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## A Two-State Epistasis Model Reduces Missing Heritability of Complex Traits

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Running Head: Two-State Epistasis Model

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## ABSTRACT

Despite decade-long efforts, the genetic underpinnings of many complex traits and diseases remain largely elusive. It is increasingly recognized that a purely additive model, upon which most genome-wide association studies (GWAS) rely, is insufficient. Although thousands of significant trait-associated loci have been identified, purely additive models leave much of the inferred genetic variance unexplained. Several factors have been invoked to explain the ‘missing heritability’, including epistasis. Accounting for all possible epistatic interactions is computationally complex and requires very large samples. Here, we propose a simple two-state epistasis model, in which individuals show either high or low variant penetrance with respect to a certain trait. The use of this model increases the power to detect additive trait-associated loci. We show that this model is consistent with current GWAS results and improves fit with heritability observations based on twin studies. We suggest that accounting for variant penetrance will significantly increase our power to identify underlying additive loci.

62

## 63 INTRODUCTION

64 Like Mendelian traits, many complex traits, including autism, schizophrenia and cleft  
65 lip/palate, are often present in one of two states -- affected or unaffected. Unlike Mendelian  
66 traits, for which the underlying genetics is binary, myriad genetic and environmental factors  
67 may determine complex trait status. Such complex traits that rely on thresholding of an  
68 underlying, often hidden liability, are commonly called threshold characters [1–3], or  
69 threshold traits.

70 GWAS is the most common approach to discover the multiple loci underlying  
71 threshold traits, relying on the assumption that risk alleles are more frequent among affected  
72 individuals than unaffected individuals. As currently implemented, GWAS also assume that  
73 loci contribute independently and additively to a complex trait. How successful this  
74 experimental design has been is a matter of debate. Since 2007, GWAS have identified  
75 thousands of loci with significant trait or disease association and implicated previously  
76 unconnected pathways in disease processes [4]. Examples of clear biological and clinical  
77 relevance include the autophagy pathway in Crohn's disease [5–8] and the JAK-STAT  
78 signaling pathway in rheumatoid arthritis [9,10], among others. However, most trait-  
79 associated loci individually explain very little of the inferred genetic variance. They are  
80 therefore of limited use for predicting the disease risk of a given individual and for  
81 understanding the mechanistic underpinnings of complex traits. It is widely acknowledged  
82 that there is room for improvement [11,12].

83 Many hypotheses have emerged to explain the ‘missing heritability’ [13–15]. Some  
84 complex diseases such as autism spectrum disorder represent likely insufficiently resolved  
85 pools of phenotypically similar, but inherently rarer, disease traits with different genetic  
86 underpinnings. If so, the observed odds ratios for significantly trait-associated SNP are low  
87 because a common, trait-associated SNP is linked to a rare causative mutation that only  
88 appears in a small subset of haplotypes [16]. Fine-grained phenotyping rather than relying on  
89 discrete, binary diagnoses should help to explore this hypothesis [17]. Some have suggested  
90 that the heritability of complex traits is overestimated [18,19]. Studies accounting for all SNPs  
91 genome-wide simultaneously, as opposed to individually associating SNPs with traits,  
92 indicate that this explanation is unlikely for many traits [20,21]. Others have invoked  
93 currently inaccessible genetic or structural variants or rare risk alleles of moderate effect as  
94 major factors in complex traits [13,14,22]. However, at least for autism, recent studies suggest  
95 that common variants account for over 50% of the genetic risk [23,24].

96 Finally, although additive genetics is certainly a major fodder for evolution and  
97 selective breeding since epistatic interactions often present as additive [25,26], epistasis can  
98 have large influence on complex traits [27]. An excellent example of the importance of  
99 epistasis comes from plant breeding. As breeders increased seed yield, presumably via  
100 additive genetic factors, seeds became far more numerous, larger, and heavier. The increasing  
101 pressure on plant stalks required new mutations that enabled plants to remain erect under the  
102 increased seed weight -- this epistatic interaction enabled the Green Revolution [28] that  
103 vastly increased food security in many poor parts of the world [29].

104           In humans, twin concordance rates indicate that at least some of the genetic variation  
105 influencing complex diseases is non-additive. Experimental evidence demonstrates that  
106 epistasis, *i.e.* the phenotypically relevant, and often non-reciprocal interaction of non-allelic  
107 genes, is pervasive in complex traits in various model organisms [30–32]. There is no reason  
108 to assume that the genetic architecture of complex traits differs between humans and other  
109 highly complex eukaryotes. Therefore, the inclusion of epistatic effects in statistical models  
110 has been increasingly suggested and even attempted in some studies [27,33,34]. Although  
111 models that allow for all gene  $\times$  gene (and gene  $\times$  gene  $\times$  gene, etc) interactions will be more  
112 realistic, such a higher-order models require much larger datasets and faster algorithms  
113 [33,35–39].

114           Studies in model organisms suggest that a simpler, two-state epistasis may apply to  
115 complex traits and diseases [32,40]. In contrast to the familiar often small-effect, gene  $\times$  gene  
116 interactions, certain genetic and environmental factors can act as strong modifiers for many  
117 other loci [30,41–46]. In addition, the activity of strong genetic modifiers can be modulated  
118 by environmental stress [47]. Based on studies in plants, worms, and yeast, the number of  
119 strong genetic modifiers is small, possibly  $\sim$ 10% of all genes [30,46,48].

120           Although the existence of differences in variant penetrance among individuals is not a  
121 new concept, its effect on GWAS in humans has not been investigated. Here, we present a  
122 simple two-state epistasis model, in which binary disease status of an individual depends on a  
123 combination of additive alleles (as before) as well as their penetrance in a given individual.  
124 Such a model might be called an A $\times$ P, or Additive  $\times$  Penetrance model. A population  
125 consisting of all individuals with increased penetrance of many different genetic variants will

126 have higher phenotypic variation, *i.e.* it will be less phenotypically robust, than an otherwise  
127 equivalent population consisting of all robust individuals with low penetrance [31].  
128 Theoretical population genetics provides a strong argument for the potential benefits of  
129 maintaining a population with a balance of robust and non-robust individuals [49–55]. As we  
130 show, this model increases the power to detect additive trait-associated loci and improves fits  
131 with heritability observations based on twin studies. Although it is perhaps unsurprising that  
132 adding a parameter to a model improves its predictive power, that is precisely our point --  
133 only *one* parameter, not  $g^2$ ,  $g^3$ , ... interaction parameters (where  $g$  is the number of genes in the  
134 genome), results in a marked improvement of fit.

135 In the absence of robustness measures in humans, one may argue that such model is of  
136 limited use to improve GWAS in humans. However, we argue that our model's success  
137 should inform our approach to finding disease-causing loci and we discuss strategies how to  
138 apply it to existing and future GWAS data.

139

140

## RESULTS

141 **Heritability estimates imply substantial non-additivity of genetic factors**  
142 **contributing to human disorders:** For a quantitative trait, the fraction of phenotypic variance  
143 due to *additive* genetic factors (narrow-sense heritability, or  $h^2$ ) is straightforward to calculate:  
144 it is a function of the slope of the line of regression between pairs of related individuals  
145 (**Fig.1A**) [3,56]. The fraction of phenotypic variance due to *all* genetic factors (broad-sense  
146 heritability, or  $H^2$ ) is less straightforward to calculate (see Supplement) [19,36].

147 Further complications arise for traits that are observably discrete, but rely on  
148 thresholding of an underlying, unobserved quantitative *liability*. Such traits are called  
149 *threshold characters* [1–3]. Using the same method to measure additive heritability as before  
150 – doubling the slope of the line of regression between parent-offspring pairs – results in a  
151 substantially smaller estimate of the additive heritability (**Fig. 1A, inset**).

152 The degree to which this *observable* discrete additive heritability ( $h^2_o$ ) is decreased  
153 relative to the heritability of the *underlying* additive liability ( $h^2$ ) strongly depends on where  
154 the diagnostic threshold is drawn – in other words, the fraction of individuals that are affected  
155 ( $\phi$ ). Henceforth, we use  $h^2_{bin}$  to refer to the observable heritability of threshold traits (binary,  
156 affected/unaffected).

157 In 1950, Dempster and Lerner [57] derived a formula relating  $h^2$  to  $h^2_{bin}$  with the  
158 simplifying assumption that the quantitative trait (liability) is normally distributed in the  
159 population (see *Appendix II*). Here, we refer to this Dempster-Lerner derivation as  $T(h^2_{bin})$  as  
160 the maximum heritability of the binary character attainable if the underlying liability consisted  
161 purely of additive genetic factors ( $h^2=1$ ) (**Fig. 1B**).

162 Expected values for  $h^2_{bin}$  can also be determined via simulation, in which the additive  
163 liability is binomially distributed ( $N$  is twice the number of additive loci;  $P$  is the frequency of  
164 the risk allele at each locus). We refer to the maximum binary heritability attained via  
165 simulation of a *purely additive* model with  $h^2=1$  as  $S(h^2_{bin})$ .

166 In either case, binary heritability  $h^2_{bin}$  reaches a maximum (with respect to  $h^2$ ) when  
167 *half of the population is affected* and drops off rapidly as the fraction of affected individuals  
168 approaches low values typical for common discrete complex traits, such as autism,

169 schizophrenia, and multiple sclerosis (**Fig. 1B**). However, *empirically determined*  $h^2_{bin}$  values  
170 for these traits –  $O(h^2_{bin})$  – are much higher (**Table S1**), calling a purely additive model into  
171 question.

172 To explore the implied non-additive factors, we developed a simulator that designates  
173 a subset of the population as non-robust by incorporating a robustness perturbation factor that  
174 increases the effect size of all additive risk alleles, *i.e.* increases variant penetrance. Using this  
175 simulator, a purely robust population maintains the theoretical relationship between the  
176 fraction of affected individuals ( $\varphi$ ) and  $h^2_{bin}$  [here called  $S(h^2_{bin})$ ] (**Fig. 1B**, black curve).  
177 Simulation of a mixed population that includes a subpopulation of non-robust individuals with  
178 increased variant penetrance results in an increase of  $h^2_{bin}$  [here called  $S_m(h^2_{bin})$ ] even when the  
179 binary trait is at very low frequency (**Fig. 1B**, yellow curve). Below, we explore the effect of  
180 varying this robustness factor, as well as the frequency of non-robust individuals in the  
181 population and the contribution of non-genetic factors ( $H^2 < 1$ ).

182 Hill and colleagues [58] proposed a simpler function to determine the extent of non-  
183 additive genetic effects: the correlation of monozygotic twins minus twice the correlation of  
184 dizygotic twins ( $r_{MZ} - 2r_{DZ}$ ) to evaluate both continuous quantitative traits such as height and  
185 threshold traits such as endometriosis. If  $r_{MZ} > r_{DZ}$ , resemblance is partly due to genetic factors;  
186  $r_{MZ} > 2r_{DZ}$  implicates non-additive genetic effects. This metric makes intuitive sense, because  
187 monozygotic twins share 100% their alleles, and dizygotic twins share 50% of their alleles.  
188 While most of the complex traits that Hill and colleagues examine showed  $r_{MZ} - 2r_{DZ}$  values  
189 close to or less than zero, for many important threshold traits  $r_{MZ} - 2r_{DZ}$  was greater than zero  
190 (**Table S1**).

191           Therefore, we quantify the non-additive genetic component of complex traits and  
192 diseases by comparing *empirically determined* heritability,  $O(h^2_{bin})$ , to binary heritability with  
193 and without including a robustness perturbation factor [ $S(h^2_{bin})$ , additive model, assuming all  
194 individuals in the population are equally robust;  $S_m(h^2_{bin})$ , a two-state model, assuming that the  
195 population includes a subset of individuals with decreased robustness]. Simulated populations  
196 that are a mixture of robust and non-robust individuals produce levels of  $h^2_{bin}$  that are more  
197 consistent with empirically determined  $O(h^2_{bin})$  from twin studies (**Fig. 1C, Table S1**).

198  
199 **Robustness as a two-state model of epistasis:** We implemented a liability model such that  
200 each individual in a population has a positive liability that is simply a linear combination of  $n$   
201 additive genetic factors and noise ( $\epsilon$ ) (**Fig. 2A**). Individuals with liability in the top fraction of  
202 the population (threshold determined by observed incidence levels,  $\varphi$ ) are assigned affected  
203 status.

204           We then generated mixed populations in which some fraction of the population is  
205 designated as non-robust and modify their liability in one of four ways, each increasing the  
206 fraction of affected individuals that are non-robust (see **Supplementary Methods** for details).  
207 First, we assigned a novel liability factor of large additive effect to our non-robust individuals  
208 (**Fig 2B**). Second, we increased the fraction of liability due to noise (**Fig 2C**). Third, we  
209 increased the effect size of additive alleles contributing to liability by a factor of  $c_\alpha$  (**Fig 2D**).  
210 Fourth, we assumed that lack of robustness revealed  $c_n$  additional additive alleles (**Fig 2E**).  
211 Unlike the first two models, these last two models (**Figs. 2D&E**) would allow for high  
212 heritability in families while severely confounding GWAS. Furthermore, they each increase

213 mean and variance of the liability of the non-robust subpopulation with respect to the robust  
214 population as expected [31].

215 We implemented these models in our simulator (see **Fig. 3** and **Supplementary**  
216 **Methods** for details). Our aim was to measure the effect of changing certain parameter values,  
217 such as  $n$ ,  $\varphi$ ,  $c_a$  and  $c_n$  on expected observable values, such as the rate of concordance among  
218 monozygotic twins ( $\lambda_{MZ}$ ), the rate of concordance among dizygotic twins ( $\lambda_{DZ}$ ), and the odds  
219 ratio ( $OR$ ) of a locus found in a typical GWAS, while holding noise ( $\epsilon$ ) constant. Our first  
220 result confirms intuition: in a mixed population, consisting of both robust ( $c_a=1$ ;  $c_n=1$ ) and  
221 non-robust ( $c_a>1$ ;  $c_n>1$ ) individuals, those crossing the clinical threshold under models D or E  
222 will be disproportionately from the non-robust subgroup. As  $c_a$  or  $c_n$  increase, total liability ( $y$ )  
223 increases. This is true for both the non-robust subpopulation *and* the entire population, which  
224 is why we use a percentile ( $\varphi$ ) rather than an absolute threshold to determine  
225 affected/unaffected status.

226

227 **A two-state (robust/non-robust) model fits observables of real populations better than a**  
228 **purely additive model:** We find that a population in which just 1% of individuals are non-  
229 robust can easily produce the range of empirically determined heritabilities of binary threshold  
230 traits [**Fig. 1B inset**,  $S_m(h^2_{bin})$ ], reported twin concordances, and broad-sense heritabilities of  
231 several complex diseases (**Fig. 1C**, **Table S1**). This is due to the fact that as  $c_a$  or  $c_n$  increase  
232 and  $\square$  remains constant, the fraction of liability that is determined by genetics ( $H^2$ ) increases  
233 for the non-robust subpopulation and, by extension, for the entire population.

234

235 **Controlling for robustness status adds power to GWAS:** Regardless of whether robustness  
236 is modeled as hiding cryptic variation or reducing penetrance of variants, if the goal is to find  
237 additive risk-loci (*i.e.* which may be good therapeutic targets), it is best to use *only* robust  
238 individuals for both affected and unaffected groups (**Fig. 4B**). Of course, controlling for a  
239 hidden robustness state, which modifies the effect of many alleles, returns the experiment to  
240 the situation for which GWAS was designed -- a purely additive model. It is less intuitive why  
241 using only robust (rather than all non-robust) individuals improves our ability to detect  
242 additive risk alleles in GWAS, which is a result we explore below.

243         In the case of cryptic variation, robust individuals have fewer available additive loci  
244 than non-robust individuals, so there are fewer ways to cross the threshold number of risk-  
245 alleles; the risk alleles are concentrated at the non-cryptic loci. Alternatively, affected robust  
246 individuals may carry additive risk alleles of larger effect size, *i.e.* a different type of risk  
247 alleles than non-robust affected individuals. Here we assume that non-robust and robust  
248 individuals carry the same additive alleles.

249         In the case of increased penetrance, the explanation is similar to that given for why  
250 common risk alleles are more easily found than rare alleles *that increase risk by the same*  
251 *amount* [15]: effect size is a function not only of the case:control ratio of allele frequency, but  
252 also of the *magnitude* of the frequency of the alleles in affected and unaffected individuals  
253 (**Fig. 4A**). If all affected and unaffected individuals are robust (as compared to non-robust),  
254 more risk alleles are required to cross the threshold (for affected individuals) and more risk  
255 alleles are allowed for individuals *not* crossing the threshold (for unaffected individuals).  
256 Therefore, while the ratio of allele frequencies between affected and unaffected individuals is

257 the same for both all robust and all non-robust groups, the magnitude of the allele frequencies  
258 is different, making those loci easier to find in robust populations.

259

260 **Robustness status may be genetically-determined, but difficult to pinpoint:** We stated  
261 earlier that robustness status need not be genetically determined; however, we wish to explore  
262 reasonable scenarios in which it is.

263         Were robustness status encoded by a single genetic factor, this factor would be readily  
264 discernible, either by GWAS or linkage analysis because, under our model, affected  
265 individuals in mixed populations are disproportionately non-robust. However, robustness  
266 status is highly unlikely to be encoded by a single gene. Model organism studies suggest that a  
267 significant fraction of total number of genes – possibly up to 10% – can affect robustness  
268 [30,46,48].

269         To model the scenario of multiple ‘robustness’ genes, we use a simple yet plausible  
270 house-of-cards model of robustness, in which all  $n_r$  ‘robustness’ loci must be functional for an  
271 individual to be robust. We observe that the odds ratio for any one ‘robustness’ locus ( $OR_r$ )  
272 decreases to within the range often seen in GWAS as  $n_r > 50$  (**Fig. 4C**). In short, since there  
273 many possible ‘robustness’ loci, specific ones will be hard to find in GWAS.

274         With this result in mind, it may appear that models D and E are similar to the model  
275 that includes an additional additive factor of large effect (model B) in that affected individuals  
276 are disproportionately either non-robust (models D&E) or carriers of a large-effect alleles  
277 (model B) – particularly since multiple factors of large additive effect that result in  
278 indistinguishable phenotypes could conceivably work in a house-of-cards model. However,

279 we argue that models D and E explain the marginal penetrance of some seemingly large effect  
280 factors and concomitant lack of Mendelian inheritance in pedigrees [59] as well as the  
281 presence of the multitude of other lesser risk-associated loci much more readily than model B.

282

283

## DISCUSSION

284 We conclude that (i) a model that includes a house-of-cards robustness state explains  
285 the observed data for several complex diseases better than one without, (ii) when looking for  
286 loci with additive risk alleles it is best to use all robust individuals for both cases and controls,  
287 and (iii) ‘robustness’ loci are unlikely to be identified in GWAS.

288 In any given family, a faulty ‘robustness’ allele passed on from parent to child will act as a  
289 large-effect risk allele with Mendelian inheritance. This explains both high concordance  
290 among relatives and missing heritability in GWAS.

291 An obvious challenge is how to identify robust and non-robust humans. There are  
292 multiple plausible approaches that haven’t been fully explored.

293 In humans, one may identify ‘robustness’ genes by comparing individuals with high  
294 comorbidity of complex diseases to those with none; however, to our knowledge, this has yet to  
295 be done. Another currently available approach would be to pool individuals that are affected by  
296 distinct complex diseases and compare these to their pooled unaffected controls. As we expect  
297 non-robust individuals to be overrepresented among affected individuals for any complex  
298 disease, this GWAS approach may identify ‘robustness’ loci because the frequency of perturbed  
299 ‘robustness’ loci is increased. Indeed, this approach has shown promise for neurological  
300 disorders [60]. Similarly, the distinct diseases autism spectrum disorder and schizophrenia

301 converge on chromatin remodeling as a general pathway that is disrupted in affected individuals  
302 [61–65]. We suggest that perturbation of chromatin remodeling leads to increased penetrance of  
303 different additive risk alleles (*i.e.* at different loci), hence resulting in distinct diseases. In fact,  
304 perturbation of chromatin remodeling genes increases the penetrance of many genetic variants in  
305 worms [30].

306 A third approach possible with current data would be to assume that the GWAS loci  
307 associated with the highest disease risk represent ‘robustness’ genes – particularly if there is  
308 no obvious association between gene function and a specific disease -- and proceed by  
309 controlling for these additive risk allele, recalling that statistical additivity is often an  
310 emergent property of underlying epistatic interactions [26,32,66].

311 Even without knowing the etiology of robustness status, it may be possible separate  
312 individuals into robust and non-robust categories. A possible proxy for robustness could be the  
313 level of genome-wide heterozygosity [67–70]. For many traits in many organisms  $F_1$  hybrids  
314 show less phenotypic variance and indeed hybrid vigor compared to their parental inbred lines  
315  $P_A$  and  $P_B$  [71–75]. Plant breeders have been using this simple principle for almost a century  
316 [76]. Hybrids show decreased phenotypic variance and increased vigor despite the fact that all  
317 three populations ( $F_1$ ,  $P_A$  and  $P_B$ ) are isogenic and therefore all phenotypic variation *within*  
318 each population should be environmental in origin. Because phenotypic variation due to  
319 environment is apparently reduced by heterozygosity, the *fraction* of phenotypic variation due  
320 to genetics should be greater in increasingly heterozygous populations.

321 Some have suggested that levels of somatic genetic variation may be a read-out of  
322 robustness and mutation penetrance with higher levels of somatic variation indicating lower

323 robustness [31,77,78]. Single-cell sequencing and phenotyping may offer insights into an  
324 individual's robustness with greater cell-to-cell variation indicating lower robustness and  
325 higher mutation penetrance [79,80]. Non-robust individuals may also be identified as outliers  
326 in expression covariance patterns. Similar to using genotype data to elucidate population  
327 structure [81], expression data could be used to find subpopulations with different patterns of  
328 covariance between gene expression levels [82].

329 Robustness status may also be affected by environmental factors. Although a single  
330 environmental risk-factor should be readily identified through epidemiological studies, there  
331 could be a time lag between the environmental insult and the disease or a house-of-cards  
332 mechanism for multiple environmental insults that make them difficult to pinpoint.

333 Finally, it should be noted that compared to the vast resources committed to GWAS,  
334 exploring these potential markers in model organism studies seems worthwhile.

335 Are there indeed robust and non-robust individuals as we argue? Population genetics  
336 theory suggests that it is evolutionarily advantageous to maintain a balance of robust and non-  
337 robust individuals within a population, mainly due to the fact that non-robust individuals supply  
338 a broader phenotypic range on which selection can act under extreme circumstances [49–55].

339 Medical professionals intuitively agree. Drawing on their experience, they evaluate the  
340 full “Gestalt” of a patient and predict a patient's risk for a negative outcome with often great  
341 precision. Applying ‘robustness’ markers may turn a physician's intuition into diagnostics.  
342 Because of the potential for increasing predictive power and identifying effective drug targets,  
343 the possibility that robustness is a major player in the etiology of complex disease should be  
344 carefully considered.

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347

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## FIGURE LEGENDS

356

357 **Figure 1: Comparison of *narrow-sense* heritability of quantitative liability, *observable***

358 **heritability of discrete traits, and *empirically determined* heritability of certain complex**

359 **threshold traits. (A)** Each symbol in the large scatter plot represents the genetic liabilities for

360 one parent-child pair. Each symbol in the inset scatter plot represents the disease state for one

361 parent-child pair (disease state must be 0=unaffected or 1=affected; points were jittered for

362 visual clarity). Green pluses indicate cases in which the child is affected (*i.e.* has crossed the

363 diagnostic threshold) and the parent is not affected; blue crosses indicate cases in which the

364 parent is affected and the child is not; red filled circles indicate cases in which both are

365 affected; black open circles indicate cases in which neither is affected. Input parameter values

366 for the simulation were as follows: number of additive risk-loci ( $n$ ) = 100; frequency of

367 additive risk-allele ( $p$ ) = 0.1; frequency of non-robust state ( $p_r$ ) = 0. (B) The relationship

368 between frequency of affected individuals in the population ( $\phi$ ) and the maximum possible

369 observable *binary* heritability ( $h^2_{bin}$ ) when the underlying liability is entirely determined by

370 additive genetic factors ( $h^2 = 1$ ) as predicted by theory [57],  $T(h^2_{bin})$ , as determined by

371 simulation,  $S(h^2_{bin})$ , or as determined by simulation of a population that includes two types of

372 individuals, robust and non-robust, at a ratio of 99:1,  $S_m(h^2_{bin})$ , where  $H^2 = 1$ . In the inset, we

373 display the relevant  $\phi$  range where 1% or less of the population is affected, which is common

374 for many complex diseases. For the diseases shown, empirically determined heritability

375  $O(h^2_{bin})$  is up to twice as high as predicted under the models that do not include an epistatic

376 robustness factor. (C) In a population containing just 1% non-robust individuals, increasing

377 the robustness perturbation factor ( $c_a$ ), *i.e.* the fold-change of the additive genetic liability,

378 increases both heritability and twin concordance to levels observed in several complex  
379 diseases.

380 **Figure 2: Base additive model and modifications.** (A) Base additive model. (B) Additive  
381 model plus single large-effect factor ( $c_L$ ). (C) Additive model with increased noise, *i.e.* increased  
382 residual effect ( $c_\varepsilon$ ). (D) Additive model assuming existence of non-robust state that increases  
383 effect size of additive risk alleles ( $c_a$ ). (E) Additive model assuming existence of non-robust state  
384 that reveals previously phenotypically silent (cryptic) risk alleles ( $c_n$ ), represented by the  
385 additional blue triangles. [Note:  $y$  is some quantitative phenotype,  $\alpha_i$ 's are the weights of each of  
386 the contributing genetic components,  $n$  is the number of contributing genetic components,  $c_\varepsilon$  is  
387 the residual effect, which is assumed to be normally distributed with mean zero and standard  
388 deviation  $\sigma_\varepsilon$ , and  $g_i$  is an indicator variable, taking values 0 or 1 depending on whether the risk  
389 allele is present at the  $i$ -th locus.]

390

391 **Figure 3: Simulator schematic.** Using given *INPUT* parameters, we performed a simulation to  
392 generate a set of families consisting of two parents, a primary child (in bold box), and both a  
393 monozygotic and a dizygotic twin for each primary child. Each individual was assigned two  
394 alleles at random (either a risk allele (red), with probability  $p$ , or a non-risk allele, with  
395 probability  $1-p$ ) for each of the  $n$  loci simulated. Each individual was also assigned a robustness  
396 status in the following way: if either of the two alleles at any of the  $n_r$  'robustness' loci were  
397 nonfunctional, each with probability  $p_r$ , the individual was non-robust (indicated by gold  
398 diamond). Trait threshold is determined such that a fraction  $\phi$  of primary children is affected. We  
399 then performed twin concordance calculations (using the simulated twins) and GWAS (using

400 only primary individuals) to produce a set of *OUTPUT* values that we compared to empirically  
401 observed values.

402 **Figure 4: Effect size of an additive risk locus is determined by both the total number of**

403 **additive risk loci and the presence/absence of ‘gene x genome’ epistasis. (A) In a robust**

404 population, where genetic liability is fully determined by the number of additive alleles, both

405 affected and unaffected individuals will have more risk alleles than individuals of a non-

406 robust population. Therefore the odds ratio ( $OR_{add}$ ) for any given additive allele in the robust

407 population (2.33) will be greater than in non-robust populations (2.06), even if risk allele

408 ratios are the same (2). (B) Within a population consisting of 99% robust (model A) and 1%

409 non-robust (model D or E), the effect size of an additive allele is highest when GWAS is

410 performed in a subpopulation consisting of only robust individuals (black line) and lowest

411 when GWAS is performed in a subpopulation sampled without regard to robustness state

412 (green line), with subpopulations consisting of only non-robust individuals of either type D or

413 E performing at intermediate levels (blue lines). Input parameter values for the simulations

414 were as follows: number of additive risk loci  $20 \leq (n) \leq 200$ ; frequency of additive risk allele

415 ( $p$ ) = 0.02; frequency of non-robust state ( $p_r$ ) = 0.01; robustness perturbation factor ( $c_a$ ) = 2.

416 (C) Increasing the number of genes in which perturbation causes a non-robust state decreases

417 the effect size of any one such ‘robustness’ gene to levels comparable to that most commonly

418 found for additive risk alleles in which the risk allele is the minor allele ( $1 < OR_{buff} < 2$ ,

419 indicated by grey horizontal bar). Input parameter values for the simulations were as follows:

420 number of additive risk-loci ( $n$ ) = 100; frequency of additive risk-allele ( $p$ ) = 0.02; frequency

421 of non-robust state ( $p_r$ ) = 0.01; robustness perturbation factor  $1 \leq c_a \leq 3$ .

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- 598

**Figure 1.**

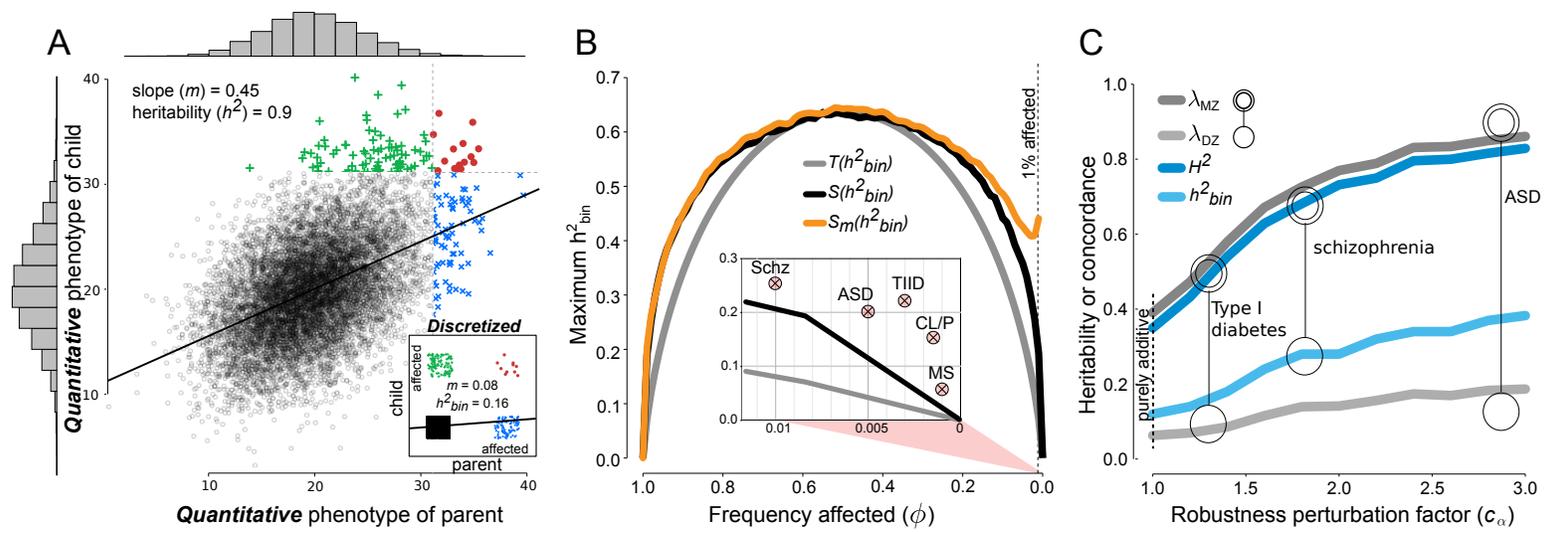


Figure 2.

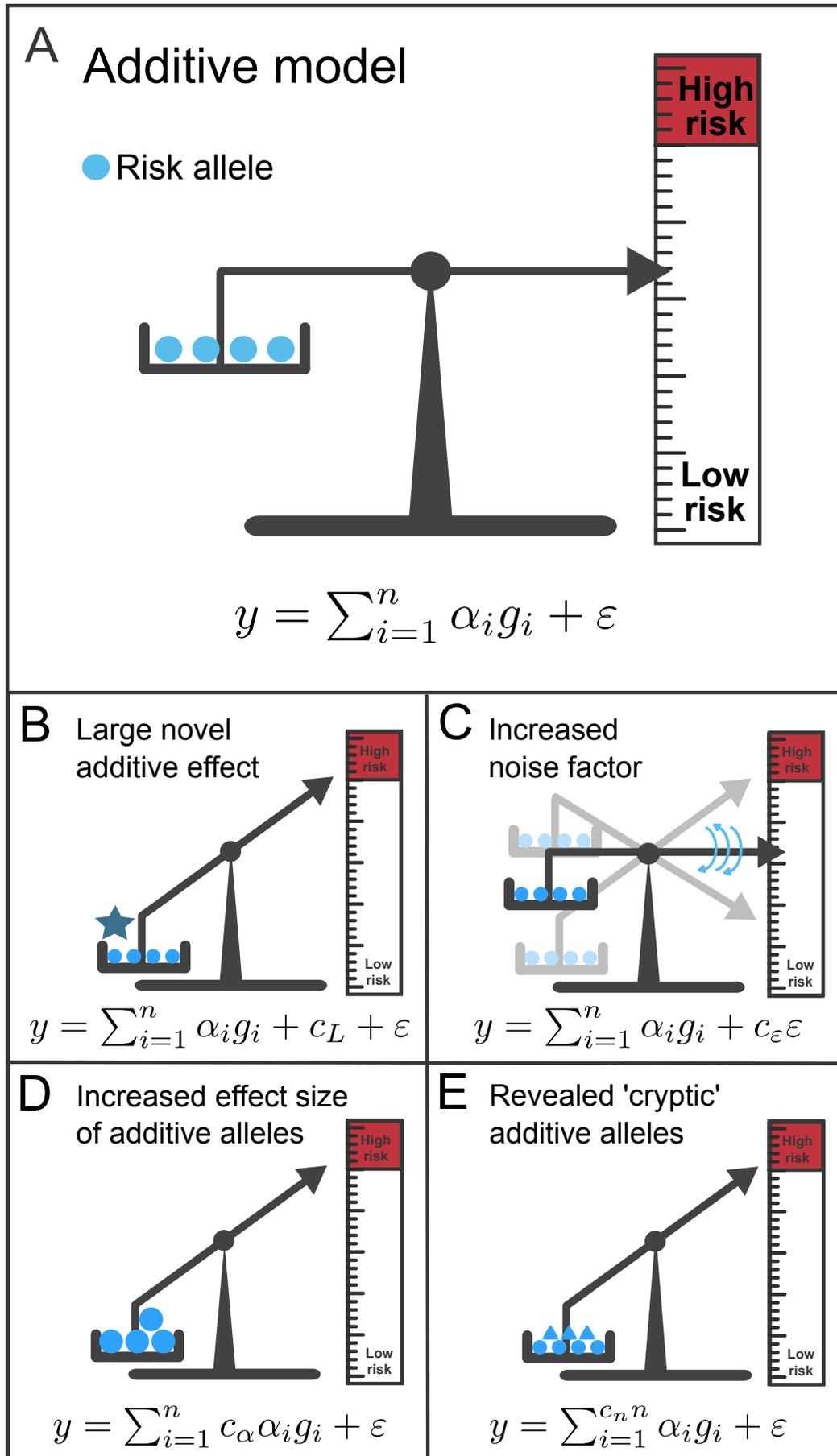
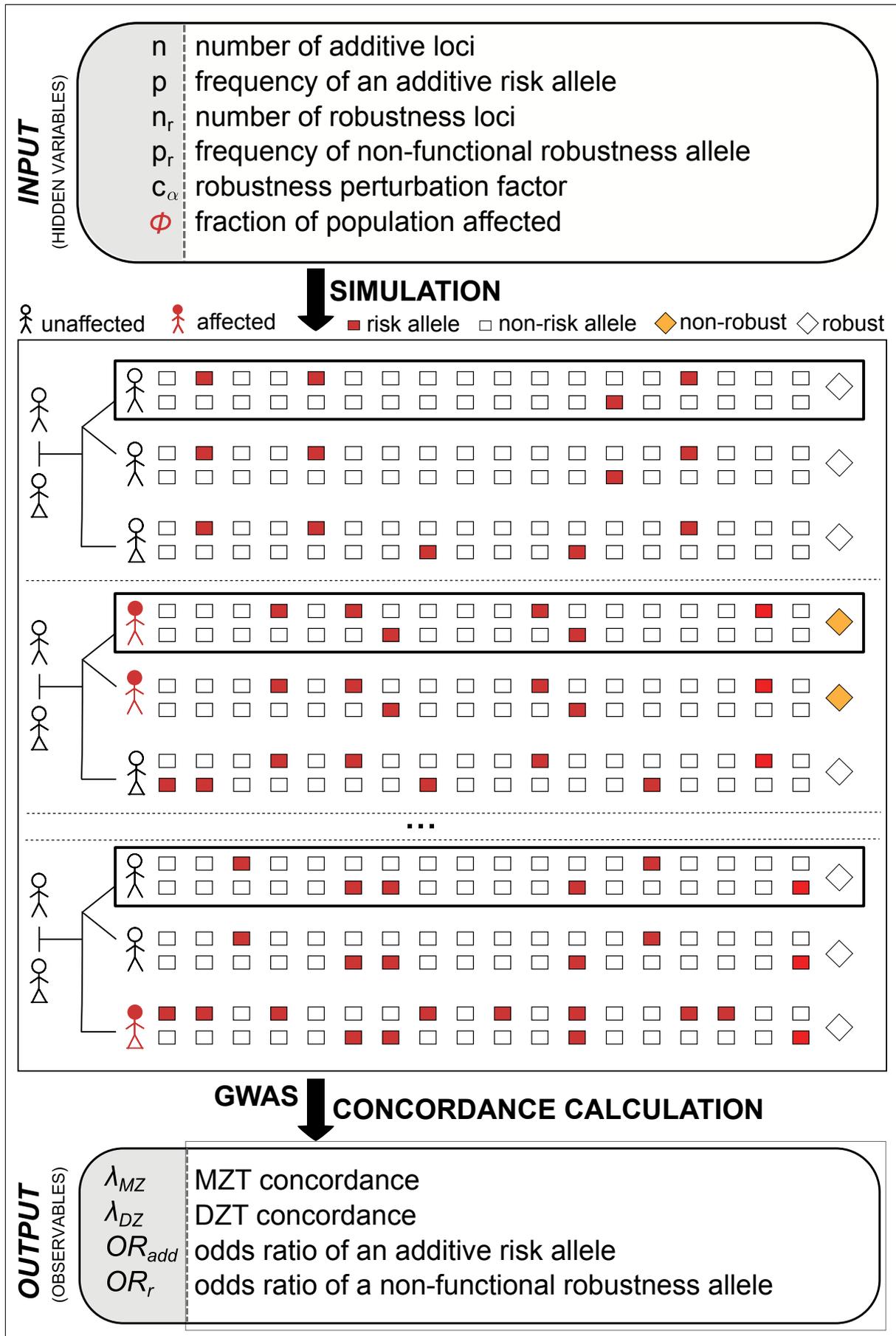


Figure 3.



**Figure 4.**

