

Altered states of consciousness assignment

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Altered States of Consciousness Consciousness is a state of awareness. This includes a person's feelings, sensations, ideas, and perceptions. There are many different states of consciousness. Sleep is a state of altered consciousness, characterized by certain patterns of the brain's activity and inactivity. An altered state of consciousness is when a person is not completely aware of their surroundings. Some researchers believe that we sleep to clear our minds of useless information. Other people believe that it is a type of primitive hibernation: we sleep to conserve energy.

There are four stages of sleep. In the first stage (10 min. into sleep), your pulse slows down and your muscles begin to relax. Your breathing becomes uneven, and your brain waves grow irregular. During the second stage, your brain waves occasionally shift from low amplitude, high frequency waves to high amplitude, low frequency waves. Your eyes then start to roll slowly back and forth. Thirty minutes into your sleep you enter stage three. In this stage, large-amplitude delta waves begin to sweep your brain about every second.

Stage four is the deepest sleep a person gets into. Large regular delta waves occur about 50% of the time. This indicates a person is in a deep sleep.

Talking out loud, sleepwalking, and bed wetting all occur during this deep sleep stage. Things that happen during this stage leave no trace on a person's memory. While in stage four, a person goes through a stage of sleep called REM. REM sleep is a stage of sleep characterized by rapid eye movement, a high level of brain activity, a deep relaxation of the muscles, and dreaming.

Another state of consciousness is hypnosis. Hypnosis is a state of consciousness resulting from a narrowed focus of attention and characterized by heightened suggestibility. By allowing the hypnotist to direct them, people can be made conscious of things they're usually not aware of. While a participant is hypnotized, they become highly receptive and responsive to certain internal and external stimuli. They are able to focus their attention on one tiny aspect of reality and ignore all other inputs.

The hypnotist induces a trance by slowly persuading the participant to relax and lose all interest in external distractions. The participant is not under the hypnotists control but can be convinced to do things that he or she would not normally do. However, anyone can resist hypnosis by refusing to open his or her mind to the hypnotist. Another state of consciousness is meditation. Meditation is the focusing of ones attention to clear the mind and produce relaxation. There are three major approaches to meditation. The first approach is Transcendental meditation.

Transcendental meditation involves the repetition of a mantra, usually a Sanskrit phrase. The participant sits with his or her eyes closed and meditate for 15 to 20 minutes twice a day. The second approach, mindfulness meditation, was developed from a Buddhist tradition. Mindfulness meditation focuses on the present moment. For example, the participant might move his or her focus throughout the body, from the tip of their toes to the top of their head, and paying very close attention to areas that cause pain. The third approach is breath meditation.

Breath meditation is when a participant focuses his or her respiration-the process of inhaling and exhaling in a rhythmic pattern. Most people believe that proper breathing can help one self to be stress free. Researchers agree that most people can benefit from some sort of systematic relaxation that meditation provides. Meditation has been shown to lower blood pressure, heart rate, and respiration rate. However participants only see the full affect of their cleansing meditation if the continue to practice it. Altered states of consciousness can be achieved many different ways.

One way is through the use of drugs. Psychoactive drugs are chemicals that affect the nervous system and result in altered consciousness. A psychoactive drug can range from stimulants like the caffeine in your coffee or in cola drinks to depressants like alcohol to powerful hallucinogens like marijuana and LSD. Marijuana has increased throughout the 1960s and than most of the 1970s, but since then it has declined. The active ingredient in marijuana is a complex molecule called tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), which occurs naturally in the common weed Cannabis sativa, or Indian hemp.

The effects of the drug vary from person to person and also depend on the setting in which the drug was taken and the users past experiences. In general, most marijuana users report hyperactive senses. To them, colors seem brighter, music sounds fuller, smells are stronger, foods have stronger flavors, and other experiences seem more intense than usual. To some, the world might seem more meaningful, and even the most simplest of tasks may take on an extraordinary significance in the participants day. However,

as some users have come to know, the drug can instill or heighten a variety of unpleasant experiences.

If the user is frightened, unhappy, or depressed to begin with, the chances are good that taking the drug will blow the negative feelings out of proportion so that their world, until the drug is worn off, becomes very upsetting. Cases have been reported in which marijuana appears to have helped bring on psychological disturbances to people who were already unstable before they used it. Although there is no direct evidence that marijuana causes lung cancer, the tar and other chemicals in marijuana smoke are drawn into the lungs and held for over 20 seconds, adding to the potential for hindering the lungs functions (Ray & Ksir, 1993).

Marijuana also disrupts memory formation, making it difficult to carry out mental and physical tasks. Some researchers believe that long-term use of the drug could lead to dependence. Also adults using marijuana scored lower than equal-IQ users on a twelfth-grade academic achievement test.

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