States of Consciousness Unit Summary

Our next unit is “Consciousness.” Generally speaking, it means awareness – awareness of your surroundings based on your sensation/perception, awareness of feelings, etc. inside yourself, as well as awareness of who we are – our existence. The word consciousness sometimes refers to the waking state – the state in which a person is awake. However, does that mean that we are either conscious or unconscious? No. Consciousness is measured on a continuum. What many of you previously thought consciousness meant is known as “waking consciousness” – a state of clear, organized alertness. During an “altered state of consciousness”, changes occur in the quality and pattern of mental activity. Sleep, hypnosis, meditation, sensory deprivation, and drugs all alter consciousness in some way. However, being in an altered state of consciousness does not mean we are unconscious. We will explore these concepts in this unit.

Unit Objectives

The following is a description of learning objectives for the major content areas covered in the AP Psychology Exam during this unit, as well as the approximate percentages of the multiple-choice section devoted to each area. This listing is not intended to be an exhaustive list of topics. All of these topics are likely to appear on the AP exam in some way, shape, or form. Other material we talk about and/or in your reading could also find its way on the unit assessment.

States of Consciousness (2-4% of AP exam)

Understanding consciousness and what it encompasses is critical to an appreciation of what is meant by a given state of consciousness. The study of variations in consciousness includes an examination of the sleep cycle, dreams, hypnosis, and the effects of psychoactive drugs.

AP students in psychology should be able to do the following:

- Describe various states of consciousness and their impact on behavior.
- Discuss aspects of sleep and dreaming:
  - Stages and characteristics of the sleep cycle;
  - Theories of sleep and dreaming;
  - Symptoms and treatments of sleep disorders.
- Describe historic and contemporary uses of hypnosis (e.g. pain control, psychotherapy).
- Explain hypnotic phenomena (e.g. suggestibility, dissociation).
- Identify the major psychoactive drug categories (e.g. depressants, stimulants) and classify specific drugs, including their psychological and physiological effects.
- Discuss drug dependence, addiction, tolerance, and withdrawal.
- Identify the major figures in consciousness research (e.g. William James, Sigmund Freud, Ernest Hilgard)

Key Terms

You should eventually be able to properly and accurately use the terms at the beginning of Chapter 5 of Barron’s, as well as the terms in bold interspersed throughout the pages assigned in Coon, in written and verbal communication.

Text Readings

- Coon Chapter 6
- Barron’s Chapter 5
Planned Assignments & Assessments (subject to change)
- Reading Quiz #1: “Introduction, Sleep, & Dreams” (Coon p.181-194 & p.212-214; Barron’s p.119-125)
- Reading Quiz #2: “Hypnosis, Mediation, Sensory Deprivation, and Drugs” (Coon p.194-212; Barron’s p.125-127)
- Yoga Reflection
- Consciousness Unit Test
- Consciousness Independent Investigation

Current Timetable (subject to change)
- Last day of unit (test) planned for Monday February 9 Thursday February 12