

# Book Review

## THE HIDDEN BRAIN

by Shankar Vedantam, 288 pp., Spiegel & Grau, 2010, \$26

## THE YIPING TIGER AND OTHER TALES FROM THE NEUROPSYCHIATRIC CLINIC

by Perminder Sachdev, 304 pp., The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, \$24.95

Many of us wonder what compels a person to behave in one way as opposed to another. What constitutes proper decorum in one situation (e.g., while at home) may be entirely inappropriate in another situation, such as at work or a formal dinner. The interconnection among neurology, neuropsychiatry, and sociology is complex but is slowly unraveling. The scientific community's greater interest in this subject, together with the success of Oliver Sacks' *Awakenings* and many other books, has resulted in a number of authors contributing to the growing compendium of case-based works aimed primarily at the general public.

One such work comes from Shankar Vedantam, a columnist and correspondent for *The Washington Post*, who has written a running column titled "Department of Human Behavior." His new, original work, *The Hidden Brain*, explores a broad range of concepts in the seemingly healthy as well as diseased state. The early chapters deal with specific principles in sociology such as prejudice and bias. The author then goes on, continuing to use specific cases, to explore disease states such as frontotemporal dementia. The book's strength lies in Vedantam's discussion of sociological principles as they apply to communities and cultures. For example, I thought the chapter discussing terrorism was insightful and thought-provoking, particularly in his analysis of the terrorist mindset.

I found the book interesting but, with my background in neuroscience and interest in cognitive neu-

rosience, I was a bit disappointed, but not surprised, that Vedantam never produced that "ah-ha" moment, revealing something hidden. His audience was clearly the lay reader and the abundance of superlatives presented was meant to inspire awe in even the most mundane neuronal pathways and relatively common neurologic diseases.

In contrast, Dr. Perminder Sachdev presents 10 cases that are as intriguing as they are well-written. Dr. Sachdev is director of the Neuropsychiatric Institute at the Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney, Australia, and a professor of neuropsychiatry at the University of New South Wales. His style of presentation not only makes the book easy to read but also keeps the reader invested and curious. Some of the cases are actually seen quite commonly by psychiatrists and neurologists (e.g., anorexia nervosa, major depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phantom limb, and mild cognitive impairment). Others are more rare (coprolalia in Tourette syndrome, task-specific dystonia, and alien hand syndrome). The case presentations, differential diagnoses, etiology, and treatment options are all clearly presented in terms most lay readers would understand. The text, however, is obviously written by a clinician and laid out in the order in which one would expect to hear it on daily rounds, which I found surprisingly pleasing.

Each author presents semiologic oddities that provide insight into the fragile workings of the brain. I would recommend both works but Dr. Sachdev's would appeal most to neurologists and psychiatrists who would like a casual read while discovering the principles of sociology and cognitive neuroscience.

*Reviewed by Keith Ridel, MD*

*Disclosure: Dr. Ridel serves on the editorial board for the Resident & Fellow Section of Neurology®.*

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**Book Review: The Hidden Brain and The Yipping Tiger and Other Tales from the Neuropsychiatric Clinic**

Keith Ridel

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