

Handout 5

1. What do you see?
2. If there are others with you, what do they see?
3. Do you and the others see something different?



You probably saw a woman. If you were a young man about town would you be interested in getting a date with her? Did you by any chance see more than one woman? If not, go back and look again. Study the picture carefully. Talk about it with someone else if possible.

Shown in the picture are the heads and shoulders of both an old woman *and* a young woman. But normally you can only see one at a time.

For some people, seeing both women is very difficult.

Which brings us to:

Point Number 1: Our perceptions play tricks on us. Even though we know intellectually that this is true, in our everyday lives we assume an objectivity and a reliability that is not born out by events. Things are not always as they seem.

Research on responses to this picture has turned up something else interesting: that young people usually see the young woman and older people see the old woman.

Which brings us to:

Point Number 2: We are selective in what we perceive (psychologists call it "selective perception"). In fact, most of what we are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or feeling at any moment is screened out by our conscious minds.

We tend to perceive consciously only that which is important to us.

But what, for the most part, determines what it is that we consider important? It is enculturation, our cultural training.

This culturally-determined perceptual set is the great steamer trunk in the cultural baggage we haul abroad with us.