The genetics of DNA methylation and of brain structure and function



Nick Martin Queensland Institute of Medical Research Brisbane

What is Epigenetics?

- Heritable, yet reversible, changes in gene function <u>WITHOUT</u> changes in the DNA sequence
 - Mediated by DNA methylation, histone modification, siRNA, etc
 - Epigenetic mechanisms are linked
- Degree of methylation is inversely proportional to gene expression
 CpG island in 60% of promoters
- DNA methylation is considered as primary modification involving transmission





Epigenetic Modifiers





Diet

- Agouti and Axin
- Stress
 - Maternal behaviour
 - Contextual fear conditioning
 - Drugs
 - Methamphetamine
 - Smoking
- Stochasticity
 - Cloned animals
 - De novo methylation
- Hormones, Infections, etc...

Main Genome Wide Techniques for Studying Methylation



27k Illumina methylation array

 Measures methylation of 27k cytosins upstream of 14,000 human genes

450k Illumina methylation array

Measures methylation of 450k cytosins in the human genome



MeDip-seq

• Sequencing based, genome-wide identification of methylated regions

Average correlation across all probes of normalised methylation measurements between relative pairs

Relationship	# Pairs	Correlation	Expected		
MZ twin	67	0.200	h^2		
DZ twin	111	0.109	$h^{2}/2$		
Sibling	262	0.090	$h^{2}/2$		
Parent – Offspring	362	0.089	$h^{2}/2$		
Parent – Parent	58	0.023	0		
Unrelated	187331	-0.002	0		

Allan McRae

Distribution of heritability estimates for DNA methylation levels

The average genetic heritability estimate is 0.199. A zero estimate for genetic heritability was observed in 17.1% of cases indicating that genetic heritability results in transgenerational inheritance of DNA methylation for at least 65.8% of probes.



Allan McRae



Identical But Not the Same: The Value of Discordant Monozygotic Twins in Genetic Research

Petra J.G. Zwijnenburg,¹* Hanne Meijers-Heijboer,¹ and Dorret I. Boomsma² ¹Department of Clinical Genetics, VU University Medical Center, Amsterdam, the Netherlands ²Department of Biological Psychology, VU University, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

and PubMed. A total number of 2,016 publications were retrieved and reviewed and 439 reports were retained. Discordant MZ twin pairs are informative in respect to variability of phenotypic expression, pathogenetic mechanisms, epigenetics, and post-zygotic mutagenesis and may serve as a model for research on genetic defects. The analysis of single discordant MZ twin pairs may represent an elegant approach to identify genes in inherited disorders. © 2010 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

Am J Med Genet Part B 153B:1134-1149.

Discordant MZ twin de			
for complex disease (herita			
MZ and DZ twin concordance			
	Proba	ndwise	
	concordance (%)		
	MZ	DZ	Two sides of the coin
Diabetes Type 1 (88%)	42.9	7.4	
Diabetes Type 2 (64%)	34	16	Personalized medicine?
Multiple Sclerosis (25-70%)	25.3	5.4	
Alzheimer's Disease (48%)	32.2	8.7	Incomplete concordance
Parkinson Disease (34%)	15.5	11.1	of MZ twins indicates
Schizophrenia (81%)	40.8	5.3	that a genome cannot
Major Depresssion (37%)	31.1	25.1	predict individual
			outcome.

MZ concordance

Dorret Boomsma



Fig. 1. Patient 1. Soft tumor and abnormal aspect in the lumbosacral area.



Fig. 2. Patient 1. Radiograph of the vertebral column shows complete duplication of the spine from L4 down.

urethra, a dilated pelvis of the right kidney, bilateral uterus unicornis with normal ovaries, hemivertebrae of thoracic vertebrae 6 and 10, and abnormal curvature of the sacrum. A persistent ductus arteriosus and secundum atrial septum defect was suspected, but results of cardiac investigations at 10 months were normal.

At physical examination for genetic evaluation at 4 months we saw a baby girl with epicanthal folds, but no other minor anomalies. She had a capillary nevus on her left buttock. In the anal region only a dimple was seen. The patient was operated on one day after birth, when a colostomy was made and a fistula connected to the colon

Discordant caudal duplication in MZ twins



Are there epigenetic factors in depression?

 Modifications of genome other than nucleotide changes that regulate gene expression (e.g. methylation of cytosines, histone modifications, microRNAs,)



Are Blood Samples an Appropriate Surrogate for Brain?

- Brain (cortex and cerebellum) and blood tissue of 2 elderly pairs of twins
- Correlation between blood and brain methylation ~0.7
- So blood DNA is not a perfect surrogate for brain but it is not useless either!



Davies, Genome Biology, 2012

Study Design

Aims:

 Identify differentially methylated regions associated with MDD

First cohort (Australian cohort):

- 23 MZ twin pairs (Age 25-73)
- Male (7 pairs) and female (16), discordant for MDD

Second cohort (TwinsUK):

 27 MZ pairs UK Caucasian females, discordant for MDD

Samples:

 Blood samples subjected to MeDIP-seq and partially to 27k and/or 450k Illumina methylation arrays



Tim Spector



Naomi Wray



Lutz Krause

MeDIP-seq: Identification of Differentially Methylated Regions





Differentially Methylated Sites in Twins Discordant for MDD



- More changes observed than expected by chance
- Some genomic regions significantly differentially methylated in twins discordant for MDD

Differentially Methylated Sites in Twins Discordant for MDD

Meta analysis on RPM for KCL and Queensland dataset using a fixed approach



Chromosome

ZBTB20

• The region was replicated in an independent sample of agematched females and showed an increased methylation of 28.2% in the 118 MDD cases compared to the 236 controls (p=0.018).

• Observed methylation changes are not result of anti-depressants

• ZBTB20 shows similar methylation pattern in entorhinal cortex and blood

• A comparison of hippocampal expression data of seven males who died by suicide (cases) and four who died in car accidents (controls) identified a significant lower expression of ZBTB20 in the hippocampus of subjects who died by suicide (p=4.23 x 10⁻¹¹.)

• ZTBT20 targets hippocampal neurons as well as cerebellum granule cells consistent with our observation of a high ZTBT20 expression in the hippocampal, cerebellum and white matter regions of the brain. Zbtb20 is also crucial for the regionalisation and volume of the archicortex which plays a role in depression.

Gene Expression Analysis Identified 30 Genes Differentially Expressed in MDD

OPEN O ACCESS Freely available online

PLos one

Blood-Based Gene Expression Profiles Models for Classification of Subsyndromal Symptomatic Depression and Major Depressive Disorder

Zhenghui Yi¹⁹, Zezhi Li¹⁹, Shunying Yu², Chengmei Yuan¹, Wu Hong¹, Zuowei Wang¹, Jian Cui³, Tieliu Shi^{3,4}, Yiru Fang¹*

1 Division of Mood Disorders, Shanghai Mental Health Center, Shanghai Jiao Tong University School of Medicine, Shanghai, China, 2 Department of Genetics, Shanghai Mental Health Center, Shanghai Jiao Tong University School of Medicine, Shanghai, China, 3 The Center for Bioinformatics and Institute of Biomedical Sciences, The College of Life Sciences, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China, 4Shanghai Information Center for Life Sciences, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Shanghai, China

5 of 30 diff. expressed genes also differentially methylated (p<1e-5):

- **CAB39L** Homo sapiens calcium binding protein 39-like (CAB39L), transcript variant 1, mRNA.
- **IL13RA1** Homo sapiens **interleukin** 13 receptor, alpha 1 (IL13RA1), mRNA.
- **RGS6** Homo sapiens regulator of **G-protein** signalling 6 (RGS6), transcript variant 3, mRNA.
- **IL20RB** Homo sapiens **interleukin** 20 receptor beta (IL20RB), mRNA.
- **IL15RA** Homo sapiens **interleukine** 15 receptor, alpha (IL15RA), transcript variant 1, mRNA.

Enrichment Analysis of Top 200 Differentially Methylated Genes in IPA

- 81 genes associated with neurological disease
- 87 genes associated with nervous system development
- => Some observed differences relevant

	Top Canonical Pathways			
	Name	p-value	Ratio	
	Corticotropin Releasing Hormone Signaling	1.85E-03	4/136 (0.029)	
	Melatonin Signaling	4.37E-03	3/78 (0.038)	
	Dopamine-DARPP32 Feedback in cAMP Signaling	6.69E-03	4/183 (0.022)	
	Neuropathic Pain Signaling In Dorsal Horn Neurons	1.17E-02	3/108 (0.028)	
	CCR3 Signaling in Eosinophils	1.51E-02	3/126 (0.024)	

Variance in Methylation Significantly Higher in Twins With Depression (MeDIP-seq)



- 23 twin pairs discordant for MDD
- Each dot represents one
 500bp window, variation in
 methylation in normal vs.
 MDD group, measured by
 MeDIP-seq
- P=2.2 e^{-16 (}Paired, onetailed Wilcoxon rank test)

Variance in Methylation Significantly Higher in Twins With Depression (MeDIP-seq)



Conclusions

- Methylation arrays: accurate (high correlation for techical replicates), easy analysis
- MeDIP-seq: genome-wide but data-analysis challenging
- Twin design powerful for identifying methylation differences
- Significant differences in methylation observed for MDD in plausible genes
- Variation in methylation significant higher in MDD twins on a genome wide scale

Epigenetics: the confused epidemiologist's friend.



If they ask you anything you don't know, just say it's due to epigenetics.

Davey Smith G Int. J. Epidemiol. 2012;41:303-308

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The genetics of brain structure and function

- *Goal* To discover some of the genes and pathways that influence the structure and function of the brain and provide a window into the biological mechanisms leading to mental illness.
- Genetic and environmental factors continuously shape the development of the brain, but the specific variants that predispose us, or protect us against, development of psychiatric disorders are largely unknown.
- QTIMS: acquiring structural and functional brain data as well as cognition and health and well-being, in hundreds of twins.
- With identical (MZ) and non-identical (DZ) twins we are able to disentangle the relative contributions of genetic and environmental factors on brain variation.
- Even in healthy individuals of the same age there is large variation in brain structure and function, some of which is due to genes and some to the environment.

Queensland Twin IMaging Study (QTIMS)

Began June 2007

Target sample ~1400 twins/sibs (20-28yrs; 50% females; R handed) 600 twin pairs (300 MZ, 300 DZ) 200 siblings

Available phenotypes

- Cognition at age 16yrs
- Personality, Health and Well-being

Available genotyping

GWAS - Illumina 610K SNP chip; >500,000 common genetic variants (SNPs)spread across the entire 23 chromosomes

Multi-modal Imaging - 4 Tesla Bruker Medspec Scanner

- High resolution anatomic scan
- 30-gradient DTI
- 105-gradient HARDI –DTI scan
- fMRI during rest
- fMRI during n-back task

To Date: ~1000 twins and sibs have been scanned



MZ twins show greater resemblance in morphometry than DZ twins

Heritability:-

- 20% in white matter
- 75% in subcortical structures (corpus callosum, ventricles)
- 20–40% in basal ganglia, thalamus
- 50% occipital lobes
- voxelwise maps define a more detailed spatial pattern for the different influences

Neuroimage 48:37-49, 2009



3D profile of genetic influences on the hippocampus

- 81 MZ & 44 DZ twin pairs
- maps show hotspots of genetic influence
- substantial variance due to unique environment hippocampus is highly plastic, adapting in response to individual experiences
- confirms previous studies h² of hippocampal vol.~40-69% (Peper et al. Human Brain Mapping, 2007; Sullivan et al. Hippocampus, 2001)



Heritability of cortical thickness (CT)

- Research has shown that patterns of cortical thinning is associated with diseases such as schizophrenia, bipolar, depression, and Alzheimer's. Although the brain is thought to be widely heritable, little is still known about the genetic underpinnings of the cerebral cortex and about which genes are likely to be involved.
- In this study, we estimated the heritability of cortical thickness from 28 regions of interest (ROIs).
 Genome-wide association (GWA) scans were performed on each ROI in order to identify variants associated with the thickness of the cortex.

Voxel-by-voxel CT brain map for one individual











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Variance components estimates on CT



White matter integrity DTI - diffusion tensor images

- i) 30 gradient directions (27 high b values and 3 b=0 repetitions)
- ii)105 gradient directions (94 high b-values and 11 b=0 repetitions)
- *Fractional Anisotropy (FA)* = White Matter integrity FA=0 – isotropic - in areas where water diffuses freely FA=1 – anisotropic- in highly myelinated WM fibres

Genetic Influences on White Matter Integrity (FA)

a

- 23 MZ & 23 DZ pairs
- strong genetic influence in all posterior white matter regions (first column)
- genetic factors explain 75 - 90% of the variance in FA in almost all white matter regions (second column).
- Chiang et al. 2009 J Neurosci, 29: 2212-24



Anterior internal

thalamic / optic

sup. longitudinal fasc.

radiation

capsule & L post.

splenium &

part of CC



Significance of genetic factors Genetic variance









Shared Unique environmental variance environmental variance















sup. & post. corona radiata





0%

50%

100%



White matter integrity correlated with IQ

correlated with PIQ
r = 0.3 - 0.4

Chiang et al. 2009 J Neurosci. 29: 2212-24





0.05



Significance

PIQ









0

0.05

Genetic correlation of white matter integrity (FA) with IQ

 Genes (partly) moderate the correlation between fibre integrity and IQ common physiological mechanism

Chiang et al. 2009 J Neurosci. 29: 2212-24



BDNF Val66Met polymorphism effects on white matter

Group 1: 99M /135F (110 fam) age: 23.7±1.9 years.

Group 2: 89M /132F (128 fam) age: 23.7±2.2 years

 Val allele associated with up to 15% reduction in FA in major fiber tracts (splenium of the corpus callosum, left optic radiation)

replicated in both samples



Clusterin (CLU-C) variant is associated with lower white matter integrity (FA)

N =325 (23.5 <u>+</u> 2.1 years)

CLU-C increases the lifetime risk for AD ~16%
approx. 88% of Caucasians carry one copy

Young, healthy carriers of CLU-C show a distinct profile of lower FA in brain regions implicated in AD

Braskie et al. J Neurosci 2011



BOLD fMRI during *n*-back working memory task



fMRI during working memory

fMRI study of 315 twins
▶74 MZ pairs (29M/45F)
▶63 DZ pairs (11M /27F /25MF)
▶41 unpaired subjects

- voxel analysis
 Blokland et al. J Neurosci. 2011
- regions of interest analysis (N=75 pairs)
 Blokland et al. 2008 Biol.
 Psychology



Maps showing genetic influences on brain activation during working memory

 significant genetic influences on WM related brain activation, especially in frontal and parietal brain regions

 genetic influences highest in the parietal lobe (60-70%)

 sizeable unique environmental effects - NOT all measurement error (reliability = 0.7 – 0.9 in most activated areas)



Cerebellar group activation maps and twin correlations.



GWAS of brain volumes (ADNI sample)

Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Iniative (ADNI) - mixed sample of healthy controls, MCI, AD

N = 742 (temporal) N = 698 (hippo)

610K Illumina SNP

Genome – wide evidence or support - chrm. 12

Lower temporal lobe vols were most assoc. with a common variant in GRIN2B.

Risk allele over-represented in AD and MCI vs elderly controls



Stein et al. Neuroimage,



ENIGMA (Enhancing Neuroimaging Genetics through Meta-Analysis)

- ENIGMA consortium founded Dec 2009
- Proof-of-principle project conduct GWAS MA of Hippocampal, Intra-cranial & Total brain volumes
- Developed imaging & genetics protocols
- 28 contributing sites
 - Including 5 research networks
- Whole life-span data
- Case/control & population



ENIGMA GWAS meta-analysis for hippocampal volume (*N*=7,795)



Chromosome 12 (HRK)



Top hit for hippocampal volume replicated in CHARGE



β, 95% confidence interval (mm³)

 Complementary focus on functional studies to improve our understanding of the effects being identified





Development of ENIGMA working groups...

- Phenotypic Meta-Analyses of case control differences in subcortical volumes
 - Schizophrenia, Bipolar, Major Depression, ADHD
 - Where should we look for endo-phenotypes?



ENIGMA – DTI working group

- Leaders: Neda Jahanshad
 & Peter Kochunov
- Major protocol development effort
- Proof-of-principle paper examining heritability of the extracted phenotypes



Neuroimage. 2013 Apr 28. pii: S1053-8119(13)00408-4. doi: 10.1016/j.neuroimage.2013.04.061. [Epub ahead of print]

Multi-site genetic analysis of diffusion images and voxelwise heritability analysis: A pilot project of the ENIGMA-DTI working group.

Jahanshad N, Kochunov P, Sprooten E, Mandl RC, Nichols TE, Almassy L, Blangero J, Brouwer RM, Curran JE, de Zubicaray GI, Duggirala R, Fox PT, Hong LE, Landman BA, Martin NG, McMahon KL, Medland SE, Mitchell BD, Olvera RL, Peterson CP, Starr JM, Sussmann JE, Toga AW, Wardlaw JM, Wright MJ, Hulshoff Pol HE, Bastin ME, McIntosh AM, Deary IJ, Thompson PM, Glahn DC.

ENIGMA-DTI

- 1. Create a common template
 - 100 healthy adult subjects from each of 4 sites around the world
- 2. Find mean white matter fiber integrity values in the full brain and 14 standard tracts of interest along the WM skeleton





- 1. Multi-site heritability analysis
 - Are heritability measures stable and reliable across cohorts in regions
 - If not, then they are not good targets for multi-site GWAS-MA



Jahanshad & Kochunov et al, NIMG 2013

Multi-site heritability analysis

 5 sites DIFFERENT: Family structures (twins/pedigrees) / Image acquisition methods / Age groups (only children/only elderly/wide range) / Ethnicities (European/Mexican-American)



- Compare 2 meta-analysis approaches
 - Weight by N and SE
- 13/15 regions found to be highly reliable and heritable in all cohorts





ENIGMA2 core analyses...

- Discovery sample
 - N= 11,740; Cohorts=22
 - Phenotypic distributions uploaded and checked
 - Cohort level QQ & Manhattans produced and examined
 - Data freeze recently established
- Anticipated replication + Discovery
 - N= 16,500; Cohorts=32

ENIGMA2 preliminary results: Hippocampus





Put

ENIGMA2 preliminary results: Putamen



expected -logP and Lambda = 1.044

ENIGMA2-PGC2-SZ Collaboration:

Do genetic variants which create risk for changes in brain structure also create risk for schizophrenia?

- 1. Determine of the validity of the endophenotype concept for subcortical structural MRI measures and schizophrenia.
- 2. Globally demonstrate if genetic variants which affect the structure of the brain also create risk for psychiatric illness
- 3. Specifically find any specific genetic variants create both changes in brain structure and risk for psychiatric illness
- 4. Biological relevance to PGC hits (which structures are affected)



Can PGC Cross Disorder GWAS results predict subcortical structure volumes ?

i.e. are the same SNPs that cause psychiatric disease also affecting brain volumes ?

Results

SNPs in the most strongly associated region in PGC's cross-disorder mega-analysis (chr3p21.1) also show low P-values for amygdala and pallidum volumes

			P-values in	Association P-values in QTIM						
			PGC-CD	Caudate	Accumb.	Amygdala	Hippocam	Pallidum	Putamen	Thalamus
rs2535629	3:52808259	0.91	2.5e-12			4.7e-03	0.04	6.3e-04	0.02	6.9e-03
rs3617	3:52808845	0.92	1.4e-11		0.04	5.3e-03		2.6e-04		
rs2071044	3:52822641	0.92	5.5e-11			3.1e-03	0.04	5.0e-04		
rs1075653	3:52800568	1.08	5.9e-09			9.7e-03	0.04	5.9e-03		0.04
rs1076425	3:52800502	1.08	6.7e-09			9.7e-03	0.04	5.9e-03		0.04
rs2071506	3:52801316	1.08	7.1e-09			9.7e-03	0.04	5.8e-03		0.04
rs2239547	3:52830269	1.08	7.1e-09					0.01		0.02
rs9324	3:52800625	1.08	7.8e-09			9.7e-03	0.04	5.9e-03		0.04
rs2071508	3:52801886	0.93	8.4e-09		0.03	9.7e-03	0.04	5.8e-03		0.04
rs4687657	3:52827578		8.6e-09			0.02		0.01		0.02
rs4687551	3:52798488	1.08	9.7e-09		0.03	9.7e-03	0.04	5.9e-03		0.04

Next step: ENIGMA \rightarrow PGC: can brain volume SNPs predict psychiatric disease ?

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Wright2, Barbara Franke5,6, Nicholas G. Martin2, Paul M. Thompson1 ENIGMA Schizophrenia Working Group Jessica A. Turner1c, 2c, Derrek P. Hibar1a, Jerod Rasmussen4c, Ole A. Andreassen5c, Lars T. Westlye5c, 20c, Unn Kristin Haukvik5c, 4d, Ingrid Agartz5c, 14c, Steven G. Potkin4c, Roel Ophoff3c, Hilleke Hulshoff Pol6c, Neeltie van Haren6c, Oliver Gruber7c, Bernd Krämer7c, David Zilles7c, Stefan Ehrlich8c, 9c, Johanna Hass8c, Kathryn Alpert10c, Lei Wang10c, Erik G. Jönsson14c, Godfrey D. Pearlson11c, 12c, David C. Glahn11c, 12c, (Marise W. J. Machielsen, Laura Koenders, Lieuwe de Haan)15c, Dick J. Veltman18c, Raquel E. Gur16c, Ruben C. Gur16c, Theodore D. Satterthwaite16c, (Gary Donohoe, Sinead Kelly)17c, Beata Godlewska17e (Rali Dimitrova, Stephen Lawrie, Cathy Bois, Heather Whalley, Andrew McIntosh)19c, Paul M. Thompson1a, Theo G. van Erp4c, as the ENIGMA-Schizophrenia Working Group ENIGMA- Bipolar Disorder Working Group Derrek P. Hibar1d, Lars T. Westlye2d, 3d, Theo G. M. van Erp4d, Jerod Rasmussen4d, Cassandra D. Leonardo1d, Unn K. Haukvik2d, 5d, Ingrid A. Agartz2d, 5d, Oliver Gruber6d, Bernd Krämer6d, Sarah Trost6d, Benny Liberg7d, Carl Johan Ekman7d, Mikael Landen27d, Kiki D. Chang8d, Allison C. Nugent9d, Wayne C. Drevets10d**, Scott Fears11d**, Nelson Freimer11d, Carrie E. Bearden12d, and the Costa Rica/Colombia Consortium for Genetic Investigation of Bipolar Endophenotypes, David C. Glahn13d, Godfrey D. Pearlson13d, Louise Emsell14d, Joanne Kenney14d**, Cathy Scanlon14d, Colm McDonald14d, Dara M. Cannon14d, Jorge Almeida15d, Amelia Versace15d, Xavier Caseras16d, Natalia Lawrence16d**, Mary Phillips15,16d, Melissa DelBello17d**, Stephen Strakowski17d, Caleb Adler17d**, Danai Dima18d, 26d, Giuseppe Delvecchio26d, Sophia Frangout8d, Ulrik F. Malt28d,29d, Erlend Bøen28d,29d, Torbjørn Elvsåshagen28d,29d, Neeltje E. M. van Haren19d, Roel Ophoff2od,21d, Rene Kahn21d, Michael Bauer22d, Andrea Pfennig22d, Martin Alda23d, Tomas Hajek23d, Benson Mwangi24d, Jair C. Soares24d, Rali Dimitrova25d, Jessika Sussmann25d, Saskia Hagenaars25d, Heather C. Whalley25d, Andrew M. McIntosh25d, Paul M. Thompson1d, Ole A. Andreassen2d as the ENIGMA- Bipolar Disorder Working Group ENIGMA Major Depressive Disorder Working Group Lianne Schmaal1e, Dick J. Veltman1e, Marie-José van Tolze, Hans Jörgen Grabe3e, 4e, 5e, Katharina Wittfeld5e, Oliver Gruber6e, Bernd Krämer6e, Andreas Mever-Lindenberg7e, Andreas Heinz8e, Nina Seiferth8e, Henrik Walter8e, Andrew Simmons 9e,10e,11e, Eva Maria Frey12e, Thomas Frod12e,13e, Jim Lagopoulos14e, Sean Hatton14e, Ian Hickie14e, Martina Papmeyer15e, Jessika Sussmann15e, Meilina Papalampropoulou-tsiridou15e, Heather Whalley15e, Andrew M. McIntosh15e, Philipp G. Sämann16e, Beata Godlewska17e, Philip J Cowen17e as the ENIGMA-Major Depressive Disorder Working Group ENIGMA DTI Working Group Neda Jahanshad 1f, Peter V. Kochunov 2f, Emma Sprooten 3f, 4f, René C. Mandl 5f, Thomas E. Nichols 6f, 7f,? Tom Booth 8f, Herve Lemaitre 9f,? Rali Dimitrova 4f, Laura Almasy 10f, John Blangero 10f, Rachel M. Brouwer 5f, Joanne E. Curran 10f, Greig I. de Zubicaray 11f, Ravi Duggirala 10f**, Peter T. Fox 10f, 17f, L. Elliot Hong 2f, Bennett A. Landman 13f, Nicholas G. Martin 14f, Jean-Luc Martinot9f, Katie L. McMahon 15f.? Sarah E. Medland 14f, Rene L. Olvera 12f, Diana Tordesillas-Gutierrez19f, 20f, Charles P. Peterson 10f, Gunter Schumann18f, Jessika E. Sussmann 4f, Arthur W. Toga 1f, Joanna M. Wardlaw 8f, 16f, Margaret J. Wright 14f, Marcel P. Zwiers22f, Barbara Franke 21f, 22f, Hilleke E. Hulshoff Pol 5f, Mark E. Bastin 8f, 16f, Andrew M. McIntosh 4f, Ian J. Deary 8f, Paul M. Thompson 1f, David C. 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