

Folk intuitions about consciousness

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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.