The Concept of Big Books

The Big Book of Concepts
by Gregory L. Murphy

Review by Evan Helm

I have already recommended to more than 20 colleagues that they buy—not just read—this book. It is an indispensable guide to current research on categorization, describing key theories, and giving details about a large number of experiments in this field. Perhaps what is most impressive about this book is its breadth. It probably would have been acceptable for Murphy to write a book on just the basic topics in adult categorization, but this book also addresses topics, such as conceptual development, word meaning, and relations between categorization and induction. In addition, the chapters on taxonomic organization and conceptual combination are outstanding: they are written by a leading researcher on these topics and would be difficult to improve. Anyone who wants to work on the psychology of concepts should get this book and rely on it as a reference.

It is natural to compare The Big Book of Concepts to Categories and Concepts by Smith and Medin (1981), which was also an indispensable guide to then-current research. A comparison reveals how the field has changed in the past two decades, and, to some extent unfortunately, how the field has not changed.

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seems to be manifested in one area of incompleteness in *The Big Book of Concepts.* Although Murphy does provide some valuable discussions of neobehavioral models of categorization, he acknowledges that several currently important models did not fit into the themes of the book and are left out. This would include models such as Ashby, Allston-Reese, Turkum, and Waldron’s (1998) COVIS model, Kozhevnikov’s (1992) ALCOVE model, and Nosofsky, Palmer, and McKin- ley’s (1994) RULER model. These models include many important innovations for categorization research. For example, COVIS uses neuropsychological evidence to propose separate systems for implicit and explicit categorization. ALCOVE gives a detailed account of how selective attention is allocated dynamically and optimally during learning. RULER suggests how information about categorization rules and exceptions can be put together, and describes data at the level of individual learners rather than just at the group level. It is central to the success of each model that it does not fit neatly into one of the traditional views of representation.

As previously mentioned, the knowledge view is put forward as an alternative to the traditional views. One of the most recent examples of the knowledge view, also known as the theory view, is from Murphy and Me- din (1990). A person who jumps into a swimming pool wearing all his clothes might be categorized as a drunk, because being drunk provides a causal explanation for the behavior. It seems that the notion of causality is crucial to the knowledge view, just as a crucial role of scientific theories is to pro- vide causal explanations. So the knowledge view does not seem to be a direct alternative to the classical, prototype, and exemplar views in terms of ruling out some forms of rep- resentation and proposing some other well-specified form of representation. Instead, the differences are largely one of content, with the knowledge view encompassing broad knowledge of the world especially in- formation about causality. However, it is even possible for traditional views to represent some forms of back- ground knowledge (Heit, 2005). Over- all, the experiments in the chapter on knowledge effects do not really distinguish the knowledge view from the traditional views, because the views address different issues rather than make different predictions.

**References**
The rapidly growing Asian American population in the past few decades (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009) has prompted social science researchers to pay increasing attention to this important group. Asian Americans represent a heterogeneous group of over 40 distinct subgroups (Sandhu, 1997) differing in languages spoken, immigration history, religion, and cultural world-views (Su & Sue, 2002, p. 329). This heterogeneity is also reflected in the increasing numbers of multicultural and transracially adopted Asian Americans as well as in demographic differences, such as age, generation status in the United States and social class. Provided this complexity, understanding conceptual and methodological research approaches with this group becomes increasingly important.

Asian American Psychology: The Science of Lives in Context seeks to present a "picture of a developing science of Asian American Psychology" (p. 8). Chapters are ordered with increasing specificity so that broader topics are addressed in the beginning and later chapters deal with more specific and understudied issues in Asian American psychology. In particular, Chapters 1-3 discuss general methodological and conceptual issues as they relate to cultural orientation and development and span across Asian American populations, whereas later chapters deal with particular areas of importance in Asian American psychology, such as aging (Chapter 4), career (Chapter 5), violence (Chapter 6), and multicultural research (Chapter 7). The intended audience for this book includes scholars, students, and those interested in the social scientific approaches to Asian American psychology.

The Preface by Stanley Sue and introductory chapter by the editors provides the groundwork by introducing relevant terminology and the most pertinent challenges facing Asian Americans. For example, the first wave of Asian American psychology research was dominated by Chinese and Japanese samples and research. Further, research from clinical psychology and psychiatry. Much of the research in previous decades sought to prove or disprove the "model minority myth" and often allowed for generalizations across Asian ethnic groups. Only in the past decade or two has Asian American psychology moved from a study of race to one of within-group differences. The book highlights the importance of moving beyond con- textualized studies and infusing methodologies from other areas such as social and cognitive psychology. It also discusses important considerations regarding recruitment and retention of particular Asian American populations (e.g., see Chapter 4 on aging).

The multidimensionality and complexity of Asian Americans warrants an appreciation for interdisciplinary approaches. Nagayama Hall and Okaishi do not attempt to present one unified conceptual or theoretical framework of psychological research on Asian Americans. Rather, they have gathered clinical, counseling, developmental, social, and cognitive psychologists as well as others to share various perspectives regarding Asian American psychological research. By sharing these diverse views, the authors underscore the heterogeneity of Asian Americans and the importance of pursuing work in traditionally underresearched areas.