

# Causal Discovery from Mass Cytometry Data

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# The Measuring Technology

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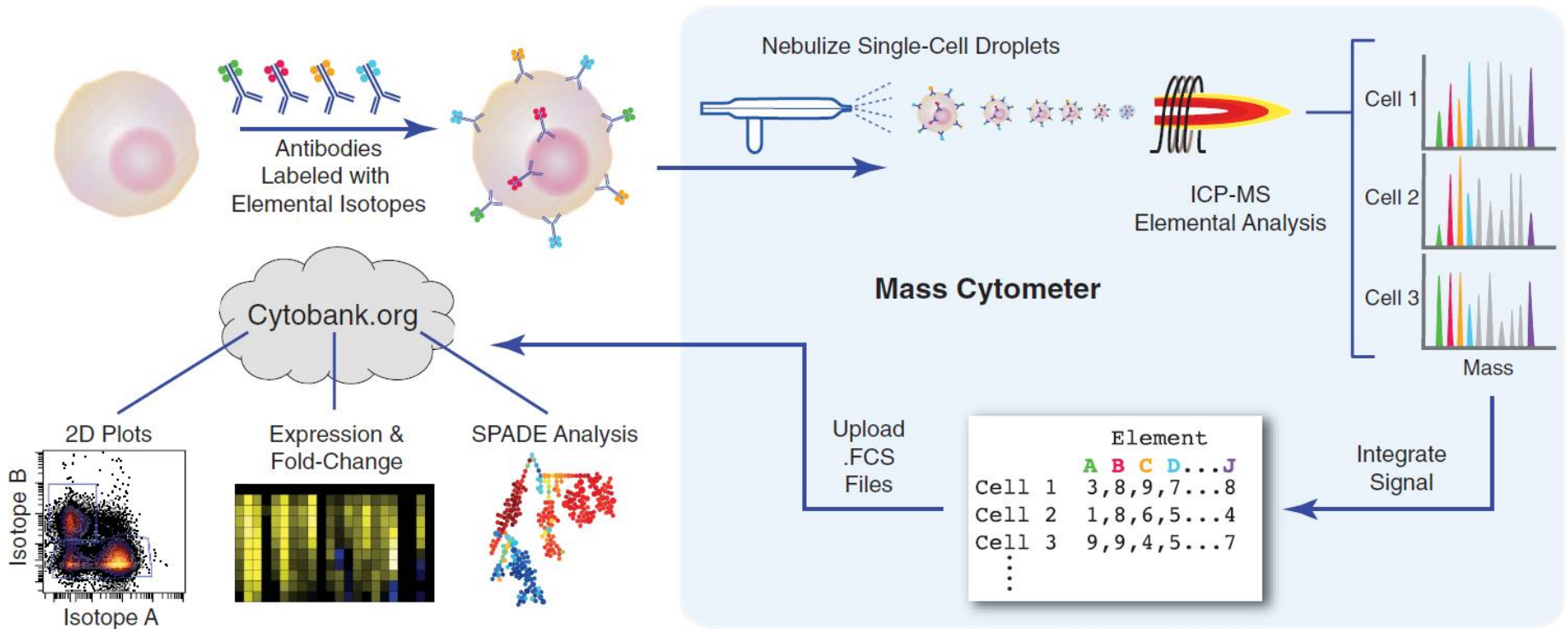
# Mass Cytometry

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- **Single cells** measurements
- **Sample sizes in the millions**, minimal cost
- Public data available
- Up to ~30 proteins measured at a time
- Applications
  1. Cell counting
  2. Cell sorting (gating)
  3. Identifying signaling responses
  4. Drug screening
  5. De novo, personalized pathway / causal discovery (?)



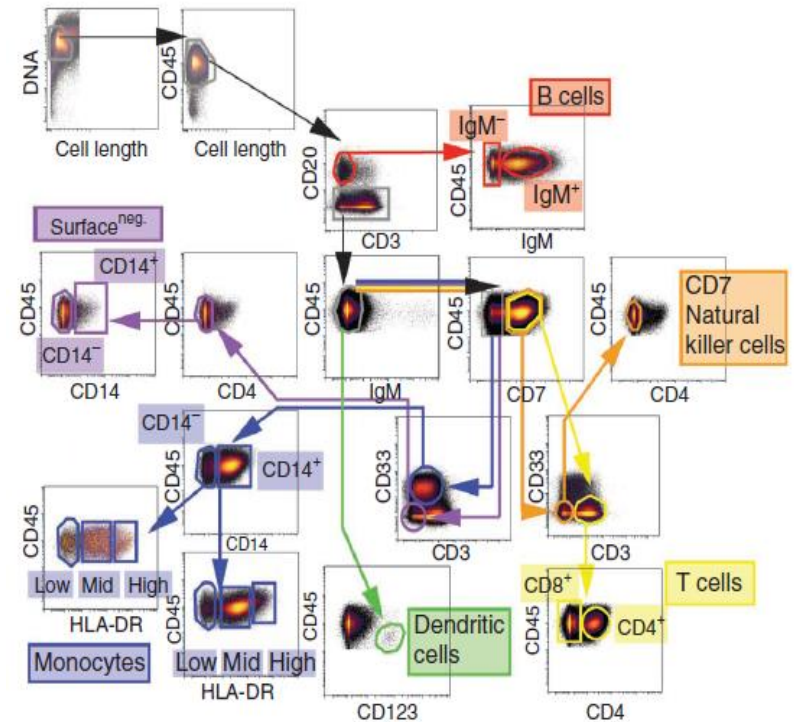
# Mass Cytometry



[Image by Bendall et al., Science 2011]

# Cell Sorting (Gating)

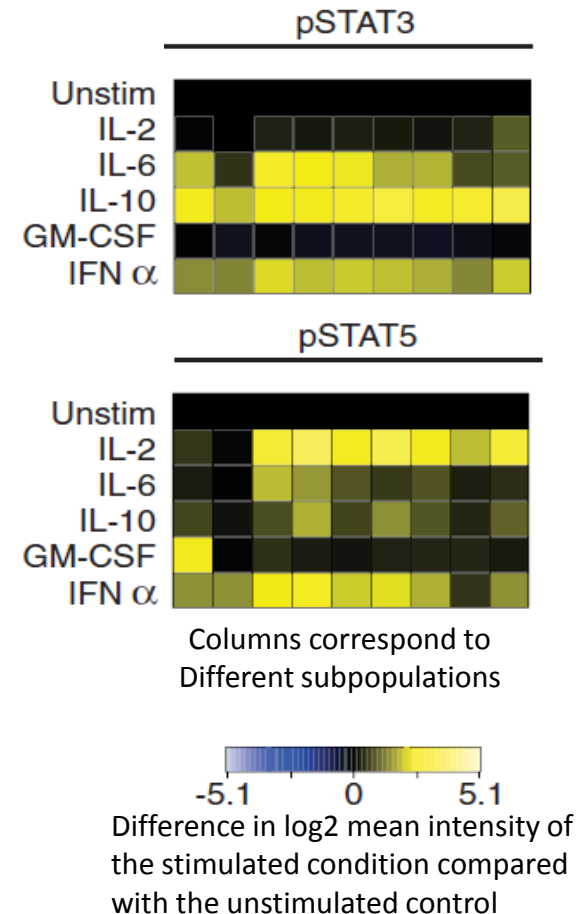
- **Immune system cells** can be distinguished based on specific surface markers.
- Process resembles a decision tree



[Image by Bodenmiller et al., Nat. Biotech. 2012]

# Identifying Signaling Responses

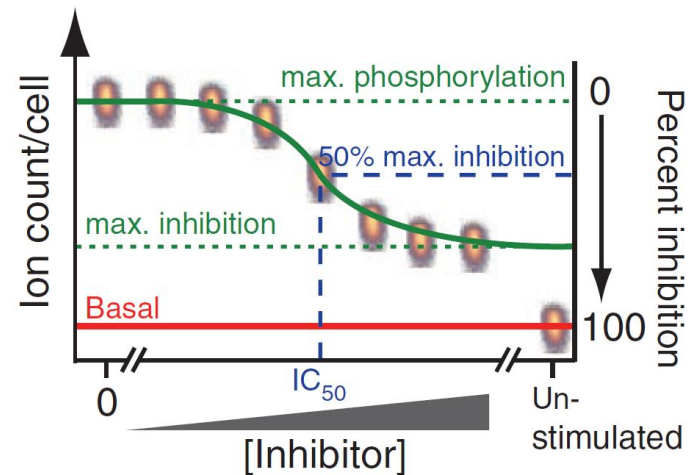
- Immune responses are triggered by specific **activators**
- Signaling responses are sub-population specific.
- Mass cytometry for identifying signaling effects:
  1. Functional proteins (non-surface) are also marked (e.g., pSTAT3 and pSTAT5)
  2. Activators are applied to stimulate a response to disease
  3. Cells are sorted by sub-population
  4. Changes in protein abundance/phosphorylation in each subpopulation are quantified



[Image by Bendall et al., Science 2011]

# Drug Screening

- Unwanted signaling responses should be suppressed for disease treatment
- Mass cytometry for drug screening
  1. **After stimulation**, cells are treated with potential drugs (**inhibitors**)
  2. Cells are sorted by sub-population
  3. Dose-response curves are identified
    - Per activator
    - Per sub-population
    - Per inhibitor



[Image by Bodenmiller et al., Nat. Biotech. 2012]

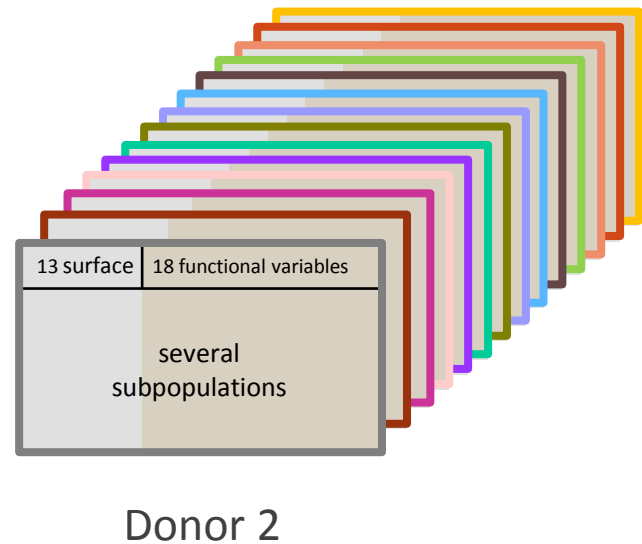
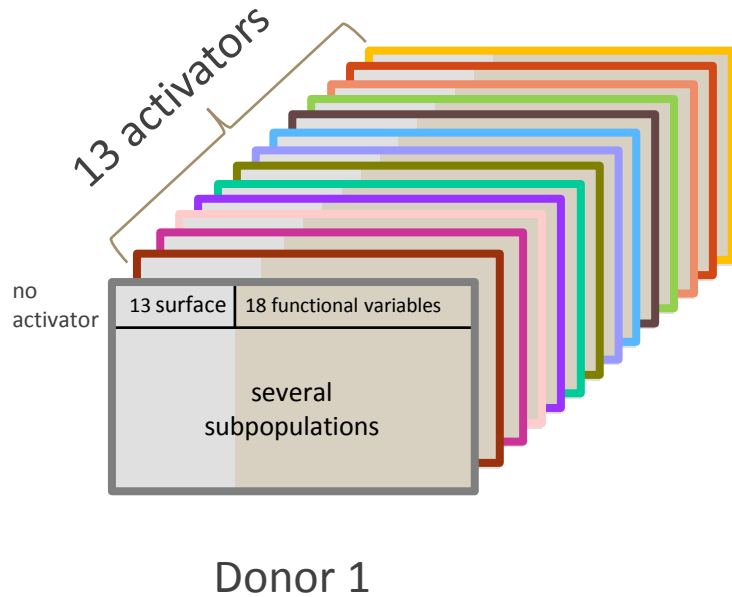
# The Public Data

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# Bendall Data

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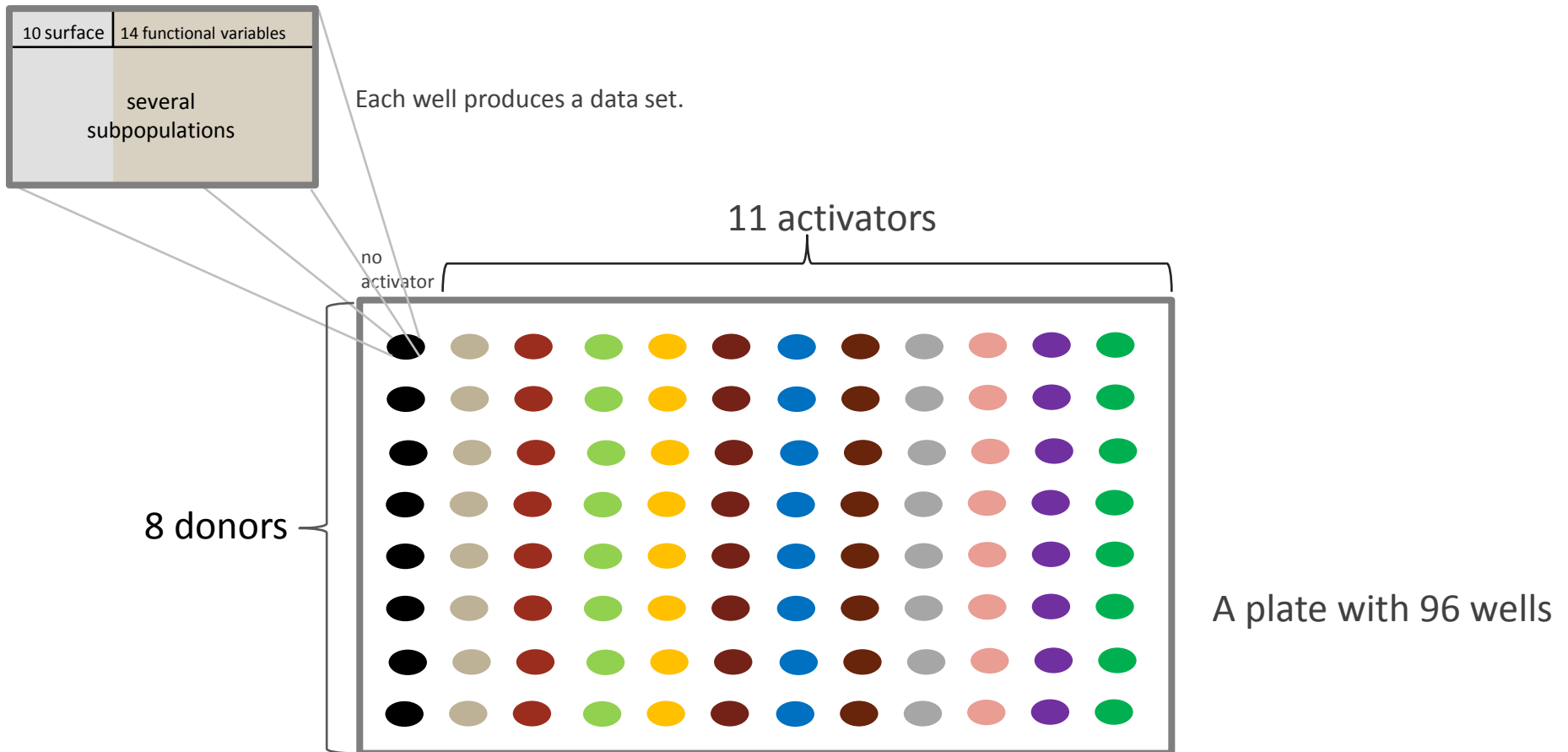
[Single-Cell Mass Cytometry of Differential Immune and Drug Responses Across a Human Hematopoietic Continuum, Bendall et al., *Science* **332**, 687 (2011)]

# Bodenmiller Data: Time Course



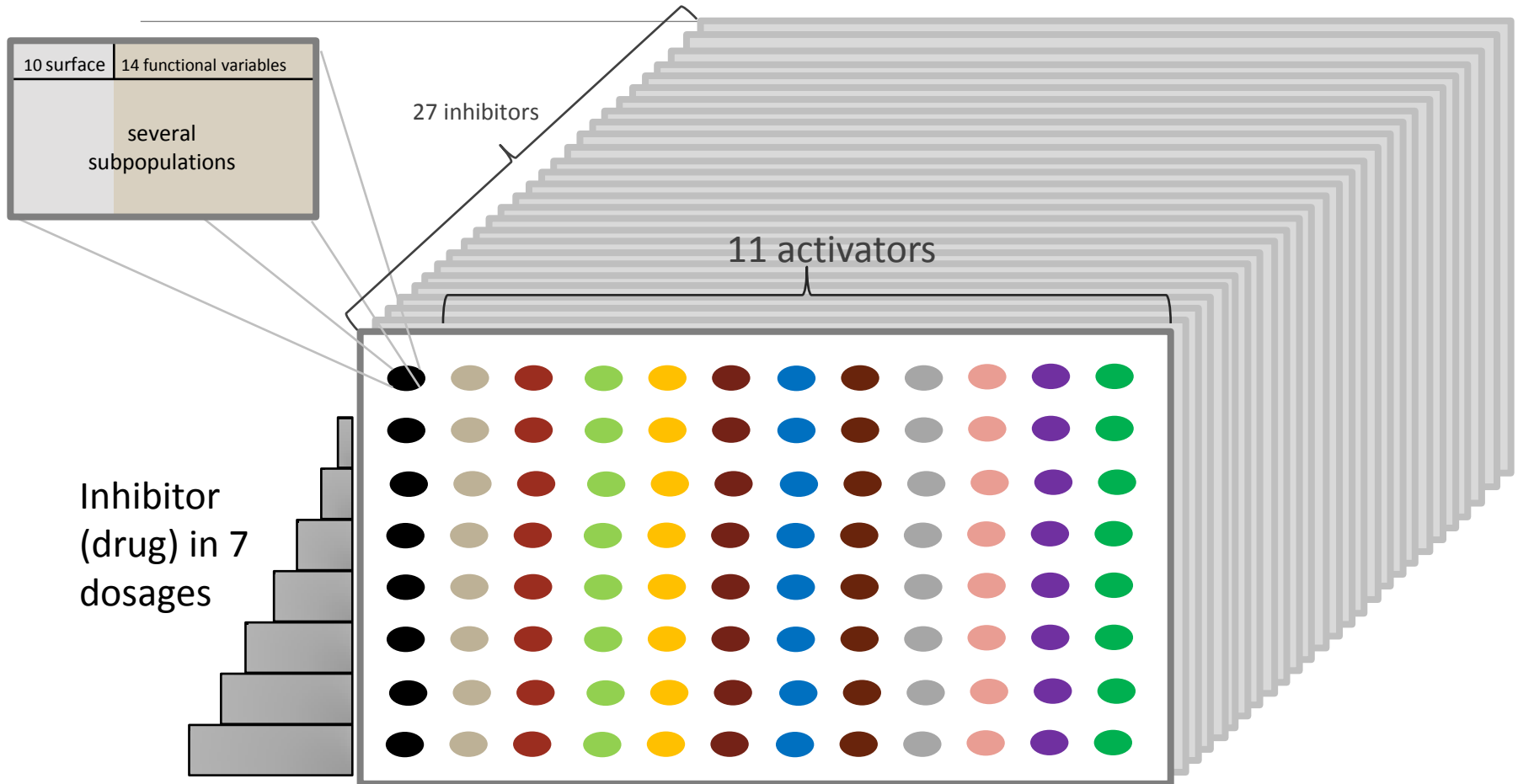
[Multiplexed mass cytometry profiling of cellular states perturbed by small-molecule regulators, Bodenmiller et al., *Nature Biotechnology* 30, 9 (2012) ]

# Bodenmiller Data: 8 donors



[Multiplexed mass cytometry profiling of cellular states perturbed by small-molecule regulators, Bodenmiller et al., *Nature Biotechnology* 30, 9 (2012) ]

# Bodenmiller Data: Inhibitors



[Multiplexed mass cytometry profiling of cellular states perturbed by small-molecule regulators, Bodenmiller et al., *Nature Biotechnology* 30, 9 (2012) ]

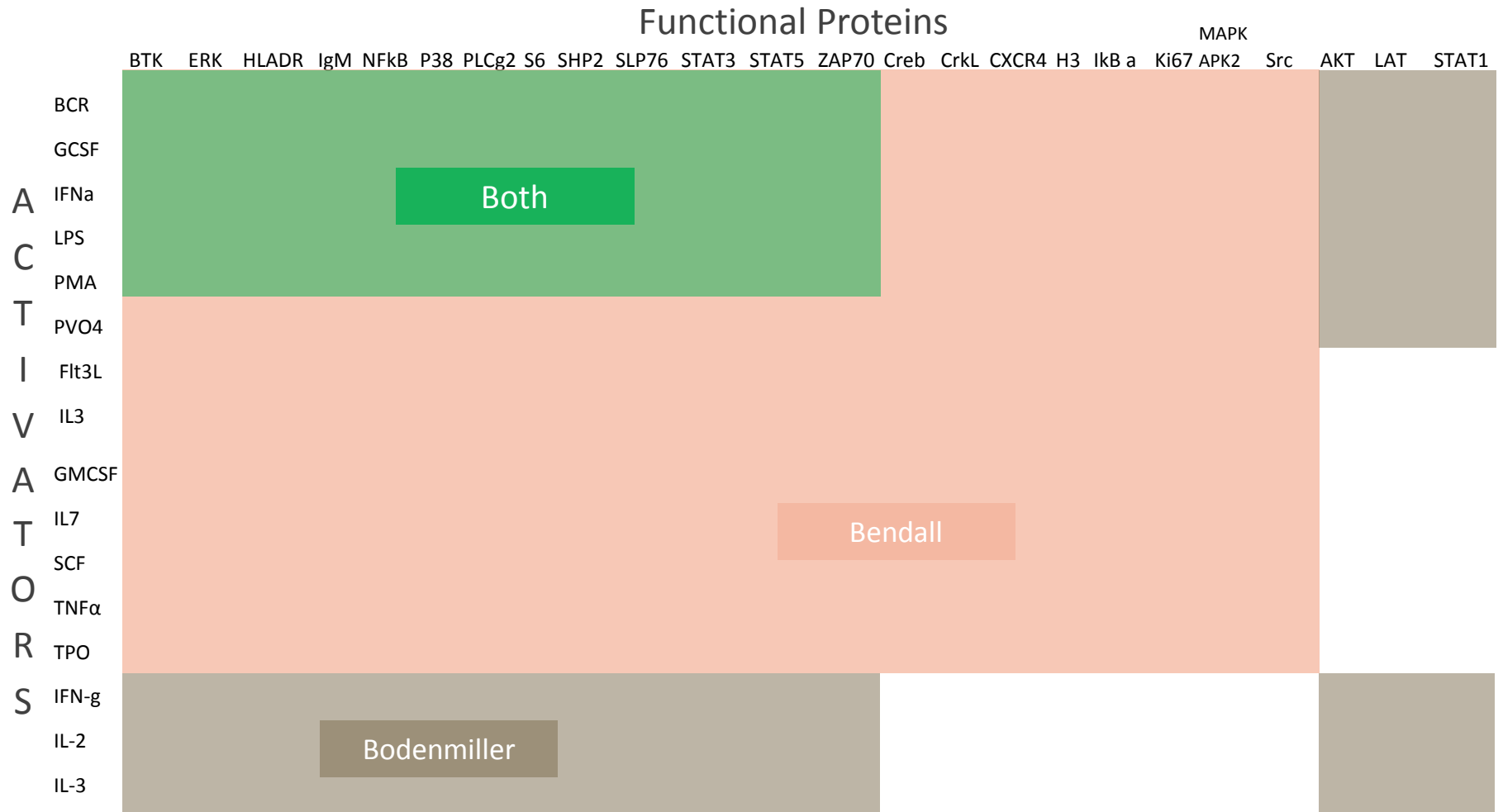
# Data summary

	Bodenmiller data			Bendall data
	Inhibitor data	8donor data	Time course data	
Activators	Green	Green	Green	Green
Time	White	White	Green	White
Donors	White	Green	White	Green
Inhibitors	Green	White	White	White
Subpopulations	Green	Green	Green	Green
Proteins	Green	Green	Green	Green

Collection of datasets with :

- All activators
- 1 time point (30')
- 1 donor
- All Inhibitors
- All Subpopulations
- All 10+14 markers measured

# Data Summary



# Causal Discovery in Mass Cytometry

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Image courtesy of Dr. Brad Marsh



A typical day in the cell

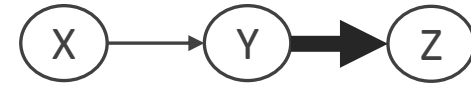
- Feedback loops
- Latent variables
- Non-linear relations
- Unfaithfulness

# A Basic Approach

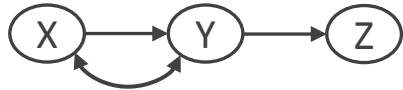
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# Local Causal Discovery



Use stimulus as  
instrumental binary  
variable



Assumptions:

1. Causal Markov Condition
2. Reichenbach's Common Cause Principle
3. No feedback cycles

$Ind(X, Z|Y)$



Nothing causes X

# Issue #1: Signaling is Sub-Population Specific

- Gate data
  - Data were gated by the initial researchers in Cytobank.org
- Analyze sub-populations independently
- Gated sub-populations differ between Bodenmiller and Bendall
  - cd4+, cd8+, nk sub-populations in common.

Bodenmiller		Bendall		
cd14+hladr-, cd14+hladrhigh cd14+hladrmid cd14+surf- cd14-hladr- cd14-hladrhigh cd14-hladrmid	cd14-surf- <b>cd4+</b> <b>cd8+</b> dendritic igm+ igm- <b>nk</b>	Pre-B II Mature CD38lo B Pre-B I Mature CD38mid B Immature B Plasma cell <b>nk</b> Myelocyte	<b>Mature CD4+ T</b> <b>Naive CD4+ T</b> CMP <b>Naive CD8+ T</b> <b>Mature CD8+ T</b> CD11b- Monocyte CD11bmid Monocyte CD11bhi Monocyte	MPP HSC Megakaryocyte Erythroblast Platelet MEP Plasmacytoid DC GMP

# Issue #2: Dormant Relations

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- Relations may appear only during signaling
  - Pool together unstimulated and stimulated data
- Different parts of the pathway maybe activated by different activators
  - Analyze data from different activators independently

# Issue #3:

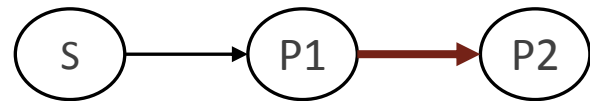
## Testing Independence

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- Check (in)dependencies:

1.  $Dep(X, Y|Z)$

2.  $Ind(X, Y|Z)$



- Choosing a test of conditional independence
  - One binary, two continuous variables
  - Relations typically non-linear
  - Options:
    1. Discretization BUT: does not preserve conditional independencies
    2. Rejected but promising candidates:
      1. Maximal Information Coefficients (Reshef et al., Science 334, 2011)
      2. Kernel-based Conditional Independence test (Zhang et al., UAI 2011)
    3. Fisher z-test of independence + logistic regression

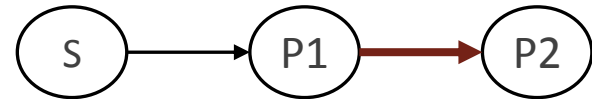
# Issue #4

## Make Reliable Predictions

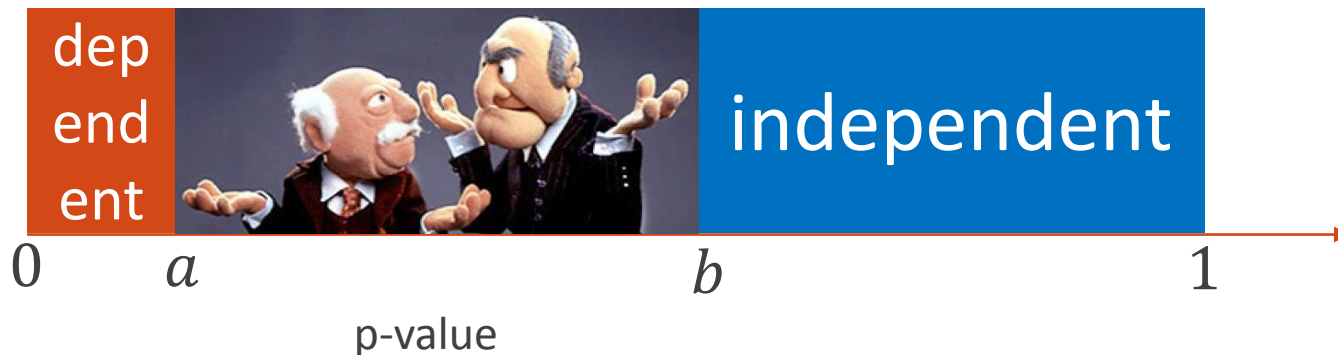
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- Check **ALL** (in)dependencies:

1.  $Dep(S, P1)$
2.  $Dep(S, P2)$
3.  $Dep(P1, P2)$
4.  $Ind(S, P2|P1)$
5.  $Dep(S, P1|P2)$
6.  $Dep(P1, P2|S)$

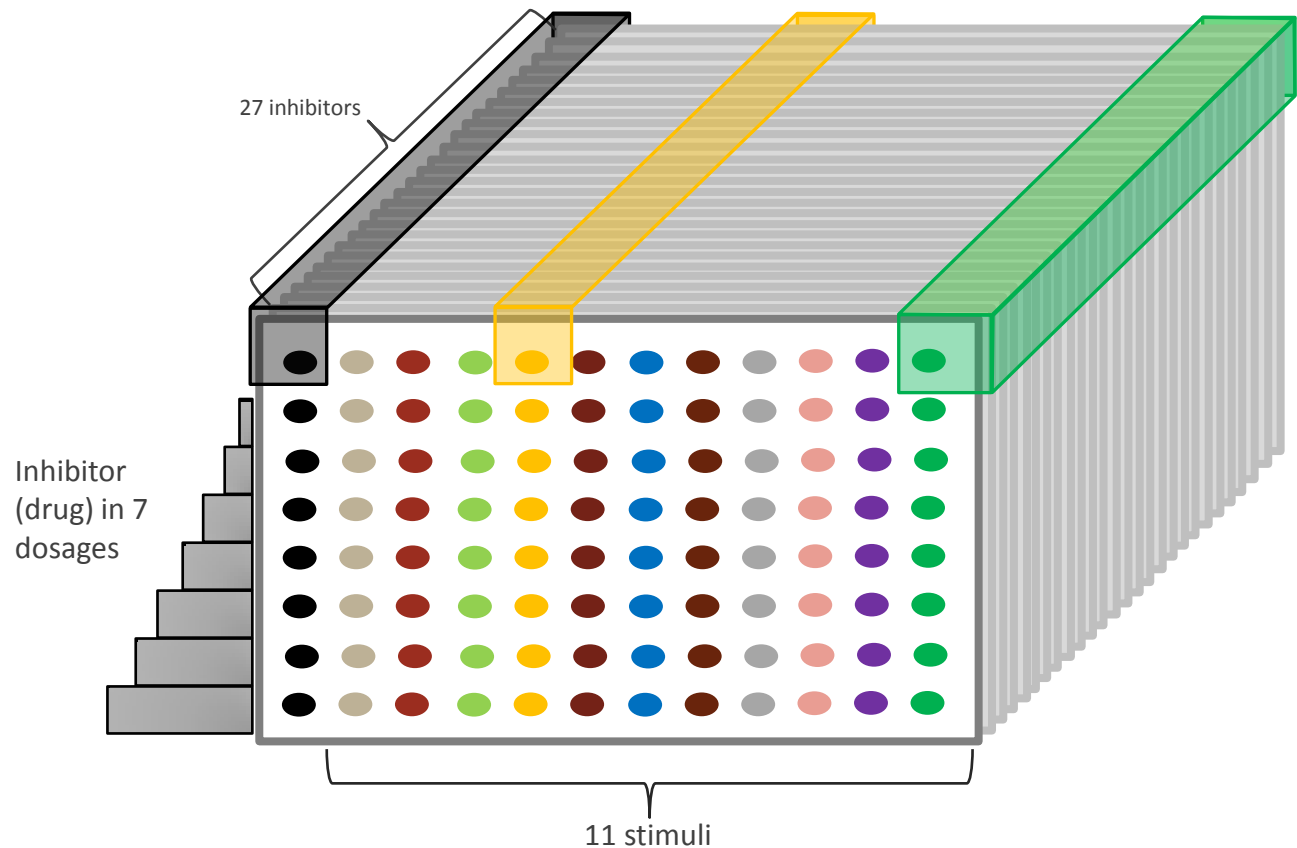


- Two thresholds,  $a = 0.05$  for dependence,  $b = 0.15$  for independence



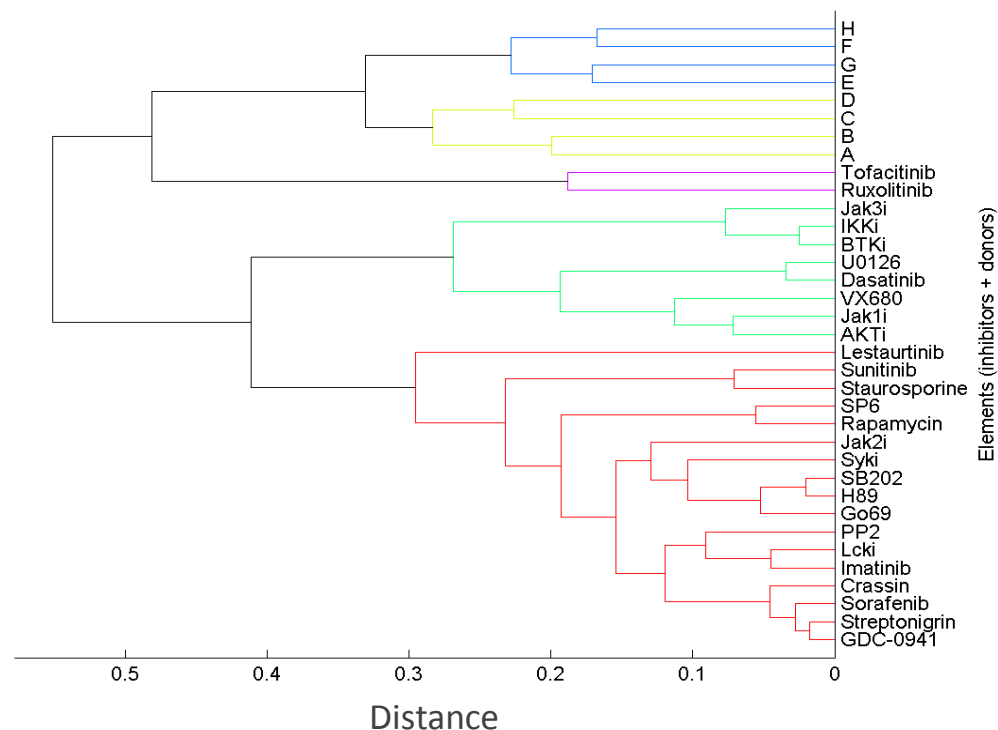
# Issue #5: Identify “Outlier” Experiments

- Inhibitor data for “zero” dosage and 8 donor data should represent the same joint distribution
- Do they?

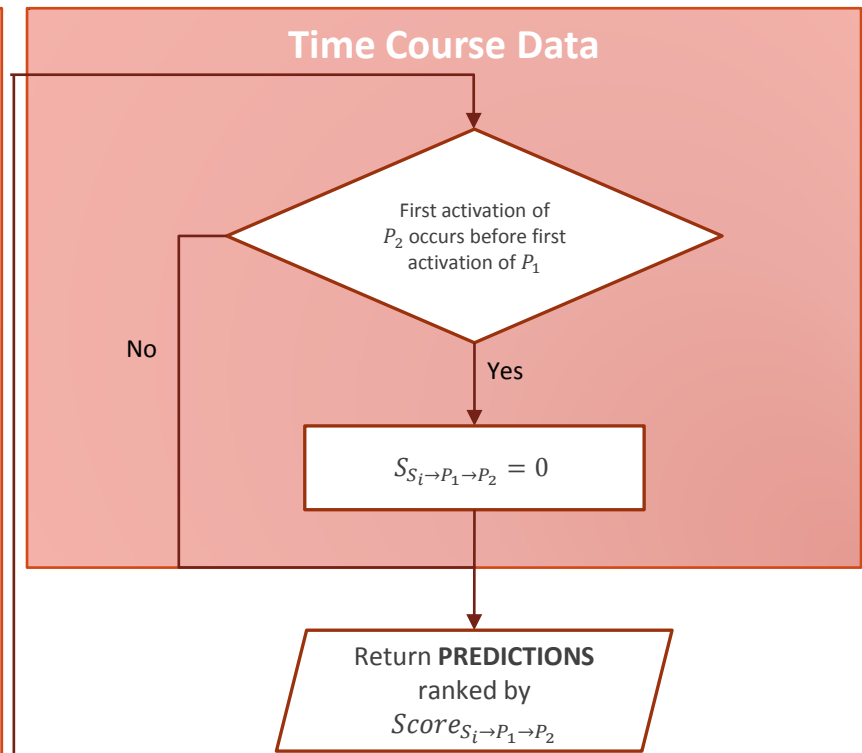
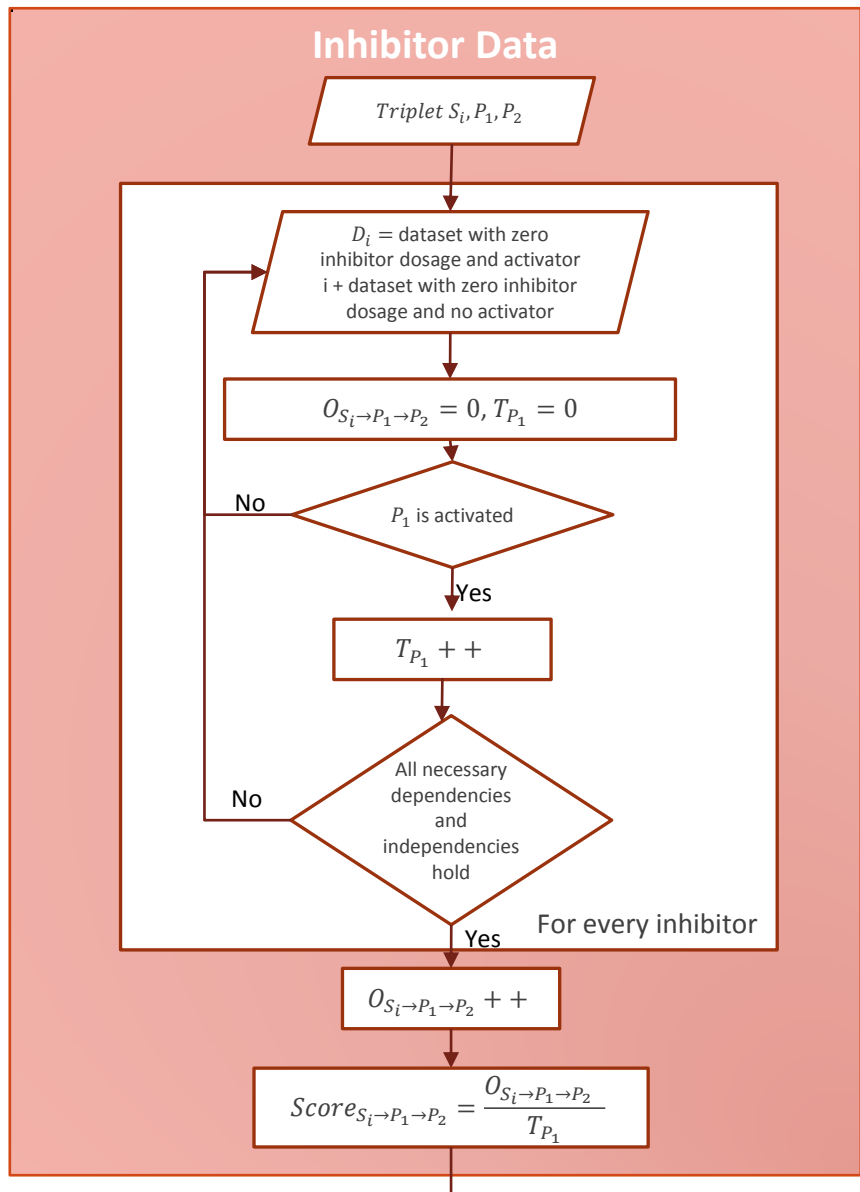


# Issue #5: Identify “Outlier” Experiments

- Inhibitor data for “zero” dosage and 8 donor data should represent the same joint distribution
- Do they?



- Given a pair of plates:
  - For each activator, rank correlations (of markers), compute spearman correlation of ranking
  - Distance = 1-min correlation over activators



Pipeline for making causal predictions



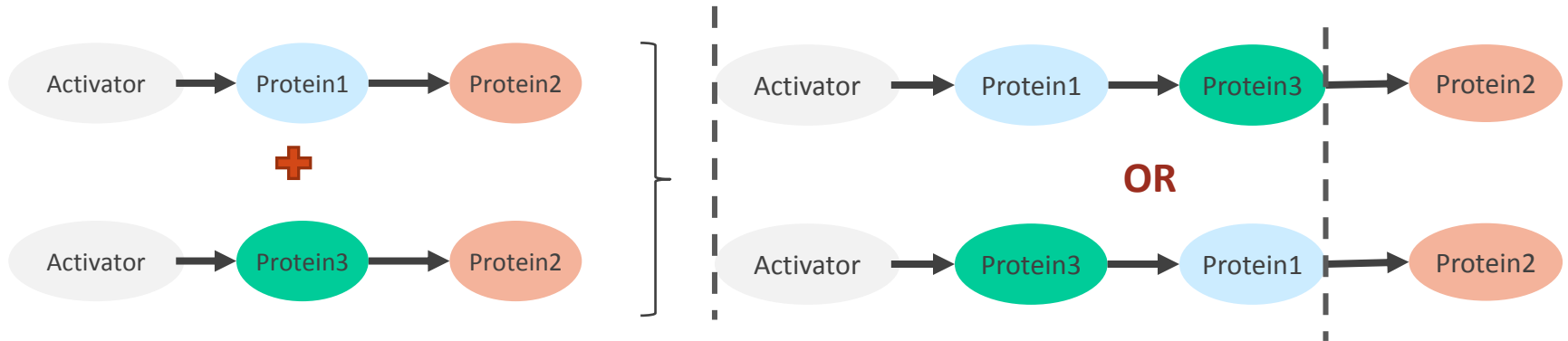
# Causal Postulates

PVO <sub>4</sub>	→	pPlcg2	→ <sup>0.5482</sup>	pSTAT3	0.875	cd14-hladr-
PVO <sub>4</sub>	→	pPlcg2	→ <sup>0.5512</sup>	pZap70	0.8125	cd14-hladrmid
PVO <sub>4</sub>	→	pSlp76	→ <sup>0.7152</sup>	pSHP2	0.8125	cd14-hladrmid
PVO <sub>4</sub>	→	pSHP2	→ <sup>0.6708</sup>	pSTAT3	0.7857	dendritic
PVO <sub>4</sub>	→	pPlcg2	→ <sup>0.8526</sup>	pP38	0.75	cd14+hladr-
PVO <sub>4</sub>	→	pPlcg2	→ <sup>0.6166</sup>	pZap70	0.75	cd14-hladr-
PVO <sub>4</sub>	→	pSlp76	→ <sup>0.5688</sup>	pZap70	0.75	cd14-hladr-
PVO <sub>4</sub>	→	pSHP2	→ <sup>0.5688</sup>	pZap70	0.7143	cd14-hladrmid
PVO <sub>4</sub>	→	pSTAT3	→ <sup>0.4557</sup>	pBtk	0.7059	cd14-hladr-
BCR	→	pS6	→ <sup>0.4557</sup>	pErk	0.7037	igm-

288 predictions in 14 sub-populations

- A list of **predicted causal** pairs, each “tagged” for a **specific population** and **activator**, ranked according to a score quantifying the frequency of appearance.

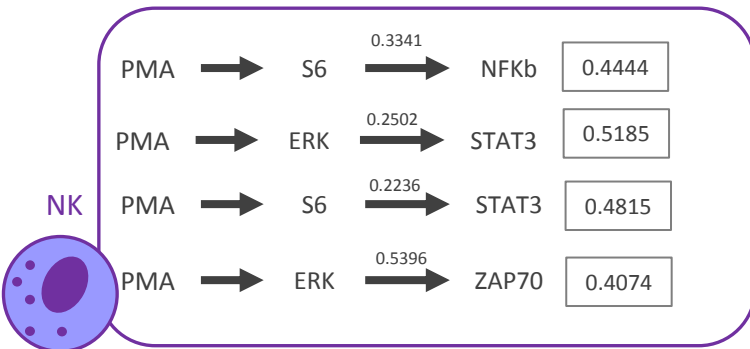
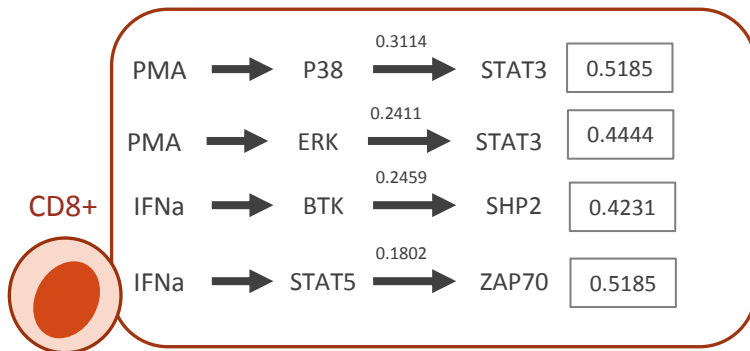
# Internal Validation



Check whether predicted triplet has also been reported

- 42% of the predicted triplets are also reported
- Despite strict thresholds and multiple testing
- Theory+algorithms: [Tillman et. al. 2008, Triantafillou et. al 2010, Tsamardinos et. al 2012]

# Validation on Bendall Data

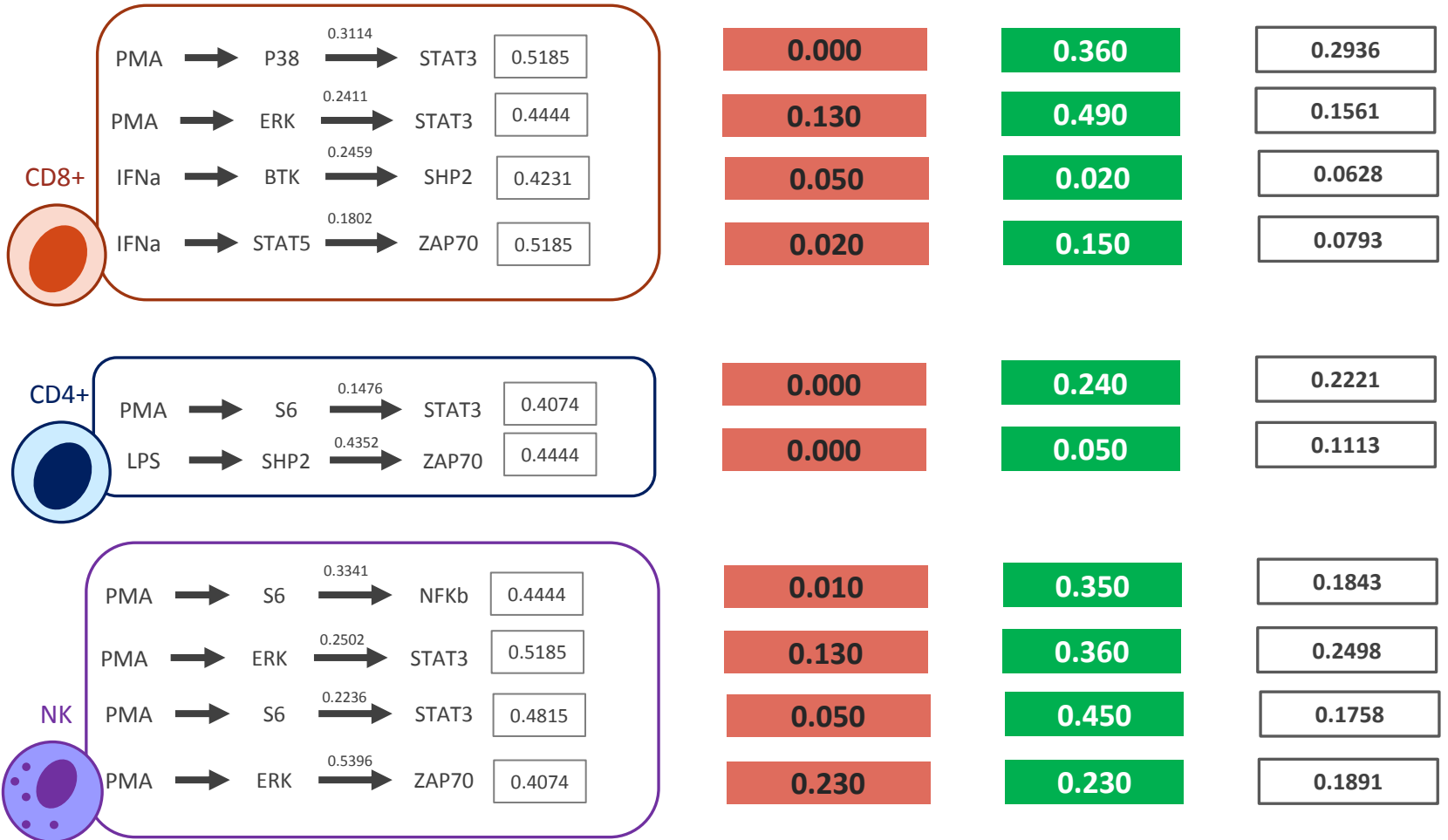


- Bendall Data**
- Run FCI with  $\alpha = 0.05$
  - Bootstrap for robustness
  - Report
    - **Conflicting** structures: Structures where  $P_2 \rightarrow P_1$
    - **Confirming** Structures: Structures where  $P_1 \rightarrow P_2$



Measurements in Bendall data are taken 15 minutes after activation

# Validation on Bendall Data



# Results

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- Hundreds of predictions to-be-tested; Experiments under way!
- Internal validation using non-trivial inferences
- Promising validation on another collection of dataset (Bendall)
- Evidence of batch effects and/or biological reasons of variability
- Method based on the most basic causal discovery assumptions

# A Not So Basic Approach

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# Co-analyzing data sets from different experimental conditions with overlapping variable sets



Condition A

p1	p2	...	p30



Condition B

p1	p2	...	p30



- Different experimental conditions
- Different variable sets



Condition C

p1	p2	...	p30



Condition D

p29	p30	...	p40

- Data can not be pulled together because they come from different distributions
- Principles of causality links them to the underlying causal graph

# Co-analyzing data sets from different experimental conditions with overlapping variable sets



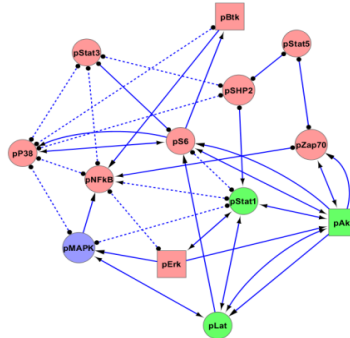
Condition A

p1	p2	...	p30



Condition B

p1	p2	...	p30



Condition C

p1	p2	...	p30



Condition D

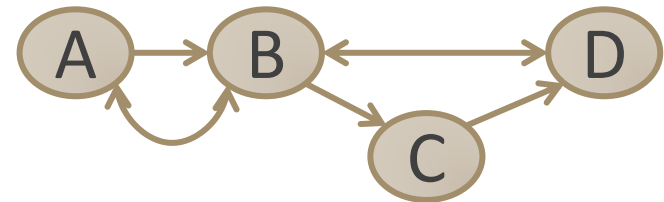
p29	p30	...	p40

Identify a **single causal** graph that simultaneously fits all data



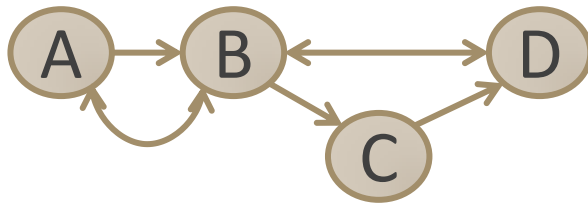
# What type of causal graph?

- Semi-Markov causal models.
- $X \rightarrow Y$ :  $X$  causes  $Y$  directly in the context of observed variables.
- $X \leftrightarrow Y$ :  $X$  and  $Y$  share a latent common cause.
- Under faithfulness,  $m$ -separation entails all and only conditional independencies that stem from Causal Markov Condition.
- No learning algorithm.



# Manipulations in SMCMs

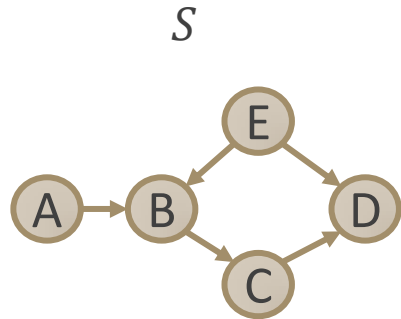
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Graph (SMCM)  $S$

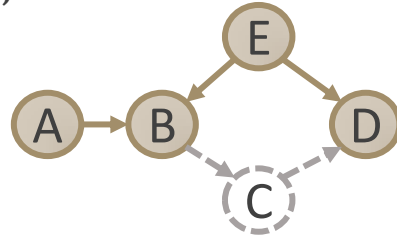
- Values of  $B$  are set solely by the manipulation procedure
- Graph surgery: Remove all edges into the manipulated node.

# Reverse Engineering

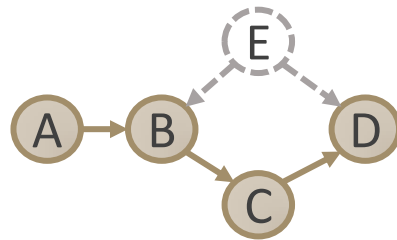


Unknown True SMCM  $S$

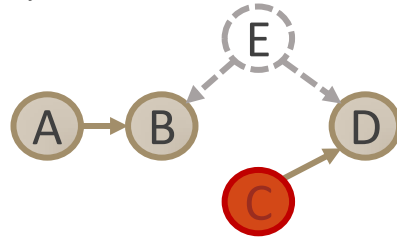
$S, C$  is latent



$S, E$  is latent



$S^C, E$  is latent



$S$  under manipulation and marginalization

$Dep(A, D|\emptyset)_{D_1}$   
 $Dep(A, D|B)_{D_1}$   
 $Dep(A, D|E)_{D_1}$   
 $Ind(A, D|B, E)_{D_1}$   
 $Dep(A, B|\emptyset)_{D_1}$

...

$Dep(A, D|\emptyset)_{D_2}$   
 $Dep(A, D|B)_{D_2}$   
 $Dep(A, D|E)_{D_2}$   
 $Dep(A, D|C)_{D_2}$   
 $Dep(A, D|B, C)_{D_2}$

...

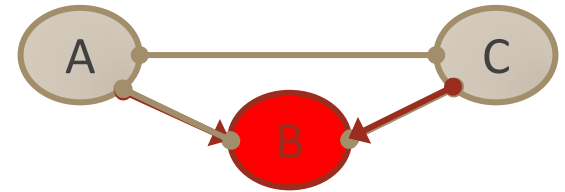
$Ind(A, D|\emptyset)_{D_3}$   
 $Dep(A, B|\emptyset)_{D_3}$   
 $Dep(A, B|C)_{D_3}$   
 $Dep(A, B|D)_{D_3}$   
 $Dep(A, D|C, D)_{D_3}$   
 $Ind(B, C|\emptyset)_{D_3}$

Observed (in) dependencies

# Independencies as constraints

- Suppose you don't know anything about the structure  $S$  of the three variables.
- You find out that in  $S^B : Ind(A, C | \emptyset)$
- In path terms:  $\nexists$  path in  $S^B$  that is m-connecting  $A$  and  $C$  given  $\emptyset$
- In SAT terms:

$$\neg edge(A, C) \wedge [\neg edge(A, B) \vee arrow(A, B) \vee edge(B, C) \vee arrow(C, B)]$$



A-C does not exist

AND

(A-B does not exist

OR

A-B is into B

OR

B-C does not exist

OR

B-C is into B)

# Statistical errors

- Constraints correspond to \*
  1. Dependencies  $Dep(A, B | \mathbf{Z})_{D_i}$
  2. Independencies  $Ind(C, D | \mathbf{W})_{D_i}$
  - e.g.,  $Ind(A, B | \emptyset)_{D_1} \leftrightarrow \neg edge(A, C) \wedge [\neg edge(A, B) \vee arrow(A, B) \vee edge(B, C) \vee arrow(C, B)]$
- Compare a dependence to an independence
  - How?
  - Low p-value suggests dependence
  - High p-value suggests independence  
(in the respective data set)



Sort constraints!

What happens with statistical errors?

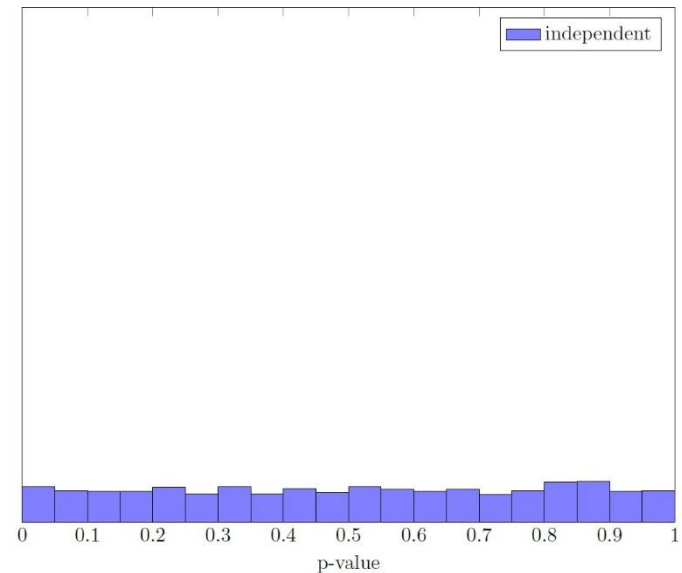
Conflicts make SAT instance unsatisfiable!



\*well, not really

# Comparing p-values

- $H_0: p \sim \text{Beta}(1,1)$
- $H_1: p \sim \text{Beta}(\xi, 1)$ ,  $\xi \in (0, 1)$
- $f(p|\pi_0, \xi) = \pi_0 + (1 - \pi_0)\xi p^{\xi-1}$ ,  $\pi_0$ : The proportion of p-values coming from  $H_0$
- If you know  $\widehat{\pi}_0$ ,  $\widehat{\xi}$  you can find the MAP ratio
- $E_0(p) = \frac{P(H_0|p)P(H_0)}{P(H_1|p)P(H_1)} = \frac{\widehat{\pi}_0}{(1-\widehat{\pi}_0)\widehat{\xi}p^{(1-\widehat{\xi})}}$ ,  $E_1 = 1/E_0$ 
  - If  $E(p) > E(p)^{-1}$ , independence is more likely than dependence
- **Sort p-values by  $\max(E_0, E_1)$**
- Use (Storey and Tibshirani, 2003) to identify  $\widehat{\pi}_0$
- Minimize negative log likelihood of  $f(p|\widehat{\pi}_0, \xi) = \widehat{\pi}_0 + (1 - \widehat{\pi}_0)\xi p^{\xi-1}$  to identify  $\widehat{\xi}$ .
- Rank constraints according to MAP ratio and satisfy them if possible in the given order.

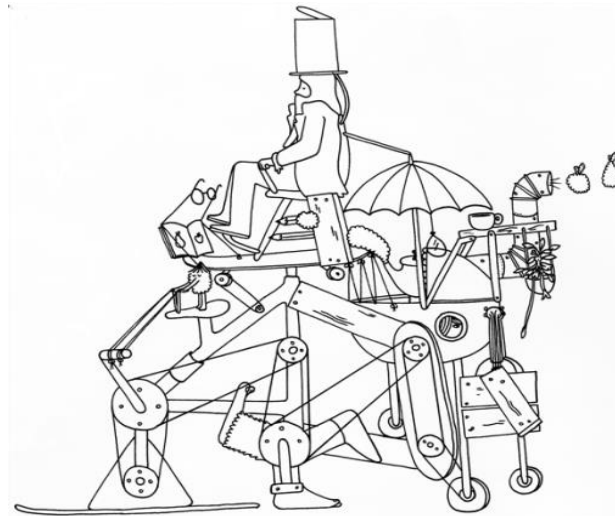
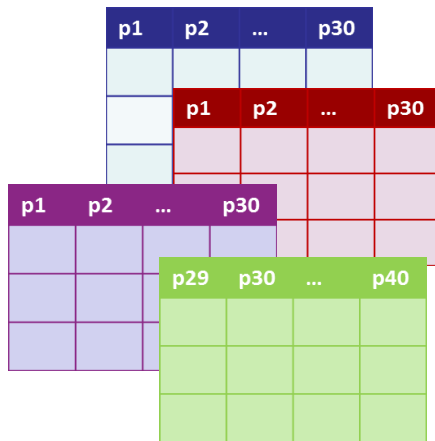


# “COmbINE” Algorithm

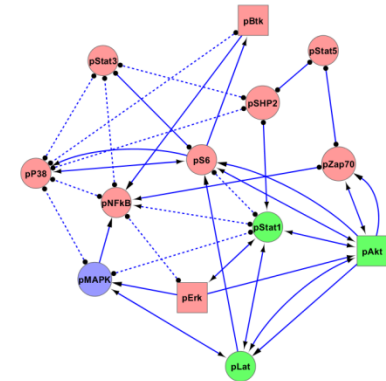
Data sets  $D_i$  measuring overlapping variables under different experimental conditions

COmbINE  
Algorithm that transforms independence constraints to SAT instance

Summary of semi Markov Causal models that best fits all data sets simultaneously



Eric Ellis



# Similar Algorithms

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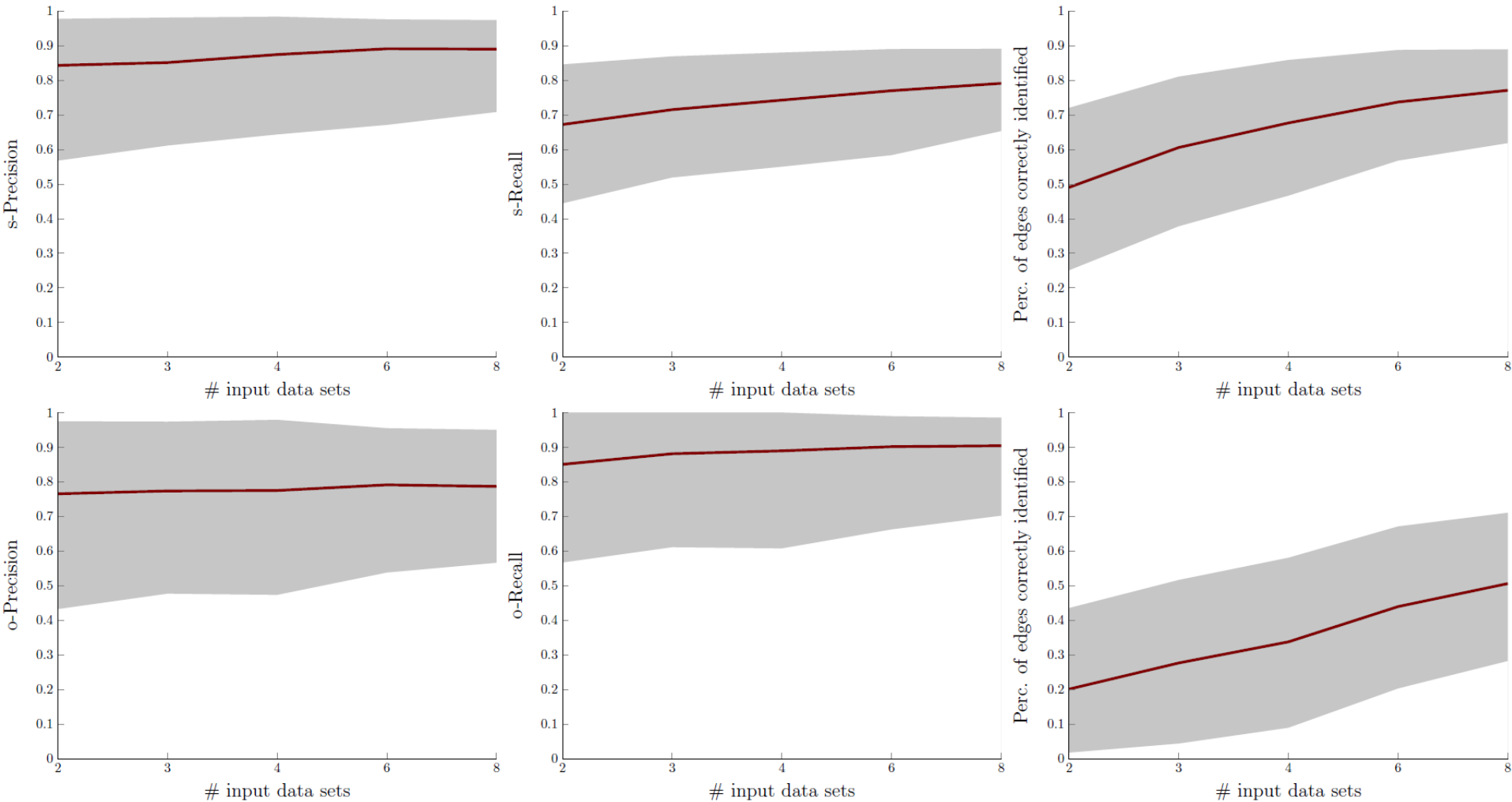
- SBCSD: [Hyttinen et al., UAI, 2013]
  - Inherently less compact representation of path constraints.
  - Does not handle conflicts; non applicable to real data.
  - In addition, it admits cycles.
  - Scales up to 14 variables
- Lininf [Hyttinen et al., UAI 2012, JMLR 2012]
  - Linear relations only.
  - Scales up poorly (6 variables in total with overlapping variables, 10 without).
  - In addition, it admits cycles.

	COmbINE	SBCSD
ASIA	$7.1768 \pm 5.2424$	$51.6617 \pm 27.5997$
CAR	$3.6994 \pm 2.2489$	$211.5117 \pm 78.2334$

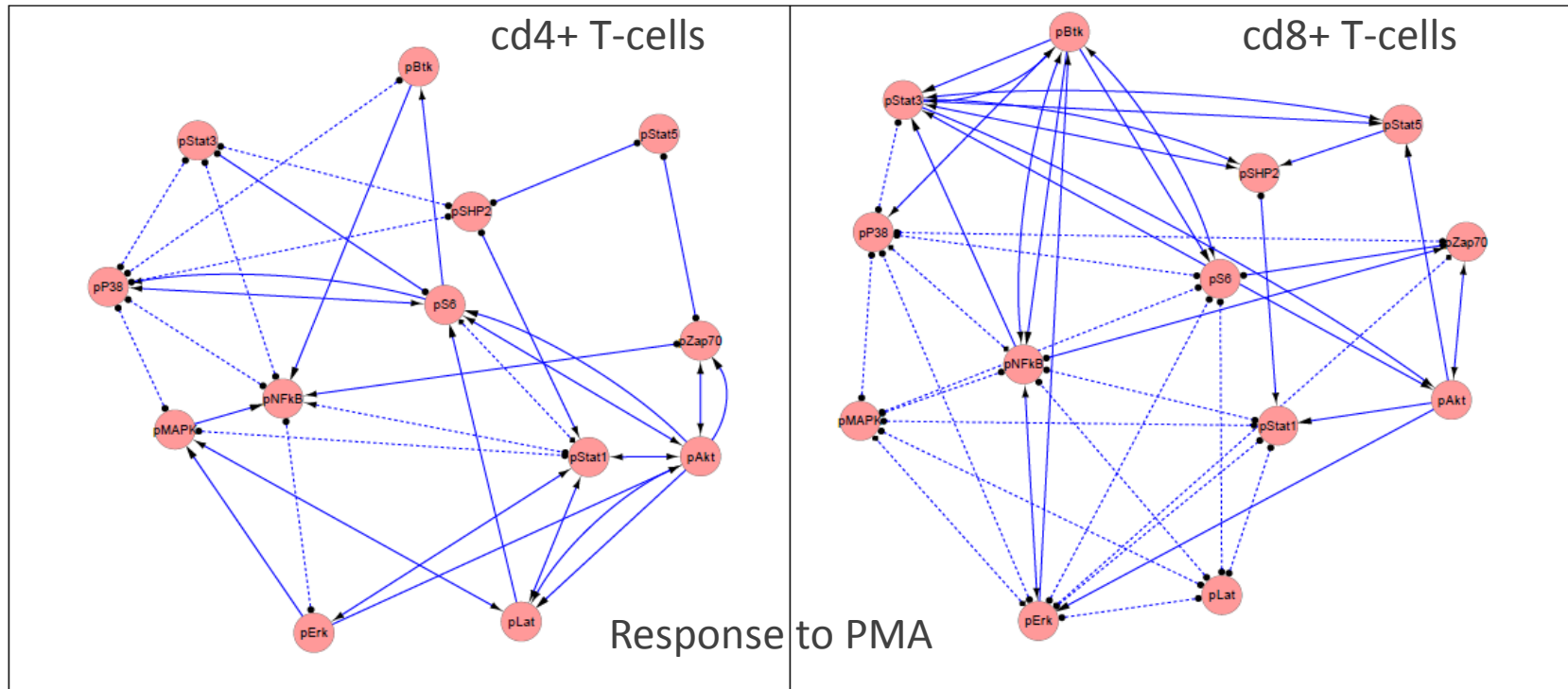
Execution Time in Seconds



# Performance on Simulated Data



# Application on Mass Cytometry data



Data set	Source	$L_i$	$I_i$	Donor
$D_1$	Bodenmiller et al. (2012)	pMAPK	pAkt	1
$D_2$	Bodenmiller et al. (2012)	pMAPK	pBtk	1
$D_3$	Bodenmiller et al. (2012)	pMAPK	pErk	1
$D_4$	Bendall et al. (2011)	pAkt, pLat, pStat1	pErk	2
$D_5$	Bendall et al. (2011)	pAkt, pLat, pStat1	pErk	3

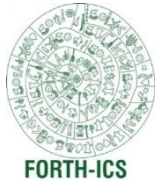
# Summary and Conclusions

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- Mass Cytometry data a good domain for causal discovery
- Hundreds of robust causal postulates
- Approach:
  - Conservative: local discovery, performing all tests, independent analysis of populations
  - Opportunistic: using 2 thresholds for (in)dependency
- New algorithm that can handle
  - different experimental conditions
  - overlapping variable subsets
  - deal with statistical errors
- Numerous directions open for future work on this collection of data
  - Experiments under way!

# Acknowledgements and Credit

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**Ioannis Tsamardinos**

Associate Prof  
Lab Head



**Jesper Tegnér**

Prof  
Unit Head



**Sofia Triantafillou**

Ph.D. Candidate



**Angelika Schmidt**

Post-Doc



**Vincenzo Lagani**

Research Fellow



**David Gomez-Cabrero,**

Project Leader



Funded by: STATegra EU project ([stategra.eu](http://stategra.eu))