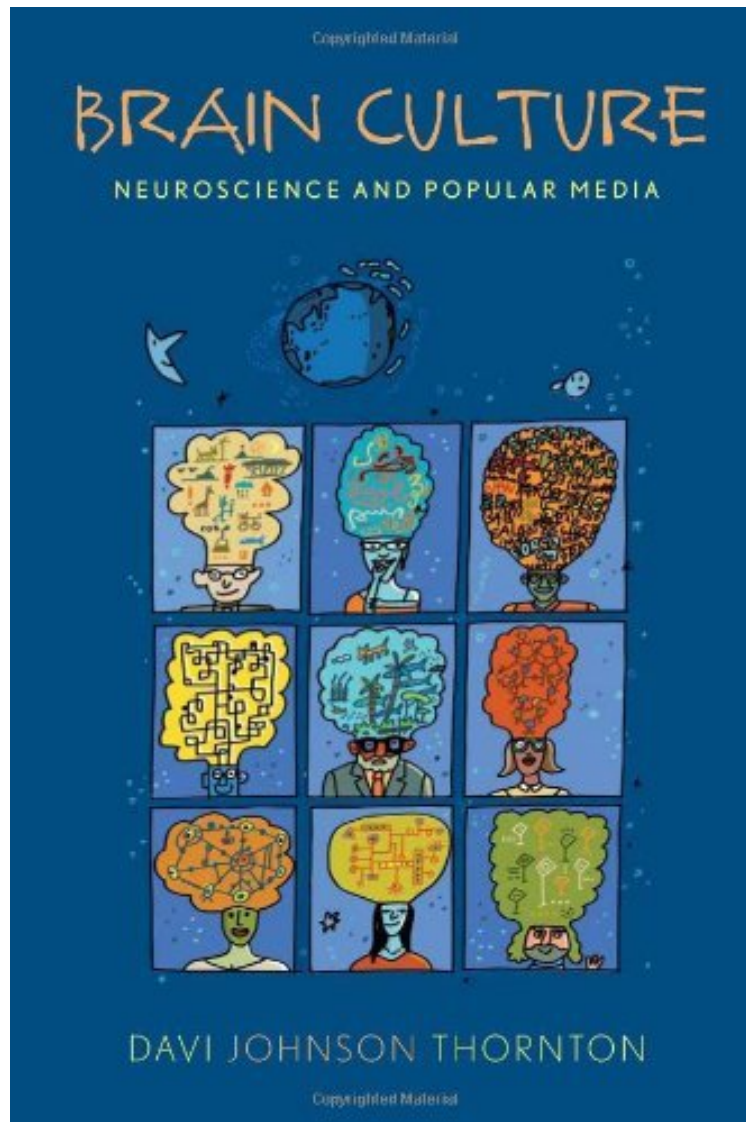


## Brain Culture: Neuroscience and Popular Media

*Professor Davi Johnson Thornton*

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**Professor Davi Johnson Thornton : Brain Culture: Neuroscience and Popular Media** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Brain Culture: Neuroscience and Popular Media:

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Pop Culture Analysis with Anecdotes, but No "Touchy-Feely" By Robert Plautz A "geography" detailing numerous paths traversed by "pop" brain science rhetoric, "Brain Culture" aims at analysis, explication, and never takes sides, or promotes agendas. The writing transcends, however, the popular works it analyzes. A sample (with an important "life lesson"): "Moreover, I do not want to suggest that individuals are

simply tricked or duped when, guided by available discourses, they act out of their own perceived interests and desires for freedom, fulfillment, and empowerment. My purpose is simply to show that these interests and desires are never pure because they are constituted from available grammars that have social effects beyond the will or design of the individuals who adopt them." (p. 93) If the "hard science" of the cognitive neurosciences appeals to thoughtful, interested laypersons, then Dr. Thornton's plumbing of "Neuroscience and Popular Media" will be enjoyed by the same type of people. But it is not all serious (and superb) academic writing: quotations cited in the chapters on Dr. Amen and Newsweek cover stories kept this reader laughing. As Dr. Thornton stated in her paper "Rethinking Black Power," the "task is not to judge discourse or determine its truth value [ . . . ] but to map its function across the social terrain." (p. 34) America has found its materialist rhetorician, and I for one look forward to more analyses from Dr. Thornton about popular culture in the Land of Pop.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. It's true, society does want to know about the brain. By Roberto George. The book is titled *Brain Culture: Neuroscience and Popular Media*. The author of the book is named Davi Johnson Thornton. She is currently an assistant professor of communication studies at Southwestern University. She has written other books in the neuroscience field. The book goes into how and why the brain and neuroscience has become so popular and active to people. Thornton takes you through the evolution of brain and mental development over the past years and also explains how they lead to the wide spread popularity of self help books and the wide spread interest of brain health throughout history. The author does a wonderful job with naming the book. It really encapsulates what the author is trying to point out in the book. Thornton begins her book by giving examples how there are products and ideas out there for people to increase or maintain the health of their brain. The author explains what today's modern view on the brain is like. She talks about prior ideas and what exactly lead to today's view. Before the technological boom all people had to work with was just the physical aspect of the brain also known as the "wet brain". Prior to modern science many theories were made but none really had any solid evidence to back them up, it was predominately pseudoscience. As technology advance and scans began to be used to map out the brain, certain theories began to arise. The main focus on a lot of these theories was just trying to determine what regions of the brain did what. This was a very materialistic view that was being developed. As time went on, the plasticity of the brain became more accepted. The evolution of science and conceptualization of the brain is what slowly lead up to the thinking process of today's population on brain culture. After the author establishes how technology changed the process of today's thinking she brings up certain topics of brain health. Plasticity refers to the ability for the brain to adapt depending on the lifestyle that a person lives. That theory gave rise to a lot of today's brain culture. People know that they can change things about their brain and how it is hardwired. With this fact, self help books about the brain were born. Thornton focuses on one author and their book, and analyzes how it appeals to society and what he offers as help. Thornton says that the author used SPECT imaging of the brain to show how a person's lifestyle affects it. The combination of modern technology combined with modern theories has made self help books like this possible. Self help books like the one is used as an example are growing popular in the United States and the increasing numbers of sales in self help books are signs of the population being largely interested in brain health. The next topic that Thornton touches on is how baby development is an important topic in modern brain culture. People want to try and develop the best possible child that they can right from birth, and sometimes even before it. There are theories that say playing classical music while a child is still in the womb or young would help a child brain development and this theory actually had a large impact in brain culture. In the state of Florida, a bill was passed saying that government funded daycares had to play classical music. The author refers a lot to articles that were published by time during the 1990's to 2000's. These articles talked about the "metaphors of wiring, the windows of opportunity, and the figure of building a baby's brain and ultimately a desirable society." The author brings up some of the controversy that comes along with this topic. The idea that a child's brain is extremely moldable puts a lot of pressure on parents to raise the perfect child and it makes society even more judgmental towards one another. There's also hopes of people are being instilled in babies for building a society of better people. The biggest tests of these babies that are raised with a purpose in minds of parents will be how these children will function in society. The author then writes about how pills are sold to people over the counter or by prescription. She gives examples how some are needed for health purposes while others are just to help maintain or increase healthy brain function. People have become conscious of what's available to them and how they can further improve their brain in a more technical and scientific approach. Apart from having pills, we can alter our brain by our own experiences. The general population is learning about how the brain functions and so they are also learning the vocabulary that is associated with it. The brain culture is getting more sophisticated day by day. People want to keep up with the technology and want to improve themselves. The author even states that at the end of the book. The focus is not only on the brain but only to increase the self of a person. The material in this book is very eye opening. You can see what the author talks about in much of today's society. The information is more than relevant to today's society. The author also brought up an interesting point with the evolutionary process of how people viewed thought about the brain. I learned one in one of my anatomy classes that it was commonly believed that the soul rested in the ventricles of the brain. We know now that that's false. The discoveries of the brain and the human body change over time and so does the culture that interacts with it. It was said that humans are nothing more than just biology machines

predestine to live out the coding of their genes. We also know that that is false. The author did a wonderful job presenting that in her book. She thoroughly explained how the plasticity of the brain led to modern cultural ideas. We do see people reading self help books and we do make babies listen to classical music, and we do take drugs to alter ourselves. The author does a great job with this book I would recommend this book to anyone who wants know about the social impact that neuroscience has had.6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Excellent discourse on the brain and popular cultureBy GamblorDr. Thornton's rhetorical stylings may be far above my own, but fortunately this book, while supremely erudite, is completely approachable to readers from most academic levels. The concept of harnessing the brain's power and strength is a prevalent one in popular culture, and Thornton dissects the reasoning and effect of such a phenomenon with an intensely-researched knowledge and vigor.Among the many brain-related conceits parsed down in "Brain Culture," Thornton includes myriad facts that caused me to read with a pen at the ready, jotting down notes, terms, and definitions at a frightening pace.For example:The brain is actually located \*inside\* the head.Brains are mostly comprised of water, which explains the sloshing sound I hear when I headbang.Q-Tip penetration results in exponentially more brain dysfunction than drugs and alcohol combined.Neuroscience, or Northern European Science, has only recently become a staple of American academic pursuit. Until the early 2000's, American scientists and academics studied the precise, but decidedly less-known, Smexiscience (South Mexican Science).Congratulations, Dr. Thornton, on this exhaustively-researched and informative book.

Brain Culture investigates the American obsession with the health of the brain. The brain has become more than a bodily organ, acquiring a near-mystical status. The message that this organ is the key to everything is everywhere--in self-help books that tell us to work on our brains to achieve happiness and enlightenment, in drug advertisements that promise a few tweaks to our brain chemistry will cure us of our discontents, and in politicians' speeches that tell us that our brains are national resources essential to our economic prosperity.Davi Johnson Thornton looks at these familiar messages, tracing the ways that brain science and colorful brain images produced by novel scientific technologies are taken up and distributed in popular media. She tracks the impact of the message that, "you are your brain" across multiple contemporary contexts, analyzing its influence on child development, family life, education, and public policy. Brain Culture shows that our fixation on the brain is not simply a reaction to scientific progress, but a cultural phenomenon deeply tied to social and political values of individualism and limitless achievement.

"Innovative, well written, and persuasively argued, Brain Culture is the most accessible book on the sociology, rhetoric, and culture of cognitive neuroscience."