

Chapter 4 Summary

- Our experience with the environment shapes our perception by creating perceptual expectations. These expectations, known as a perceptual set, make particular interpretations more likely to occur. They allow people to anticipate what they will encounter and, therefore, increase both the speed and efficiency of the perceptual process.
- There are several factors that may contribute to differences in people's sensation and perception. There are physical and environmental conditions, genetic factors, socialization norms, and acculturation practices.
- Studies on cross-cultural differences in the perception of simple patterns showed only small variations. Cross-cultural similarities in the drawing of visual patterns suggest the presence of a common mechanism for perceptual processes. Shape constancy of perception is significantly influenced by learning experiences. Culturally specific conditions determine which skills will improve in individuals in a particular culture and which skills will remain underdeveloped.
- Psychologists offer several hypotheses that explain cultural differences in illusion susceptibility. The carpentered world hypothesis postulates a learned tendency among people raised in an environment shaped by carpenters to interpret nonrectangular figures as representations of rectangular figures seen in perspective.
- There is a strong degree of similarity in the way color terms are used in different cultures. Moreover, verbal labels, if they are not available in the lexicon of a language, can be readily learned. Education, travel, interpersonal contacts, and the media can play a significant role in the development of color recognition and labeling.
- There are perhaps common perceptual mechanisms that lead to similarities across cultures in the perception of time and in aesthetic appreciation. Many similarities in perception of the beautiful were found in different cultural groups despite apparent socioeconomic differences among them. Because the traditional music of different cultures may differ in notion and harmony, there are some cultural differences in the perception of musical harmony.
- The universal similarity in the anatomy and physiology of human sensory organs and the nervous system seems to make it likely that sensory impressions and their transmission through the perceptual system are comparable across cultures.
- Consciousness is a process, which has several stages or states. The "normal" flow of consciousness may consist of periods of full attention and concentration or relative detachment from the outside events. Periods of wakefulness are altered by periods of sleep. Under various circumstances, meditation, psychoactive substances, trances, or hypnotic suggestion can alter consciousness. The understanding of consciousness is based on general cultural views of mental life and the relationship between body and soul.
- From a cultural standpoint, the normal flow of consciousness directs our behavior in ways that are adaptive in particular physical and social environments. Individual consciousness is dependent on socialization experiences, which, in turn are based on cultural factors, collective forms of existence, or shared collective experiences. Human consciousness develops together with the development of both physical and social environments. Increasing knowledge of the world at the same time broadens consciousness.
- Both duration and patterns of sleep may vary individually and from culture to culture. Despite significant differences in the manifest content of dreams, the latent dream content is believed to be generally similar in people living in different cultures. Dreams not only reflect our private world, but also mirror the environment in which we live. The dreaming individual's brain organizes and retrieves various images in a "culturally ascribed" manner.
- Phenomena such as meditation, trance, hypnosis, and near-death experiences during coma are very common in practically every culture. Analyzing them, a specialist should take into consideration personal characteristics of the studied individuals, their educational level, and position within the society. Specialists should also notice that certain life circumstances can influence individual experiences. Another set of conditions is a predominant cultural attitude toward altered states of consciousness expressed in the media, people's everyday conversations, or public opinion (if data are available).

Key Terms

Absolute Threshold The minimum amount of physical energy needed for the observer to notice a stimulus.

Aesthetic Experience A term used to identify the feeling of pleasure evoked by stimuli that are perceived as beautiful, attractive, and rewarding. The term also refers to displeasure evoked by stimuli that are perceived as ugly, unattractive, and unrewarding.

Altered States of Consciousness (ASC) The general name for phenomena that are different than normal waking consciousness and include mystic experiences, meditation, hypnosis, trance, and possession.

Behavioral Environment A mental representation that orients people to dimensions such as time, space, and the interpersonal world.

Consciousness The subjective awareness of one's own sensations, perceptions, and other mental events.

Daydreaming Turning attention away from external stimuli to internal thoughts and imagined scenarios.

Depth Perception The organization of sensations in three dimensions, even though the image on the eye's retina is two dimensional.

Dreams Storylike sequences of images occurring during sleep.

Difference Threshold The lowest level of stimulation required to sense that a change in the stimulation has occurred.

Meditation A quiet and relaxed state of tranquility in which a person achieves an integration of emotions, attitudes, and thoughts.

Perception The process that organizes various sensations into meaningful patterns.

Perceptual Set Perceptual expectations based on experience.

Sensation The process by which receptor

cells are stimulated and transmit their information to higher brain centers.

Sensory Adaptation The tendency of the sensory system to respond less to stimuli that continue without change.

Sleep A nonwaking state of consciousness characterized by general unresponsiveness to the environment and general physical immobility.

Trance A sleeplike state marked by reduced sensitivity to stimuli, loss or alteration of knowledge, rapturous experiences, and the substitution of automatic for voluntary motor activity.