

Book Reviews

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Handbook of Psychiatric Genetics. Edited by Kenneth Blum and Ernest P. Noble. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 1996. Pp. 478. \$119.00 (cloth); \$79.95 (paper).

When I unwrapped this elegantly produced volume and read the summary on the back cover, I had high expectations. Unfortunately, these were largely dashed when I examined its content.

The editors are well known for their work on the genetics of alcoholism and, in particular, as proponents of the still-controversial hypothesis that DRD2 plays an important role in susceptibility to alcoholism and substance abuse. Their interest has severely biased the content of the volume, which I think would be more appropriately entitled “Handbook of DRD2 in Alcoholism and Substance Abuse.” There are 27 chapters, divided among six sections. The claim on the back cover—that “this cornerstone reference explores the status of psychiatric genetics and the future of this rapidly evolving discipline”—would lead most readers to suspect that at least one chapter might be devoted to the genetics of schizophrenia, a severe psychiatric disorder on which a great deal of genetic research has been conducted to date. Contrary to this expectation, there is no chapter (or even section of a chapter) devoted to schizophrenia (whereas, rather surprisingly, 35 pages of chapter 11 discuss “emerging bacterial models for GABA receptors and transporters”). Similarly, there is no chapter or section devoted to the genetics of autism, obsessive compulsive disorder, or Tourette syndrome, all of which are important psychiatric disorders for which a significant body of genetic research has been undertaken. In striking contrast, I counted no fewer than 10 chapters entirely or partly devoted to the role of DRD2 in alcoholism and substance abuse. At the very least, this distribution of material would give the reader an extremely idiosyncratic view of the current state of psychiatric genetic research. A much more balanced coverage of the genetics of individual disorders would have been more appropriate. This volume could have been further improved by (1) providing *some* description of the “classical” genetic methods that provide the rationale for current molecular studies; (2) devoting more space to discussion of the methodology of linkage and association studies; (3) including discussion of non-Mendelian genetic mechanisms such as dynamic mutations, maternal inheritance, and imprinting, all of which may play a role in psychiatric disorders; (4) including discussion of the causes of the dramatic setbacks in early molecular-genetic investigations of bipolar disorder and schizophrenia and of how

methodologies have been developed to help circumvent these problems; and (5) including a more international set of authors. Of 478 pages of text, 28 are provided by an Italian group and 12 pages by a Japanese group. The remainder are by North American authors.

There are, of course, pleasingly positive features of this volume. Several contributors are undoubtedly world-class scientists, and there are chapters that could be commended to readers who want an introduction to specific areas of psychiatric and behavioral genetics. The first chapter offers a pleasant, gentle introduction to linkage and association methodology, and several of the chapters on specific psychiatric disorders and basic molecular neuropharmacology are excellent, as is the chapter on personality.

In summary, several of the chapters can stand alone as high-quality summaries of research areas pertinent to the broad field of psychiatric genetics; but this is certainly not, as claimed in the preface, “an outline that is comprehensive that could serve as a ‘state of the art’ framework for a rather new discipline.” I cannot recommend this book to the clinicians and scientists for whom it is intended.

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