NO PREP

The Influence of Culture on Perception

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

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Keywords: perception, culture, cultural influences, cultural relativism

Focus

How cultural factors can influence perception, including cultural differences in color perception, taste preferences, and time perception.

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Introduction

Perception, the process of interpreting sensory information, is not solely a biological function. It is deeply intertwined with our cultural experiences. Culture, the shared beliefs, values, and customs of a group, shapes how we perceive the world around us. This reading will explore how cultural factors can influence perception, focusing on color perception, taste preferences, and time perception.

Cultural Differences in Color Perception

Color perception is not universal. Different cultures have varying vocabularies and conceptualizations of color. For example, the Russian language distinguishes between "light blue" (goluboy) and "dark blue" (siniy), while English does not. This linguistic difference reflects cultural variations in how these colors are perceived and categorized. A study conducted by Berlin and Kay (1969) found that while there are variations in color terms across languages, there is a universal sequence in which colors are acquired. This suggests that there are underlying biological and cognitive factors that influence color perception, but cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping how we perceive and categorize colors.

Cultural Influences on Taste Preferences

Taste preferences are also culturally influenced. Foods that are considered delicacies in one culture may be reviled in another. For example, while Americans

often find insects to be disgusting, they are considered a delicacy in many cultures. This suggests that our taste preferences are not solely determined by biology but are also shaped by cultural factors such as exposure, socialization, and beliefs. Cultural differences in taste preferences can also be seen in the use of spices. Cultures that rely heavily on agriculture often use spices to preserve food and enhance its flavor. These cultural practices can lead to unique taste preferences that are passed down from generation to generation.

Cultural Variations in Time Perception

Time perception is another area where cultural differences are evident. Cultures vary in their attitudes towards time, with some emphasizing punctuality and efficiency, while others prioritize relationships and flexibility. These cultural differences can influence how individuals perceive and value time. For example, in Western cultures, time is often viewed as a linear resource that can be measured, quantified, and managed. This perspective can lead to a focus on punctuality and efficiency. In contrast, some Eastern cultures view time as more cyclical and interconnected, emphasizing relationships and harmony over strict adherence to schedules. The concept of "polychronic time" versus "monochronic time" is often used to describe cultural differences in time perception. Monochronic cultures, such as those in the United States and Western Europe, tend to focus on one task at a time and adhere to strict schedules. Polychronic cultures, such as those in Latin America and the Middle East, are more flexible and allow for multiple tasks to be done simultaneously. Cultural differences in time perception can also be seen in the way people use and understand time-related metaphors. For example, in English, we often use metaphors such as "time is money" or "time is a thief." These metaphors reflect the Western cultural emphasis on efficiency and the limited nature of time. In contrast, other cultures may use metaphors that emphasize the cyclical nature of time or the importance of relationships over schedules.

Conclusion

In conclusion, perception is not solely a biological process but is deeply influenced by cultural factors. Culture shapes how we perceive colors, tastes, and time, as well as our attitudes towards the world around us. Understanding these cultural differences can help us to appreciate the diversity of human experience and to communicate more effectively across cultures.

Primary Source: The Cultural Basis of Perception (Harold C. Kelly, 1970)

"Perception is not merely a biological process, but is also influenced by cultural factors. These cultural factors, such as language, values, and beliefs, shape the way we interpret sensory information and give meaning to our experiences."

1. How does Kelly's perspective on perception differ from a purely biological approach?

_____

_____

2. What role do cultural factors play in shaping our perception of the world according to Kelly?

_____

_____

Multiple Choice

1. Which of the following is not a cultural factor that can influence perception?

    a) Language

    b) Religion

    c) Genetics

    d) Socialization

2. The concept of "polychronic time" is associated with:

    a) Flexibility and multitasking

    b) Strict adherence to schedules

    c) A focus on one task at a time

    d) A linear view of time

3. The study by Berlin and Kay (1969) found that:

a) Cultural factors have no influence on color perception

b) Color perception is entirely determined by biological factors

c) There are no cross-cultural variations in color terms

d) There is a universal sequence in which colors are acquired

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Monochronic time	A) The belief that there is no absolute right or wrong, but rather that what is right or wrong depends on cultural context.
2. ___ Polychronic time	B) The idea that time is a limited resource that should be used efficiently.
3. ___ Cultural relativism	C) The foods that a person enjoys or dislikes.
4. ___ Taste preferences	D) The concept of being able to engage in multiple activities simultaneously.

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. The process of interpreting sensory information is called _____.

2. Cultural differences in _____ can be seen in the way people use and understand time-related metaphors.

3. The study by Berlin and Kay (1969) focused on _____.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. How can cultural differences in time perception influence business practices?

2. Discuss the role of socialization in shaping taste preferences.

3. Explain how cultural relativism, the belief that what is right or wrong depends on cultural context, can help us to understand and appreciate cultural differences in perception.