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Difference Between

DELUSION, HALLUCINATION & ILLUSION

3 Concepts Psychology Students Commonly Confuse

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What is a Delusion?

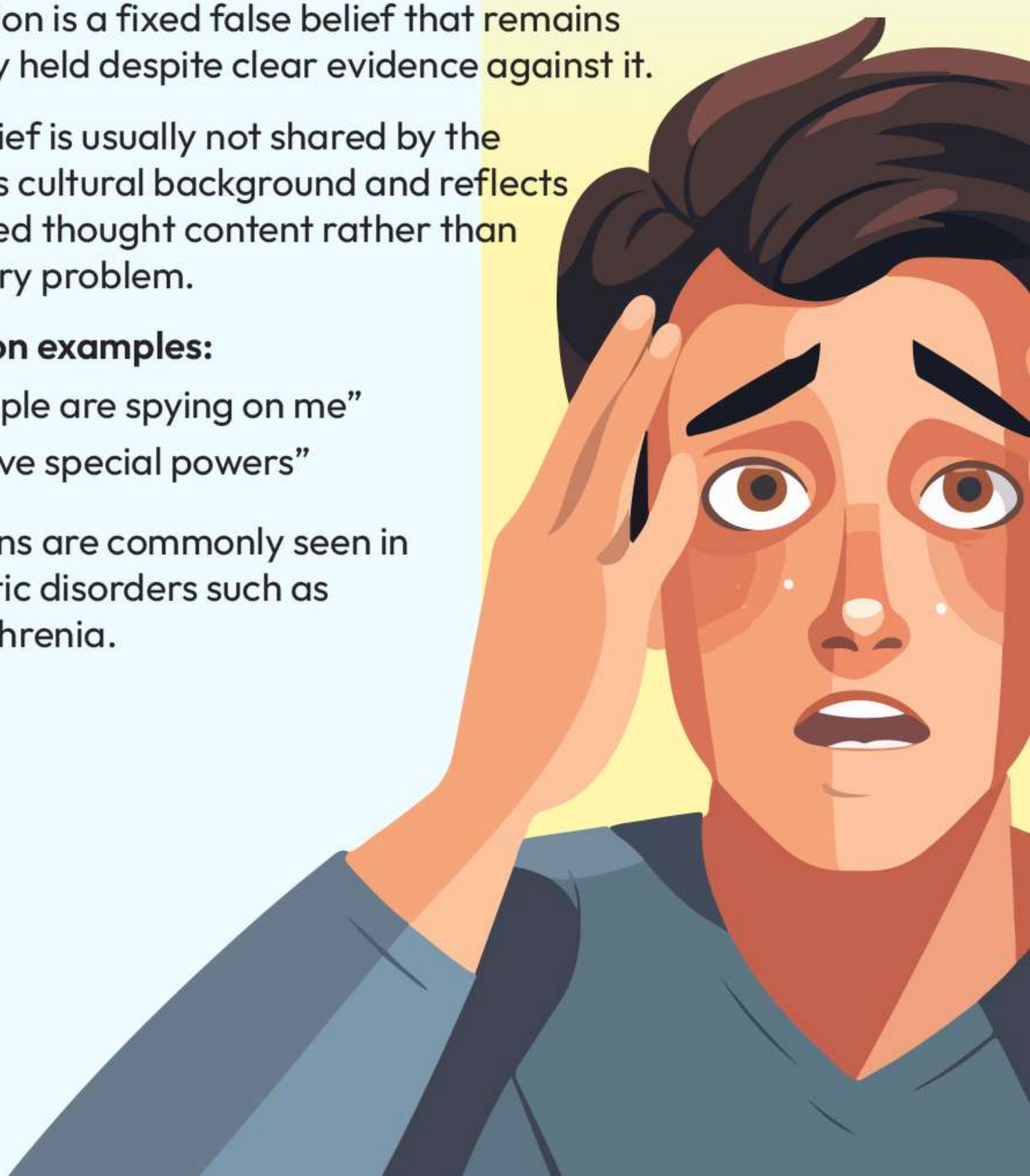
A delusion is a fixed false belief that remains strongly held despite clear evidence against it.

The belief is usually not shared by the person's cultural background and reflects disturbed thought content rather than a sensory problem.

Common examples:

- "People are spying on me"
- "I have special powers"

Delusions are commonly seen in psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia.



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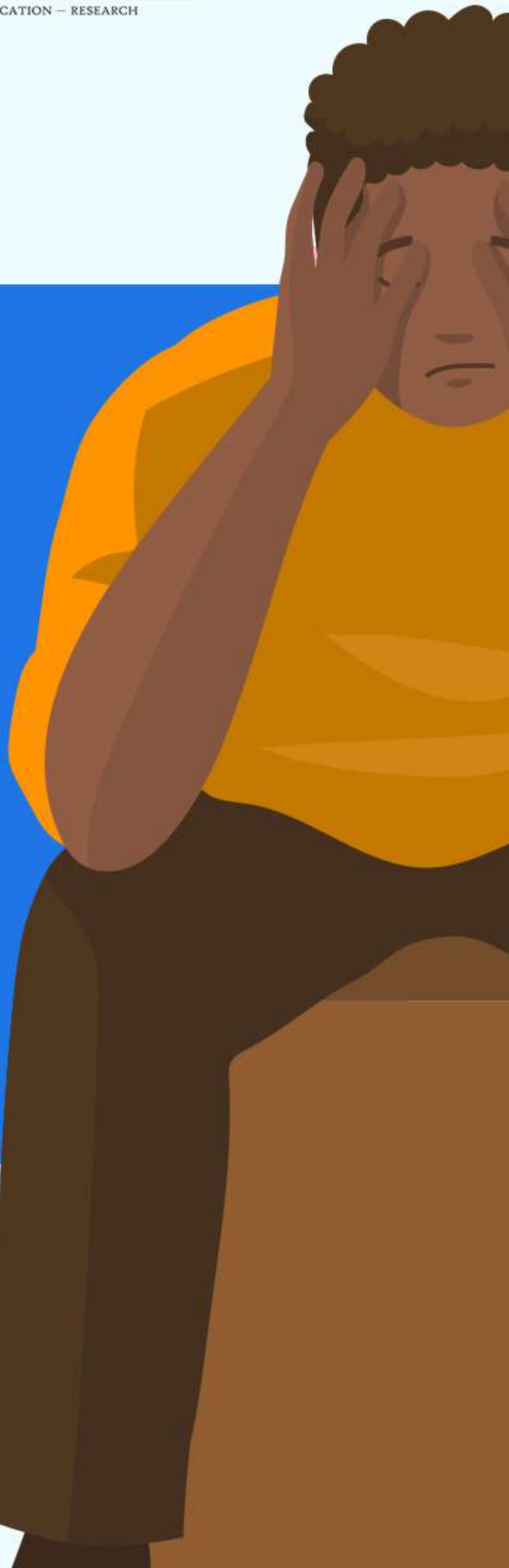
Common Types of Delusions

- **Persecutory** → "People are trying to harm me"
- **Grandiose** → "I have extraordinary powers"
- **Referential** → "TV messages are directed at me"
- **Somatic** → false beliefs related to the body



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What is a Hallucination?

A hallucination is a perception-like experience occurring without any external stimulus.

The person may:

- Hear voices
- See things
- Smell odors
- Feel sensations that are not actually present

Main feature: The experience feels completely real even though no real stimulus exists.



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Types of Hallucinations

Hallucinations can involve different sensory modalities:

- **Auditory** → hearing voices
- **Visual** → seeing things others cannot
- **Olfactory** → smelling nonexistent odors
- **Tactile** → feeling sensations on the skin



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What is an Illusion?

An illusion is the misinterpretation of a real external stimulus.

Examples:

- Mistaking a rope for a snake
- Hearing your name in background noise

Unlike hallucinations, a real stimulus is present, but it is interpreted incorrectly.

Illusions can occur even in psychologically healthy individuals, especially during fear, fatigue, or poor lighting conditions.



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Why Students Confuse Them

All three involve altered experiences of reality, but they are psychologically very different.

The key distinction:

Delusion →
false belief

Hallucination →
false perception

Illusion →
misinterpretation of a real stimulus

Understanding this difference is essential in abnormal psychology and clinical assessment.

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