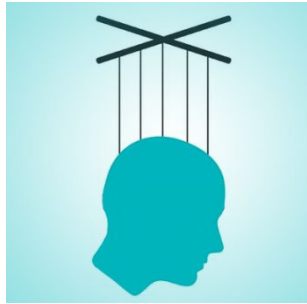


Unit 3

Issues and Debates in Psychology



Specification

The Nature vs Nurture debate:

- The relative importance of heredity and environment in determining behaviour;
- The interactionist approach.

Free will and determinism:

- Hard determinism and soft determinism;
- Biological, environmental and psychic determinism.
- The scientific emphasis on causal explanations.

Holism and reductionism:

- Levels of explanation in Psychology.
- Biological reductionism and environmental (stimulus-response) reductionism.

Gender and culture in Psychology

- Universality and bias.
- Gender bias including androcentrism and alpha and beta bias;
- Cultural bias, including ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.

Idiographic and nomothetic

- Idiographic and Nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation.

Ethical implications

- Ethical Implications of research studies
- Ethical implications of theory,
- Social sensitivity.

The Nature-Nurture debate:

The Nature Vs Nurture debate centres on the relative contributions of genetic inheritance (nature) and environmental influences (nurture) to human behaviour

Reference: Lawton, J and Willard, S. (2015) Psychology for A level, Hodder Education, London



Key Terms	Definition
Nature	The view that behaviour is a product of genetic or innate biological factors
Heredity	The process by which traits are carried down from one generation to another (genetic inheritance)
Nurture	The view that behaviour is a product of environmental influences
Environment	Any influence on human behaviour that is not genetic. This can include the environment in the womb through to cultural and historical influences
Interactionist Approach	The view that both nature and nurture interact and work together to shape human behaviour
Diathesis -Stress	A psychological theory that attempts to explain the cause of a disorder as the result of an interaction between a pre-dispositional vulnerability (diathesis) and a stress caused by life experiences.
Neural Plasticity	The brain's tendency to change and adapt functionally and physically as a result of experience or learning

Nature

Nature is known as the **nativist** position, and the basic assumption is that the characteristics of the human species are a product of evolution and that individual differences are the result of each person's unique **genetic code**. Nature is the view that behaviour is the product of **innate biological** or **genetic** factors.

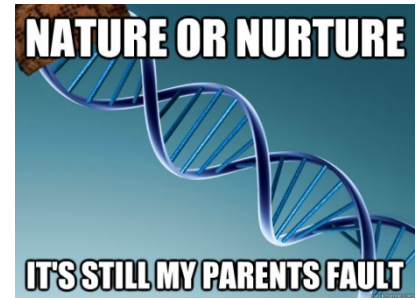


Heredity is the process in which physical and psychological traits are genetically **passed down from one generation to the next**. Characteristics like height, weight, hair loss, life expectancy and vulnerability to specific illnesses are positively correlated with genetic relatedness and this has led psychologists to investigate whether psychological characteristics are also "**wired in**" before we are born. Characteristics and differences that are not observable at birth, but which emerge later in life, are regarded by **nativists** as the product of **maturation**, as we have a "biological clock" which switches certain behaviours 'on' or 'off' in a pre-programmed way.

Attachment- Bowlby proposed that children come into the world **biologically programmed** to form attachments because this will help them to **survive**. This suggests attachment behaviours are naturally selected, and passed on as a result of **generic inheritance** (heredity mechanisms). Bowlby's theory is supported by **research** by Lorenz and Harlow using animals. This theory therefore provides support for the influence of nature in attachment behaviour.

Schizophrenia

Family, twins and adoption studies show that the closer the relatedness of two people, the more likely it is that they will show the same behaviours. **Gottesman (1991)** pooled the results of around 40 family studies and found that the risk increases to 46% for those with two parents who have schizophrenia. This emphasises the importance of the contribution of genetics on behaviour and therefore provides evidence for the nature side of the nature vs nurture debate.



Nurture

Nurture is the view that behaviour is the product of environmental influences.

The **environment** is seen as everything outside the body which can include people, events and the physical world. **Environmentalists** (also known as empiricists) hold the assumption that the human mind is a **tabula rasa** (a blank slate) and that this is gradually “filled” as a result of experience. This view was first proposed by John Locke in the 17th Century and was later taken up by behavioural psychologists. For example, **John Watson**. According to environmentalists, psychological characteristics and behavioural differences that emerge through infancy and childhood are the result of learning.

Attachment

Behavioural psychologists explain **attachment** in terms of classical conditioning, where food (unconditioned stimulus) is associated with the mother (neutral stimulus), and through many repeated pairings, the mother becomes a conditioned stimulus who elicits a conditioned response in the child. Therefore, the child forms an attachment based on the pleasure experienced as a result of being fed. This theory and the research supporting it demonstrates the role of nurture in attachment



Schizophrenia

Environmental explanations can also partly explain the occurrence of **schizophrenia**. **Bateson et al. (1956)** proposed the **Double Bind Theory** which suggests that schizophrenia is the result of disordered communication within the family environment. Children in such environments receive mixed messages about what is right and what is wrong and become confused about the world around them. Prolonged exposure to such interactions prevents the development of a coherent construction of reality, and in the long run, this manifests itself as schizophrenic symptoms. This theory supports the role of nurture and the environment in the development of psychological disorders such as schizophrenia.



[Click here for a webinar](#)

Evaluation of the Nature Nurture debate

It is too simplistic to consider nature and nurture in isolation of one another and **The Interactionist Approach** suggests that human characteristics and behaviour are best explained by how both our **biology (nature)** and our **environment (nurture)** interact.



In psychopathology, many psychologists argue that both a **genetic predisposition** and an appropriate **environmental trigger** are required for a psychological disorder to develop; this is set out in the **diathesis-stress model**. The diathesis is the biological vulnerability such as being born with a gene that predisposes you to develop a disorder. However, the disorder will only develop if there is an environmental 'stressor' to trigger it.

Nature and Nurture can **interact** in a variety of ways, as explained below (Plomin et al, 1977).

Nurture can affect Nature and this interaction can be demonstrated through the diathesis stress model of behaviour. Evidence to support the **diathesis-stress model** comes from the topic of Schizophrenia. **Tienari et al's (2004)** Finnish study followed 19,000 children adopted from Finnish mothers with Schizophrenia. They assessed the adoptive parent's child-rearing style and the rates of Schizophrenia in the children. All of which was compared with a matched group of children who had no family history of schizophrenia. They found that high levels of criticism and conflict were linked to the development of Schizophrenia in the children but only in those children who had a high genetic risk; this was not found to implicate schizophrenia in the children in the control group. The research concludes that both genetic vulnerability and family related stress contribute to the development of schizophrenia and genetically vulnerable children are more sensitive to parenting behaviour. This research provides **strong evidence** that schizophrenia is best explained by looking at an **interaction** between **genetic inheritance** and **environmental triggers**, in this case, **family environment**.

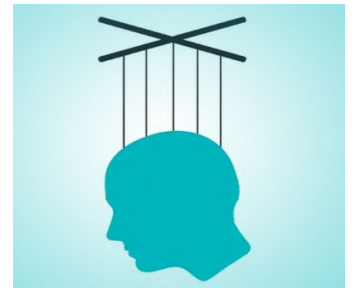
Nature and Nurture can be combined to explain Neural plasticity is another example of how nature and nurture **interact**. The brain can reorganise itself by forming new **neural connections** throughout life. Neuroplasticity is a term which describes the changes in the structure of the **brain** (nature), as a result of life **experience** (nurture).

For example, **Maguire et al (2000)** investigated the **hippocampi** volume of London taxi drivers' brains. She found that this region of the brain was larger in taxi drivers in comparison to non-taxi drivers. The **hippocampus** is an area of the brain heavily involved in spatial skills in humans and animals. Consequently, Maguire concluded that the rigorous training including learning and recalling all of the London streets and routes as well as experience driving the taxi (nurture) actually had an effect on the size of the hippocampi (nature) supporting the theory of **neural plasticity** and the **interaction of nature and nurture**.



Free will and Determinism

The free will versus determinism debate explores the extent to which our thoughts and behaviour are influenced by forces beyond our conscious control.



Key Term	Definition
Determinism	The view that human behaviour is shaped or controlled by internal or external forces and free will is an illusion. Behaviour always has a cause and is therefore predictable
Causal Explanations	One of the basic principles of science is that everything has a cause and thus can be predicted. Scientific research is therefore heavily determinist in its use of causal explanations.
Hard Determinism	The view that forces outside of our control (e.g biology or experience) shape our behaviour and free will is an illusion
Soft Determinism	The view that behaviour is constrained by environmental or biological forces but only to a certain extent and there is an element of free will in behaviour
Biological Determinism	The idea that human behaviour is innate and determined by biological influences such as genetics
Environmental Determinism	Behaviour is caused by external forces such as previous experience and learning through classical and operant conditioning
Psychic Determinism	Claims that behaviour is the result of innate drives (such as the ID, EGO and SuperEGO) and unconscious conflicts.
Free Will	The notion that humans have an active role and can make choices about how they behave. Behaviour is not determined by internal or external forces

Determinism

Determinism is the view that **free will** is an **illusion** and that we are governed by **internal** or **external** forces over which we have no control. Behaviour is therefore viewed as predictable as it always has a **cause**. The causal laws of determinism form the basis of **science**. Internal causes would include **biological factors** such as the influence of genetics or hormones on behaviour. External forces can include elements of the environment including the role of parents in reinforcing behaviour. There are varying degrees of determinism including hard and soft determinism.

The Scientific Emphasis on Causal Explanations

One of the basic principles of science is that all events have a **cause**. Knowledge of causes and the formulation of causal laws allow scientists to **predict** behaviour. In Psychological research, the lab experiment allows for an **independent variable** to be manipulated and observe the **causal effect** on a dependent variable. **Extraneous variables** are able to be controlled which can enable psychologists to precisely predict human behaviour.

Hard Determinism

Hard Determinism is the view that we have absolutely **no control** over our behaviour and internal and external forces shape our behaviour. **Hard determinism** is therefore **incompatible** with **free will**. Biological, Environmental and psychic determinism are all types of hard determinism

Types of Hard Determinism

Biological Determinism

Biological Determinism emphasises the role of **biology** in behaviour. It refers to the idea that behaviour is **innate** and determined by genetic influences (including hormonal and neurochemical explanations).

The Biological Approach

Family studies evidence a **genetic vulnerability** for developing psychological **disorders** such as **OCD**. **Nedast et al (2010)** reviewed twin studies and found high concordance rates in identical twins demonstrating the role of genetics in causing OCD

Psychic Determinism

This type of determinism claims that human behaviour is directed by **innate drives** and **unconscious conflicts repressed** from childhood.

The Psychodynamic Approach.

Freud claimed that child development occurs in five stages each marked by a different **conflict** that the child must **resolve**. If the child has unresolved conflicts then this leads to a **fixation** and the child can carry associated behaviours through to **adult life**.

Environmental Determinism

This is the view that behaviour is determined by our **Experience**. BF Skinner proposed that free will is an illusion and all behaviour is a result of **conditioning**. Behaviour can also be shaped by **socialisation**.

The Behaviourist Approach

The **two process** model suggests that phobias are acquired and maintained through conditioning. Watson and Raynor (1920) illustrated this in their study of **little albert** which showed the acquisition of a fear response learnt through **classical conditioning**.

Soft Determinism

Soft determinism suggests that behaviour is **constrained** by the environment or biology however only to a **certain extent**. Soft Determinism suggests some behaviour may involve an **element of free will**. Soft determinism therefore argues that although behaviour may be **predictable**, it does not mean it is inevitable as ultimately we can **choose** how to behave.

Free will

The notion of free will suggests that human behaviour is **self-determined**. The concept believes that humans can **choose** their thoughts and actions and therefore have **control** over their behaviour. A belief in free will does **not deny** that internal and external forces contribute to behaviour but ultimately that humans have choice over how to behave in response to these. **Humanistic Psychologists** argue against Determinism and claim that humans have self-determination and free will and therefore behaviour cannot a result of any single cause. Humanists such as Carl **Rogers** and Abraham **Maslow** believe that individuals are in control of their behaviour and are trying to achieve personal **growth**.



Discussion- Free will vs Determinism

The Deterministic viewpoint is consistent with science

Hard determinism as an approach is **consistent** with the **features of science**. This allows for the manipulation of an independent variable to see its effect on a dependant variable to identify cause and effect. This allows psychologists to adopt an objective approach through the drawing of causal relationship that can predict future behaviour. **However** this approach can be criticised as it typically discounts the **importance of extraneous variables** that may not have been controlled for. Rules of Hard determinism can result in Psychology making sweeping generalisations about human behaviour that do not recognise the potential for our behaviour to be influenced by other factors in other contexts or circumstances. As there are so many potential variables influencing human behaviour it is arguably **impossible to identify one single cause** for any one behaviour and control and predict behaviour effectively.

Determinism is incompatible with conventional views on morality and the legal system

Many Psychologists and theorists do **not favour** the determinism viewpoint as if the view that external or internal forces determine behaviour is accepted this provides a potential **excuse** for undesirable behaviours in society such as **offending**. For example offenders in court have previously used the argument that they have been born with a **predisposition** to be violent or aggressive to mitigate their **liability**. Although courts reject this argument, accepting and adopting a truly deterministic position is undesirable due to it's **implications** on society as it could lead to legal issues regarding mens rea (the nature of responsibility and intent).

Free will is a more appropriate approach to understanding Human Behaviour

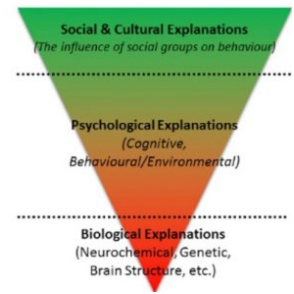
The idea of free will is appealing for many and is therefore viewed as **intuitively correct**. It is this experience that means the determinism vs free will debate continues. Human **subjective experience** involves the belief that we are in control of our actions and behaviour. This is further **supported by Humanism** and the **Positive Psychology movement**. This movement has had a positive influence on a variety of methods adopted in **therapy and counselling** today. The effectiveness of such treatments including client-based therapy supports the value of recognising free will as a positive approach to explaining human behaviour.

Free will is just an illusion

The concept of free will has attracted criticism from Psychologists. Some Psychologists such as Skinner have argued that **free will is an illusion** and all behaviour is determined even if we are unwilling to admit it. More recent evidence by **Libet et al** supports this claim in support of **biological determinism**. They found that the motor regions in the brain become active even **before** an individual **consciously registers** an awareness of their **decision** to move their hand. This strongly supports the idea that behaviour is biologically determined and that all thought we believe we have free will, behaviour may have a biological cause and free will is merely an illusion. Also the concept of free will as it is simply impossible to test. It is a non-physical vague concept that cannot be observed or quantified. This means that the concept cannot be falsified and as psychology is a science this idea is challenged by many who believe that if it is not measurable, it does not **exist**. This also means that a **resolution** of the determinism vs free will debate is not likely.



Reductionism vs Holism



The debate concerned with whether it is best to understand the complexity of human behaviour by reducing it to their simplest structures or parts or to view human behaviour as a whole integrated experience

Key Term	Definition
Reductionism	The scientific view that human behaviour is best explained by breaking it down into simpler component parts.
Biological Reductionism	Biological reductionism refers to the way Psychologists reduce behaviour to its physiology and explain behaviour in terms of genetics, neurotransmitters, hormones and biological structures.
Environmental Reductionism (stimulus- response)	Environmental reductionism reduces behaviour to a simple stimulus- response.
Parsimony	The idea that complex behaviour should always be explained in its simplest parts
Levels of Explanation	This view by Rose (1976) argues that there are different levels of explanations. These include the highest level of Social and Cultural explanations, middle Psychological levels and the lowest being Biological explanations.
Holism	Holism is the argument that human behaviour is too complex to be broken down into simple parts. Therefore by being holistic psychologists consider the "whole" individual as a sum of its parts.

Reductionism

Reductionism is the view that human behaviour can be explained through **reducing** the individual's behaviour down into **simpler parts**. Those who support this view point suggest that behaviour as a whole is best understood if we explore the parts contributing to the system. Reductionism is based on **scientific** assumptions of **parsimony**: the idea that all should be explained in the simplest terms possible. This is similar to the concept of Occam's Razor which argues the answer to any problem is often the **simplest explanation**.

Biological Reductionism refers to the way that biological Psychologists reduce behaviour to its **physical level**. Biological Psychologists reduce behaviour to **single biological components** such as **genetics, neurons, neurotransmitters** and **hormones**. Explanations of Psychological illness that highlight a biological cause are biologically reductionist. The theory that Schizophrenia is caused by excessive activity of the neurotransmitter dopamine is reducing **schizophrenia** to the single **component of dopamine**.

Environmental Reductionism is also known as **stimulus-response** reductionism. Behaviourists support the concept of classical conditioning which assumes behaviour can be reduced to a stimulus- response (S-R) where behaviour is shaped by learnt **associations**. Complex behaviours are explained here by a series of S-R chains. Behaviourists reduce the complex behaviour of **attachment** down to a stimulus response. The infant responds with pleasure when a caregiver feeds them. A learnt association is then formed and the caregiver then becomes a conditioned stimulus who will alone create the conditioned response of pleasure in the infant.

Levels of Explanation

Rose (1976) proposed that there are different levels of explanation. The **lowest level** of explanation would include **Biological explanations** where behaviour is explained in its smallest parts including genetics, neurochemicals and biological structures. At this level explanations are considered reductionist. **Middle level explanations** reduce behaviour to **Psychological Explanations** (e.g Cognitive and Behavioural). The **highest level** considers both Social and Cultural explanations where behaviour is explained in regards of the influence of **social groups**. Any Behaviour can be explained using these levels and this idea is best illustrated using an example from a topic.

Memory

Social and Cultural explanations

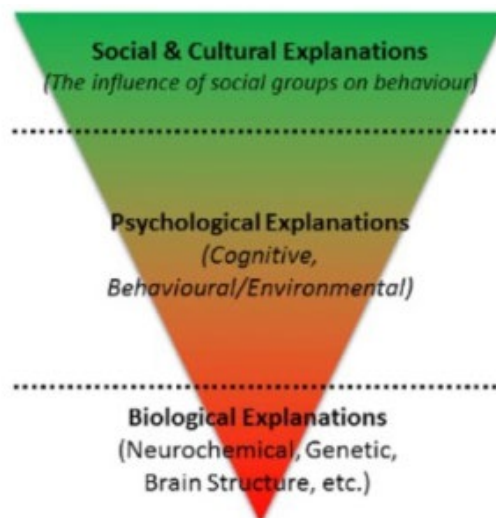
Bartlett's- Schema theory
Memory can be explained through cultural explanations as research suggests socially learnt schemas affect what we remember and how we recall

Psychological explanations

Cognitive Psychologists explain memory through theoretical models such as the Multistore model of memory. Evidence from Miller and Peterson and Peterson support this.

Biological explanations

Bio Psychologists have found that memory is localised in areas of the brain such as the hippocampus



Gender

Social and Cultural explanations

Mead conducted research into cross cultural differences in gender roles and found that gender was shaped by social factors and cultural norms

Psychological explanations

Cognitive Psychologists such as Kohlberg explain Gender develops as a child progresses through stages of cognitive intellectual development

Biological explanations

Gender has been explained to be developed as a result of the action of sex hormones such as the higher levels of testosterone in males which has been used to explain masculine behaviour

Holism

Holism comes from the greek word "Holos" which means "**whole**". Holism is the argument that human behaviour should be viewed as a whole **integrated experience** and not through separating its parts.

Holism is supported by **Gestalt Psychology** which explores how when we perceive something in the real world and argues that we do so as a **whole** rather than as a collection of pieces. We only make sense of and perceive our world accurately through considering the whole image. Therefore by separating human behaviour into parts, this means that **complex** behaviour can be easily **misunderstood**.

Humanists support the Holistic approach as they argue that humans experience stimuli as a whole. Humanists such as Maslow propose theories such as the "**hierarchy of Needs**" that consider all contributors to human behaviour uses. Humanists use qualitative methods to support their **holistic** investigation of Psychology.



Discussion- Reductionism vs Holism

Reductionism supports a scientific approach

Reducing behaviour to a form that can be studied is useful in Psychology as it allows for **experimental** research to take place. By breaking behaviour down we can isolate operationalised **variables** that can be manipulated and controlled in a laboratory setting. These variables can then be measured to determine the contribution they have to behaviour. Experimental research has produced an array of empirical **support for psychological theory** including the role of our biology in psychological illness for example the role of the neurotransmitter serotonin in symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder. This demonstrates how reducing a complex behaviour to single factors can enable scientific study providing evidence to support theoretical explanations of behaviour

Biological reductionism ignores the complexity of human behaviour

Reducing behaviour to **lower levels** such as our biology may result in other variables being **overlooked** which can lead to an **incomplete** understanding of the behaviour. For example this can be problematic when **isolating** a single biological cause for a **psychological illness** when a variety of factors may be involved. Reducing Psychological illness to the biological level **ignores the complexity**; context and function of such behaviour whereas adopting a more holistic approach in considering psychological explanations to adopt an interactionist approach can inform more holistic explanations which have been found to be much more effective in explaining the cause of conditions such as Schizophrenia and OCD.

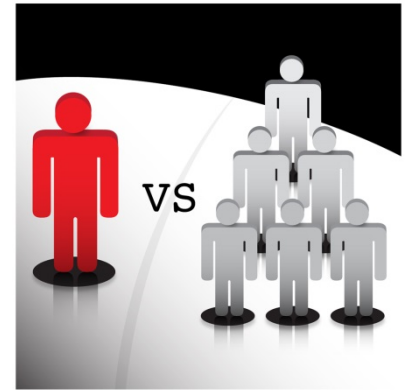
Holism considers all levels of explanations but is difficult to evidence

Holism attempts to consider all different levels of explanation as it aims to provide a **complete understanding** of human behaviour. Humanists advocate for a Holistic view of human behaviour and argue that human subjective experience cannot be understood through investigating single parts (reductionism). Humanists believe behaviour can only be fully understood through the studying of the whole person including the consideration of **free will** and **human motivation**. However Holism along with the Humanistic approach have been criticised due to its **untestable nature** and theorists inability to objectively evidence behaviour when adopting a holistic approach. Reductionists support the need to study the whole person but stress that this can only be achieved through the process of initially breaking the behaviour down into small measureable parts.



Idiographic vs Nomothetic approaches

This Debate considers the extent to whether Idiographic or Nomothetic approaches to research in Psychology are more appropriate in aiding our understanding of behaviour. Is it more important to establish norms and similarities across groups or to study the individual seeing them as unique?



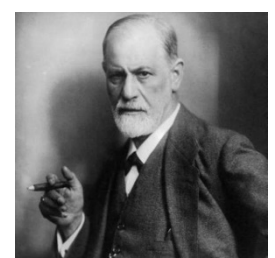
Key Term	Definition
Idiographic	From the Greek word "Idios" meaning own. Psychologists who take this approach focus on the individual and emphasise the unique experience of human behaviour. They will study individuals using qualitative data.
Nomothetic	From the Greek "Nomos" meaning law Psychologists are concerned with establishing general laws about behaviour from the study of groups of people using quantitative statistical techniques.

The Idiographic Approach

The Idiographic approach focuses on the **individual** and emphasising the **unique** personal experience. Researchers use **Qualitative** research methods such as case studies, unstructured interviews and thematic analysis which give depth and **insight** into individual behaviour. The Idiographic approach does not aim to formulate laws or generalise results to others.

Case studies provide an in-depth insight into an individual or small group which can be used to **evaluate a theory**. Case studies can be found to **undermine whole theories** and **inspire future enquiry** for example in the case study of Patient KF in **memory**. The Patients short term memory (STM) of auditory information was greater than his forgetting of visual information suggesting that STM is not one unitary component thus challenging the validity of the multistore model of memory. The case study of Clive Wearing again from the topic of memory was useful in evidencing the existence of the difference memory stores of Long term memory this demonstrates the **usefulness** of an idiographic approach and the use of case studies in Psychology.

Further case study approaches can be seen in the **Humanistic** and **Psychodynamic Approaches**. Freud conducted detailed investigations of his patients to understand their Psychological disorders, a famous study being that of little Hans. Freud's case study work contributed to Psychology emphasising the importance of early childhood events and their impact on later behaviour including attachment and offending.



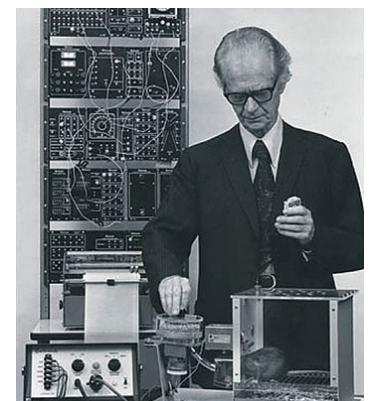
The Nomothetic Approach

Psychologists who take a nomothetic approach are concerned with establishing **general laws** of behaviour based on the study of large **groups** of participants. Nomothetic approaches will use **statistical analysis** through **quantitative** data collection. Research methods supporting a Nomothetic Approach include **Experiments**, Correlations and Meta-Analysis.

Biological Psychologists take a nomothetic approach as they adopt **scientific methods** to identify **trends** and generate **causal laws**. For example when explaining Psychological disorders such as OCD. They pinpoint biological factors that tend to be responsible for disorders and use this law to inform treatments such as drug therapies to treat all patients with. Also in Psychopathology classification systems such as the DSM and ICD are used to diagnose psychological illness and these are nomothetic classification tools.



Behaviourists such as Watson, Pavlov and Skinner conduct research using animals to draw general laws of learning such as classical and operant conditioning. Behaviourists generalise such laws to humans and animals and such laws can be used in treatments such as the behavioural treatments for phobias including systematic desensitisation and flooding. Social Psychologists including Asch and Milgram also adopt a nomothetic approach to understanding Conformity and Obedience. They researched the role of situational factors in social behaviour and concluded that situational factors influence levels of conformity and obedience in all individuals.



Evaluating the Nomothetic vs Idiographic debate

Psychology as a Science- Quantitative vs Qualitative Approaches

The **Nomothetic approach** is considered **scientific** as it adopts **quantitative experimental methods** and findings from such research have the ability to predict behaviour whereas the **qualitative** methods used **Idiographic** approach is criticised for its essentially **unscientific** nature, subjectivity and inability to draw **general laws** or **predictions**. This limits the usefulness of the idiographic approach particularly in its application and treatment of **psychological disorders**. **However** supporters of the idiographic approach still argue that it is only through the understanding of a single individual that Psychologists can truly predict behaviour and its **in-depth analysis** increases the **validity** of its findings over the reliance of statistics.

Nomothetic approaches are useful

As the Nomothetic approach adopts the **laws of science** it is useful in identifying trends; predicting and controlling behaviour which has **useful applications**. The Biological perspective adopts a Biological approach when explaining the cause of disorders such as OCD. This has led to the development of **drug therapies** to treat chemical imbalance such as SSRI's. Some Psychologists argue **however** that alternate treatments such as **talking therapies** and CBT are more suitable as they adopt a more person centred approach which is based on the principles of an **idiographic approach**.

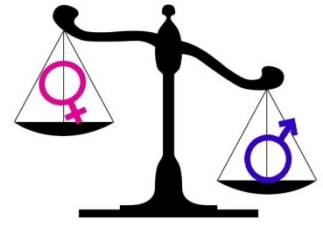
Idiographic and Nomothetic methods should be used in combination

An **Idiographic** stance such as a **case study** is often the seed that **prompts** an idea for further research. An idiographic study explores a behaviour or phenomenon with depth and detail that will often lead to new research ideas or challenge previous theory and assumption from nomothetic research. What this suggests is that **both methods** have value and Psychology should adopt a **mixed methods** approach with idiographic and Nomothetic methods used to complement and challenge each other. This can be seen in approaches such as the **Cognitive approach** use nomothetic approaches to draw general laws but also use idiographic methods to explore topics such as memory with more depth. Eysenck's theory of personality explains uniqueness through drawing on general laws of personality. Therefore the idiographic/nomothetic distinction could be argued to be a **false separation**.



Gender Bias

Bias is used to suggest that a person's views are distorted in some way. There is evidence in Psychology that gender difference is presented in a biased way.



Key Term	Definition
Gender Bias	The differential treatment and/or representation of males and females based on stereotypes
Alpha Bias	Theories or research that exaggerates the difference between males and females
Beta Bias	Theories or research that minimises or ignores the differences between males and theories.
Androcentrism	Theories which are centred or focused on males
Universality	When a theory is universal it can be applied to all people irrespective of culture or gender

Gender Bias is the differential treatment or representation of males and females based on **stereotypes** and **not real evidenced differences**. Psychological theory and research is at risk of either **exaggerating** differences in males and females or **ignoring** these completely. This can often be a result of socially constructed gender stereotypes and not real differences. **Androcentrism** means being centred on or **dominated by males** or the male viewpoint. This can be a conscious or unconscious bias. In the past most Psychologists were male and therefore constructed theory tended to represent a male view of the world and therefore present a level of bias

Alpha Bias

Alpha Bias refers to theories which can **exaggerate the differences** between males and females,

Freud's Psychodynamic approach argued that boys and girls experience different conflicts in their psychosexual development. Girls do not suffer the same oedipal conflict as boys and therefore they do not identify with their mothers as strongly as boys identify with their fathers. then argued this had an impact on development arguing that girls as a result are inferior to males and develop a weaker superego emphasising differences between males and females. However there is no evidence that females possess a weaker super-ego infact researcher into morality and offending behaviour challenges this assumption

Evolutionary explanations for Attachment also demonstrates Alpha Bias. Evolutionary Psychology explains behaviour through the human need to survive and therefore reproduce. The Evolutionary approach therefore explains how males and females are innately different to help their adaptation to roles, which would aid survival off a species. Males tend to be more dominant and women have more empathy and parental investment to aid the survival of offspring. **Bowlby's monotropic** theory suggests infants are **innately programmed** to form attachment with one primary caregiver who is usually the mother who is the source of food and is more nurturing. Attachment for mother and child is therefore a survival mechanism. He also then argues that deprivation from the mother would cause long term social and emotional effects. This is Gender biased as it suggests that the mother should be the primary caregiver not the father exaggerating the differences between males and females despite the fact that there is no evidence of the negative implications of the **father** as the primary caregiver.

Beta Bias

Beta bias theory **ignores or minimises sex differences**. These theories often assume that findings from research on males can apply equally to females (or vice versa).

Gender

Kohlberg's Cognitive explanation of Gender suggests that all children develop their gender identity through progressing through three maturational stages. Kohlberg's theory therefore assumes that boys and girls progress through at the same rate and develop their gender in the same way. Evidence however suggests that boys have a much less flexible concept of gender role than girls, and boys show much greater resistance to opposite-sex activities than girls. For example, research has found that Boys are less likely to play with dolls than girls are likely to play with trucks. These differences are likely to be social/cultural in origin, and are difficult to explain in terms of Kohlberg's cognitive/developmental theory, which suggests that children's gender forms through the natural maturation of cognitive processes. It therefore also highlights a beta bias in the theory, as it does not pay attention to the differences between the two genders, presuming that girls and boys develop concepts of gender in the same way.



Social Influence

Asch's 1950s research into conformity involved a sample of only male participants and thus demonstrated Beta and androcentric bias. It was assumed that females would respond in the same way as the males and therefore show the same conformity rate. More recent replications by Mori and Arai (2010) however showed gender differences in conformity rates therefore Asch's research and theory demonstrates beta bias as it ignores gender differences through the assumption that females would behave the same thus supporting the argument that the research is unable to provide support for a complete explanation of conformity.

Discussing Gender Bias

Gender Bias may affect the validity of research and theory

Gender may result in research **finding differences** between genders that **do not actually exist** and this can be a result of biased research methodologies and/or as a result of the gender of the researcher themselves. Rosenthal found that male experimenters are more pleasant towards female participants than male participants and in the same research males performed less well on the tasks involved. Feminists argue lab experiments disadvantage women because of their controlled nature and research has found that although women and men displayed different leadership styles in lab based research, in real settings they were judged more similarly demonstrating the impact of gender bias on the **validity of research**.

Gender Bias and Gender Stereotyping

Issues of Gender Bias have historically gone **unnoticed and theory and research has contributed to the formation of rigid gender stereotypes**. For example the assumption that females should be the primary caregiver as they are innately programmed to be more nurturing. Such assumptions have contributed to widespread beliefs about gender roles in the family and caregiving responsibilities or females over males. This is socially sensitive for both mothers and fathers and can have negative economic implications for instance if the mother is the breadwinners but assumes she should stay at home with her child. This particular assumption has only recently been challenged with research supporting the role of the father as a primary caregiver. This demonstrates the issue with biased research and how it can produce socially sensitive results and the negative implications as its contribution to **negative gender stereotypes**.

Culture Bias

There is evidence in Psychology that theory and research can demonstrate Culture Bias through ignoring culture differences or assuming cultures are profoundly different



Key Term	Definition
Culture	The values, Beliefs and patterns of behaviour shared by a group of individuals
Culture Bias	The tendency to judge people in terms of one's own cultural assumptions
Alphas Bias	When a theory assumes that cultural groups are profoundly different.
Beta Bias	When real cultural differences are ignored or minimised. This can be seen in universal research designs.
Ethnocentrism	Ethnocentrism means seeing the world from one's own cultural perspective and believing this is accurate
Cultural Relativism	Cultural relativism insists that behaviour can only be properly understood if the cultural context is taken in consideration
Universality	When a theory is universal it can be applied to all people irrespective of culture or gender

Culture Bias is the tendency to **judge** others in terms of one's **own cultural assumptions**. Alpha Bias occurs when a theory in Psychology assumes cultural groups are profoundly different whereas Beta Bias occurs when real cultural differences are ignored or minimised which is often seen in Psychology where research designs are applied **universally** that result in drawing conclusions that assume all cultures are the same. **Ethnocentrism** is a form of culture bias where the researcher sees the world from their own cultural perspective believing this is correct. This often occurs as a **lack of awareness** that other ways of seeing things can be as valid as one's own.

Psychopathology

Definitions of abnormality demonstrate Culture Bias in Psychopathology as **defining abnormality** varies from culture to culture. It has been found that African-Caribbean's in Britain are diagnosed as psychologically ill on the basis of behaviour such as hallucinations which are perceived as normal in their subculture. This therefore challenges the Bias and validity of the definitions of abnormality and diagnostic tools in the UK.

Attachment

Ainsworth's strange situation is an example of **ethnocentric research** as it was designed in America to assess attachment types assuming the strange situation has the same meaning for infants from other cultures. The Strange situation has been argued to demonstrate imposed etic. Cross cultural research has found differences in the findings across culture for instance German children demonstrated a higher rate of insecure avoidant behaviour. This may be a result of the methodology used as children in Germany are encouraged to be more independent and therefore would respond differently in the strange situation. This culture bias challenges the validity of the findings and the universality of the research and its methodology in explaining and understanding attachment.

Cultural Relativism

Cultural Relativism argues that behaviour can only be properly understood if **culture is taken into consideration**. Social norms are culturally relative and context is vital in understanding human behaviour. **Attachment type** can arguably only be understood if the childrearing and parenting styles are taken into account therefore attachment is culturally relative.

Psychological disorders are affected greatly by Culture. Anxiety disorders are informed by culture in regards to what situations/objects are likely to cause fear. Some **anxiety** disorders are therefore specific to cultures such as in Japan there is a syndrome for fearing of upsetting others. In the UK there is no such phobia and this would be classed as a social phobia. This demonstrates how Psychological illness is relative to culture.

Discussing Culture Bias

Recognising Cultural Bias in Psychology

One way of dealing with culture Bias is to **identify** when it occurs. Smith and Bond (1988) surveyed research on social psychology in a text book and found that 66% of the research studies were American, 32% European and 2% from the rest of the world. It has also been found in 2010 that 67% of participants in research are American Psychology undergraduates. This suggests that research is severely **unrepresentative** but also that this can simply be improved through **sampling** different cultural groups. Therefore by recognising cultural Bias, this issue can be **improved**.

Consequences of Culture Bias

Culturally Bias research can have severe **implications** through amplifying or validating damaging **stereotypes**. Tests in Psychology which are formed with cultural Bias may advantage those participants who are from the culture from which it is derived. For example Americans are more likely to perform well over other cultures on an IQ test which was constructed in America. The results from such research would then inform **attitudes** on the intelligence of different cultures suggesting that Americans possess higher intelligence than others. Not only would such findings be invalid and **inaccurate** but they could contribute to **negative stereotypes**.

Progress in Culture Bias

Although it is difficult to approach research completely objectively without any level of conscious or unconscious culture bias Psychological researchers do give consideration to these matters and an **increased understanding** of this issue is helping to reduce ethnocentrism in Psychology. Psychologists today are well-travelled and academics hold international conferences which exchange research and ideas across cultures again aiming to minimise the **effects of the issue**. **Indigenous Psychology** has been developed which aims to explicitly draw on the experiences of individuals in different cultural contexts. One example is Afrocentrism which emphasises the importance of recognising the African context of behaviours and attitudes. Such approaches are said to hold strength in regards to cultural relativism however some still argue that these are still biased views of behaviours and **new forms of ethnocentrism** which possess the same issues of the approaches they are aiming to replace.



Ethical Implications and Social Sensitivity



This issue is concerned with the ethical implications of psychological research and theory on participants and also the way in which the findings impact the public.

Key Term	Definition
Ethical Guidelines	Ethical guidelines refer to the correct rules of conduct necessary when carrying out research outlined by the BPS or APA in Psychology.
Ethical Issues	An example of an ethical issue in Psychology is deception of participants. An ethical issue brings systems of morality and principles into conflict.
Ethical Implications	Ethical Implications consider the impact or consequences of Psychological research or theory on the rights of the participants taking part and other people in the wider context
Social Sensitivity	Siebert and Stanley (1988) used the term to describe studies where there are potential social consequences for the participants, the group of people represented by or related to the research.

Ethical Implications

Ethical implications consider the **impact** or **consequences** psychological **research** has on the **participants** and the rights of **other people** in a **wider context**.

Ethical Implications of Research Studies

Milgram's research has several ethical issues as **participants** in his research into obedience were highly deceived and were unable to give fully informed consent. The research methodology caused **distress** and the participants did not feel as if they could withdraw. The participants were debriefed afterwards and there were follow-up interviews; however, the results of the research may have affected the participants as they may have found the fact that they obeyed authority with the **potential to cause** another individual **harm** difficult to accept.

Zimbardo's prison experiment has also been criticised for being highly unethical due to the **distress** caused for the participants. The observable psychological harm experienced was so extreme to the extent that the research had to be stopped early as a result of the psychological distress presented by the participants who were in the role of the prisoner. The guards may also have **felt distress after the experiment** due to the nature of the behaviour they demonstrated and abuse they subjected the prisoners to.

Ethical Implications of theory

Bowlby's theory of attachment and **monotropy** suggests that children form one special attachment bond and this is usually with the mother. This attachment must also be formed within a critical period. Bowlby also suggested that this can form an internal working model for future relationships. This theory **ethical implications** as it argues that a woman's role is to be the primary care giver in the home which may make women feel guilty for wanting to or returning to work. This can also have implications on fathers who may be discouraged to be the care giver or this may cause single parent fathers concern over their ability to form attachments.

Social Sensitivity

Sieber and Stanley (1988) defined research or theory as **Socially Sensitive** where there are potential **consequences** for the **participants** or the group of **people represented** by the research.

1. **The Research Question:** The researcher must consider their research question carefully. Asking questions like 'Are there racial differences in IQ?' or 'Is intelligence inherited?' may be damaging to members of a particular group.
2. **The Methodology Used:** The researcher needs to consider the treatment of the participant's and their right to confidentiality and anonymity. For example, if someone admits to committing a crime, or to having unprotected sex if they are HIV positive, 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. If the research is funded by a private institution or organisation, why are they funding the research and how do they intend to use the findings?
4. **Interpretation and Application of Findings:** Finally, the researcher needs to consider how their findings might be interpreted and applied in the real-world

Socially Sensitive Research- Forensic Psychology- Raine et al (1997)

Raine et al's (1997) research used **brain scans** of **violent criminals** to examine their level of impulse control. Raine found that there was damage to most areas of the brains, focused around the frontal lobe which specialises in impulse control. The research could be seen as socially sensitive as the findings may be **interpreted** in a way that suggests that children should have brain scans to identify a **predisposition** for **offending behaviour**. Children, their **parents** and the general society would feel unease as to then what to do with the knowledge that a child or children have a predisposition to violent criminal behaviour. This could lead to support for genetic engineering to avoid criminal genes being transmitted which is highly socially sensitive. It could also have sensitive **legal implications** as the theory supports a determinist view in that the individual is not seen as **culpable** in a criminal act and violent crimes could thus not lead to **convictions**.



Discussing Ethical Implications and Socially Sensitive Research

Socially Sensitive research can lead to issues of discrimination

Socially Sensitive research can have **negative implications** on **members of society**. For example **Bowlby's Maternal deprivation** hypothesis argues that attachment forms with a primary care giver which is usually the mother. This has negative implications on society as it may cause or increase levels of **discrimination** towards **fathers** who are primary care givers or anxiety and concern for single parents in their ability to form **attachments**. It could also enhance stigma around mothers who return to work and place their children in ChildCare. A solution to this is to ensure Psychologists **consider the wider implications** of their research not just prior to but after publication. This could involve Psychologists engaging more actively with the media and with policy makers **after publication**.

Socially Sensitive research can reduce prejudice through challenging misconceptions and aid advancement in Psychology.

Through **highlighting the potential implications** of research and theory psychologists are able to potentially **safeguard** the participant's as well as their family and able to consider the wider implications of their research on society. This awareness has greatly **improved** and is undoubtedly important. However it is also important that Psychologists are able to conduct important Socially sensitive research that may have the potential to benefit society. An example of this could be from the studies investigating the cause of **Gender Identity disorder (GID)** which could be deemed to have ethical implications as may be sensitive to participants. **Avoiding** the study of vulnerable or underrepresented groups such as those with GID may be detrimental as research into these topics may actually **promote a greater sensitivity** and understanding of Gender which can help **reduce prejudice** and **stigma**.

Socially Sensitive research may also be useful and beneficial for society

Often investigation into socially sensitive research topics provides conclusions that are highly useful and ones which can directly impact policy and practice to benefit society. Research into the unreliability of **eyewitness testimony** and the role of anxiety in EWT has reduced the risk of miscarriages of justice Socially Sensitive research can be used by the government and other organisations to positively shape policy. For example research into the role of **same sex parents** and the **role of the father** in **attachment** has contributed to the relatively recent introduction of paternity leave for fathers and the introduction of father skin on skin contact with their babies shortly after birth. This further demonstrates the importance and usefulness in conducting socially sensitive research in psychology



Exam Questions

The Nature Vs Nurture Debate

Briefly outline the nature- nurture debate in Psychology (2 marks)

Outline one example of the interactionist approach to the nature vs nurture debate (3marks)

Discuss the relative importance of heredity and environment in determining behaviour (16 marks)

Read the following

Tony and Clive both play tennis to a high standard. Tony believes that his skill is innate whereas Clive explains his in terms of the effort he has put into training since childhood.

With reference to the above outline what is meant by the Nature vs Nurture debate (4marks)

Discuss the Nature vs Nurture debate in Psychology. Refer to at least two topics you have studied (16 marks)

Free Will vs Determinism

Give an example of psychic determinism in Psychology (3 marks)

What is meant by Hard and Soft determinism? (4 marks)

Discuss the role of free will in human behaviour (8 marks)

Discuss the free will and determinism debate in Psychology. Refer in your answer to two topics you have studied (16 marks)

Extract from a newspaper article

Coping with Life's Pressures

Depression often runs in families, but many depressed people have serious social problems or have experienced traumatic events in the past. However, many people find ways to cope. What we need is the will to overcome our problems.

With reference to the item above, explain what is meant by 'determinism'. Refer to **three** types of determinism in your answer.

[6 marks]

Reductionism vs Holism

Explain what is meant by levels of Reductionism in Psychology (3marks)

Discuss Environmental Reductionism in Psychology (6marks)

Discuss Reductionism explanations in Psychology (8marks)

Outline and evaluate the Reductionism vs Holism debate referring to two approaches in Psychology (16 marks)

Gender and Culture Bias

Distinguish the difference between alpha and beta bias (4marks)

Outline how androcentrism has affected Psychological research (3marks)

Outline one example of gender bias in Psychological research (3 marks)

Discuss gender Bias in Psychology (16 marks)

Idiographic vs Nomothetic

Outline what is meant by the terms idiographic and nomothetic (4 marks)

Evaluate the nomothetic approach to psychological investigation (6 marks)

Discuss idiographic and Nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation (16 marks)

Ethical Implications and Socially Sensitive Research

Explain what is meant by socially sensitive research (3 marks)

Outline one example of research that is socially sensitive (3 marks)

Read the item and then answer the questions that follow.

In a study of antisocial activity and social background, researchers interviewed 100 children aged 14 years. They then classified each child according to their level of antisocial activity. They concluded that 26 were 'very antisocial', 40 were 'mildly antisocial' and 34 were 'not antisocial'. The researchers found that the majority of the 'very antisocial' children attended Crayford secondary school, whereas most of the other two groups of children attended another local school. 0 1 . 0 2 . 1 0 2 . 2 0 3 3 Turn over 4 The study on the opposite page is an example of socially sensitive research.

Briefly explain how the researchers could have dealt with the issue of social sensitivity in this study. [4 marks]

Discuss the ethical implications of research studies and theory including reference to social sensitivity (16 marks)

Further exam questions

Some researchers believe people have no choice over their sexuality and it is genetically determined. Others accept there is a genetic component but we cannot ignore the influence of upbringing on people's sexual behaviour and how this interacts with the norms and values of society. **Briefly discuss both biological determinism and Biological reductionism. Refer to the case above as part of your discussion (16 marks)**

Dancho is a talented and famous musician. He was taught to play the piano by his father who was a concert pianist. From the age of four years Dancho attended a specialist music school where he spent many hours each day practising the piano.

In a recent TV interview Dancho said, 'My earliest memories are of notes and melodies, so music is a part of me. To hear the applause in the concert hall is what I live for. Even if I wanted to stop playing, I could not.'

Discuss **two or more** types of determinism. Refer to the case of Dancho as part of your discussion. **[16 marks]**

Discuss Gender and Culture Bias (16 marks)

Read the item and then answer the question that follows.

A prison psychologist used an idiographic approach to study offending. He asked two offenders to record their thoughts about their childhood and their offending behaviour in a journal over a period of four weeks. Qualitative analysis of the journals showed that the offenders often thought about sad childhood events and believed that their childhood experiences had influenced their offending. Findings from idiographic research like the study described above are often used as a basis for other investigations.

Explain how the researcher might develop the above investigation through taking a nomothetic approach. [6 marks]

Discuss Nomothetic and idiographic approaches to psychological investigation (16 marks)

Discuss ethical Implications and Socially Sensitive research (8marks)

