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Boundary Extension in Response to Food: Exploring the Role of Appetitiveness

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Abstract

Boundary extension (BE) is a cognitive phenomenon in which people seem to misperceive visual scenes. Increased attention and emotion have been shown to reduce or reverse the effects of BE (e.g., Mathews & Mackintosh, 2004). Would people for whom food is highly appetitive (vs. not) have similar responses when shown photographs containing food (vs. no food)? Our hypothesis was not supported: All participants experienced BE. More BE was observed in response to food (vs. nonfood) photographs, but this difference was more pronounced for those who served as controls and less pronounced for those who think of food as highly appetitive. We suggest that having similar perceptual experiences in response to food (vs. nonfood) photographs might be related to difficulties involving the inhibition of automatic behaviors (e.g., Mobbs et al., 2010) but argue that more research is needed to determine whether BE could be used for clinical purposes.