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Gender and culture Bias in psychology

A presentation on psychological practice, and the
inherent biases within them.



Hello, and welcome to our presentation. Today we will be gender and cultural biases within psychology.

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What is Cultural Bias?

- Cultural Bias deems that behaviour occurring in one culture is attributed universally to all cultures within a species (Henrich et al., 2010).
- It is the belief that one culture is superior, either morally or behaviourally, to another. This belief has developed into ethnocentrism (Hammond & Aselrod, 2006).
- Cultural Bias is the view through one's lens, with little or no consideration for the context around other cultures' behaviour or decision making (Miner, 1956).



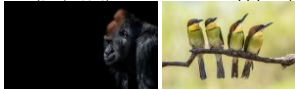
These three definitions of cultural bias from research pieces with varying degrees of focus emulate the difficulty in assessing what this bias reflects. The categories that Cultural Bias can divide into will become elaborated later on, but broadly there are two ways bias can affect research. Henrich et al. discuss how research is generalised to reflect all cultures, specifically within human psychological studies. The second piece examines the way that this approach is damaging scientific behavioural research. The third piece is a pseudo-satirical work by Howard Miner and demonstrates how abnormal a culture must appear when examined through other cultures' points of view. These research pieces illustrate how difficult defining cultural bias can be and demonstrate that psychologists (and anthropologists, amongst others) have known cultural bias impacts upon research. This section of the presentation will appear to lean heavily on the work of Henrich et al. However this is in part due to this work being a meta-study of cultural bias in psychological research, and has since been critiqued, and counterpointed to a

high degree of due diligence on their part, and it would be foolish not to consider this piece essential and relevant.

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Can Cultural Bias be categorised?

- Alpha (Ethnocentrism)
- Beta (Cultural Relativism) (Sparks,



The two main categories that Cultural bias divides into are ethnocentrism and cultural relativism. The two categories are opposites due to ethnocentrism taking no alternative cultural differences into account, whereas cultural relativism considers all cultural differences relevant. This dualism is the controversy with cultural bias. It raises the question of universality or generalisation; how can we research behaviour and apply it to all humanity if only one section of humanity shows this behaviour? An additional question that also arises; how can we detect all humanities behaviours if we only research one group of people? Henrich et al. explore this more in their work, as Causidias et al., 2018; Hammond & Axelrod, 2006; von der Beck et al., 2017; and Zhang et al., 2014 also do.

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What are the issues with cultural bias?



Behaviours are not always present in all cultures (Causidias et al., 2018; Henrich et al., 2010; von der Beck et al., 2017).

Cultural Relativism can be costly and time-consuming, and complications arise concerning validity and reliability (Causidias et al., 2018; Gardner et al., 1998; Gardner, 2006; Mines, 1956; von der Beck et al., 2017).

Generalisations tend to cause issues for researchers because it allows for critiques of the results. It is the behavioural science equivalent of painting yourself into a corner. Conversely, it is not reasonably practicable to perform studies on all cultures globally at once. This practice is unprecedented, and yet, in a piecemeal fashion, cross-cultural expectations are increasing. By performing meta-studies, comparisons, and internet surveys, research is beginning to globalise.

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What are the benefits of Cultural Bias?



Behaviour Identification (Asch, 1956; Henrich et al., 2010; Miner, 1956; von der Beck et al., 2017).

Culturally relevant findings appear in culturally specific cases (Buss, 2016; Causidias et al., 2018; Gardner et al., 1998; Gardner, 2006; Hammond & Avelrod, 2006; Henrich et al., 2010; von der Beck et al., 2017).

If the researcher aims to establish whether or not a behaviour occurs in any culture or species, narrow research fields are considered acceptable, provided they are not considered universal. If the research findings are relevant to the culture under research, and not oversimplified or generalised, this would not necessarily show Culture Bias, but specific data, and therefore considered culturally relevant as long as this is made clear in the findings.

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Where does Cultural Bias appear in psychology?



- Majority of psychological studies are American (Henrich et al., 2010).
- Majority of these studies consist of American undergraduate students (Henrich et al., 2010).
- Psychologists such as Piaget presented findings from a small range of subjects, which supposedly reflected humanity (Causidias et al., 2018; Gardiner et al., 1998; Hammond & Axelrod, 2006; Henrich et al., 2010; Sparks, 2018; von der Beck et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014).

As mentioned in the presentation, most psychological studies concentrate on American undergraduate students; however, the findings are considered universal. Consider this hypothetical example; findings revealed in *Men's Health Magazine* regarding sleep increasing motivation for exercise is more likely to have come from an American University, yet is printed worldwide as transferable. This factor is an example of ethnocentric bias but does not demerit the research per se; indeed, the results may well be universal; however, how can we determine this? Moreover, can we ensure that the conclusions drawn from this research do not negatively impact on cultures where the opposite is true? Jean Piaget studied his children to develop his theories of learning and considered the findings universal. Incredibly, so did the world, and whilst Piaget has uncovered many truths in his research, some of his conclusions are not transferable to non-western cultures. (Causidias et al., 2018; Gardiner et al., 1998; Hammond & Axelrod, 2006; Henrich et al., 2010; Sparks, 2018; von der Beck et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014)

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Is there any way to avoid bias in psychological procedures, and are these avoidance measures practicable?

- Cross-cultural research should integrate as often as universality is present in academic conclusions (Hammond & Aetelrod, 2006; Henrich et al., 2010; Mui, 1996; von der Beck et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014).
- Claiming that a finding is species-wide when not testing a representative sample should be considered unscientific (British Psychological Society, 2018; Buu, 2016; Gardner et al., 1998; Gardner, 2006; Hammond & Aetelrod, 2006).
- Having journal publishers adhere to publicise research that is either deemed specific or representative or pronounce research shortcomings when determining universality (Henrich et al., 2010).

These points are selected as they offer a broad attack on research with both cultural bias divisions present. If implemented, these measures would dictate that researchers who are not taking cultural bias into account should explicitly state that is the case, and that researchers who are including cross-cultural samples overtly mention where each group studied positions in their results. Journal Publishers should take more responsibility for incorporating biased studies into their volumes: By being unambiguous that research will possess shortcomings, and identifying what those shortcomings are, the journal presents the reader with a greater degree of clarity, and as a result, the public readership benefits from insights that reflect the challenges faced by the researcher. Whether these changes can be made cross-discipline requires further research, a critique of biased work and transparency between investors, researchers, journal publishers, and journalists on how bias has been challenged (or not) within the work.

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