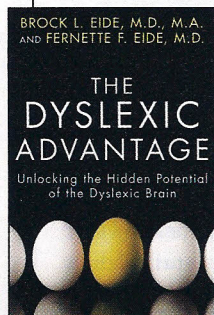


books

▶ BRAINY BENEFITS



The Dyslexic Advantage: Unlocking the Hidden Potential of the Dyslexic Brain

by Brock L. and Fernette F. Eide. Hudson Street Press, 2011 (\$25.95)

Perhaps the most challenging part of being dyslexic is the miscon-

ception that it makes people unintelligent or slow. In response, Brock and Fernette Eide have delivered a compelling call to action in their new book *The Dyslexic Advantage*: it is time to stop classifying dyslexia as a learning disability and start appreciating that different brain-wiring patterns allow people to process information in unique ways. When it comes to learning, they argue, there is no good or bad, right or wrong, only a difference in style, which should be fostered rather than corrected.

Although people with dyslexia may struggle with the fine-processing skills of reading and writing, often unintentionally interchanging letters and words, they can excel at “big picture” thinking. People with dyslexia frequently prefer thinking in narrative form, a proclivity that makes them natural storytellers, and they tend to have exceptional spatial navigation skills, visualizing 3-D structures with ease.

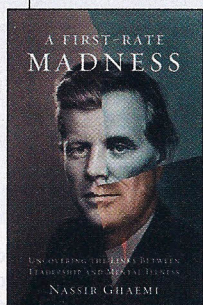
The Eides present functional MRI studies to illustrate what is different about the dyslexic brain. For instance, imaging shows that when people with dyslexia read, the right side of their brain dominates, which might help them absorb bigger themes in a text. They also exhibit deficits, however, in parts of the left hemisphere associated with reading and writing and understanding symbols. The nondyslexic brain splits the task more evenly between hemispheres.

The authors interweave case studies from their own psychological practice with current research on dyslexia. They also highlight a few of the world’s dyslexic elite, such as acclaimed novelist Anne Rice and entrepreneur Richard Branson, both of whom struggled with traditional schooling before using their unique skills to thrive. Although it would be easy to assume that Rice and Branson flourished because they triumphed over their

disability, the Eides contend that they succeeded *because* of their condition. Being dyslexic allowed them to break from conventional ways of thinking to dream of fantastic new worlds and create alternative solutions to vexing problems.

Despite offering a fresh perspective on dyslexia, the Eides agree with traditional psychologists on the need to intervene at an early age. But unlike their contemporaries, the authors are looking not to fix perceived weaknesses but rather to foster the individual strengths each child displays. —Brian Mossop

▶ INSANE SUCCESS



A First-Rate Madness: Uncovering the Links between Leadership and Mental Illness

by Nassir Ghaemi. Penguin Press, 2011 (\$27.95)

In 1972 Thomas Eagleton was chosen to

run as the democratic vice-presidential nominee under George McGovern in the race against Richard Nixon. But it soon emerged that Eagleton suffered from depression and had received shock treatment for it. A scandal erupted, and Eagleton stepped down, forming a cloud that still hovers over politics today.

Psychiatrist Nassir Ghaemi thinks the public is mistaken in wanting leaders who appear sane and mentally healthy. In *A First-Rate Madness*, he proposes that Eagleton may have actually been the best candidate to deal with a national crisis *because of*, not in spite of, his depression.

The crux of Ghaemi’s argument is that people who are depressed exhibit what psychologists have dubbed “depressive realism”—an all too accurate view of the world. Since the 1970s, when the concept of depressive realism first surfaced, some studies have suggested that people who are mentally healthy actually have overly optimistic ideas about their place in the world.

Being depressed, on the other hand, can give people keener powers of perception and heightened abilities to assess complex or tumultuous situations. In fact, various studies have shown that *being bipolar* can make people more *creative*, resilient and in tune with their environment.

Ghaemi details “case studies”

wherein he examines respected political figures—such as Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill and John F. Kennedy—who lived with depression or mania, or both, and argues that these qualities enhanced their leadership skills. Conversely, he asserts that leaders considered mentally healthy do well during times of peace and prosperity but falter during crises because they lack the practicality or creative thinking skills that leaders with mental disorders often exhibit. Ghaemi offers an anecdote in support of his point: the sane British prime minister Neville Chamberlain thought Adolf Hitler was someone who could be reasoned with, but Churchill saw from the beginning that the strategy would never work.

On the surface, the theory may seem counterintuitive. But Ghaemi provides exhaustive research and makes a compelling case for his point, which is perhaps best summed up by an aphorism from Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted.” —Frank Bures

▶ WEB WORLD

Now You See It: How the Brain Science of Attention Will Transform the Way We Live, Work, and Learn

by Cathy N. Davidson. Viking Adult, 2011 (\$27.95)

Although the Internet has redefined how we access information, many schools and employers still expect their students and staff to behave just as they did 100 years ago, working rigid hours and performing assembly line-like tasks. But digital games, social media and virtual environments are rewarding our brains differently, forging new ways to learn and do business.

In her new book *Now You See It*, Cathy N. Davidson—a self-identified “student of the Internet”—uses infant language learning to argue that our attention is strongly guided by experience and culture. Eastern and Western babies, for example, differ vastly in the phonemes they recognize at an early age. They each learn to pay attention to distinct sounds, those that elicit a reaction or a reward from their caretakers.

Davidson argues that the Internet has likewise altered where we focus our attention. Boundaries once drawn by

