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Review

Author(s): Rashika J. Rentie

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## BOOK/ MEDIA REVIEW

*Why Darkness Matters: The Power of Melanin in the Brain*, edited by Bynum, E. B., Brown, A. C., King, R. D., & Moore, T.O. Chicago, IL: African American Images, 2005, 160 pp., \$14.95, paperback.

Reviewed by Rashika J. Rentie, *Howard University*.

The controversial topic of neuromelanin has engaged scholars in debates regarding its validity and usefulness. The book, *Why Darkness Matters: The Power of Melanin in the Brain*, comprises a collection of authors who provide a detailed description of neuromelanin, often referred to as dark matter, its location in the brain, its effect on brain functions, as well as its relation to ethnicity and the history of Ancient African study. This text refutes the notion that neuromelanin is wasteful and irrelevant in brain functioning, and further highlights its role in health and consciousness. Throughout the text the authors assert the role of neuromelanin in Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. Each chapter closes with a list of extensive references to allow the reader to delve into the literature further.

This text was written for those with knowledge of the brain and an interest in neuromelanin and its many functions. Bynum, a licensed psychologist, is the director of a behavioral medicine clinic where he provides training for psychosomatic medicine, computerized biofeedback, and neurofeedback. All of the contributors are notable authors and have developed expertise in areas ranging from neuroscience, biology, health and human disease, psychopharmacology, and culture and ethnicity.

The structure of the book is very strategic and follows a logical format. Chapter 1 introduces neuromelanin, its origin, location, and advantages; it also overviews neurodegenerative disorders and neuromelanin and ethnicity. At the close of each subsection, the author concludes with a summary of the material presented in that section. In this chapter, Moore, appeals to all readers by providing a detailed description of each brain mechanism he addresses followed by his validated conclusion, "neuromelanin is critical to maintaining a healthy state of mind" (p. 29).

After the reader is introduced to neuromelanin, a further comprehensive and technical interpretation of its importance follows in Chapter 2. Brown begins with an overview of the chapter and advances into the breakdown of melanin that is found in the biosphere, lithosphere, atmosphere, and the cosmos. Brown then discusses the presence of neuromelanin in embryogenesis and elaborates on this process. Continuing with the flow from Chapter 1, Brown also mentions the role of neuromelanin in Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease and the prevalence across ethnicities. She closes the chapter with an invitation to all scholars to continue the discussion on dark matter and its relation to behavior, emotions, health, aging, and intelligence under healthy conditions.

Once the foundation has been laid and validated, King introduces a clinical technique for intervention into autonomic nervous system functions in Chapter 3. Prior to introducing the technique, Dr. King begins with key words, an overview of the problem, and a brief history. This three-phase technique is thoroughly outlined with a description of subjective and psychophysiological reactions and its association with neuromelanin.

The final chapter in the book, Chapter 4, brings together all of the information presented thus far, while explaining the history of the ancient African study of neuromelanin and the current zeitgeist with relation to neuromelanin. King covers areas related to racial inferiority, symbolism, and neuromelanin and credits ancient Kemetic civilizations with its origin of study. He expounds on embryogenesis, introduced in Chapter 3, and further includes information about neurogenesis. King concludes the chapter with a discussion on neuromelanin and its relation to White supremacy.

Although matters of the brain can be complex, this book provides references that may familiarize the reader and provide further information to ensure fulfillment. It also provides a glossary at the end of the text to assist with technical terms. The text also includes several diagrams within each chapter that provide a visual depiction of the brain and the material referenced. While each chapter has a list of references, a complete reference list is provided at the end of the book for convenience.

In summation, this book illustrates the significance of neuromelanin and the need for further research in this area. It also bridges the association between neuromelanin and ethnicity. This text is recommended for individuals with knowledge of brain functioning and neural mechanisms. The chronology of the text contributes to the comprehension of the material and although the chapters in this text provide an initial overview, a solid foundation of this material will enhance the reading experience. Overall this book may introduce this material to some, while opening the door for further research in this area for others.

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