

Aphantasia

“Imagine a red apple in your head.” What do you see when you close your eyes?

You may see an apple, but for the 4% of the world’s population with aphantasia, they struggle to come up with that mental image.



- Aphantasia is a phenomenon where people are unable to visualize imagery.
- Suppose you were to ask a person with aphantasia to imagine something, they can probably describe the object, explain the concept, and say facts that they know about the object, but they can't conjure a mental image of the scene, face, or object.
- Aphantasia can be a familial condition -that means if an individual has congenital aphantasia, there is a 21% chance that their first-degree relative will also have it.

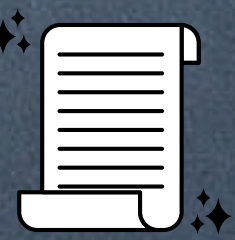
History



Aristotle first described a sixth sense of visual imagination called phantasia. While aphantasia means the absence of mental imagery, approximately 10%-15% of people have extremely vivid imagery or photographic memories, or hyperphantasia.

340 B.C.

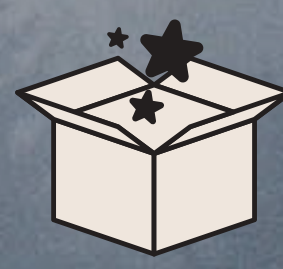
1880



Francis Galton touched upon the concept in a paper about mental imagery published. He noted that people experience various degrees of vividness in their mental visual imagery and that some may experience no visual imagery at all.

Mental imagery was considered a taboo research topic. Behaviorism rejected introspection as a way to understand behavior. But in present-day, it is embraced by scientists of all types because it is measurable.

2nd Half of 20th Century



2015



Due to a lack of consistent research, both aphantasia and hyperphantasia were only named recently by Dr. Adam Zeman, professor of cognitive and behavioral neurology at the University of Exeter in the U.K. in 2015.

Aphantasia, Other Senses, Memories



- Although aphantasia is often described as a visual condition, it is multisensory.
- Aphantasics can also have a reduced capacity to access other mental senses and experience lower levels of sensory sensitivity.
- They have more difficulty with autobiographical memory and face recognition.
- Global aphantasia - a complete absence of mental senses
- Most studies about aphantasia are focused on only visual imagination, so a lot of the multisensory components are still unknown.

Living with Aphantasia

- The experience of having aphantasia is difficult to generalize as it varies from individual to individual
- Even among visual aphantasics, people can have completely different experiences—some have no concept of visual imagery, but 63% can see vivid images in their dreams.
- Unable to visualize people and places or unable to picture the face of a loved one who has passed away can be distressing and upsetting
- Having aphantasia does not necessarily hurt a person's success in life.
- Aphantasics tend to have a higher average IQ and are less affected by scary scenery since they cannot visualize them.
- Future investigations of the condition should not only focus on its causes and effects, but also on possible recommendations on how to improve the ability to mentally visualize



RESEARCH SUMMARY BY LISA WANG
INFOGRAPHIC DESIGN AND FORMAT BY LISA WANG IN CANVA

References:

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