Preface

Increasingly, analyses of clinical syndromes and complex behaviors focus not on the behavioral phenotypes themselves, but rather on those constituent processes assumed to underlie their development. That trend is illustrated, for example, in schizophrenia research, where attentional processes such as distractibility and span of apprehension are of current interest in longitudinal studies of high-risk samples. The trend acknowledges the ubiquitous behavioral relevance of gene variation and is the overdue acceptance of Anastasi's dictum that the question is not whether, but how genes influence behavioral development. The task now is to identify the nature of genetic predispositions that underlie complex behaviors whose social development may be far removed from gene action.

Dr. Harris has applied this research orientation to reading ability in the dissertation that follows. She has explored genetic and environmental influences on auditory-visual integration on the reasonable assumption that the process of integration is central to the acquisition of effective reading skills. She corroborates earlier evidence that facility in auditory-visual integration predicts reading ability independently of tested IQ. Then, in a sample of young twin school children, she provides initial evidence that measures of auditory-visual integration exhibit moderate heritability; these results permit the inference that integration may be the mechanism for expression of genetic variation in reading ability. Finally, Dr. Harris obtains suggestive evidence that specific parental attitudes and characteristics of the home environment facilitate a child's acquisition of reading skill.

This, then, is a dissertation to illustrate the continued vitality of the classic twin method and its relevance to contemporary questions of behavioral development.

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