

UC Merced

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

Folk intuitions about consciousness

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4gd7t7qk>

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 39(0)

Authors

Graben, Katharina

Hamburger, Kai

Knauff, Markus

Publication Date

2017

Peer reviewed

Folk intuitions about consciousness

Katharina Graben

Justus Liebig University , Giessen, Hessa, Germany

Kai Hamburger

Justus Liebig University, Giessen, Hessa, Germany

Markus Knauff

Justus Liebig University, Giessen, Hessa, Germany

Abstract: In science and philosophy, there is still no general agreement on what ‘consciousness’ is. But how do normal people (with no education in psychology or philosophy) use the term in their everyday life? What is the folk understanding of the word “conscious”? We conducted an online study on how the general public uses the word “consciousness” in their daily life. Participants (n=445) answered the question “What is consciousness?” in four different formats: they (1) generated free definitions in their own words, (2) generated many synonyms, (3) generated one synonym, or (4) selected one alternative description in a multiple choice task. The most frequent words were: alertness, clarity, I-sensation, knowledge, perception, reflecting, and thinking. The word perception was provided most often across all formats. There was also a high correlation between all response formats. We discuss these findings and their implications for the scientific study of consciousness.