tutor2u

AQA A-LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

ISSUES AND DEBATES

TOPIC COMPANION

Student Name:

INTRODUCTION TO ISSUES AND DEBATES

Issues and Debates is an AQA A Level Psychology Paper 3 topic. It is compulsory for all students to answer all questions in this section of the exam.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 GENDER BIAS IN PSYCHOLOGY

Specification: Gender bias including androcentrism and alpha and beta bias.

What you need to know

Discuss how gender bias has been an issue in psychology, with reference to the following terms:

- Androcentrism
- Alpha bias
- Beta bias

The term 'bias' is used to suggest that a person's views are distorted in some way.

In Psychology, there is evidence that gender is presented in a biased way which could lead to differential treatment of males and females, based on stereotypes and false differences.

For example, Freud argued that 'anatomy is destiny', claiming there are genuine psychological differences between men and women because of their physiological differences. He claimed that young girls suffer from 'penis envy' and viewed femininity as a failed form of masculinity. These assumptions can have negative consequences for females.

The difficulty lies in distinguishing 'real' gender differences from culturally created gender differences, and 'false' differences that some research promotes.

Androcentrism

Androcentrism means being centred on, or dominated by, males or the male viewpoint. This can be conscious (the researcher/psychologist knows they are behaving this way) or unconscious. In the past, most psychologists were male, and the theories they produced tended to represent a male view of the world.

Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1988) argued that there are two types of gender bias: Alpha and Beta bias.

Alpha Bias: theories that *exaggerate the differences* between males and females.

Example 1: In his psychoanalytic approach, Freud argued that because girls do not suffer the same Oedipal conflict as boys, they do not identify with their mothers as strongly as boys identify with their fathers, and so develop weaker superegos.

Example 2: The evolutionary approach suggests that evolutionary processes in the development of the human species explain why men tend to be dominant, why women have more parental investment in their offspring, and why men are more likely to commit adultery. However, society has changed considerably over recent years, and it is argued that the evolutionary perspective should not be used to justify gender differences.

Beta Bias: theories that *ignore or minimise* sex differences. These theories often assume that the findings from males can apply equally to females.

Example 1: Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development was based on extensive interviews conducted with boys aged 10-16. The same all-male sample was then re-interviewed at intervals of 3-4 years over 20 years. Some researchers, such as Carol Gilligan (1982), have found that women tend to be more focused on relationships when making moral decisions and therefore often appear to be at a lower level of moral reasoning when using Kohlberg's system. Therefore, Kohlberg's approach meant that a real difference was ignored.

Example 2: Male and female participants are used in most studies, but there is normally no attempt to analyse the data to see whether there are significant sex differences. Where differences are found, it may be possible that these occur because researchers ignore the differential treatment of participants. For example, Rosenthal (1966) reported that male experimenters were more pleasant, friendly, honest, and encouraging with female participants than with male participants. This led Rosenthal to conclude: "Male and female subjects may, psychologically, simply not be in the same experiment at all."

Example 3: Biological research into the fight-or-flight response has often been carried out with male animals because they have fewer variations in hormones than females. It was assumed that this would not be a problem as the fight-or-flight response would be the same for both. However, later stress research by Taylor et al. (2000) has challenged this view by providing evidence that females produce a tend-and-befriend response. The beta bias in the earlier animal studies meant that for a long time, the stress response was not fully understood and a real difference was ignored.

The result of beta bias in psychological research is that we end up with a view of human nature that is supposed to apply to men and women alike, but in fact, has a male or androcentric bias.

Evaluation of Gender Bias in psychology

- One strength of being aware of gender bias in Psychology is that solutions can be put forward. For example, some psychologists attempt to develop theories that emphasise the importance or value of women. **Cornwell et al. (2013)** noted that females are better at learning, as they are more attentive and organised, thus emphasising both the value of and the positive attributes of women. As a result, this type of research helps to reduce or challenge gender stereotypes, which is important in reducing gender bias.
  - Another way to reduce gender bias is to take a feminist approach that attempts to restore the imbalance in both psychological theories and research. For example, feminist psychology accepts that there are biological differences between males and females: Research by **Eagly (1978)** claims that females are less effective leaders than males. However, the purpose of Eagly's claim is to help researchers develop training programmes aimed at increasing the number of female leaders in the real world.
  - **Worrell (1992)** also suggested a number of research criteria that are particularly important to ensure research investigations that are not gender biased: using alternative methods of inquiry to explore the personal lives of women; considering women in the natural settings in which they function; collaborating with research participants to explore personally relevant variables and studying diverse samples (women who vary by age, socio-economic class, partner preference, minority or ethnic group).
- Unfortunately, issues of gender bias often go unchallenged. For example, Darwin's established theory of sexual selection suggests that women are selective (choosy) in terms of mate selection. These views have only recently been challenged by DNA evidence suggesting that women are equally as competitive as men when the need arises.
- As society has changed and females have progressed further in academic disciplines such as psychology, there have been changes, both in the research methodology used and in the earlier theories. As previously explained, Carol Gilligan (a student of Kohlberg's) proposed that women have a different sense of moral understanding from men and compiled her stage theory of moral understanding. Her approach showed that men and women are different, but neither kind of moral reasoning (justice focus or care focus) is better, they are just different.

- It is also important to remember that sometimes gender bias can work against males as well as females, as sometimes alpha bias theories heighten the value of women. For example, **Chodorow (1978)** viewed women as more relational and caring. Another example is that women are more likely to be diagnosed with depression and given treatment than males. This may be because women are more likely to suffer from depression, or it could be that the diagnostic system may be biased towards finding depression among women. The expectation that males should be able to 'pull themselves together' may highlight an issue with the diagnostic systems for mental disorders.

EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

1 Which of the following statements describes the term androcentrism?

a Theories that are focused or centred on men.
b Theories that ignore differences between men and women.
c Theories that exaggerate differences between men and women.
d Theories that apply equally to men and women.

2 Briefly explain what is meant by the term 'gender bias' in psychology. (2 marks)

Exam Hint This is only a short question so you do not need to delve into too much detail or examples.

3 Many social psychology experiments (e.g. Asch, Zimbardo, and Milgram) used male-only samples. Using your knowledge of gender bias, explain the issue of gender bias in psychological research. (4 marks)

Exam Hint Although there is some additional information in this question, you do not have to use these studies, since the question does not state that you must. However, they are good examples of research that relate well to gender bias.

4 Outline how androcentrism has affected psychological research. (3 marks)

Exam Hint Before you answer this question, make sure you understand what this term means. Avoid just talking about gender bias in general!

5 Explain the difference between an alpha and beta bias. (4 marks)

Exam Hint To get full marks in this question, you need to do more than just describe both alpha and beta bias. You need to emphasis what the difference is between them. You need to write at least a small paragraph of relevant, clear material to get full marks.

6 Discuss gender bias in psychology. (16 marks)

Exam Hint This command word (Discuss) requires you to demonstrate multiple skills. You need to outline what you know about gender bias and evaluate it. Do more than just offer limitations or strengths. Although this is acceptable, better answers will build discussion by offering counter points or a flow between the evaluation points.

CHAPTER 2 CULTURE BIAS IN PSYCHOLOGY

Specification: Cultural bias, including ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.

What you need to know

Discuss how culture bias has been an issue in psychology, with reference to the following terms:

- Ethnocentrism
- Cultural relativism
- Universality

Culture can be defined as the 'values, beliefs and patterns of behaviour shared by a group of people'.

When a theory is described as **'universal'**, it means that it can apply to all people, irrespective of gender and culture. However, historically, psychology has been dominated by white, middle-class American males, who have monopolised psychology both as researchers and participants. Despite this, research findings and theories have been generalised, as if culture makes no real difference.

Cultural bias is the tendency to judge people in terms of one's cultural assumptions. Another way to consider cultural bias is through the distinction between ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.

Ethnocentrism

Seeing the world only from one's own cultural perspective and believing that this one perspective is both normal and correct.

Example 1: Definitions of abnormality vary from culture to culture. Rack (1984) claims that African-Caribbeans in Britain are sometimes diagnosed as 'mentally ill' based on behaviour which is perfectly normal in their subculture, and this is due to the ignorance of African-Caribbean subculture on the part of white psychiatrists.

Example 2: Ainsworth's Strange Situation was developed to assess attachment types, and many researchers assume that the Strange Situation has the same meaning for infants from other cultures, as it does for American children. German children, on average, demonstrate a higher rate of insecure-avoidant behaviour. However, it is not the case that German mothers are more insensitive than American mothers. Instead, they value and encourage independent behaviour, and therefore their children react differently in the Strange Situation. The Strange Situation has been described as an **imposed etic**, which is when a technique or theory is developed in one culture and then imposed on another.

Cultural Relativism: the assumption that behaviour can only be understood if the cultural context is taken into consideration. Therefore, any study which draws its sample from only one cultural context (like American college students) and then generalises its findings to all people everywhere, is suspect.

Example: The meaning of intelligence is different in every culture. **Sternberg (1985)** pointed out that coordination skills that may be essential to life in a preliterate society (e.g., those motor skills required for shooting a bow and arrow) may be mostly irrelevant to what is considered intelligent behaviour for most people in a literate and more "developed" society.

Evaluating Culture Bias in psychology

- One problem with culturally biased research is that it can lead to negative effects in the real world, such as validating damaging stereotypes. For example, the US Army used an IQ test before WWI which was culturally biased toward the dominant white majority. Unsurprisingly, the test showed that African Americans were at the bottom of the IQ scale, and this harmed the attitudes of Americans toward this group of people. Therefore, this highlights the negative impact that culturally biased research can have.
- One strength of acknowledging the issue of cultural bias in psychological research, is that ways to reduce it can be identified. For example, in their 1998 survey of European textbooks, Smith and Bond found that 66% of the studies were American, 32% European, and only 2% from the rest of the world. This suggests that much psychological research is severely unrepresentative and can be greatly improved by simply selecting different cultural groups to study.
- One strength of understanding the impacts of cultural bias in psychology is that it has led to changes that improve research. Heightened awareness of cultural diversity has led to the development of **'indigenous psychologies'**: theories drawing explicitly on the experiences of people in different cultural contexts. For example, 'Afrocentrism', is a movement which suggests that because all black people have their roots in Africa, theories about them must recognise the African context of behaviours and attitudes. This shows that taking an emic approach to psychology research, rather than imposing etics, can emphasise the uniqueness of every culture and look at behaviour from the inside of a particular cultural system.

EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

1 Briefly explain what is meant by the term 'cultural relativism'. (2 marks)

2 Outline two examples of cultural bias in psychological research. (4 marks)

Exam Hint You can use any two examples you want but think carefully before you start answering the question. Using inappropriate examples could make it harder for you to answer the question. You can use examples from any part of the specification, such as Attachment or one of your paper 3 options.

3 Just before the First World War, Yerkes developed Army intelligence tests to assess recruits. The items on the tests were very specific to American culture and the test results showed that European immigrants fell slightly below White Americans in terms of intelligence and African Americans were at the bottom of the scale with the lowest mental age. With reference to this example, explain what is meant by 'ethnocentrism'. (4 marks)

Exam Hint This question includes a stem so you must contextualise your answer. In addition, avoid talking about culture bias too generally, instead focusing on ethnocentrism.

4 Discuss the issue of culture bias in Psychology. (16 marks)

Exam Hint The command word 'discuss' requires you to offer both A01 and A03 knowledge and understanding. Use specialist terminology throughout your essay and make sure your evaluation is detailed and developed. You can use examples such as attachment in your answer to clarify your A01.

CHAPTER 3 FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM

Specification: Free will and determinism: hard determinism and soft determinism; biological, environmental and psychic determinism. The scientific emphasis on causal explanations.

What you need to know

- Understand the debate about the costs and benefits of free will and deterministic approaches to studying human behaviour.
- Distinguish between different types of determinism
- Apply the free will and determinism debate to topics in psychology

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

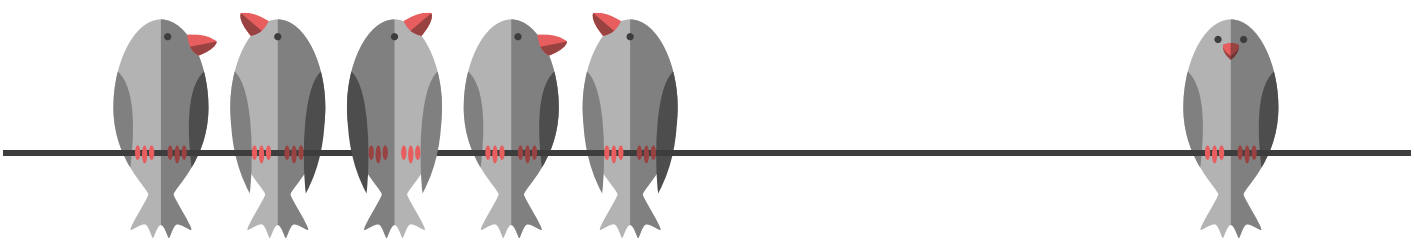
Example: The Humanistic Approach to understanding human behaviour and development promotes the idea of free will. It assumes that we are in control over our development, rather than determined by forces such as biology.

Determinism: the assumption that free will is an illusion and that our behaviour is governed by internal or external forces over which we have no control. Consequently, our behaviour is viewed as predictable. The causal laws of determinism form the basis of science. There are different types of determinism:

1. **Biological determinism:** the idea that all human behaviour is innate and determined by genes. For example, genetics research provides evidence to support the idea of biological determinism. Chorley et al., (1998) reported a statistically significant association between IQ test scores and the IGF2r gene on chromosome six, suggesting that intelligence is to some extent biologically determined.
2. **Environmental determinism:** the view that behaviour is determined or caused by forces outside the individual, such as behaviourism or social learning. For example, Bandura (1961) found that children with violent parents are more likely to become violent parents themselves, because of observational learning.
3. **Psychic determinism:** the view that human behaviour is the result of childhood experiences and innate drives (id, ego and superego), as seen in Freud's model of psychological development.

There are also varying degrees of determinism, including **hard** and **soft determinism**. Hard determinism is the view that forces outside of our control (e.g. biology or past experience) shape our behaviour. Soft determinism is an alternative position favoured by many psychologists. According to soft determinism, behaviour is constrained by the environment or biological make-up, but only to a certain extent. Soft determinism suggests that some behaviours are more constrained than others and that there is an element of free will in all behaviour.

Science is heavily deterministic in its search for **causal relationships** as it seeks to discover whether X causes Y, or whether the independent variable causes changes in the dependent variable. For example, in **Loftus and Palmer's (1974)** research, they manipulated the verb used in the critical question (IV), to measure the effect on the participant's estimate of speed (DV). In Bandura's Bobo doll experiment, he manipulated the condition to which the children were exposed (aggressive role model, non-aggressive model and no role model) to examine the effect on the behaviour of the children.



Evaluating the free will and determinism debate

- One limitation of the deterministic view is that there is research to challenge it. For example, identical twin studies typically find an 80% similarity in intelligence scores and a 40% similarity in the likelihood of depression. However, as identical twins share 100% of their genes, these results suggest that 20% is caused by other (environmental) factors. This demonstrates that biological determinism is unable to explain any behaviour, in this case, depression and intelligence. The same evidence indicates that no behaviour is completely environmentally determined. If identical twins only show an 80% likeness in terms of intelligence, it is therefore assumed that only 20% is caused by the environment.
- One limitation of the deterministic view is that it is not compatible with the legal system. If behaviour is determined by outside forces, that provides a potential excuse for criminal acts. For example, in 1981 Stephen Mobley argued that he was 'born to kill' after killing a pizza shop manager because his family had a disposition towards violence and aggressive behaviour. An American court rejected this argument. Therefore, a truly determinist position may be undesirable as it provides an 'excuse', allowing people to mitigate their liability.
- One strength of the deterministic view is that there is research to support it. **Libet et al. (1983)** found that the motor regions of the brain become active before a person registers conscious awareness of a decision, i.e. the decision to move their finger when asked to press a button was actually a pre-determined action of the brain. This strongly suggests that many responses are biologically determined and that although we may believe that we have free will, claims that free will is an illusion may be correct.
- One limitation of the free will view is that it is not compatible with the aims of science. When we research behaviours, nomothetic approaches help to establish general laws of behaviour and to make predictions about development and behaviour. However, if behaviour is the result of free will rather than determinism, then such predictions would not be possible. Therefore, free will ideology is not regarded as scientific. Despite this, it is now accepted that there is no such thing as hard determinism in science. This type of determinism seemed more appropriate in the 18th and 19th centuries when most physicists believed they would eventually be able to make very precise and accurate predictions about everything relevant to physics.

EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

1 Which two of the following statements describe a free will point of view? (2 marks)

a People are not responsible for their actions.
b People behave randomly.
c Behaviour always has a cause.
d People exercise full choice over how they behave.
e People have no choice about how to act.

2 Explain what is meant by hard determinism and soft determinism. (4 marks)

Exam Hint For full marks, explain both terms. You can use examples to support your answer but do not be distracted by them.

3 This is an extract from a newspaper article:

"Research suggests that depression runs in the family. However, many depressed people also have other issues, including social problems, or problems with drink or drugs. Despite these challenges, many depressed people overcome their depression and find ways to resolve their issues."

With reference to the extract above, explain what is meant by 'determinism'. Refer to at least two types of determinism in your answer. (6 marks)

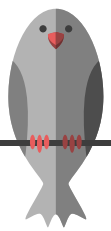
Exam Hint This question is assessing your ability to stay focused on determinism and contextualise your answer based on the information in the stem. You need to do more than quote from the stem, so think carefully about how you will connect information from the stem to your knowledge.

4 Outline and evaluate the role of free will in human behaviour. (8 marks)

Exam Hint Although this is an 8 mark question, it is an extended essay question and requires the same level of clarity and sophistication as a 16 marker. You can offer less A01 and A03 than you would in a bigger essay question, but you still need to show in-depth knowledge and understanding of free will. Although the question names free will only, you can use your knowledge of determinism in your evaluation.

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

Exam Hint To reach full marks in this question, you need to demonstrate all the assessment objective skills (A01, A02, A03). In addition to outlining the debate and evaluating it, you need to apply your knowledge to any two topics (or more) such as approaches, psychopathology, or any optional topics from paper 3.



CHAPTER 4 HOLISM AND REDUCTIONISM

Specification: Holism and reductionism: levels of explanation in psychology: Biological reductionism and environmental (stimulus-response) reductionism.

What you need to know

- Understand the holism and reductionism debate in psychology
- Explain and apply the levels of explanation
- Distinguish between types of reductionism

The holism and reductionism debate focuses on an important question in the philosophy of science: Can complex behaviours be reduced to their simpler components?

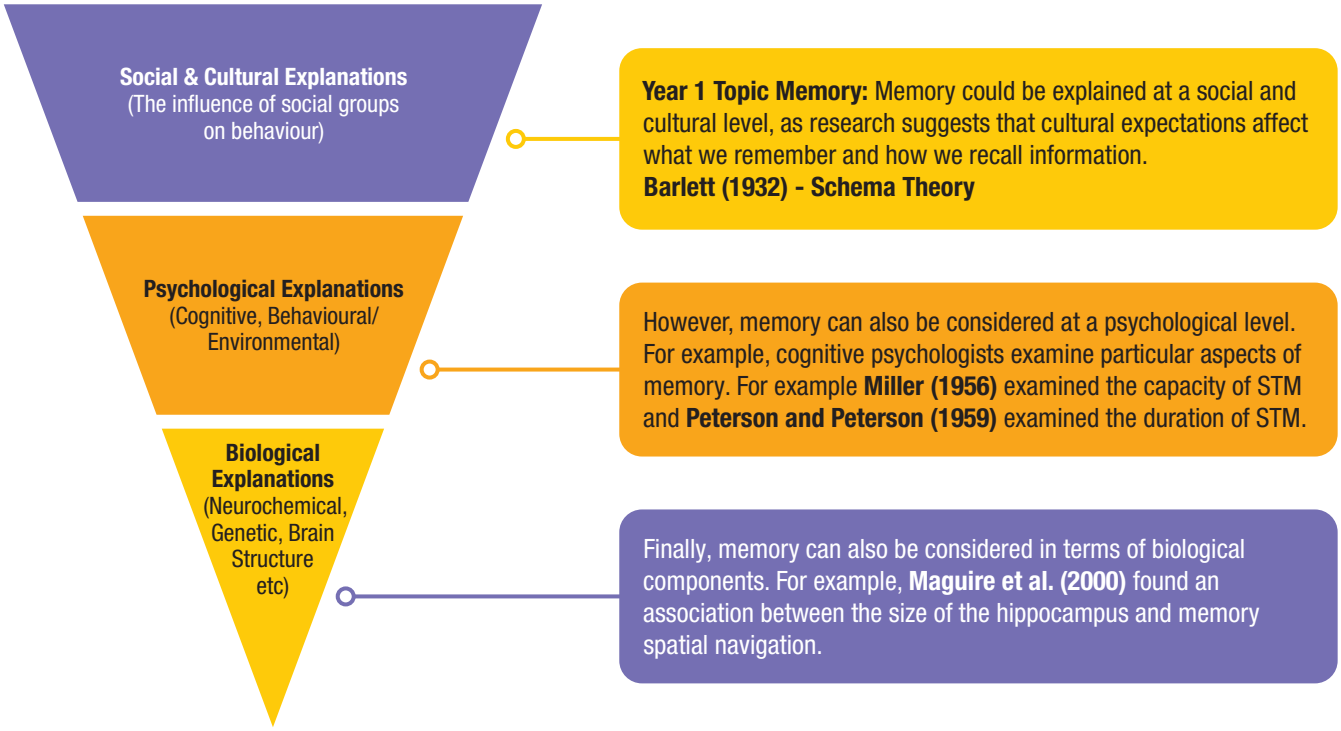
Holism: this term means 'all', 'whole' or 'entire' and is the idea that human behaviour should be viewed as a whole integrated experience, and not as separate parts.

Example: Humanistic psychology advocates a holistic approach, as it argues that humans react to stimuli as an organised whole, rather than as a set of stimulus-response links. As an approach, it uses qualitative methods to investigate all aspects of the individual, as well as the interactions between people.

Reductionism: the belief that human behaviour can be explained by breaking it down into simpler parts. Those who take a reductionist position believe that the best way to understand behaviour is to look closely at the parts that make up our systems, and then use the simplest explanations to understand how they work.

The reductionist approach suggests that there are different **levels of explanation**. The lowest level considers physiological (biological) explanations, where behaviour is explained in terms of neurochemicals, genes and brain structure; the middle level considers psychological explanations (e.g. cognitive and behavioural) and the highest level considers social and cultural explanations, where behaviour is explained in terms of the influence of social groups.

Any behaviour can be explained using these levels.



Example: Aggression can be explained at a biological level in terms of hormones (e.g. testosterone) or brain structure (e.g. the amygdala); or at a psychological level through either operant conditioning or observation and imitation (social learning). Furthermore, it could also be explained in terms of cultural norms and expectations. This was illustrated by **Souweidane and Huesmann (1999)**, who found that Detroit High School children who had been born in the United States were more accepting of aggression than children who had emigrated from the Middle East, especially if they did so after the age of 11.

There are different types of reductionism to be aware of.

Biological reductionism refers to the way that biological psychologists try to reduce behaviour to a physical level and explain it in terms of neurons, neurotransmitters, hormones, brain structure, etc. For example, a meta-analysis of 14 twin studies of OCD found that monozygotic twins were more than twice as likely to develop OCD in comparison to dizygotic twins if their co-twin also had the disorder **(Billett et al., 1998)**, thus suggesting a genetic link.

Environmental reductionism (also known as stimulus-response reductionism) is the assumption that all behaviour can be reduced to the simple building blocks of S-R (stimulus-response) associations and that complex behaviours are a series of S-R chains. For example, behaviourists reduce the complex behaviour of attachment down to a stimulus-response link, where the mother becomes the conditioned stimulus that becomes associated with the pleasure from feeding. Therefore, the child comes to feel pleasure (conditioned response) when he or she encounters their mother, leading to the formation of an attachment.

Experimental reductionism is where complex behaviour is reduced to a single (isolated) variable for the purpose of testing. For example, while the multi-store model of memory suggests that memory consists of three stores and each store has its own coding, capacity and duration, cognitive psychologists often examine memory in terms of isolated variables. For example, Peterson and Peterson (1959) examined the duration of short-term memory.

Evaluating the Reductionism and Holism debate

- One strength of reductionism is that it is compatible with the aims of science. Breaking complex behaviours into small constituent parts means that they can be scientifically tested, and over time explanations based on scientific evidence will emerge. In addition, biological reductionism has led to the development of biological therapies, such as drugs. For example, SSRIs are more effective than placebos at treating the symptoms of OCD and reduce the symptoms for up to three months after the treatment **(Soomro et al., 2008)**. Therefore, there are benefits to taking a reductionist approach to understanding and researching human behaviours.
- One limitation of reductionism is that it can lead to errors because the complexity of human behaviour is often unaccounted for. For example, to treat conditions like ADHD with drugs in the belief that the condition consists of nothing more than neurochemical imbalances is to mistake the symptoms of the phenomenon for its true cause. Ritalin may reduce these symptoms, but the conditions which gave rise to ADHD have not been addressed. Therefore, reductionism can lead to mistakes or incomplete understandings of behaviours.
- One limitation of holism is that it is not considered compatible with the aims of science. The holistic explanation attempts to blend different levels of explanation; holistic theory and approaches attempt to provide a complete and realistic understanding of human behaviour. However, holistic explanations do not establish causation because they do not examine behaviour in terms of operationalised variables that can be manipulated and measured. This means that holistic explanations are viewed as unscientific.
- One strength of holism is that it considers the full complexity of human behaviour, rather than focusing on one level of explanation. For example, humanism acknowledges the role of culture, social influences, and other factors in our behaviour and development. Although this is not as scientific as reductionist approaches, it does offer a thorough account of behaviour which is preferred by many.

EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

1 Explain what psychologists mean by 'levels of explanation' in relation to reductionism. (3 marks)

2 Outline one example of biological reductionism from an area of psychology you have studied. (3 marks)

Exam Hint Choose your example carefully and if you find yourself struggling to write enough, choose a different one! You could consider a biological theory of OCD, or the more generic biological approach, for example.

3 Distinguish between biological reductionism and environmental reductionism. (6 marks)

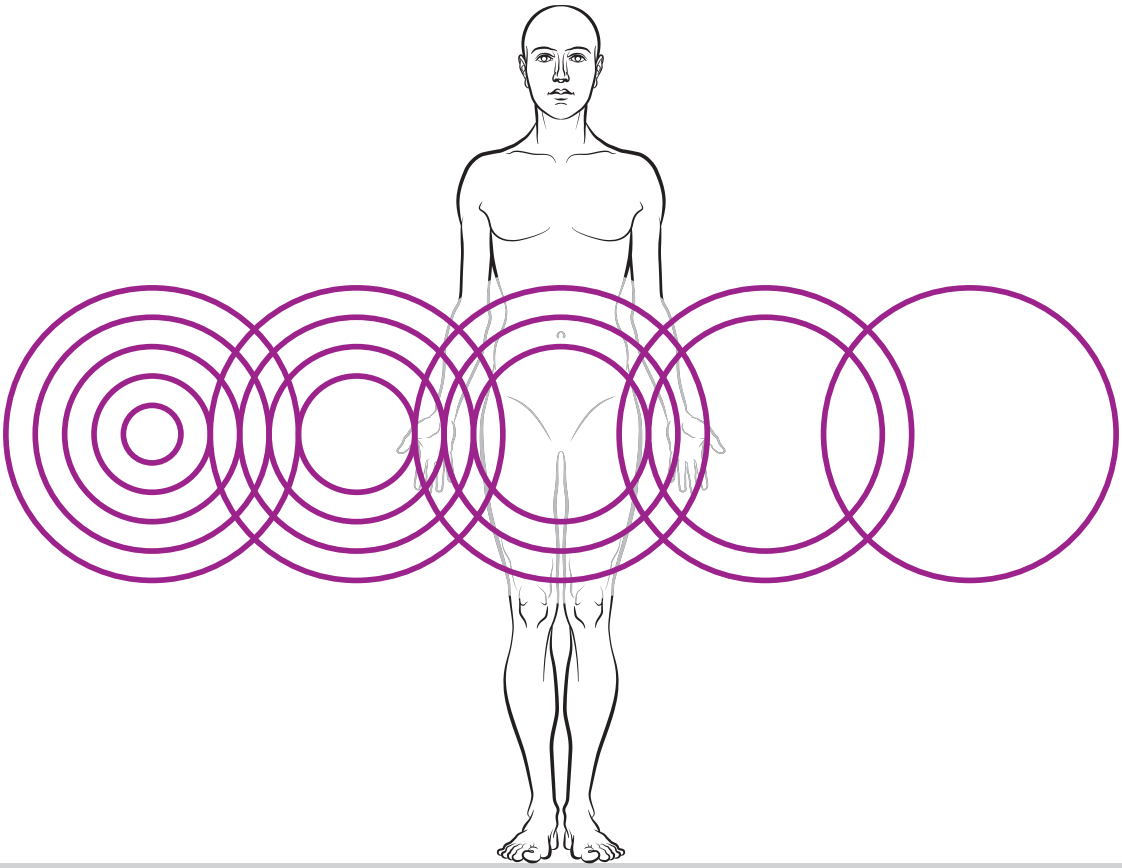
Exam Hint This question requires you to emphasise the differences between these types of reductionism, rather than just describe them both with examples.

4 Outline and evaluate reductionism in psychology. (8 marks)

Exam Hint This question requires you to stay focused on reductionism, but you could still use your knowledge of holism in your evaluation/discussion. You should still use the same specialist terms and sophistication you would use in a larger extended question.

5 Discuss holism and reductionism in psychology. (16 marks)

Exam Hint When you answer this question, plan for what evaluation you will use. Many students struggle to structure their evaluation in a question like this, so you could consider the strengths and limitations of holism and the strengths and limitations of reductionism.



CHAPTER 5 NATURE AND NURTURE

Specification: The nature-nurture debate: the relative importance of heredity and environment in determining behaviour; the interactionist approach.

What you need to know

- Understand the nature and nurture debate in psychology
- Describe the role of heredity in behaviour
- Explain the interactionist approach to understanding human behaviour

The nature versus nurture debate is one of the oldest debates in psychology. It centres on the relative contributions of genetic inheritance and environmental factors to human development and behaviour.

Nature: the view that behaviour is the product of innate biological or genetic factors. For a long time, psychologists have known that certain physical characteristics, such as eye colour and certain diseases (e.g. Huntingdon's) are biologically determined and the result of heredity (or genetic inheritance).

Heredity: the process in which traits are passed down from one generation to the next.

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. Family, twin and adoption studies show that the closer the relatedness of two people, the more likely it is that they will show the same behaviours.

Example: The risk of being diagnosed with schizophrenia is approximately 1% of the general population. However, Gottesman and Shields (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. Also, Joseph (2004) pooled the data for schizophrenia studies conducted before 2001 and found an average concordance rate of 40.4% for MZ twins and 7.4% for DZ twins, highlighting a significant genetic component.

Characteristics and differences that are not observable at birth, but which emerge later in life, are regarded by nativists (people who take the nature approach to understanding behaviour) as the product of maturation, as we have a 'biological clock' which switches certain behaviours 'on' or 'off' in a pre-programmed way. For example, **Huntingdon's disease** is a genetically transmitted disorder that usually emerges between the ages of 30 and 50, although it can appear at any time since the genetic cause is innately present.

Evolutionary explanations also emphasise the importance of nature, as they assume that behaviours or characteristics that increase our chances of survival and reproduction will be naturally selected; the genes for these characteristics or behaviours will be passed on, as they provide an adaptive advantage.

Example: 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 genetic inheritance (heredity mechanisms).

Nurture: 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' because of experience.

According to environmentalists, psychological characteristics and behavioural differences that emerge through infancy and childhood are the result of learning.

Example 1: 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 because of being fed.

Example 2: Batson et al. (1956) proposed the double bind theory, which suggests that schizophrenia is the result of disordered communication within the family. This is where one instruction is given overtly to a child (e.g. a mother says 'come to me') while another instruction is given covertly (e.g. the mother's manner and tone of voice are rejecting). 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.

The Interactionist Approach

It is now widely accepted that heredity and the environment **do not** act independently and **both** nature and nurture are essential for almost all behaviour. Therefore, instead of defending extreme nativist or environmentalist views, most researchers are now interested in investigating how nature and nurture interact. The interactionist approach is the view that both nature and nurture work together to shape human behaviour.

Evaluating the Nature and Nurture debate

- One challenge against both the nature and nurture part of the debate is that there are real-world examples where the interactionist approach is more appropriate. The genetic disorder **PKU (phenylketonuria)** is caused by the inheritance of two recessive genes, one from each parent. People with PKU are unable to break down the amino acid phenylalanine which builds up in the blood and brain causing mental retardation. However, if the child is diagnosed early, they are placed on a low-protein diet for the first 12 years, which helps to avert this potentially lifelong disorder. Therefore, the disorder PKU (nature) is not expressed, because of an altered environment (low protein diet – nurture). This shows that an interactionist approach to understanding behaviours is more appropriate than just a nature or nurture view.
- One challenge to the view that nature and nurture influences are isolated, is that research into neural plasticity shows how they 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), because of life experience (nurture). For example, **Maguire et al. (2000)** investigated the hippocampi volume of London taxi drivers' brains. She found that the hippocampus on each side of the brain (and especially the right hippocampus) was larger in taxi drivers in comparison to non-taxi drivers. Consequently, Maguire concluded that driving a taxi (nurture) affected the size of the hippocampi (nature) suggesting that these influences do not operate in isolation.
- One challenge of the nature perspective is that it can lead to socially sensitive conclusions about human behaviour. For example, **Jenson (1969)** found that the average I.Q. scores of black Americans were significantly lower than white people, concluding that genetic factors and heredity are responsible for intelligence. Conclusions about nature and genetics, and the fixed nature of behaviour can have social and political implications, such as emphasising or justifying inequalities between social groups. Therefore, although there is plenty of research support for the role of nature, it can be problematic to assume that behaviour is fixed.
- One strength of the role of nurture is that there is a wealth of research support. For example, **Margaret Mead (1935)** conducted a classic study of cultural differences in Papua New Guinea. She examined three different tribes and found the Arapesh men and women to be gentle, responsive and cooperative; the Mundugumor men and women were violent and aggressive, seeking power and position; and the Tchambuli showed the opposite gender-role behaviours to those seen in most cultures, as the women were dominant, impersonal and managerial and the men were more emotionally dependent. Mead originally concluded that these differences highlight the impact of culture on gender, which shows that nurture and our environment do influence our behaviour.
  - However, 'epigenetics' is the term used to describe behaviours that are inherited through sources other than genetics. For example, our environmental influences can influence what genetic information is 'triggered'. This shows that it is harder than it seems to truly separate the influence of nature and nurture.

EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

1 Explain what is meant by an interactionist approach in relation to the nature-nurture debate. (4 marks)

Exam Hint This question requires you to focus on the interactionist approach, not just a generic nature-nurture response. You also need to do more than state that it is 'a bit of both nature and nurture'.

2 "Research suggests that depression runs in the family. However, many depressed people also have other issues, including social problems, or problems with drink or drugs. Despite these challenges, many depressed people overcome their depression and find ways to resolve their issues." With reference to the item above, identify one influence of nature on our behaviour and one influence of nurture on our behaviour. (4 marks)

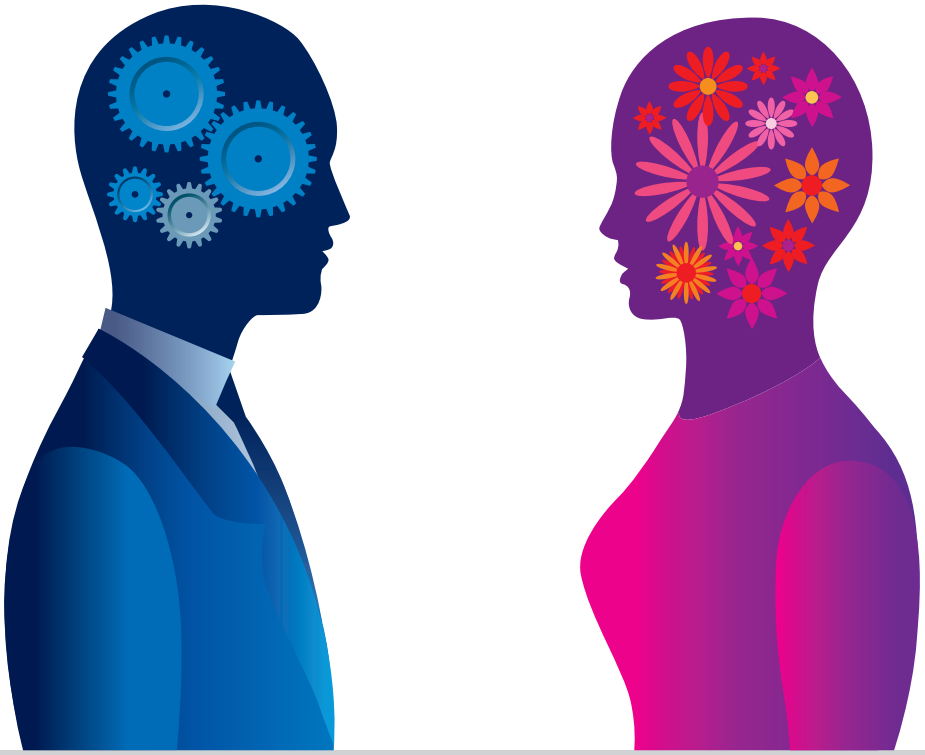
Exam Hint In addition to demonstrating your knowledge and understanding of the debate, you need to ensure your answer in contexualised using information from the stem. However, you need to do more than merely quote the stem!

3 Discuss the relative importance of heredity (nature) in determining behaviour. (8 marks)

Exam Hint This question might seem strange and difficult at first, but it is asking you to outline what you know about nature and how important it is, and then to evaluate this information. Although nurture is not included in the question, you can still use this as a challenge in your discussion!

4 Discuss the nature-nurture debate in psychology. Refer to at least two topics you have studied in your answer. (8 marks)

Exam Hint Some of the marks you will gain in this question are for your application to two relevant topics. Consider your whole course and select carefully! Topics such as phobias, gender, aggression, and addiction are good for the nature-nurture debate, for example.



CHAPTER 6 IDIOGRAPHIC AND NOMOTHETIC

Specification: Idiographic and nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation

What you need to know

- Distinguish between idiographic and nomothetic approaches in psychology
- Use examples to demonstrate idiographic and nomothetic approaches and methods in psychology
- Discuss idiographic and nomothetic approaches

What is the aim of psychological research: Is it to discover universal laws of human behaviour, or to develop an in-depth understanding of unique cases? This is the central argument in the debate between the idiographic and nomothetic approaches.

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

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

Idiographic approaches

The term **'idiographic'** comes from the Greek word 'idios', which means 'own' or 'private'. Psychologists who take an idiographic approach favour qualitative research methods, such as the case study, unstructured interviews and thematic analysis which allow an in-depth insight into individual behaviour. The idiographic approach does not seek to formulate laws or generalise results to others.

Example 1: Shallice and Warrington (1970) examined the case of Patient KF, who experienced a motorbike accident. KF's short-term forgetting of auditory information was greater than his forgetting of visual information, suggesting that short-term memory (STM) consists of multiple components. Consequently, Patient KF undermines the Multi-Store Model of Memory suggesting that STM is not one unitary component. Therefore, an individual case study can highlight flaws within a theory and significantly undermine other research.

Example 2: Freud conducted detailed investigations into the lives of his patients to understand and help them overcome their psychological disorders. His most famous case studies include Little Hans and The Rat Man. While Freud did try to produce generalisations from his case studies, they are still viewed as an idiographic approach because each person's psychological disorder is derived from their unique childhood experiences.

Nomothetic approaches

The term **'nomothetic'** comes from the Greek word 'nomos' which means 'law'. Psychologists who take a nomothetic approach are concerned with establishing general laws, and use experiments, correlations, psychometric testing and other quantitative methods. The nomothetic approach is the main approach within scientifically oriented psychology.

Example 1: Biological approaches take a nomothetic approach when explaining psychological disorders, such as OCD and depression. They typically pinpoint biological factors, such as neurotransmitters, that are responsible for such disorders and use biological therapies (e.g. drugs) to treat all patients.

Example 2: Social psychologists, such as **Milgram and Asch**, used a nomothetic approach to create general conclusions about human behaviour: that situational factors are responsible for both obedience and conformity.

Evaluating Nomothetic and Idiographic approaches

- One limitation of idiographic approaches is that many psychologists criticise them for their unscientific nature. The emphasis on in-depth data collection and the difficulties in arriving at justifiable generalisations contradicts the central purpose of any mature science: to explain the most variation in the fewest possible terms so that phenomena can be predicted and ultimately controlled. Research practices that do not address these goals can seem scientifically pointless. Therefore, there are questions about how compatible idiographic methods and theories are with the aims of science.
- One strength of idiographic methods such as case studies is that they can help to advance our understanding of human behaviour and conditions in circumstances where experimental methods are not appropriate. For example, research that investigates specialist and unique conditions such as amnesia can offer insightful, rich information about the condition and how it impacts life. This can be seen in case studies such as KF, HM, and Clive Wearing, who all suffered amnesia. Although the studies are idiographic, they have helped to change our understanding of memory and challenge preexisting theories about memory functions.
- One strength of nomothetic approaches is that experimental (quantitative) methods, controlled measurement and the ability to predict behaviour, are all seen as compatible with the aims of science. Controlled methods allow for replication to examine the reliability of findings which has helped psychology establish itself as a scientific discipline. The development of theories and empirical testing are just some of the key features of science that are employed by the nomothetic approach.
- One limitation of nomothetic approaches is that they are criticised for losing sight of the 'whole person', due to being focused on quantitative data and statistical analysis. Nomothetic approaches only provide a superficial understanding of human behaviour. For example, Milgram's research found that 65% of participants obeyed an authority figure and inflicted a 450-volt electric shock because they were ordered to do so. However, the results fail to explain *why* each person obeyed, and there may have been very different circumstances that led to the obedience found in each participant.
- One limitation is that it is not always possible to disentangle idiographic and nomothetic approaches. For example, while cognitive psychologists typically take a nomothetic approach and create general laws of cognitive processes (e.g. the Working Memory Model), they also take advantage of the idiographic approach when using case studies to provide evidence for a particular theory (e.g. Patient KF, Shallice and Warrington, 1970). Many research studies make use of both approaches, and it could be argued that the distinction between idiographic and nomothetic is meaningless and that psychologists should employ both methods depending on the nature of the research question.

EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

1 Which of the following statements describes a nomothetic approach in psychology? (2 marks)

a Studying an individual and formulating general laws.

b Studying an individual and not formulating general laws.

c Studying a large group and formulating general laws.

d Studying a group and not formulating general laws.

2 Explain what is meant by the terms idiographic and nomothetic. (4 marks)

3 Two psychologists wanted to study delinquent behaviour in schools. One psychologist chose to conduct a case study on a pupil called Nathan who has ADHD, whereas the other psychologist chose to examine an entire primary school population to come up with a theory about delinquent behaviour. Using your knowledge of the idiographic and nomothetic approaches, outline one strength of both approaches in relation to this scenario. (4 marks)

Exam Hint This question is testing what you know about idiographic and nomothetic approaches, but it also wants you to contextualise your answer. If you do not engage with the stem material, and do more than merely quote from it, you will not gain high marks.

4 Outline and evaluate the idiographic and nomothetic debate in psychology. (8 marks)

5 Discuss idiographic and nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation. (16 marks)

Exam Hint The command word 'discuss' requires you to offer both A01 and A03 knowledge and understanding. Many students interpret this command word as only evaluation or only knowledge, however, this is wrong and can be costly in your exam.

CHAPTER 7 ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS AND SOCIALLY SENSITIVE RESEARCH

Specification: Ethical implications of research studies and theory, including reference to social sensitivity.

What you need to know

- Outline what is meant by the term ethical implications and use examples of research and theories.
- Describe what is meant by 'socially sensitive research'.
- Discuss socially sensitive research in psychology.

Ethical Implications of Research Studies and Theories

Implications refer to the effects or consequences of research or theories. The term *ethical implications* refers to how research affects people who are not involved in research, and the implications of research findings in a wider context. This is different from ethical guidelines and issues from earlier in the specification.

Example 1: Milgram's (1963) research has many ethical implications for wider society. Whether such research is justified needs to be considered. The participants were deceived and were unable to give fully informed consent. The experiment also caused significant distress, and the participants were told or coerced to continue against their will. On the other hand, the participants were debriefed after the experiment and a follow-up interview took place a year later. The outcome of these follow-up interviews suggested that the participants had suffered no long-term effects.

Example 2: Bowlby's Theory of Attachment suggests that children form one special attachment bond, usually with their mother, which must take place within a critical period. Bowlby also suggested that this attachment bond affects their future relationships through an internal working model. While Bowlby's theory has contributed to the development of childcare practices, it has also encouraged the view that a woman's place is at home with her children, which could make some mothers feel guilty for wanting to return to work following childbirth.

Socially sensitive research

Sieber and Stanley (1988) used the term social sensitivity to describe studies where there are potential social consequences for the participants or the group of people represented by the research. They identified four aspects of the scientific research process that raise ethical implications in socially sensitive research:

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 question alone can be considered socially sensitive.
The methodology used	The researcher needs to consider the treatment of the participants 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	The researcher needs to consider how their findings might be interpreted and applied in the real world. Could their data or results be used to inform policy?

Example: Cyril Burt used studies of identical twins to support his view that intelligence is largely genetic. His views greatly influenced the Hadow Report (1926), which led to the creation of the 11+ exam for entry into a selective 'grammar school'. This was used throughout England from 1944-1976 and is still used today. This meant that generations of children were affected by the 11+ exam, even though there has been huge controversy regarding whether Burt had falsified his research.

Evaluation of Ethical Implications and Socially Sensitive Research

- One strength of the proposals by Sieber and Stanley is that they can help safeguard people who may be affected by research studies/theories. Since such research can affect people whom the sample represents, and their friends, family, and communities, researchers need to consider the wider implications of their research, and how their research can be used by others. Sieber and Stanley recommend that researchers should consider this when interpreting and applying their findings, to ensure that psychological research does no indirect harm to other members of society. Furthermore, because many marginalised groups (such as those with disabilities, the elderly, and the economically disadvantaged) are largely excluded from research, they may in some way be harmed by its conclusions and application.
- One limitation of socially sensitive research is that it can be harmful to groups in society and lead to discrimination. For example, research examining racial differences in IQ has been used to justify new (and often unwarranted) forms of social control. For example, between 1907 and 1963, over 64,000 individuals were forcibly sterilized under eugenic legislation in the United States, and in 1972, the United States Senate Committee revealed that at least 2,000 involuntary sterilizations had been performed on poor black women without their consent or knowledge. This could be 'justified' by (flawed) research findings (e.g. Robert Yerkes) which argued that black Americans had lower IQ scores in comparison to white Americans. This highlights the negative impact of socially sensitive research.
- One strength of socially sensitive research is that sometimes, the ends do justify the means. For example, research examining eye-witness testimony, especially the use of child-witnesses has found that young children can be reliable witnesses if they are questioned in a timely and appropriate manner. Additionally, Elizabeth Loftus completed research to show how eyewitness testimonies are unreliable, leading to the development of cognitive interview techniques. In this area, socially sensitive research has resulted in a good working relationship between psychologists and the legal profession to help improve the accuracy and validity of children's eyewitnesses. Therefore, it is important to recognise that not all socially sensitive research is controversial, and some is desirable and beneficial to society.

- One limitation of raising concerns about socially sensitive research is that it could lead to restrictions on what can be studied. Psychologists must be free to carry out whatever research seems important to them, because if governments start passing laws to prohibit certain kinds of research (e.g. ethnicity-related research), then there is a real danger that research will be stopped for political rather than ethical reasons.

EXAM STYLE QUESTIONS

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

Exam Hint In this question, you need to do a little more than just define what socially sensitive research means. You can consider how it impacts the wider society, and you could use an example to support your explanation.

2 Outline one example of research you have studied that is socially sensitive. (3 marks)

Exam Hint Whatever you choose to outline, stay focused on socially sensitive research. You can do this by justifying why your chosen example is socially sensitive.

3 Raine (1996) conducted brain scans on violent criminals and found that they tended to have subtle damage to areas of the brain associated with impulse control. He suggested that this type of brain damage is a marker of violent criminality. Explain why this research could be considered socially sensitive. (4 marks)

Exam Hint This question requires you to engage with the stem material (which is real research!) and do more than quote from it. You need to use your knowledge to justify why this research is socially sensitive, such as what it could lead to, how it could be used by others, amongst other things.

4 Discuss the ethical implications of research studies and/or theories, including reference to social sensitivity. (16 marks)

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