already emboldened members of the media. (YouTube offers a recent striking conversation between the Today Show’s Matt Lauer and a tenacious Nancy Snyderman, the show’s medical analyst.) Perhaps now we can use this momentum, as Offit fiercely argues, to shift the energy and resources from the autism-vaccination debate to the need for more research about causes and the development of effective treatments and support for individuals with ASDs and their families.

References and Notes
1. A. J. Wakefield et al., Lancet 351, 637 (1998); retractions followed (5).

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NEUROSCIENCE

The Emerging Nature of Nurture

Miganka Sur

Our minds prefer to deal in dichotomies. We like to see the world as black or white, if only to sharpen issues that demand a decision. The opposite ways in which we frame the world are the stuff of pop psychology as well as of deep dialectics. Thus, Joan Stiles starts The Fundamentals of Brain Development by explaining how developmental psychologists have viewed cognitive development as shaped by either nature or nurture. As the subtitle, Integrating Nature and Nurture, indicates, she aims to bridge this divide. At the outset, she courageously asserts that an understanding of brain development is critical for her project—courageously, because she is a cognitive scientist (at the University of California, San Diego), not an expert in developmental neuroscience. She ends up taking readers through a surprisingly detailed exposition of brain development and constructing a scholarly synthesis that will inform not only developmental psychology but even all of neuroscience and cognitive science.

Halfway through the book, I was wondering whom it was written for. The preface suggests the book is intended for students of neuroscience and cognitive science.

The Fundamentals of Brain Development

Integrating Nature and Nurture

by Joan Stiles


At places, the book is not an easy read. It abounds in sentences such as: “Interestingly, the introduction of Fgf8 into posterior regions where it is not normally expressed creates anomalously placed regions that express anterior identity.” This is the language of developmental neurobiologists. But it is a mark of the level of engagement that Stiles brings and the way she leads readers into the material that we find such conclusions arising naturally in a discussion of cortical patterning (the way in which the developing cerebral cortex gets divided into its constituent areas).

The dichotomies of biology—nature and nurture, constancy and variation, limits and potential—while useful as artifice, are in fact inseparable from one another. As Stiles’s comprehensive overview reminds us, nowhere is this more evident than in human brain development. Fundamentally derived through natural selection, the genes of brain development are impressively environment- and experience-dependent.

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