

Cultural Bias in Psychological Studies



This activity will help you to:

- Distinguish between emic and etic constructs
- Explain what an imposed etic is
- Evaluate research that imposed an etic
- Explain what ethnocentrism is
- Outline examples of psychological research that are ethnocentric
- Evaluate ethnocentric psychological research studies

Emics, etics and imposed etics

An **etic construct** is a theoretical idea that is assumed to apply in all cultural groups. An **emic construct** is one that applies only in one cultural group. Cultural bias can occur if a researcher assumes that an emic construct is actually etic. This results in an **imposed etic**, where a culture-specific idea is wrongly imposed on another culture.

What you need to do:

Remind yourself of (a) Ainsworth's Strange Situation Classification and (b) Van Ijzendoorn's cross-cultural research on attachment. Then, working in pairs or threes, discuss and formulate answers to the following questions.

- (a) According to the SSC research, how do Japanese and German children differ from American?
- (b) In what way could the imposed etic that occurs when the SSC is used with non-US samples lead to misleading conclusions?
- (c) "The meaning of a behaviour can only be understood with reference to its cultural context". Explain this statement, referring to the cross-cultural SSC research.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the cultural equivalent of androcentrism. Ethnocentrism occurs when a researcher takes the views or behaviour of their own culture as 'normal' and, if other cultures differ from this, views them as abnormal, deviant or in some sense deficient.

What you need to do:

- Using the available texts, find out and briefly summarise what Arthur Jensen and/or Hans Eysenck said about cultural variations in measured intelligence (IQ).
- Now look at the Chittling Test (Dove, 1971 – ask for a copy). What point do you think Dove is making about embedded cultural bias in IQ testing?
- Jensen argued for the ending of federal funding for the Headstart project. Find out what this was, and explain the impact that Jensen's research could have had.

And if you finish that...

Luria (1969) gave Russian rural-dwellers the following IQ test question:

Which is the odd one out: hammer axe log saw

The right answer is 'log' but all his sample said 'hammer'. (a) Does this mean they were stupid? (b) What does this finding tell us about cultural bias in Psychological research?