Gender Bias in Psychology

This controversy has much in common with the previous issue of culture bias. For example, both have an Alpha or a Beta bias. Similarly to the issue of culture bias, this controversy has two strands. Firstly, what is the bias, and secondly, how can we deal with and minimise the bias?

a) Define Gender bias

What is “gender bias”? This is the differential treatment or representation of men and women based on stereotypes rather than real differences. This bias can exist in the way that research is carried out (biased sampling etc) or in theories that are biased in favour of a particular gender. The bias can take a number of forms, for example by over emphasising or underemphasising the differences between genders. Most often the bias is against females, favouring males.

Give an example from psychology

b) Discuss the issue of gender bias in psychology

What genuine differences are there between men and women?

Do you think that any of the things you have written are stereotypes? What is a genuine difference?

Aristotle saw women as being inferior and saw that this inferiority was rooted in biology and physiology: "We should look upon the female as being a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature".

According to Kitzinger (1998) questions about gender differences have been used for a variety of reasons e.g. to keep women out of university, to put women in mental health institutes etc. In other words, the research into gender differences is often used for political reasons. “However much psychologists may think or hope or believe that they are doing objective research and discovering truths about the world they are always influenced by the social and political context in which they are doing their research” (this quote would also be appropriate to use for the issue of culture bias).

Wilkinson (1991) argued that psychology’s theories often exclude women, or distort their experience by comparing it to male norms or man-made stereotypes, or by regarding “women” as a single category, to be understood only in comparison with the dominant category of “men”.

Women! Know your place.
Terms to know:
Alpha bias: ____________________________________________________________________________
Beta bias: ____________________________________________________________________________
Androcentrism: _______________________________________________________________________

Brain storm: what theories and studies have we looked at in psychology where a gender bias might possibly exist? (Use Unit 1/2/3 topics, studies and theories that may have a gender bias?)

Extra Research/ Evidence for gender bias

Gender stereotypes
• Williams and Best (1982) carried out a large scale survey of gender stereotypes in 30 different cultures. They found that there were many similarities across the various cultures. Men were seen as more dominant, aggressive and autonomous; a more instrumental role. Women were more nurturing, deferent and interested in affiliation; being encouraged to take an expressive role. This suggests some kind of universal biological basis for gender stereotypes. Is this favouring Alpha or Beta bias?

• However, Whyte (1978) considered 93 non-industrialised cultures, and found that men dominated their wives in 67 % of those cultures. There was equality of the sexes in 30% of the cultures, and women dominated their husbands in the remaining 3%. The less industrialised a culture was, the more likely the husband was to be dominant over the wife. What does this suggest about the generalisability of research carried out on men applied to women? Could we also use this research in the issue of Culture Bias?

Alpha Bias
• Hoffman (1975) assessed the tendency of children to do what they had been told not to. The behaviour of boys and girls did not differ in many of the studies. When there was a sex difference, it was the girls (rather than the boys) who were better at resisting temptation. What does this suggest about Freud’s theories of morality in females?

• In evolutionary psychology, there has been a tendency to use evolutionary explanations to explain why men tend to be dominant over women, and why women have a much greater parental investment. However, there have been major cultural changes over the past 100 years or so, and as a result of which, it is increasingly argued that the evolutionary perspective shouldn’t be used to justify gender differences. How could this apply to sociobiological theories of relationship formation (think Buss)?

• Most journals in psychology are much more willing to publish significant findings than non-significant ones. As a result, it is likely that the published literature exaggerates the extent of gender differences in behaviour – researchers finding no differences tend not to publish their results.
Beta Bias

- Male and female participants are used in most studies, but there is typically no attempt to analyse the data to see whether there are significant sex differences. It may be possible that sex differences are found in psychological research because researchers ignore the different treatment of men and women. **Rosenthal (1966)** found that researchers were more pleasant, friendly, honest and encouraging with female rather than male participants. He concluded that “Male and female subjects may, psychologically, simply not be in the same experiment at all”. *Can you think of study where gender differences were found that might possibly be explained in this way?*

- **Kohlberg’s (1969)** theory of moral development and reasoning was based on studies with young boys. He used the results from these studies to develop his model of development which was then applied to both genders. Girls typically score lower on this, leading Kohlberg to assume that girls are not as moral as boys. However **Gilligan (1982)** argued against this, saying that girls have a different perspective on morals than boys (more info on page 76).

- **Eagly (1978)** found that when tested with an experiment similar to Asch were even more conformist than men. However, she argued it was because women are much more focussed on interpersonal goals, and therefore only appear to be more conformist in experimental situations. *What does this suggest about a beta bias in Asch’s research?*

Androcentrism

- The view that male behaviour is “normal” and that female behaviour is “different” is at the heart of androcentrism. This can be seen particularly in the conclusions drawn in research. **Tavris** identified common conclusions from gender difference research, and rephrased these from a different perspective.

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<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Rephased</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women have lower self-esteem than men</td>
<td>Men are more conceited than women</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women value their efforts less than men</td>
<td>Men overvalue the work they do</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women are more likely to say they’re hurt than admit they’re angry</td>
<td>Men are more likely to attack others when unhappy rather than seeking support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women have more difficulty in developing a sense of self</td>
<td>Men have more difficulty than women in forming attachments</td>
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**Conclusion**

What can we conclude from the evidence into gender bias? Is it an issue? Are we successful at eradicating it from psychology? How can we make things fairer?
### Gender Difference or Gender Bias

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Alpha Bias</td>
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### Heterosexism
Historical and Social Context

The invisibility of women in Psychology
Assessment
You will be asked for 10 marks of A02 and 15 marks of A03

Example question........
In 1998, the American Psychological Association surveyed its members and found that of the top 100 psychologists of the 20th century, only 6 were women.

To what extent do you agree that women are invisible in psychology (25 marks)

Tips
This question contains a scenario so you must refer to it.
For evaluation you can use research, consider implications or make any comparisons
A conclusion should always be reached.
You have about 35 mins of writing time.

How do you answer this?
Main focus will come from the last two sections
Invisibility of women in psychology and social/historical context
However
You can, however use Gender difference/bias and heterosexism here as it will address whether it actually matters?
Conclusion
You can think about- Does it actually matter- is there more value knowing the sex/gender of researcher? Do men and women have different agendas in psychological researcher??