Dynamic and stable brain connectivity during movie watching as revealed by functional MRI

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Abstract

Spatially remote brain regions show synchronized activity as typically revealed by correlated functional

MRI (fMRI) signals. An emerging line of research has focused on the temporal fluctuations of

connectivity, however, its relationships with stable connectivity have not been clearly illustrated. We

examined the stable and dynamic connectivity from fMRI data when the participants watched four

different movie clips. Using inter-individual correlation, we were able to estimate functionally

meaningful dynamic connectivity associated with different movies. Widespread consistent dynamic

connectivity was observed for each movie clip as well as their differences between clips. A cartoon

movie clip showed higher consistent dynamic connectivity with the posterior cingulate cortex and

supramarginal gyrus, while a court drama clip showed higher dynamic connectivity with the auditory

cortex and temporoparietal junction, which suggest the involvement of specific brain processing for

different movie contents. In contrast, stable connectivity was highly similar among the movie clips, and

showed fewer statistical significant differences. The patterns of dynamic connectivity had higher

accuracy for classifications of different movie clips than the stable connectivity and regional activity.

These results support the functional significance of dynamic connectivity in reflecting functional brain

changes, which could provide more functionally related information than stable connectivity.

Keywords: dynamic connectivity; movie connectome; movie watching; naturalistic stimuli; stable

connectivity

1. Introduction

The human brain exhibits a highly synchronized structure of activity as revealed by functional MRI (fMRI) in resting-state (Biswal et al., 1995, 2010), during task performance (Cole et al., 2014; Di et al., 2020; Krienen et al., 2014), and during watching naturalistic stimuli such as movies (O'Connor et al., 2017; Vanderwal et al., 2019). Functional connectivity, as measured by the correlations of observed blood-oxygen-level-dependent signals (Biswal et al., 1995; Friston, 1994), have been widely used to examine the organization of large-scale brain networks (Margulies et al., 2016; Salvador et al., 2005; Yeo et al., 2011) and to parcellate small brain structures such as the thalamus and striatum (Di Martino et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2020; Yuan et al., 2016). However, the spatial distribution of functional connectivity is highly similar across different tasks and movie watching conditions (Cole et al., 2014; Di et al., 2020; Krienen et al., 2014; Vanderwal et al., 2019). To localize functional meaningful connections, it is therefore critical to examine the time-varying fluctuations of dynamic connectivity (Allen et al., 2014; Di and Biswal, 2020a; Hutchison et al., 2013), as well as the changes of functional connectivity between different task conditions (Di and Biswal, 2019; Fornito et al., 2012; Friston et al., 1997).

The time-varying dynamic connectivity is mostly studied in the resting state by using the sliding-window approach (Allen et al., 2014; Hutchison et al., 2013; Lurie et al., 2020). It has been shown that the variability of dynamic connectivity fluctuations is lower between regions from the same functional networks and higher between regions from different networks (Fu et al., 2017), resulting in an overall negative correlation with the stable functional connectivity (Thompson and Fransson, 2015; Zhang et al., 2018). However, because of the unconstrained nature of the resting-state, it is difficult to ensure that the obtained estimates are functionally meaningful or simply resulting from noise (Lindquist et al., 2014). Until recently, dynamic connectivity is also studied when the participants were given complex stimuli, such as watching movie clips (Di and Biswal, 2020a). An advantage of using the movie stimuli is that by estimating inter-individual similarity (Hasson et al., 2004; Nastase et al., 2019), one can ensure that the observed dynamic connectivity is functionally meaningful and related to the processing of the video stimuli.

In our previous study, we have demonstrated the inter-individual consistency of dynamic

connectivity when different participants watched the same animated movie Partly Cloudy (Di and Biswal,

2020a). By using a seed-based analysis strategy, we identified highly consistent dynamic connectivity

between the supramarginal gyrus and posterior cingulate gyrus, two regions that are critical in the

processes of empathy and theory of mind (Richardson et al., 2018). Moreover, among a set of regions of

interest, the dynamic connectivity pattern was largely dissociated with stable functional connectivity. To

date, the only handful of studies have examined dynamic connectivity during movie watching (Cooper et

al., 2021; Di and Biswal, 2020a; Freitas et al., 2020; Simony and Chang, 2020). It is still largely

unknown how the spatial pattern is modulated by different movie contents, and how dynamic connectivity

is spatially distributed.

The central goal of this study is to compare dynamic connectivity and stable connectivity in the

context of movie watching. In addition to the previously analyzed Partly Cloudy dataset (Richardson et

al., 2018), we also analyzed the Healthy Brain Network Serial Scanning Initiative (HBN-SSI) dataset

(O'Connor et al., 2017), where the same participants watched three different movie clips. The video clips

were derived from different types of movies, ranging from a science fiction cartoon comedy, a science

fiction action film, to a court drama. It is reasonable to expect that different brain systems are involved in

the process of the different movie clips. However, Vanderwal and colleagues have examined the stable

connectivity of the three movies, and showed very similar spatial patterns among them (Vanderwal et al.,

2019). We speculate that dynamic connectivity might be more sensitive to reflect the changes in brain

functions among the movie clips.

Further, we systematically examine the relationships between dynamic and stable connectivity in

terms of their spatial distributions and context modulations. The economic theory of brain network

organization has suggested that the maintenance of long-range between-system communications is costly,

and long-range and between-system connectivity may be more dynamic and depend on task demands

(Bullmore and Sporns, 2012). In line with this account, the dynamic connectivity between different

functional systems are more variable than within functional systems (Fu et al., 2017; Thompson and

Fransson, 2015), and task modulated connectivity are also likely to take place between regions from

different functional networks (Di and Biswal, 2019). Similarly, for the movie-watching data, we

speculate that dynamic connectivity might take place between regions from different functional modules.

In contrast, the stable connectivity might tightly reflect the functional organizations of brain networks, i.e.

high stable connectivity between regions from the same functional networks, and lower stable

connectivity between regions from different networks. The dissociation might result in different spatial

patterns between the dynamic and stable connectivity.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. FMRI dataset

We analyzed two publicly available fMRI datasets when participants watched different movie clips, the

Partly cloudy dataset (Richardson et al., 2018) and the HBN-SSI dataset (O'Connor et al., 2017). For the

Partly Cloudy dataset, we analyzed the adults' data where they watched the animated movie "Partly

Cloudy". And for the HBN-SSI dataset, we analyzed the data when the same participants watched three

different movie clips from different types of movies.

2.1.1. Partly Cloudy dataset

The data were obtained through openneuro (https://openneuro.org/; accession #: ds000228). Consistent

with our previous study, we only included the adult participants (n = 33) (Di and Biswal, 2020a). After

dropping data due to large head motion (see below) and poor brain coverage, the effective sample

included 17 females and 12 males. The mean and standard deviation of age were 24.6 years and 5.3,

respectively (age range: 18 to 39 years). The original study was approved by the Committee on the Use

of Humans as Experimental Subjects (COUHES) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

During the fMRI scan, the participants watched a 5.6-minute long silent version of Partly Cloudy

(Pixar, 2009). MRI images were acquired on a 3-Tesla Siemens Tim Trio scanner with the standard

Siemens 32-channel head coil. Blood-oxygen-level dependent (BOLD) sensitive fMRI images were

collected with a gradient-echo EPI sequence in 32 interleaved near-axial slices (EPI factor: 64; TR: 2 s,

TE: 30 ms, and flip angle: 90°). The participants were recruited for different studies with slightly

different voxel sizes and slice gaps. Three participants had 3.13 mm isotropic voxels with no gap, and 26

participants had 3.13 mm isotropic voxels with a 10% gap. All the functional images were resampled to 3

mm isotropic voxel size during preprocessing. 168 functional images were acquired, with four dummy

scans before the real scans to allow for steady-state magnetization. T1-weighted structural images were

collected in 176 interleaved sagittal slices with 1 mm isotropic voxels (GRAPPA parallel imaging,

acceleration factor of 3; FOV: 256 mm). More information can be found in Richardson et a. (2018).

2.1.2. HBN-SSI dataset

The HBN-SSI dataset was obtained through the project website

(http://fcon_1000.projects.nitrc.org/indi/hbn_ssi/). Thirteen participants were recruited in the study.

After removing data of four participants due to excessive head motion in any of the movie-watching

sessions, data from four females and five males were included in the current analysis. All the participants

are right-handed. The age range was from 23 to 37 years old (*Mean = 29.4; SD = 5.5*).

We selected the movie watching scans of three movie clips, Wall-E (Walt Disney Productions,

2008), The Matrix (Warner Bros., 1999), and A Few Good Men (Columbia Pictures, 1992), from the 12

repeated scanning sessions. Each movie clip was 10 minutes long, and was watched by the same

participant four times in separate sessions. The order of the movie watching was counterbalanced across

sessions. The fMRI data were scanned using an EPI sequence with the following parameters, TR: 1,450

ms, TE: 40 ms, flip angle: 55°, and voxel size: 2.46 x 2.46 s 2.5 mm^3 without any gap. Four hundred and

twenty images were scanned for each run. However, for one participant, there were only 410 images for

several sessions. We, therefore, used the first 410 images for the current analysis for all the subjects and

sessions.

Lastly, the MPRAGE image from the first sequential scanning session of each participant was

also used to assist preprocessing of the fMRI and DWI data. The scanning parameters include TR, 2,730

ms; TE 1.64 ms; flip angle, 7°; voxel size 1 x 1 x 1 mm^3 with no gap. More information about the study

design and MRI acquisitions can be found in O'Connor et al., (2017).

2.2. FMRI data preprocessing

The fMRI data preprocessing was performed by using SPM12 (SPM, RRID: SCR_007037) under

MATLAB environment (https://www.mathworks.com/). The two datasets were preprocessed using very

similar pipelines. Specifically, the anatomical image of each participant was first segmented into gray

matter, white matter, cerebrospinal fluid, and other tissue types, and normalized into standard Montreal

Neurological Institute (MNI) space. The functional images of each session and subject were aligned to

the first image of their specific session, and were coregistered to the skull striped anatomical image of the

subject. The deformation field maps obtained from the segmentation step were used to normalize all the

functional images into MNI space. The fMRI images from the Partly Cloudy dataset were resampled to 3

x 3 x 3 mm^3 voxel size; and the images from the HBN-SSI dataset were resampled to 2.5 x 2.5 x 2.5 mm^3,

which were chosen according to their respective original voxel sizes. All the functional images were then

spatially smoothed using an 8 mm Gaussian Kernel. Lastly, we defined a generalized linear model

(GLM) for each session and subject by using 24 head motion variables (Friston et al., 1996) and a

constant term as regressors, with implicit high-pass filtering at 1/128 Hz. After model estimation, the

residual images were saved for further analysis.

We calculated framewise displacement for translation and rotation for each session and

participant (Di and Biswal, 2015). For the Partly dataset, we used strict criteria of maximum framewise

displacement of 1.5 mm or 1.5° to discard data with large head movements. Two participants' data were

discarded accordingly. For the HBN-SSI dataset, a participant's data were discarded if any of the sessions

exceeded the criteria. We adopted a slightly liberal criterion of maximum framewise displacement

greater than 2.5 mm or 2.5º or mean framewise displacement greater than 0.2 mm or 0.2º. Four

participants' data were removed accordingly.

2.3. Independent component analysis

Because the main goal of the current study is to study connectivity across brain regions, we adopted

spatial independent component analysis (ICA) to define connectivity nodes. We extracted 20 and 80 ICs

to represent different spatial scales of brain networks. We first analyzed the local activity and

connectivity with 20-IC solutions to identify statistically significant local effects. We then calculated

connectivity using the 80-IC solutions to examine their spatial distributions. For spatial ICA, the number

of ICs that could be extracted depends on the number of time points for each participant/session.

Theoretically, $t - 1$ components could be extracted where t represents the total number of time points. We

chose 80, which is roughly half of the time points for the Partly Cloudy dataset.

Group ICA of fMRI Toolbox v3.0b (Group ICA of fMRI Toolbox, RRID: SCR_001953) was

used for ICA (Calhoun et al., 2001). The ICA was performed for the Partly Cloudy and HBN-SSI

datasets separately. After extraction, we manually selected the ICs that were related to functional

networks, and discarded the noise-like ICs. For the Partly Cloudy dataset, 16 and 65 ICs were considered

functionally meaningful ICs. And for the HBN-SSI dataset, 16 and 54 ICs were kept. After ICA, the

time series of each IC for each subject and session were back reconstructed by using a group ICA

algorithm. The time series were used for further activity and connectivity analyses.

2.4. Inter-individual consistency of regional activity

For both regional activity and dynamic connectivity, we estimated the inter-individual consistency across

participants and sessions. Conventionally, the intersubject correlation was used to study the inter-

individual consistency (Chen et al., 2016; Hasson et al., 2004; Nastase et al., 2019). In our recent study,

we have shown that the principal component analysis (PCA) can be used to estimate the inter-individual

consistency, which is quantitively similar to intersubject correlation (Di and Biswal, 2020b). Specifically,

for a given region we have a t (# of time points) by n (# of participants) matrix X. X is a 168 x 29 matrix

for the Partly Cloudy dataset and a 410 x 36 matrix (36 = 9 participants x 4 sessions) for each of the three

movie clips from the HBN-SSI dataset. We performed PCA on the matrix X and obtained the percent

variance explained by the first PC as a measure of intersubject consistency.

For the HBN-SSI dataset, there were four sessions for each participant and each movie. Ideally,

the multi-session and multi-participant design can be used to differentiate the consistent and idiosyncratic

responses. We have explored this issue, and found that the within-participant consistency was mainly

driven by the overall across-participant consistency but not participant-specific idiosyncratic responses

(see supplementary materials). Moreover, the idiosyncratic responses are not the focus of the current

study. Therefore, in the current analysis, we treated session and participant as separate data and

calculated inter-individual consistency across all the sessions and participants.

2.5. Dynamic connectivity

The sliding-window approach is the most commonly used method to estimate dynamic connectivity

(Allen et al., 2014; Di and Biswal, 2020a; Fu et al., 2014). A recent development is to utilize time-by-

time interactions to approximate dynamic connectivity, a.k.a. edge-centric time series (Faskowitz et al.,

2020). The development comes from the intuition that the commonly used measure of functional

connectivity, i.e. Pearson's correlation coefficient, is the summation of the point-by-point multiplications

of two z transformed variables. Therefore, if we keep the original point-by-point multiplication time

series, a.k.a. interaction, it can reflect point-by-point estimates of dynamic connectivity. In Figure 1, we

show the averaged time series of two networks, i.e. the posterior cingulate network and supramarginal

network from the Partly Cloudy dataset. We also show the averaged sliding-window time series and

point-by-point multiplication time series. Strong negative interactions can be seen when the two original

time series have strong anti-phase correlations. Indeed, the peaks in the posterior cingulate network and

supramarginal network represent the theory-of-mind and pain empathy events, respectively, as indicated

by the original paper (Richardson et al., 2018). The point-by-point interaction indicates strong negative

connectivity during these events. In contrast, the sliding window correlation can only reflect a smoothed

trend of such interactions. The point-by-point interaction approach can avoid overly smoothing the time

series data as done by the sliding-window approach, therefore providing better interpretability of the

results. On the other hand, the interaction term may be noisier and more prone to physiological noises

and head motion artifacts. But this may be less problematic for movie watching data, where we only

estimate consistent effects cross individuals. We have performed statistical analyses on the Partly Cloudy

dataset, and confirmed that the point-by-point interaction approach had better statistical sensitivity.

Therefore, we adopted the point-by-point interaction approach to estimate dynamic connectivity.

Figure 1 Averaged time series of regional activity in the posterior cingulate (PCC) network and

supramarginal network (SMG), and their point-by-point interaction and sliding-window dynamic

connectivity when watching an animated short movie Partly Cloudy. The two brain networks that are

shown in the inserted slices correspond to independent components #15 and # 6 in Figure 2, respectively.

We calculated the point-by-point interaction between each pair of networks (ICs). The time

series from each network (IC) were first z transformed, and then point-by-point multiplied. PCA was

then performed on the interaction time series across participants. To determine the statistical significance

of the variance explained by the first PC, we performed circular time-shift randomization to determine the

null distribution (Di and Biswal, 2020b; Kauppi et al., 2010). The time series from the two network ICs

from all the participants were circular-shifted with random delays. Point-by-point interactions were then

calculated for each participant, and PCA was performed. The randomization was performed 10,000 times

for each pair of networks from the 16 networks. The real values were compared with the null distribution

to perform statistical inferences. This resulted in a 16 x 16 matrix. FDR correction was used to correct

for multiple comparisons (120: 16 x 15 / 2).

For the HBN-SSI dataset, we also compared the differences in variance explained by the first PC

among the three movies. For a pair of networks ICs, the interaction between two IC time series were first

calculated, forming a 410 (time point) x 36 (participant/session) matrix for each movie. The matrices

from the three movie clips were concatenated to a 410 x 108 matrix, and permutation was performed

along the individual/session dimension to define three permutated matrices. The differences in variance

explained by the first PC between each movie clip and the other two clips were calculated and compared

with the permutated distributions of 10,000 times. An FDR correction at $p < 0.05$ was used to correct

multiple comparisons of all three movie clips.

The randomization-based statistics were performed for all the analyses in the 20-IC solutions.

For the 80-IC solution, the goal of the analyses was not to identify specific statistically significant

connections. Rather, we examined the spatial distributions of dynamic connectivity, and their relations to

stable connectivity.

2.6. Relations to stable connectivity

Next, we examined how the spatial distribution of dynamic connectivity is associated with stable

connectivity. Here we focused on a finer spatial scale of 80-IC solutions. To assess the stable

connectivity, we calculated Fisher's z transformed Pearson's correlations across the included networks

(ICs). The matrices were averaged across individuals, and transformed back to r quantities. First, we

examined whether the dynamic and stable connectivity has similar spatial distributions. For both

matrices, the upper triangular part was converted to vectors, which were in turn correlated with each other

across different movie clips. We adopted Spearman's correlation coefficients to avoid violations of

Gaussian distributions of the matrix data.

Next, we calculated connectivity gradients (Margulies et al., 2016; Vos de Wael et al., 2020)

based on the stable connectivity patterns in the HBN-SSI dataset. By calculating gradients, the brain

networks (ICs) can be placed into a 2-D space based on their relative stable connectivity strengths. The

2-D gradients reflect large-scale brain organizations between unimodal networks and higher-order

transmodal areas (e.g. the default mode network) and between visual and sensorimotor regions (Margulies

et al., 2016). We can next display dynamic connectivity in the 2-D space to illustrate whether the

dynamic connectivity takes place between proximal or distal regions in the 2-D space. Specifically, we

first calculated gradients for each movie clip based on the group stable connectivity matrices using the

BrainSpace toolbox (Vos de Wael et al., 2020). The gradients were then aligned across the movie clips

with Procrustes alignment. The default diffusion-embedding and row-wise threshold (top 10% percentile)

were used. After model fitting, the first two gradients were obtained. The network ICs were mapped into

the 2D gradient space. Lastly, the dynamic connectivity from the three movie clips was plotted on the 2-

D layout.

2.7. Movie clips classification

In addition to univariate analysis, we also explored whether the dynamic connectivity, stable connectivity,

and regional activity can reliably reflect an individual's movie-watching condition (Finn et al., 2015). For

each participant of the HBN-SSI dataset, we calculated a connectivity or activity measure for each movie

clip, and also the corresponding connectivity or activity measure for the remaining 8 participants. We

compared three types of measures. First, we calculated the inter-individual consistency of point-by-point

interactions. The individual's consistency was calculated across the four sessions of the same movie

clips. The consistency of the remaining participants was calculated across 32 participants/sessions. The

lower diagonal of the matrices was converted into a 1,431 by 1 vector to perform the classification

analysis. Second, we calculated mean stable connectivity for the individual (averaged across 4 sessions)

and the remaining participants (averaged across 32 sessions). Third, we calculated the inter-individual

consistency of the regional activity. Similarly, individual measures were calculated across the four

sessions, and the remaining participants' measures were calculated for the 32 participants/sessions. Each

measure was a 54 by 1 vector, which was used for the classification analysis.

We used a winner-take-all algorithm to perform the movie clip classifications. To classify the

individual measure's state (movie clips), the individual's measures were correlated with the remaining

participants' measures from the three movie clips. The movie clips with the highest correlation were used

as the predicted class. The classification was performed for each of the 9 participants and 3 movie clips,

from which we calculated confusion matrices among the three movie clips and the overall classification

accuracy of all the three movie clips. To determine statistical significance, we adopted a permutation

procedure to randomly shuffle the predicted movie label 10,000 times.

3. Results

3.1. Dynamic and stable connectivity in 20-IC solution

We first examined the dynamic connectivity by calculating point-by-point interactions between each pair of 16 networks (IC) on the Partly Cloudy dataset (Figure 2a). We found widespread inter-individual consistent interactions at $p < 0.05$ of FDR correction. We also applied the sliding window approach, which only yielded statistically significant effects on six pairs of networks (supplementary materials). This suggests that the point-by-point interaction approach has better sensitivity to detect dynamic connectivity than the sliding-window approach. Although widespread, higher inter-individual consistency was found mostly involving one network of the higher visual networks (IC# 2, 3, and 4 in Figure 2c). And more interestingly, high inter-individual consistent dynamic connectivity was also found between the supramarginal and default mode network (IC # 6 and 15), which was similar to our previous analysis using a different analytic approach. In contrast, the stable connectivity showed different spatial patterns than the dynamic connectivity (Figure 2b). The networks with known functional relations, e.g. all the visual related networks (IC # 1, 2, 3, and 4), had higher stable connectivity, which showed square-like structures along the diagonal.

Figure 2 a) Inter-individual consistent point-by-point interactions (dynamic connectivity) across the 16 networks (independent components, ICs) from the Partly Cloudy dataset. The colors in the matrix

represent the percent variance explained by the first principal component of the point-by-point interaction.

The red dots indicate a false discovery rate (FDR) $p < 0.05$ using a circular time-shift randomization

procedure. b) Mean stable connectivity across the 16 network ICs. The networks are ordered roughly

according to their functions. The locations of the networks are shown in c).

Figures 3a through 3c show the consistent point-by-point interactions among the 16 networks

(ICs) for the three movies in the HBN-SSI dataset. Consistent with the Partly Cloudy dataset, widespread

consistent dynamic connectivity was observed. The networks that had higher consistent dynamic

connectivity were higher visual networks and the auditory network (IC 7). We further directly compared

the consistency of dynamic connectivity among the three movies (Figure 3d through 3f). Compared with

the other two movie clips, Wall-E showed higher consistency in interactions between the supramarginal

network (IC 6) and many other networks, and between the posterior cingulate network (IC 13) and visual

related networks. Compared with the other movie clips, Matrix showed higher consistency between only

three pairs of networks, among the posterior visual cortex, posterior parietal network, supramarginal

network, and a left frontoparietal network. And lastly, compared with the other two movie clips, A Few

Good Men showed higher consistency in the interaction of the auditory cortex (IC 7) with other networks,

and between the temporoparietal junction network (IC 5) and other networks.

Figure 3 a) through c), consistency of dynamic connectivity across 16 networks (independent

components, ICs) when watching the three movies in the Healthy Brain Network serial scanning initiative

dataset. The colors in the matrices represent the percent variance explained by the first principal

component of the point-by-point interaction. d) through f), the differences in consistency of dynamic

connectivity between each movie clip and the other two clips. The red dots indicate statistical

significance at a false discovery rate $p < 0.05$ with permutation testing. The differences in consistency of

dynamic connectivity are also shown in graph representation in g) through i), where the node color

represents the consistency differences in regional activity. j) shows the representative maps for the 16

network ICs.

We also examined the relationships between regional activity consistency and dynamic

connectivity consistency. We first compared the variance explained by the first PC for regional activity

between the three movie clips (supplementary Figure S2). Four networks (ICs) showed higher

intersubject correlations in Wall-E compared with the other two movie clips, including the posterior

cingulate cortex, supramarginal gyrus, left fronto-parietal, and medial and lateral prefrontal networks.

Only one network covering the posterior parietal lobe showed higher intersubject synchronization in The

Matrix compared with the other two movie clips. Eight networks showed higher intersubject correlations

in A few Good Men compared with the other movie clips, including the auditory cortex, medial visual,

temporo-parietal junction, and a few fronto-parietal networks. More interestingly, the regions with higher

consistency in regional activity in different movie clips seem to correspond well with the regions with

many consistent dynamic connectivities (Figure 3g through 3i).

We next examined the stable connectivity among the 16 networks (ICs) (Figure 4). Not

surprisingly, the overall patterns in the three movies were very similar. When directly comparing the

differences among the three movies, no statistical differences were found even at the $p < 0.05$ threshold.

Figure 4 Top row, stable connectivity among 16 networks (independent components, ICs) when watching

the three movie clips from healthy brain network serial scanning initiative. Bottom row, differences in

stable connectivity between a movie clip and the other two clips. No statistically significant difference

363   was found even with an uncorrected threshold of $p < 0.05$.

3.2. Dynamic and stable connectivity in 80-IC solution

We further studied the relations between dynamic connectivity and stable connectivity in a larger spatial

scale with 80 IC solutions. Figure 5 shows the dynamic connectivity consistency and stable connectivity

matrices for the four movie clips. The patterns are very similar to what with the 20 IC solution. That is,

the stable connectivity matrices showed modular structures, and were very similar across different movie

clips. In contrast, the dynamic connectivity distributions were highly skewed, with higher consistency

between lower-level brain regions such as the visual and auditory cortex.

Figure 5 Dynamic connectivity consistency (top row) and mean stable connectivity (bottom row) for the

four movie clips using 80-independent-component solutions. Please note that the number of included

independent components (ICs) are different between the Partly Cloudy dataset than the other three movie

clips.

We next directly examine the correlations among the matrices. For the Partly Cloudy data, the

correlation between stable and dynamic connectivity consistency was only 0.09 (Figure 6A), although it

was statistically significant due to the large number of IC pairs. The relations have been confirmed by the

NBH-SSI dataset (Figure 6B). The stable connectivity of the three movie clips had almost perfect

correlations. The dynamic connectivity of the three movies had moderate correlations. In contrast, there

were very small correlations between the dynamic and stable connectivity matrices.

Figure 6 Correlations between stable connectivity and dynamic connectivity for the Partly Cloudy dataset

(a) and Healthy Brain Network Serial Scanning Initiative (HBN-SSI) dataset (b). The connectivity

matrices were calculated based on 80-independent-component solutions. Spearman's rank correlation (ρ)

389   was used.

In order to show the spatial distributions of dynamic connectivity in the context of global stable

connectivity, we calculated connectivity gradients based on the stable connectivity of the three movie

clips in the HBN-SSI dataset (Top row in Figure 7). The first and second gradients represented unimodal

to transmodal gradient and visual to motor gradient, respectively. Next, we plotted the top 10% of

dynamic connectivity in each movie clip compared with the other two movie clips (Bottom row in Figure

7). It can be seen that the consistent dynamic connectivity for the three movies usually took place

between networks from far connectivity space, connecting visual, sensorimotor, and higher-order

association systems. There are also notable differences among the three movie clips. For example, for

the movie clips A Few Good Men, the consistent dynamic connectivity connected the higher-order

associate areas to visual and sensorimotor regions, separately. But direct connections between visual and

sensorimotor regions were rare.

Figure 7 Top row, gradient maps of stable connectivity in the Healthy Brain Network Serial Scanning

Initiative dataset. Bottom row, top 10% consistent dynamic connectivity in each movie clip compared

with the other two clips mapped to the connectivity gradient space.

3.4. Movie clips classification

Last we asked whether the dynamic or stable connectivity pattern can enable individual-level prediction

of the different movie clips. For each participant from the HBN-SSI dataset, we classified one of the

three movie clips based on different measures. Overall, the consistency of dynamic connectivity achieved

the highest prediction accuracy (*Accuracy = 92.6%*), followed by the stable connectivity (*Accuracy =*

85.2%) and the consistency of regional activity (*Accuracy = 74.1%*). Compared with chance level

accuracy of 33.33%, all classification accuracies were statistically significant (*p < 0.001*) based on

permutation tests. The clip-to-clip classification results for the different features are shown in

Supplementary Table S1.

4. Discussion

In the current analysis, we have shown widespread region-to-region dynamic connectivity that is

consistent across individuals when the participants watched the same movie clips. Different movie clips

showed different patterns of dynamic connectivity, suggesting that the interactions may support the

processing of context-specific information. For example, the two carton movie clips showed similarly

consistent dynamic connectivity between the posterior cingulate network and supramarginal network.

The action movie clip, The Matrix, showed higher consistent interactions in networks related to attention.

And the drama movie, A Few Good Men, showed higher consistent interactions involving networks

related to language processing, including bilateral fronto-parietal networks and prefrontal cortex. In

contrast, stable connectivity showed very similar spatial patterns in different movie clips, with few

statistical differences. The dynamic connectivity connected brain regions that are farther in the

connectivity gradient space, and can better classify different movie clips than the stable connectivity and

regional activity.

We first empirically compared the statistical results of inter-individual correlations of dynamic

connectivity measured by sliding window and point-by-point interaction. Not surprisingly, the interaction

approach showed higher statistical sensitivity than the sliding window approach, as indicated by a much

larger number of significant effects. It is not surprising because the point-by-point interaction has kept

the information of every time point, while the sliding-window approach can be seen as smoothed time

series that could potentially filter out real signals. More specifically, the point-by-point interaction

approach detected consistent interactions between almost every pair of network ICs. This is in line with

previous studies of regional activity, which also showed statistically significant effects in almost all

cortical regions (Chen et al., 2016; Di and Biswal, 2020a). In contrast, the sliding window approach can

only detect a small number of the dynamic connectivity among higher visual networks, and between

supramarginal gyrus and posterior cingulate networks. This is probably because there is slow time-

varying dynamic connectivity between these regions (e.g. Figure 1), which can be detected by the sliding

window approach. This is in line with studies showing that higher-order brain regions process longer

time scale information (Baldassano et al., 2017). The results confirm the limitation of the sliding window

approach in studying dynamic connectivity.

Consistent dynamic connectivity is ubiquitous, but different movies clips were associated with

different patterns of dynamic connectivity. The movie clips from Wall-E showed a similar dynamic

connectivity pattern as another animated movie Partly Cloudy. Specifically, dynamic connectivity was

mainly observed in connectivity with two main networks, the supramarginal and posterior cingulate

networks. These regions involve higher-order social processes such as empathy and theory of mind

(Richardson et al., 2018; Schurz et al., 2021). The involvements of these networks may indicate that

understanding the cartoon movies requires understanding the social interactions and intentions of the

virtual characters. This is in line with studies suggesting that different brain regions are involved in the

process of real versus virtue worlds (Han et al., 2005). In contrast, the court drama clip A Few Good Men

showed higher dynamic connectivity consistency that involved the auditory and temporoparietal junction

networks. Because the court drama included numerous conversations, it is not surprising that the

interaction between the auditory cortex and many other networks showed higher consistency, which

included fronto-parietal networks that may involve in the language process. The temporoparietal junction

is thought to be responsible for attributing other's mental states (Koster-Hale and Saxe, 2013; Wang et al.,

2021), which may also be a key component in understanding the conversations in the movie clip.

In contrast to the dynamic connectivity, no differences were identified in stable connectivity

among the three movie clips. In a larger spatial scale of 54/80 ICs, we further showed that the spatial

distribution of stable connectivity was highly correlated among the three movie clips, which is consistent

in a previous study (Vanderwal et al., 2019). The largely similar patterns of connectivity during watching

different movies are also in line with the observations in conventional task fMRI. When regressing out

task activations (Cole et al., 2014; Di and Biswal, 2019) or using continuous task design (Krienen et al.,

2014), the stable connectivity or task-independent connectivity showed largely similar spatial patterns

with each other and with what in resting-state. Similarly, the absolute correlation patterns of trial-by-trial

variability of the stop and go conditions in a stop signal task also showed similar patterns with each other

and with a separate resting-state run (Di et al., 2020). Taken together, all the results convergently suggest

that there is an overall connectivity pattern that may be related to the baseline brain function, but may also

be related to the underlying physiology (Chen et al., 2020) or anatomical network structures (Laumann

and Snyder, 2021). The lack of specificity of this global connectivity pattern makes it less desirable as a

measure of brain connectivity in specific cognitive and mental conditions. It should be noted that when

using multivariate classification analysis, the spatial patterns of stable connectivity can still be used to

identify different movie clips, but with less accuracy than the dynamic connectivity patterns. The high

classification accuracy of the dynamic connectivity suggested that dynamic connectivity could potentially

be useful in predictive-based analysis to reflect individual differences (Finn et al., 2015).

The spatial distributions of dynamic connectivity and stable connectivity are largely dissociated.

On one hand, the dynamic connectivity could take place between regions within the same functional

systems, e.g. the visual system. This is less apparent when using the sliding-window approach, probably

due to that the sliding-window approach can only capture slow fluctuations of dynamic connectivity. The

point-by-point approach could capture the fast dynamics of the interactions. It is reasonable that the

lower-level sensory regions showed consistent interactions, but this may be overlooked by using the

conventional sliding window approach. On the other hand, the current results also showed that dynamic

connectivity could also take place between different functional systems, e.g. between visual areas and

default mode networks. This is in line with the economic account of brain network organizations, which

indicates transient communication between remote brain regions could enable efficient information

transmissions. When overlaying the dynamic connectivity on the connectivity gradients space, it

demonstrated more clearly that the dynamic connectivity took place between higher association areas,

such as the default mode network and lower-level sensory and motor regions.

One limitation of the current study is the sample size. The HBN serial scanning dataset has a

relatively small sample size (n = 13). However, each participant watched three different types of movie

clips and repeated four sessions, which enable us to directly compare connectivity among these diverse

movie types and ensure the robustness of the results within an individual. Although promising, a larger

sample size with an examination of behavioral scores is needed for future brain-behavioral association

studies (Finn and Bandettini, 2021), where researchers can directly examine the differences in behavioral

correlates between dynamic connectivity and stable connectivity (Eichenbaum et al., 2021). Secondly,

the current analysis only focused on the spatial distributions of dynamic connectivity. Given the

ubiquitous dynamic connectivity identified in the current analysis, future studies could also examine the

time courses of the interaction term, which could paint a more complete picture of the dynamic

connectivity.

5. Conclusion

By analyzing the inter-individual consistency of point-by-point interactions between brain regions, we

were able to identify functionally meaningful dynamic connectivity during movie watching. We found

that compared with the stable connectivity, the dynamic connectivity can be more sensitive to detect

functional changes due to different movie contexts. The spatial distributions of dynamic connectivity and

stable connectivity were largely dissociated, with dynamic connectivity more reflect long-range

communications. Overall, dynamic connectivity may provide more functionally related information than

stable connectivity.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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