ISSUES AND DEBATES

REVISION POWERPOINT
GENDER IN PSYCHOLOGY: GENDER BIAS
GENDER BIAS

• There are two ways that theories may be biased:
  – **ALPHA BIAS** – This refers to theories that assume there are real and enduring differences between men and women
  – **BETA BIAS** – This refers to theories that ignore or minimise gender differences
    • They assume that all people are the same and so it is reasonable to apply the same theories/methods to men and women
    • The aim is to produce theories that can claim to have universality
ANDROCENTRISM

• Most of Psychology has been male-dominated

• Nearly all psychologists were men and so theories they produce tend to represent a male world-view

• This is **ANDROCENTRISM**

• This could lead to alpha bias or beta bias
ALPHA BIAS

• This exaggerates the difference between men and women and theories tend to devalue one gender in comparison to the other
  – E.g. Freud’s theories reflected the culture which he lived in (19th Century)
  – He viewed femininity as failed masculinity (exaggerating the difference between men and women)
  – He saw women as being inferior to men as they are jealous of men’s penises (penis envy) and cannot undergo the Oedipus conflict as boys do
  – As the superego develops from the Oedipus conflict, women therefore must me morally inferior as they have a weaker identification with their mothers’
BETA BIAS

• **Androcentrism can lead to people assuming what is true for men is also true for women (therefore mistakenly minimising the differences between the two)**
  – E.g. Fight-or-flight response to stress
  – This research was conducted on male animals (as female animals would make the research more difficult due to the variations in hormone levels)
  – It was assumed that male-only samples wouldn’t matter as what is true for males would be true for females
  – In fact there are differences in females response to stress (to ensure the survival of their offspring)
  – Therefore, due to this the stress response has not been fully understood for many years
  – So the beta bias meant that a real difference was ignored
KEY TERMS

• GENDER BIAS – The differential treatment or representation of men and women based on stereotypes rather than real differences

• ALPHA BIAS – A tendency to exaggerate differences between men and women. The consequence is that theories devalue one gender in comparison to the other

• BETA BIAS – A tendency to ignore or minimise differences between men and women. Such theories tend either to ignore questions about the lives of women, or assume that insights derived from studies of men will apply equally well to women

• ANDROCENTRISM – Centred or focused on men, often to the neglect or exclusion of women

• UNIVERSALITY – The aim to develop theories that apply to all people, which may include real differences
EVALUATION OF GENDER BIAS
FEMINIST PSYCHOLOGY

• Feminist psychology argues that “difference” in psychology comes from biological explanations of behaviour.

• Feminist psychology agrees that there are real biological based sex difference, but socially determined stereotypes make a greater contribution to perceived differences.

• So, it takes the view that a prerequisite to any social change with gender roles must be a revision of our “facts” about gender.

• It aims to redress the imbalance in theory and research in psychology.

• One way to do this is to use evidence that women may be inferior to provide women with greater support.
  – E.g. Eagly (1978) acknowledged that women may be less effective leaders than men, but this should be used to develop training programmes to create a future with more women as leaders.
BIAS IN RESEARCH METHODS

• One consequence of gender bias in research is that research may find differences between genders
  – It may not be the genders that differ, but the methods used to test or observe them are biased (so males and females appear to be different)

• Another issue is the gender of the researcher
  – Rosenthal (1966) found that male experimenters are more pleasant, friendly and encouraging to female participants
  – Males appeared to perform less well on the task because of this

• Lab experiments disadvantages women
  – Findings created in a controlled setting tell us very little about the experiences of women outside of those settings
  – E.g. Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that in a real setting men and women were judged as more similar in styles of leadership than in lab settings
Another approach is to develop theories which show the difference between men and women, but emphasise the value of women. This can be seen in feminist research which shows instances where women are better. E.g. Research shows that women are better at learning as they are more attentive, flexible and organised (Cornwell et al, 2013).

This research challenges the stereotype that in any gender differences the male position must be better, and changes people’s preconceptions.
AVOIDING BETA BIAS

• Minimising differences (beta bias) has consequences for women

• But equal treatment under the law has allowed women greater access to educational and occupational opportunities

• However, Hare-Mustin and Marecek found that arguing for equality between men and women draws attention away from women’s special needs and from differences in power between men and women

• In a society where one group holds most of the power, seemingly neutral actions ends up benefiting the group with the power
  - E.g. equal parental leave ignores the biological demands of pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and the needs of women. So disadvantaging women
Assumptions need to be examined

- Examples of gender bias continue unchallenged in many theories
  - E.g. Darwin’s theory of sexual selection portrays women as choosy and males as the ones who compete to be chosen
  - It pays for females to be more selective as the costs are high (to produce eggs)
  - This has been used to explain female “coyness” as a means of masking their interest in males when they are choosing
  - Males on the other hand are more explicit in the pursuit of females due to competition

- It has been noted that women are equally more competitive and aggressive when the need arises
  - E.g. DNA evidence supports the idea that it is a good adaptive strategy for females to mate with more than one male. This puts females in competition with other females (Vernimmen, 2015)
CULTURE IN PSYCHOLOGY: CULTURAL BIAS
CULTURAL BIAS

• Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1988) suggested that before being able to decide if there are cultural differences we must consider the extent to which any research is biased

• They suggested two ways in which theories may be biased (Alpha and Beta Bias)
ALPHA BIAS

• This refers to theories that assume there are real and enduring differences between culture groups
  – E.g. Individualists (like USA) and Collectivists (like Japan)
  – We would expect members of an individualist culture to be less conformist as they are less orientated towards group norms
  – But a study by Takano and Osaka (1999) did not support this common view about differences in conformity
  – This suggests that the individualism/collectivism dimension may not be a real distinction, which suggests that the distinction between “individualist” and “collectivist” cultures is no longer a useful one
**BETA BIAS**

- **This refers to theories that ignore or minimised cultural differences**
  
  - They do this by assuming that all people are the same and therefore it is reasonable to use the same theories/methods with all cultural groups
  
  - E.g. IQ tests devised by Western psychologists to study intelligence in many different cultures. The psychologists assume that their view of intelligence applies to all cultures equally
  
  - The result is that when Western IQ tests are tested on non-Western cultures, they may appear as less intelligent
  
  - These tests are described as an **imposed etic**, where a research method or psychological test developed by one group is imposed on other groups of people
ETHNOCENTRISM

• This refers to the use of own ethnic or cultural group as a basis for judgements about other groups

• There is a tendency to view the beliefs, customs and behaviours of our own group as “normal” and even superior, whereas those of the other groups are “strange” or deviant
Ethnocentrism is an example of alpha bias as one’s own culture is considered to be different and better, and the consequence of this is that other cultures and their practices are devalued.

- E.g. individualist attitudes towards attachment where independence is valued and dependence is seen as undesirable.
- In collectivist cultures, dependence tends to be more highly valued.
ETHNOCENTRISM

BETA BIAS

• Ethnocentrism can also lead to beta bias, if psychologists believe their world view is the only view
  – E.g. it was believed to be appropriate to use American IQ tests all over the world as there was an assumption that the American standard was universal
CULTURAL RELATIVISM

• This is the opposite to ethnocentrism (the idea that all cultures are worthy of respect and that in studying another culture we need to try to understand the way that a particular culture sees the world)
CULTURAL RELATIVISM

ALPHA BIAS

• Cultural relativism can lead to an alpha bias where the assumption of real differences leads to psychologists to overlook universals

—E.g. Mead’s research in Papua New Guinea where she initially concluded that there were significant gender differences due to culture, but later recognised that they were universal (that the men in all cultures were more aggressive than the women)
CULTURAL RELATIVISM

BETA BIAS

• Cultural relativism is often discussed in the context of defining mental disorders

• In the case of statistical infrequency definition of abnormality, behaviours that are statistically infrequent in one culture may be statistically more frequent in another
  – E.g. one symptom of Schizophrenia is hearing voices, but this is common in some cultures

• By assuming that the same rules apply universally (a beta bias), we may diagnose some people as mentally ill, but that diagnosis is relative to our culture
KEY TERMS

• **CULTURE** – The rules, customs, morals and ways of interacting that bind together members of a society or some other collection of people

• **CULTURAL BIAS** – A tendency to judge all people in terms of your own cultural assumptions. This distorts or biases your judgement

• **CULTURAL RELATIVISM** – The view that behaviour cannot be judged properly unless it is viewed in the context of the culture in which it originates

• **ETHNOCENTRISM** – Seeing things from the point of view of ourselves and our social group. Evaluating other groups of people using the standards and customs of one’s own culture
EVALUATION OF CULTURAL BIAS
INIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGIES

• This is the development of different groups of theories in different countries
  – E.g. Afrocentrism (the movement whose proposition is that all black people have their roots in Africa and that psychological theories concerning these people must be African-centred and express African values)

• Afrocentrism also disputes the view that European values are universally appropriate descriptions of human behaviour that apply equally to Europeans and non-Europeans
EMIC-ETIC DISTINCTION

• The “emic” approach (such as Afrocentrism) emphasises the uniqueness of every culture by focusing on culturally specific phenomena/occurrences
  – The problem with this is that the findings tend to be significant only to the understanding of behaviour within that culture

• The “etic” approach seeks universal behaviours
  – One way to achieve this, whilst avoiding cultural bias, is to use indigenous researchers in each cultural setting
  – E.g. research by Buss (1989) where data was collected from 37 different cultures (p.64) to look at universal behaviour
BIAS IN RESEARCH METHODS

• Cultural bias in Psychology can be dealt with by using studies with samples from different cultural groups
BIAS IN RESEARCH METHODS

• This was not the case at the end of the last century
  – Smith and Bond (1998) surveyed research in one European textbook on social psychology (66% of the studies were American, 32% European and 2% from the rest of the world)
  – Sears (1986) reported that 82% of research studies used undergraduates as participants and 51% were Psychology students. Henrich et al (2010) found that 67% were American psychology students
  – Researchers calculated that a randomly selected American student was 4000 times more likely to be a participant in a Psychology study than a random non-Westerner
  – So most of psychology is based on middle-class, academic, young adults who are often male – THESE REPRESENT DIFFERENT CULTURE GROUPS
  – PSYCHOLOGY FINDINGS ARE NOT ONLY UNREPRESENTATIVE ON A GLOBAL SCALE, BUT ALSO WITHIN WESTERN CULTURE
CONSEQUENCES OF CULTURAL BIAS

• Damage from psychological research 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 with the lowest mental age.

• This data had a profound effect on the attitudes held by Americans towards certain groups of people (black and south-eastern Europeans).

• The data led to enduring stereotypes about certain ethnic groups and their IQ (Gould, 1981).
WORLDWIDE PSYCHOLOGY COMMUNITY

• Researchers in psychology travel much more than they did 50 years ago
  – So they have an increased understanding of other cultures at a personal level but also at a professional level

• International conferences are held where researchers from many different countries and cultures regularly meet to discuss and exchange ideas

• Therefore, there is a greater exchange of ideas, which should reduce ethnocentrism in psychology, enable an understanding of cultural relativism and mean that real differences are identified and valued
FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM
DEFINITIONS

• **DETERMINISM** – this is the view that an individual’s behaviour is controlled by either internal or external forces. This means that behaviour should be predictable.

• **FREE WILL** – this is where an individual is seen as being capable of self-determinism. According to this view, individuals have an active role in controlling their behaviour (i.e. they are free to choose and are not acting in response to any internal (biological) or external pressures).
DEFINITIONS

• **DETERMINISM** – behaviour is controlled by internal or external forces acting upon the individual

• **FREE WILL** – each individual has the power to make choices about their behaviour

• **HARD DETERMINISM** – The view that all behaviour can be predicted and there is no free will. The two are incompatible

• **SOFT DETERMINISM** – A version of determinism that allows for some element of free will (everything is determined by your biology and past experiences, but there is still some choices that can be made by a person)
DETERMINISM
BIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

• Research into the human genome is producing increasing evidence of genetic influences on behaviour

• It appears that our behaviours are determined by our genes
  – E.g. intelligence gene IGF2R (Hill et al, 1999)

• Genes influence brain structure and neurotransmitters (serotonin and dopamine) which are often implicated in behaviour
ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINISM

• Behaviourists believe that all behaviour is caused by previous experience, through the processes of operant and classical conditioning (which can be direct and indirect)

• The principles of learning theory have been applied to many areas of behaviour, including aggression
PSYCHIC DETERMINISM

• Freud’s psychoanalytical theory of personality suggests that adult behaviour is determined by a mix of innate drives and early experience (i.e. both internal and external forces)

• Behaviour is driven by the libido, which focuses on erogenous zones (in order), like the mouth or anus

• If a child is frustrated or spoiled (external forces) at any stage during development, then the libido remains tied to the relevant erogenous zone and the individual is thus fixated on that zone

• The method of obtaining satisfaction that characterised the stage will dominate their adult personality
Scientific research is based on the belief that all events have a cause.

An IV is manipulated to observe the causal effect on a DV.

The example seen in Harlow’s monkeys study is that contact comfort, not food, determined the formation of an attachment (DV).
EVALUATION OF DETERMINISM
EVALUATION OF DETERMINISM

GENETIC DETERMINISM

• It is doubtful that 100% genetic determinism will ever be found for any behaviour
  – E.g. twin studies find about 80% similarity on intelligence and 40% for depression
  – So if one twin has high intelligence, there is an 80% chance of the other twin also having high intelligence

• Therefore, genes do not entirely determine behaviour
The concordance rates of twin intelligence (seen in previous slide) also show that the environment cannot be the sole determining factor in behaviour; there is at least some genetic input.
EVALUATION OF DETERMINISM

SCIENTIFIC DETERMINISM

• Dennett (2003) argues that it is now accepted that there is no such thing as total determinism
• Chaos theory proposes that very small changes in initial conditions can result in major changes (“butterfly effect”)
• The conclusion is that causal relationships are probabilistic rather than determinist (they increase the probability of something occurring rather than being the sole determinist)
• Determinist explanations tend to oversimplify human behaviour
• They may be appropriate for non-human animals, but human behaviour is less rigid and influenced by many factors (e.g. cognitive factors like thinking about what you intend to do)
• This means that it is unrealistic that psychological research will ever find a simple determinist formula
EVALUATION OF DETERMINISM

DOES IT MATTER?

• There have been attempts for murderers to claim that their behaviour was determined by inherited aggressive tendencies and so they should not be punished with the death penalty (in the US)
• So in practice, a determinist position may be undesirable as it would allow individuals to “excuse” their behaviour
• Determinism is also an issue in the treatment of mental disorders
• If disorders like Schizophrenia are determined by a person’s biology then the treatment should target their genes or neurotransmitters
• However, such determinist treatment may then block the consideration of other treatments that might be beneficial, such as CBT
FREE WILL
HUMANISTIC APPROACH

- Humanistic psychologists argued that self-determination (free choice) was a necessary part of human behaviour
- Without it, healthy self-development and self-actualisation are not possible
- Rogers (1959) claimed that as long as an individual remains controlled by other people or other things, they cannot take responsibility for their behaviour and therefore cannot begin to change it
- Things which are outside a person’s sense of self remain beyond personal control
- Only when an individual takes self-responsibility is personal growth possible
MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

• The basis of this is that an individual is in charge of their own actions (i.e. can exercise free will)

• The law states that children and those who are mentally ill do not have this responsibility

• But in society, “normal” adult behaviour is self-determined

• Basically, humans are accountable for their actions, regardless of innate factors or the influences of early experiences
EVALUATION OF FREE WILL
THE ILLUSION OF FREE WILL

• Just being able to decide between different courses of action is not free will, but it may give us the illusion of having free will.

• Skinner points out that a person might “choose” to buy a particular car or see a particular film, but in fact these choices are determined by previous reinforcement experiences.
EVALUATION OF FREE WILL

CULTURALLY RELATIVE

• The idea of self-determinism may be a culturally relative concept, appropriate for individualists only

• Collectivist cultures place greater value on behaviour determined by group needs
EVALUATION OF FREE WILL

RESEARCH CHALLENGE TO FREE WILL

• Libet et al (1983) recorded activity in motor areas of the brain before a person had a conscious awareness of the decision to move their finger
  – In other words, the decision to move the finger (a conscious state) was simply a “read out” of a pre-determined action

• Supporting this, Chun Siong Soon et al (2008) found activity in the prefrontal cortex up to 10 seconds before a person was aware of their decision to act

• However, Trevena and Miller (2009) showed that brain activity was simply a “readiness to act” rather than an intention to move

• Neuroscience seems to support free will
THE NATURE-NURTURE DEBATE
DEFINITIONS

• **NATURE-NURTURE DEBATE** – The argument as to whether a person’s development is mainly due to their genes or to environmental influences.

• **ENVIRONMENT** – Everything that is outside our body, which includes people, events and the physical world.

• **HEREDITY** – The process by which traits are passed from parents to their offspring, usually referring to genetic inheritance.

• **INTERACTIONIST APPROACH** – With reference to the nature-nurture debate, the view that the process of nature and nurture work together rather than in opposition.

• **NATURE** – Behaviour is seen to be a product of innate (biological or genetic) factors.

• **NURTURE** – Behaviour is a product of environmental influences.
NATURE-NURTURE

• Innate influences are referred to as “nature” which is any ability determined by genes

• “Nurture” is are acquired through interactions with the environment
  – This includes both the physical and social world and may be referred to as “experience”
  – It includes effects on an infant before birth (e.g. if a mother smokes)
NATURE
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
  – E.g. the concordance rate for a mental disorder like Sz is about 40% for Mz twins and 7% for Dz twins
  – This shows that nature has a major contribution to this disorder
EVOLUTIONARY EXPLANATIONS

• Any evolutionary explanation is based on the principle that a behaviour or characteristic that promotes survival and reproduction will be naturally selected
  – This is because these behaviours/characteristics are adaptive and so the genes for that behaviour/characteristic will be passed on to subsequent generations
  – E.g. Bowlby (1969) proposed that attachment was adaptive because it meant an infant was more likely to be protected and therefore more likely to survive
NURTURE
BEHAVIOURISM

- Behaviourists assume that all behaviour can be explained in terms of experience alone
  - Skinner used classical and operant conditioning to explain learning
- Behaviourists suggested that attachment could be explained in terms of classical conditioning (food – the mother who feeds the baby) OR operant conditioning (food reduces the discomfort of hunger and is therefore rewarding)
SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

• Bandura’s view was a little less extreme than traditional behaviourism
  – He proposed that behaviour is acquired through learning, adding the new dimension of indirect reinforcement
  – He also recognised that biology had a role to play
  – He acknowledged that the urge to behave aggressively might be biological, but the important point was that the way a person learns to express anger is acquired through environmental influences (direct and indirect reinforcement)
OTHER EXPLANATIONS

• **Double-bind Theory** of Sz suggests that the Sz develops in children who frequently receive contradictory messages from their parent
  – *E.g.* if a mother tells her child that she loves them at the same time as turning her head away in disgust
  – These conflicting messages about her feelings prevent the child developing an internally consistent construction of reality, which may lead to symptoms of Sz
EVALUATION OF NATURE-NURTURE
The psychologist Donald Hebb suggested that nature and nurture both contribute to behaviour and characteristics and so cannot be separated.

- E.g. the disorder **phenylketonuria** is an inherited disorder that prevents the amino acid phenylalanine being metabolised (absorbed), resulting in brain damage.

  - If this condition was detected at birth, an infant can be given a diet lacking phenylalanine and so brain damage is averted.

  - Therefore, prevention can be achieved through environmental manipulation.
DIATHESIS-STRESS

• A Diathesis is a biological vulnerability, such as being born with certain genes that predispose a person developing a disorder
• However, everyone with those genes does not develop the disorder
• Expression of the gene or genes depends on experience in the form of a “stressor” which triggers the condition
• Thus a person’s nature is only expressed under certain conditions of nurture
NATURE AFFECTS NURTURE

• Genes may exert an **indirect effect** in a number of way

• **First**, genetic factors create an infant’s **microenvironment**
  – E.g. a child who is genetically more aggressive might provoke an aggressive response in others
  – This response becomes part of the child’s environment and affects the child’s development
  – Plomin et al (1977) called this **reactive gene – environment interaction** because the child is reacting to genetically influenced behaviour

• Plomin et al identified a **second** kind of interaction – **passive influence**
  – Parents’ genes determine aspects of their behaviour. E.g. a parent with a genetically determined mental illness creates an unsettled home environment. In this case a child’s mental disorder could be due to indirect, passive effects
The **third** kind of interaction is **active influence** (or niche picking)

- As children grow older they seek out experiences and environments that suit their genes
- Research has shown that the influence of genes **increases** as children get older, which is due to niche picking
NURTURE AFFECTS NATURE

• Life experiences shape your biology
  – E.g. Maguire et al’s (2000) study of London taxi drivers showed that the region of their brains associated with spatial memory was bigger than in controls
  – This is not because they were born this way but because their hippocampi had responded to increased use

• Blakemore and Cooper’s (1970) work with kittens shows how experience affects innate systems
  – Given large collars from birth so restricted what they could see and they were raised in a circular drum with vertical or horizontal stripes
  – When they were introduced to the real world (5 months old) they no longer had the ability to see lines of the opposite orientation
  – Their innate visual system had been altered through experience
EPIGENETICS

• This refers to the material in each cell of your body that acts like a set of “switches” to turn genes on or off
• Life experiences, such as nutrition or stress, control these switches, and most importantly these “switches” are passed on to subsequent generations
• Therefore, twins might produce children who would differ in weight even though their children had identical diets – because of epigenetic material they inherited, which was derived from an environmental effect
EPIGENETICS

- This explains why cloning doesn’t produce identical copies
  - Cloning involves placing the genetic material from one individual into an egg that has no nucleus
  - The egg should then grow into an identical copy of the cloned individual
  - However, that doesn’t happen, as seen by the picture of Rainbow and CC (Carbon Copy)
  - The reason is that there is epigenetic material in the donor egg cell (which was produced by environmental effects in the donor’s lifetime)
HOLISM AND REDUCTIONISM
DEFINITIONS

• **HOLISM** – With respect to a behaviour such as memory or mental disorder, perceiving the whole experience rather than the individual features and/or the relations between them

• **REDUCTIONISM** – An approach that breaks complex phenomena into more simple components, implying that this is desirable because complex phenomena are best understood in terms of a simpler level of explanation
REDUCTIONISM
The reductionist approach in psychology suggests that explanations begin at the highest level and progressively look at component elements:

- **Highest Level**: Culture and social explanations of how our social groups affect our behaviour
- **Middle Level**: Psychological explanations of behaviour
- **Lower Level**: Biological explanations of how hormones and genes etc affect our behaviour
LEVELS OF EXPLANATION (cont.)

- Any behaviour can be considered in terms of all three levels
  - E.g. memory can be explained at a **social level** in terms of how cultural expectations affect what we remember
  - It can be explained at a **psychological level** in terms of episodic memories
  - It can be explained at a **biological level** in terms of the areas of the brain where the memories are stored (hippocampus and temporal lobe) and the neurotransmitters involved in forming memories (e.g. acetylcholine)
BIOLOGICAL REDUCTIONISM

• As all animals are made up of atoms, then human behaviour must be explainable at this level (i.e. it can be reduced to a physical level)
• Biological psychologists reduce behaviour to the action of neurons, neurotransmitters, hormones, etc
  – E.g. it has been suggested that schizophrenia is caused by excessive activity of the neurotransmitter dopamine because drugs that block this neurotransmitter reduce the symptoms of Sz
ENVIRONMENTAL (STIMULUS-RESPONSE) REDUCTIONISM

• Behaviourist explanations suggest that all behaviour can be explained in terms of simple stimulus-response links
  – i.e. behaviour can be reduced to a simple relationship between behaviour and events in the environment

• Examples of behaviourist explanations can be seen in attachment
  – The complex emotion of attachment is reduced to a set of probabilities: the mother is likely to provide food which is reinforcing (reduces discomfort)
EXPERIMENTAL REDUCTIONISM

• Reducing complex behaviours to isolated variables is a useful strategy for conducting research.

• It underlies the experimental approach where behaviours are reduced to operationalised variables that can be manipulated and measured to determine causal relationships.
HOLISM
HOLISM

• This approach focuses on systems as a whole rather than on essential parts, and suggests that we cannot predict how the whole system will behave just from a knowledge of the individual components.

• This means that reductionist explanations would only play a limited role in understanding behaviour.
GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

• This means “whole” in German and was used by German psychologists in early 20th Century
• They focused especially on perception, arguing that explanations for what we see only make sense through a consideration of the whole rather than the individual elements
GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

• Look at each circle individually
• What do you see?
• Look at the whole picture
• What do you see now?
HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

• Humanistic psychologists believe that the individual reacts as an organised whole, rather than a set of stimulus-response (S-R) links

• What matters most is a person’s sense of a unified identity; and so a lack of identity or a sense of “wholeness” leads to mental disorder
COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

• Memory is a complex system which in recent years has been understood in terms of connectionist networks.
• The idea of a network is that each unit (such as a neuron) is linked to many other units (other neurons).
• These links develop through experience and, with each new experience, the links are strengthened or weakened.
• Connectionist networks are described as holist because the network as a whole behaves differently than the individual parts.
EVALUATION OF HOLISM AND REDUCTIONISM
THE DANGER OF LOWER LEVELS OF EXPLANATION

- Lower levels are part of any account of behaviour, but offering accounts at different levels creates problems.
- If lower levels (e.g. biological or behavioural explanations) are taken in isolation, then the meaning of behaviour may be overlooked.
- This may lead to fundamental errors of understanding.
  - E.g. Wolpe (1973) who developed the therapy of SD and treated one woman for a fear of insects, but there was no improvement in her condition by using SD.
  - It turned out that she was not getting on with her husband and he had been given an insect nickname.
  - So her fear was not the result of conditioning but a means of representing her marital problems; to focus on the behavioural level and ignore meaning would have been an error.
  - The danger of lower levels of explanation is that they may distract us from a more appropriate level of explanation.
    - E.g. The administration of Ritalin to hyperactive children may miss the real causes of a child’s hyperactive behaviour (e.g. family or emotional problems).
BIOLOGICAL REDUCTIONISM

- One consequence of biological explanations has been the development of drug therapies.
- The **strength** of these treatments is that they have led to a considerable reduction in institutionalisation since the 1950s.
- It is also a **more humane approach** to the treatment of mental illness in that it does not blame the patient, which may lead to greater tolerance of the mentally ill.
- Although, drug therapy has **variable success rates** and the **only treat the symptoms, not the cause** and therefore **may not have lasting effects**.
- Reducing mental illness to the biological level **ignores the context and function of such behaviours**.
- **Psychological explanations take more account of these and have produced many successful therapies.**
ENVIRONMENTAL REDUCTIONISM

• The behaviour approach was developed as a result of experiments with non-human animals.

• It may be appropriate to explain their behaviour in terms of simple components, **but such explanations may not be appropriate for more complex human behaviour**.

• Humans are not scaled-up versions of other animals – their **behaviour is influenced by social context, intentions, etc**.

• Even in non-human animals, **reductionist explanations ignore other possible influences like cognitive and/or emotional factors**.
EXPERIMENTAL REDUCTIONISM

• Reducing behaviour to a form that can be studied is productive and may be a necessary part of understanding how things work

• Experimental research in psychology has produced a wide variety of findings about behaviour, but the question is how much these findings actually tell us about everyday life
  – E.g. findings from lab studies on EWT like Loftus and Palmer’s study have not always been confirmed by studies of real-life eyewitnesses where memories have been found to be highly accurate (e.g. Yuille and Cutshall, 1986)
  – The operationalisation of variables (e.g. eyewitness memory) may result in something that is measurable but bears no resemblance to the real thing
  – Also, in real life there are other factors that motivate performance which cannot be recreated in an experiment – so findings often do not reflect the real world
THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM – AN INTERACTIONIST APPROACH

• One of the issues from a reductionist perspective is the mind-body problem (the problem of describing the relationship between the mind and body/brain)

• One solution to this problem (materialism) suggests that ultimately everything is reducible to the physical world

• The problem with this kind of reductionism is that it assumes that the physical basis of behaviour has a causal link to the higher levels, whereas we can only observe that certain physical events are associated with mental events
  – E.g. certain electrical activity in the brain (during REM sleep) is associated with subjective reports of dreaming
  – Psychologists often make the mistake of leaping to the assumption that one causes the other
THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM – AN INTERACTIONIST APPROACH

• Another alternative way to deal with the mind-body problem as well as dealing with reductionism, which is to analyse how the different levels of explanation interact

• Dualists believe there is a physical brain and a non-physical “mind” which interact with each other

• Research has shown that the mind can affect our biology
  – E.g. Martin et al (2001) found that depressed patients who received psychotherapy experienced the same changes in levels of serotonin and norepinephrine in the brain as those receiving drugs
  – Kandel (1979) suggests that these physiological changes should not be surprising as we know that learning creates new neuronal connections
OCCAM’S RAZOR

• Suppose there are two explanations for an occurrence

• According to Occam’s Razor the simpler one is usually right – and that’s often the one at the lowest level
IDIIOGRAPHIC AND NOMOTHETIC APPROACHES TO PSYCHOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION
DEFINITIONS

• IDIOGRAPHIC APPROACH – This focuses on individuals and emphasises uniqueness. It favours qualitative methods in research

• NOMOTHETIC APPROACH – This seeks to formulate general laws of behaviour based on the study of groups and the use of statistical (quantitative) techniques. It attempts to summarise the differences between people through generalisations
**IDIOGRAPHIC APPROACH**

- This approach uses the study of individuals and the unique insights each individual gives us about human behaviour
IDIIOGRAPHIC APPROACH

QUALITATIVE METHODS

• Idiographic approach is qualitative as the focus is on gaining insights into human behaviour by studying unique individuals in depth (rather than gaining numerical data from lots of individuals and using average characteristics)

• The focus is on the quality of the information not the quantity

• It is also qualitative as it uses unstructured interviews, case studies and thematic analysis
IDIOGRAPHIC APPROACH

EXAMPLES OF IDIOGRAPHIC APPROACH

• Freud used case studies to understand human behaviour like “little Hans”

• This case consisted of nearly 150 pages of exact quotes and descriptions of events in Hans’ life and Freud’s own interpretation of the events

• Freud did produce generalisations from his case studies but they are still idiographic as they are drawn from unique individuals
IDIOGRAPHIC APPROACH

EXAMPLES OF IDIOGRAPHIC APPROACH

• Humanistic psychologists also favour the idiographic approach as they are concerned with studying the whole person and seeing the world from the perspective of that person

• What matters is the person’s subjective experience and not something that someone else might observe of their behaviour
NOMOTHEtic APPROACH

• This involves the study of a large number of people and then seeks to make generalisations or develop laws/theories about their behaviour

• This is also the goal of the scientific approach
NOMOTHETIC APPROACH

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

• This is based on numbers (measures of central tendency, dispersion, statistical analysis)

• These calculations need data from groups of people rather than individuals

• Research studies may only involve 20 people, but normative research (e.g. establishing norms for IQ tests) involves thousands of participants
NOMOTHETIC APPROACH

EXAMPLES OF NOMOTHETIC APPROACH

• The **biological approach** seeks to portray basic principles of how the body and brain work
  – This approach has sometimes mistakenly just studied men and assumed that the same processes would occur in women (e.g. the stress response)

• **Behaviourist psychologists** produced general laws of behaviour (e.g. classical and operant conditioning)
  – Their research may not have involved thousands of human participants (which is typical for the nomothetic approach), but they were seeking one set of rules for all animals – humans and non-humans
NOMOTHETIC APPROACH

EXAMPLES OF NOMOTHETIC APPROACH

• Cognitive psychology is also a nomothetic approach in its aim to develop general laws of behaviour which apply to all people (e.g. like understanding typical memory processes)
  – The cognitive approach does use case studies (like HM) but these are needed, as in order to understand the working of the normal mind, it is often necessary to look at rare abnormal cases

• Eysenck’s (1947) psychometric (measuring psychological characteristics like personality and intelligence) approach to personality
  – Large groups of people are tested and the distribution of their scores informs us about what is normal and abnormal
  – Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) was used to collect large amounts of data to create personality types
EVALUATION OF IDIOGRAPHIC AND NOMOTHETIC APPROACHES
ALLPORT

● Allport was a major figure in the study of personality from the early part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century

● Together with his students he analysed 301 letters from a middle-aged woman (Jenny Masterson)

● The letters were written to Allport and his wife over a period of 12 years
  – Allport’s son had been the roommate of Jenny’s son (who had died)

● The method used to analyse was the letters was similar to thematic analysis
FOCUS ON THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

• Humanistic psychologists and qualitative psychologists felt that there was too much emphasis on measurement and that psychologists had lost sight of what it was to be human
• Allport argued that a drastic reorientation was needed and that’s what the idiographic approach did
• Allport also argued that it is only by knowing the person as a person that we can predict what that person will do in any situation
• So the strength of the idiographic approach has been to focus psychology back on the more individual level
SCIENTIFIC BASIS

• A criticism of the idiographic approach is that it is not scientific
• This is one of the reasons for the recent growth in positive psychology (the branch of psychology that uses scientific understanding)
  – Positive psychology viewed humanistic psychology as not being sufficiently evidence-based and so their findings were meaningless
• The same criticism cannot be made about other idiographic approaches which do use an evidence-based approach and also seek to be objective
  – E.g. qualitative approaches use reflexivity to identify the influence of any biases
  
  • **REFLEXIVITY** = the process where the researcher reflects/thinks critically during the research process about the factors that affect the behaviour of both researchers and participants
BEING ABLE TO MAKE PREDICTIONS

• The idiographic approach may be scientific, but the inability to produce general predictions about behaviour is limiting
  – Such general predictions can be useful (e.g. in producing drugs to treat mental illness)
  – It would be too time consuming to produce personal therapies for unique individuals and so we need to make predictions about the most likely therapeutic solutions

• However, Allport argued that the idiographic approach does enable predictions
  – Once a researcher has built up extremely detailed observations of a few individuals, this can be used to make generalisations and formulate theories

• Hall and Lindzey (1970) argue that this stance makes Allport’s approach nomothetic and not idiographic
TIME CONSUMING

• The idiographic approach is more time consuming.
• Both approaches are based on large amounts of data, but one is in terms of one person (idiographic) and the other is in terms of a number of people (nomothetic).
• Collecting large amounts of data from a group of people takes time, but it is quicker once a questionnaire or psychological test is devised, data can be generated and processed quickly.
COMBINED METHODS

• Holt (1967) argued that the idiographic/nomothetic distinction is a false separation as generalisations are made
  – Holt claimed that there is no such thing as a unique individual and what idiographic approaches actually do is generate general principles
  – In other words, the idiographic approach actually ends up being nomothetic (as Hall and Lindzey said about Allport’s approach)

• Millon and Davis (1996) suggested that research should start with the nomothetic approach and, once “laws” have been produced, they can then focus on a more idiographic understanding
  – The future for drug therapies will probably entail just that – individual “recipes” for what is effective based on a mix of genetic and environmental insights
COMBINED METHODS

• A number of approaches actually combine the two approaches
  – Freud used idiographic methods to study people, but also used those insights to produce general laws about human development in his theory of personality (id, ego and superego)

• Uniqueness can be produced using the nomothetic approach – it depends how we define uniqueness
  – For Allport, only individual traits capture a person’s uniqueness, whereas for Eysenck each individual is unique insofar as they have a unique combination of extraversion, introversion and neuroticism
  – Therefore, uniqueness can be explained through nomothetic laws
ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH STUDIES AND THEORY
DEFINITIONS

• SOCIALLY SENSITIVE RESEARCH – Any research that might have direct social consequences for the participants in the research or the group that they represent.
ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS: SOCIAL SENSITIVITY

• Sieber and Stanley (1988) produced a landmark paper in the issues related to research that has social consequences

• They pointed out that the ethical guidelines produced by the American Psychological Association referred to the social implications of research but offered no advice about how such ethical issues might be resolved

• Their paper offered a way forward
THE RESEARCH PROCESS

• Sieber and Stanley identified four aspects in the research process at which ethical issues with social consequences occur:

  – The research question
    • Simply asking the question may be damaging to members of particular racial group or sexual orientation as it appears to add scientific credibility to prejudice. E.g. “is homosexuality inherited?”

  – Conduct of research and treatment of patients
    • The main concern is the confidentiality of the information collected. E.g. if a participant confesses to committing a crime, should confidentiality remain?

  – The institutional context
    • Research may be funded and managed by private institutions who may misuse the data or may misunderstand the data produced

  – Interpretation and application of the findings
    • Research findings may be used for purposes other than originally intended. E.g. the development of IQ tests was used to demonstrate the inferiority of certain groups of people and was also used to identify the “feeble-minded” who could then be sterilised (used in the US in the early 20th Century)
ETHICAL ISSUES IN SOCIALLY SENSITIVE RESEARCH

• Sieber and Stanley also identified 10 types of ethical issues that relate especially to socially sensitive research:

1. Privacy
   • During the research process, a skilled investigator may extract more information from participants than they intended to give. Some research (e.g. AIDS research) may lead to social policies that are an invasion of people’s private lives (through compulsory testing)

2. Confidentiality
   • Participants may be less willing to provide information in the future if confidentiality has been breached and further related research would be compromised

3. Valid methodology
   • In cases of poor methodology, scientists may be aware of these problems, but the media and the public may not, and thus poor studies might shape important social policy to the detriment of those groups represented by the research
4. Deception
   - Including self-deception whereby research may lead people to form untrue stereotypes (e.g. believing that women are less good at Maths), which then affects our own performance

5. Informed consent
   - Potential participants may not always understand what is involved

6. Equitable treatment
   - All participants should be treated in an equitable/reasonable manner and resources which are vital to the participants’ well-being (e.g. educational opportunities) are not withheld from one group whilst being available to another

7. Scientific freedom
   - The scientist has a duty to engage in research but at the same time has an obligation not to harm participants as well as institutions in society
8. Ownership of data

- Some of the problems with determining ownership involve the sponsorship of the research (e.g. a university department or commercial organisation) and the public accessibility of the data.

9. Values

- Psychologists differ in their position towards subjective (idiographic) approaches and more objective (scientific) approaches. Sensitive issues arise when there is a clash in such values between the scientist and recipient of the research.

10. Risk/Benefit ratio

- Risks or costs should be minimised, but problems arise in determining risks as well as benefits.
EVALUATION OF ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH STUDIES AND THEORY
THE WIDER IMPACT OF RESEARCH

• There are always some social consequences to participation in research
  – But with socially sensitive research there is also the increased potential for a more indirect impact on the participant’s family, their co-workers, or even the group that they represent (e.g. addicts, women, elderly, etc)

• It does not seem sufficient to simply safeguard the interests of the individual in research
  – There must be some consideration of the likely impact of the research on the larger group of which the participant is a member
THE INADEQUACY OF CURRENT ETHICAL GUIDELINES

• Psychologists deal with ethical issues in research by the development of strict guidelines for the conduct of their studies

• Ethical guidelines may protect the immediate needs of research participants, but may not deal with all the possible ways the research may inflict harm on a group of people/section of society
  – E.g. at present ethical guidelines don’t ask researchers to consider how their research might be used by others, as recommended by Sieber and Stanley

• Therefore the considerations outlined some time ago have not yet filtered into professional practice
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.

• It might be argued that our understanding of human behaviour has been lessened by our misinterpretations of, or failure to include, representative samples of people with disabilities, the elderly, the disadvantaged and members of minority cultures.

• The failure to accurately represent and research these groups carries with it an additional ethical issue.
  – The fact that these groups then miss out on any of the potential benefits of research.
SHOULD SOCIALLY SENSITIVE RESEARCH JUST BE AVOIDED?

- It might be tempting to think that the solution to the problem of handling socially sensitive research might be to try and avoid it
  - E.g. to avoid research on homosexuality, race, gender, addiction, etc. because the findings may have negative consequences for the participants, for the section of society they represent or the whole of society
- However, this would probably leave psychologists with nothing to examine but unimportant issues
- **Sieber and Stanley’s view is that to simply ignore sensitive research is not a responsible approach to science**
  - They suggest that avoiding controversial topics, simply because they are controversial, is also an avoidance of responsibility
- **Therefore, psychologists have a duty to conduct such research**
ENGAGING WITH THE PUBLIC AND POLICYMAKERS

• In order to reduce the likelihood of misuse of data, psychologists should take responsibility for what happens to their findings.
• They should be aware of the possibility that the results of their research might lead to abuse and discrimination, or, as Sieber and Stanley (1988) suggest, offer “scientific credibility to the prevailing prejudice.”
• The BPS has a press centre which aims to promote evidence-based psychological research to the media.
  – But it is really a matter for individual researchers to see it as part of the research process to promote their research in a socially sensitive way, as opposed to the neutral position that some scientists wish to take.