

Observations

January 19, 2005

Iowa Lab Vandalized

On the weekend of November 13, 2004, vandals dumped chemicals, damaged computers, and freed research animals at the University of Iowa. Most of the damage took place in the behavioral and cognitive science division of the psychology department.

“This will be a major setback in terms of research,” said APS Charter Member Gregg Oden, chair of the department. “We don’t know how much damage has been done.”

The vandalism included laboratories where research animals were housed. An undetermined number of mice and rats were missing, and more than 30 computers were damaged, university officials said. According to an Iowa press release, most of the damage was in Spence Labs and in the east wing of Seashore Hall, both of which are home to the department of psychology. Uncertainty about the extent of the damage, including the deliberate dumping of chemicals, prompted police to evacuate Spence Labs and all of Seashore Hall, which also houses the school of journalism and the department of sociology.

There were no reports of injuries to faculty, staff, or students in connection with the incident. University officials are still assessing the damages, but said they expected the monetary value to be in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Perhaps relatedly, a nearly completed science building under construction at the University of Minnesota-Duluth was also vandalized sometime over that same weekend. Law enforcement officials, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, are currently investigating, and police officials said there is no evidence, thus far, linking the two crimes.

Tom Wolfe Prizes Psychology

The opening pages of Tom Wolfe’s new book, *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, describe the Nobel Prize-winning accomplishments of fictional psychologist Victor Starling. Starling removed the amygdala – the control center for emotions – from 30 cats, causing them to enter a state of “sexual arousal hypermanic in the extreme.” The de-amygdalized cats were then placed in relative proximity to control cats, which, after a period of time, exhibited the same sexual arousal, though their amygdalae were completely intact.

Sterling’s discovery that social environments could “overwhelm the genetically determined responses of perfectly normal, healthy animals” earned him the Nobel Prize; it also serves as a metaphor for the remainder of Wolfe’s book, which explores a similar phenomenon pervading student behavior at Dupont University.

Outside the covers, APS Fellow Daniel Kahneman, Princeton University, is the only Nobel Laureate with a PhD in psychology. Kahneman received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2002. Psychology professor and William James Fellow Award winner Herbert Simon won the Nobel in 1978, though his PhD was in political science. Wolfe also references APS President-Elect Michael S. Gazzaniga, whose book *The Social Brain* comes up as a reading assignment from Starling to Simmons.

New Editors

Beginning in January 2005, Harry Reis will be placed on the masthead as editor of *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, and Morton Ann Gernsbacher, University of Wisconsin, will become co-editor of *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*.

Reis, who takes over for Alan Kazdin, has assembled an Advisory Board of psychologists to help solicit the best articles in the field. “These are my scouts,” Reis said. “They survey the landscape of psychological science for topics and articles that would be of interest to our readers.”

Gernsbacher joins founding *PSPI* co-editor Stephen J. Ceci, and succeeds founding co-editor Robert A. Bjork. Her profile will appear in the February 2005 *Observer*. For more information on these American Psychological Society journals, visit www.psychologicalscience.org/journals.

NIA Establishes Six New Roybal Centers

The National Institute on Aging, or NIA, part of the National Institutes of Health, recently announced the establishment of six new Edward R. Roybal Centers for Research on Applied Gerontology.

The centers – at the University of Indiana, Princeton University, Stanford University, the RAND corporation, and the Oregon Health and Sciences University – will join the four existing Roybal Centers to conduct research on patient management; well-being; how to forecast the effects of medical breakthroughs; the effects of policy on the decisions people make medically, and economically; and new ways to use technology to measure and provide health care. The Roybal Centers are part of NIA’s Behavioral and Social Research Program, which, along with basic biological and clinical research, addresses issues affecting the health and well-being of older people and their families.

APS Fellow and Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman will be the principal investigator at the Princeton center. Princeton will develop Kahneman’s methods on introducing important psychological and social components to measure well-being on a more effective basis than traditional approaches.

Principal investigators at the other centers are Christopher M. Callahan at Indiana, Alan Garber at Stanford, Dana Goldman and Arie Kapteyn at the two RAND centers, and Jeffrey Kaye at Oregon. APS Fellow and Charter Member Laura L. Carstensen is co-PI with Garber at Stanford.

“Building on a foundation of strong basic findings, this new group of Roybal Centers has the potential to develop highly innovative and practical solutions for a number of very real and pressing problems,” said Richard Suzman, associate director of the NIA’s Behavioral and Social Research Program. “These include how to help make better medical and health-related decisions and to develop a more accurate

measure of quality of life that could be used to measure the impact of clinical interventions on people's well-being."

Authorized by Congress in 1993 and named for former House Select Committee on Aging Chair Edward R. Roybal, the centers are designed to move promising social and behavioral basic research findings out of the laboratory and into programs, practices, and policies that will improve the lives of older people and the capacity of society to adapt to societal aging. Established for five years, the centers will each receive a total of \$1.8 million in funding in their first year.

More information on these programs, as well as consumer-oriented publications on healthy aging, can be found on at www.nia.nih.gov.

Cantor Inaugurated

On November 5, 2004, former APS Board Member Nancy Cantor was inaugurated as the 11th Chancellor and President of Syracuse University. Thousands of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members attended the inauguration ceremony in the Carrier Dome.

Déjà Vu Reloaded

Despite what Keanu Reeves might have us believe, déjà vu is not simply "a glitch in the matrix." But it's not that far off, either.

A recent review, published in the December 2004 issue of *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, found that the déjà vu illusion occurs when a person has an inappropriate feeling of familiarity in a situation that is objectively unfamiliar or new. The amorphous nature of this experience has made identifying its etiology challenging, but recent advances in neurology and the understanding of implicit memory and attention are clarifying this cognitive illusion.

A number of scenarios may cause a person to experience déjà vu. The first is a brief change in normal neural transmission speed, which creates a slightly longer separation between identical messages received from two separate pathways. As a result, the second message is interpreted as duplicating an earlier experience, rather than being integrated into one seamless event.

Déjà vu can also be caused by a brief split in a continuous perceptual experience, which could result from external or internal distractions. The split gives the impression of two separate perceptual events. Another possible scenario underlying déjà vu is the activation of implicit familiarity for some portion of the present experience without an accompanying conscious recollection of the prior encounter.

The research suggests that procedures that involve degraded or occluded stimulus presentation, divided attention, subliminal mere exposure, and hypnosis may prove especially useful in further understanding this enigmatic cognitive illusion. For all its work on double-takes, however, the research did not examine the phenomenon of why successful Keanu Reeves movies – "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure," "Speed," and "The Matrix" – failed to spawn decent sequels.

-Alan S. Brown

Alan S. Brown is author of the *Current Directions* article “The Déjà Vu illusion.”

Google Searches Scholar

In late 2004, [Google](#) launched a new Google Scholar search service, www.scholar.google.com, which provides the ability to search for scholarly literature.

Aimed at scientists and academic researchers, Google Scholar enables users to search specifically for peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, preprints, abstracts, and technical reports.

Google worked with publishers to gain access to material normally locked behind subscription barriers, and therefore “invisible” to Web searchers. In addition to documents and abstracts, Google Scholar also lists scientific citations, as well as ways to locate materials that are not available online.

More information at <http://scholar.google.com/scholar/about.html>.

Loftus Wins Grawemeyer

Former APS President Elizabeth Loftus, University of California, Irvine, won the 2005 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for Psychology.

The fifth awarding of the \$200,000 prize for outstanding ideas in the field of psychology went to Loftus, whose research on false recollections and the reliability of eyewitness reports and memories “recovered” through therapy has affected the way law enforcement agencies and the court system view such testimony.

Loftus has shown that people not only forget but also falsely remember, meaning that they sincerely and vividly can recall events that never happened when information suggested to them becomes entwined with their memory of what actually happened. She points out that the individual may not be able to separate the real threads of memory from the added strands of suggestion.

Loftus’ research has implications for law and for psychotherapy’s methods of probing memory. She has testified or consulted in many nationally publicized cases, including trials involving Michael Jackson, Rodney King, and the Oklahoma City bombing. She is a recipient of the American Psychological Society’s William James and James McKeen Cattell Fellow Awards, and she has been elected to the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

For more information on Loftus, go to www.grawemeyer.org.

Church Gives James Address

On October 16, 2004, William James Distinguished Lecturer Russell M. Church, Brown University,

addressed the 44th Annual Meeting of the New England Psychological Association, or NEPA. Church's presentation, "The Beauty of a Good Mathematical Model of Behavior" was delivered with convincing simplicity, perhaps in deference to NEPA's large undergraduate audience.

Using a quantitative version of the Turing test, APS Fellow and Charter Member Church demonstrated visual comparisons of his lab's results with the actual behavior of an operantly guided rat. The original Turing test examines a machine's capability to perform human-like conversation. In the test, a human judge engages in a natural language conversation with two other parties, one a human and the other a machine. If the judge cannot reliably tell which is which, then the machine is said to pass the test. It is assumed that both the human and the machine try to appear human.

In his modified version, Church found strong similarities between the model and the actual rat, evidenced in type, pattern, and frequency of behavior.

Church emphasized that this model is presently limited to simple environments. However, the incorporation of classical and operant conditioning procedures simulated by a packet theory of timing was impressive. The William James Distinguished Lecture series is sponsored by the American Psychological Society.