

Essay title: Discuss cultural bias in psychology. (16 marks)

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.

Another way to address cultural bias is through the distinction between ethnocentrism and cultural relativism. Ethnocentrism means seeing the world only from one's own cultural perspective, and believing that this one perspective is both normal and correct. Ethnocentrism is an often inadvertent lack of awareness that other ways of seeing things can be as valid as one's own. Cultural relativism insists that behaviour can be properly understood only 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.

One way to deal with cultural bias is to recognise it when it occurs. Smith and Bond found, in their 1998 survey of European textbooks on social psychology, 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.

Culturally biased research can have significant real-world effects by, for example, amplifying and validating damaging stereotypes. 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 had a negative effect on the attitudes of Americans' toward this group of people, which highlights the negative impact that culturally biased research can have.

A well-detailed introduction which clearly explains the difference between alpha and beta bias.

Additional specialist terminology used effectively.

A good example to demonstrate the idea of ethnocentrism. This could have been developed with a specific example (e.g. Asch)

A simple yet very effective evaluation point.

Another effective evaluation point.

Contemporary psychologists are significantly more open-minded and well-travelled than previously, and have an increased understanding of other cultures at both a personal and professional level. For example, international psychology conferences increase the exchange of ideas between psychologists which has helped to reduce ethnocentrism in psychology and enabled a more nuanced understanding and appreciation of cultural relativism.

A third effective evaluation point.

This heightened awareness of cultural diversity has led to the development of 'indigenous psychologies': theories drawing explicitly on the particular experiences of people in different cultural contexts. One example is Afrocentrism, 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 matters because it has led to the emergence of theories that are more relevant to the lives and cultures of people not only in Africa, but also to those far removed from their African origins. The development of indigenous psychologies is often seen as a strength of cultural relativism, but there are limitations as well: Are Afrocentric theories not as culturally biased as those they claim to replace?

Introduction of new specialist terminology.

A very detailed and effective evaluation point which draws on contemporary ideas and uses specialist terminology well.

[507words]

Examiner style comments: **Mark band 4**

This is an accurate and well-detailed essay which used a range of specialist terminology (often beyond the specification) correctly and effectively. The evaluation is interesting, thorough and effective, and focused on the question. There were one or two occasions where a link to other topics or Year 1 content would have developed the answer, but this is clearly a mark band 4 essay.