## Controversy – Culture Bias

### Culture Bias

Culture Bias occurs when people of one culture make assumptions about the behaviour of people from another culture based on their own cultural norms and practice.

#### Cross-Cultural Studies

Psychologists conduct cross-cultural studies to see whether cultural practices affect behaviour. This allows us to identify universal behaviour, informing our knowledge of behaviour that might be biological in origin as it exists across the world.

For example, David Buss (1989) conducted a large-scale cross-cultural study investigating human mating preferences. He surveyed more than 10,000 people from 37 cultures. Regardless of culture, Buss found consistency in male and female mating preferences that were consistent with his hypothesis that males look for health attractive females to bear children and female looks for strength and security in males – this illustrates the importance of conducting research and help us to focus on the similarities between cultures which can help break down stereotypes.

Behaviours that are unique to different cultures are a product of our society and upbringing.

A second problem is that research may use tests or procedures that have been developed in the US are not valued in the other culture. The use of psychological tests or technique developed in one culture and used in other is called an imposed etic.

A further problem is that the group of participants may not be representative of that culture and yet we make generalisations about the whole culture.

There is also an issue of observer bias, where the observer’s expectations alter what they “see” as well as problem of investigation effect, where participants try to guess what answers the researcher would like to provide those answers.

Additionally, cross-cultural replication of studies are difficult to do. Smith and Bond (1988) argued that replications are impossible as procedures will have different meanings to people in different cultures – therefore, can lack validity (may not be testing what they say they are).

#### Difference or Bias

Most cross-cultural research has found differences between cultures. For example, Myers and Diener (1995) noted that more people in individualist cultures report subjective well-being than in collectivist culture. Such a difference is a fact. Culture bias is not concerned with the distorted view that psychologists have because of their own cultural affiliations and how this bias affects their theories and studies.

However, finding a difference in social well-being may be due to cultural bias. For example, if social well-being is measured using a questionnaire designed by Western research (imposed etic) then the question is based on Western (individualist) assumptions of what constitutes social well-being.

The result is that people from collectivist cultures may appear different. The two cultures may not be different in terms of social well-being, but the methods used to test or observe them are biased so some cultural groups appear different.

#### Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism refers to judging other cultures by comparing them with our own.

Rachel and Jeanne (1988) suggest that there are two different ways that theories can be biased:

- **Alpha Bias**: The assumption that there is a real and enduring difference between the cultural group. In terms of ethnocentrism this it the belief that one’s own culture is

#### Historical and Social Context

Values and norms of culture are passed on from one point in time to another. As these norms are transmitted across time some may evolve and change, while some remain consistent.

For example, Freud’s theory was influenced by the Victorian era where women were seen as second class. They were not allowed to vote or...