MLODINOW Eisei

Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior
Leonard Mlodinow

Our conscious mind remembers a small fraction of the input it receives, but that does not mean the rest is lost. To protect us from sensory overload, our unconscious mind stores a tremendous amount of information that, while often vital to our functioning and survival, does not need to clutter our thoughts every minute of every day. And what the unconscious mind does not remember, it invents. Leonard Mlodinow, PhD, explores how the unconscious mind controls our behavior in ways we do not even realize in Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior.

According to Mlodinow, the unconscious mind is everywhere. Advertisers have capitalized on it to build “brand preference,” despite there being no discernable difference between a product and its competitors. In addition to questioning the source of our preferences, Mlodinow challenges us to question our own memory. The unconscious mind can cause us to vividly remember experiences that actually never happened—a function of our mind making things up to fill in the blanks when we cannot actually recall.

As a species, our social and emotional connections often transcend the need for language. As humans evolved, our conscious mind helped us stay alive under harsh prehistoric conditions. However, as humans found social groups to be advantageous, our unconscious mind became valuable in helping us navigate the resulting complex network of social behaviors. Interestingly, the brain structure associated with the pain we feel in an awkward social situation is also associated with the emotional component of physical pain.

Mlodinow explores the role of the unconscious mind in stereotyping, including the judgments we form about people based not on what they say, but on how they say it. Pitch, timbre, volume, cadence, speed, and modulation all send signals the unconscious mind perceives, and that leads to judgments of the speaker’s character and even their state of mind. Mlodinow observes that the mind constructs emotions based on limited data rather than from direct perception, much like it fills in gaps in memories the mind cannot recall and images the human eye cannot fully see. “[O]ur subliminal mind combines information about our physical state with other data arising from social and emotional contexts to determine what we are feeling.”

When directing the unconscious mind inward instead of outward, we perceive ourselves with exaggerated strengths and minimized weaknesses. Our unconscious mind provides our self-perception the ambiguity it needs to construct a narrative for ourselves that is bigger than life and that we believe because it comes from within. In this way, the distortion maintains what Mlodinow calls the “illusion of objectivity” that serves as the foundation for each individual’s unique perception of reality.

Mlodinow does an outstanding job of combining scientific research with storytelling to bring the unconscious mind to life for lay readers as well as those who are knowledgeable in the neurosciences. His recounting of early, arguably unethical, psychological research involving actual sham surgical procedures is simultaneously alarming and engaging. Of particular value and applicability to medical communicators are the direct correlations of this narrative to ourselves and the indirect but easily extrapolated correlations to our interactions with employers and clients, and our work.

Reviewer: Brian G. Bass, MWC.
Brian is President of Bass Global, Inc., in Fort Myers, Florida.

* * *

The Ethos of Medicine in Postmodern America: Philosophical, Cultural, and Social Considerations
Arnold R. Eiser
Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014; hardback, 205 pages, $38.00

Dr. Arnold R. Eiser’s book The Ethos of Medicine in Postmodern America: Philosophical, Cultural, and Social Considerations discusses the burgeoning 21st-century health care corporate bureaucracy, along with the role of technology, the focus on consumerism, and the leveling of hierarchy in medicine. How has postmodern American culture contributed to the increase in centralized bureaucracies, the decrease in overall physician morale, and the change in the patient-physician relationship in the postmodern era? Drawing upon cultural observations from leading postmodern thinkers, Eiser strives to provide a perspective for understanding changes within health care delivery and what can be done to improve the system.

Our society should prioritize public discourse on the impact of what Eiser calls “the three big Cs” of American medicine: consumerism, computerization, and corporatization. He questions whether advancements in computer technology have improved patient care as much as they have increased corporate control and profits. He argues that corporate influence and bureaucratic control via the use of computerized performance measurements and protocols have led to a decrease in clinician decision-making with respect to the individual patient.
Over the past half century, bureaucracy has increased in the practice of medicine, and the patient–physician relationship has shifted. Eiser reflects on the erosion of the patient–physician relationship in clinical medicine and the potential reduction in individualized patient care, both of which have occurred during the same timeframe that physician burnout has been on the rise.

Eiser challenges the reader to consider difficult issues such as societal resource allocations, the cost effectiveness of technology, and the risk or benefit for patients within an improved American health care system. The author suggests that changes in patient responsibilities are an integral part of an improved system. He states that patients should complete advance directives to make known their preferences regarding treatment for serious health issues, and patients should modify their expectations to realistically reflect the capabilities of current medical practice. These changes could lead to a more responsible citizen-patient model versus a strict consumerist model. Lastly, Eiser ponders, “Would health-centered medical care that puts patient health and rational understanding of a full life expectancy at the center make more sense than a consumerist model of medical care?”

The author’s experience as a professor of medicine and researcher in medical education innovation, patient education, and bioethics is relevant to the ideas presented and questions posed in this book. The use of subheadings and mini-summary sections provides the reader with a clear idea of the purpose of each chapter. Although the author spends more time discussing the problems within the health care system than suggesting potential solutions, the interdisciplinary discussion gives the reader a solid framework for understanding the complex issues that constitute the American health care system. Shifting from the current profit-centered health care delivery system to a more patient-centered system, as Eiser suggests, would be a large collaborative undertaking that is worthwhile for patients, health care providers, and anyone working in health services research to consider.

Reviewer: Monique A. Pond, PhD
Monique is a former Medical Writer and Consultant at Whitsell Innovations, Inc, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

* * *

**The Role of Emotions in Preventative Health Communication**

Jessica Gall Myrick, PhD
Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015, Hardcover, 283 pages, $99.00

In *The Role of Emotions in Preventative Health Communication*, Jessica Gall Myrick, PhD, calls for more and higher-quality research on the topic introduced by the title of this scholarly work. About half of the volume focuses on theoretical foundations and what is known about individual emotions, such as guilt, sadness, and hope, from psychology and communication research. Myrick explores both the negative and well-studied, such as fear, and the positive and more newly recognized, such as elevation or inspiration. In nearly every negative case there is a discrepancy in reality, or a perceptively inevitable version of the future, with what the individual thinks they should experience. The positive cases are more nuanced, tapping into what a person thinks they are capable of or would like to be capable of. These initial chapters also include sections on engagement with public health policies, as studying the role of emotions in politics has a much longer history than in health communication.

The later chapters are spent on preventative health communication contexts in which a health communicator might apply different emotion-focused strategies, such as traditional campaigns or social media. For example, the antismoking truth® campaign, initiated in Florida in the 1990s, utilized the anger young people feel toward being manipulated by framing tobacco companies as manipulative. The typical reaction to feeling anger is to seek retribution, which the target audience enacted by not supporting the tobacco industry through product sales. More recently, exercise-focused video games with health messaging can evoke hope in an individual that they can replicate the success of characters with whom they identify or exemplars in the social community affiliated with the game.

Myrick treats each chapter as a stand-alone scholarly essay, with appropriate section headings, adequate context, and reference lists. The introduction and conclusion sections tie the chapters together into a metanarrative reflecting on what is known, but mostly on what is not known about emotion in communication in general, let alone the specific context of preventative health communication. Subsequently, Myrick frequently relies on studies on the role of emotion in entertainment messaging. Myrick expresses a keen awareness of the limitations of what had been researched up until the book was written and the methodology used in those studies. Throughout the work, and particularly in the Health Information Seeking chapter and overall conclusion, Myrick discusses how life experience and mood prior to and at the time of message consumption affects reactions and behaviors based on consuming messaging. Although this information is pertinent to understanding how different audiences may alter their behavior differently, or choose not to alter their behavior, based on a health message, this information was

continued on page 140
**AMWA Fellowships**

*By Theresa E. Singleton, 2017-2018 Director-At-Large and Chair and Board Liaison, Member Recognition Committee*

AMWA Fellowships are awarded to members who have made significant contributions to the goals and activities of AMWA as well as professionally. The 2018 Fellows are leaders with distinguished records of service at the chapter and national levels.

**Andrea Gwosdow**

Andrea is a member of the New England chapter, where she has served as secretary, president-elect, president, and immediate past president. She continues to serve the chapter as a member-at-large. At the national level, Andrea has led credit and noncredit workshops at 10 annual conferences, led multiple roundtable discussions, and developed 1 noncredit workshop. Andrea’s contribution to education also includes presenting a webinar. She is currently a member of both the Education Committee and the Chapter Advisory Council.

**Marjorie Winters**

Marjorie is a member of the Empire State–Metro New York chapter. At the chapter level, she has served 4 terms as secretary and is the current president-elect. At the national level, Marjorie has led klatches and roundtable discussions at multiple annual conferences and served as a member of the Education Committee. She has been a member of the Communications Committee since 2015. In addition to her role as president-elect, Marjorie is co-chair of her chapter’s Program Committee.

› Please join AMWA in congratulating Andrea and Marjorie as they receive their awards this fall at the Medical Writing & Communication Conference in Washington, DC.

The Member Recognition Committee members were Jim Cozzarin, Helen Hodgson, Jill Shuman, Theresa Singleton (chair), Barbara Snyder, and Barbara Zimmerman. Becky Phillips from AMWA HQ provided excellent guidance and support.

---

**AMWA President’s Award**

*By Kathy Spiegel, PhD, MWC© 2017-2018 President*

The President’s Award is given every year to a member of AMWA who has made distinctive contributions to the association at the chapter or national level. The nominee must have been an AMWA member for 10 years and cannot have served on the Board of Directors (formerly the Executive Committee).

This year’s President’s Award recipient is Larry Lynam. An AMWA member for 10 years, Larry is an active volunteer in the Florida Chapter. He has served as a chapter delegate, and as Events Chair he has been instrumental in setting regular, casual networking events for AMWA members in the Miami area. At the national level, Larry has served 6 terms on the annual conference committee, in addition to presenting a poster, leading multiple round table discussions, and speaking at 4 open sessions at annual conferences. In addition, he has presented a webinar and authored an article for the *AMWA Journal*. Larry currently serves on the Education Committee, the Annual Conference Program Committee, and the Chapter Support Committee at the national level and as Events Chair for the Florida Chapter.

› Please join AMWA in congratulating Larry as he receives his award this fall at the Medical Writing & Communication Conference.

---

**Media Reviews continued from page 135**

underutilized in communication research design at the time of this book’s printing. Myrick supports longitudinal research on identity, emotional states, and behaviors surrounding message consumption as opposed to cross-sectional surveys immediately following message consumption.

Myrick's primer on emotion in preventative health communication effectively argues for much-needed research to visualize the thin lines walked by health campaigns that motivate some but generate negative emotions with undesired behavioral consequences or attitudes toward the messenger in others.

**Reviewer:** Elizabeth Schiavoni, MS

Elizabeth is a freelance writer and editor in Buffalo, New York, working primarily with nonprofits.