8.1 Gender Bias in Psychological Theory and Research

AQA 7182 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

At least four questions require full sentences. Total time suggested 55 minutes.

1 Define β bias and its consequence for universality claims

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Outline two limitations of gender-balanced sampling

(Total for Question 2 is 6 marks)

3 Define androcentrism with an example

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

4 Explain a social consequence of gender-biased research

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Discuss gender bias in psychological research

(Total for Question 5 is 16 marks)

6 Identify bias in a male-only stress study

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

7 Identify α or β bias in a gender-differentiated moral reasoning theory

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

8 Explain Kohlberg's β bias in moral development theory

(Total for Question 8 is 6 marks)

Mark scheme · 8.1 Gender Bias in Psychological Theory and Research

Question 1

defines β bias as minimising or ignoring differences between genders, treating findings from one gender as applicable to both oe	**B1**
states the problem: it can falsely support claims of universality when male-based findings do not generalise to females oe	**B1**

Answer: Beta bias downplays or ignores gender differences, treating results from one sex as if they apply to both; this can wrongly support claims that psychological findings are universal.

Question 2

identifies a limitation, e.g. balancing numbers does not address deeper issues like androcentric measures, gendered operationalisation or interaction effects oe	**M1**
explains that measures may be biased if they reflect male norms or ignore gender-relevant variables, so equal sampling alone will not fix conceptual bias oe	**A1**
identifies a second limitation, e.g. equal numbers may still mask within-gender variability or cultural differences oe	**M1**
explains that men and women are not homogenous groups and intersectional factors mean simple balancing can miss important differences oe	**A1**
may suggest that ethical, practical or cost constraints make balanced sampling difficult in some contexts oe	**B1**
concludes that methodological and conceptual changes beyond sampling are needed to reduce bias effectively oe	**B1**

Answer: Equal numbers of men and women does not solve conceptual bias: measures and operational definitions may still reflect male norms, and balancing samples does not capture within-gender diversity or intersectional factors. Methodological and theoretical changes are also needed.

Question 3

defines androcentrism as male-centred research or interpretation where the male experience is treated as the norm oe	**B1**
gives an example, e.g. using a male-only sample and assuming findings apply to women, or interpreting female behaviour as deviant relative to male norms oe	**B1**

Answer: Androcentrism is male-centred research or interpretation that treats the male experience as the default; for example using male-only samples and assuming results apply to women.

Question 4

identifies a social consequence, e.g. biased research used to justify discrimination in hiring, education or policy oe	**M1**
explains the mechanism: how a biased claim becomes taken as scientific evidence to support unequal treatment oe	**A1**
gives a short, relevant example, e.g. arguing women are less suited to leadership based on flawed research leading to fewer promotions oe	**B1**
explains why this matters, e.g. incorrect policy decisions, reduced opportunities and reinforcement of stereotypes oe	**B1**

Answer: Biased research can be used to justify discrimination, for example flawed claims that women are less suited to leadership can be treated as scientific evidence and lead to fewer promotions and entrenched stereotypes.

Question 5

Level 4 Knowledge of gender bias is accurate and detailed. Discussion and evaluation are thorough and integrated, addressing alpha and beta bias, androcentrism and gynocentrism, consequences for individuals and science, and appropriate methodological and theoretical solutions. The Kohlberg example is applied effectively. Specialist terminology is used appropriately and the answer is well organised.	**13-16**
Level 3 Knowledge is clear with some detail. There is effective evaluation with some integration of points and an appropriate example. Solutions are discussed but may not be fully developed. The response is mostly well organised with good use of terminology.	**9-12**
Level 2 Knowledge of concepts is present but limited or partially imprecise. Evaluation is present but superficial, and the example or solutions may be only briefly applied. Organisation and use of terminology may be inconsistent.	**5-8**
Level 1 Answer contains limited knowledge and little or no evaluation. Points may be brief or asserted without development. The response lacks structure and appropriate terminology.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditworthy material.	**0**

Indicative content:

- AO1: Definitions of alpha bias (exaggerating sex differences) and beta bias (minimising or ignoring differences and generalising from one gender to both).
- AO1: Definitions of androcentrism (male-centred research and norms) and gynocentrism (female-centred research and norms).
- AO1: Distinction between universality and bias: universality claims that findings apply across genders and contexts; bias undermines claims of universality when samples, measures or interpretations are gendered.
- AO2: Kohlberg as a worked example of historical beta bias: male-dominated samples and a justice-oriented scoring system that undervalued female care-based reasoning, leading to claims of lower moral maturity for women; mention Gilligan's critique and methodological implications.
- AO3: Consequences for individuals: biased diagnosis, inappropriate treatments, workplace discrimination, educational inequality and reinforcement of gender stereotypes. Consequences for science: limited generalisability, skewed theory development and unjustified universality claims.
- AO3: Methodological critiques, e.g. sampling bias, androcentric measures, gendered operationalisation, lack of intersectional perspectives; explain why these lead to invalid conclusions.
- AO3: Evaluation of proposed solutions: gender-balanced sampling, development of gender-sensitive measures, use of feminist and intersectional frameworks, replication across cultures and contexts, reflexivity in researchers. Discuss limitations of each solution, e.g. balancing samples alone does not fix conceptual bias, and practical constraints in some research areas.
- AO3: Consideration of contemporary progress, for example increased awareness, mixed-sex sampling and editorial policies, balanced against persistent problems in some fields and publication bias.
- AO3: Balanced argument including counter-evidence or complexity, e.g. some sex differences are robust and important to study, but researchers must distinguish between biologically driven differences and socially constructed ones, and avoid essentialism.
- AO3: Conclude with a judgement on how psychological science can move towards more valid, inclusive theories while recognising the complexity of gender, interact with culture and other variables, and avoid simple universality claims.

Question 6

identifies β bias (generalising from male-only results to all humans) cao	**M1**
justifies by noting the sample used only males and the conclusion claims universality without evidence from females oe	**A1**
might mention the omission of female-typical responses such as tend-and-befriend as evidence the conclusion ignores gender differences oe	**B1**
explicitly links sample limitation to inappropriate universal claim oe	**B1**

Answer: This is β bias: the researcher generalises from a male-only sample to claim a universal human fight-or-flight response, ignoring evidence that females may show different stress responses.

Question 7

identifies α bias cao	**M1**
explains that the theory exaggerates differences and presents them as large and innate oe	**A1**
may reference that presenting such distinct, innate differences can overlook overlap and social or cultural influences oe	**B1**
links to the scenario by noting the strong, categorical claims about male versus female moral reasoning oe	**B1**

Answer: Alpha bias: the theory exaggerates and essentialises sex differences by claiming women are mainly care-oriented and men mainly justice-oriented, presenting large innate differences.

Question 8

states that Kohlberg's research drew mainly on male samples and used male norms as the standard oe	**M1**
identifies the β bias: generalising male-based stages as universal moral development stages cao	**M1**
explains Gilligan's critique or similar: that female moral reasoning may emphasise care and relationships, so Kohlberg's scale underestimates women's moral maturity oe	**A1**
explains why this matters: Kohlberg's scoring system labelled female responses as less morally mature even when based on a different but valid orientation oe	**A1**
may point out the methodological issue: sample bias and culturally or gender-limited scenarios leading to inappropriate universality claims oe	**B1**
explicitly links this to the consequence that women were judged against a male standard and so disadvantaged in theoretical terms oe	**B1**

Answer: Kohlberg exemplified β bias by drawing mainly on male samples and treating his stage-based scoring as a universal standard; critics argued this used male norms and undervalued female care-based moral reasoning, so women were judged as less morally mature by a male-centred scale.