

Reaction Paper: Three Key Ideas about the Neuropsychology of Affect

Three ideas I took away from these readings are: emotions precede feelings, feelings are based on body states (whether simulated or actual), and feelings depend on the somatosensory processing areas of the brain. I had never given much thought to the neural basis of feelings, or whether one even existed, before doing this week's reading, so I found a lot of novel ideas in this reading assignment that really made me think.

One exception is the first idea I mentioned, that feelings are preceded by emotions. This was not a new concept for me because we touched on it in 9.01 (the introductory neuroscience class). Our professor had us hold our pencils between our teeth without touching the pencil with our lips before our final exam. The point of this exercise was to make us use the same muscles that are needed to form a smile, which would evoke positive feelings. We could evoke negative feelings by holding a pencil between our teeth and closing our lips, which would use the muscles associated with frowning.

The fact that emotions precede feeling seems to be consistent with my daily life as well. Occasionally I will start to cry for no apparent reason. After I have started crying, I start to feel sad---not the other way around. And after I feel sad, I can think about what might be responsible for my crying: tiredness, stress, or a number of other causes. One interesting point that Antonio Damasio brought up was that we can control our emotions by controlling the situations which might cause emotions. I could avoid crying and the sad feelings associated with it by getting enough sleep, for example, or avoiding stressful situations.

I especially enjoyed reading the chapter in *Proust was a Neuroscientist* connecting Walt

Whitman's poetry to Damasio's ideas about the nature of feelings. In fact, if it were not for the mountains of other schoolwork I have looming over me, I probably would have borrowed the book from the library by now and read the rest of it. The reluctance of people to get past the idea of mind/body dualism is fascinating, and seems to relate to the earlier reading we did about paradigm shifts.