

The AACCP Newsletter

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July 2009

Brain Brain, What Is Brain?

A Report on Some of the Latest Brain Research

By Leonard D. Chan

Some recent National Public Radio (NPR) programs caught my attention this month. One segment of the NPR program *Talk of the Nation* dealt with the conspiracy group called birthers and the nature of rumors, and another segment of the NPR program *Science Friday* dealt with "Why We Trust."

How this relates to the Asian and Pacific Islander American concerns and issues that are usually covered in this newsletter is a little ancillary. What fascinated me about the topics covered in these and other related programs and articles I found was the underlining brain research that is being done by scientist and researchers. When I heard those first two radio programs, I began to wonder what new brain research was being done in the subjects of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Specifically, are there scientific explanations for why we stereotype, prejudge, and discriminate, and what could be done about it?

Needless to say, my research for this article only scratches the surface of this expansive field of study. I can't explain too much on the articles that I have seen because I'm not sure if I understand them myself. I will discuss some of the basics that I have learned and supply some links to academic articles on this subject.

Summary of Various Radio Programs and Articles on Subjects Related to the Brain

Ground Up In the Rumor Mill

Talk of the Nation, July 22, 2009

- <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106890664>

In this program, host Neal Conan speaks with guest Sam Wang, professor of neuroscience at Princeton University and co-author of *Welcome to your Brain*. They discuss the nature of rumors and conspiracy believers.

Here are some of the key points from this discussion -

False rumors are aided by "source amnesia." Human memory is often faulty and alterable. What is often lost from memory is the source of where we receive some bit of information. Remembering the source to some information is the key to its credibility. Source amnesia allows falsehoods to get confused and mixed up with the truth. An example of this is some bit of information that you remember hearing, but can't remember where you heard it and whether it was even correct or not.

Compounding our confusion over the truthfulness of some information is our "bias dissimulation" or confirmation bias. We tend to remember parts of information that confirm or go along with our biases and forget or reject information that does not.

(confirmation bias - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confirmation_bias)

Strong emotions and repetition also help to reaffirm a memory, whether it is the truth or not, and can create barriers that obstruct us from seeing the truth.

In Chapter 1 of Prof. Wang's book, it describes how our brains often throw away information, takes mental shortcuts, and invent memories. An experiment is described where the subjects of the experiment show a "tendency to attribute groups of related characteristics to people without much evidence." The text goes on to say that our brain's haste to estimate likely outcomes "may also be the root cause of many of the stereotypes and prejudices that are common in society."

Why We Trust

Science Friday, July 24, 2009

- <http://www.sciencefriday.com/program/archives/200907242>

The key point in this discussion with Antonio Damasio, Professor of Neuroscience, University of Southern California was that studies confirm that we do have tendencies to initially judge people's trustworthiness by their appearance. His studies also showed that the part of the brain called the amygdala appears to have some influence over evaluation of trust. People that had damage to their amygdala tended to trust everyone.

This program led me to other related *Science Friday* programs.

The Science of Decision-Making

Science Friday, July 24, 2009

- <http://www.sciencefriday.com/program/archives/200907244>

Guests: Michael J. Frank, Assistant Professor, Brown University; Jennifer S. Lerner, Professor, Harvard University; Colin Camerer, Professor, California Institute of Technology

In this program the guests discuss various factors that play into decision making. This program covered many different points. Here's a summary.

People when confronted with choices have a tendency to choose the option that had a good outcome in the past. People with a certain gene variations may be predisposed to being open to exploring new choices when the choices are uncertain.

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Give Us Your Feedback

Please feel free to send us your reviews, comments, and book suggestions. You can contact us at -
aacpinc@asianamericanbooks.com

Up Coming Events

Here are some events that AACP will soon be attending. Invite us to your events.

Date/Time	Event	Location
Aug 6-9	OCA National Convention	St. Francis Hotel San Francisco, CA
Sept. 26	Spirit of Japantown Festival	San Jose, CA
Other Event of Interest that AACP May Not Attend		
July 25- Sept 20	California in Relief A History in Wood and Linocut Prints Includes works by George Matusaburo Hibi, Chiura Obata, and others	Saint Mary's College of CA Hearst Art Gallery Moraga, CA
July 31- Aug 2	The 11th Annual KAAN Conference (Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network)	Sheraton Hotel Denver, CO
Aug 1	San Mateo OCA Angel Island Immigration Station Tour - Contact San Mateo OCA	Angel Island, CA
Aug. 5-8	Chinese American Citizens Alliance 50th Biennial National Convention	Industry Hills, CA
Aug. 8-9	Pistahan Festival and Parade Filipino arts, culture and cuisine	Yerba Buena Gardens San Francisco, CA
Aug. 15-23	69th Annual Nisei Week	Little Tokyo Los Angeles, CA
Aug. 22-23 10am-6pm	22nd Annual Oakland Chinatown StreetFest	Oakland Chinatown Oakland, CA
Sept. 12	Midori Kai Arts & Craft Boutique	MV Buddhist Temple Mountain View, CA
Sept. 19-20 11am-6pm	Chinatown Autumn Moon Festival	Chinatown San Francisco, CA
Sept. 24-26	California Council For History Education	Hilton Orange County Costa Mesa, CA
Sept. 26-27	Kaiser Permanente San Francisco International Dragon Boat Festival	Treasure Island San Francisco, CA
Sept. 27 11am-4pm	Chinatown Mall Culture Fair Historic Chinatown Mall	Sacramento, CA

Editor's Message

Hello Everyone,

I saw Ibuki Hibi Lee this past month. For those of you that don't follow the newsletter that closely, we interviewed her back in July of 2005 about her mother's art work and their book. She told me about some of her father's artwork being exhibited at Saint Mary's College of California, Hearst Art Gallery, in Moraga. We hope some of you get a chance to see it. Thank you Ibuki for that information.

Hope to see you at up coming events. Have a nice summer.

Bye.

Leonard Chan
Executive Editor

What I Like About You America

July is usually the month where I write a special article for my friend Gary - something positive about America. In an attempt to spur some ideas to write about, I read Thomas Paine's Common Sense. Reading old English can be pretty challenging if you haven't done it for some time. I didn't get any grand ideas for an article except I found his ideas to be quite radical for his time. Perhaps that is the legacy that Paine left behind - America's greatest is in its freedom of thought and ideas.

We no longer have a monopoly on greatness in practically anything, but we are the originators of many radical ideas. Not all of these ideas are necessarily good ones, but thinking out of the box is sometimes what is needed just as it was for Thomas Paine back in his day.

One other idea I had for this article - a customer came up to me and mentioned the amazingly courteous treatment he got from a sales person in Japan. I replied to him that I guess Americans aren't as polite. He seemed a little taken back by my remark. At that moment, it occurred to me that he thought I was putting down Americans - people other than me. For those of you that are not in the habit of hearing Asian Americans using the word American as a synonym for Caucasian - it never occurred to me that I was using it in that sense. To me I was referring to myself. I am an American, a person with no other affiliation, and that's about the best thing I can say about us at this time. Hope that works for you Gary.

Here's the haiku you suggested I write.

*My America
No longer best anymore
But we keep trying*

Brain Brain, What Is Brain?

(Continued from page 1)

Integral emotions are feelings that have a direct connection to the decision being made. Incidental emotions are feelings that may be carried over from a time before we are confronted with a decision. Incidental emotions such as anger can play much more of a role in our decision making than we may think.

Incidental anger makes you more optimistic - predisposes you to believing things are going to turn out your way, makes you take more risks because you perceive less risk, makes you think more heuristically rather than systematically, gives you a sense of control and certainty, and causes you to think less deeply. See the article Portrait of The Angry Decision Maker.

Neuroscientist, psychologist, and even economist are using new tools to study the human thought process. One of these tools is functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fmri>. fMRI gives scientist and researchers a way to peer inside the human brain while we think and see what general areas of the brain are utilized for that thought. By knowing the general map of the brain, scientist can electrically stimulate a certain brain region or alter brain chemistry to see if it triggers certain thoughts. These maps of the brain generated from fMRI can also be helpful in designing new brain experiments.

Do You Want to Believe?

Science Friday, October 3, 2008

- <http://www.sciencefriday.com/program/archives/200810037>

The key point in this discussion between host Ira Flatow and guest Jennifer Whitson, Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at Austin, is that there is a strong correlation between a lack of control and belief in conspiracies and illusions.

Research shows that in circumstances in which a person is not in control, they're more likely to see illusions, notice patterns where none exist, and be convinced in conspiracy theories.

"People see false patterns in all types of data, imagining trends in stock markets, seeing faces in static, and detecting conspiracies between acquaintances. This suggests that lacking control leads to a visceral need for order - even imaginary order," said Jennifer Whitson.

This also explains why there are so many superstitions related to

sporting events, gambling, the weather, and any other things that are out of our control. When I was a software engineer, whenever we couldn't figure out the cause of a problem and it would somehow disappear, I would call this voodoo programming and voodoo computing.

On a more serious note, this also explains why groups often scapegoat and blame others when times get bad. It's not too hard to make the jump and conclude that the lack of control is at the heart of much of the discrimination, hatred, violence, wars, and other problems of the world.

Other Related Academic Articles on the Subject

Biography of and list of articles by Susan T. Fiske, Professor of Psychology, Princeton University - a leading researcher on stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.

- Biography and Article List - <http://fiske.socialpsychology.org/>
- Article List - <http://unjobs.org/authors/susan-t.-fiske>

(Dis)respecting versus (Dis)liking

Susan T. Fiske, Jun Xu, and Amy C. Cuddy
<http://www.people.hbs.edu/acuddy/1999,%20fiske,%20xu,%20cuddy,%20&%20glick,%20JSI.pdf>

A Model of (often mixed) Stereotype Content

Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J., Glick, P., & Xu, J. (2002).
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82, 878-902.
http://www2.uni-jena.de/svw/igc/studies/ss04/Fiske_Cuddy_Glick_Xu_2002-JPSP.pdf

Controlling Racial Prejudice

Mary E. Wheeler and Susan T. Fiske
http://www.psychologicalscience.org/pdf/ps/race_fear.pdf

Dehumanizing the Lowest of the Low


Lasana T. Harris and Susan T. Fiske
Neuro-imaging responses to extreme outgroups. Psychological Science, 17, 847-853.
http://homepages.nyu.edu/~lh65/Harris_Fiske_2006.pdf

Social Groups that Elicit Disgust are Differentially Processed in the mPFC

Lasana T. Harris and Susan T. Fiske
Social Cognitive Affective Neuroscience, 2, 45-51.
http://homepages.nyu.edu/~lh65/Harris&Fiske_2007.pdf

ADDITIONS TO OUR WEBSITE

The following books are discounted for subscribers to our newsletter. The discounts on these books end August 21, 2009.

	<p>One By Kathryn Otoshi 2008, 32 pages, Hardback.</p> <p>Kathryn Otoshi's book One is a creative new fable that shows a way of dealing with bullies. One's main characters are spots of colors and a brave and strong numeral 1. When Red picks on Blue, none of the other colors step in to defend Blue. Eventually Red begins to bully the other colors too. When 1 stands up to Red the other colors learn to stand up for themselves and in the process transform into colored numbers.</p> <p>Item #3565, Normally \$16.95 ... for newsletter subscribers \$13.56</p>
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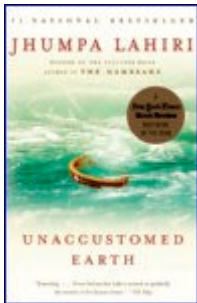
Cycle of Rice Cycle of Life A Story of Sustainable Farming

By Jan Reynolds
2009, 46 pages, Hardback.

Cycle of Rice, Cycle of Life is a fascinating real life study of past and present rice farming practices on the island of Bali in Indonesia. Contrary to the notion that technological advances in farming techniques are always good farming and ecological practices, Cycle of Rice, Cycle of Life shows that some traditional practices are better and more sustainable.

Having taken forestry and geography courses in college on this very subject, I find Jan Reynolds' book to be a great introduction to kids and even adults about the issues and complexities of sustainable farming techniques - it's very relevant to our present day ecological concerns.

Item #3564, Normally \$19.95 ... for newsletter subscribers **\$15.96**



Unaccustomed Earth

By Jhumpa Lahiri
2009, 352 pages, Paperback.

Unaccustomed Earth is a collection of eight short stories. As in Jhumpa Lahiri's previous work, the novel The Namesake, the characters are vividly detailed South Asian Americans. Lahiri's writing makes you feel like you really know these characters and also provides a window into Indian culture. This is award winning writer Jhumpa Lahiri's third major work.

Item #3567, Normally \$15.00 ... for newsletter subscribers **\$12.00**

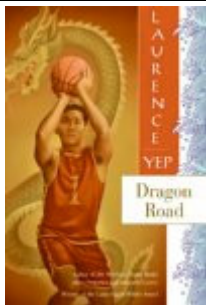


Auntie Tiger

By Laurence Yep
Illustrated by Insu Lee
2009, 30 pages, Hardback.

When a tiger disguised as an aunt confronts two bickering Chinese sisters, they learn valuable lessons about listening to elders, and helping and taking care of each other. Auntie Tiger is award winning children's book author Laurence Yep's adaptation of a Chinese version of Little Red Riding Hood.

Item #3563, Normally \$17.99 ... for newsletter subscribers **\$14.39**



Dragon Road Golden Mountain Chronicles: 1939

By Laurence Yep
2008, 320 pages, Hardback.

Back in the Depression Era when barnstorming independent pro sports teams were common, there was an all Chinese American basketball team, that toured the United States and Canada, called the Hong Wah Kues. Dragon Road is a fictionalized story about a young out of work Chinese American living in a segregated 1939 San Francisco. His great basketball skills lead him to joining the Dragons - a professional basketball team loosely based on the Hong Wah Kues. Dragon Road is the latest addition to Laurence Yep's Golden Mountain Chronicle series of books.

Item #3566, Normally \$16.99 ... for newsletter subscribers **\$13.59**