

Are the Mentally Ill as Perceptive as Others?

*a self-test
for Journal readers*

Garnar V. Walsh

Are you perceptive where other people are concerned? Are you sensitive to them, to their attitudes, and to their feelings? If your answer is "yes," you are probably very effective in dealing with most people. As a member of both formal and informal groups, you are probably popular and successful. However, if you admit that you may not be particularly perceptive, perhaps this article will be of some value to you. It will give you a chance to test yourself.

People perceive others in a variety of ways. Some of these perceptions are complimentary while others are not. People often make judgments about others despite a paucity (dearth) of evidence, much of it being hearsay. People thus draw conclusions from a very weak base without proper supporting evidence. As a result, they often issue statements which tend to categorize themselves as either prejudiced individuals or bigots.

Perceptive Capability Study

A recent research study was conducted for the purpose of checking a person's perceptive capability. Your own reactions will indicate to some extent your awareness of others, and your ability to analyze them properly.

The study reported here involved a "disguised technique" devised by M. Haire. A technique of this type is a concealed or disguised approach for the purpose of determining a person's attitude toward an object. Under certain conditions this technique may have higher validity than direct measurement. This is true when the attitude measured is not readily acceptable by others or by the person himself or is a violation of the norms of a group.

M. Haire in his original work investigated the attitude of housewives toward instant coffee. The direct-questioning approach was deemed unsatisfactory by him so

he made up two identical shopping lists — identical except for one item. That item was coffee. One list included a jar of instant coffee while the other included a one-pound can of Maxwell House Coffee (drip grind). He asked a number of housewives to write a brief description of the personality and character of each of the women who had prepared the shopping lists. His results indicated that the two women were perceived quite differently.

Detailed Analyses

The housewives wrote a very detailed analysis of each of the women, despite the fact that there was only one apparent difference between them. There was little hesitancy on the part of the housewives to make statements and to draw inferences and conclusions about the character or personality of each of the women.

The woman who purchased the instant coffee was perceived by the group in a very negative way. She was described generally as a very shallow individual, a social climber, and a person with little regard for others.

The woman who purchased the drip grind coffee was judged more positively by the housewives. She was described as loving her family, concerned about people, not socially minded, and an ideal wife and mother. M. Haire thus inferred that the differences in the perceptions of the housewives reflected the differences in the participants' attitudes about instant coffee, and persons who purchased it.

A "Normal" Group

The housewives sampled by M. Haire in his study can be described as middle class, white, and psychologically normal. Haire was unconcerned about including in his group a wide cross-sampling through various socio-economic and/or intellectual levels. His pri-

mary concern was whether or not a group of people actually perceived the two women differently.

In the study reported here, the "disguised technique" was used, but a new dimension and goal was added to make the research more meaningful. This dimension concerned the nature and background of the individuals asked to participate in the study. It was decided to involve members of the following socio-economic and/or intellectual groups: university graduate and undergraduate students, Black high school students, and seriously-ill mental patients who were hospitalized for a variety of reasons. This grouping represented a wide cross-section of our society.

Two Questions Explored

The study intended to explore two questions. The first was, "Will the participants, despite their varied backgrounds, respond in roughly the same manner?" The second question, directed primarily at you, the reader, is, "Will you be able to identify the participants as belonging to one of the three groups — educated white, disadvantaged Black, or seriously-ill mental patient — on the basis of

the responses they give?" As these individuals present their analyses, will you be able to categorize them? Keep these questions in mind from this point on. Your conclusions, if carefully drawn, may broaden your field of perception and may yield important knowledge about yourself in relation to others.

In the research reported here, participants were asked to describe the personality and character of two men, Man "A" and Man "B," on the basis of the information presented in THE PERCEPTUAL TEST in the box at the bottom of this page.

As can be seen, the two men are identical except for the automobiles they own and drive.

A number of perceptions will now be presented as they were written by several of the participants in this study. Be sure to keep the previously mentioned questions in mind as you read along. To which of the three groups does the person writing belong? Are the various responses quite similar? Identification of the individual writers may be found at

the end of this article.

Participant No. 1:

Man "A" lives within his income. He buys his clothes and car in accordance with what he can reasonably afford. He enjoys himself and enjoys helping others. Strictly on the basis of his car, I would say he doesn't put on a false front. He is the same man at home as out in public. He goes out to hunt and fish for the enjoyment of the sport. He and his wife go out to see a good show and enjoy an evening out together. "A good honest Joe."

Man "B" is a social climber (strictly on basis of type of car owned). He is a different person at home from public. He joined the clubs for the status involved. The "big" boys go on hunting trips so he likes to go for the effect. He will probably scrimp on some items to be able to afford a high-class car. He is very conscious of his public image. He might take his wife out for the places they go, not to enjoy an evening out. A man out to fight his way up.

Is the writer above an educated white, a disadvantaged Black, or a seriously ill mental patient?

Participant No. 2:

Man "A" likes good things as long as they are under reasonable cost. He is open-minded, and has consideration for his wife. He fields that with an income of \$15,000 and a home of \$25,000 he should balance this with a medium priced car. Man A fields that he can afford to purchase \$100 suits and not go overboard with his expenses. He holds a high rank in most of his organizations. He is a good hunter and fisher.

Man "B" likes flashie things. He takes his wife out to be a show-off. He says "a car should

THE PERCEPTUAL TEST

Man "A":

He owns a \$25,000 home
He has a \$15,000 job
He occasionally takes his wife out to dinner and a show
He owns a 1973 Ford
He purchases \$100 suits
He belongs to four civic organizations
He likes to hunt and fish

Man "B":

He owns a \$25,000 home
He has a \$15,000 job
He occasionally takes his wife out to dinner and a show
He owns a 1973 Cadillac
He purchases \$100 suits
He belongs to four civic organizations
He likes to hunt and fish

be like a home" but he really cannot afford to buy a Cadillac, and a wardrobe of \$100 suits will complete the Cadillac. Mr. B. has an ego that craves for leadership or to be the boss. He probably holds a high rank in his organization. He is a happy-go-lucky sportsman and hunts for the fun of it.

Is the writer above an educated white, a disadvantaged Black, or a seriously ill mental patient?

Participant No. 3:

"A" is a "middle-class-man" of long standing as was his father before him etc. He lives in a well established suburban neighborhood and works in an established business firm in town. He has always considered himself a quiet respectable citizen. He doesn't like attention drawn to himself in a way which might look as if he were bragging or showing off. But he does like quiet attention. He likes people to think of him as an attractive, well dressed man (no run of the mill Joe), a good dependable solid guy who spends time with wife and family (and prefers an evening at home to a night on the town), a pillar of the suburban community in that he is involved in church work, PTA and Cub Scouts. Oh, but don't get me wrong, he likes to be a man's man too and enjoys Rotary, the challenge of hunting and fishing and a good pipe.

"B" is also a middle classed citizen but he worked to this status via his own effort and no family helped him. His job is good, but not so well established as "A's." He likes to have others acknowledge his status and strives to make them conscious of it through a new (through moderately priced)

home in a new housing development, a rather fancy car, and nice though sometimes flashy clothes. As his peer "A," he likes to be noticed but "loud noticing" is not displeasing to him. He likes public acclamations of his achievements in the town's Shriners, Rotary, City commissioners (and once was mayor!) and Baptist church work. And he's an all around guy too - he considers himself a rugged outdoors man - he likes to hunt and fish and drink beer with the boys; he likes his public image to include his being a family man and he occasionally takes his wife out to prove it.

Is the writer above an educated white, a disadvantaged Black, or a seriously ill mental patient?

Participant No. 4:

Man "A" seems to be a very conservative person, maybe one paying cash for things instead of having charge accounts. Trying to save for this children's future and also take part in community affairs thro' the civic organizations and etc. I believe his hunting may be his only form of recreation and done on a moderate amount of money but with a whole hearted feeling. I also feel he is a home body and loves his family.

In my opinion, Man "B" may be trying to put on airs (or has a wife wanting to do so). Living beyond his means financially and social wise also doing everything on a big scale. Wanting prestige in the community and will settle for nothing less.

Fishing or hunting maybe be an outlet but to me it seems it would be to keep up with the

crowd. Maybe less attentive to his family and a more out-going person.

Is the writer above an educated white, a disadvantaged Black, or a seriously ill mental patient?

Participant No. 5:

Mr. "A" is a conformist who would, upon occasion, act in a rash manner. He feels obligated to his town and would eulogize the old oaken bucket if it was expected of him.

His rashness may lie in the fact that his time payments are really more than he can afford in order to keep up with the Joneses'. His personality is bland and a bit of a bore.

Mr. "B" likes to do everything with a flourish and will rob Peter to pay Paul. He hunts and fishes because he honestly enjoys doing these things, only his boat is larger and his gun must be more powerful than the other fellow's. He keeps up a front because his ego demands it. He is outspoken and brash. He is never lonely and considered a good Joe tho' a bore and offensive at times.

Is the writer above an educated white, a disadvantaged Black, or a seriously ill mental patient?

Participant No. 6:

I don't believe I can tell you much about this man's (A) personality and character. However, I will indulge in some speculation. This man has somewhat over-indulged in buying his home and car. He is probably making large car payments and house payments. His membership in 4 civic organizations, plus hunting and fishing, probably keep him quite busy. If he lives in the South, I think he is probably an insurance

salesman, works hard, is an average husband. I think he probably is rather tense, but I doubt that he has enough time or money to release his tensions in extended vacations or hobbies. I suppose he is the "typical" salesman, not very good or very bad either.

This man (B) is in trouble. He has the idea that a Cadillac will give the impression of success. I suspect his occupation to be in the sales field (note: 4 civic organizations). But he is not as good as his car indicates. I believe he may have a feeling of failure, wants to bolster his own feelings with a big car.

Is the writer above an educated white, a disadvantaged Black, or a seriously ill mental patient?

Participant No. 7:

I'm afraid that I cannot begin to describe the personality and/or character of either man from the factors given.

Ignoring other factors (eg.) age, income of parents, tooth spacing, age of pubescence, condition of first "trike," etc., which are not given on your list, I might be presumptuous enough to talk of how they might deviate from the norm on other factors, if national data were available, using \$15,000 as the base variable.

There would be too many variables accounting for the purchase (and it might have been a gift, or won in a raffle) of a 1973 Cadillac (new or used) to diagnose personality and/or character - that is unless one happens to be a psychiatrist.

You know, the psychiatrists (some) were quite successful in diagnosing Goldwater's mental health from little more than you have given in your cluster. You might send the problem to

them for some really firm answers.

Is the writer above an educated white, a disadvantaged Black, or a seriously ill mental patient?

Reach Your Conclusion

At this juncture, it is important that you reach a conclusion about this study. Were you able to differentiate the participants on the basis of their answers? If you were unable to, try to reason why. And, if you haven't already done so at this point, look at all of the "Man A" responses as a group. Then, study all of the "Man B" responses. What is your conclusion? Finally, has this study taught you anything about yourself and your perception as to how others function?

The answers to all of these questions may prove helpful in your future social and vocational lives. Perceptiveness in dealing with others is of unestimable value. Pre-conceived notions, premature judging of individuals, prejudice and many other factors seriously affect our relationships with others. The successful individual takes all of these into account during each day of his working life.

Identification of the participants is as follows:

No. 1 - undergraduate, white, female student

No. 2 - Black, male, high school student

No. 3 - mentally ill, white, female

No. 4 - mentally ill, white, female

No. 5 - mentally ill, white, female

No. 6 - graduate, white, male student

No. 7 - graduate, white, male student

This research study revealed to the author a great deal about

himself and how he perceived others. What did it tell you?

EDITOR'S NOTE: The M. Haire study referred to in this article is "Projective Techniques in Marketing Research" by Mason Haire, *Journal of Marketing*, 1950.

Garnar V. Walsh is the assistant to the president, State University College at Potsdam, N.Y. He is also currently a professor of Education at the college. He has had many different administrative, research and teaching positions. He was selected as summarizer for President Nixon's National Reading Council in 1970. He has published several articles dealing with college level administration. He received the Ed.D. degree from the University of Florida.

Picture King® largest portable screen!



★ Largest tripod type screen made.

★ Heavy-Duty construction.

★ Available in sizes up to 8' x 8'.

★ Built-in keystone eliminator.

★ Choice of White Magic glass beaded surface or non-gloss Mat White.

DA-LITE

Quality projection screens for every need
DA-LITE SCREEN CO., INC., Warsaw, Ind. 46580
Write or Phone (219) 267-8101