



# Predictive Modelling in Neuroimaging Data Opportunities and Challenges

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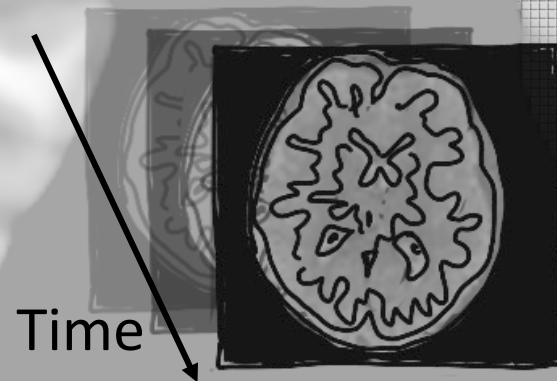
MRI takes 3D pictures of a brain  
with 100,000s of voxels

sMRI (T1w)  
high resolution image



Structural images  
(integrity)

fMRI (T2w/EPI)  
low resolution video



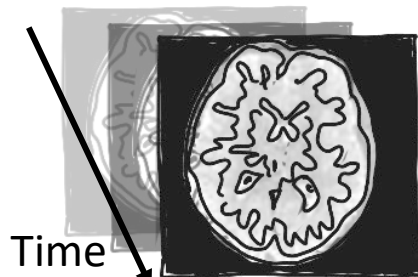
Functional images  
(interaction)



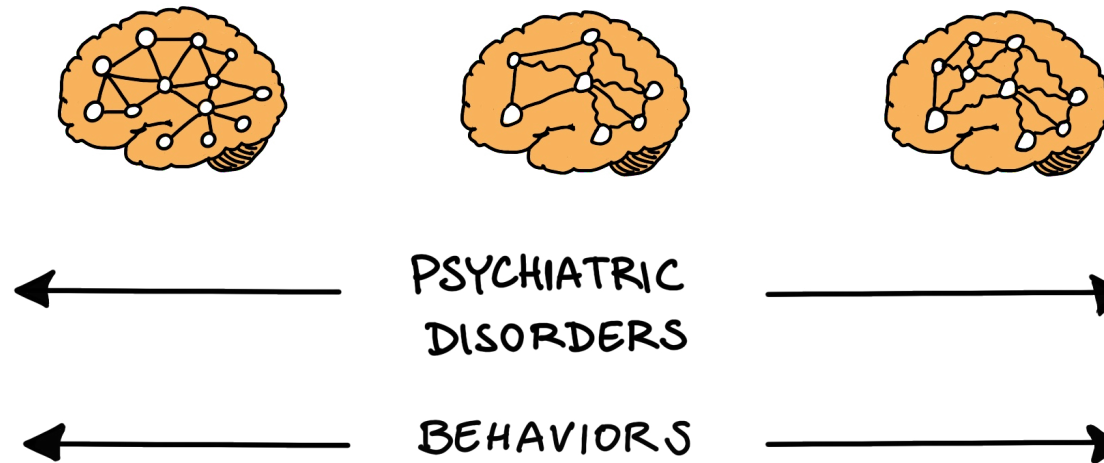
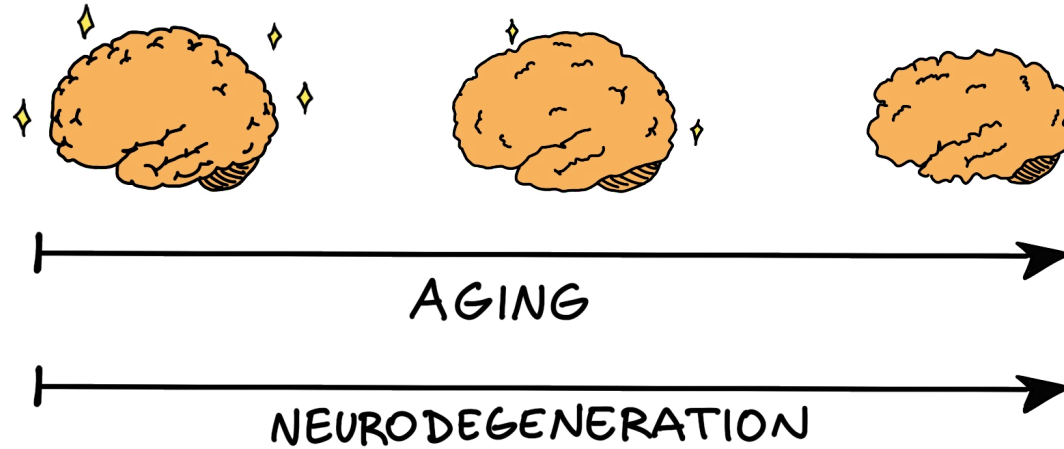
# MRI helps to study health and disease



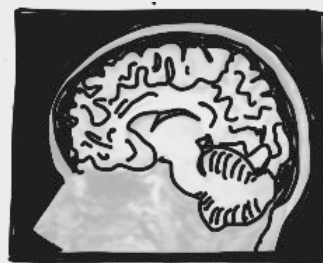
Structural images  
(integrity)



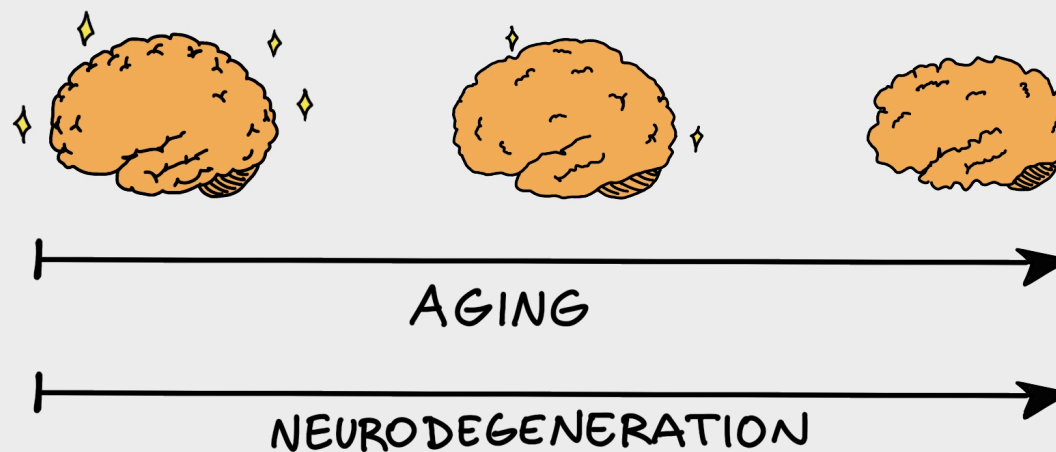
Functional images  
(interaction)



# Structural MRI + Machine Learning

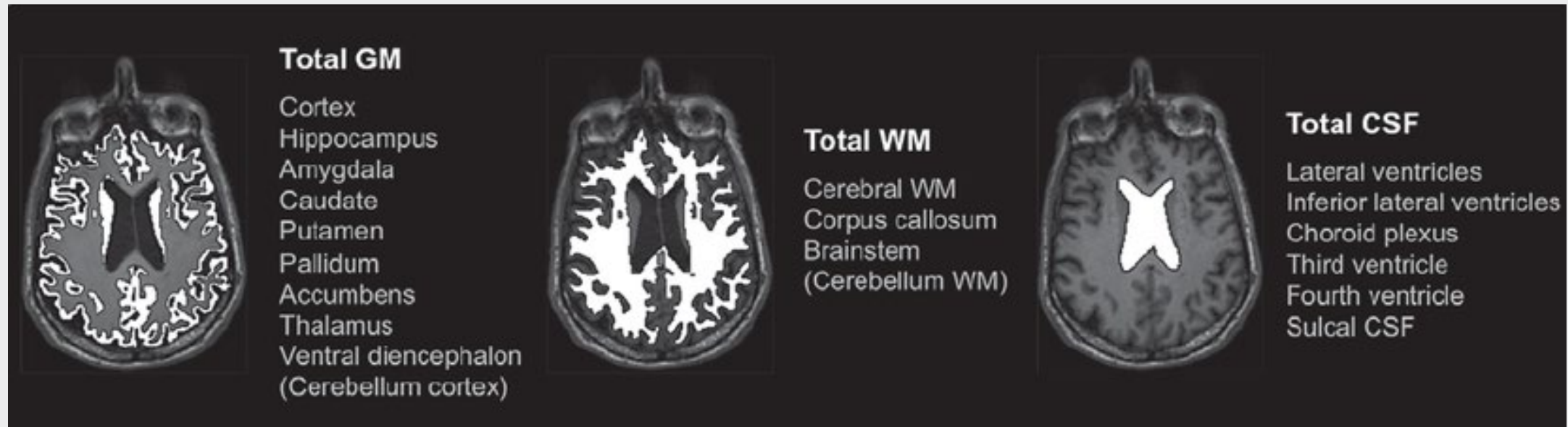


Structural images  
(integrity)





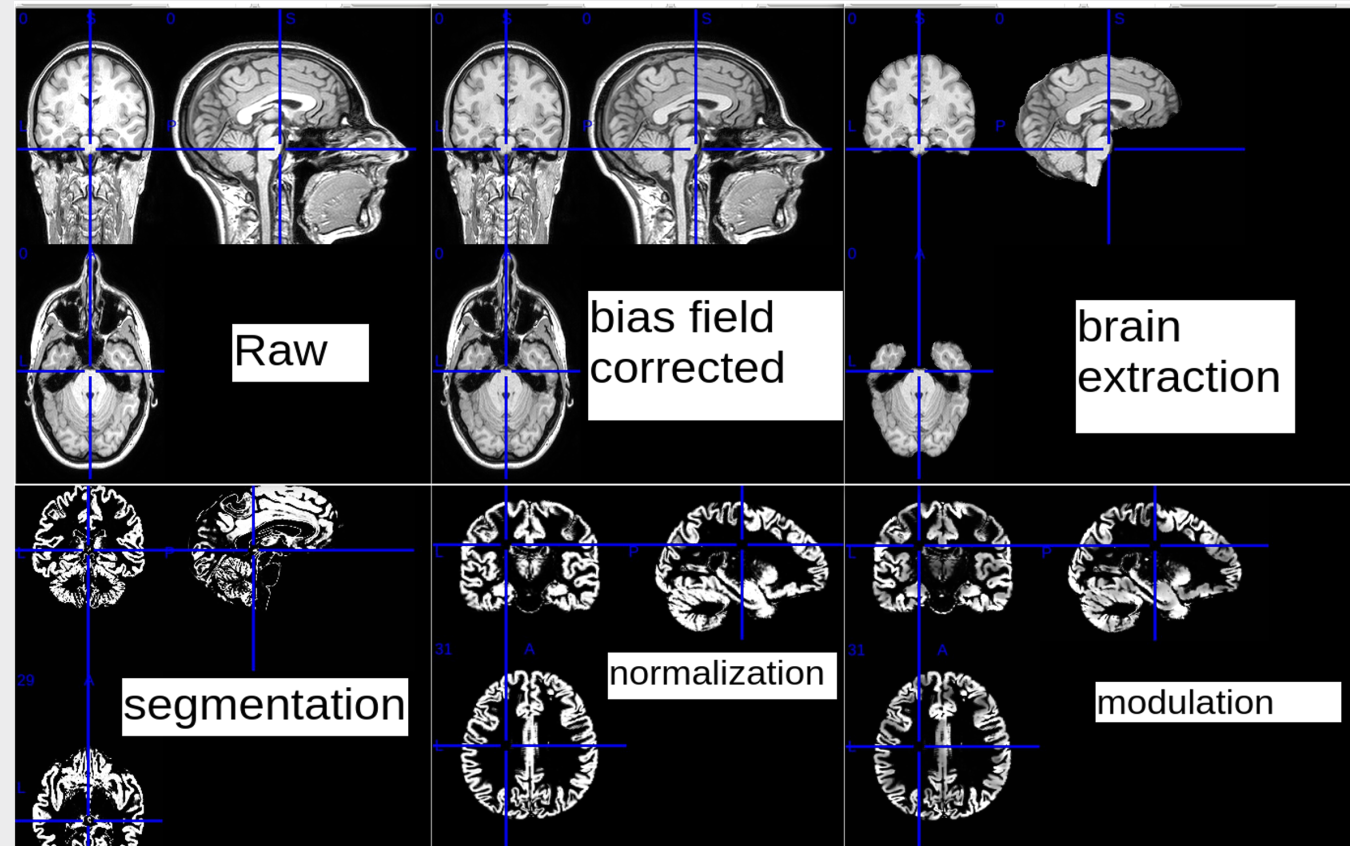
# Structure of the Human Brain: T1w



- **Grey matter (GM)**: A thin layer surrounding the brain. Home to neural cell bodies, axon terminals, and dendrites, as well as all nerve synapses (cortical).
- **White matter (WM)**: Containing nerve fibres or axons, which are extensions of nerve cells or neurons. Found in the deeper tissues of the brain (subcortical).
- **Cerebro-Spinal Fluid (CSF)**: A clear and colourless fluid which surrounds the brain and spinal cord of all vertebrates.

# Brain-age prediction: which features?

- sMRI to gray matter volume using voxel-based morphometry
- CAT toolbox
  - VBM tools comparison, Antonopoulos et al. (Under Review)



There are several ways to **extract features** from this voxel-wise data:

- Parcel-wise averages, different parcellation schemes
- Voxel-wise, different resampling and smoothing

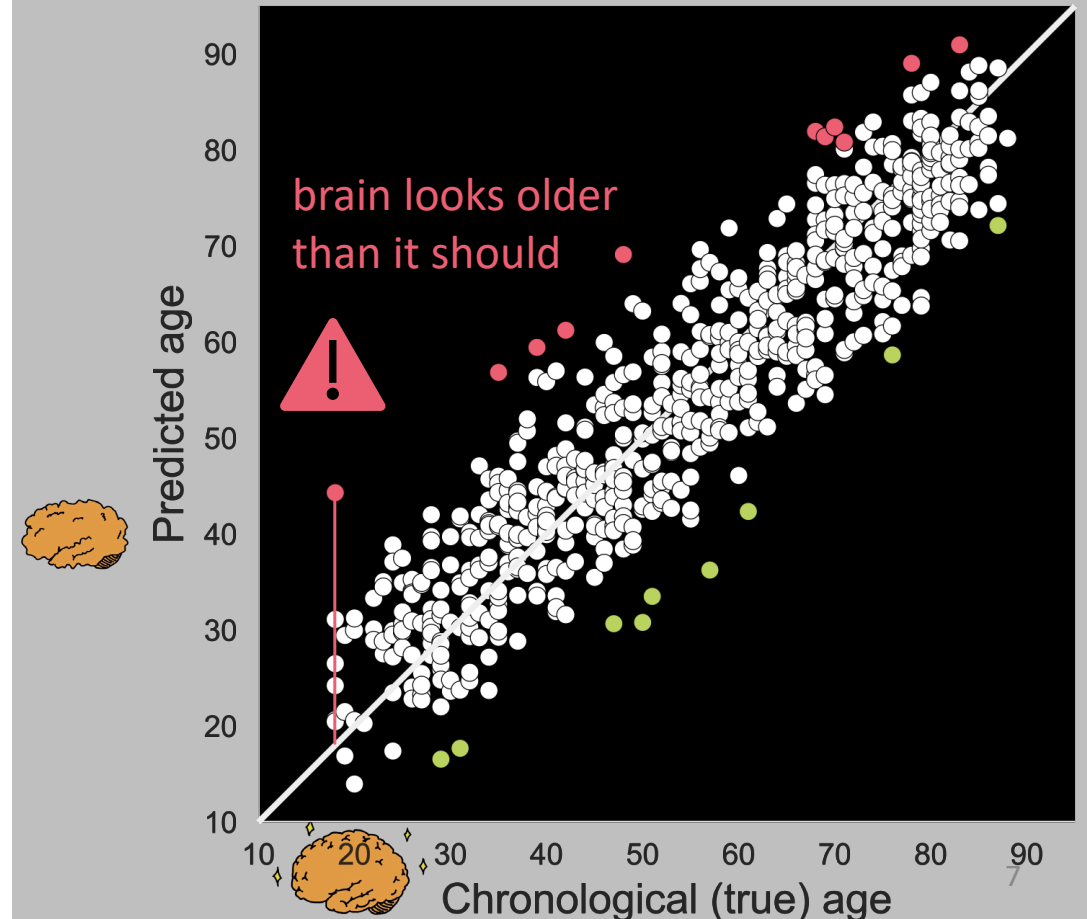
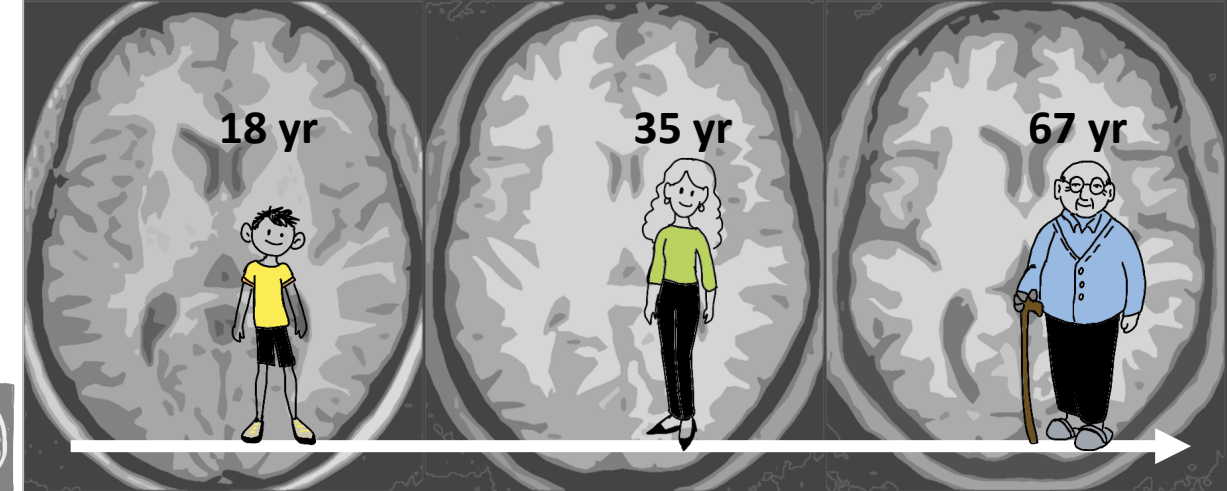
Which is the  
best choice?

And there are many **ML algorithms**

- Gaussian Process, Ridge, LASSO, Random Forests etc.

# Can a 5-minute MRI scan reveal your age?

- Train a ML model using a database with sMRI images of many individuals
- Indeed, we can predict ~4-5 years!
- Predicted age > Actual age:
  - Brain-age delta = Predicted - Actual
  - Abnormal ageing: early warning system
  - In many cases brain changes happen (years) before external symptoms
  - Disorder-agnostic: Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Schizophrenia



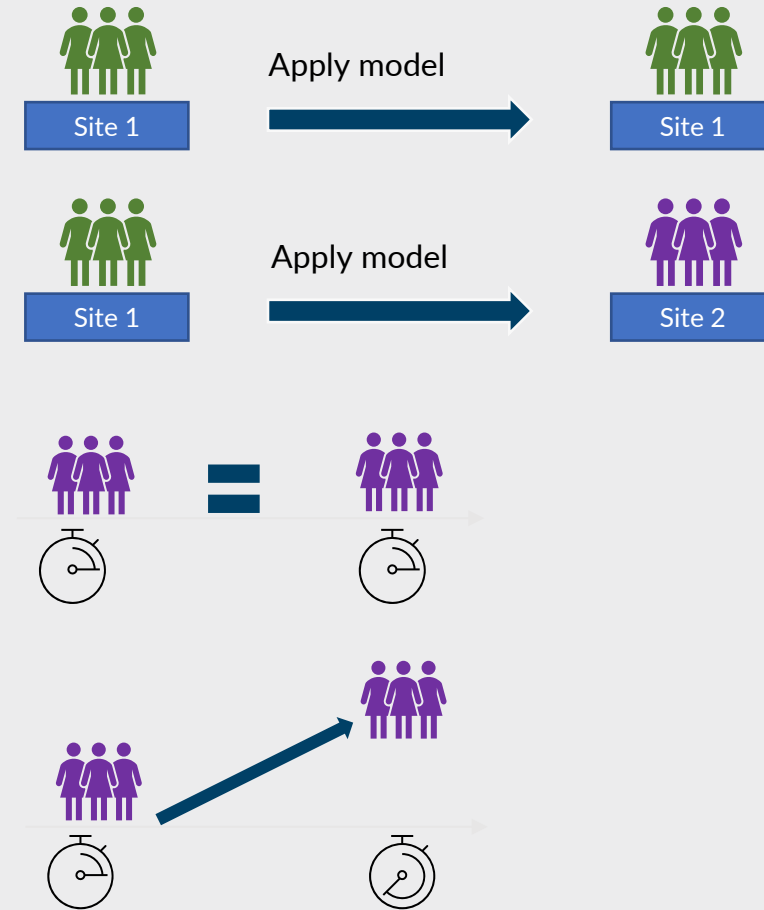




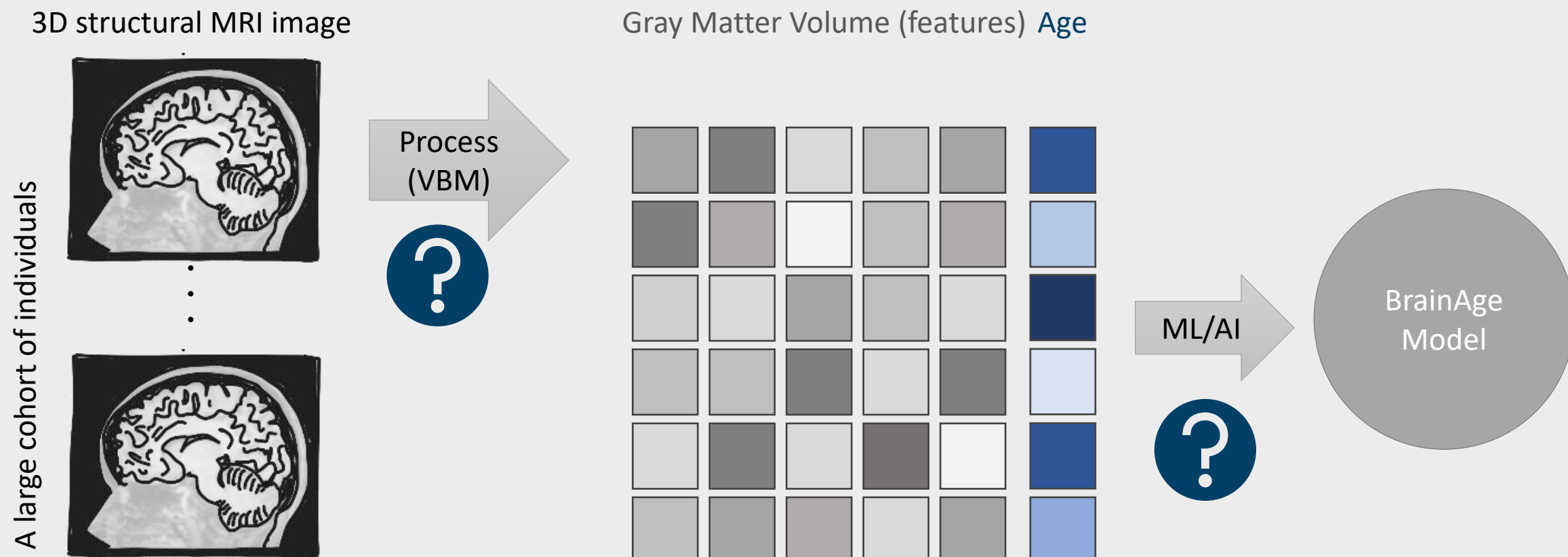
Shammi  
More

# Brain-age prediction: what do we need?

- **Generalizability:** work well on new data from the training site as well as on data from new sites
- **Reliability:** Estimated age must be reliable on repeated measurements
- **Longitudinal consistency:** the predicted age should be proportionally higher for later scans after a longer duration



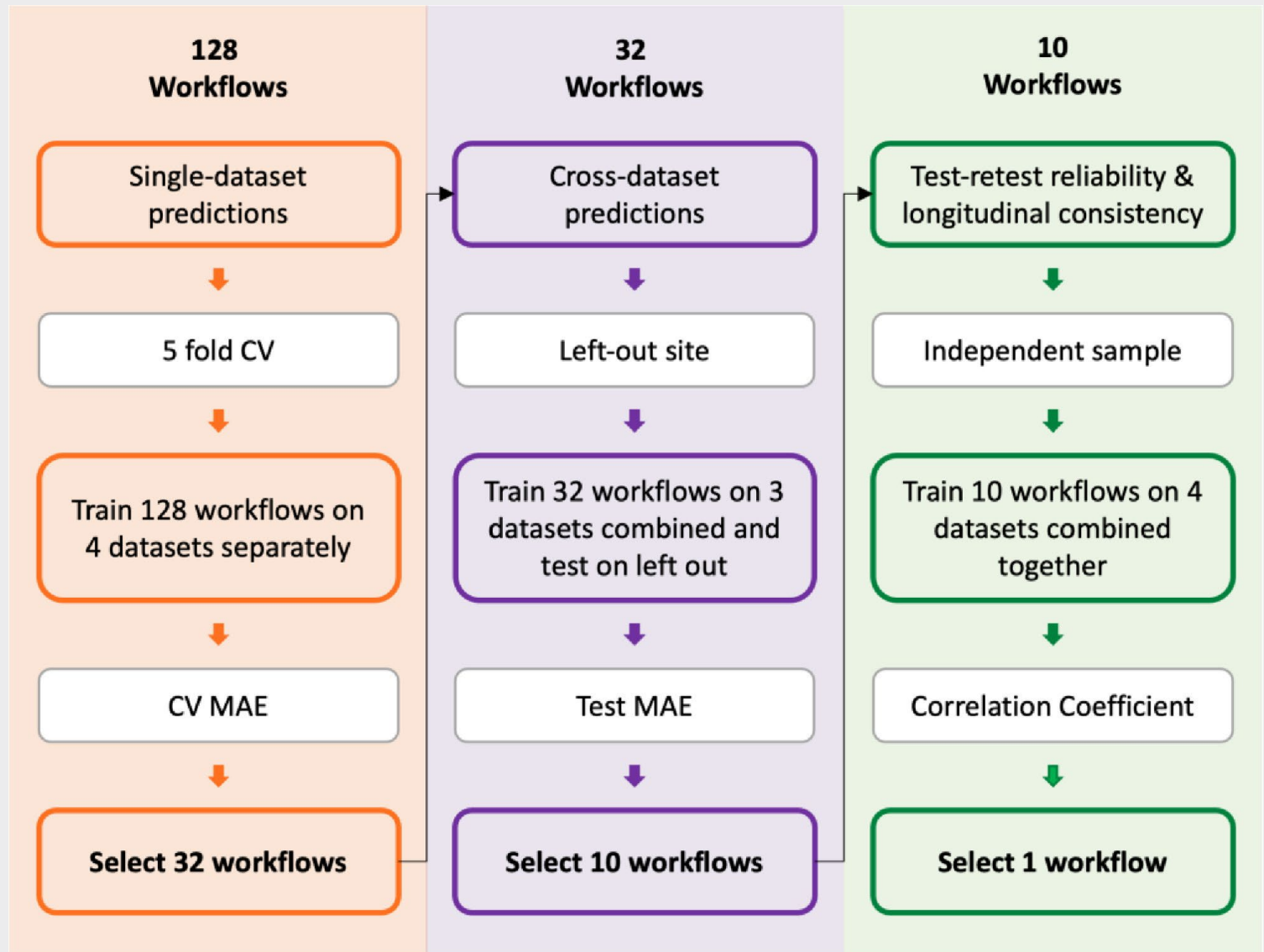
# How to build a brain-age model?



# Brain-age prediction: which workflow?

## Comparison of 128 workflows

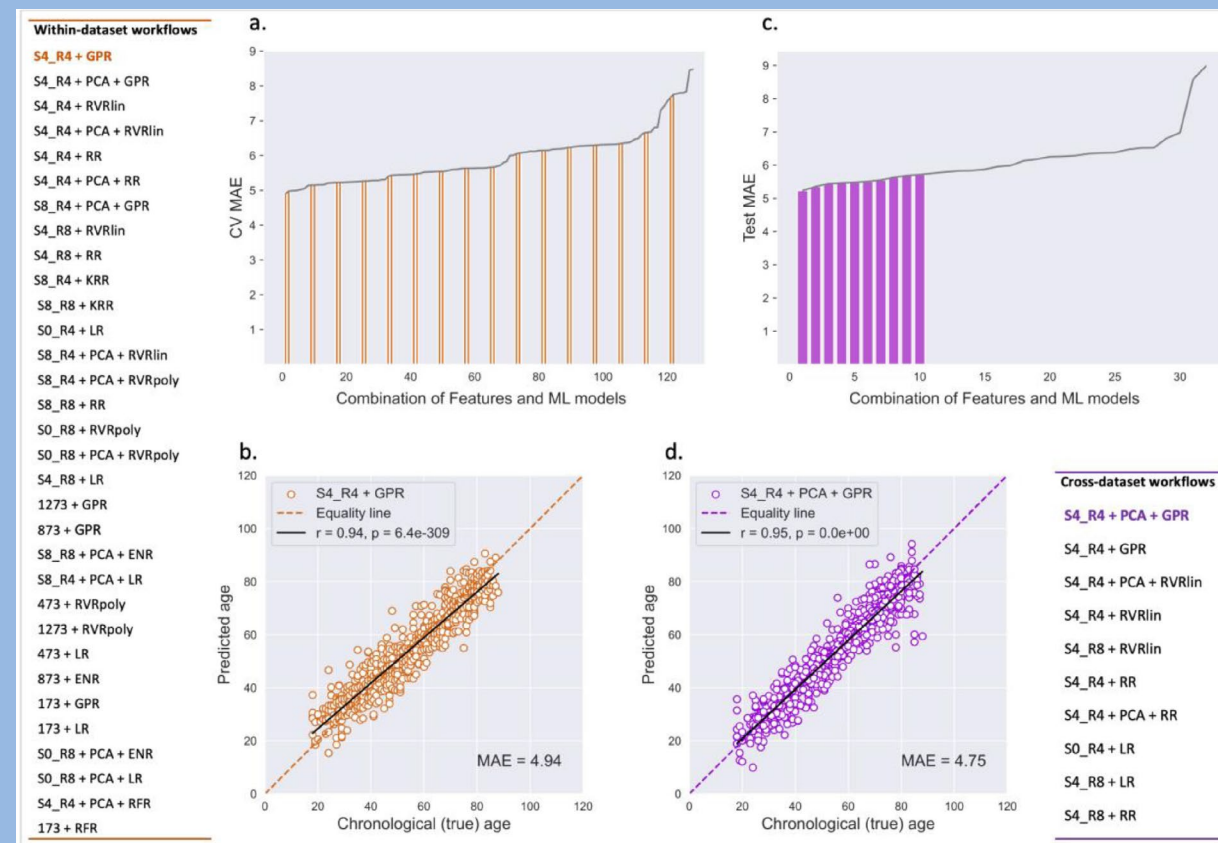
- 16 feature spaces
  - Voxel- and parcel-wise
- 8 ML algorithms
  - LASSO, GPR, RF, RVRlin, RVRpoly, Ridge



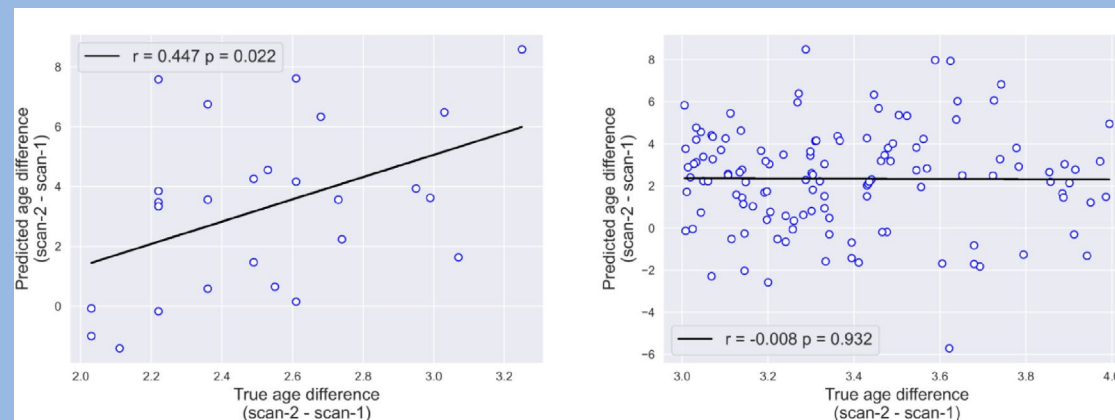


# Brain-age workflow selection

- S4\_R4: smoothing with 4mm FWHM and resampling to 4x4x4 voxels
- GPR and RVR perform well
- It fulfills most of the desiderata
  - Within and cross-dataset generalization
  - Reliability

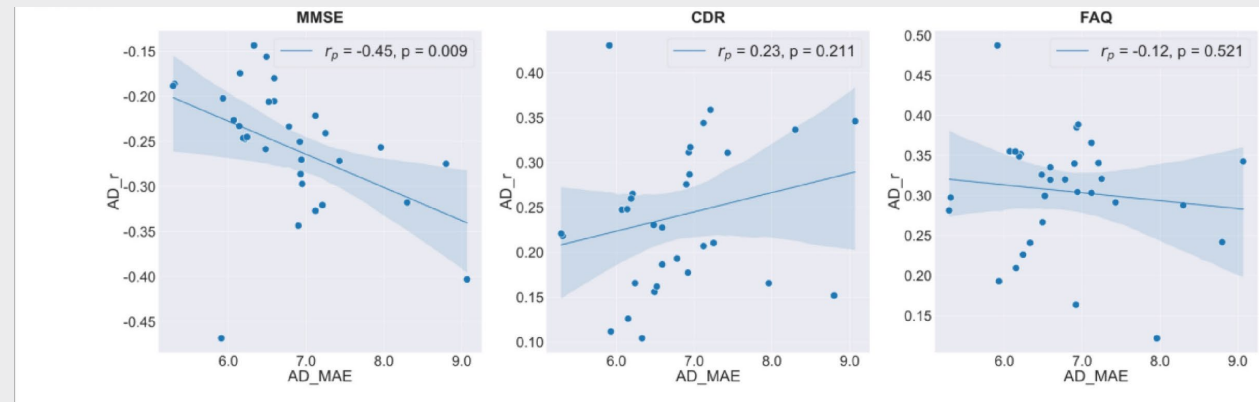
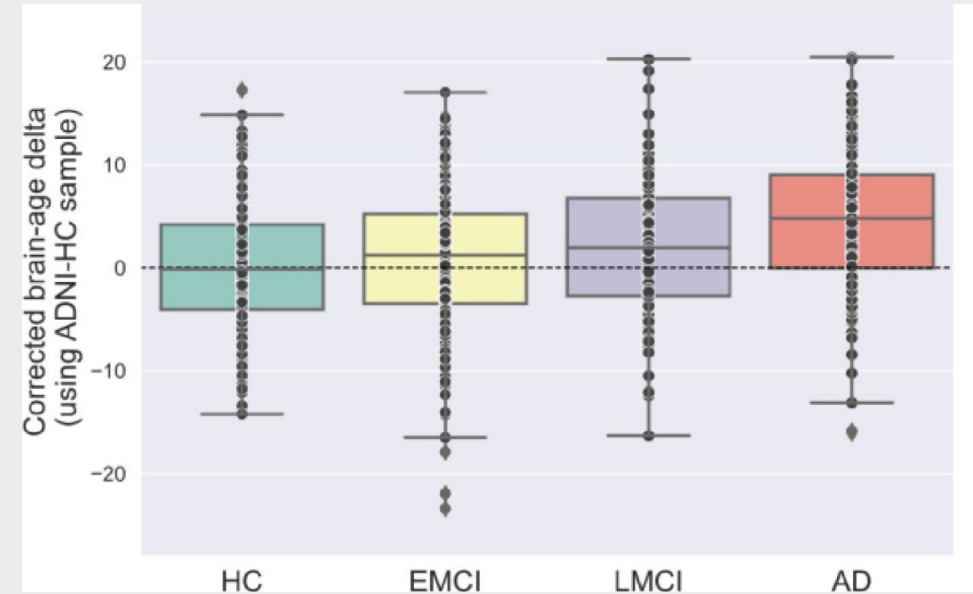


Difficult to achieve longitudinal consistency



# Brain-age application to Alzheimer's disease

- ADNI dataset
  - Healthy control (HC), early and late mild cognitive impairment (EMCI, LMCI), and Alzheimer's disease (AD)
- Bias correction is needed
  - Models show systematic correlation with age
- AD indeed shows higher delta (deviation of predicted age from chronological age)
- The “brain-age delta” also correlates with cognitive scores



Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE), Clinical Dementia Rating (CDR),  
Functional Activities Questionnaire (FAQ)



Geo.  
Anto.

# Which Voxel-based Morphometry Pipeline?

3D structural MRI image

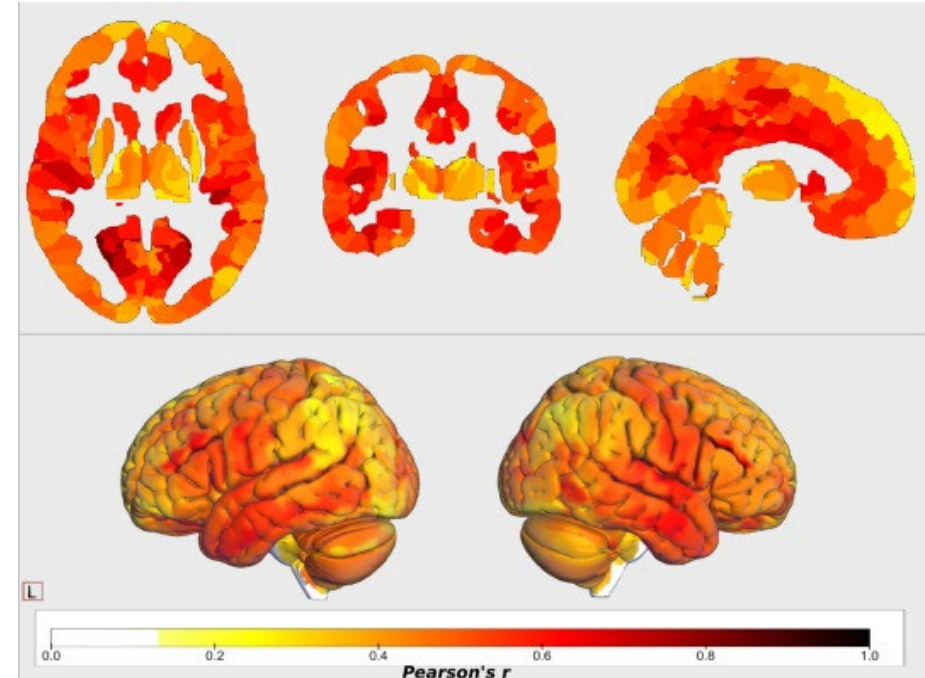


Process  
(VBM)

Gray Matter Volume Features



- Process: Voxel-based Morphometry
- Several software tools are available
- They produce quite different GMV estimates!
- What to use for brain-age?
  - CAT 12.8 or fMRIPrep+FSL
  - Use a general template

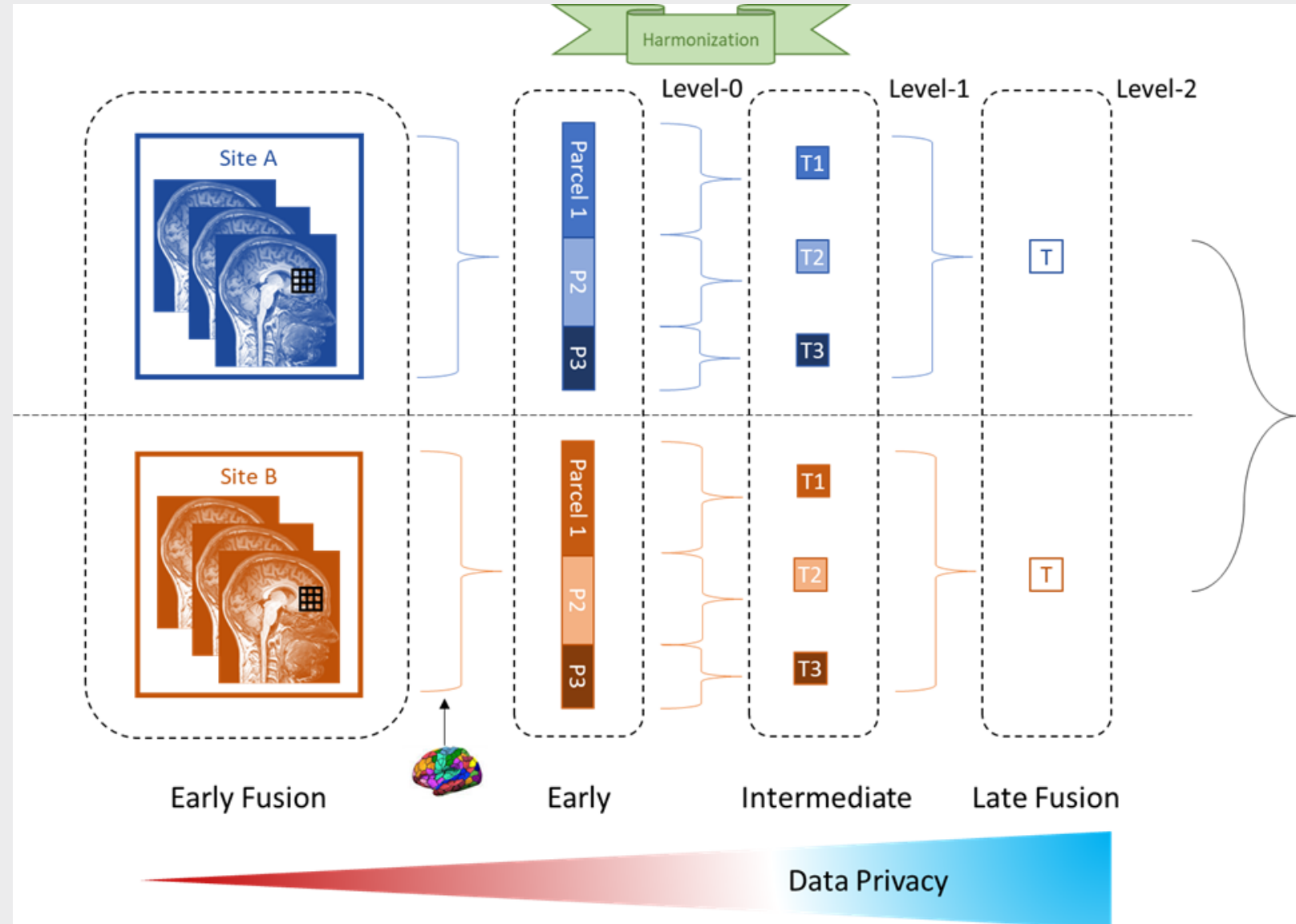


Median GMV-Age correlation  
across VBM pipelines is rather low!



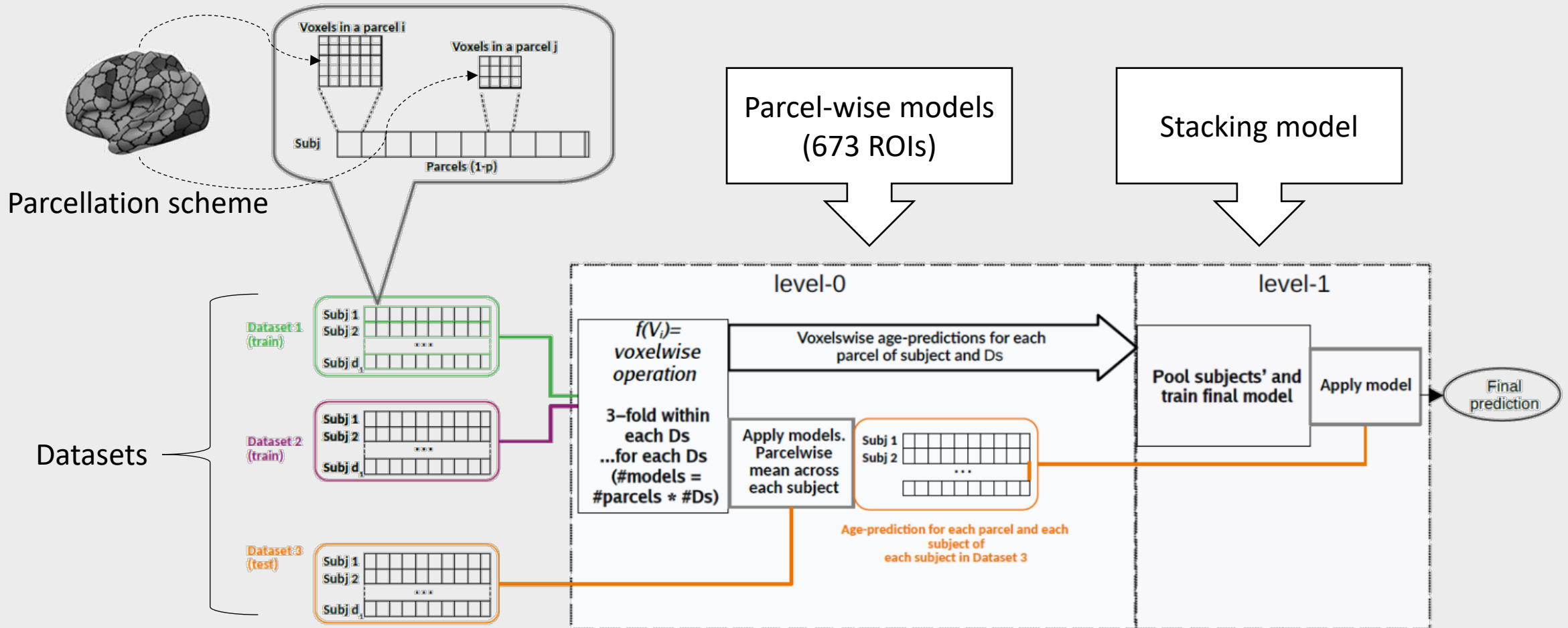
# Stacking for better accuracy and privacy

- Built-in harmonization
  - Age means the same across sites
- Better interpretation
- Improved data privacy
  - Controlled sharing of train/test data
  - Distributed learning



# A stacking model

Build a model for each brain region and stack them!



Conventional parcel-wise model is **average**, e.g., hippocampal volume is used for tracking AD.

# Stacking parcels

## Improved accuracy

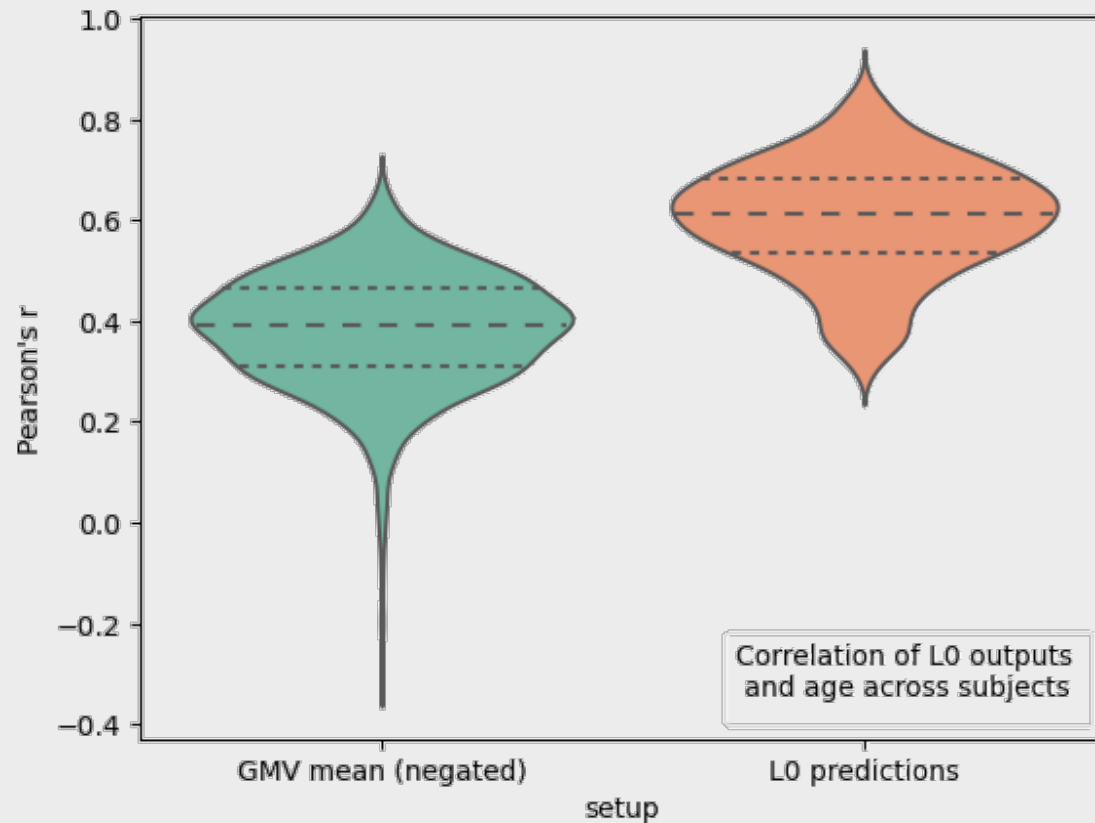
- Parcel-wise mean is least accurate (conventional method)
- Parcel-wise stacking is better
  - Best is pooled L1 models (MAE=4.69)
- L0 & L1 models at each training site, L0 from test site (MAE = 4.93)
  - Most private for both training and test sites

Set up	Pooling	MAE
Mean GMV l1 per site		6.70
l0 & l1 per site	None	5.12
l0 oos-test l0 & l1 per site		4.93
l0 per site l1 pooled	Average of site-wise l0 predictions	5.19
<u>l0 oos-test</u> <u>l1 pooled</u>		<u>4.69</u>
Mean GMV l1 pooled		6.35
l0 pooled l1 pooled	Prior to l0 training	4.97
l0 oos-test l1 pooled		4.76

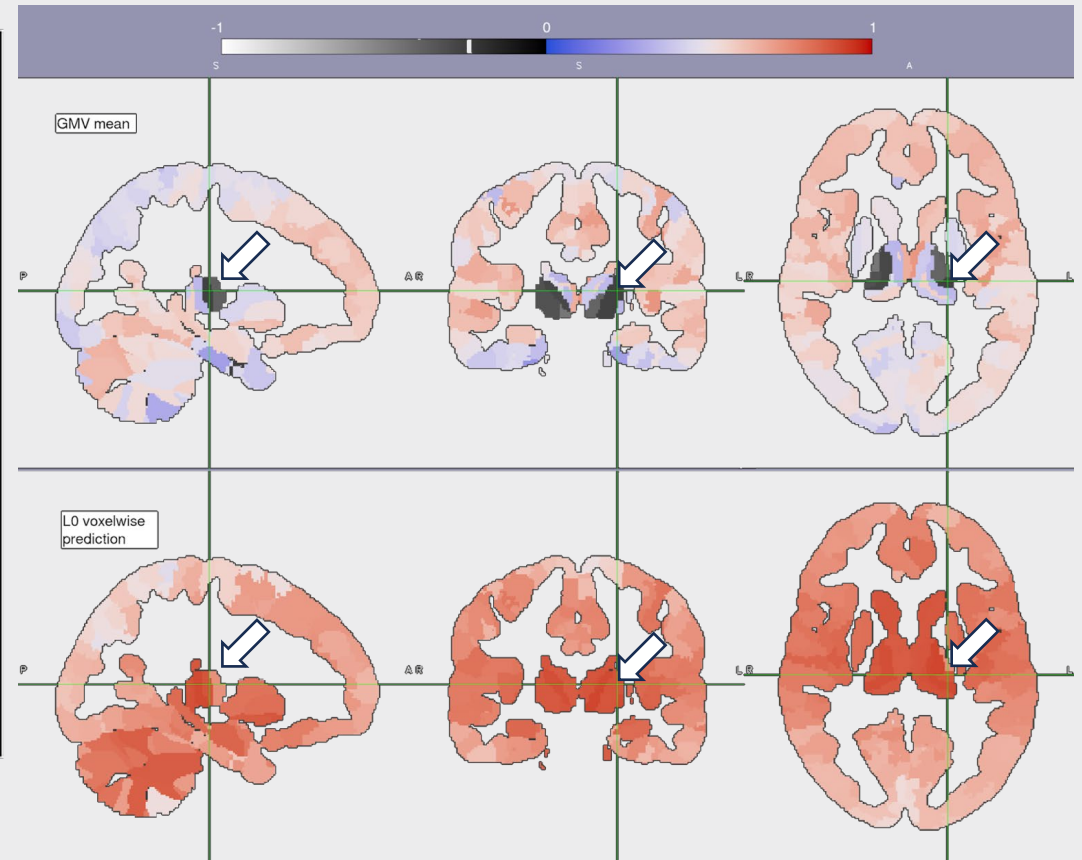


# Stacking parcels

Improved interpretability



Higher correlation of each parcel with age

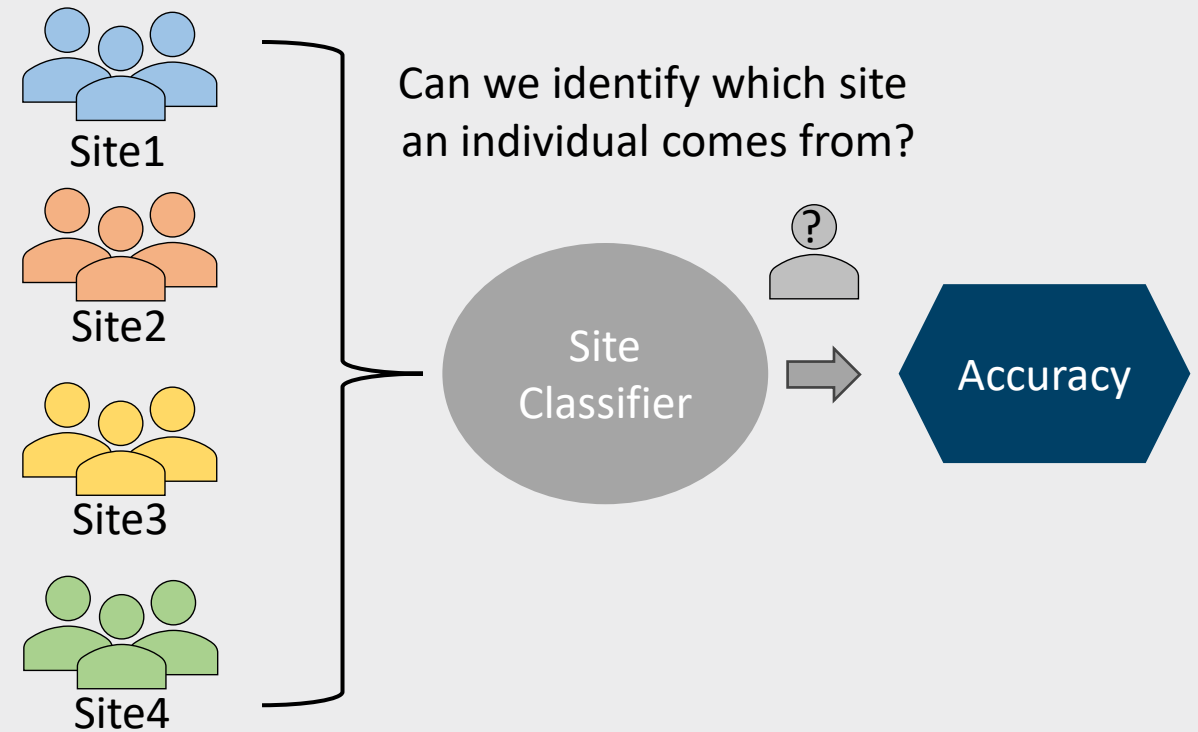


Subcortical regions show up as related to age

# Stacking parcels

## Improved privacy

- Data sharing, especially patient, raises privacy concerns
  - Privacy preserving methods are needed
- ✓ L0-level predictions, i.e. age, provide a solution



Lower Accuracy = Higher Privacy (*caveats)	
GMV mean	87%
<b>L0 predictions</b>	<b>63%</b> ✓

# What about other modalities?

## BrainAge with FDG-PET

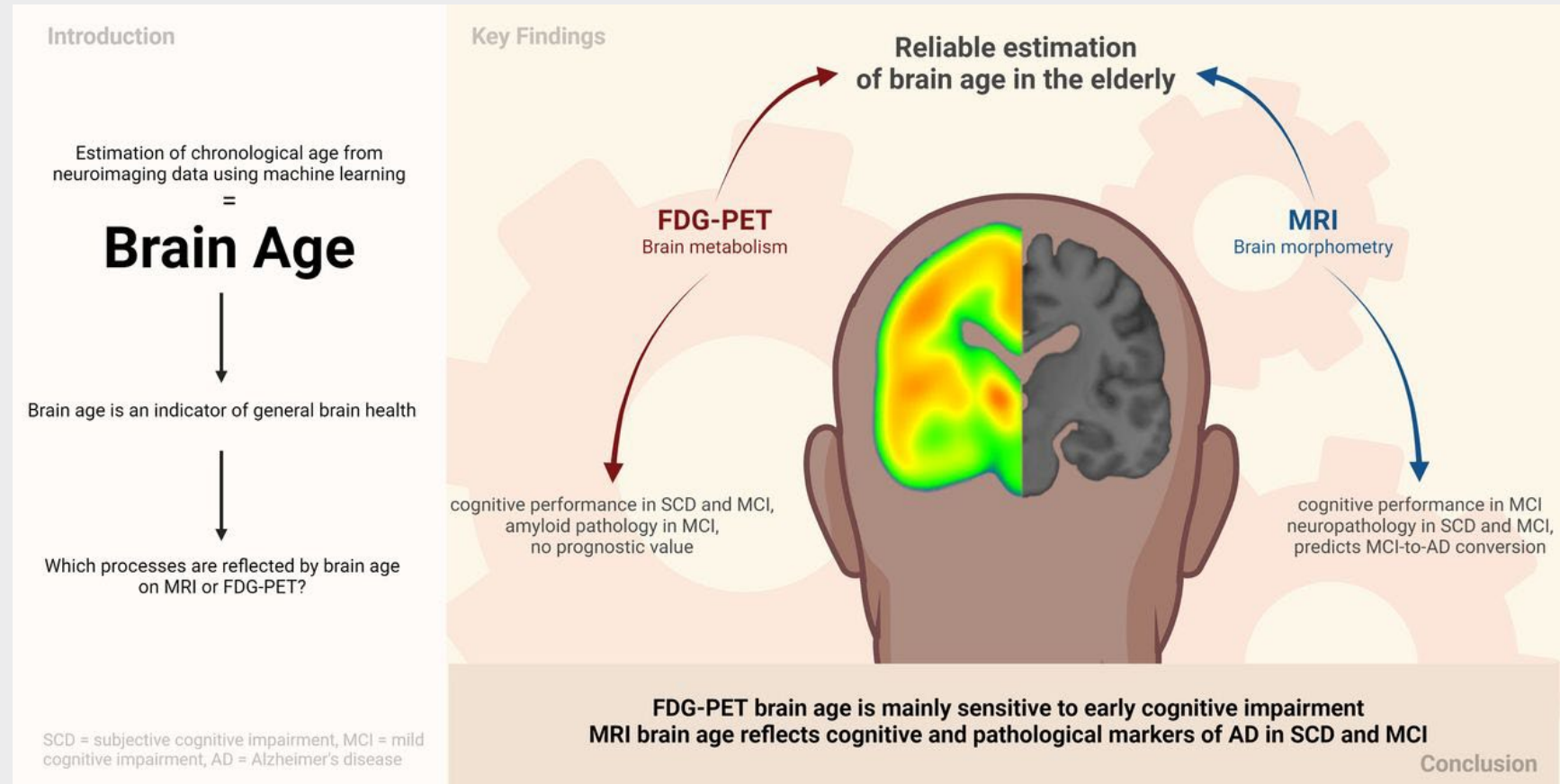
- FDG-PET (Fluorodeoxyglucose Positron Emission Tomography) measures cellular metabolism
  - Reflecting the level of activity in different tissues
- Used in diagnosing and assessing the progression of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's
  - Affected brain areas show reduced glucose metabolism.
- PET data scarcer than MRI



Elena  
Doering

# Differing utility of FDG-PET and T1w MRI

- **FDG PET:**  
Early cognitive impairment
- T1w MRI: Subjective and mild cognitive impairment
- Brain-age gap predictive of MCI-to-AD conversion on par with clinical markers, e.g. P-tau/A $\beta$ 42 ratio



Copyright © Society of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging

Doering et al., J Nucl Med 2024



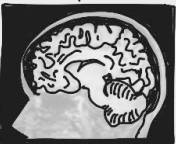
# Brain-age prediction: ongoing work

## Applications

- Alzheimer's: is accuracy the best metric for model selection?
- Schizophrenia: brain ageing and behavioral interventions
- Astronauts: effect of space travel

## Methodological

- Stacking: integrate information within brain regions and across clinical cohorts.
- Clinical standards validation
- Deep neural network for rank consistent prediction.

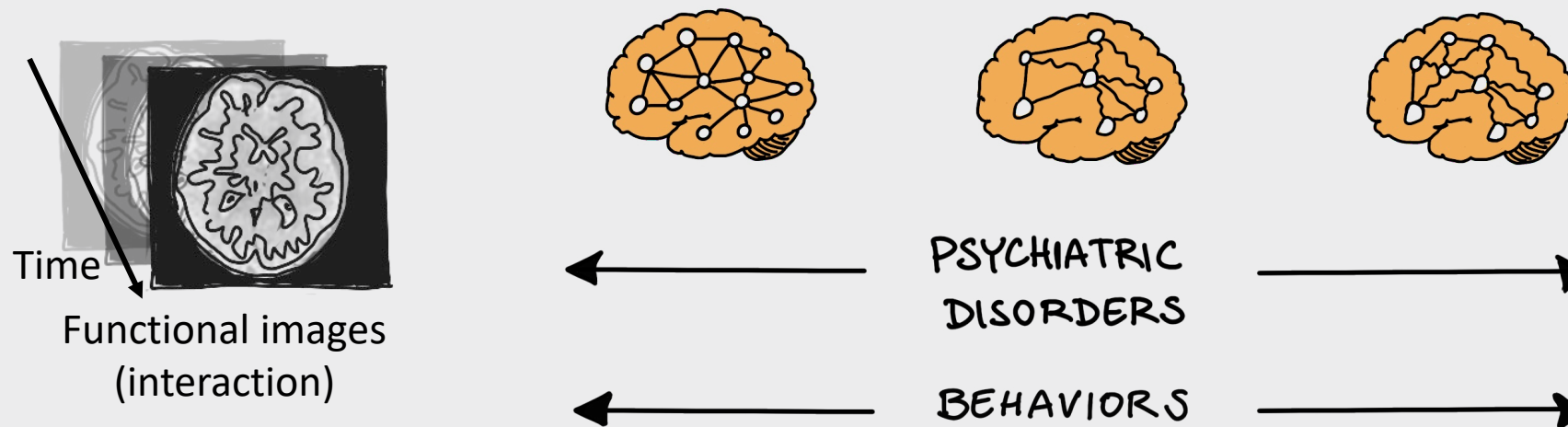


## Summary: Structural Imaging

- sMRI can uncover structural organization of the human brain.
- Data analysis & ML can help understand brain structure organization and how it changes in health and disease.
- Several techniques can be used
  - Voxel-based morphometry (VBM)
  - Shape analysis
  - Surface and thickness
  - ... and more



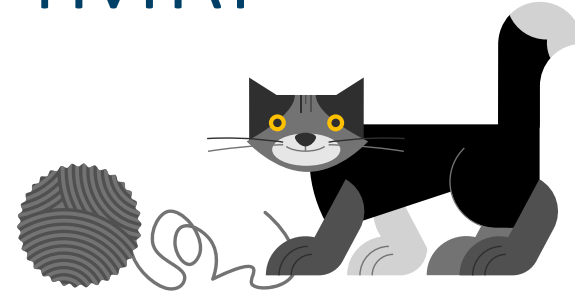
# functional MRI + Machine Learning



# Task versus Resting-state fMRI

- **Task fMRI (tfMRI)**

- Explicit task: e.g., finger tapping
- Specific questions with a hypothesis



- **Resting-state fMRI (rsfMRI)**

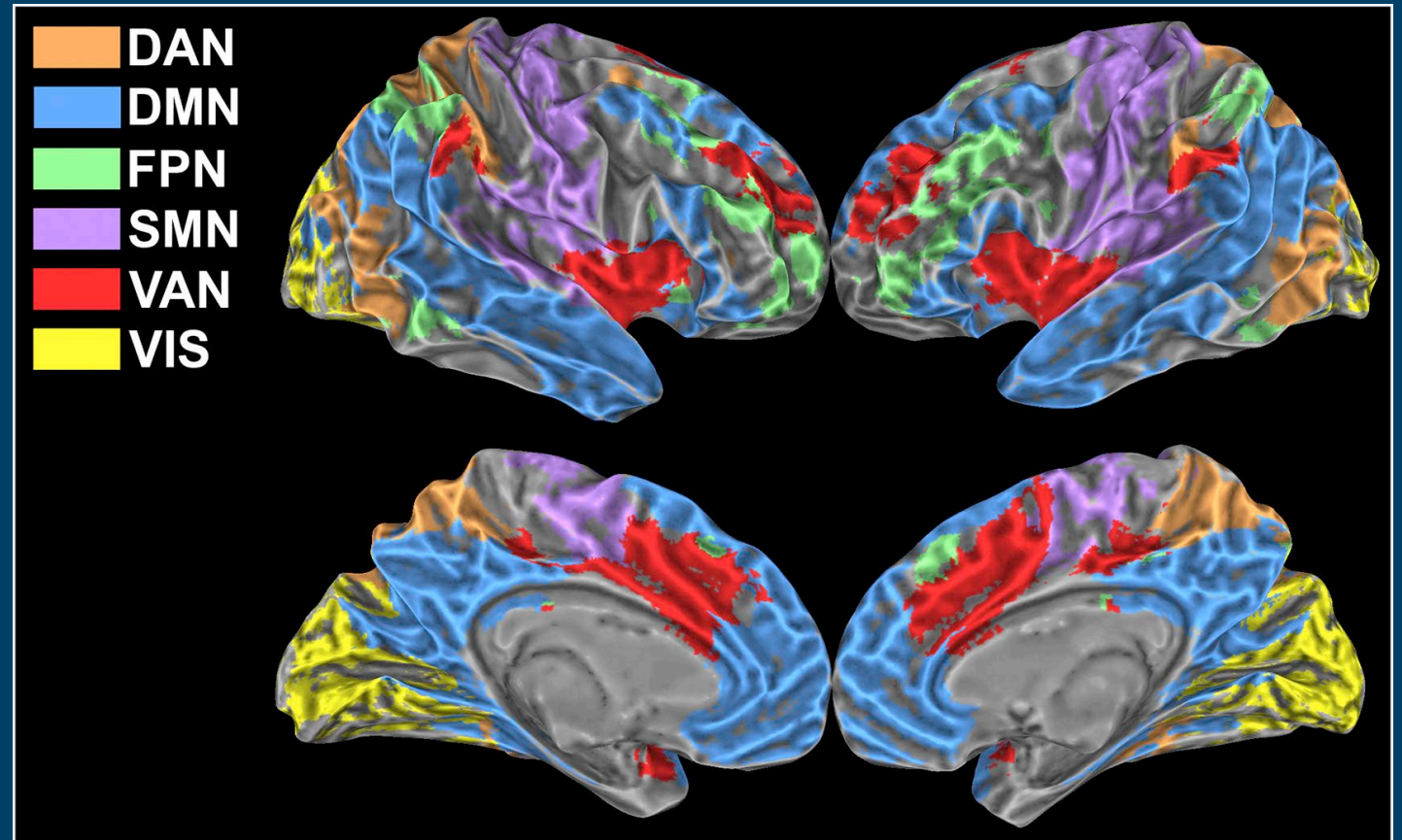
- No explicit task, no stimulation
- Eyes open or close, rarely covered
- Instruction:
  - *“Think of nothing in particular and try not to sleep!”*
  - *“Watch movie and Think of nothing in particular!”* (Naturalistic fMRI)
  - *“Try to sleep!”* (EEG-fMRI studies of Epilepsy)
- Duration 5-15 minutes





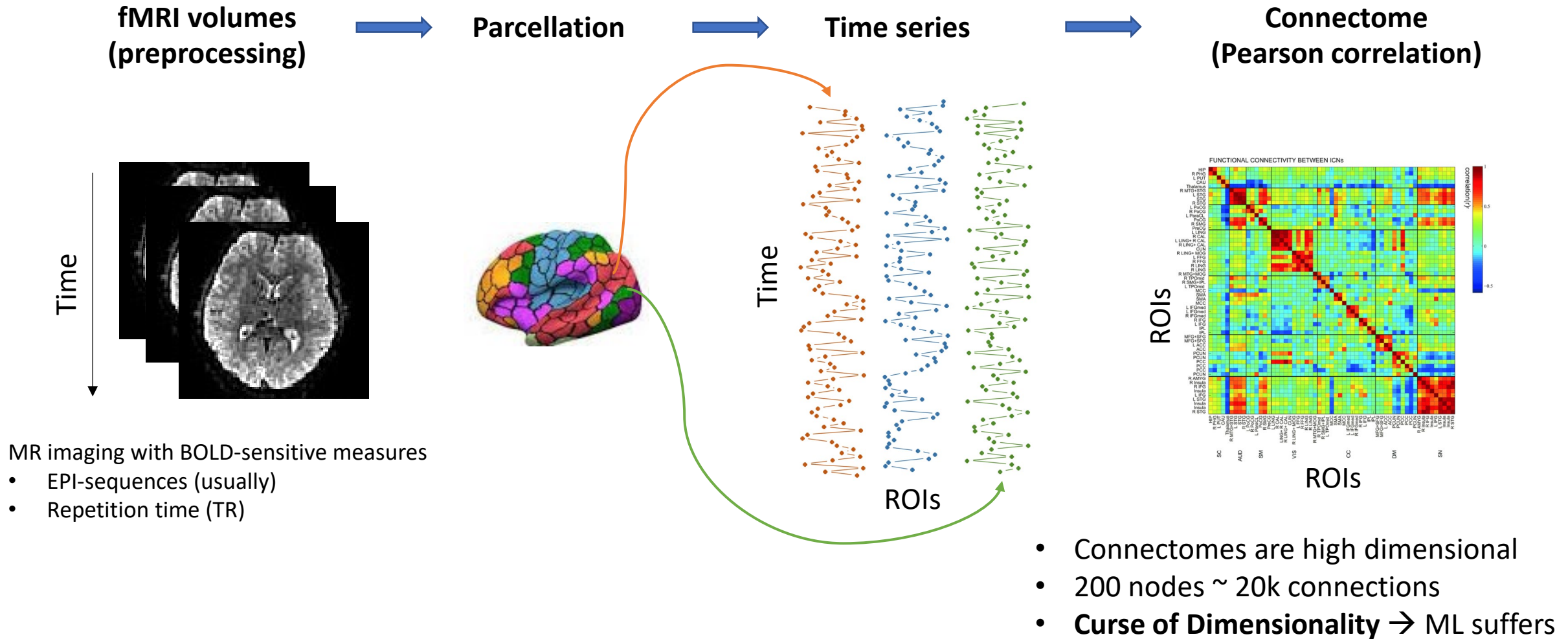
# The Brain at Rest

- The brain is always active
- Even when we are not doing anything actively
  - The brain regions are communicating with each other
- This is called as the “intrinsic connectivity”
- High utility in clinical settings where task engagement is tricky

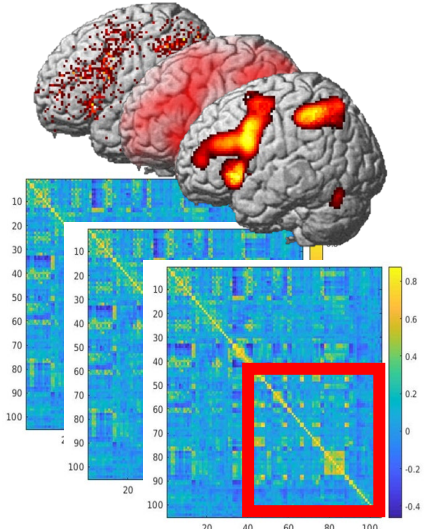
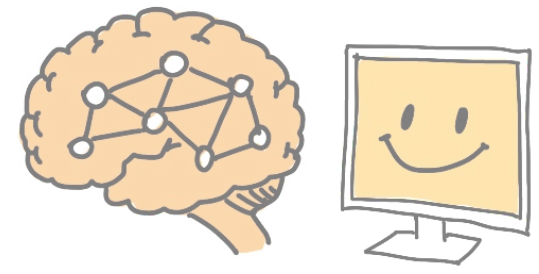


<http://marbilab.eu/publications-menu-en/papers-menu-en/tommasin2018>

# fMRI to connectome

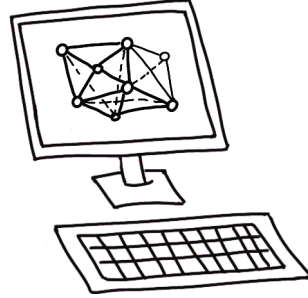


# Prediction of schizophrenia symptoms: Biologically meaningful priors



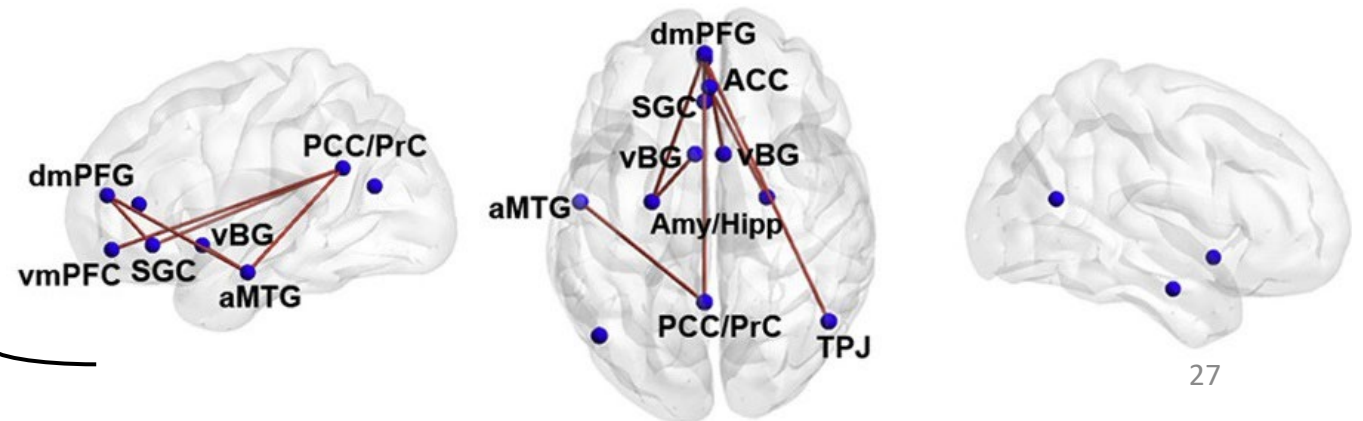
Connectomes

MACHINE  
learning



*Cognitive dimension  
predicted by  
social and affective  
network*

- Reuse brain mapping knowledge
- Lower dimensionality
- Better interpretation

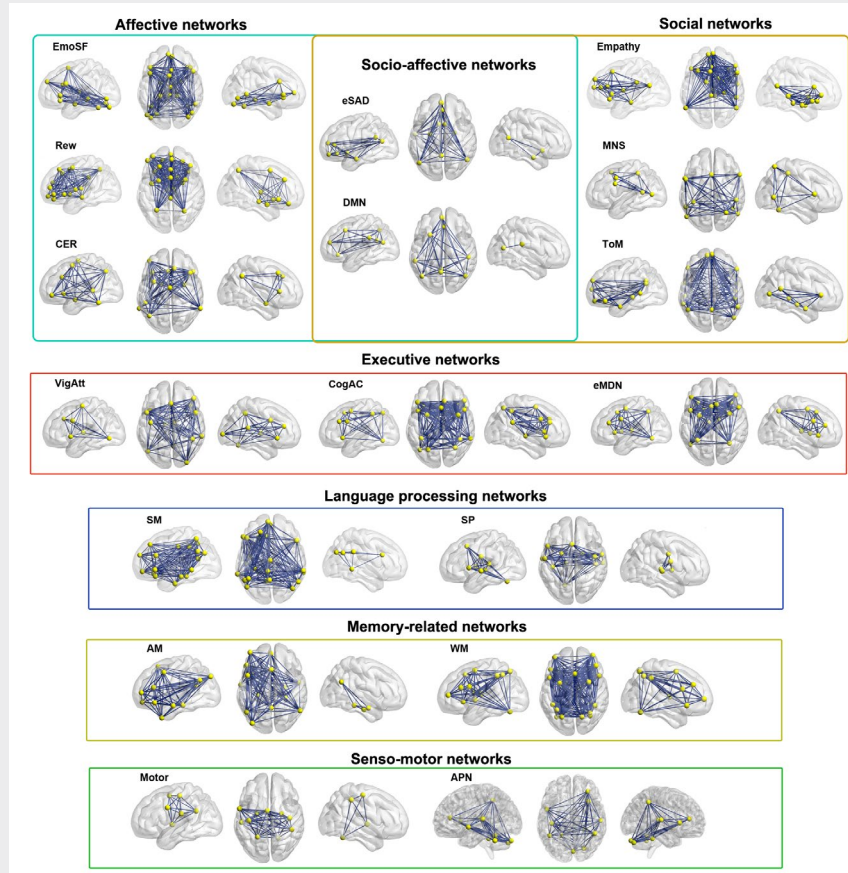




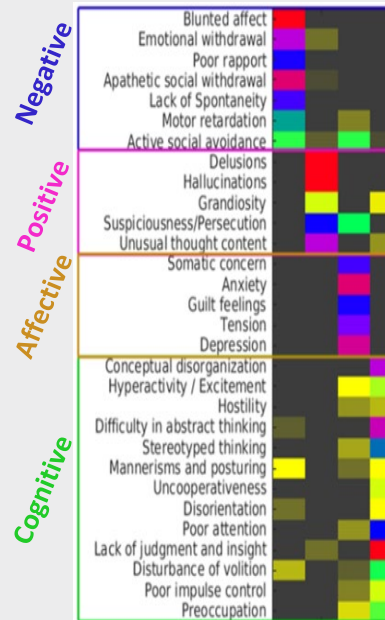
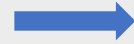
# Schizophrenia: Dimensional Psychopathology

Prediction of Symptom scales using Meta-analytic Networks

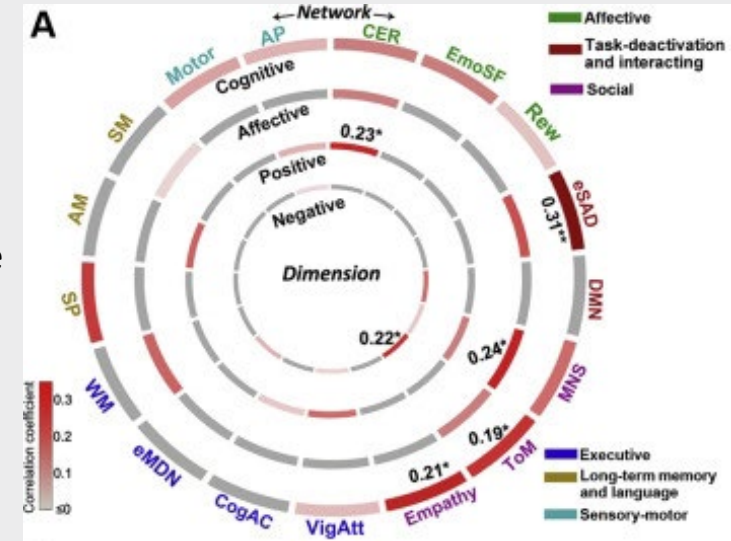
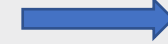
Chen et al., Biol. Psych. 2020



Predict



Significance



Connectivity within meta-analytic networks as biological priors

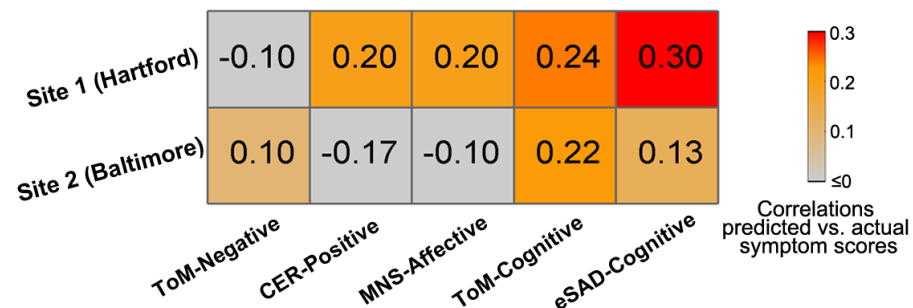
Psychopathology dimensions derived using OPNMF factorization of PANSS score (Chen et.al, Biol Psych 2020)

Predictive networks



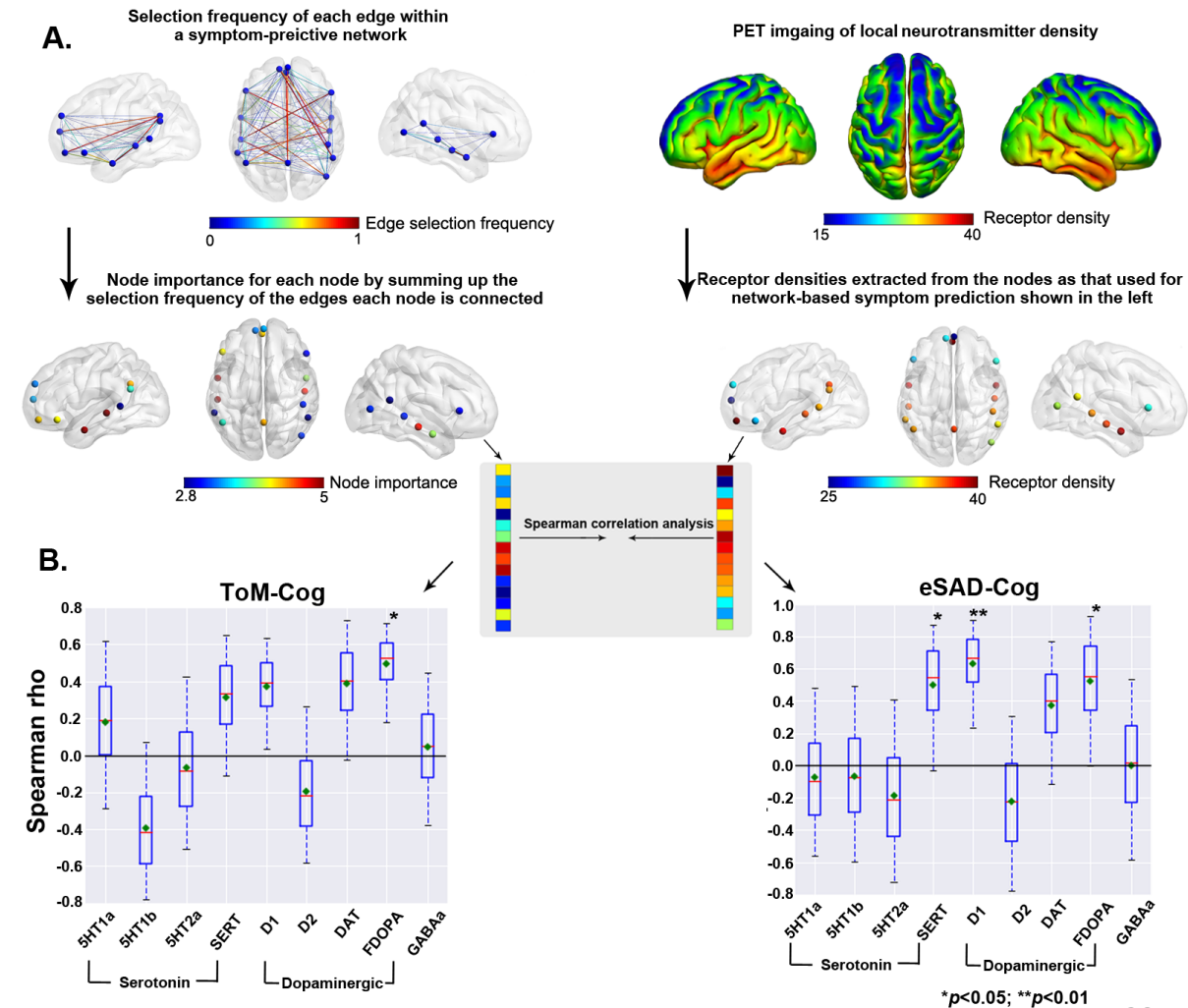
# Schizophrenia: from networks to receptors

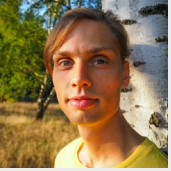
The extended social-affective default mode network (eSAD) predicts cognitive symptoms



Replication in two cohorts  
→ The result is robust

Network node importance correlates with receptor densities (FDOPA, SERT)





Leonard  
Sasse

# Prediction of behavioral scores

Do fewer timepoints  
provide similar or  
better information  
regarding behavior?

Region-wise time series



Edgewise  
timeseries  
and RSS

Esfahlani et al.,  
2020 PNAS

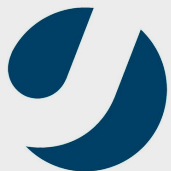
Ordering of timepoints



Low amplitude  
co-fluctuation

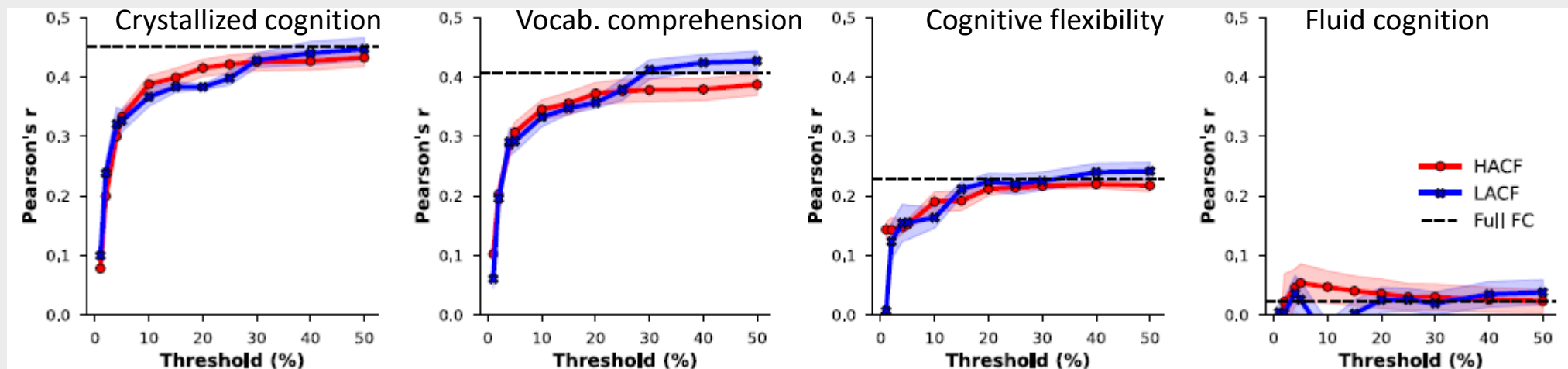
High amplitude  
co-fluctuation

- HACF timepoints contain idiosyncratic information
- Do they also contribute towards behavior?



# Prediction of behavioral scores

Sequentially adding HACF or LACF timepoints (Human Connectome Project-Ageing)

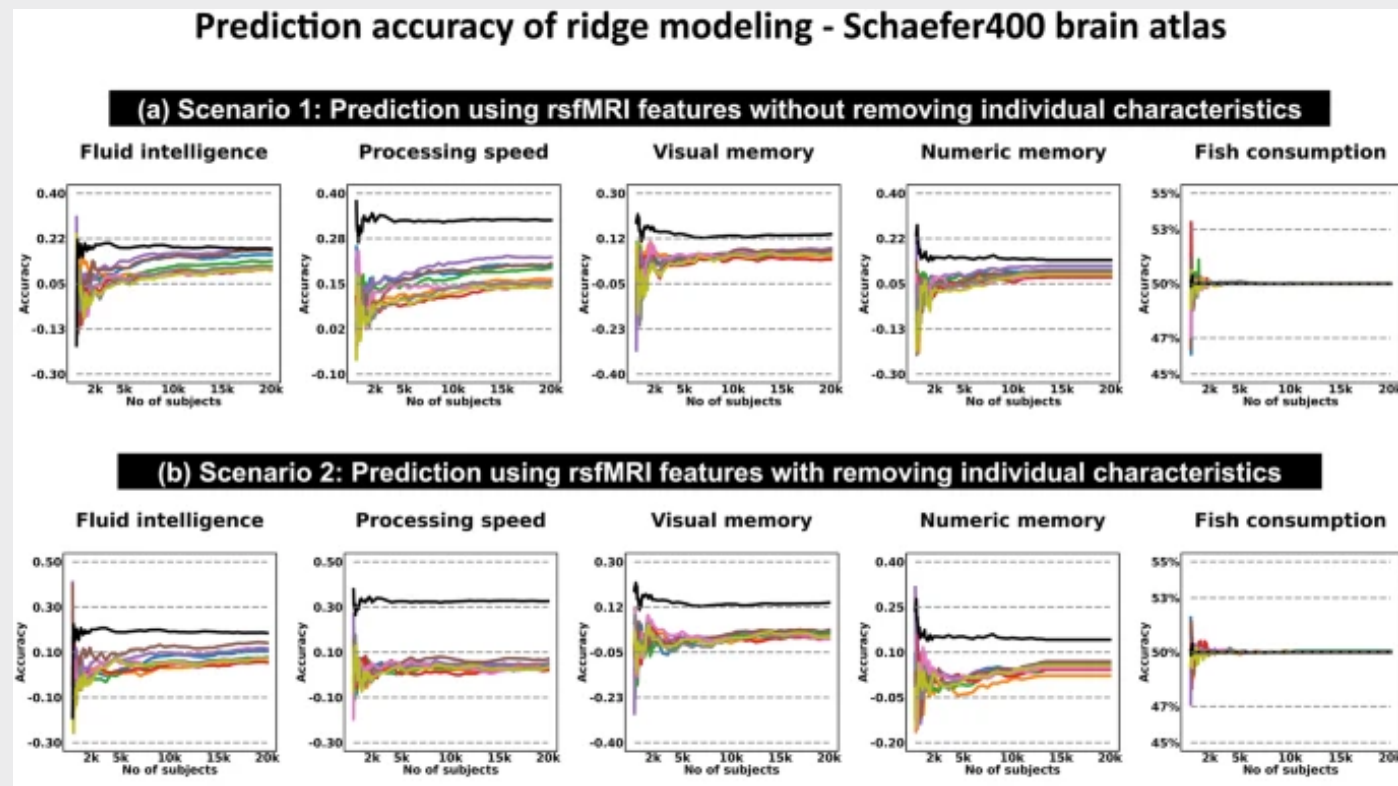


Sasse et al., bioRxiv 2022, Under revision

- HACF and LACF do not seem to provide different information
- Intermediate bins contain more information, counter to the original hypothesis
- Different scores show different predictability

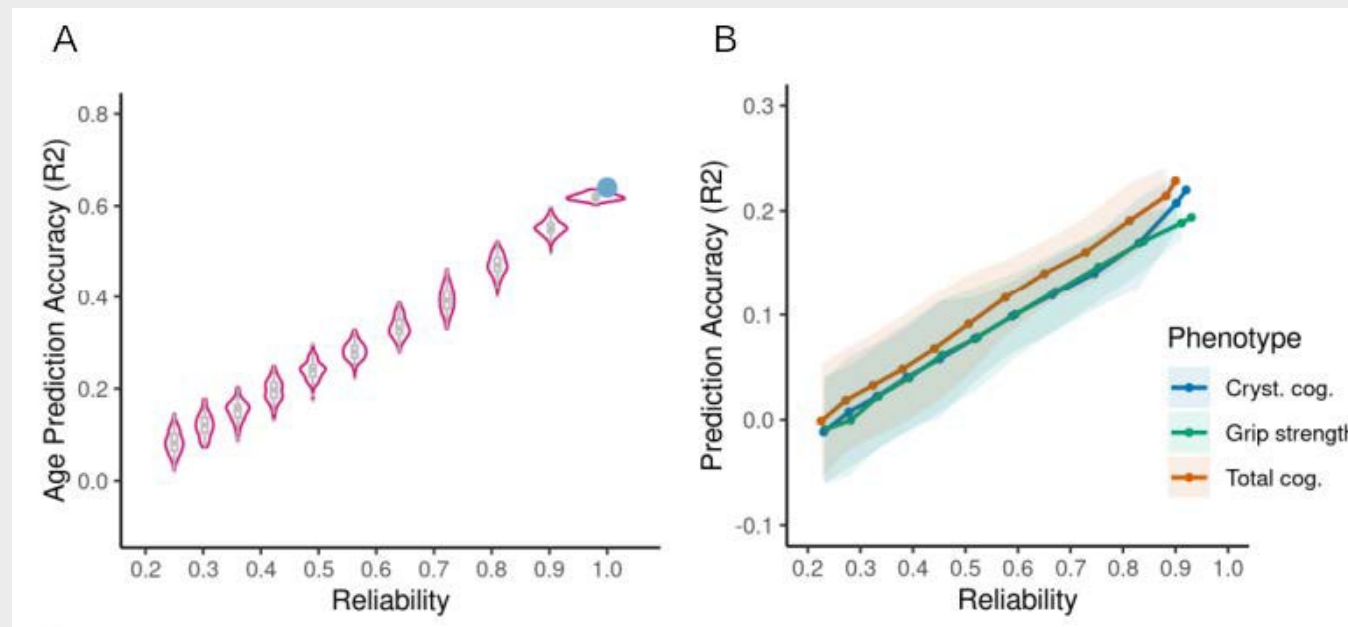
# How useful is RS?

- Various RS properties
  - Local and global connectivity
  - Entropy measures
- Individual characteristics
  - age, gender, and total intracranial volume
- Characteristics > RS



# Impact of target reliability

- Target reliability impacts prediction performance
- Lower reliability means worse prediction
- Many results could be because of this



Gell et al., Nat. Comm. accepted



# Challenges in ML/AI

# Outline

- Biased models
  - TIV bias in male/female classification
- Confound leakage
  - Increased accuracy after confound removal?
- Data harmonization
  - Leakage and site-target dependence



female & male  
brains



# Are there organizational differences between female & male brains?



Lisa  
Weirsch

- Clinical prevalence of many diseases differ
- Pharmacological differences
  - e.g., anesthetics
- ML models can uncover organizational differences
- Naturally female-male brains are different in size
  - The body sizes are different
- ML models likely learn this “simpler” signal while ignoring organizational differences
- Measure brain size using MRI: Total Intracranial Volume (TIV)
- Train a ML model using VBM features while ignoring this information
  - **Confound removal**: from each feature (voxel-wise GMV) linearly regression out TIV signal
  - **Matching/stratification**: Sample males and females within same TIV range

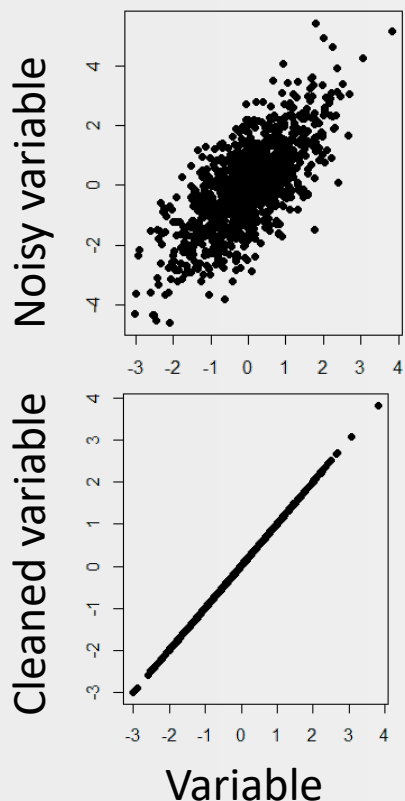




Shammi  
More

# Confounding

Simulation with  
known noise



## What is it?

- “Nuisance” variables bias the data and in turn the model
  - Older people are more likely to be diagnosed with Parkinson’s
  - Male bodies (and brains) tend to be larger on average
- We want a de-confounded model

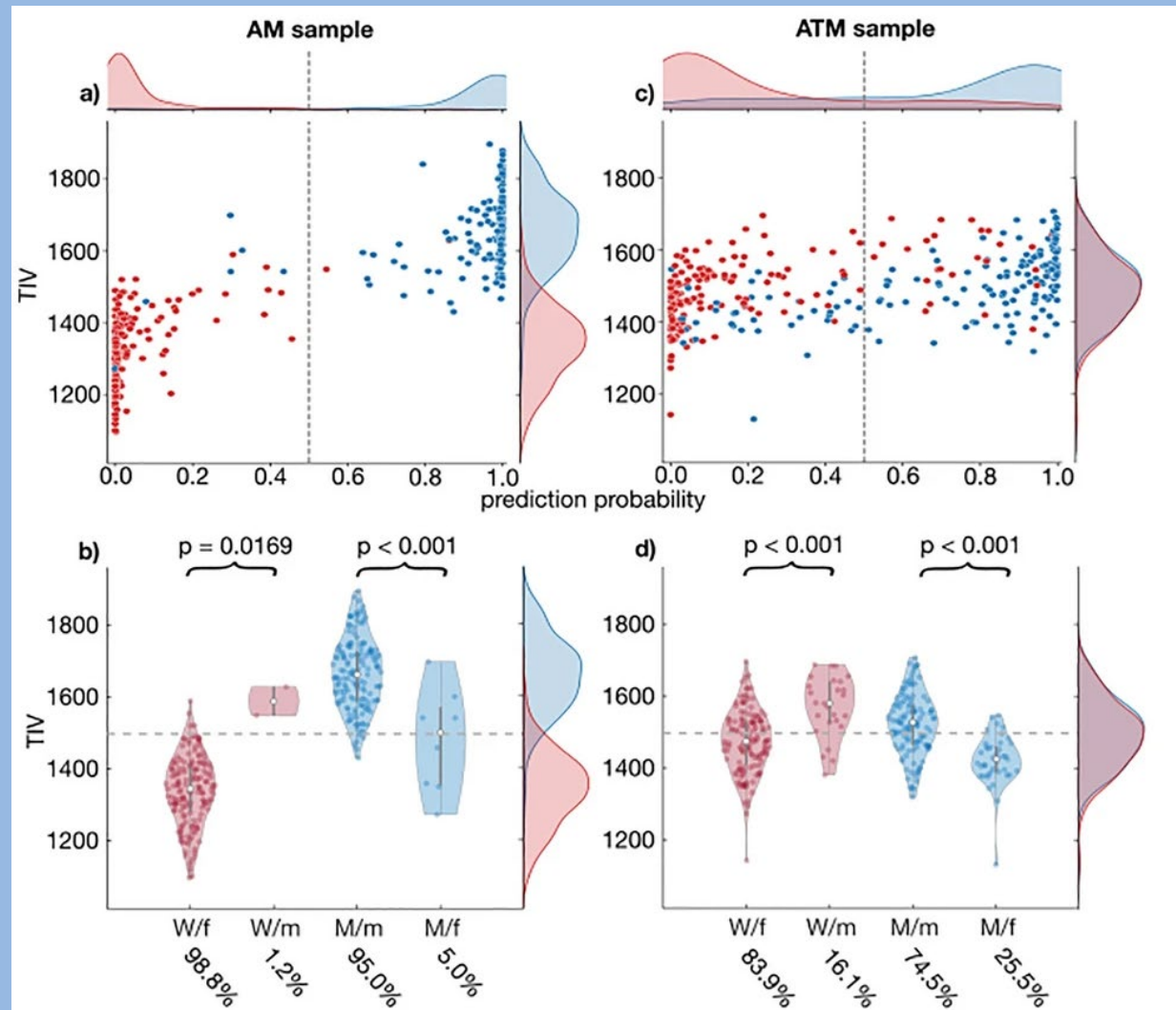
## How to deal with it?

- Featurewise confound removal in a CV-consistent manner
  - Avoid data leakage
  - More et al., 2021 ECML

1.  $\mathbf{f}: \mathbf{x} \sim \mathbf{conf}$
2.  $\hat{\mathbf{x}} = \mathbf{f}(\mathbf{conf})$
3.  $\mathbf{x}_{CR} = \mathbf{x} - \hat{\mathbf{x}}$

There are other ways, e.g. stratifying w.r.t. confounding variance, with their own pros and cons.

# Is there a TIV bias?



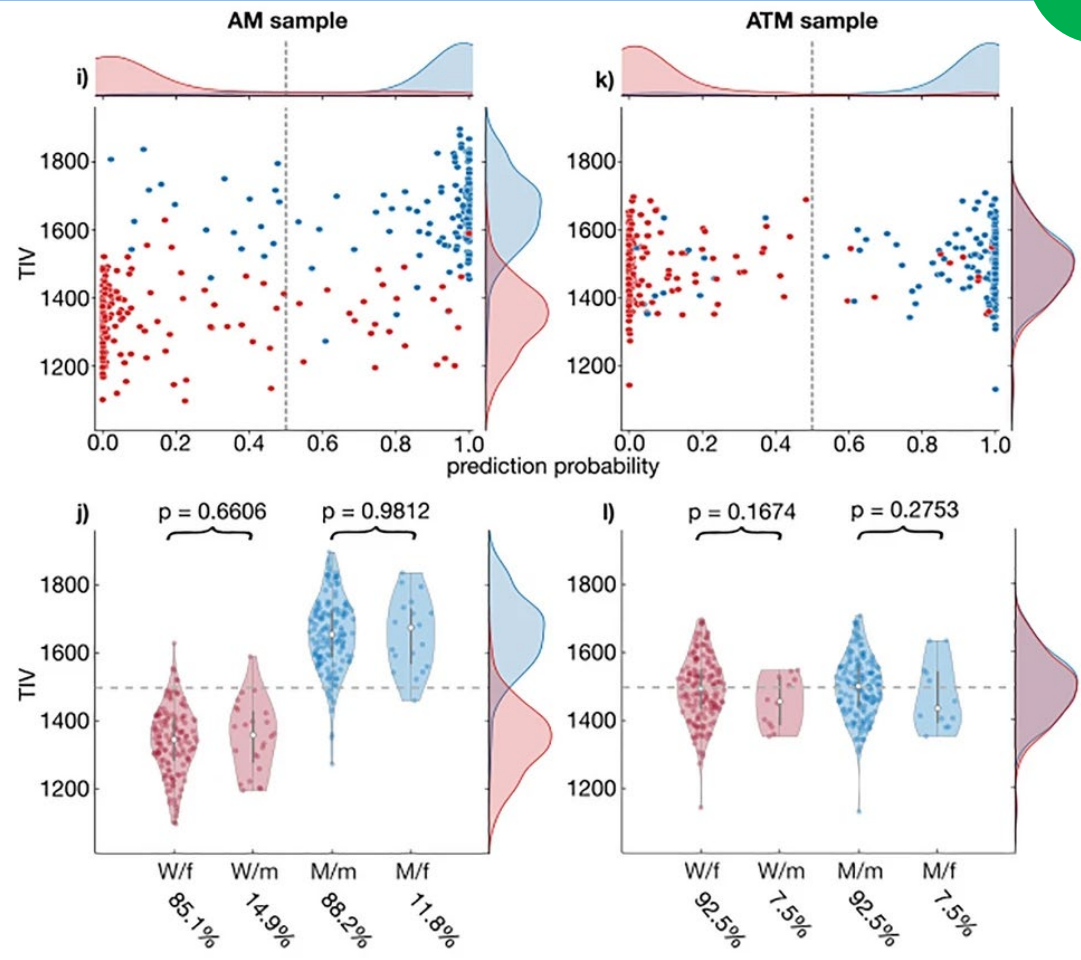
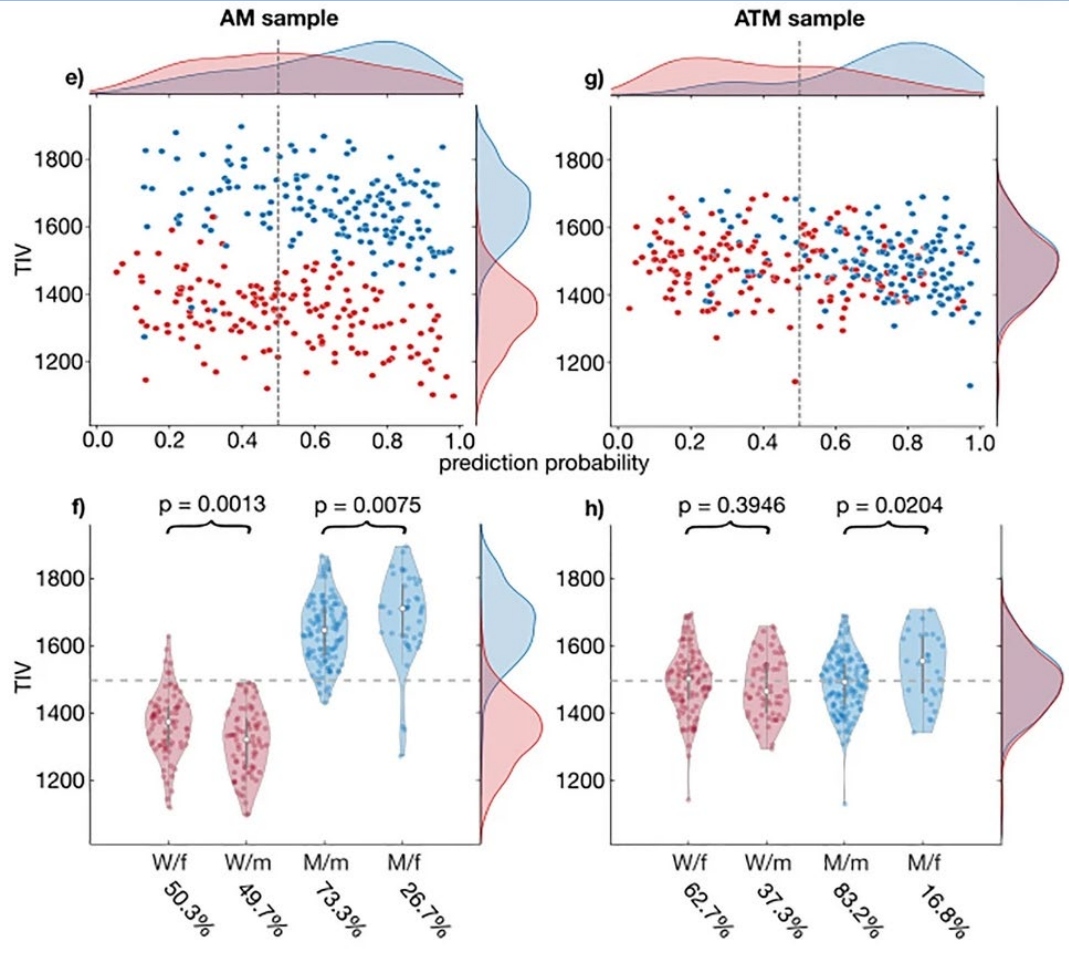
Errors



# Different ways to a bias-free models

## Confound removal

## Matching



Errors

Errors



# Matching better than Confound removal

Matching  
works better

- Higher accuracy
- Lower bias

But it needs  
more data

- We select a matching subset
- Difficult with retrospective analysis



Confound  
removal  
and leakage

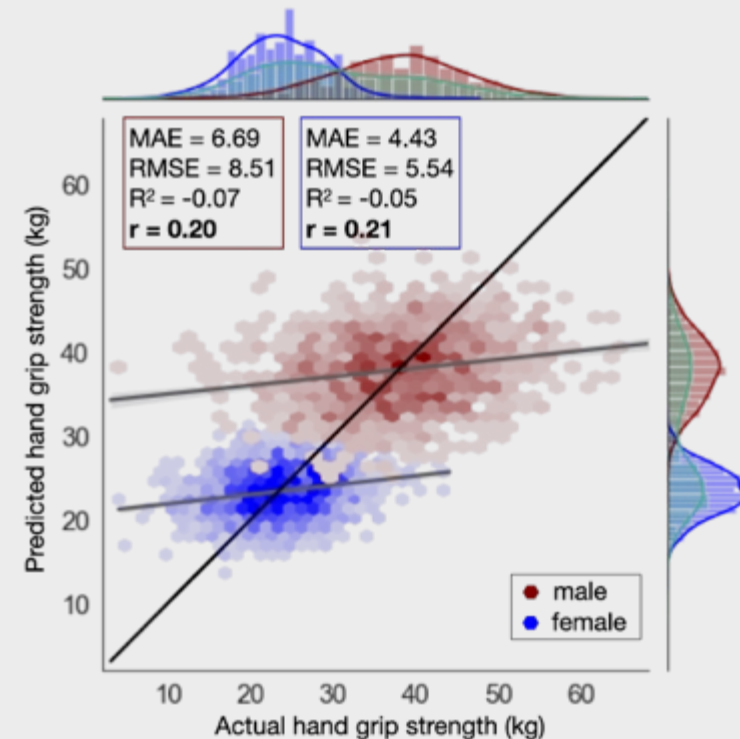
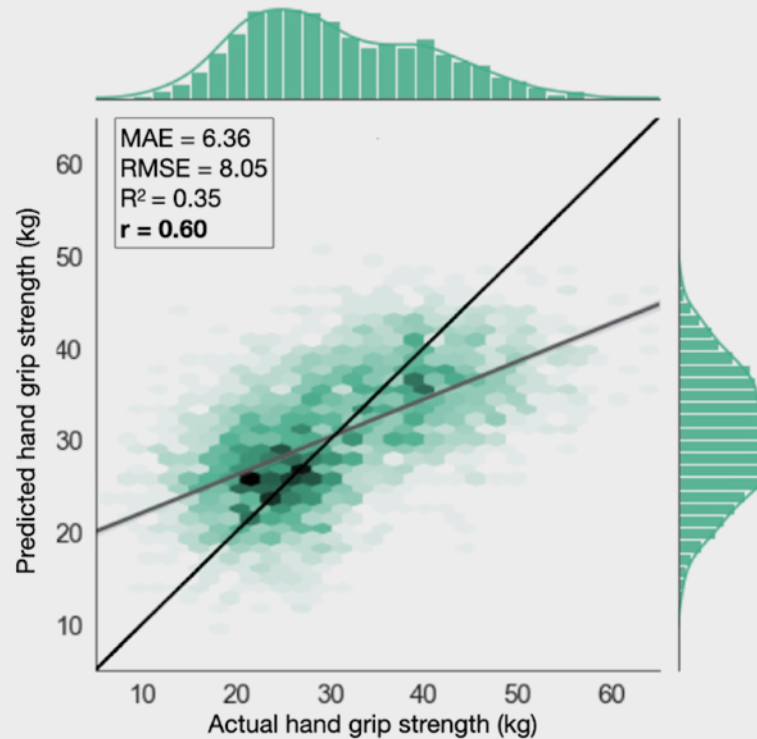






Vera  
Komeyer

# Confounding: Predicting hand-grip-strength (HGS) using brain structure (VBM)

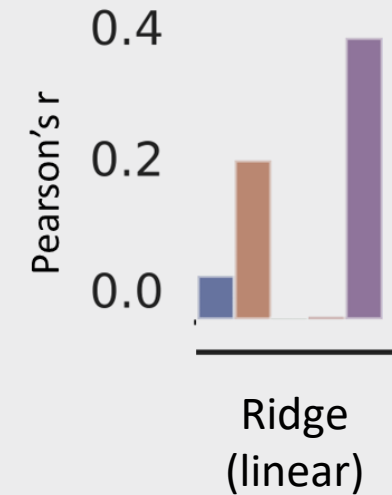
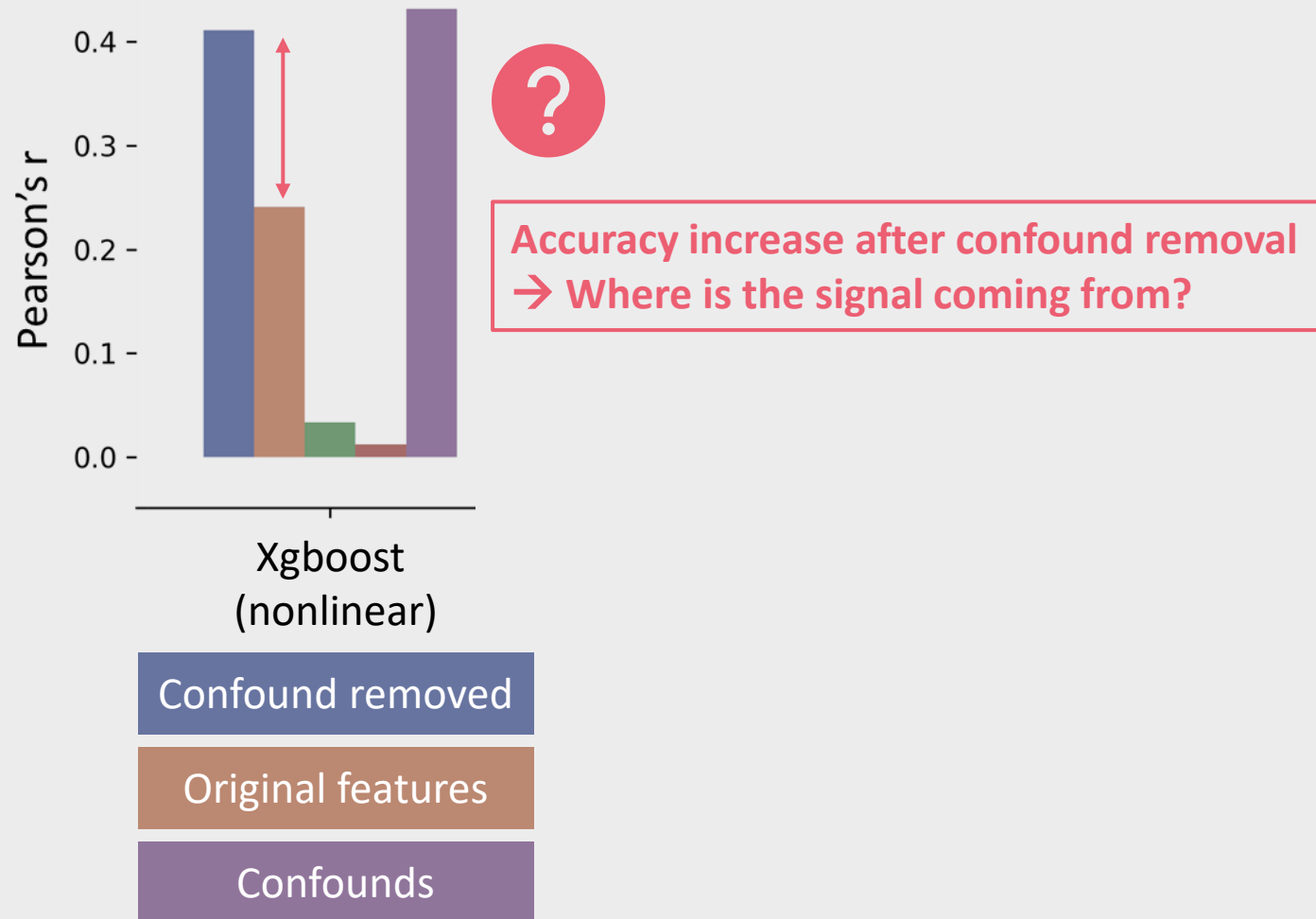


Predictions are driven by the sex of the subjects

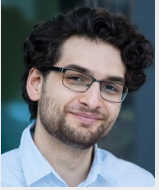
**Accuracy decrease after confound removal**  
→ **Signal was confounded**

# What if accuracy increases after CR?

- 400x400 DWI connectomes (UK Biobank)
- Masked using white matter hyperintensity lesion maps
- Calculate the “disconnectivity” matrices, perform UMAP (3D)
- Age and sex as confound
- Predict: Cognition symbol digit substitution correct matches



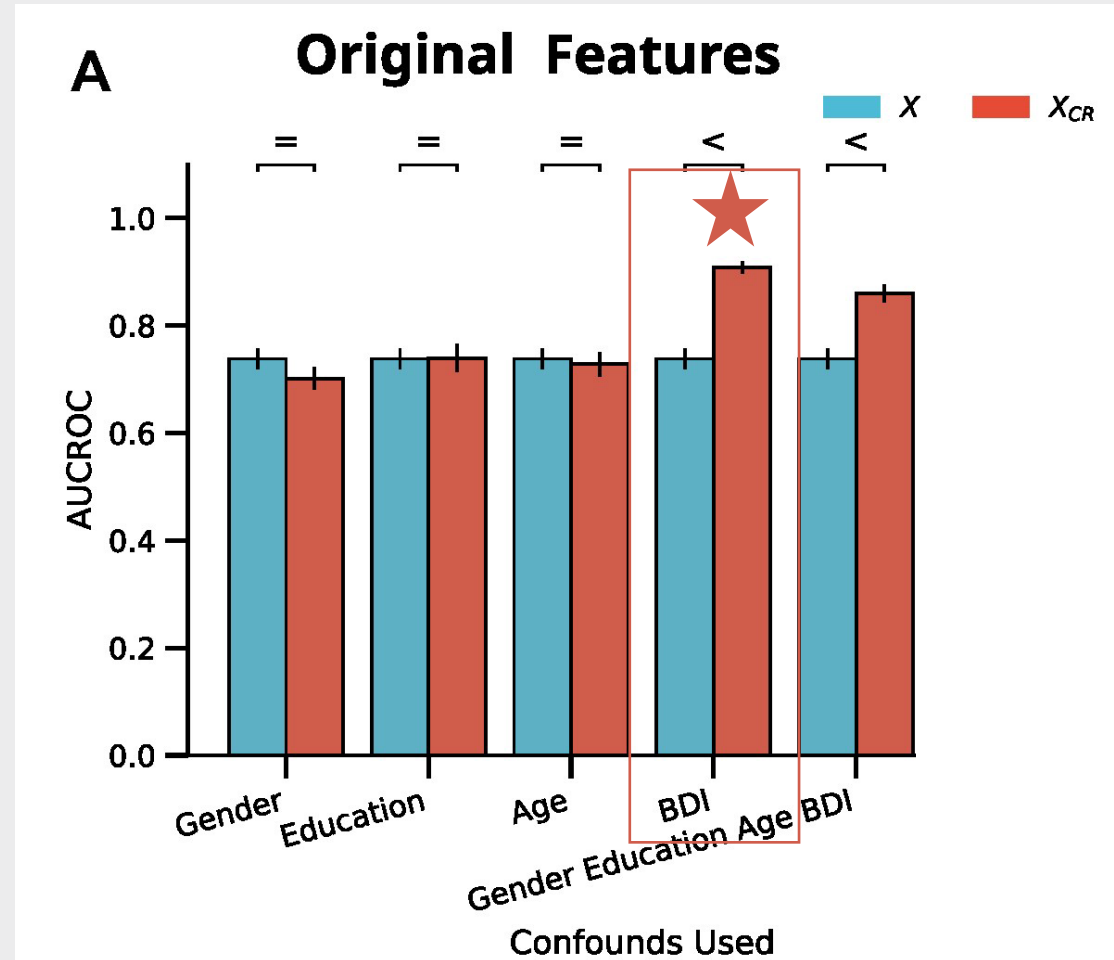
**We do not see the same pattern with a linear model**



Sami  
Hamdan

# Confound leakage: ADHD prediction

- Voice-derived features
  - Can aid in objective diagnosis
- Depression is a comorbidity
  - We want the model to learn “ADHD” and not depression.
  - Measured using BDI
- Featurewise confound removal
- BDI removal gives high accuracy: we solved an important clinical problem?
  - AUC ~ 0.9 → diagnostic tool!
  - Wait! Is this real?

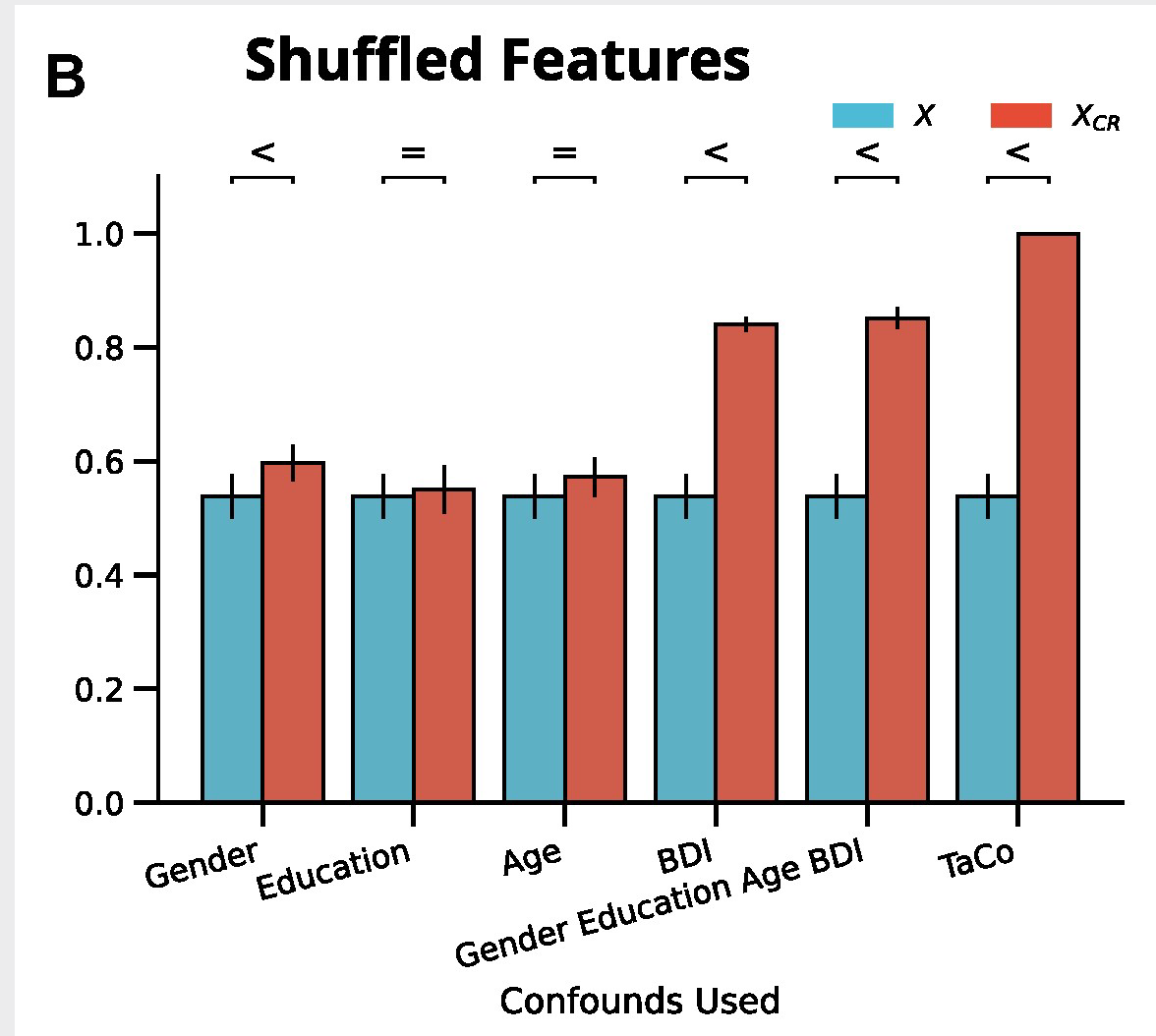


The comparison signs are from the Bayesian ROPE



# Confound leakage: ADHD prediction

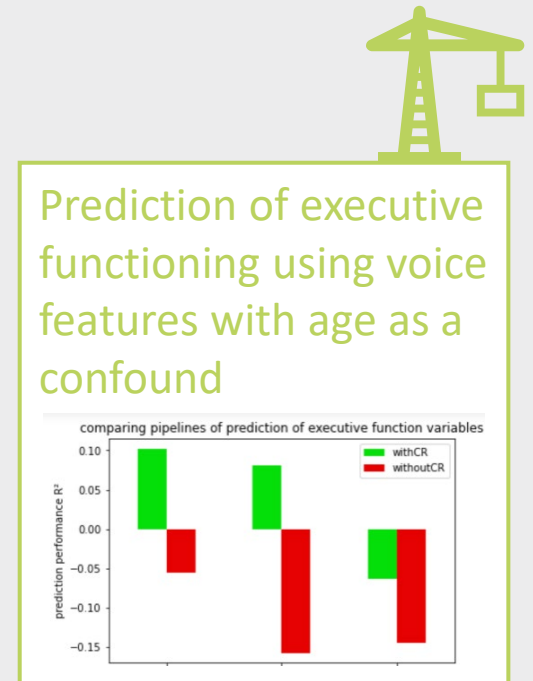
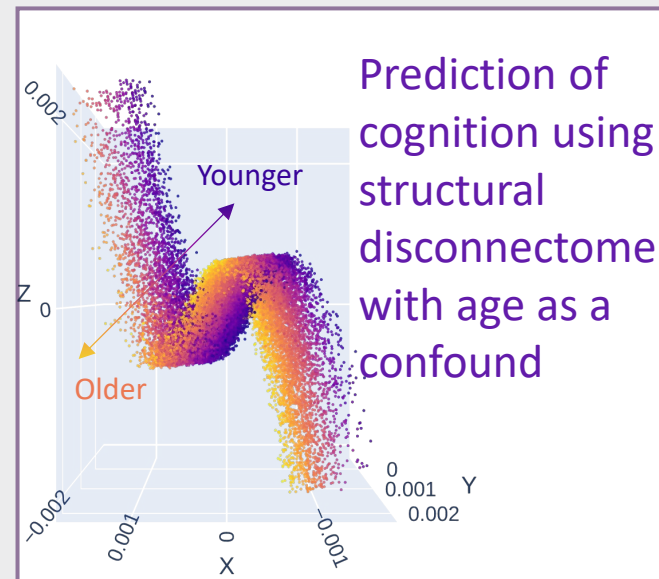
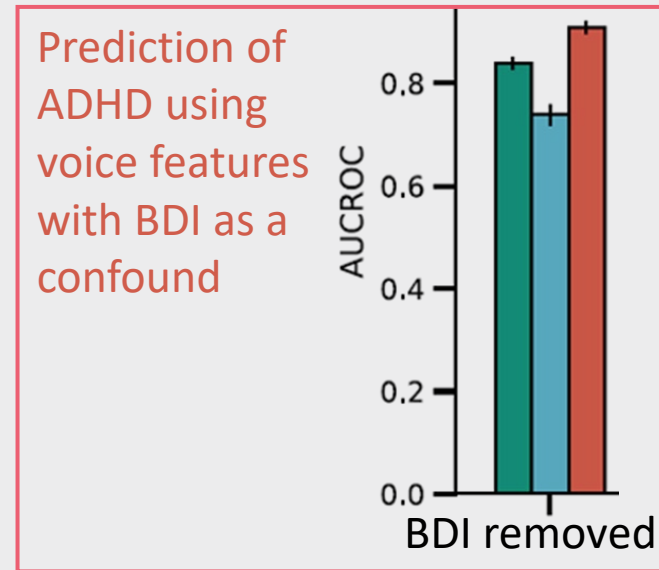
- Is it really leakage?
- Let's shuffle the features
  - Destroys features-confounds relationship
  - Keeps confounds-target relationship
- High AUC with BDI and TaCo (Target as Confound) indicative of leakage



# Confound leakage: Summary

- The confounding variance can leak into the features
- New features (residuals) are not confound-free
- Nonlinear models (RF, MLP) are more likely to pick up the leaked signal
- Misleading models and predictions
- Report results with and without confound removal

Hamdan et al., 2022 arXiv, Under revision





# Data Harmonization






# So, what is the problem?

Need to know the biological variability to preserve it.

We need to tell ComBat the labels.  
**Also, on the test data!**

## ComBat and cross-validation

neuroimaging, mvpa



 Log In

I found a paper by Wachinger et al. (<https://arxiv.org/abs/2002.05049> <sup>11</sup>) that seems to apply ComBat within a brain age prediction framework (resulting in improved metrics), but as the authors did a leave-site out evaluation, I am assuming they applied ComBat to the whole dataset prior to training the brain age prediction model (i.e. data leakage)? But might be wrong here.

And maybe as a final more general question, how bad is it to harmonize the imaging features across all samples prior to training your model?

Looking forward to connect and hearing your thoughts and ideas!

Laura

Jul 2018

9 / 11

Jun 2020

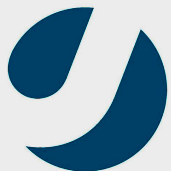
Jul '20

Jul 2020

Shotgunosine

Based on my experience, I'd run it separately on the training and test set.

<https://neurostars.org/t/combat-and-cross-validation/2055/10>





Nicolas  
Nieto

# Harmonization

- Real-world data is acquired from different sources or sites.
- ML can benefit from large datasets → combining datasets is appealing
- Sites present intrinsic variability
  - observer effect, scanner effect, batch effect



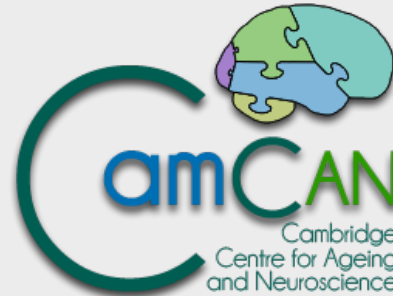
## AOMIC: the Amsterdam Open MRI Collection

Three datasets with multimodal 3T MRI data and detailed demographics and psychometric variables

ID1000

PIOP1

PIOP2



## The Enhanced Nathan Kline Institute-Rockland Sample (NKI-RS)

**Multiband Imaging Test-Retest Pilot Dataset**



International Neuroimaging  
Data-Sharing Initiative

## Southwest University Adult Lifespan Dataset (SALD)

A Multi-model Dataset from A Large, Cross-sectional Adult Lifespan Sample





# Different scanners → different data

## Datasets

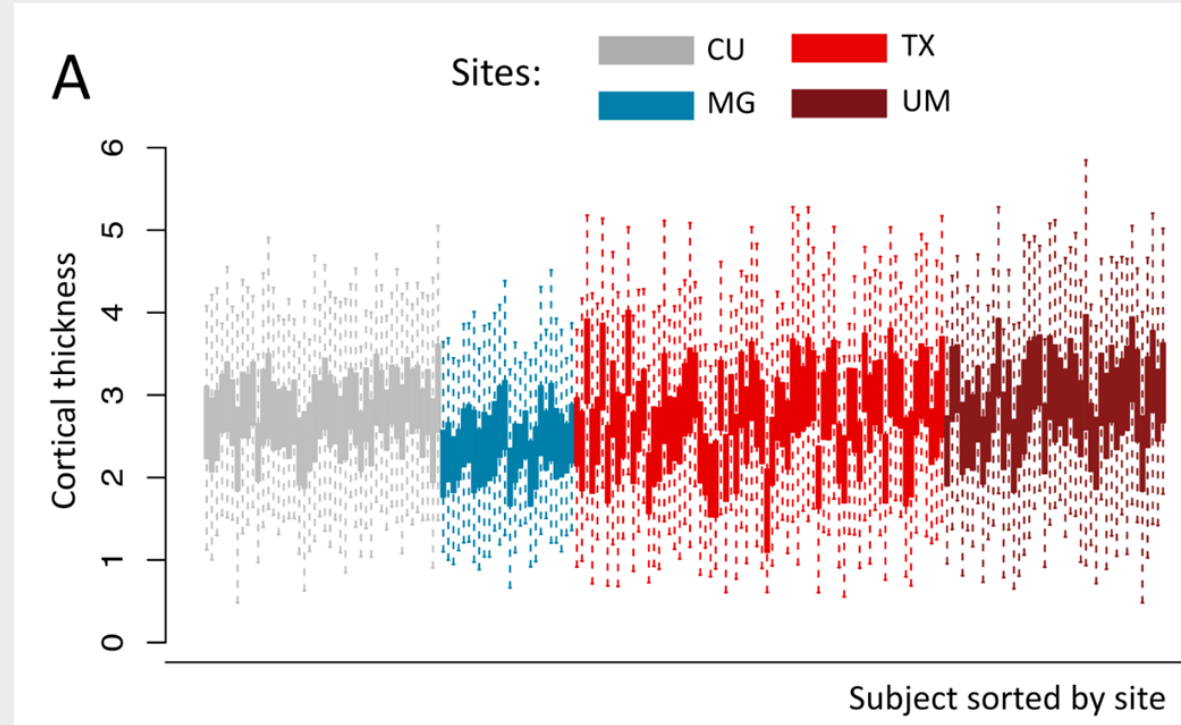
CU = Columbia University

TX = University of Texas Southwestern

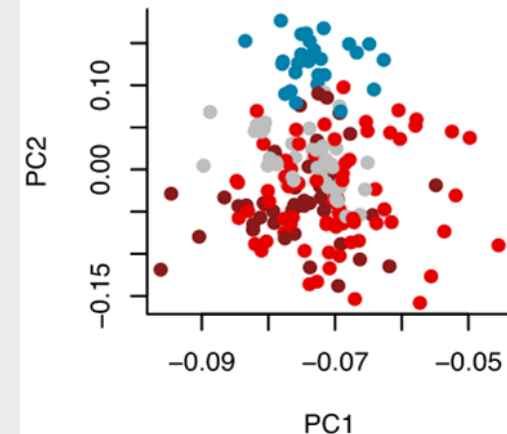
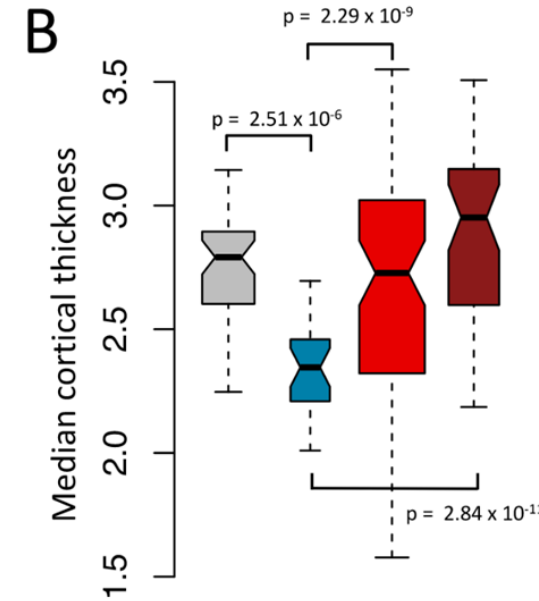
MG = Massachusetts General Hospital

UM = University of Michigan

They further demonstrate that these differences are not due to another covariate (age, gender, etc)



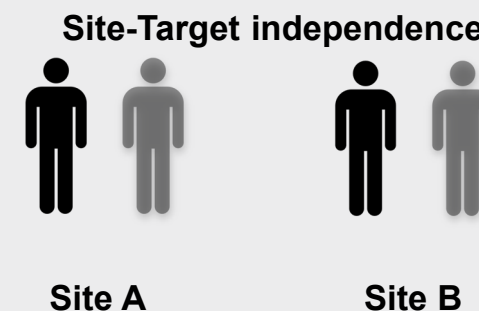
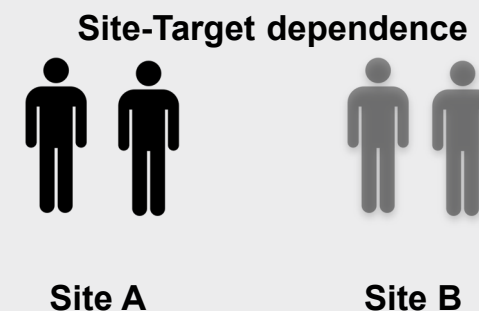
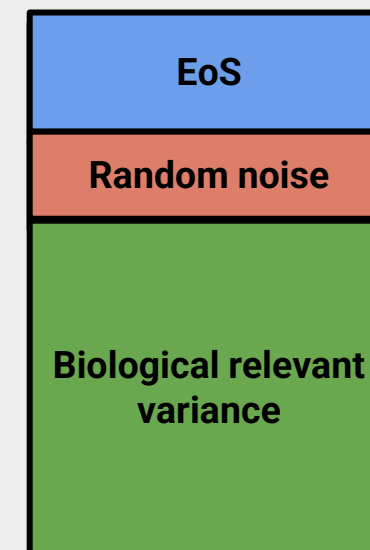
Figures from: Fortin et al. 2018 NeuroImage  
Harmonization of cortical thickness measurements across scanners and sites



# Remove Effect of Site (EoS)

## ComBat

- Estimate a feature-wise **location** and **scale** correction for each site.
  - Empirical Bayes
- ComBat cannot differentiate between biologically relevant variance and site-effect when the *site and target are dependant*.
  - Class proportion differs across sites
  - In the extreme cases all control and all patients acquired at different sites



# Data leakage, how?

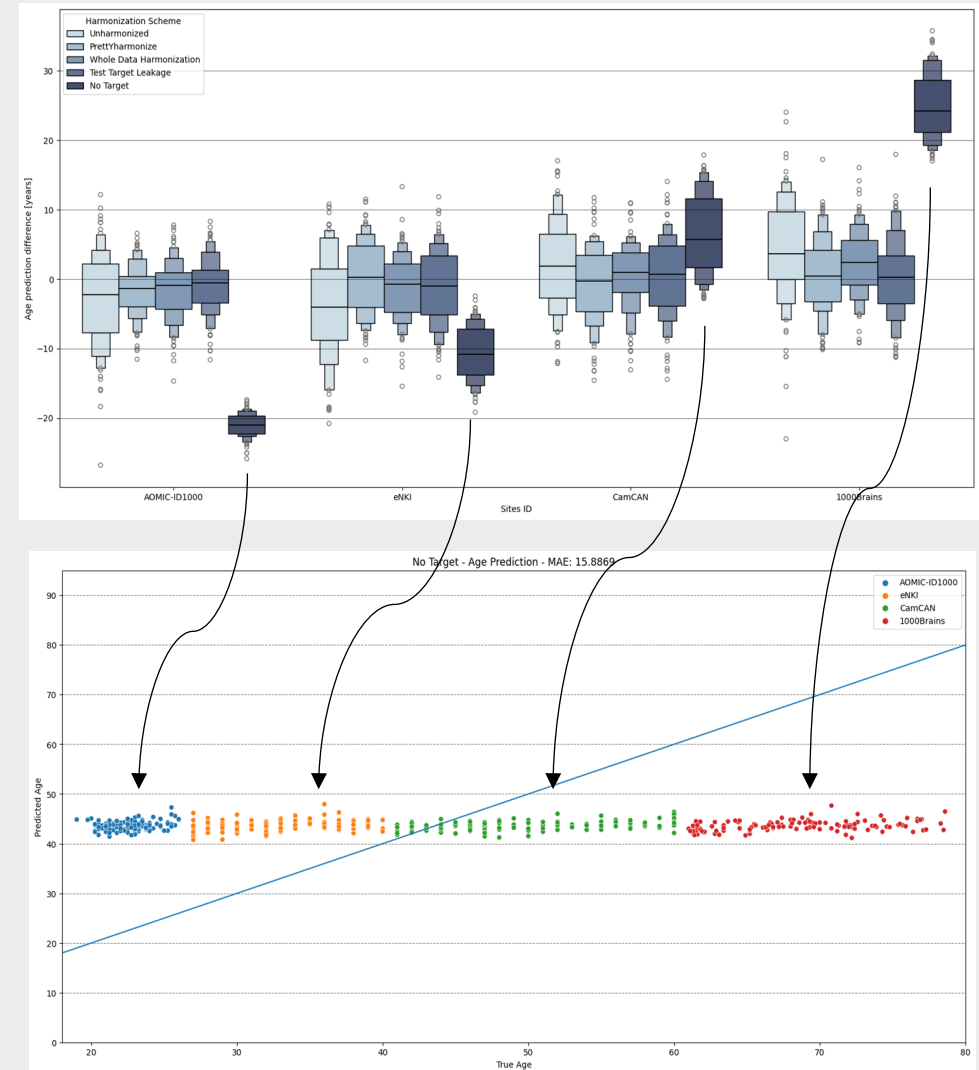
- neuroHarmonize (based on ComBat) needs the **train and test labels** as “covars” to preserve the associated variance
- Prevents real-world applications, as the **test labels are not know!**

```
def harmonizationApply(data, covars, model, return_stand_mean=False):  
    """  
    Applies harmonization model with neuroCombat functions to new data.  
  
    Arguments  
    -----  
    data : a numpy array  
    |     data to harmonize with ComBat, dimensions are N_samples x N_features  
  
    covars : a pandas DataFrame  
    |     contains covariates to control for during harmonization  
    |     all covariates must be encoded numerically (no categorical variables)  
    |     must contain a single column "SITE" with site labels for ComBat  
    |     dimensions are N_samples x (N_covariates + 1)  
  
    model : a dictionary of model parameters  
    |     the output of a call to harmonizationLearn()  
  
    Returns  
    -----  
  
    bayes_data : a numpy array  
    |     harmonized data, dimensions are N_samples x N_features  
  
    """
```



# Empirical evaluation

- “No Target” removed the biological signal → Worst performance
- WDH and TTL better than Unharmonized → Leakage
- *PrettYharmonize* was the same or slightly better without data leakage
- **None** of the harmonization methods showed an improvement when site-target were independent.
  - MRI: age, sex, dementia
  - ICU: mortality



# Further conceptual/data challenges

1. Low prediction accuracy often driven by demographics
2. Reliability issues
3. Data biases, e.g. ethnicity
4. Replicability and analysis freedom

**nature**

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Article | [Published: 20 May 2020](#)

## Variability in the analysis of a single neuroimaging dataset by many teams

[Rotem Botvinik-Nezer](#), [Felix Holzmeister](#), [Colin F. Camerer](#), [Anna Dreber](#), [Juergen Huber](#), [Magnus](#)

*Individual characteristics versus rsfMRI for cognitive phenotypic prediction*

## Is resting state fMRI better than individual characteristics at predicting cognition?

Amir Omidvarnia<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Leonard Sasse<sup>1,2</sup>, Daouia I. Larabi<sup>1,2</sup>, Federico Raimondo<sup>1,2</sup>, Felix Hoffstaedter<sup>1,2</sup>, Jan Kasper<sup>1,2</sup>, Juergen Dukart<sup>1,2</sup>, Marvin Petersen<sup>3</sup>, Bastian Cheng<sup>3</sup>, Götz Thomalla<sup>3</sup>, Simon B. Eickhoff<sup>1,2</sup>, Kaustubh R. Patil<sup>1,2</sup>

## The Burden of Reliability: How Measurement Noise Limits Brain-Behaviour Predictions

Martin Gell<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Simon B. Eickhoff<sup>2,3</sup>, Amir Omidvarnia<sup>2,3</sup>, Vincent Küppers<sup>2</sup>, Kaustubh R. Patil<sup>2,3</sup>, Theodore D. Satterthwaite<sup>4</sup>, Veronika I. Müller<sup>2,3 †</sup> & Robert Langner<sup>2,3 †</sup>

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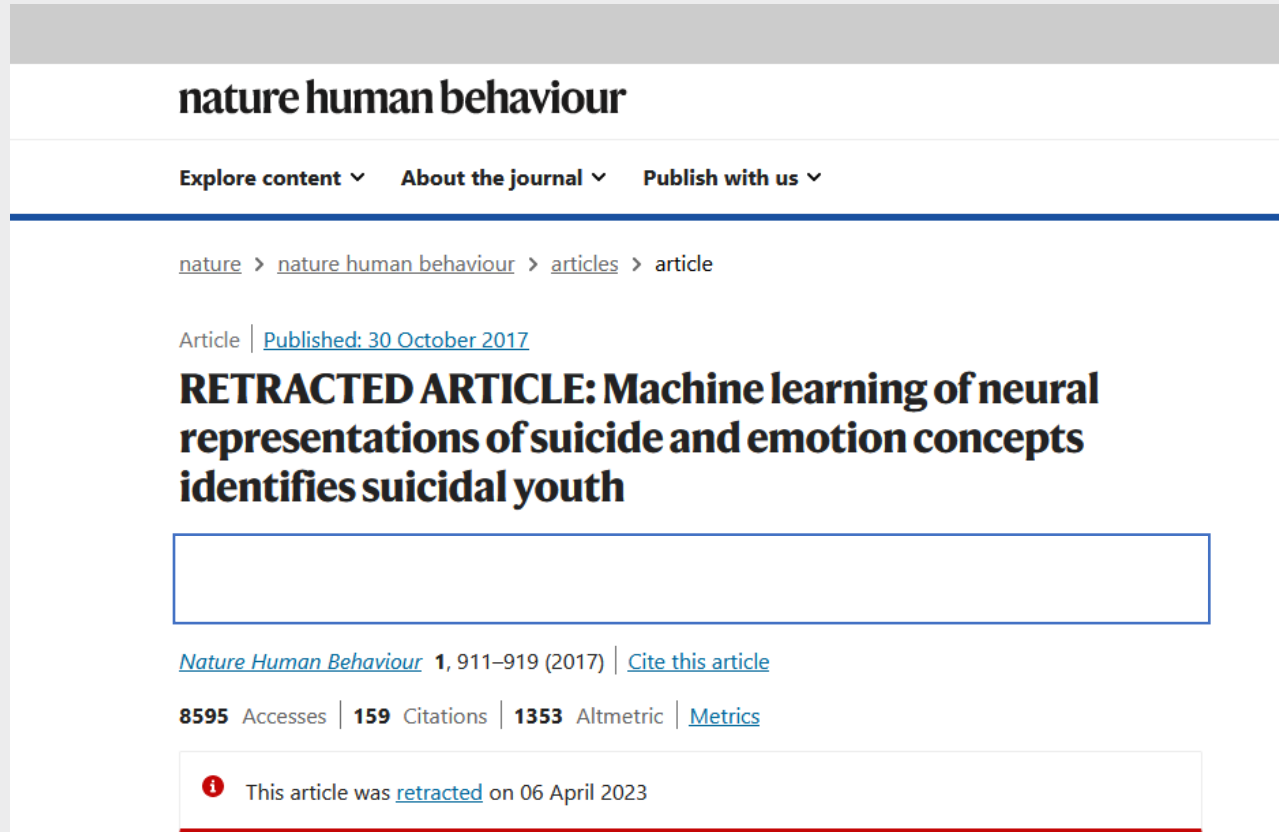
## Cross-ethnicity/race generalization failure of behavioral prediction from resting-state functional connectivity

[JINGWEI LI](#) [DANILO BZDOK](#) [JIANZHONG CHEN](#) [ANGELA TAM](#) [LEON QI RONG OOI](#) [AVRAM J. HOLMES](#) [TIAN GE](#) [KAUSTUBH R. PATIL](#) [MBEMBA JABBI](#)

[SIMON B. EICKHOFF](#) [B. T. THOMAS YEO](#) [AND SARAH GENON](#) [fewer](#) [Authors Info & Affiliations](#)



# ML mistakes are Expensive



The screenshot shows the header of the journal 'nature human behaviour' with navigation links: 'Explore content', 'About the journal', and 'Publish with us'. Below this is a breadcrumb trail: 'nature > nature human behaviour > articles > article'. The article title is 'RETRACTED ARTICLE: Machine learning of neural representations of suicide and emotion concepts identifies suicidal youth', published on 30 October 2017. A large empty box is present below the title. At the bottom, a red banner states: 'This article was retracted on 06 April 2023'. Metrics shown include 8595 Accesses, 159 Citations, and 1353 Altmetric.

nature human behaviour

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Article | [Published: 30 October 2017](#)

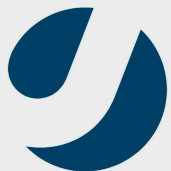
**RETRACTED ARTICLE: Machine learning of neural representations of suicide and emotion concepts identifies suicidal youth**

[Nature Human Behaviour](#) 1, 911–919 (2017) | [Cite this article](#)

8595 Accesses | 159 Citations | 1353 Altmetric | [Metrics](#)

**i** This article was [retracted](#) on 06 April 2023

The authors are retracting this article after concerns were raised about the **validity of their machine learning method** in a Matters Arising<sup>1</sup>. While revising their response to these concerns, the authors confirmed that their method was indeed flawed, which affects the conclusions of the article. Specifically, the stepwise classification method used in the article **overestimated the classification accuracy of who is a suicidal ideator because the features of the classifier were tuned to that particular dataset.**



# Considerations when Building a ML Pipeline

## Nested cross-validation

- Avoid overfitted generalization estimates

## Data transformations in CV-consistent manner

- Confound removal
- Principal Components Analysis (PCA)

## Rapidly evolving field

- New methods proposed regularly
- For feature engineering and learning

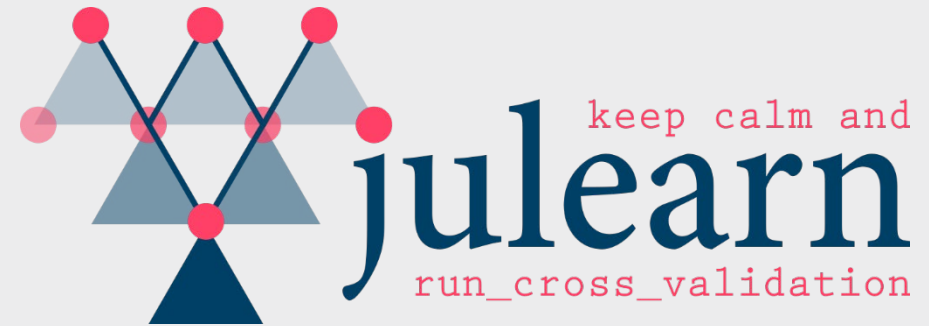
## Expertise and overhead

- Programming and replicability
- Conceptual understanding



# JULEARN: An easy-to-use ML library

- One-line nested-CV pipelines
- Built-in CV-consistent data transformations
- Modular: plug-and-play scikit-learn transformers
- Data type support
- Specific models: CPM, CPMEX
- Built for non CS/ENG/ML
  - But suitable for them too!

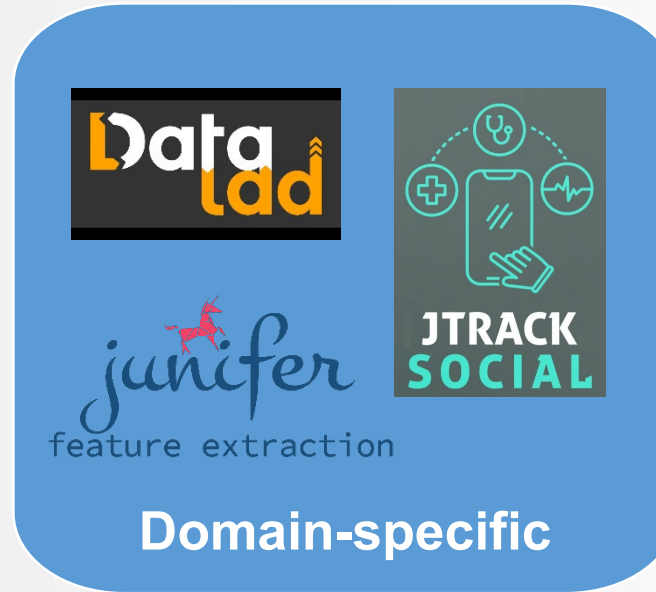


```
from julearn import run_cross_validation, PipelineCreator

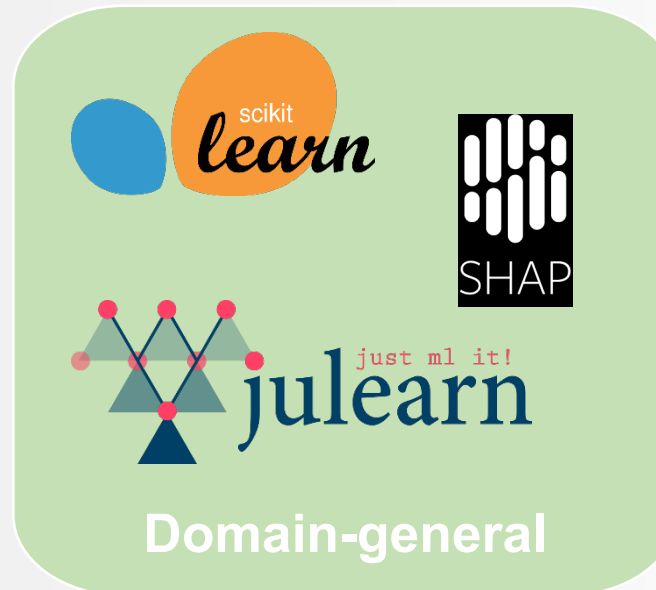
creator = PipelineCreator(problem_type="classification")
creator.add("zscore", with_mean=[True, False])
creator.add("pca", n_components=2)
creator.add("svm", C=[1,2], degree=[3,4])

# X_types optional
run_cross_validation(
    X=X, y=y, data=data, model=creator, X_types={"continuous":X})
```

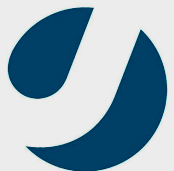
# From Data to ML Results



- Data collection
- Data organization and processing
- Feature generation



- Model training, comparison & selection
- Model evaluation & insights



# Thank you for your attention!

## The AML group



## Collaborators (FZJ)

Simon Eickhoff  
Susanne Weis  
Robert Langner  
Felix Hoffstaedter  
Masoud Thahmasian  
... (and more)

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Götz Thomalla, UKE  
Bastian Cheng, UKE  
Bradley Love, UCL  
Kshitij Jadhav, IITB  
Nivethida T, IITB  
... (and more)

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