Humans have five senses:
- Vision
- Audition
- Gustation
- Olfaction
- Kinesthesia

Narrator: When first learning about psychology, many students erroneously use the terms sensation and perception synonymously.

However, nothing could be further from the truth.

Humans have five senses: vision, audition, otherwise known as hearing, gustation, otherwise known as taste, olfaction otherwise known as smell, and kinesthesia, otherwise known as touch.

Our senses are continually being bombarded with information from our surround even if we are not aware or attending to these signals.

For instance, have you ever had the experience of sitting next to someone who emphatically declares, “Why does that dog have to bark so much?!"

As your friend says this, you are now “suddenly” able to hear the dog barking whereas you were not before your friend made the statement.

But were you actually “hearing” the dog all along?

Well, yes and no. “Yes,” because the sound waves emitted from the dog were resonating in your ears, but “no” because you were not attending to the sensory input and were not perceiving the dog as barking.

Many of us have likely pondered the question, “If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there is hear it, does it still make a sound?”

The answer, of course, is “no” because for us to “hear” something, we need both the sensory experience (the sound waves registering in our ear) and the perceptive experience (experiencing the sound as a tree falling). The crash of the tree still emits sound waves, but the sound is not perceived as a tree crashing because there is no person or animal there to receive the signal.

The point here is that even though we may all hear the same sounds, see the same sights, smell, taste and feel the same objects, our mental representations of these events can be very different across cultures.

Thus, many researchers contend that culture is cognition; that is, culture instructs us how to think about the sensations that we experience and our interactions with the world around us.
Let us reflect for a moment on one definition of culture:

“Human culture is a unique meaning and information system, shared by a group and transmitted across generations, that allows the group to meet the basic needs of survival, pursue happiness and well-being, and derive meaning from life.”

Narrator: Let us reflect for a moment on one definition of culture:

“Human culture is a unique meaning and information system, shared by a group and transmitted across generations, that allows the group to meet the basic needs of survival, pursue happiness and well-being, and derive meaning from life.”

If we reflect for a moment on this definition, it is intuitively apparent that culture is completely cognitive in nature. Without the ability to think, reason, and respond, the cultures that have developed around the world and in our own country and neighborhoods could never have come to exist.

Our ancestors used the cognitive abilities at their disposal in their unique sociohistorical context to solve the problems that they faced. As they learned to survive, pursue happiness, and derive meaning in their environments, they transmitted the knowledge, skills and abilities to future generations.

In fact, many families pride themselves on being a seventh generation farmer or fourth generation firefighter or fifth generation school teacher because these occupations have meaning to their culture or family value and belief structure.

As we explore this topic, keep Hofstede’s (1980) notion of “mental programming” in the forefront of your mind. Remember that he likened culture to computer programming – that is, just like software programs allow us to do different tasks with the same computer, so does our culture allow us to think, behave and act in different ways even with the same physical human body.

Slide 3

Title: Optical Illusions

Slide Content:

- Click here to view the optical illusions.
- **Critical Thinking Point:** Can you think of other sensory-perceptive experiences that might differ by culture? Take a few moments and reflect on how visual stimuli in one culture might be experienced or interpreted differently in another.

Narrator: Many of us have been exposed to optical illusions over the course of our lives. Although we often enjoy trying to make sense of these often confusing visual stimuli, research has suggested that people from various cultures might be expected to understand visual stimuli differently because of the varied experiences they have in their culture, or because of the types of activities in which they engage. Even though two people can stand directly next to one another and have the same experience of light being reflected onto the retina and eventually being registered in the occipital cortex responsible for vision, making sense of that visual ray will depend on our life experiences and our cultural backgrounds.

Let’s explore an example. One of the most common measures of intelligence in adults is the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, sometimes called the WAIS, now in its fourth edition. One of the subtests on the WAIS is titled “Picture Completion” and involves respondents viewing illustrations and being asked to describe what important part of the picture is missing. On the third edition of this test, the most difficult item in this set showed an aerial view of a snowy barnyard scene with a wood pile near the barn and a wooden fence around the barn and wood pile. The roof of the barn and the fence clearly had fresh snow drift across them, but the wood pile was devoid of any fresh snow. People from warm climates, like the
southern or southwestern United States, Caribbean, or other tropical areas may not have ever watched it snow or seen how the snow tends to cover everything that is outdoors. Thus, when trying to identify what important part is missing, these people might not know that the correct answer is snow on the wood pile because their personal, cultural, and perceived experiences in the world have not included a scene like this. Thus, an item such as this unfairly discriminates against people from cultures in which snow is not a part of their life experience.

Can you think of other sensory perceived experiences that might differ by culture? Take a few moments and reflect on how visual stimuli in one culture might be experienced or interpreted differently in another.

End of Presentation