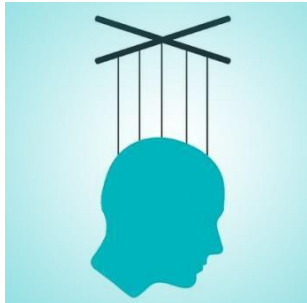


Unit 3

Issues and Debates in Psychology



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.

Idiographic and nomothetic

- Idiographic and Nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation.

Gender and culture in Psychology

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

Ethical implications

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

The Nature-Nurture debate:



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

What is the debate about?

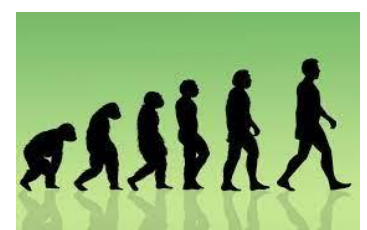
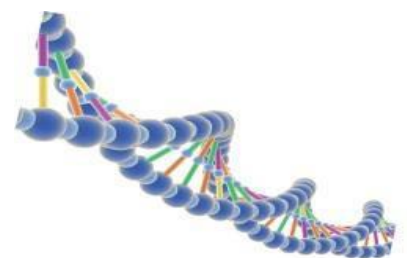
The Nature Vs Nurture debate centres on the relative contributions of genetic inheritance (nature) and environmental influences (nurture) to human behaviour.

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.

Examples of theories that argue a Nativist point of view

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.

Example of theories that take a nurture point of view:

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.



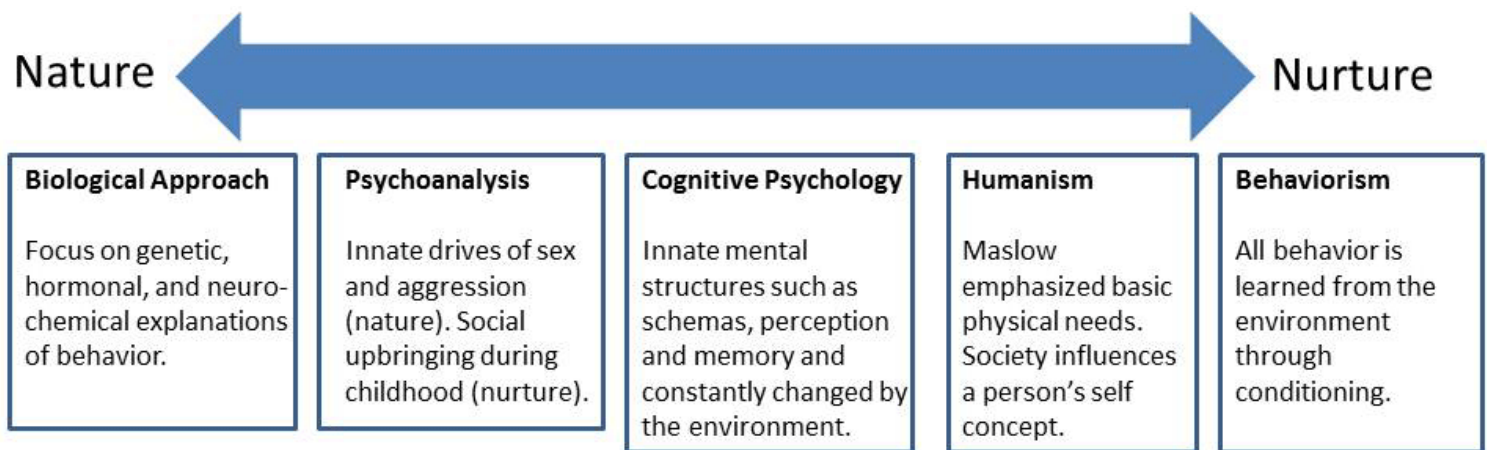
Schizophrenia

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.

So where do the approaches sit on this debate?

It helps to understand each debate by think about where each approach sits in the debate. For example:



Evaluating the Debates can be tricky!!! Here are some general top tips for your PEEL paragraphs:

Do's

- To have a debate means to **discuss both sides**. Therefore everyone single one of your PEEL paragraphs should consider both sides of the debate. Often comparing the opposing sides on the basis of the same point withinin the same paragraph.
- E.g. use P's like this...."One of the complexities of the nature vs nurture debate is that nurture can affect nature and vice versa. For example....."

And some don'ts

- Your P's "Points" should be discursive rather than evaluative. Avoid the terms "strength" and weakness". For example...
- Don't write "One strength of the nature way of looking at behaviour is that there is supporting evidence for it"
- Don't write "One weakness of the nurture is that it is a determinist way of looking at behaviour"
- Don't write "One weakness of the nature vs nurture debate is that it fails to consider that nature effects nurture.."

Nature v Nurture Evaluation (A03)

So Instead of defending extreme nativist or environmentalist views, most researchers are now interested in investigating the ways in which nature and nurture interact. Therefore your PEEL's for this debate will centre around interactionism in a number of different ways.

Nature can change/interact with nurture and vice versa.

You need to understand some key terms about the interplay of genes (and, more broadly, genome function) and the physical and social environment. You can then use a number of examples from any topic that demonstrates this complex interaction in your evaluation (A03).

1. **Passive gene environment interaction**= parents contribute to their child's development by passing on their genes and providing an environment for the genetic predisposition to grow.
2. **Evocative gene environment interaction**= heritable traits influence the reaction of others and hence the environment provided by others.
3. **Active gene-environment interaction**= the child's inherited traits lead them to make choices in their environment, this is called **niche picking** or constructivism.

PEEL point using passive gene environment interaction – using a schizophrenia example.

As psychological knowledge has deepened, the nature nurture debate has grown increasingly complex and now some argue it is a distraction from more important matters. **Plomin (1977)** suggested the idea of a "passive influence" where a parents genes determine aspects of a child's environment which affects their behaviour. For example, if a parent has a genetically determined mental illness this can create an unsettled home life which can indirectly lead to the child developing that mental disorder. Evidence for this comes from **Tienari's** Finnish adoption study where children of schizophrenic mothers adopted into healthy families only had an incidence of schizophrenia of 5.8% compared with those raised in dysfunctional families which was 36.8%. This demonstrates that without the biological mother's influence on the environment schizophrenia was less likely to develop and that with a similar unsettled home life i.e., passive influence the genetic predisposition is just over 30% more likely to develop demonstrating the interaction between nature and nurture.

PEEL point discussing how experience (nurture) can alter nature – using brain plasticity as an example.

Other psychologists have argued that the influence can work in the other direction with life experiences shaping our nature. Neuroplasticity is a term which describes the changes in the structure of the brain (nature), as a result of life experience (nurture). Demonstrated by **Maguire et al** (2000) investigated the hippocampi volume of London taxi drivers' brains. She found that this region of the brain (heavily involved in spatial skills in humans and animals) was larger in taxi drivers in comparison to non-taxi drivers. Consequently, Maguire concluded that the rigorous training including learning and recalling all the London streets and routes as well as experience driving the taxi (nurture) influenced the size of the hippocampi (nature) supporting the theory of neural plasticity and the interaction of nature and nurture.



PEEL – final point that draws a conclusion about the debate.

Most psychologists now consider it far too simplistic to consider nature and nurture in isolation of one another and instead adopt an Interactionist approach. A celebrated example being the diathesis stress model that states that even though a person may have a biological vulnerability, for e.g. the SERT or COMT candidate gene linked to OCD. OCD will only be triggered by a stressor in the environment. Research has suggested that not everybody with these candidate genes go on to develop OCD and this interaction with the environment (nurture) is needed. The diathesis stress model then suggests that it is impossible to say which is more important nature or nurture as for nature to be expressed nurture must be

involved. Also looking at behaviour in terms of an interactionist approach rather than nature OR nurture has also led to improvements in the way we explain and treat many physical and psychological illnesses and so interactionism is a more useful way at looking at behaviour.

How to structure a debates essay for 16 marks.

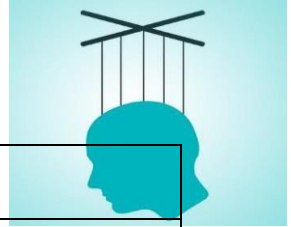
Now that you have learnt about your first debate you need the skills to be able to write about it in an essay. Follow this structure to maximize your marks for ALL 4 debate. You should be able to write 16 marks on all 4 debates by the end of the topic.

- **1. Introductory sentence - ALWAYS start by explaining what the actual debate is arguing about (or miss a01 marks). For example:**
“the nature vs nurture debate argues over **the extent to** which we can say that behaviour is the result of inherited traits versus the extent to which it is influenced by experiences”.
- **2. First main paragraph - Describe one side of the debate using key terms e.g....**
*The nature side of the debate refers to how human characteristics are **innate** as a result of **heredity** (genes being passed on from one generation to the next).*
- **3. Then give one example from psychological research to illustrate your definition (but only a brief summary) e.g...**
An example of this is with OCD, Gottesman found a concordance rate of 87% for MZ twins and 47% for DZ twins for obsessive symptoms and features. This similarity for individuals that share the same genes shows that nature has a major contribution to the disorder.
- **4. Describe the other side of the debate using key terms**
- **5. Give an example from psychological research to illustrate your definition**

AO3- 3 PEELS

- **6. Each P must be discursive and not “one strength is..” e.g**
Some psychologists argue that looking at the freewill versus determinism debate is a pointless exercise as the concept of freewill is an illusion and it doesn't exist.

Free will and Determinism



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 behaviour. Behaviour is not determined by internal or external forces

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

Determinism

Determinism is the view that **free will** is an **illusion** and that we are governed by **internal (biological)** or **external (environmental)** 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 completely incompatible with **free will** as it is the view that we have absolutely **no control** over our behaviour and internal and external forces shape our behaviour.

There are 3 types of hard determinism Biological, Environmental and psychic 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**. **Nestadt 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

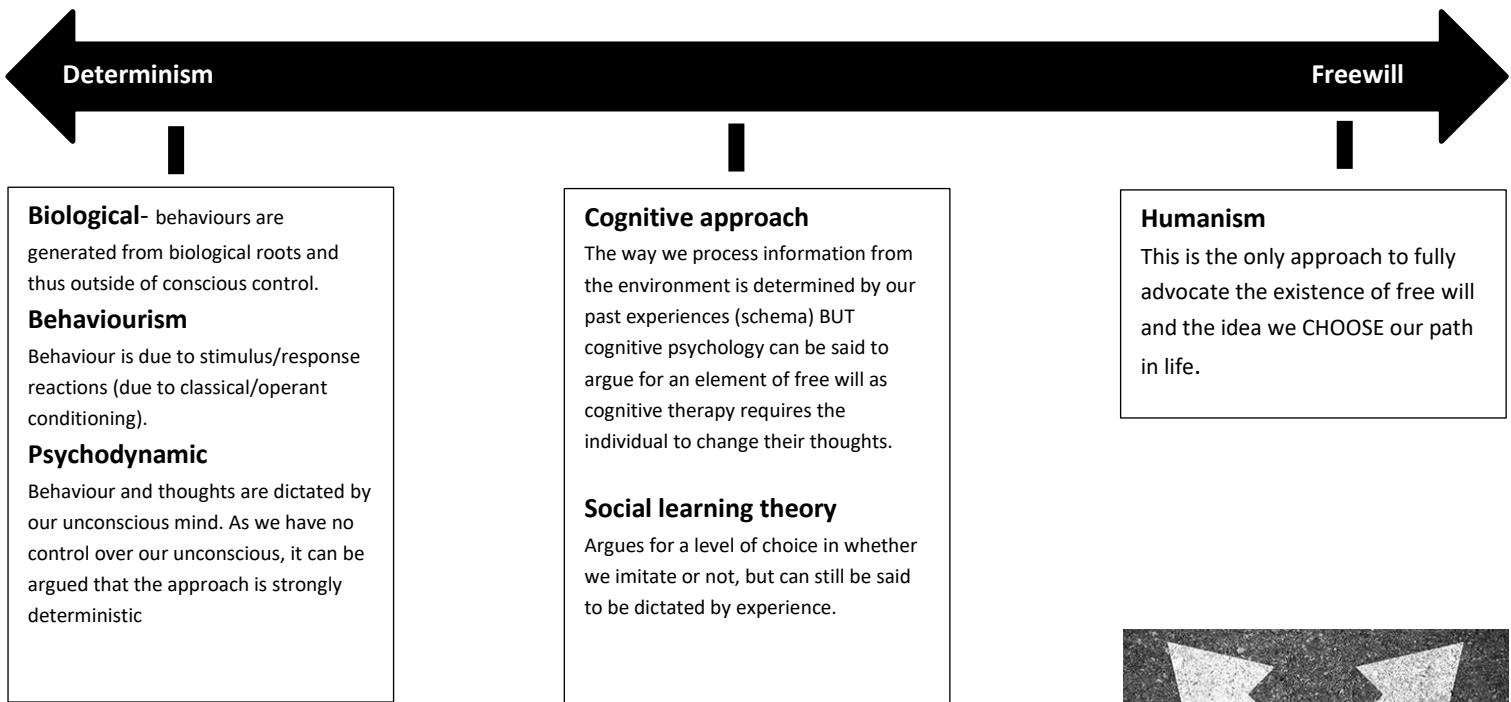
Soft determinism suggests that behaviour is **constrained** by the environment or biology, however only to a **certain extent**. Soft Determinism suggests some behaviour may involve an **element of free will**. Soft determinism therefore argues that although behaviour may be **predictable**, it does 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 be 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**.

So where do the approaches sit on this debate?



Free will vs Determinism Evaluation (A03)

Determinism and negative implications on criminal behaviour.

One argument for adopting a freewill stance over one of hard determinism is the negative implications of a hard determinist way of explaining behaviour.

If behaviour is determined by outside forces such as biology, then that provides a potential excuse for criminal acts. Court cases in the US, for example, have attempted to use the defence that a genetic variant called the MAOA gene was responsible for violent acts and even murders committed by offenders. Determinism as a defence has never been successful in preventing a conviction so isn't compatible with the legal system or with conventional views on morality. Freewill then is more compatible with society's views on responsibility but also is more appropriate as it suggests that people can change and be rehabilitated rather than be controlled by their biology or upbringing.

Freewill may suggest we can change but there is evidence that it is just an illusion.

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. Freewill is also supported by the Positive Psychology movement and has had a positive influence with the effectiveness of such treatments including client-based therapy or rehabilitation programmes in prison, supporting the value of recognising free will as a more positive approach to explaining human behaviour. However, Psychologists such as Skinner would argue that the freewill versus determinism debate is a pointless one as freewill is just an illusion. Libet et al (1983) supports this claim with their research that found that the motor regions of the brain become active at least 2000 milli seconds before a person registers conscious awareness of a decision, i.e. the decision to move the finger was actually a pre-



determined action of the brain. This strongly suggests that many actions are biologically determined and that even though we may believe we have freewill Skinner's claim that it is an illusion may be correct.

Determinism is consistent with science unlike freewill

There is an argument that the determinism viewpoint is a stronger one as it is consistent with the features of science unlike freewill. The determinist way of studying behaviour allows for the manipulation of an independent variable to see its effect on a dependant variable to establish cause and effect. This allows psychologists to adopt an objective approach through the drawing of causal relationships that can predict future behaviour. Whereas the concept of free will 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. However, those who adopt a freewill stance criticise science's determinism for making sweeping generalisation about behaviour and with so many potential variables influencing human behaviour it is arguably impossible to identify one single cause for any one behaviour or to predict behaviour effectively, whereas, freewill looks at each person individually avoiding these sweeping generalisations.

How do you finish an freewill v determinism essay? Well....

When looking at the strengths and limitations of both sides of the freewill versus determinism debate it would appear that **neither may be fully correct**. Maybe individuals do make conscious choices but they are constrained to some extent by external and internal forces so the answer to the debate is in fact **soft determinism**.

Reductionism vs Holism

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.

This debate is 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 in which we consider how multiple variants are interacting.

Levels of Explanation

If you look at any one behaviour, there are different levels of explanation you can consider to explain it..

Rose (1976) proposed that there are different levels of explanation that are taken to explain behaviour varying from those at a lower or fundamental level focusing on basic components or units to those at a higher more holistic multivariable level. We need to think of reductionism as a hierarchy moving from extreme reductionism of the hard sciences (low-level) through biological level to broader psychological levels (mid-level) and then to sociological level (high-level).

- **Lowest level = Extreme reductionist.** Biological reductionism where behaviour is explained in its smallest parts including genetics, neurochemicals and biological structures. At this level explanations are considered reductionist.

- **Middle level explanations** = Psychological Explanations (Machine reductionism as in cognitive psychology or Environmental reductionism as in behaviourism).
- **The highest level** = **Holistic multivariable level**. This level considers both Social and Cultural explanations where behaviour is explained in regard to social groups.

Memory

Social and Cultural explanations

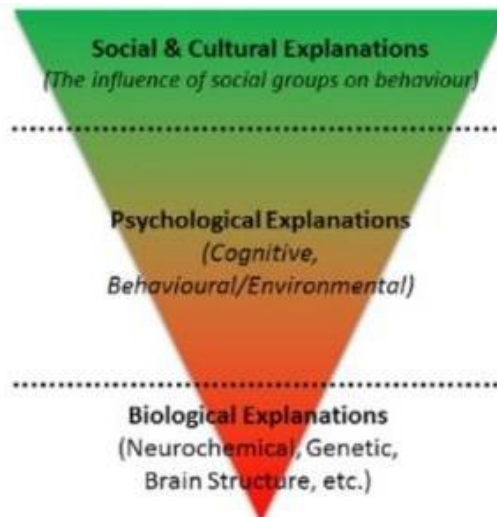
The effects of social factors in post-event contamination e.g the role of post event discussion. Or misleading questions.

Psychological explanations

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

Biological explanations

Bio Psychologists look at the basic physiological level, eg action of acetylcholine and role of the hippocampus



Forensics

Social and Cultural explanations

Differential association theory such as Sutherland would suggest offending is due to frequency and intensity of social groups holding more pro-crime attitudes and values than those with anti-crime.

Psychological explanations Cognitive Psychologists such as Kohlberg explain offending behaviour as has a lower level of moral development. Operating at a pre-conventional level based on punishment or rewards.

Biological explanations Offending behaviour is the result of genetics such as the MAOA gene. Or Offending behaviour can be reduced down to structural brain differences such as an underactive amygdala in the limbic system.

The lowest level of explanation- 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 viewpoint 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**.

The Three main types of reductionism are:

Extreme 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.

Machine reductionism Explanations which liken human behaviour to that of a machine. For example as seen in the cognitive approach the use models of memory such as the multi-store model by Atkinson and Shiffrin. This means that such explanation tend to overlook the influence of emotional and social factors.

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 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**.

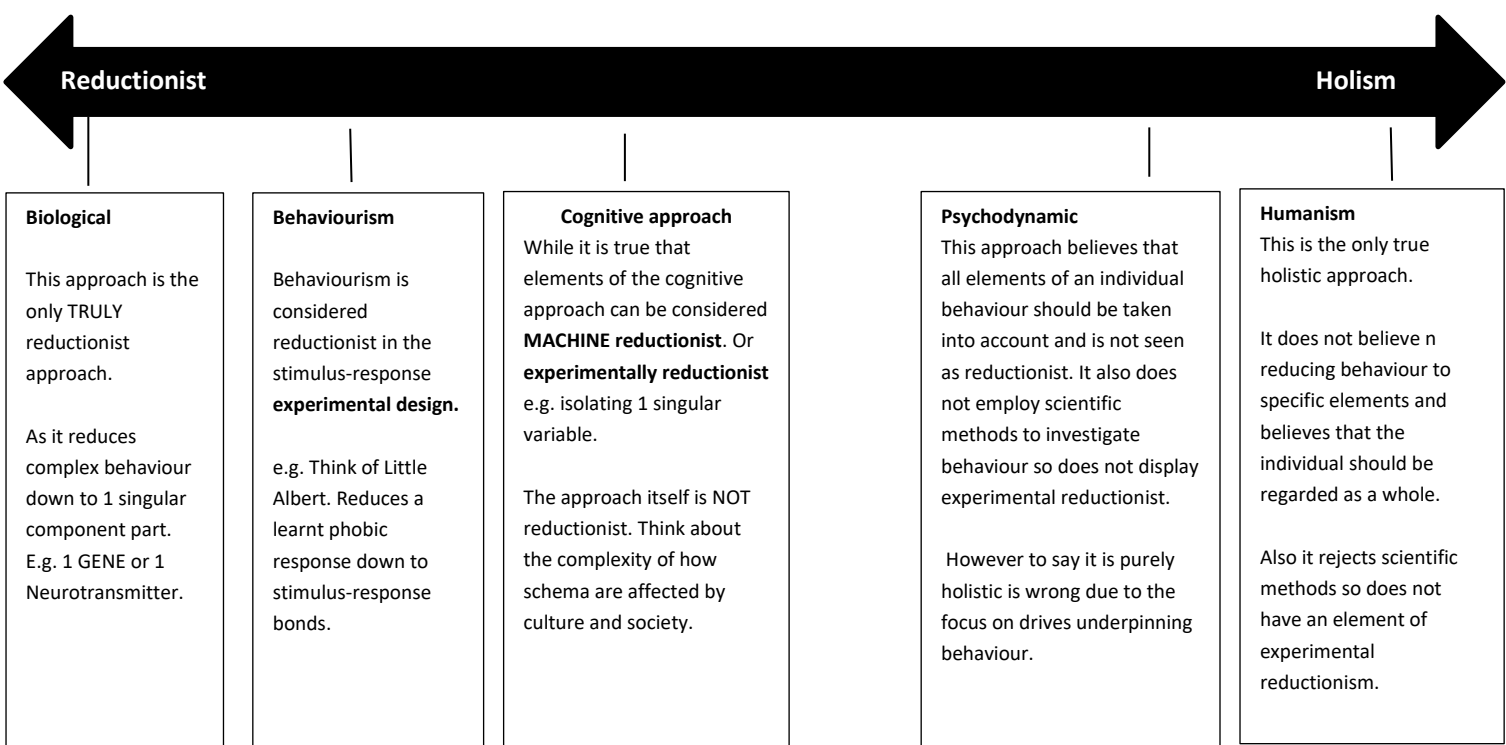
People who agree with Holism do not deny the potential influence of genetics of biochemistry but feel that human behavior is far from complex and that consequently it is necessary to take a step back from the detail and consider the person from a less reductionist level. The social context that are in is very important, as are their family and friends. For this reason they are drawn to higher levels of explanation such as social groups and social cognition.



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.

So where do the approaches sit on the debate?



Evaluating the Reductionism vs Holism debate. (A03)



**** common misunderstanding**** Reductionism **is not** the same as saying it is a view that ignores other factors. Instead it ignores the **complex interaction** of many factors.



Don't forget to be discursive in your PEEL's. make sure you are mentioning both sides of the debate within the same paragraph.

Reductionism is scientific whereas Holism is not.

One argument supporting a reductionist way of explaining behaviour is that reductionism takes a **scientific approach** in research unlike holism. Studying basic units of behaviour in research by **isolating variables** underpins the scientific way of studying behaviour and so is more **objective**, it also provides **empirical** support for psychological theory e.g. the role of serotonin in symptoms of OCD. Holism however has been criticised due to its **untestable** nature. Those taking this view would argue that as multiple variables are interacting research should not attempt to isolate variables. Furthermore its not possible to find objective evidence of behaviour, as it looks at vague concepts like freewill and human motivation. Reductionists argue that science is a reductionist endeavor and if Psychology is truly a science, then it should be too.

The implications for treatments.

Due to the scientific nature of biological reductionism it has been possible to develop successful therapies. For example isolating the variable of serotonin as a single cause of depression it has allowed drug therapies to be developed such as SSRI's which have been successful at reducing symptoms of depression and allowing people to go back to work and live a normal life. However, critics would argue that this is a limited way of treating behaviour because if a person stops taking the drugs the symptoms will return. Those who advocate a holistic approach to treating mental illness would suggest using biological and psychological therapies simultaneously. Research by Craighead and Dunlop (2014) found a combination of drugs and CBT was more effective at treating depression than either of them used separately. Therefore while reductionist approaches have lead to successful outcomes in treatment there is an argument that taking this approach only addresses part of the problem.

Holism is a more effective way of explaining behaviour and looks at context

A holistic way of explaining behaviour may be considered more appropriate as reductionism is considered the lowest level of explanation. Reducing behaviour to **component parts** such as biology by saying depression is caused by low serotonin for e.g. may result in an **incomplete** understanding of the behaviour. For example by reducing Psychological illness to the biological level this **ignores the complexity; context and function** of such behaviour. whereas adopting a more holistic approach in which the multiple factors are understood in how they interact with each other gives a better understanding. Someone may be more biological predisposed to psychological illness however this needs to be understood in the context of their culture and life experiences. For example there are some culturally specific differences in the way anxiety and depression is manifested and treated. Or if we consider offending behaviour someone may be genetically predisposed but they are also exposed to social groups with pro-crime attitudes, they are experiencing poverty and/ or hostility in society. Therefore reductionist explanations may only ever offer us part of the explanation but holistic explanations may have greater explanatory power in fully understanding behaviour.

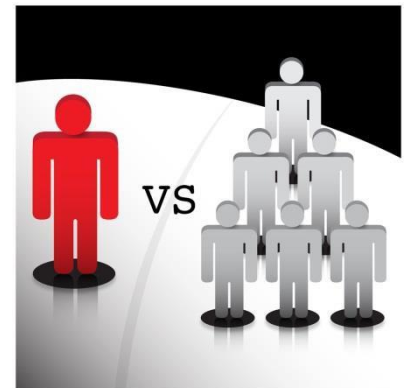
Idiographic vs Nomothetic approach

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.
Quantitative data	Data that can be counted usually giving numbers .
Quantitative data analysis	Any means of extracting meaning from data that uses numerical data as the basis for investigation and interpretation (e.g. descriptive or inferential statistics)
Qualitative data	Data that is expressed is expressed in words and non-numerical (although qualitative data may be converted to numbers for the purposes of analysis e.g. content analysis turns Qual→ quant.)
Qualitative data analysis	Any means of extracting meaning from data that focuses on words than on forms of numerical data. Qualitative analyses interpret the meaning of an experiences to the individual/s concerned.

What is this debate about....

*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?*

***So unlike the other debates think of this one more like a research methods debate. Should we use quantitative methods or qualitative methods. ***



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 that can be applied across any given population.

It is proposed that there are 3 types of general laws:

- **Classification** - this is the idea that people can be classified into certain groups according to characteristics. E.g. Diagnostic manuals such as the The ICD-10 and DSM-5 both attempt to diagnosis people with mental health disorder by the symptoms they present.
- **Establishing principles** – this is the focus of trying to establish laws and principles that can be applied to human behaviour. There are many examples in psychology of laws that propose cause and effect.

For example Biological Psychologists take a nomothetic approach as 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.



Or **Behaviourist psychologists** who look to laws of classical and operant conditioning to explain learnt responses E.g. the cause of maintaining a phobia is attributed to negatively reinforcing it through avoidance. Such laws are then used in systematic desensitisation to treat the phobia.

- **Establishing dimensions**

This is the attempt to document continuums upon which an individual can be placed. This allows comparisons with others. E.g. in personality research dimensions of extroversion-introversion are used (see Eysenk's personality questionnaire in the forensic pack).

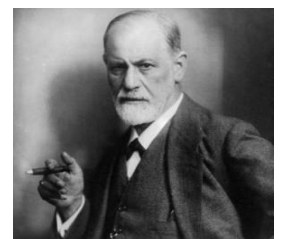
All three types of laws means that quantitative methods of data collection and analyses are needed. Therefore those taking a Nomothetic Approach would use methods including **Experiments**, Correlations, Meta-Analysis... All of which allow for statistical analysis which determines whether a difference or association found in a particular investigation is statistically significant more than could have occurred by chance. Such methods and analysis give greater confidence when applying findings to wider populations. Which is exactly what the nomothetic approach aims to do.

The idiographic approach

The Idiographic approach focuses on the **individual** and emphasising the **unique** personal experience. Therefore this viewpoint does not seek to generalize findings from research to others. Indeed strong supporters of the idiographic stance would be unlikely to conduct large scale studies or use quantitative methods at all. Consequently those taking this stance use **Qualitative** research methods such as case studies, unstructured interviews and thematic analysis which give depth and **insight** into individual behaviour. Such methods allow for opinion, attitude and self reflection from the participant, gaining detail rich information.

For example 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.

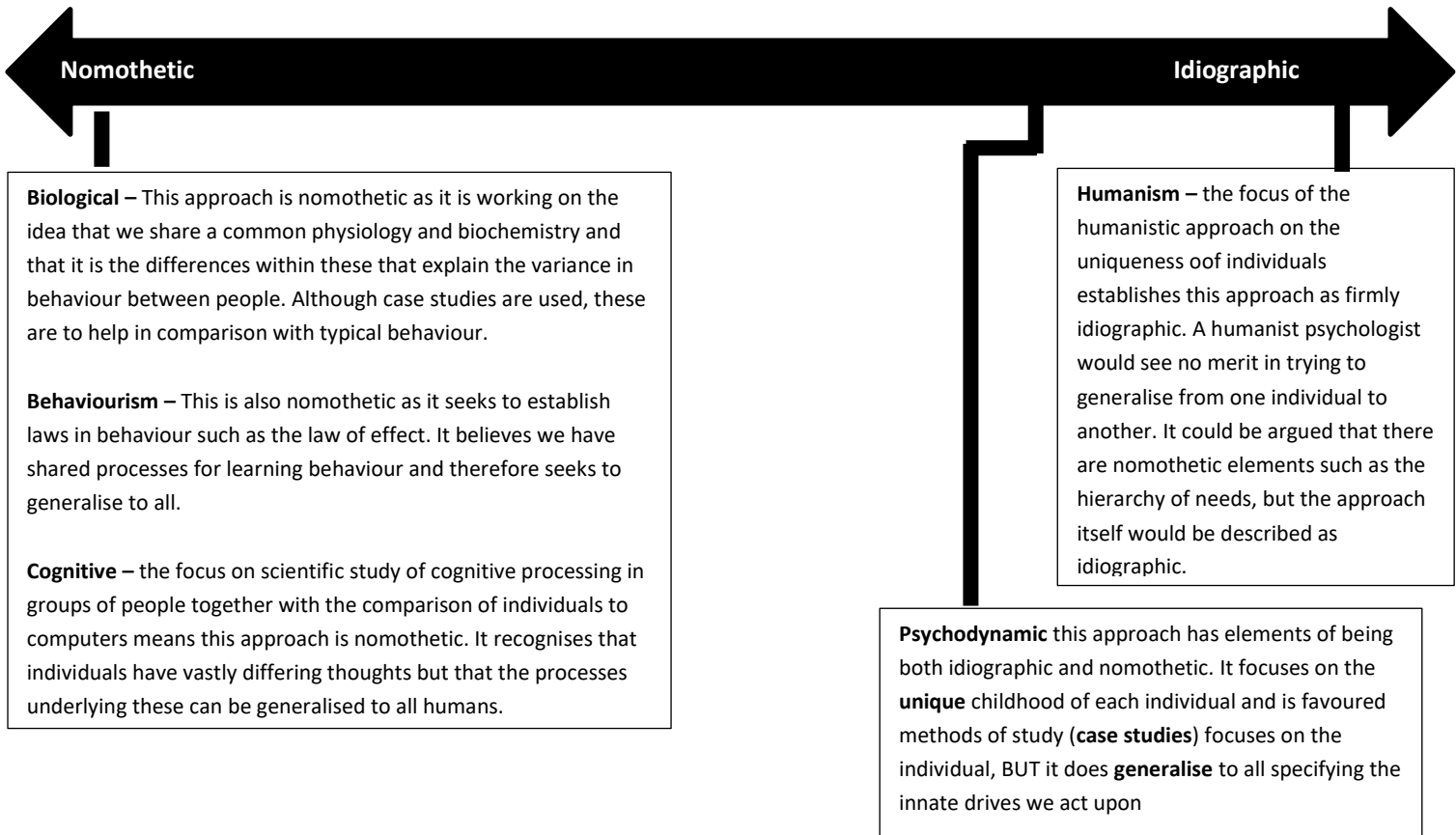
Further case study approaches can be seen in the **Humanistic** and **Psychodynamic Approaches**. Freud conducted detailed investigations of his patients to understand their Psychological disorders, a famous study being that of little Hans. Freud's case study work contributed to Psychology emphasising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



As the viewpoint is interested in the unique experience it is completely irrelevant to even try to develop universal laws of behaviour. You can see this reflected in humanistic psychology e.g. for instance **Carl Rogers** focused on the study of the self and the importance of personal growth and self-actualization.



So where do the approaches sit on the debate?



Evaluating the Nomothetic vs Idiographic debate.

****Remember to be discursive. So aim to discuss both sides of the debate within your A03****

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 in the **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.

Implications for treatment

As the Nomothetic approach adopts the **laws of science** it is useful in identifying trends; predicting and controlling behaviour which has **useful applications**. For example the Biological perspective adopts a nomothetic 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** such as humanistic Client Centered therapy 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**.

Now to the issues:

Gender and culture in Psychology

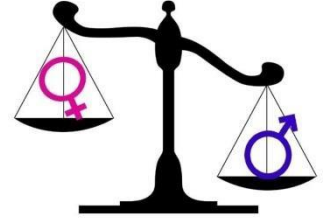
- Universality and bias.
- Gender bias including androcentrism and alpha and beta bias;
- Cultural bias, including ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.

Ethical implications

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

Gender Bias

Bias is used to suggest that a person's views are distorted in evidence in Psychology that gender difference is presented



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 females.
Androcentrism	Theories which are centred or focused on males. In which Male behaviour and masculine traits are judged to be the norm/acceptable/ desirable. Whereas female and feminine traits are abnormal/ less acceptable / less desirable.
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**.

Androcentrism

For most of its life psychology (and society in general) has been very much male dominated. Almost all psychologists were and are men and therefore the theories they produces tend to represent a male world-view. This is a described as Androcentrism (see definition above) and may result in either an **Alpha** or **Beta** bias.

Alpha Bias

Alpha Bias refers to theories which can **exaggerate the differences** between males and females and as a consequence of this, theories that are alpha bias devalue one gender in comparison to another.

Here are just two examples:

Approaches / Forensics - 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. Freud 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** if you consider official crime statistics, men are disproportionality represented (i.e. they commit more crime than women) and thus it would not appear to be valid that women have inferior superego's.

Attachment – Bowlby's Monotropic theory - Bowlby's monotropic theory of attachment can be considered an example of alpha bias due to its exaggeration of the **mother-child bond**. Bowlby argued that the

mother-child attachment was biologically innate and crucial for a child's healthy development. This theory often **neglects the role and influence of other male attachment** figures.

Beta Bias

Androcentricism can also result in people assuming that what is true for men is also true for women, thus leading to a **beta bias** which mistakenly minimizes the difference between men and women. The consequence is that the needs of one gender (usually women) are ignored. A **beta bias** can often occur when findings from all male sample are then applied to women

Forensics Kohlberg- Only Chicago boys to develop stages but it's suggested females have **different** moral reasoning than men.

Carol Gilligan criticized Kohlberg's moral reasoning research for exhibiting beta bias by focusing primarily on male participants and failing to adequately consider the moral development and experiences of females. Gilligan argued that Kohlberg's theory of moral development emphasized an **abstract, justice-based approach to morality that was more commonly found in males**, while neglecting the **ethics of care and interpersonal relationships that were often prioritized by females**. According to Gilligan, this gender bias in Kohlberg's research limited our understanding of moral reasoning and perpetuated gender stereotypes, overlooking the unique perspectives and moral dilemmas faced by women. Gilligan's critique highlighted the importance of considering gender differences in moral development and challenged the generalizability of Kohlberg's theory to the broader population.



Biopsychology

Biological research is usually conducted on male animals because in females the variations in hormone levels would make the research more difficult. It is assumed that such male-only samples wouldn't matter because what is true for males would be true for females. In stress research it was assumed that the **fight or flight** response was universal- until Shelley Taylor and colleagues (2000) challenged this. They provided evidence that females produce a **tend-and-befriend** response at times of stress which is adaptive because it ensures the survival of their offspring.



Evaluating Gender Bias

The impact of gender bias research (stereotypes and discrimination)

Issues of Gender Bias have historically gone **unnoticed in which 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 breadwinner 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. For example Field's research into primary caregiver fathers has challenged Bowlby's monotropic theory. His research found that these father-infant interactions were similar in quality to mother-infant interactions and had positive effects on children's

social and cognitive development. This challenges Bowlby's theory, which suggests that the mother is the primary and indispensable attachment figure. Field's research highlights the importance of considering the active and nurturing involvement of fathers in child-rearing and suggests that multiple attachment figures can contribute to a child's well-being, **challenging the alpha bias** inherent in Bowlby's monotropic theory, which may have contributed to the stereotypes in society.

Gender Bias in the methodology

Gender biased research may result in **finding differences** between genders that **do not actually exist**. **Biased** research methodologies or the researcher themselves could be the cause of such outcomes. For example 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. Also the **laboratory experiment** (the cornerstone of research) may further disadvantage women. Female participants are more likely to be placed in an inequitable relationship with a (usually male) researcher who has the power to label them as unreasonable irrational and unable to complete complex tasks (Nicolson 1995). Feminists argue **lab experiments** disadvantage women because of their controlled nature, research has found that although women and men displayed different leadership styles in lab based research, in real settings they were judged more similarly. This means that psychology may be guilty of supporting a form of institutional sexism that creates bias in theory and research (Denmark et al 1988).

Discussions about gender bias and the causes of the bias been positive

Contemporary modern researchers have sought ways of reducing gender bias. For example Judith Worrell (1992) put forward a number of criteria that should be adhered to in order to avoid gender bias in research. Women should be studied within meaningful **real-life contexts**, and genuinely participate in research rather than being the **objects of study**. Diversity within groups of women should be examined (e.g. age, ethnicity, socio-economic status etc). Finally there should be a greater emphasis placed on collaborative research methods that collect qualitative data as opposed to numerical data (in contrast to the lab experiments mentioned above). As a result research can challenge biased research. For example Carol Gilligan attacked Kohlberg for the absence of female participants within his research on cognitive moral development. Her argument was that while male morality is based on abstract principles (such as the importance of justice), female morality is more influenced by an ethic of care and responsibility to others. Gilligan argued that the natural female tendency towards care would place women at a lower and less mature level of moral reasoning in Kohlberg's model. Through her own research with female participants she sought to demonstrate how female morality whilst different is no less mature or sophisticated.

EXAM TIP – You could specifically get asked **how to reduce** gender bias when conducting research. Here are some ideas

- Do not extrapolate findings from research with male participants to females OR do not extrapolate findings from research with female participants to males.
- use both male and female participants in research
- involve both male and female researchers
- Do not exaggerate differences between males and females where there are no real differences – avoid alpha bias.
- Do not minimise or ignore real differences between the behaviour of males and females – avoid beta bias.
- Be sensitive to male and female norms/standards when designing research/when reporting findings.
- Take a reflexive approach, ie constantly reflecting on own gender biases when carrying out research

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	The idea that a behaviour can only be properly understood/only has meaning/only makes sense in the context of the norms and values of the society or culture in which it occurs.
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.

Cultural bias is the tendency to judge people in terms of one's own cultural assumptions. In psychology, cultural bias takes the same two forms as gender bias. **Alpha bias** occurs when a theory assumes that cultural groups are profoundly different, and that recognition of these enduring differences must always inform psychological research and understanding. **Beta bias**, on the other hand, occurs when real cultural differences are ignored or minimised, and all people are assumed to be the same, resulting in universal research designs and conclusions that mistakenly assume that all cultures are the same.

Exam Hint: Alpha and beta bias are only required for Gender Bias, and while it is useful to understand these terms, you are only required to understand ethnocentrism and cultural relativism for the Culture in Psychology subtopic.

Examples of culture bias

Schizophrenia

Culturally there is an issue with diagnosis of schizophrenia, Auditory hallucinations, seen as a symptom in the diagnostic manuals, are a sign of powers in other cultures and therefore are not indicative of mental illnesses in those cultures. This could potentially explain the higher rates of diagnosis found by Cochrane (1995) amongst African-caribbean immigrants (rates being 7x higher than the white majority).

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 (called Taijin Kyofusho) . 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.

Evaluating Culture Bias

Consequences of Culture Bias

Culturally Bias research can have severe implications through amplifying or validating damaging stereotypes. **For example** the research mentioned above by Cochrane (1995) that highlighted a culture bias in diagnostic statistics manuals may explain wider negative experiences. There is still a stigma attached to the label of being schizophrenic, many people misunderstand the disorder and make assumptions about sufferers being

dangerous. Therefore if certain groups in society are more likely to be diagnosed as schizophrenic due to culturally biased manuals then it stands to reason that they are also more likely experience the stigma attached. Which in turn may affect other life chances such as employment.

One of the most infamous examples of the damage done by psychologists through cultural bias was the US army Alpha and beta **IQ test**, used just before the first world war as a way of selecting recruits for certain positions. The tests showed that European immigrants fell slightly below white Americans in terms of IQ, and African Americans were at the bottom of the scale with the lowest mental age. The IQ tests have been heavily criticized for the biased nature of the questions – they were much harder for non-American citizens, not because of the respondent's intellect but rather the cultural context of the question (have a look at the examples below). The data from these tests had a profound effect on the attitudes held by Americans towards certain groups of people – black people and people from South-Eastern Europe. The data led to enduring stereotypes concerning certain ethnic groups and their IQ (**Gould 1981**).

Questions used in the IQ tests - would you be able to answer these?

1. 'Washington is to Adams as first is to
2. 'Crisco is a: patent medicine, disinfectant, toothpaste, food product?'
3. 'What item is missing in this picture?'
4. What is missing in these pictures



Answers:
1. Second - Because Washington was the first US president and Adams was the second
2. It is a food product
3. A ball is missing from the man's right hand

Recognising Cultural Bias in Psychology

One way of dealing with culture Bias is to **identify** when and why it occurs. In one recent journal of Psychological Science it was found that in top tier research; **94%** of participants were drawn from Western countries. **58%** from the US alone. **72%** of abstracts had no information about the population sampled (they didn't put the skewed data in context). Furthermore 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. 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**.

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.

Click on QR code – to watch a short webinar on how to write cultural bias essay – skip to end.



Ethical Implications and Social Sensitivity



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	Sieber 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.

The ethical implications of psychological research concern the way that research impacts on those who **take part** in research and also on the way the findings are communicated to **the public** and how the findings are used. Psychologists have focused particular attention on the implications of findings that are socially sensitive.

Socially sensitive research refers to 'studies in which there are potential social consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or the class of individuals represented by the research' (Sieber and Stanley 1988). Such potential consequences may lead to a change in, or justification for, the way these groups are treated/perceived.

What could make research socially sensitive?

Sieber and Stanley identified 4 aspects in the research process at which ethical issues with social consequences may occur.

- **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.
- **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?
- **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?

- **Interpretation and Application of Findings:** Finally, the researcher needs to consider how their findings might be interpreted and applied in the real-world

One very famous piece of research that highlights all of Sieber and Stanleys 4 aspects is the work by **Cyril Burt**. It also demonstrates numerous consequences for wider society.

Cyril Burt was influential in establishing the 11+ examination in the UK. Which was used to determine whether children had a secondary modern education or went on to study a grammar school.

Burts views were based on the evidence he produced that intelligence was genetic, citing studies of twins that showed a heritability coefficient of .77 (Burt 1955)

Discrepancies in his 'data' later revealed that Burt had made much of it up, as well as inventing two research assistants, and he was publicly discredited. The 11+ however, and the idea that children should be separated on the basis of their 'natural' intelligence remained for a long time - along with the subsequent damage it had on young people's life chances.



More on Cyril Burt – scan QR code

To this day there is still controversy around the 11+ and the division of children at such an early age into different types of schooling. One for those labelled academic and the other for those more suited for other work.

Think about:

1. What reasons other than genetic inheritance are there for some children doing well in the 11+ while the others don't?
2. Do you think it's right at the age of 11 for your future education to be pathed out?
3. How might you have felt if you failed at the age of 11?

When we think about the possible consequences on wider society of socially sensitive research. They can be far reaching.

Potential consequences	As applied to Cyril Burt's IQ is inherited research
potential use of the findings, e.g. allocation of resources	Children who passed the 11+ received a higher standard of education.
potential use of the findings, e.g. political consequences –	The creation and use of the 11+ exam itself and the Grammar school system (1944 education act)
potential bias against people of certain cultures / socioeconomic backgrounds	The 11+ exam was culturally and class biased - one argument is that children from families of lower economic backgrounds were disadvantaged, they were less able to afford the extra tuition and resources to pass the 11+ and thus less likely to have the same life chances as those that could afford it.
potential influence on moral attitudes towards individual / social and ethnic groups	Reinforcing stereotypes of the working class and ruling elite, thus arguable perpetuating inequality.
economic implications , e.g. for further psychological research, e.g. funding etc	

There are many other research studies that you have covered that have ethical implications. Here are just a few...

Ethical Implications of Research Studies on the participants themselves.

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 debrief 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.



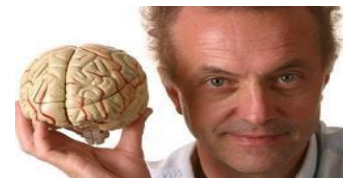
Zimbardo's prison experiment has also been criticised for being highly unethical due to the **distress** caused for the participants. The observable Psychological harm experienced was so extreme to the extent that the research had to be stopped early as a result of the psychological distress presented 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 too.

Ethical Implications of research on the wider population.

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 women'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.

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**.



Exam tip - Occasionally you may be asked How to **deal** with socially sensitive research. Here are a few ways:

- submit research proposals to ethics committees and abide by any recommendations
- weigh up the possible costs and benefits before conducting any research. Only proceed where the benefits (to many) outweigh the costs (to a few)
- take care when formulating the aim/framing the question so as not to misrepresent certain groups
- be alert to the possibility of misuse of findings and take steps to present findings in a value-free way
- consider the wider effects of publication of the findings eg Sieber and Stanley's recommendations as part of the peer review process
- take steps to avoid prejudicial/biased/sensational media presentation of findings
- consider the possible reactions of participants to any research procedure they experience and take account of ethical issues in the design of any studies.

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

Scan this QR code for a good webinar on how to structure an essay question on ethical implications and socially sensitive research.



Nature V Nurture

- 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).**
- Discuss **one or more** ethical implications of research in psychology. Refer to **at least one** topic you have studied in psychology in your answer. **(Total 8 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 □ 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.

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)**