

PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES AND GENDER BIAS

ALPHA BIAS – These theories assume real and enduring differences between men and women. Sometimes they heighten the value of women and sometimes they devalue them. Within socio-biology, for example, differences in male and female behaviour may be attributed to genetic determinism.

BETA BIAS – Theories and research into this have generally ignored or minimised sex differences. They have done this by either ignoring questions about the lives of women, or by assuming that findings from studies of males apply equally well to females. Such approaches, at best misguided, at worst arrogant, have resulted in what is essentially an androcentric view of human behaviour, rather than offering insights into what is essentially one half of the human race.

ANDROCENTRIC – These theories tend to offer an interpretation of women based on an understanding of the lives of men. Ideas of ‘normal’ behaviour may be drawn exclusively from the studies of the development of males e.g. Freud's account of male identity development.

GENDERCENTRIC – These theories see male and female development as following separate paths. Theories that are regarded as gendercentric do not devalue women in the way that androcentric theories might. Theories that might be described as gendercentric display an alpha bias, in that they emphasize how males and females differ, rather than how their characteristics might intersect.

ETHNOCENTRIC – Theories assume that development and interaction are the same across cultures and races. Offer quite fixed sets of assumptions about ‘normal’ patterns of family functioning, and appropriate roles for males and females within the family structure.

HETEROSEXIST – Most traditional theories of psychological development view heterosexual orientation as normal and therefore view orientation toward partners of the same sex as abnormal. Homosexuality was diagnosed as a category of mental illness by the American Psychiatric association up until 1973, when it was finally removed from the diagnostic classification system.

INTRAPSYCHIC – Attribute all behaviours of an individual to factors within themselves. These theories tend to minimise the role of external influences, thus leading to the inevitable consequence of ‘blaming’ the victim for whatever happens to them.

DETERMINISTIC – Assume that patterns of behaviour have developed as a result of past events and are thus more or less fixed. The consequence of this would be that ideas of gender role become an inflexible aspect of one's personality and are thus relatively unchangeable at a later stage of development.