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| **Gender and Culture in Psychology: Cultural Bias** | | | |
| **Culture Bias AO1**  In 1992, 64% of the world’s 56,000 psychology researchers were American. In Baron and Byrne’s 1991 textbook on social psychology, 94% of the studies cited were conducted in North America. As well as being a male-dominated discipline, psychology is also mainly the study of white American males. Despite having restricted their enquiries to particular parts of the world (i.e. America), many psychologists routinely claim to have discovered ‘facts’ about human behaviour that are ‘universal’… | | | |
| **Universality and Bias**  Although psychology may claim to have unearthed ‘truths’ that say something about people all over the world, in reality, findings from studies only apply to the particular group of people that were studied.  Critics argue that mainstream psychology has generally ignored culture as an important influence on human behaviour, and by doing so, has mistakenly assumed that findings derived from studies carried out in Western culture can be easily applied all over the world, e.g. studies of conformity and obedience (Asch and Milgram) originally conducted with US PPs revealed very different results when replicated in other parts of the world. | | | |
| **Ethnocentrism**  This is a belief in the superiority of one’s own cultural group. In psychological research this may be interpreted as any behaviours that do not conform to the model (usually Western) are somehow deficient, unsophisticated or underdeveloped.  Mary Ainsworth’s Strange Situation (1970) was criticised as reflecting only norms and values of American culture. Ainsworth identified the main variable of attachment type as the child’s experience of anxiety on separation, stating that the ‘ideal’ (secure) attachment would mean the child showed some level of distress when left alone, and that German mothers were cold and rejection rather than encouraging independence in their children. | | | |
| **Cultural Relativism**  Ainsworth’s research is one example of imposed etic in psychology. In assuming the US-based model of classifying attachment was the norm, Ainsworth imposed her own cultural understanding upon the rest of the world.  John Berry (1969) has drawn a distinction between ***etic*** and ***emic*** approaches;   * ***etic*** = looks at beh. *outside* of a given culture and attempts to describe the beh. that are *universal* * ***emic*** = functions from *within* or inside certain cultures and identifies beh. that are *specific* to that culture   Ainsworth was therefore an example of an imposed etic as she studied a single culture (American) and assumed her ideal attachment type could be applied universally.  Berry argues psychology is guilty of etic approaches - it argues that theories, models, concepts etc. universal, when actually they came about by emic research, studying one approach. He suggests psychologists should be mindful of the cultural relativism of their research. The things that they discover only make sense from the perspective of the culture within which they were discovered. Recognising this will help to avoid cultural bias in research. | | | |
| **Culture Bias AO3** | | | |
| **Individualism and Collectivism**  P: One strength of cultural bias is that it is less common in research now. Often in the past when psychologists have made reference to ‘culture’ they have done so within the context of the individualist-collectivist distinction.  E: For example, Individualist culture is associated with Western countries (like the US) that are thought to value personal freedom and independence. Collectivist cultures such as India and China are said to place more emphasis on independence and the needs of the group.  E: However, critics have suggested, in this age of global communication and increased interconnectedness that such a ‘lazy’ and simplistic distinction between cultures no longer applies. Yohtaro Takano and Eiko Osako (1999) found that 14 out of 15 studies that compared USA and Japan found no evidence of the traditional distinction between individualism and collectivism.  L: This could perhaps suggest that cultural bias in research is less of an issue that it once was. | **Cultural Relativism vs Universality**  P: Berry’s concept of imposed etic can be criticised as it should not be assumed that all psychology is culturally relative and that there is no such thing as universal human behaviour.  E: For example, research (e.g. Ekman 1989) suggests that basic facial expressions for emotions (such as happiness or disgust) are the same all over the human and animal world.  E: This is an issue because too much emphasis is being put on the differences between cultures, when in reality there might not be that many. Critiques of Ainsworth’s strange situation should not obscure the fact that some features of human attachment such as imitation are universal.  L: As a consequence this weakens Berry’s concept of imposed etic on culture bias suggesting that cultural bias is not such a big issue in psychological research. | **Unfamiliarity with Research Tradition**  P: An issue with cultural bias is that different cultures have a different understanding of research.  E: For example, in Western culture the participants’ familiarity with the general aims and objectives of scientific enquiry is assumed. However, the same knowledge and ‘faith’ in scientific testing may not extend to cultures that do not have the same historical experience of research.  E: For this reason, demand characteristics (always an issue within any investigation) may be exaggerated when working with members of the local population (Bond and Smith 1996) – This may have an adverse effect on the validity of the research.  L: Therefore, there may be methodical issues when conducting research in one particular culture. | **Operationalisation of Variables**  P: Another issue with conducting research in different cultures is that the variables under review may not be experienced in the same way by all participants.  E: For instance, the behavioural expression of emotions such as ‘aggression’ may give rise to quite different behaviours within an indigenous population than they would in the West. In China, the invasion of personal space is seen as normal, whereas in the West this may be seen as threatening or confrontational.  E: For this reason, it could affect interactions between the researcher and participants, or between Western or non-Western participants, in cross-cultural studies.  L: As a result we would not be able to apply the findings of research to all cultures. |