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Brain Culture: Neuroscience and Popular Media

Professor Davi Johnson Thornton

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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.

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