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Evaluating the reliability, validity, and utility of overlapping networks: Implications for
cognitive control

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Abstract

Brain regions can be consistently clustered together into a small number of large-scale networks

based on the correlation of their activity across time. However, the methods typically used to

assign regions to these networks typically force non- or minimal overlap between the networks,

losing information about how particular regions may connect to multiple networks. However,

new methods are emerging that allow networks to overlap. Here, we examined the reliability and

validity of one such assignment method, the mixed membership algorithm, and the utility of

overlapping assignment for identifying potential gaps in existing network models of behavior.

Analyses were conducted on resting state data from a large set of participants. First, we split the

data into two halves and generated group-level overlapping networks for each subgroup. We

then used a bootstrapped Dice similarity analysis to demonstrate that the binarized network

topographies showed good agreement between subgroups. Next, we generated nonoverlapping

networks in the combined data using a typical k-means clustering method. Using the same Dice

Similarity analysis, we compared these nonoverlapping networks both with previously published

nonoverlapping networks (Yeo et al, 2011) and with overlapping networks likewise generated for

the combined data. The nonoverlapping networks generally recapitulated known networks in the

literature, and the overlapping networks captured large portions of one to three nonoverlapping

network topographies. Following this, we used a relative entropy analysis to assess the

uniformity of each region's distribution of connections across the overlapping networks. While

many regions were indeed assigned to one network, more were assigned to multiple networks.

Furthermore, regions assigned to multiple networks did not necessarily show stronger

connection to one network over the others. Finally, we assessed the network membership of

regions of the fronto-parietal and cingulo-opercular networks of the Dual-Networks model of

cognitive control. In combination, the regions were members of all of the overlapping networks,

and the majority were assigned to multiple networks. Together, these results indicate that

overlapping assignment produces consistent and biologically plausible network topographies,

and that a complete network model of cognitive control, or indeed any network model of

behavior needs to be updated to account for multiple-network membership and the complex

interactions that occur between the relevant networks as a function of their overlapping nature.

Keywords: Network neuroscience, multiple-network membership, clustering,

overlapping networks, cognitive control, functional connectivity

1. Introduction

Over the past 15 years, researchers have repeatedly demonstrated that brain regions can be consistently clustered together into a small number of spatially discontinuous groups based on the tendency for their activity during rest or performance of a task to be correlated in time. This measure of timeseries correlation between brain regions is referred to as functional connectivity (Biswal et al., 1995; Friston, 1994), and the groups of regions that demonstrate high mutual functional connectivity are referred to as intrinsic networks (Cole et al., 2013). Network neuroscience aims to identify these intrinsic networks in human functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) data and understand how they interact in service of behavior. Converging evidence from several different metrics indicates that intrinsic networks communicate through a relatively small subset of brain regions that are highly connected across multiple networks. For example, intrinsic networks exhibit many of the properties of a small-world architecture, including functionally segregated clusters with low numbers of cross-cluster connections and power-law distribution of degree (number of connections) across regions (Bassett & Bullmore, 2006). Likewise, graph theory metrics of participation coefficient and within-module degree, which assess the distribution of a region's connections across networks, reveal a group of brain regions that are particularly strongly connected to multiple networks. Moreover, these properties underlie measures of network segregation and integration, such as modularity and between-network connectivity, which have been related to behavioral performance in a range of cognitive tasks (Baniqued et al., 2018; Cohen & D'Esposito, 2016; Kitzbichler et al., 2011; Mohr et al., 2016; Parkin et al., 2015).

While network neuroscience approaches have provided significant insight into the functional organization of the brain, global metrics like small-worldness, modularity, and between-network connectivity do not capture the role of individual brain regions in specific intrinsic networks. Even participation coefficient and within-module degree, which characterize region-level connectivity, only provide aggregate measures that collapse across networks. Characterizing the specific networks to which individual regions connect would give further insight into functional organization of the brain that are lost with these measures. However, the methods typically used to assign brain regions to intrinsic networks in most studies typically force non- or minimal overlap between intrinsic networks. The most common methods rely on either clustering methods, which explicitly assign regions to a single network in a winner-takes-all fashion (Bassett & Bullmore, 2006), or independent components analysis, which tends to produce networks with minimal overlap in functional magnetic resonance imaging data as a

matter of course (Langers, 2009). These types of assignment methods likely lose important

information about how particular brain regions may intrinsically connect to multiple networks.

However, new methods are emerging that allow networks to overlap, which provides a

straightforward and quantifiable way to capture how brain regions associate with multiple

intrinsic networks. For example, Najafi and colleagues (2016) reported the first use of the mixed

membership algorithm to assess intrinsic network structure. This algorithm uses a stochastic

block model to assign regions to a set of overlapping networks, producing a vector for each

region that indicates the strength of the region's association with each network. This allows for

intrinsic network overlap wherever the regions have a nonzero association with more than one

network. Importantly, the area of overlap between two networks topographically indicates the

regions that connect between those networks. This provides a direct map of which intrinsic

networks each region contributes to. Najafi and colleagues applied the mixed membership

algorithm to a set of fMRI data collected from 100 human subjects at rest and during several

different tasks. Their analysis produced a set of overlapping networks that resembled networks

produced using standard clustering methods, but extended into other areas of cortex as well.

Moreover, these results showed that multiple-network membership was common across a wide

range of regions, including areas from all four lobes as well as subcortical structures.

Thus, methods such as the mixed membership algorithm that allow for overlap between

networks give an intuitive map of regions' multiple-network membership, providing an important

new tool for investigating and expanding network models of behavior. One prominent network

model of behavior is the Dual-Networks model of cognitive control (Dosenbach et al., 2007,

2008). This model posits that cognitive control is supported by two networks, the fronto-parietal

(FP) and cingulo-opercular (CO), each of which handles distinct aspects of information

processing. The FP and CO networks are composed of separate sets of regions and do not

share any connections between them. This may be an artifact of the methods used to define the

two networks, which identified the networks as nonoverlapping. Using an overlapping method

such as the mixed membership algorithm allows one to address this important issue.

Here, we sought to further test the reliability and validity of the mixed membership

algorithm and explore the utility of overlapping assignment for identifying potential gaps in

existing network models of behavior. To assess the reliability of the mixed membership

algorithm, we calculated the topographical consistency of overlapping networks assigned from

two different human subject samples collected under the same MRI protocols (Glasser et al.,

2013; Van Essen et al., 2012). Next, to assess its validity, we likewise calculated the

topographical similarity of overlapping networks with intrinsic networks derived in the same data

using established non-overlapping methods. Finally, we explored the method's utility by

assessing the multiple-network assignment of the original regions of the Dual-Networks model

(Dosenbach et al., 2007, 2008).

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Datasets

The following analyses were performed on a 200-subject subset of the open access

1200-subject young adult data from the Human Connectome Project (Van Essen et al., 2012).

Details on informed consent procedures and measures taken to ensure ethical and inclusive

recruitment are described in detail by Van Essen and colleagues (2012, 2013). The data used

here included the de-identified preprocessed first session resting state scans (LR acquisition)

from each subject (1200 timepoints, TR = 0.72s, total scan time = 14 min 24s; Glasser et al.,

2013), where subjects were selected randomly. Each scan was further subjected to additional

processing using functions available in the Analysis of Functional Neuroimages (AFNI) package

(Cox, 1996). As has been previously reported (Hwang et al., 2017), the mean whole brain signal

(-ort whole_brain_signal.1D) and frequencies outside of a band between 0.009 and 0.08 Hz (-

band 0.009 0.08 -automask) were removed. The remaining analyses were conducted in

volumetric space.

2.2. Data processing

To prepare the data for network assignment analysis, the following preprocessing steps

were followed using a combination of the AFNI package (Cox, 1996) and MATLAB software. A

1000-unit, 7-network derived version of the Global-Local parcellation (2mm resolution) by

Schaefer and colleagues (2018) was used to define the regions of interest (ROIs) to be used for

the correlation matrix. This parcellation provided the most fine-grained division of individual

brain regions, especially in association areas such as the lateral frontal cortex.

The AFNI function 3dNetCorr (options: -fish_z, -in_rois) was used to extract region-wise,

z-scored correlation matrices for analysis. ROIs with zero data were automatically removed from

the correlation for each subject. Next, the data was imported into MATLAB and formatted for

subsequent network assignment using a series of in-house scripts (available at

https://github.com/savannahcookson/NetChar). Any ROIs excluded for a given subject were

removed from all subjects, ensuring that all subjects had valid correlation values for all ROIs in

subsequent analysis. Negative correlations were removed from the matrices and converted the

diagonal to zeros. The matrices were thresholded and binarized to retain only the top 10% of

correlations and then averaged across subjects. The resulting average matrix was again

thresholded to the top 10% of correlations and binarized for subsequent assignment.

For the reliability analysis, the data were split into two subsets of 100 subjects each,

which we will refer to as the "exploratory" and "confirmatory" datasets throughout this report.

The remaining analyses (validity and utility) were conducted on the combined dataset, which we

will refer to as the "combined" dataset, to maximize the sample size used to define the

overlapping networks in these analyses.

The process of preparing the correlation matrices for network assignment and the actual

assignment process both excluded several ROIs due to a lack of data. Correlation matrix

processing excluded 25 ROIs in the exploratory dataset and 23 in the confirmatory dataset,

where 21 were mutually excluded in both datasets. Overlapping network assignment excluded a

further 36 ROIs in the exploratory dataset and 32 in the confirmatory dataset, with 29 mutually

excluded. This resulted in a 939-region correlation matrix for the exploratory dataset and a 945-

region matrix for the confirmatory dataset. These regions were mostly located in ventral frontal

and anterior temporal cortex, and were likely due to signal dropout during data acquisition.

Overlapping and non-overlapping network assignment from the combined dataset, and

comparative analyses were restricted to those regions included in both the exploratory and

confirmatory datasets, for a final count of 934 total ROIs.

2.3. Overlapping Network Assignment

Overlapping network assignment was conducted using the mixed-membership algorithm

first reported by Gopalan and Blei (2013; package available at

https://github.com/premgopalan/svinet) and applied to neuroimaging data by Najafi and

colleagues (2016). Briefly, this program conducts overlapping network assignment by using an

assortative stochastic block model to infer the probability (Bayesian estimation) that a given

region is connected to each network, where the number of networks is pre-specified by the user.
This produces an "assignment matrix" in which each region is given an association weight for
each specified network. We implemented this program on our data, specifying seven (7)
networks for assignment and the number of ROIs included in the correlation matrix and setting
the -linksampling option with the default threshold. Seven networks were specified to match the
number of nonoverlapping intrinsic networks originally used to generate the regional parcellation
used to define our ROIs. This permitted assessment of the extent of the differences in network
topologies derived from overlapping and non-overlapping methods while keeping the base
number of networks equivalent.

2.4. Characterization of Assignment Consistency

Our first aim was to test the reliability of overlapping assignment by assessing mutual
similarity between the overlapping network topographies produced by the mixed membership
algorithm for the exploratory and confirmatory datasets and determine if the networks produced
by the method were consistent across groups of subjects. To compare the overlapping networks
from each dataset, we binarized each network without thresholding and then conducted a
topographic Dice coefficient calculation via the AFNI command 3ddot (-dodice option, whole-
brain mask) between each pair of networks between datasets. Conducting this analysis on the
un-thresholded, binarized topographies allowed us to explore the broadest extent of potential
overlap between networks.

To assess the significance of the Dice coefficients derived from this analysis, we
conducted a 10,000-iteration permutation test. For each iteration, the assignment matrix region
labels for the confirmatory dataset assignments were randomized and the Dice coefficients
recalculated across the exploratory and shuffled confirmatory networks. Repeating this process
for each iteration generated a null distribution of Dice coefficients for each pair of networks,
which could be used to assess which of the Dice scores was significantly greater than chance.
Significance was thresholded at α_{FW} = .05 family-wise corrected across network pairs (49
comparisons total), for a within-comparison α = .001. To estimate the mutual alignment across
all seven networks between the two datasets, we selected the seven pairs without repetition that
maximized the total Dice score across networks. This process was also used to align other
overlapping and nonoverlapping networks generated in later analyses. We finally repeated this

Dice similarity permutation testing between the overlapping networks generated for the
combined dataset and each of those from the exploratory and confirmatory datasets.

2.5. Relation to Non-Overlapping Networks

Our second aim was to assess the validity of overlapping assignment by assessing the
topographical similarities between overlapping and non-overlapping networks derived in the
same data using methods commonly reported in the imaging literature. For example, Yeo and
colleagues (2011) generated a set of non-overlapping networks in functional connectivity
matrices derived from the resting state data of 1000 participants (500 participants each in a
discovery and replication sample). They found stable clustering results at a resolution of 7
networks, and the topologies of these networks corresponded to previously reported functional
networks. These networks are remarkably robust, having been replicated across a wide range
of methodologies and datasets (Cole et al., 2014; Power et al., 2011).

Here, we applied a standard k-means clustering method to the averaged correlation
matrices of the combined dataset here to define a set of non-overlapping intrinsic networks
using standard techniques. First, we conducted the Dice coefficient permutation tests described
above to compare the nonoverlapping networks to those defined previously by Yeo and
colleagues (2011) to confirm their topographical consistency. Then, we conducted a Dice
coefficient permutation test to compare these non-overlapping topographies to the overlapping
networks produced by the same data. In both of these permutation tests, the non-overlapping
topographies identified by k-means assignment in the current dataset were shuffled to generate
the Dice coefficient null distribution used for statistical testing.

2.6. Assessing Network Membership of FP and CO Network Regions

Our final aim was to perform an exploratory analysis to assess the overlapping network
membership of regions canonically assigned to the FP and CO networks in the Dual-Networks
model of cognitive control. To do this, we identified the regions that contained each of the 16
point-coordinates of the regions assigned to the FP and CO networks originally reported by
Dosenbach and colleagues (2007, 2008) and extracted the assignment vectors of each region.

We also sought to characterize the extent these regions' propensity for multiple-network

membership relative to other regions in the brain. To do this, we calculated the total number of

assigned networks and the entropy (DKL) of each region's assignment vector relative to a

uniform assignment reference distribution using the Kullback-Leibler divergence method from

information theory. This method indexes the extent to which the actual assignment vector

diverges from the reference distribution by estimating the amount of information about the

assignment that would be lost by approximating it with that reference. In this method, regions

that are assigned to more networks will have assignment vectors that more closely resemble a

uniform distribution, resulting in a lower DKL value. We scaled these values to a range of zero

to one for intuitive interpretation, such that regions with more uniform assignment tended toward

zero (lowest divergence) and regions assigned to a single network had a value $DKL = 1$ (highest

divergence). We plotted a histogram (100 bins) of these values across regions along with

reference lines for the average DKL value as a function of the number of networks a given

region was assigned to. We also included reference lines at the specific DKL values for each of

the 16 FP and CO network regions.

3. Results

3.1 Comparison Between Samples

The reliability of the mixed membership algorithm was assessed by analyzing the

consistency of the networks generated by two separate samples. Applying the mixed-

membership assignment algorithm separately to the exploratory and confirmatory datasets

produced two sets of seven networks that shared many similarities (Figure 1). Generally,

assignment produced one network that primarily covered visual regions (Overlapping Network

4), two that covered mostly sensorimotor regions (Overlapping Networks 2 and 5), and four that

were comprised of mostly association cortex.

Figure 1. Overlapping network topographies generated by the mixed membership algorithm.
Networks (N) are matched between sets to produce the largest overall similarity score, indexed
by the sum of the Dice coefficients across network pairs.

The Dice coefficient analysis revealed that each network in one dataset was statistically

similar to two to three networks in the other dataset (Table 1), consistent with a set of networks

with significant areas of overlap between them. Homologous networks were defined by

identifying seven mutually exclusive pairs of significantly similar networks between datasets

while maximizing the sum of the Dice coefficients across pairs. These homologues showed

strong between-pair similarity, with Dice coefficients greater than .75 for all seven pairs (mean:

0.86, range: [0.77:0.93]). There were also significant Dice coefficient similarities between non-

homologue "secondary" pairs. These values were generally lower than those seen for the

homologous pairs (mean: 0.56, range: [0.38:0.80]). Three of these secondary pairs were

consistent between the exploratory and confirmatory networks. These included pairs between

networks 1 and 6; networks 2 and 5; and networks 3 and 4. The remaining secondary pairs

were: between Exploratory Overlapping Network (EON) 7 and Confirmatory Overlapping

Networks (CONs) 1 and 2; and between CON7 and EON3.

Table 1

Similarity between exploratory and confirmatory networks (Dice coefficient)

	EON1	EON2	EON3	EON4	EON5	EON6	EON7
CON1	0.89	-	-	-	-	0.69	0.43
CON2	-	0.77	-	-	0.65	-	0.46
CON3	-	-	0.85	0.50	-	-	-
CON4	-	-	0.38	0.93	-	-	-
CON5	-	0.80	-	-	0.91	-	-
CON6	0.60	-	-	-	-	0.83	-
CON7	-	-	0.50	-	-	-	0.87

Note. Shows the dice coefficients of significantly similar pairs of networks between the exploratory and confirmatory datasets. "-" represents values that were not significant. EON: Exploratory overlapping network; CC: Confirmatory overlapping network.

Comparing the overlapping networks from the exploratory and confirmatory datasets to
those generated for the combined dataset (Figure 1) generally preserved this pattern of
statistical similarity and homology for both sets of comparisons (Table 2). The patterns of
similarity found between the combined dataset and each of the two comparison datasets were
almost identical, with just one additional significant similarity score for the similarity between
combined Overlapping Network (ON) 5 and EON7 that was not reflected in the scores for the
combined and confirmatory networks. The patterns of both the combined-exploratory and
combined-confirmatory similarities showed some additional similarities not reflected in the
pattern of the direct comparison between the exploratory and confirmatory networks, likely
because the networks derived for the combined dataset were partially informed by data from
both of the split datasets. Overall, the mixed membership assignment produced a visually
consistent set of networks with statistically verifiable homologues, supporting the reliability of
this method for overlapping network assignment.

Table 2

Similarity between exploratory and confirmatory overlapping networks and overlapping networks from combined datasets (Dice coefficient)

		ON1	ON2	ON3	ON4	ON5	ON6	ON7
Exploratory	EON1	0.82	-	-	-	-	0.66	-
	EON2	-	0.73	-	-	0.67	-	0.54
	EON3	-	-	0.77	0.48	0.44	-	-
	EON4	-	-	-	0.95	-	-	-
	EON5	-	0.79	-	-	0.79	-	0.38
	EON6	0.66	-	-	-	-	0.81	-
	EON7	0.50	-	0.61	-	0.38	-	0.66
Confirmatory	CON1	0.91	-	-	-	-	0.62	-
	CON2	-	0.64	-	-	0.51	-	0.63
	CON3	-	-	0.65	0.54	0.47	-	-
	CON4	-	-	-	0.92	-	-	-
	CON5	-	0.78	-	-	0.79	-	0.39
	CON6	0.53	-	-	-	-	0.91	-
	CON7	0.53	-	0.66	-	-	-	0.59

Note. Shows the dice coefficients of significantly similar pairs of overlapping networks between the exploratory and confirmatory datasets and the overlapping networks produced for the combined datasets. "-" represents values that were not significant. EON: Exploratory overlapping network; CON: Confirmatory overlapping network; ON: overlapping network.

3.2. Comparison with Non-Overlapping Networks

The validity of the overlapping networks generated by the mixed membership algorithm
was assessed by comparing the overlapping topographies derived from the combined dataset to
nonoverlapping networks in this same dataset. A set of seven nonoverlapping intrinsic networks
was produced using a k-means analysis (Figure 2). We first compared these nonoverlapping
networks to those previously reported by Yeo and colleagues (2011) to confirm that they
represented similar topographies to those typically reported in the literature (Table 3). All of the
nonoverlapping networks produced by k-means assignment were statistically similar to exactly

one of the intrinsic networks described by Yeo and colleagues, with the exception of the "limbic"

network. The HCP data used for the current analyses has weak signal in anterior temporal

regions, many of which are included in the limbic network, so this result is not particularly

surprising. In any case, the nonoverlapping networks defined in the current data generally

aligned well with previously published intrinsic networks, insofar as the regions they contained

were included in our data.

Figure 2. Topographies of networks generated by k-means clustering compared with original
topographies reported by Yeo et al (2011). K-means networks (KN) for the current analysis are
presented on the left; networks from Yeo et al are presented on the right with originally reported
names. CTR: Control Network; SMN: Somatomotor Network; DAN: Dorsal Attention Network;
VIS: Visual Network; SVN: Salience/Ventral Attention Network; DMN: Default Mode Network;
LIM: Limbic Network.

Table 3

Similarity between k-Means networks and published networks (Dice coefficient)

	KN1	KN2	KN3	KN4	KN5	KN6	KN7
CTR	0.74	-	-	-	-	-	-
SMN	-	0.88	-	-	-	-	-
DAN	-	-	0.71	-	-	-	-
VIS	-	-	-	0.90	-	-	-
SVN	-	-	-	-	0.77	-	-
DMN	-	-	-	-	-	0.73	-
LIM	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. Shows the dice coefficients of significantly similar pairs of networks between k-means networks from the current analysis and networks previously reported by Yeo and colleagues (2011). "-" represents values that were not significant. KN: k-Means network; SVN: Salience/Ventral Attention Network; SMN: Sensorimotor Network; CTR: Control Network; DAN: Dorsal Attention Network; DMN: Default Mode Network; VIS: Visual Network; LIM: Limbic Network.

We next compared the topographies of the nonoverlapping networks from the combined

dataset to the overlapping networks produced in the same dataset using the mixed membership

algorithm. In this analysis, the overlapping networks were significantly similar to one to three

nonoverlapping networks, indicating that each overlapping network represented one or a

combination of a small subset of nonoverlapping networks (Table 4; Figure 4). Two overlapping

networks were similar to exactly one non-overlapping network; one aligned with the "visual"

network, and one with the "somatomotor" network. The remaining five overlapping networks

were similar to two or more non-overlapping networks.

Table 4

Similarity between k-Means networks and overlapping networks (Dice coefficient)

	ON1	ON2	ON3	ON4	ON5	ON6	ON7
KN1	0.54	-	0.35	-	-	-	-
KN2	-	0.83	-	-	0.57	-	-
KN3	-	-	0.42	-	0.35	-	-
KN4	-	-	-	0.73	-	-	-
KN5	-	-	0.26	-	0.21	-	0.44
KN6	0.34	-	-	-	-	0.65	-
KN7	-	-	-	-	-	0.44	0.44

Note. Shows the dice coefficients of significantly similar pairs of networks between the k-means networks and overlapping networks generated for the combined datasets. "-" represents values that were not significant. KN: k-Means network; ON: overlapping network.

Figure 3. Visualization of which nonoverlapping networks are included in the topography of each overlapping network. Overlapping topographies are shown on the left in green (ON: overlapping network, combined dataset). Nonoverlapping networks (KN) are shown on the right in red. Brackets indicate the set of nonoverlapping networks whose topographies are included in each overlapping network.

3.3. Exploring Network Models with Overlapping Assignment

In this final analysis, we examined the extent of multiple-network membership in regions

across the brain and explored whether the regions of the FP and CO networks, which were

previously defined using a nonoverlapping method, were members of other networks. Across

the brain, the weighted overlapping network assignments for the combined dataset were

extracted for each region and subjected to a relative entropy analysis. This analysis revealed a

large number of regions (263 out of 937) with entropy values at 1, with the rest of the brain

regions with entropy values less than 1 distributed relatively evenly across the full range of

values (*DKL* range: [0:0.9912]; Figure 4). While a plurality of regions were assigned to a single

overlapping network (i.e., *DKL* approaching 1), many more (i.e., DKL < 1) were assigned to

multiple networks, with a maximum of four assigned networks for some regions (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Distribution of relative entropies across brain regions. Histogram of the relative
entropies across the 937 regions included in overlapping network assignment. Colored vertical
bars represent the average relative entropy for all regions assigned to the labeled number of
networks. Black vertical bars show the specific relative entropies for the 16 regions of the FP
and CO networks.

Next, we extracted the assignment vectors for the brain regions of the FP and CO

networks (as defined by a non-overlapping assignment method) that form the basis for the Dual

Networks model of cognitive control. These regions were members of all seven of the

overlapping networks, where the most common assignments were to networks 1, 3, and 7

(Table 5). Most regions assigned to ON3 were nodes of the FP network, while most regions

assigned to ON7 were nodes of the CO network; however, both of these overlapping networks

contained regions from both the FP and CO networks. Finally, ON1 showed broad inclusion of

regions from both the FP and CO networks. Most regions of the FP and CO networks were

assigned to two or three overlapping networks, with only the left anterior prefrontal cortex (L-

APFC) and mid-cingulate regions assigned to a single network. Accordingly, most of regions

from the FP and CO networks had relative entropy values much less than one. The regions with

the lowest values – the dorsal anterior cingulate/medial superior frontal cortex (dACC/msFC),

right precuneus, and right anterior insula/frontal operculum (R-aIfO) – were the three regions

assigned to three overlapping networks, the highest number of networks assigned for any FP or

CO network regions.

Table 5
Overlapping network membership and graph theory properties of LFC regions

		Coordinates (MNI)*			Overlapping Network							
		x	y	z	ON1	ON2	ON3	ON4	ON5	ON6	ON7	DKL (scaled)
Frontoparietal Network	R-IPS	29	-65	42	0.35	-	0.649	-	-	-	-	0.505
	L-IPS	-31	-62	45	0.485	-	0.513	-	-	-	-	0.469
	R-FC†	42	2	37	-	-	0.446	-	-	-	0.553	0.475
	L-FC†	-42	3	38	0.407	-	0.591	-	-	-	-	0.482
	R-Precuneus	10	-73	43	0.536	-	0.208	0.255	-	-	-	0.228
	L-Precuneus	-9	-76	40	0.888	-	-	0.111	-	-	-	0.735
	mid-Cingulate	-1	-31	31	0.998	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
	R-IPL	50	-51	45	0.728	-	-	-	-	0.271	-	0.554
	L-IPL	-51	-54	37	0.615	-	-	-	-	0.383	-	0.489
	R-dlPFC†	44	21	34	0.875	-	0.086	-	-	-	0.038	0.656
	L-dlPFC†	-44	22	36	0.998	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Cingulo-Opercular Network	R-aIfO	38	19	0	0.261	-	0.171	-	-	-	0.567	0.255
	L-aIfO	-36	17	3	-	-	0.073	-	-	-	0.925	0.799
	dACC/msFC	-2	7	50	-	0.426	-	-	0.195	-	0.377	0.195
	R-APFC	28	51	25	0.641	-	-	-	-	0.274	0.084	0.352
	L-APFC	-28	54	6	0.998	-	-	-	-	-	-	1

Note. Shows the original coordinates from each study and their weighted assignment to the seven overlapping networks for the combined dataset. Weightings of 0 (i.e., nonassigned) are marked with a "-" for visual clarity. Region names are preserved from the original papers. ON: overlapping network; R-: Right hemisphere; L-: Left hemisphere; IPS: Intraparietal sulcus; FC: Frontal cortex; IPL: Inferior parietal lobule; dlPFC: Dorsolateral prefrontal cortex; aIfO: Anterior insula/frontal operculum; dACC/msFC: Dorsal anterior cingulate/medial superior frontal cortex; APFC: Anterior prefrontal cortex; DKL: Kullback–Leibler divergence.

* Coordinates have been converted to MNI space from the original reported Talairach space
† Coordinates in original Talairach space are mirrored

4. Discussion

The results of our analyses indicate that the overlapping networks generated by mixed-membership assignment have good between-sample reliability, and thus produce consistent overlapping networks across subjects. They also meaningfully recapitulate structures seen in typical nonoverlapping networks, indicating that the mixed membership algorithm produces equally valid network assignments as previous assignment methods. Finally, these results indicate the utility of the mixed membership algorithm for revealing regions' involvement in networks that are obscured by nonoverlapping methods. Together, these results demonstrate that overlapping network assignment is a practical and accessible tool. Moreover, they highlight the pressing need to consider how network overlap can be accounted for in our existing network models of behavior.

4.1. Reliability of overlapping network assignment

Overall, the overlapping networks generated by the mixed-membership algorithm
showed good agreement between two independent datasets based on the Dice coefficient
permutation test. All of the networks derived from the exploratory dataset had significant
similarity with two or three networks from the confirmatory dataset. Moreover, homologous
network pairs could be identified for all seven identified networks, along with additional
similarities that reflected consistent areas of overlap between networks. Moreover, these
patterns were replicated when comparing each of the sets of networks from the split-half
datasets to those generated across the full combined dataset. Together, these findings
suggests that the mixed-membership assignment method produces reliable networks between
samples.

Najafi and colleagues (2016), who originally reported the use of the mixed-membership
algorithm on brain imaging data, previously demonstrated that the mixed membership algorithm
is a reliable method. However, there were several differences between the methods used here
and those used by Najafi and colleagues. While Najafi and colleagues used a bootstrapping
technique to test the reliability of overlapping network assignment within a single subject sample
(N = 94 in that study), here we demonstrated the reliability of the method between samples (N =
100 subjects each). Notably, while direct comparison of the networks produced here and those
found by Najafi and colleagues is not possible due to differences in the number of networks
specified for analysis (Najafi et al: 6; here: 7), there were marked qualitative similarities in their
spatial topography. Future research is necessary to explore how the number of networks used
for assignment might lead to comparable and/or contrasting topographies and the best
resolution for overlapping assignment for various applications.

An additional difference between the current research and the study by Najafi and
colleagues is the computational demand of the methods employed for network assignment.
Najafi and colleagues applied an iterative assignment process that aligned the most similar
network topographies across iterations and generated a consensus assignment that accounted
for variations in assignment region-by-region. Here, we attained similar reliability across
networks between samples with a single round of assignment, lowering the computational
demands of the assignment significantly. Furthermore, we have made our processing scripts
available as an easily accessible open-source download
(https://github.com/savannahcookson/NetChar), which should facilitate more widespread

adoption of the mixed membership algorithm for network assignment in future studies of brain
networks.

There were some small qualitative differences in the network topographies derived from
the exploratory and confirmatory datasets, most notably in the areas of medial frontal and mid-
prefrontal cortices, superior temporal cortex, and parietal cortex, which might call into question
the overall reliability of mixed membership assignment. However, given the otherwise high
consistency in network assignment across the two datasets, this seems unlikely. Instead, this
inconsistency may reflect particularly high inter-subject variability. Recent work identifying
"network variants" across individuals using non-overlapping methods may be a source of this
variability in network assignment across datasets. Gordon and colleagues (2017) first reported
these network variants in a set of ten subjects with a large amount of high-quality individual
data. Generating a non-overlapping network parcellation for each subject individually revealed
variations in network assignment in certain areas that were not present in the group average.
These areas included anterior mid/inferior and ventromedial prefrontal cortices, middle cingulate
cortex, and superior parietal cortex, which are similar in location to the areas that were
inconsistently assigned here. In a follow-up study using the same dataset, Gratton and
colleagues (2018) demonstrated that these variants were stable individual features across task
demands, indicating that these variants were likely intrinsic. Moreover, Seitzman and colleagues
(2019) demonstrated that these variants are trait-like, suggesting that they are stable over time
within individuals. They also showed that participants could be divided into groups that show
similar variant structures across individuals. Future research using the mixed-membership
algorithm will provide an opportunity to further our understanding of these network-variants and
their influence on group-level network assignment.

4.2. Validity of overlapping network assignment

To determine the relationship between overlapping and non-overlapping networks, we
applied a k-means clustering algorithm to the correlation matrix for our combined datasets to
produce seven non-overlapping networks. The nonoverlapping networks we identified were
generally topographically consistent with networks previously reported by Yeo and colleagues
(2011). Moreover, the overlapping networks we identified showed good consistency with the
nonoverlapping networks generated from the same dataset. Two overlapping networks showed
a strong similarity to one single nonoverlapping network, one visual and one somatomotor; the

remainder were composed of combinations of multiple networks comprised of brain regions in

association areas. Najafi and colleagues (2016) also performed a comparative analysis between

overlapping and non-overlapping networks in the same dataset by calculating the spatial

correlation of their topographies, with similar conclusions. Four of their six overlapping networks

had a single nonoverlapping homologue, two of which (communities 1 and 2 in their original

report) included visual and somatomotor cortices respectively as seen in our results here. The

other two networks were composed of association cortex from widespread frontoparietal and

temporal regions.

Given that all seven of our overlapping networks have topographic consistencies with

non-overlapping networks, it seems unlikely that overlapping assignment is capturing

fundamentally different or novel networks from those identified using non-overlapping

assignment to define the networks. Instead, the overlapping networks appear to replicate the

nonoverlapping topographies either individually or in limited combinations. Altogether then,

overlapping and nonoverlapping assignment methods are capturing similar mathematical

patterns in the functional connectivity data. It is tempting then to ask which method better

captures the "ground truth" of the brain's network topographies; however, this begs the question

of how the ground truth can be achieved. Shinn and colleagues (2017) point out that there is no

epistemological reason to believe that there is a community structure in a given network a priori,

and further that there is no possible method to determine the ground truth of the correct

resolution or decomposition of that community structure. Instead, a better question is to ask is

which method is more biologically plausible.

First, there is evidence that individual brain regions are anatomically connected to

multiple networks, not just regions within their own network. For example, seminal work using

histological tracing in primates (for review, see Goldman-Rakic, 1988) demonstrated that frontal

region 46A and parietal region 7A, regions assigned the FP network in modern analyses, are

directly connected to the superior temporal sulcus (e.g., a region assigned to the default mode

network), post-cingulate gyrus (e.g., a region assigned to the salience/ventral attention

network), and area 19/peristriate cortex (e.g., a region assigned to the visual network). Work in

humans indicates that functional connectivity captures not only these direct connections but also

many indirect connections (Honey et al., 2009), suggesting that network overlap is even broader

in functional data. Accordingly, evidence from human brain imaging studies demonstrates that

regions show flexibility in network affiliation, both at rest and during task performance (Cole et

al., 2014; Khambhati et al., 2018; Pedersen et al., 2018). Moreover, studies using other

techniques that have allowed for some level of network overlap (Bijsterbosch et al., 2019; Yeo

et al., 2014) likewise have demonstrated that regions can be assigned to multiple networks.

Finally, many studies have highlighted the behavioral importance of "hub" regions that share a

high number of connections with regions outside of their assigned network (Cole et al., 2013;

Hwang et al., 2017; Power et al., 2013). Ultimately, there is no distinction between which

network(s) a region is a "member" of and which they merely "connect" to, a point previously

made in Pessoa's (2014) recent review of brain networks; these hubs are simply members of

multiple networks. While the connections of these hubs may be able to be ascertained with

nonoverlapping methods, though, there may be other regions that are not identified as hubs that

may nonetheless be members of multiple networks. These regions' involvement in multiple

networks is effectively lost with nonoverlapping assignment.

Thus, the existing literature broadly indicates that overlapping networks indeed better

capture the brain's large-scale network organization. This notion is consistent with studies of

task-related networks. For example, Nee (2021) demonstrated a rostro-caudal gradient of

network membership related to the processing of three distinct cognitive control factors, with

extensive overlap between adjacent networks. Each of the three networks included regions from

multiple intrinsic nonoverlapping networks. More specifically, each task-related network included

distinct combinations of the FP network, default mode network, salience network, and dorsal

attention network. Notably, the combined topography of these three task-related networks is

similar to the topography of one of the overlapping networks we identified (i.e., ON1). Future

research should relate these and other task-related networks to overlapping network

topographies to better understand how network overlapping drive dynamic network

reorganization during task performance. More importantly, it is vital that network neuroscience

embrace methods that explicitly adopt an overlapping network perspective to support more

biologically plausible interpretations of the brain's network organization and avoid losing

information about which regions connect to multiple networks.

4.3. Utility of overlapping network assignment

A unique feature of the mixed membership algorithm, like many overlapping assignment

methods, is that it generates an assignment vector for each region, which captures the

probability that that region is a member of a particular network. At a whole-brain level, we

assessed which overlapping networks each region was assigned to. Combined with our analysis

of the similarity between our overlapping and nonoverlapping networks, this gave us an intuitive

map of how regions in different nonoverlapping networks shared membership across multiple

networks (Figure 5). An analysis of the relative entropy of assignment for each of these regions

revealed a broad spectrum of connectivity distributions across different overlapping networks.

That is, regions did not universally show preferential assignment to one network over another;

instead, many regions showed relatively even assignment to two or even more networks

simultaneously. This yet further supports the need to move toward using overlapping methods

that do not obscure this information.

Figure 5. Visualization of nonoverlapping network topographies that significantly make up each overlapping network. K-Means networks (KN) are presented in black. Each Overlapping Network (ON, combined dataset) is then presented in a different color encircling the set of k-means topographies that is significantly represented in the overlapping network.

545   The goal of any network model of behavior is to capture which networks support that behavior and how they interact with one another. A common method of exploring brain network interactions is to assess their integration and/or segregation during different tasks (see Sporns, 2013 for review) by calculating by assessing the connectivity between regions in one network and regions in another network and comparing this value between task conditions or between

task and rest. Previous research using this method has demonstrated that the FP and CO

networks demonstrate increased integration during performance of a task requiring the

integration of FP- and CO-related processing relative to a simple categorization task (Cohen et

al., 2014), which is taken as evidence that these two networks indeed interact during cognitive

control. Similarly, Menon (2011) has proposed a "Tri-Network" model of psychopathology that

proposes that clinical symptoms manifest as a function of disorderly interactions between the

FP network, the default mode network, and the salience network.

However, any speculation about interactions between networks in models such at the

Dual-Networks model of cognitive control or the Tri-Network model of psychopathology is

incomplete without accounting for regions that are members of multiple networks. To illustrate,

we extracted the assignment vectors for each of the regions of the FP and CO networks to

determine their possible assignment to all of the overlapping networks that we identified.

Collectively these regions were members of all seven networks, indicating the potential

involvement of more networks than just the FP and CO networks in the service of cognitive

control. Even the relatively restricted set of FP regions analyzed here were members of five

networks when networks were allowed to overlap, suggesting that any model involving the FP

network must account for interactions with many other networks. There is indeed mounting

evidence that several additional networks are involved in various aspects of cognitive control,

including the dorsal attention network (Badre & Nee, 2018; Ito et al., 2017; Nee, 2021),

salience/ventral attention network (Seeley et al., 2007), and even default mode network (Smith,

Mitchell, & Duncan, 2018; see also Cocchi, Zalesky, Fornito, & Mattingley, 2013). Thus, a

complete network model of cognitive control needs to be updated to account for the role of

these additional networks and the complex interactions that occur as a function of their

overlapping nature.

5. Conclusions

We have argued that network neuroscience will need to adopt methods that account for overlap

between networks to fully capture the network architecture of the human brain. We have

presented evidence that the mixed membership algorithm can be used to reliably generate

overlapping network topographies in resting state data that recapitulate known patterns of

organization seen in nonoverlapping networks. We have argued that these overlapping

networks represent a more biologically plausible organization of the brain. We have further

demonstrated that regions show a broad range of multiple-network membership, and that

regions that are members of networks known to be involved in cognitive control are likewise

members of a wide set of networks unaccounted for in existing network models. These results

highlight the need to expand our network models of behavior to fully capture the networks

involved and account for the overlap and interactions between them.

Data and code availability statement

A Bash- and MATLAB-based implementation of the methods used to prepare the functional

connectivity matrices for assignment in this study can be accessed for open-access use at

https://github.com/savannahcookson/NetChar. The mixed membership algorithm used to

generate the overlapping networks used in these analyses are available open-source from

https://github.com/premgopalan/svinet, courtesy of Gopalan and Blei (2013). All results derive

from data that are publicly available as cited in Section 2.1 in the text.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors affirm that we have no competing interests.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Savannah L. Cookson: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Methodology;

Project administration; Resources; Software; Validation; Visualization; Roles/Writing - original

draft; Writing - review & editing.

Mark D'Esposito: Conceptualization; Funding acquisition; Methodology; Project administration;

Resources; Supervision; Visualization; Writing - review & editing.

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