

Studies of perceptual set

You are learning about...	You are learning how to...
Studies of perceptual set	Comment on psychological studies using a range of different criteria

For each of the studies below we will consider its **aims and conclusions**, its **internal and external validity** and its **implications** for real world situations.

McGinnies (1949)

The researcher used 16 psychology students, half of whom were female and half male. The participants were tested in a laboratory setting using an apparatus called a tachistoscope, which is a sort of projector that allows things to be shown for very brief and precisely controllable periods of time (nowadays we would use a computer for this sort of thing). The PPs were shown a series of words, some of which were emotionally neutral (e.g. 'apple', 'dance') and some of which were emotionally loaded (e.g. 'raped', 'whore'). Each word was initially flashed very briefly (too fast to actually be perceived) and the length of presentation was gradually increased. The PPs were instructed to say each word out loud as soon as they recognised it. Neutral words were identified at much quicker presentations than emotionally loaded words, which had to be shown for much longer before PPs were able to identify them.

Gilchrist & Nesburg (1952)

The researchers used 26 psychology students, randomly assigned to two groups. One group was deprived of food for twenty hours. The other group acted as a control group for comparison. In a laboratory setting, all the participants were shown a series of pictures, some of which were food-related and some of which were not. The participants were asked to rate each picture according to how bright and colourful it was¹. The food-deprived group tended to rate the food-related pictures as brighter and more colourful than the control group. They also rated the food-related pictures as brighter and more colourful than the non-food related pictures.

Bruner & Minturn (1955)

The researchers used 24 undergraduate students assigned to two groups. A tachistoscope was used to present the participants with a series of visual stimuli including one that looked like this:



The PPs were asked to call out what each stimulus was after it was shown to them. One group of PPs was shown the figure above embedded in a series of letters. The other group was shown it embedded in a series of numbers. The 'letters' group tended to call it 'B' whereas the 'numbers' group tended to call it 'thirteen'.

Seagall et al (1966)

The researchers pulled together data from 1878 participants from the United States and 14 other countries. All participants were shown five different distortion illusions including the Muller-Lyer and the Ponzo. They were asked questions to find out whether they were susceptible to the illusions or if they perceived the stimuli accurately. Seagall et al found that PPs from Europe and the US tended to be more susceptible to the illusions than those from non-Western countries, who tended to perceive the stimuli accurately.

¹ Actually, the response method was more complex than this and involved PPs turning a knob to vary the picture's brightness.