How Mindset Affects Observations

The difference between an observation and simply seeing is that an observation requires making a connection amongst various things (Beveridge, 104). Furthermore, when we observe, we require a certain amount of attention, while seeing can be done without much effort, or conscious awareness (Herman, 26). However, there are ways our observations can be manipulated. For this paper, I will be focusing on exactly how this can be done via priming, and its connection to optical illusions, and gestalt psychology.

Priming is manipulating implicit memory to elicit a predicted response (Woltz, 429). This is usually done through words, picture, or scenarios that trigger an implicit recall. For example, based on what news you see, your real-world observations can be influenced. Constantly seeing violence and unrest may shift your mind to be more aware of similar acts that may occur around you, and feel paranoid. Consequently, if you often see news segments that show hospitality amongst people, you may view the world better than it is, which may lead to naivety (Oppong). Thus, what you are shown shapes the connections you make in the real world, whether you realize or not.

Relating this to optical illusions- which are misleading visual stimuli that trick the perceptual system to see something else (Parks)- you can be primed to regard a certain aspect of the image. For example, a specific optical illusion shows an image of a vase. However, if you were to look at it another way, you would see that the vase is comprised of two joint faces. Thus, if you were primed with words related to flowers and pots, you will most likely see the vase rather than the two faces. If you are primed with words related to facial appearance, you will most likely see the faces. Both images are there, it just depends on what you are ‘told’ to connect it to, which shapes your observation of the image.

Gestalt psychology is looking at parts as if it were a whole (Boeree). In this phenomenon, our brains connect the dots to see completed pictures rather than fragments. We can be primed to see these images as well. For example, if we are constantly bombarded by visual stimuli of a completed arrow (all lines filled in), when shown its smaller parts, we are able to make the connection from the previous seen image and state that the ‘new’ image is also an arrow, even though it deviates from the one, last seen. You will not, however, see a square. The way we are primed, with the images we see every day, affect how we fill in gaps for pictures that are only partially portrayed. Thus, these connections we make between previous seen images and new stimuli influence our reality, made through observations.

Overall, we can see that the way we are implicitly manipulated affects how we, in turn, see the world. In relating to the field of psychology, priming, connected to illusions and gestalt psychology, show how various mindsets can affect how we connect ideas.

References
Boeree, C. George. “Gestalt Psychology.” Gestalt Psychology

