of the IQ scale.
- Acknowledging the issue of cultural bias in psychological research helps to create strategies to reduce it. E.g. the underrepresentation of non-Western researchers in Psychology.
- In their 1998 survey of European textbooks, Smith and Bond found that 66% of the studies were American, 32% European, and only 2% from the rest of the world. They suggest improvements are possible by selecting different cultural groups to study.
- Understanding the impact of cultural bias has led to heightened awareness of cultural diversity and the development of 'indigenous psychologies': theories drawing explicitly on the experiences of people in different cultural contexts.
- Taking an emic approach to psychology research (embracing cultural diversity) rather than imposing etics (researchers' own cultural norms), can help to look at behaviour from the inside of a particular cultural system.

**Androcentrism:** being centred on, or dominated by, males or the male viewpoint.

**Alpha Bias:** when the differences between genders are exaggerated.

**Beta Bias:** when the differences between genders are minimised.

### Alpha Bias

Historically, most psychologists were male. Their theories tended to represent a male view of the world.

E.g. Freud argued that girls do not suffer the same Oedipal conflict as boys and therefore develop weaker superegos.

### Beta Bias

These theories often assume that the findings from males can apply equally to females. E.g. an all-male sample in a study.

This leads to research/theories that are based on the male view but still applied to female behaviour.

E.g. Research into the fight-or-flight response has often been carried out with male animals (beta bias) however Taylor et al. (2000) found that females produce a tend-and-befriend response.

### Evaluation

- Being aware of gender bias in Psychology means solutions can be put forward. For example, some psychologists attempt to develop theories that emphasise the importance or value of women.
- Taking a feminist approach can help to restore the imbalance in psychological theories and research. For example, feminist psychology accepts that there are biological differences between males and females.
- Worrell (1992) suggested that some criteria can be followed to ensure gender bias in research is avoided. For example, using alternative methods of inquiry to explore the personal lives of women; considering women in the natural settings in which they function; and collaborating with research participants to explore personally relevant variables.
- Darwin's established theory of sexual selection suggests that women are selective (choosy) in terms of mate selection. These views have only recently been challenged by DNA evidence suggesting that women are equally as competitive as men when the need arises.
- Gender bias can work against males as well as females, as sometimes alpha bias theories heighten the value of women. For example, Chodorow (1978) viewed women as more relational and caring.

**The Debate**

When understanding human behaviour, should we break it into components, or view it as a whole?

**Reductionism**

Reductionism: human behaviour can be explained by breaking it down into simpler component parts. There are different 'levels of explanation'.

**Biological Reductionism:** reducing behaviour to a physical level and explaining it in terms of neurons, neurotransmitters, hormones, brain, etc.

**Environmental Reductionism:** assuming all behaviour can be reduced to the simple building blocks of S-R (stimulus-response) associations.

**Experimental Reductionism:** complex behaviour is reduced to a single (isolated) variable for testing. For example, MSM memory stores are broken down into SM, STM, and LTM, and each is tested separately.

**Holism**

Holism: the idea that human behaviour should be viewed as a whole integrated experience, and not as separate parts.

**Evaluation**

- One strength of reductionism is that it is compatible with the aims of science. Breaking complex behaviours into small constituent parts means that they can be scientifically tested, and over time explanations based on scientific evidence will emerge.
- One limitation of reductionism is that it can lead to errors because the complexity of human behaviour is often unaccounted for. For example, to treat conditions like ADHD with drugs in the belief that the condition is only a neurochemical imbalance.
- One limitation of holism is that it is not considered compatible with the aims of science. They do not establish causation because they do not examine behaviour in terms of operationalised variables that can be manipulated and measured.
- One strength of holism is that it considers the full complexity of human behaviour, rather than focusing on one level of explanation.

**Examples**

Aggression can be explained at a biological level in terms of hormones (e.g. testosterone) or brain structure (e.g. the amygdala); or at a psychological level through either operant conditioning or observation and imitation (social learning). However, humanist psychologists would claim that to understand aggression, we must study the whole.

### The Debate

Is our behaviour and mental wellbeing determined by internal/external forces, or do we exert free will?

### Determinism

The assumption that free will is an illusion and that our behaviour is governed by internal or external forces over which we have no control. E.G:

- **Biological determinism:** all human behaviour is innate and determined by genes.
- **Environmental determinism:** behaviour is determined or caused by forces outside the individual, such as behaviourism or social learning.
- **Psychic determinism:** human behaviour is the result of childhood experiences and innate drives.

*Determinism can be hard (we have zero control) and soft (we have some control at least).*

### The Causal Explanation

Science is heavily deterministic in its search for **causal relationships** as it seeks to discover whether X causes Y, or whether the independent variable causes changes in the dependent variable.

### Free Will

**Free will:** the idea that we play an active role and have a choice in how we behave. The assumption is that individuals are free to choose their behaviour and are *self-determined* and that our behaviour is not predictable.

### Evaluation

- One limitation of the deterministic view is that it is not compatible with the legal system. If behaviour is determined by outside forces, that provides a potential excuse for criminal acts.
- One strength of the deterministic view is that there is research to support it. Libet et al. (1983) found that the motor regions of the brain become active before a person registers conscious awareness of a decision, i.e. the decision to move the finger was a pre-determined action of the brain.
- One limitation of the free will view is that it is not compatible with the aims of science. If behaviour is the result of free will rather than determinism, then such predictions would not be possible.

### Examples

The biological approach represents a deterministic (biologically deterministic) theory about human behaviour. It claims our development is the result of genetics, the brain, and neurochemistry, rather than free will.

The cognitive approach is an example of soft determinism. Although the approach does suggest our development is influenced by our thoughts and other cognitions, it also promotes the idea that we can change them for the better, with some help (e.g. CBT).

### The Debate

Should researchers be aiming to establish laws of behaviour based on their research, or acknowledging the individual differences that affect behaviour?

### Nomothetic

**Nomothetic:** Psychologists who take a nomothetic approach are concerned with establishing general laws by using statistical analysis of research conducted on large groups of people.

Example: Biological approaches take a nomothetic approach when explaining psychological disorders, such as OCD and depression. They typically pinpoint biological factors, such as neurotransmitters, that are responsible for such disorders and use biological therapies (e.g. drugs) to treat all patients.

### Idiographic

**Idiographic:** Psychologists who take an idiographic approach focus on the individual and emphasise the unique personal experience of human nature.

The idiographic approach does not seek to formulate laws or generalise results to others.

Example: Freud conducted detailed investigations into the lives of his patients to understand and help them overcome their psychological disorders. His most famous case studies include Little Hans and The Rat Man.

### Evaluation

- One limitation of idiographic approaches is that many psychologists criticise them for their unscientific nature. There are questions about how compatible idiographic methods and theories are with the aims of science.
- One strength of idiographic methods such as case studies is that they can help advance our understanding of human behaviour and conditions in circumstances where experimental methods are not appropriate.
- One strength of nomothetic approaches is that experimental (quantitative) methods, controlled measurement and the ability to predict behaviour, are all seen as compatible with the aims of science.
- One limitation of nomothetic approaches is that they are criticised for losing sight of the 'whole person', due to being focused on quantitative data and statistical analysis.

### Link to Research Methods

Case studies, open questions, thematic analysis, and interviews can be linked to the idiographic approach since they look at behaviour in a holistic way and are not primarily used to establish laws of behaviour.

In contrast, research methods such as experiments and controlled observations can be linked to nomothetic approaches.

### The Debate

Is our behaviour and development influenced by nature or nurture? It centres on the relative contributions of genetic inheritance and environmental factors to human development and behaviour.

### Nature

Nature is the view that behaviour is the product of innate biological or genetic factors. Heredity is the process in which traits are passed down from one generation to the next.

For example, eye colour, addictions, and fitness levels may be rooted in genetics. This is known as the nativist position, the assumption that characteristics are a product of evolution and each person's unique genetic code.

### Nurture

Nurture is the view that behaviour is the product of environmental influences (outside of the body).

Environmentalists (also known as empiricists) assume the human mind is a tabula rasa (a blank slate) and that this is gradually "filled" as a result of experience.

For example, Bandura argued that aggression is learned through observation, vicarious reinforcement and imitation, and is therefore explained by Social Learning Theory.

### Evaluation

- Researchers now assume that nature and nurture might not operate independently. The **interactionist approach** is the view that both nature and nurture work together to shape human behaviour.
- Evidence for the interaction between nature and nurture comes from neural plasticity research, which describes the changes in the structure of the brain (nature), as a result of life experience (nurture).
- There is a wealth of evidence to support the power of nature on our development. For example, twin studies show that monozygotic twins have higher concordance rates for schizophrenia than dizygotic concordance, suggesting that genetics (nature) are a powerful influence on our development.
- There is a wealth of evidence to support the role of nurture in our development. For example, the case of Little Albert shows how we can learn phobias through classical conditioning, supporting behaviourist assumptions that we learn our behaviours.
- One limitation is that it can be hard to isolate the effects of nature and nurture when attempting to discover which is the most influential. For example, when researching twin studies, concordance rates for monozygotic twins never reach 100%, suggesting that genes (nature) only play a role. It would also be hard to eliminate the influence of nature when researching twins since they share environmental influences inside and outside of the womb.

The Issue

Sieber and Stanley (1988) used the term social sensitivity to describe studies where there are potential social consequences for the participants or the group of people represented by the research.

Socially Sensitive Criteria

Sieber and Stanley (1988) identified four aspects in the scientific research process that raise ethical implications in socially sensitive research:

**1.The Research Question:** Asking questions like 'Are there racial differences in IQ?' or 'Is intelligence inherited?' may be damaging.

**2.The Methodology Used:** The researcher needs to consider the treatment of participants and their right to confidentiality and anonymity. For example, if someone admits to committing a crime, should the researcher maintain confidentiality?

**3.The Institutional Context:** The researcher should be mindful of how the data is going to be used and consider who is funding the research.

**4.Interpretation and Application of Findings:** The researcher needs to consider how their findings might be interpreted and applied in the real-world. Could their data or results be used to inform policy?

Evaluation

- Not all socially sensitive research is negative. For example, research into the effects of maternal deprivation has led to positive changes in improving attachment and reducing the effects of institutionalisation. Additionally, research into the accuracy of eyewitness testimonies has led to the cognitive interview technique.
- One strength of the proposals by Sieber and Stanley is that they can help safeguard people who may be affected by research studies/theories. Since such research can affect people whom the sample represents, and their friends, family, and communities, researchers need to consider the wider implications of their research, and how their research can be used by others.
- One limitation of raising concerns about socially sensitive research is that it could lead to restrictions on what can be studied. Psychologists must be free to carry out whatever research seems important to them, because if governments start passing laws to prohibit certain kinds of research (e.g. ethnicity-related research), then there is a real danger that research will be stopped for political rather than ethical reasons.

Example of Socially Sensitive Research

Cyril Burt used studies of identical twins to support his view that intelligence is largely genetic. His views greatly influenced the **Hadow Report (1926)** which led to the creation of the 11+ which was used from 1944-1976. This meant that generations of children were affected by the 11+ exam, even though there has been huge controversy regarding whether Burt had **falsified** his research data.