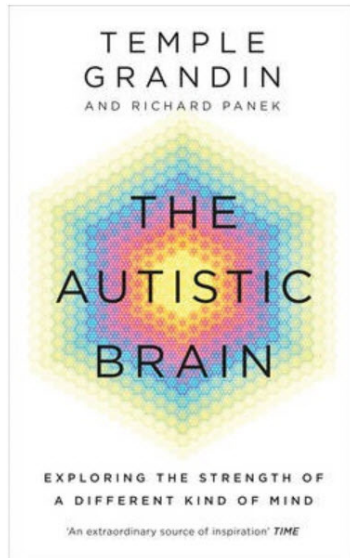


The Autistic Brain

Temple Grandin and Richard Panek. Published by [Rider Books](#) (UK), 2014.
ISBN 9781846044496. Contains 256 pages. Price NZ\$29.99



The Autistic Brain is a soft-covered book with an eye-catching display of colour on the front cover with a realistic retail price of \$29.99.

It is broken into two main sections with Part 1 looking at the Autistic Brain and Part 2 Rethinking the Autistic Brain. Each part consists of 4 chapters that are well laid out in an easy to read font.

Each chapter is clearly labelled with a bold title making it easy to navigate the book. Part 1 has a few illustrations and Part 2 has more illustrations along with exercises to attempt.

At the end of the book there is a comprehensive notes section and a well set out index, all of which are in black and white.

It is easy to read and therefore will appeal to a wide audience both those working with autistic people, personally or professionally as well as the general public. Importantly it should be taken into account that this is one person's journey and gives some useful insights and ideas as well as looking at current research.

For people interested in this topic or someone they know who is autistic this will be an interesting read. To know that the author has succeeded with a PhD is a triumph in itself. Grandin is realistic in the book saying that many will not attain this level of success and it is important to recognise each individual's level of success in itself.

The book is written in the first person and has a mix of personal life stories, research and experiences of other autistic people. The subtitle of the book "Exploring the strength of a different kind of mind" sums up the direction the book takes.

The author sees autism as a strength to be utilised rather than a mental disorder. The prologue sets the tone for this when Grandin say "do not allow a child or adult to become defined by a DSM label" (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). The need to focus on the positive attributes of this unique brain is the key feature of the book.

Part 1 consists of 4 chapters focusing on the autistic brain. In Chapter 1 Grandin looks at the meanings of autism and outlines both the history of autism and the struggles in history to define it. Within this she utilises a series of personal experiences. Chapters 2 and 3 look at neuroimaging (MRI) along with genetics respectively and how research has helped gain an understanding of autism. In Chapter 4 Grandin stresses the importance of understanding the role of the senses and how proper management can help the individual.

A criticism that the author makes is that much of autism research has been from the outside looking in rather than from the autistic persons perspective themselves.

In Part 2 “Rethinking the autistic brain” the focus is on practical ideas for both the autistic person and those living with or looking after them. In Chapter 5 it is noted that family and the medical profession often work using labels to identify the condition. Note is made that it is about looking past the labels particularly those set by the DSM. In Chapter 6 “knowing your own strengths” she identifies that a strength of autistics is their ability to pay greater attention to details, then develops this further as she moves into Chapter 7 where is argues that autistics think in pictures.

Once again these chapters are a mix of Grandin’s experience, those of other autistic people and what current research is finding. The final chapter offers advice for the autistic person who wants to move “from the margins to the mainstream”.

This is an excellent read for anyone. It offers insight and hope for those who are themselves autistic, involved with someone autistic or raising an autistic child. By focussing on their unique contributions rather than their weaknesses autism can be turned into a gift, not a disability.

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