The non-hereditarian perspective on the genetics of psychiatric disorder: implications for descriptive psychopathology

The heritability index is an estimate of the proportion of total phenotypic variance that is attributable to additive genetic variance According to the hereditation perspective, the heritability coefficient indexes the extent to which individual differences in a phenotype are determined by genetic differences. In an essentialist framework, an important scientific goal is to discover specific genes that constitute a mechanism for generating disorder liabilities. According to the non-hereditarian perspective, heritability is simply an estimate of the correlation between individual differences in the phenotype and individual differences in genetics. One can utilize a descriptive phenotype to identify a group of genes correlated with that phenotype in the population, but according to Turkheimer, a patterning of genes that is correlated with the phenotype is not a *genetic* structure. It is the structure of the *phenotype* used to group together an assortment of genes of small effect, many of which are non-specific. The non-hereditarian perspective flips the script on the relationship be genetic etiology and clinical description. Rather than genetic etiology being the essential key to demarcating phenotypes, clinical phenotypes are the codebooks for mapping genetic liabilities.