

Essay Title: Discuss gender bias in psychology. (16 marks)

A gender bias occurs when men or women are treated or represented differently in psychological research. Psychology has historically been a male-dominated field, and consequently many psychological theories assume and represent a male point-of-view. This is known as androcentrism. There are two types of gender bias that can occur: alpha and beta bias.

When a theory or study assumes that there is a real difference between males and females, then an alpha bias is said to have occurred. A prime example is Freud's theory of psychoanalysis which viewed femininity as a form of failed masculinity. Consequently, Freud's theory exaggerated the differences between males and females, which is an example of an alpha bias.

A beta bias, on the other hand, occurs when a theory or study minimises the real differences between males and females. For example, biological psychologists have typically used only male animals to examine the fight-or-flight response. This beta-biased approach meant that female behaviour went largely unexamined until recently. These biases obscure the central aim of psychology which is to generate theories that have universality and apply to all people.

One of the main limitations of psychological research is that 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. This highlights the importance of continually challenging earlier gender research, and reducing gender bias to ensure that a valid picture of women is portrayed in contemporary studies.

Contemporary psychologists have looked for ways to reduce gender bias, proposing a number of solutions. 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

A well-detailed introduction which outlines and defines the key terms.

The term alpha bias is defined with and an example demonstrates additional knowledge.

The term beta is defined, drawing on an example for biological psychology.

The term universality has been introduced.

A highly effective evaluation point, outlining a limitation of gender bias with a clear example.

emphasising both the value 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.

The answer explores different ways to reduce gender bias.

Another way to reduce gender bias is to take a feminist approach which 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) actually claims that female are less effective leaders than males. However, the purpose of Eagly's claim is to help researchers develop training programmes aimed at reducing the lack of female leaders in the real-world.

The answer explores different perspectives, again drawing on further research.

However, not all psychologists agree with Eagly, and some psychologists claim that males and females are not significantly different and that it is the research methodology used in gender research which is biased, resulting in males and females appearing different when they are not. This is important because it could reduce the validity of gender theories and research, resulting in an alpha bias. However, this can also result in a beta bias, which on the one hand promotes equal treatment but on the other also draws attention away from important differences between males and females.

The essay introduces a counter-argument effectively and explores two different sides to the issue of research methodology in gender research.

There should be no doubt that gender bias still exists. Despite the many attempts to overcome it in research and theory, psychologists should always consider these issues before conducting research.

While this is a nice conclusion it adds little value to the essay.

[550 words]

Examiner style comments: **Mark band 4**

This is an excellent essay which uses a wealth of specialist terminology, theories and perspectives to tackle the question. The knowledge is well-detailed and there is a clear understand of the different terms. The evaluation is extensive and always effective, focusing on the debate surrounding gender bias in psychological research.