

# Testing dark matter with dwarf galaxies in cosmological simulations with baryons

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With Carlos Frenk, Julio Navarro, Kyle Oman, Azi Fattahi, Laura Sales+

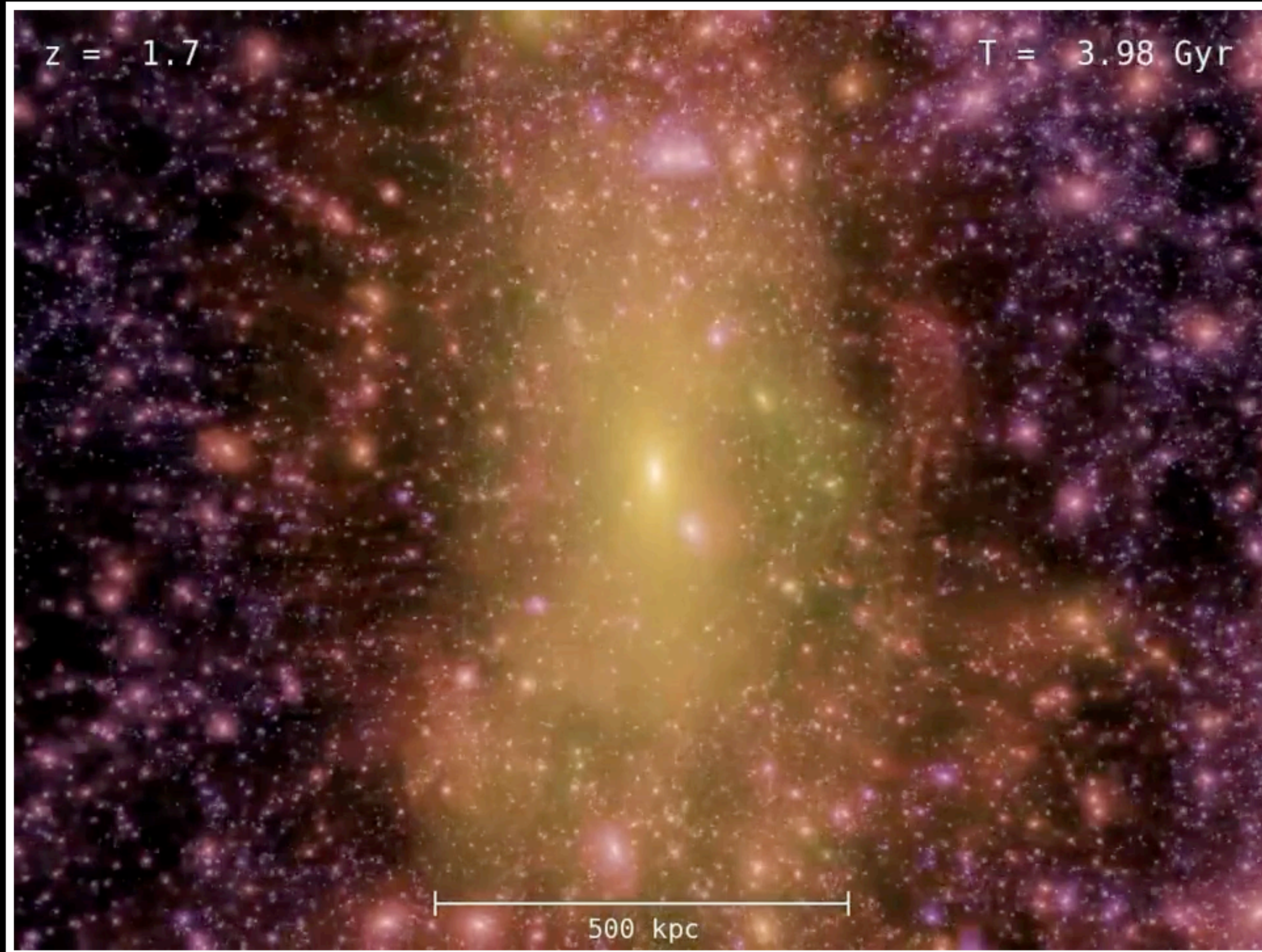
News from the Dark - Montpellier September 2025





# Substructure in Cold Dark Matter

Aquarius-A MW-mass halo simulation [Springel+08]



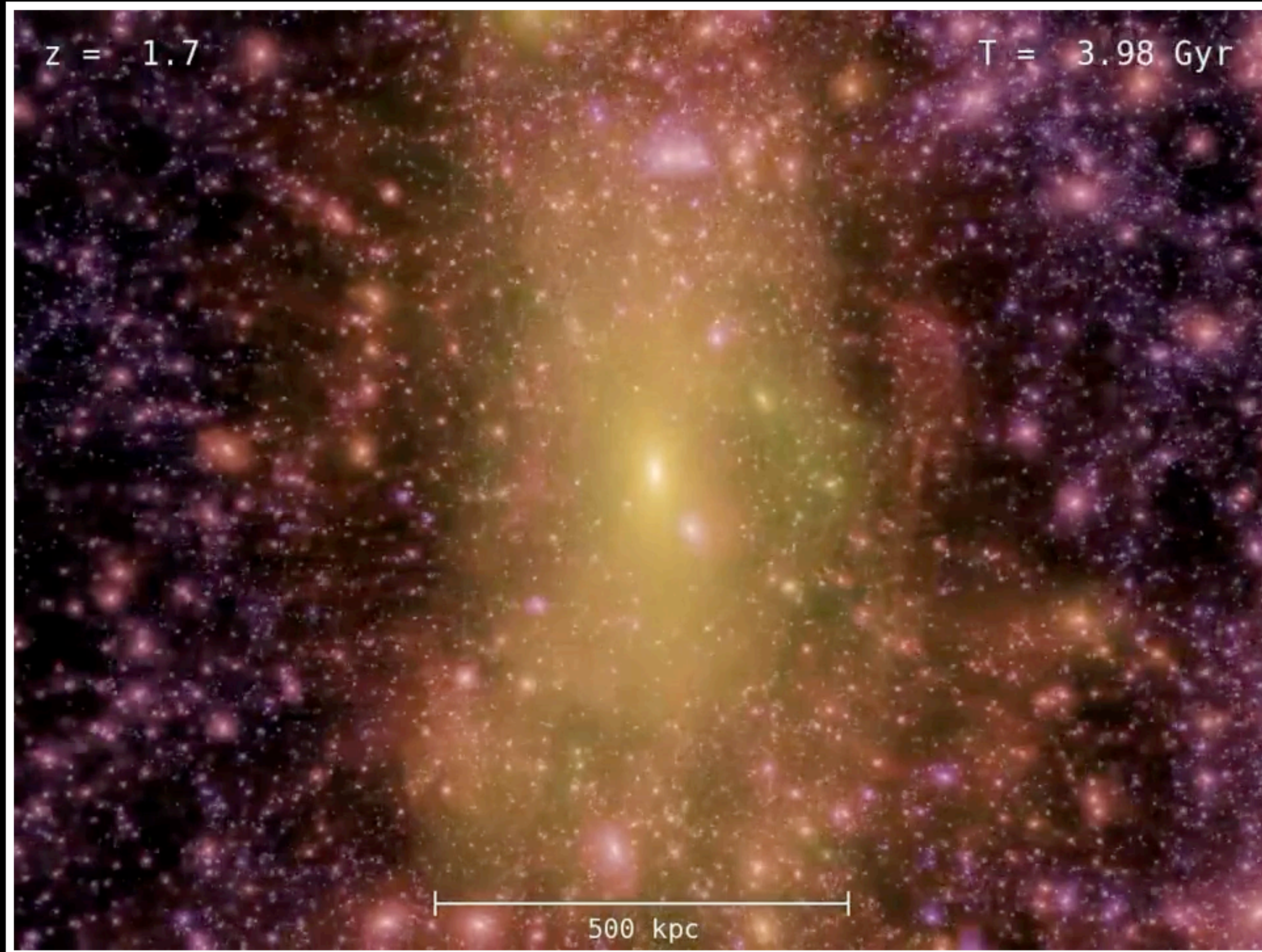
- 1 Well-defined mass function  
→ More small halos than large ones  
Self-similar abundance of substructure
- 2 Universal, “cuspy” halo density profiles  
→ resilient to tidal effects
- 3 Orbits and accretion histories

[See e.g. Press&Schechter74; Bond+91; White&Rees78; White&Frenk91; NavarroFrenk&White97; Springel+08; Bullock&Boylan-Kolchin17].



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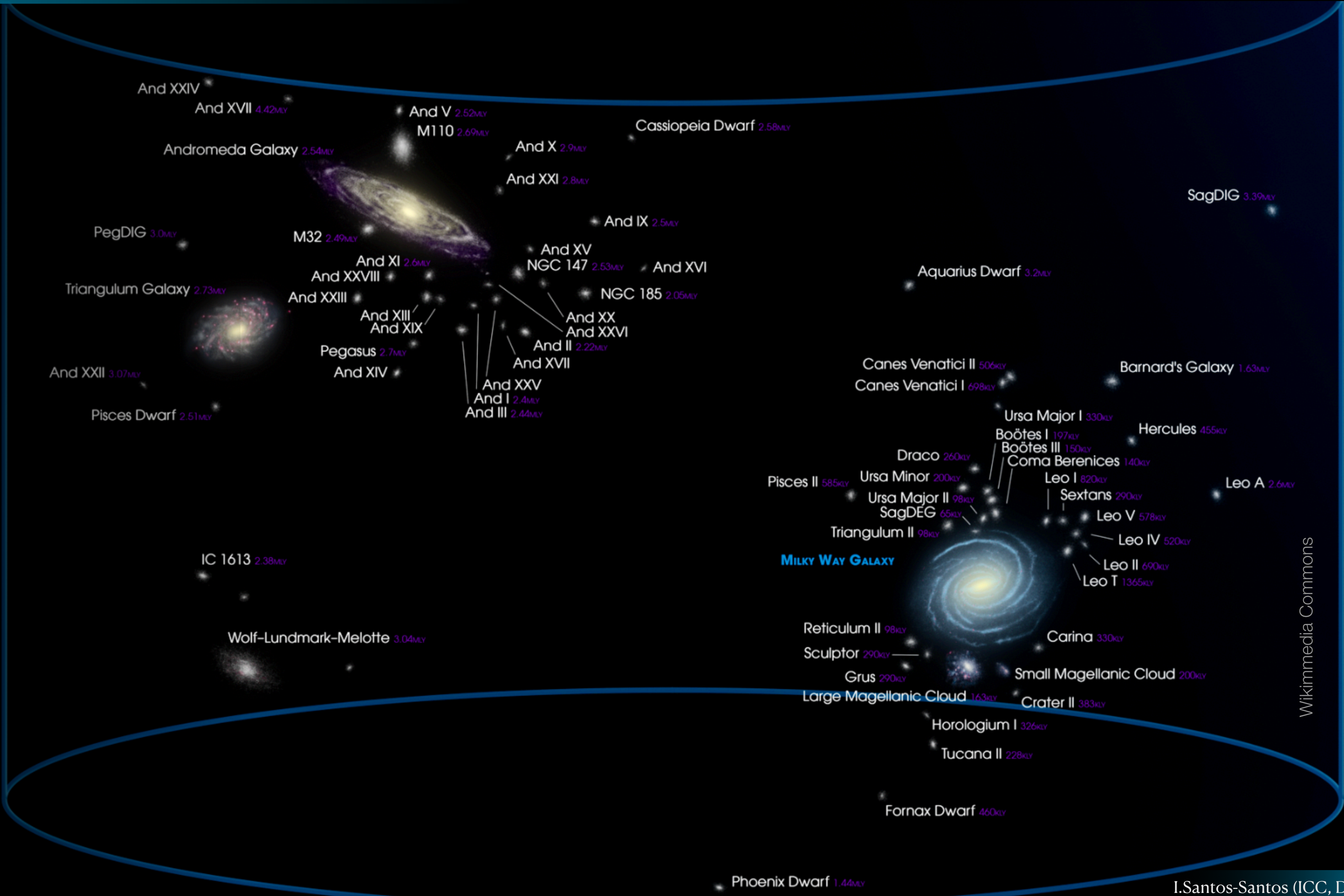
[See e.g. Press&Schechter74; Bond+91; White&Rees78; White&Frenk91; NavarroFrenk&White97; Springel+08; Bullock&Boylan-Kolchin17].



# Substructure observed in the MW

\*\*Not up-to-date

LOCAL GROUP

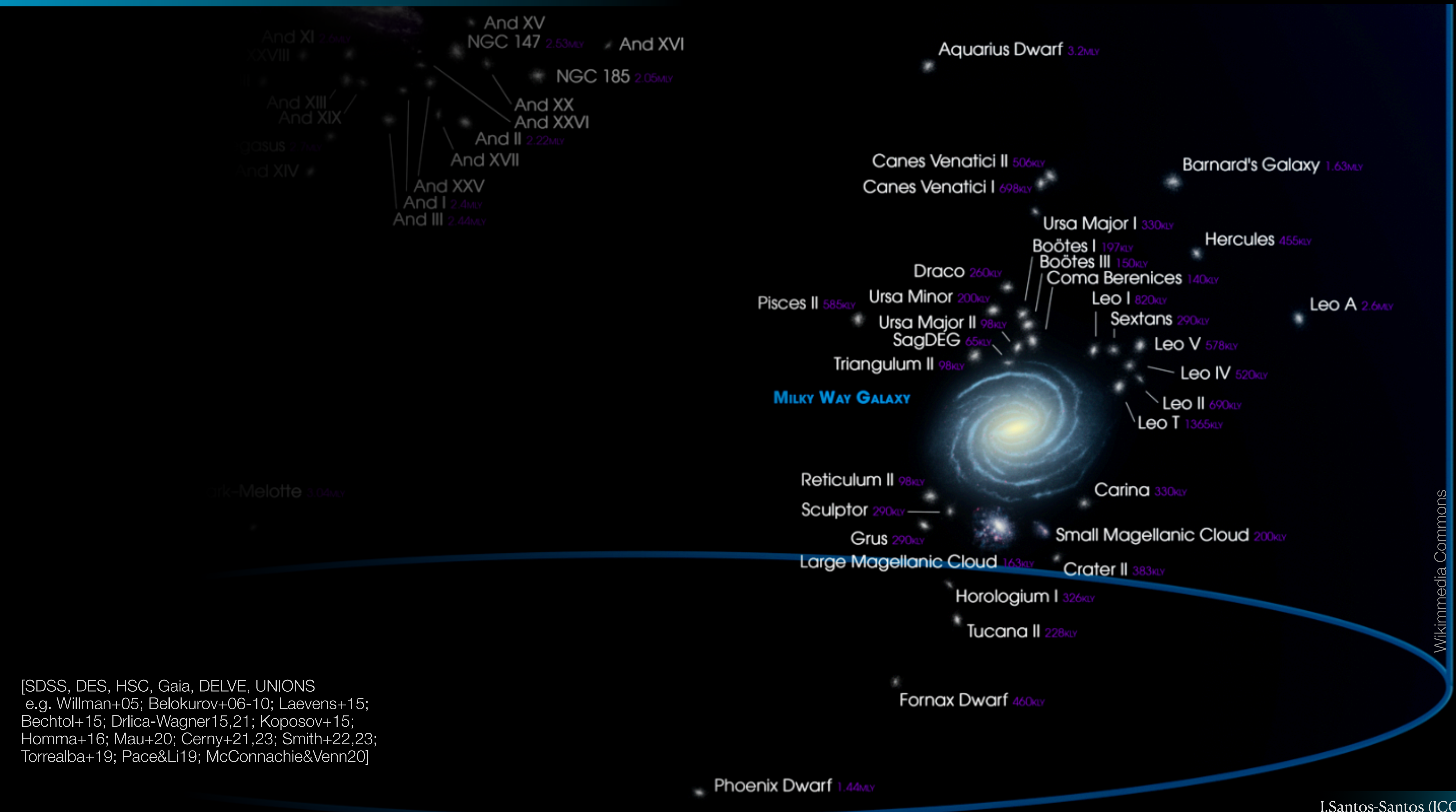


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[SDSS, DES, HSC, Gaia, DELVE, UNIONS  
e.g. Willman+05; Belokurov+06-10; Laevens+15;  
Bechtol+15; Drlica-Wagner15,21; Koposov+15;  
Homma+16; Mau+20; Cerny+21,23; Smith+22,23;  
Torrealba+19; Pace&Li19; McConnachie&Venn20]



# Substructure observed in the MW

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Currently ~60 MW satellite candidates

Recent findings of extremely ultrafaint systems (e.g. Tuc3, UMa3/Unions1)

New upcoming deep surveys (e.g. Rubin LSST)

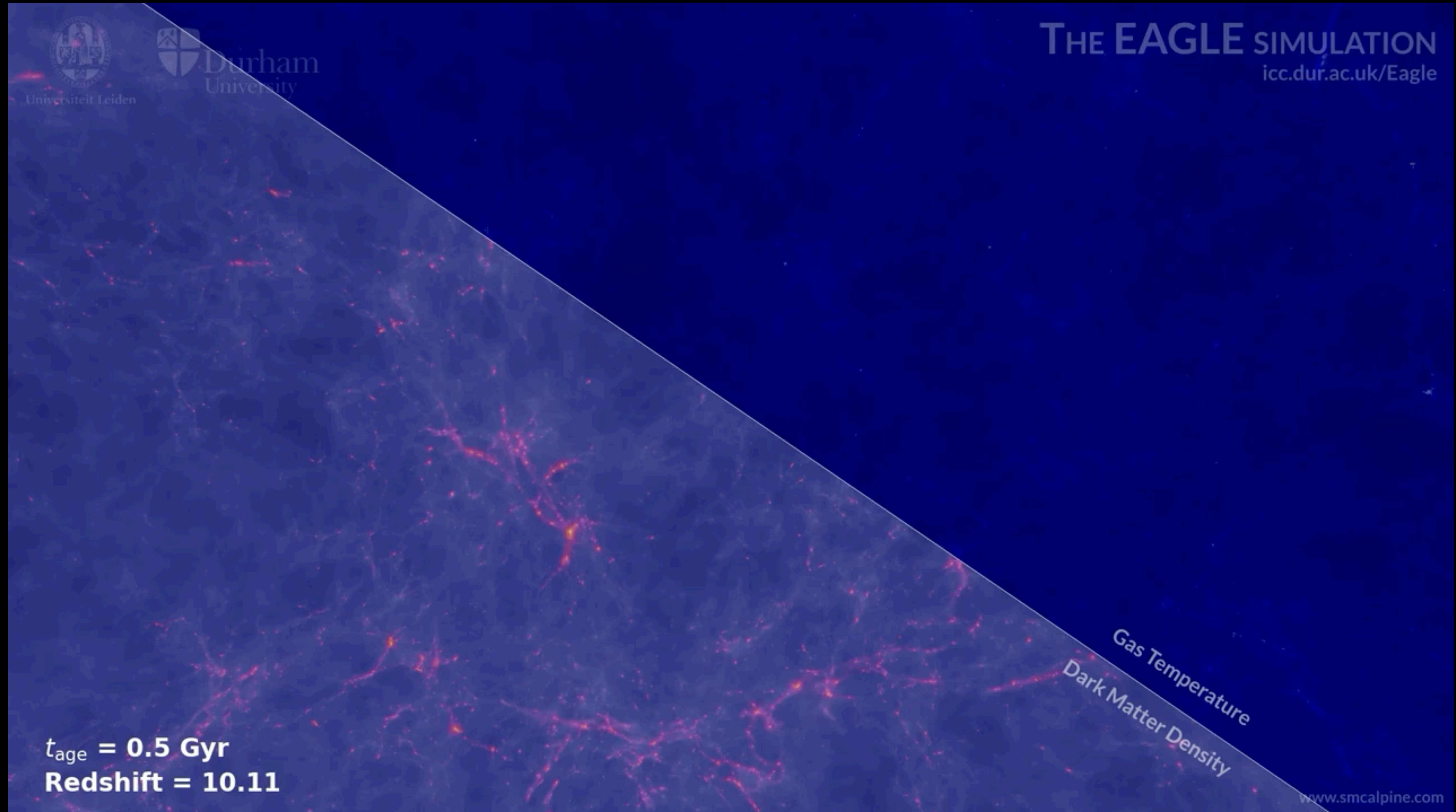


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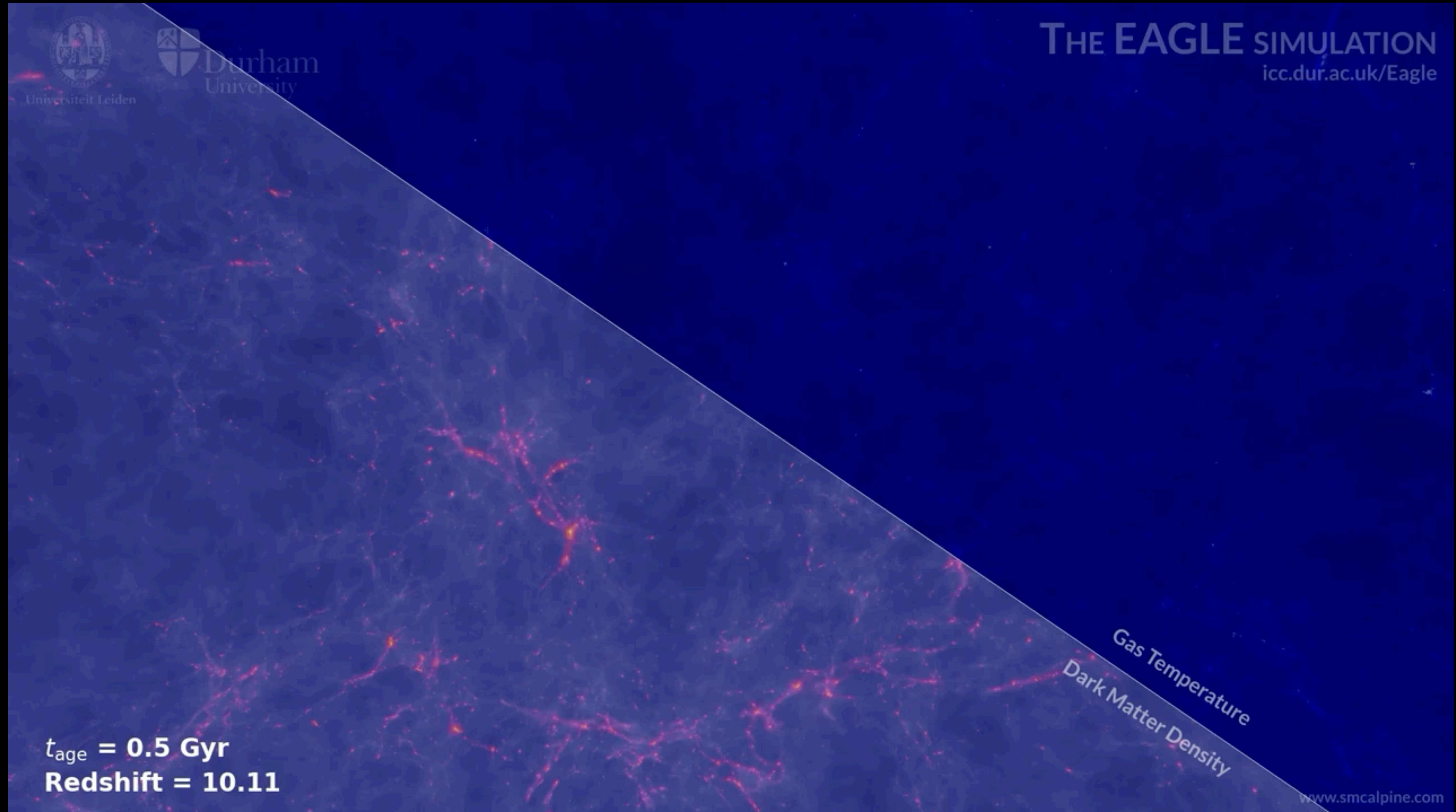


# Cosmological simulations with baryons





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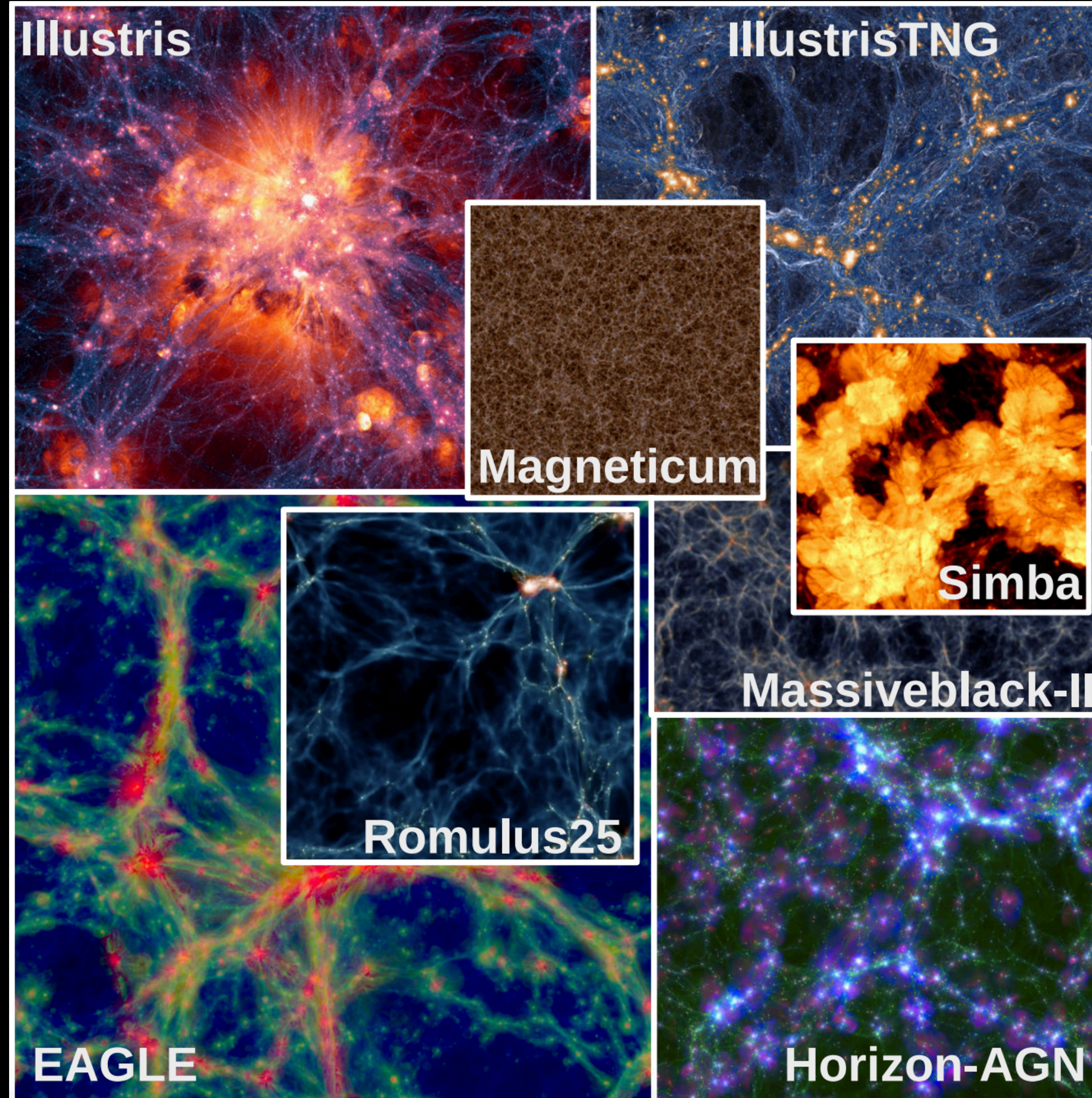




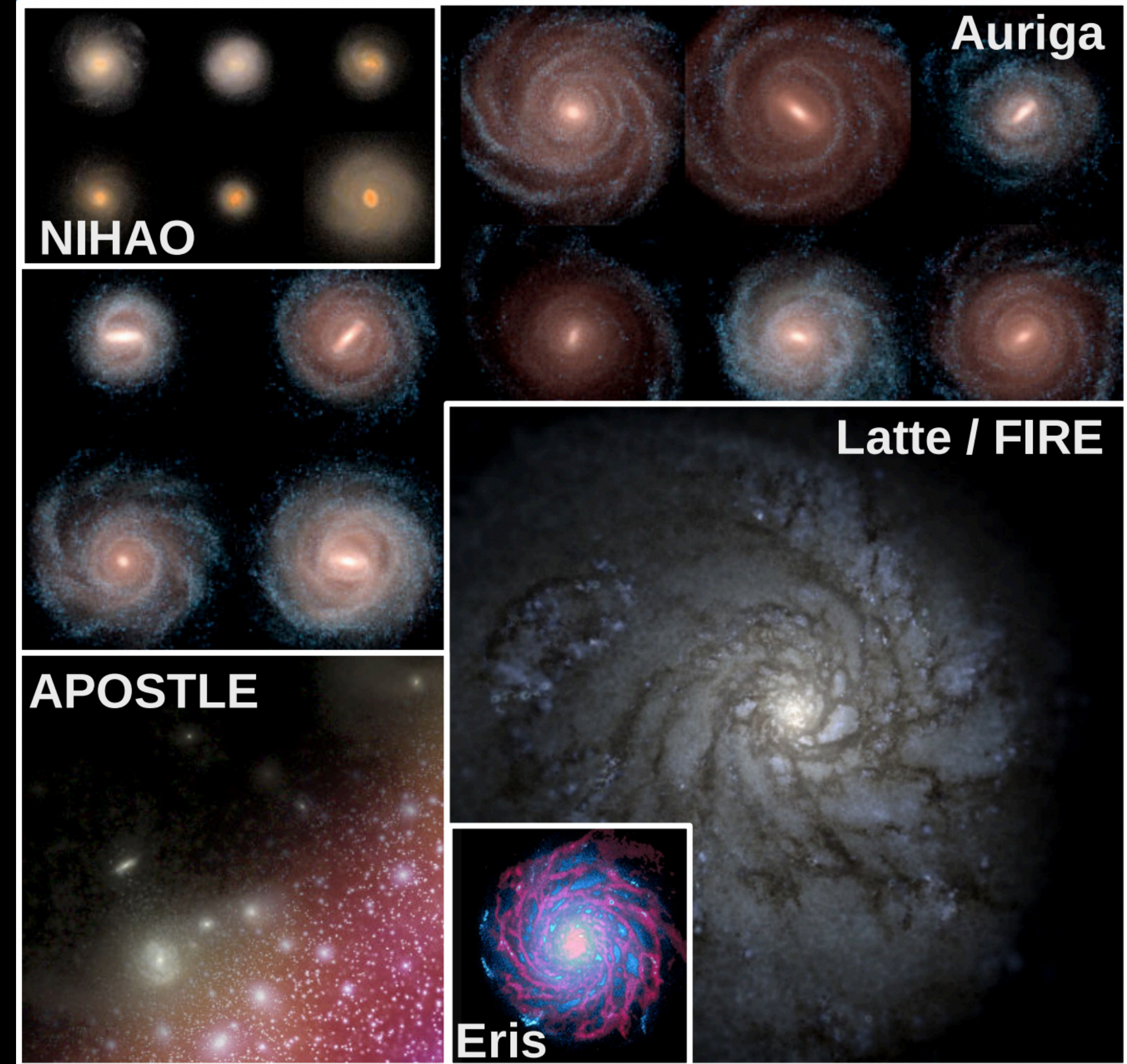
# Cosmological simulations with baryons

Some examples [Vogelsberger+2020 and references therein]

Large volumes



Zoom-ins



+ e.g. EDGE, COLIBRE, NewHorizon, Lyra, Gear, DC Justice League, Hestia, FLAMINGO, ...



# Tests of Cold Dark Matter at small-scales



Dark Matter  
density profiles



Abundance of  
substructure



# Tests of Cold Dark Matter at small-scales

Diversity of dwarf galaxy  
rotation curves

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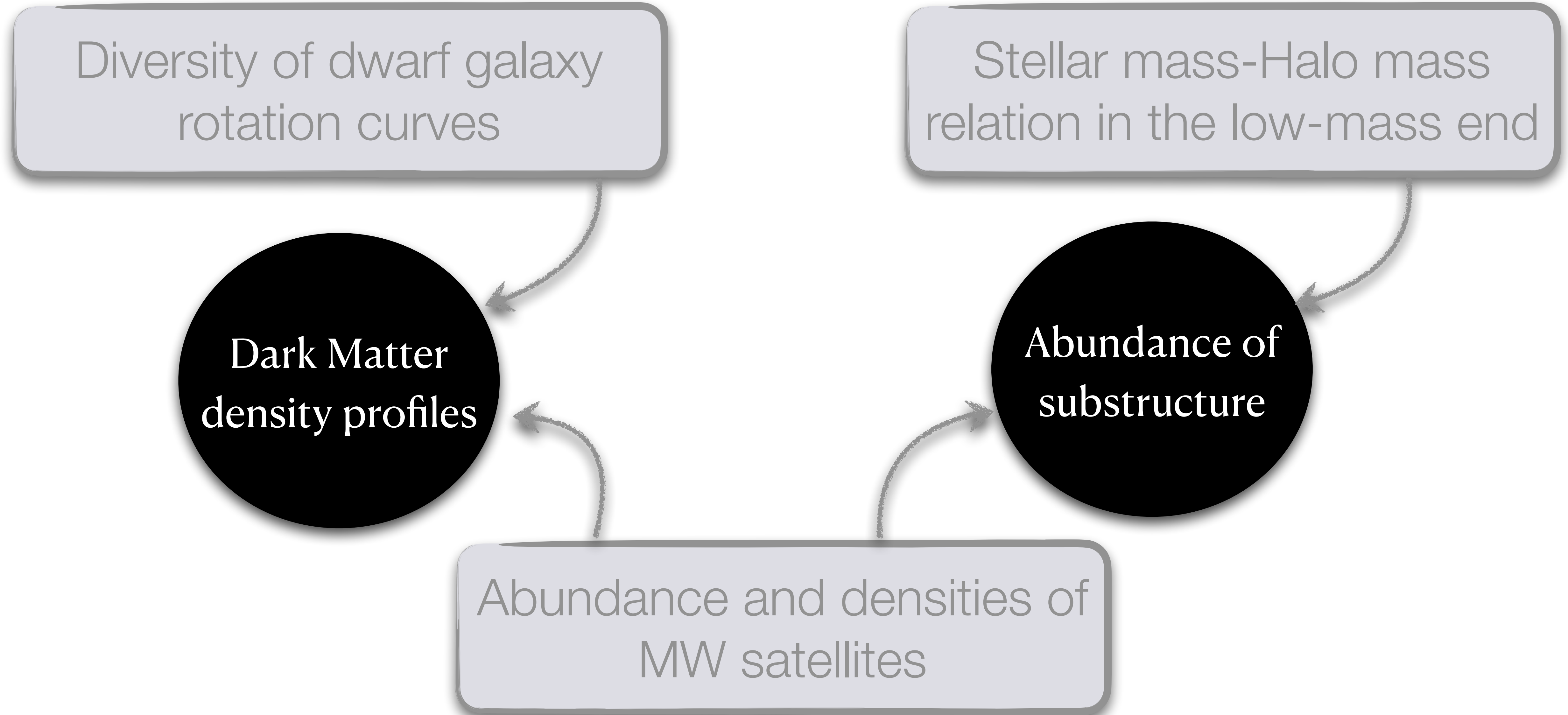
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Stellar mass-Halo mass  
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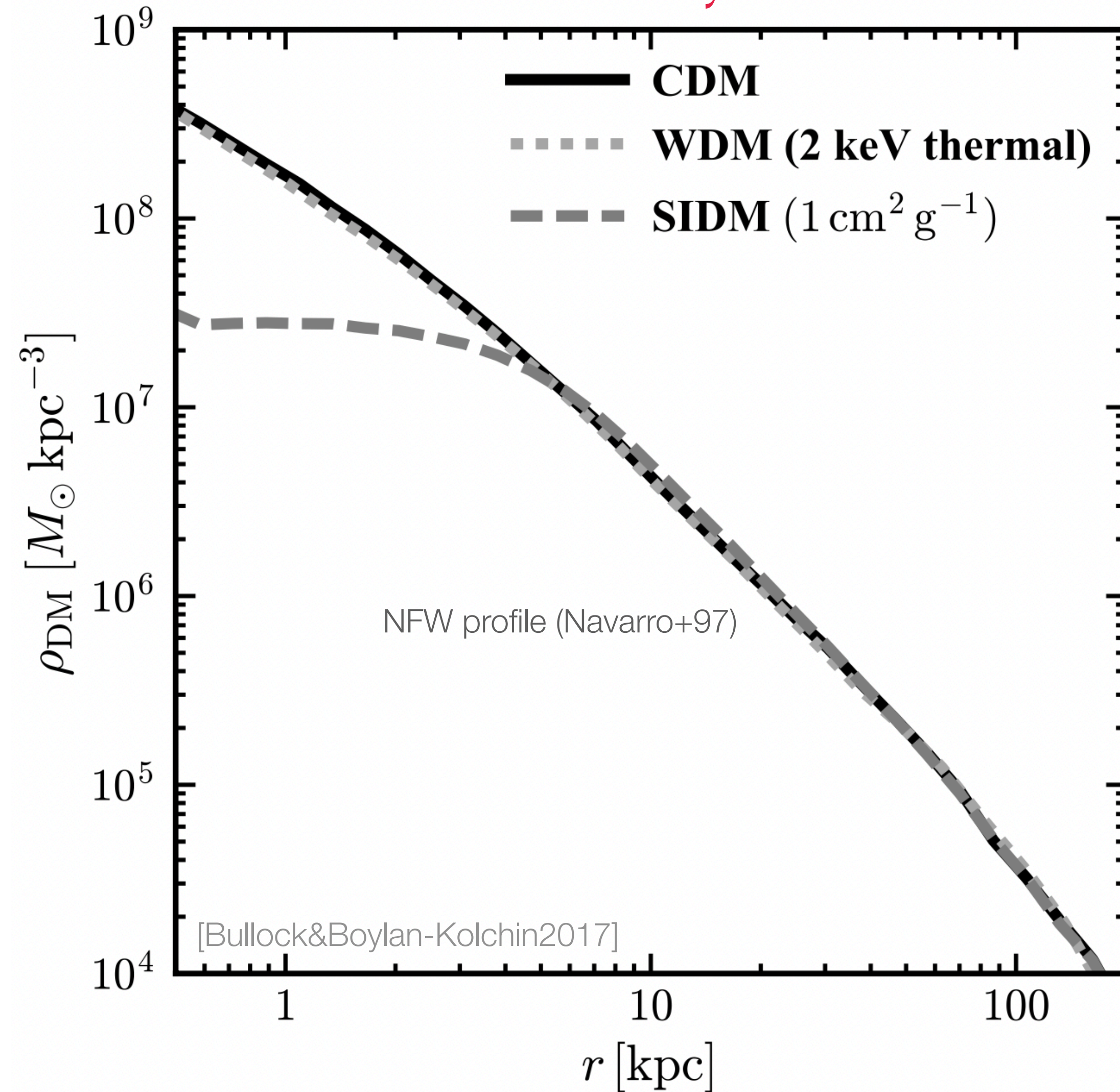
# Tests of Cold Dark Matter at small-scales





# Dark matter density profiles

Pure Dark Matter-only simulations

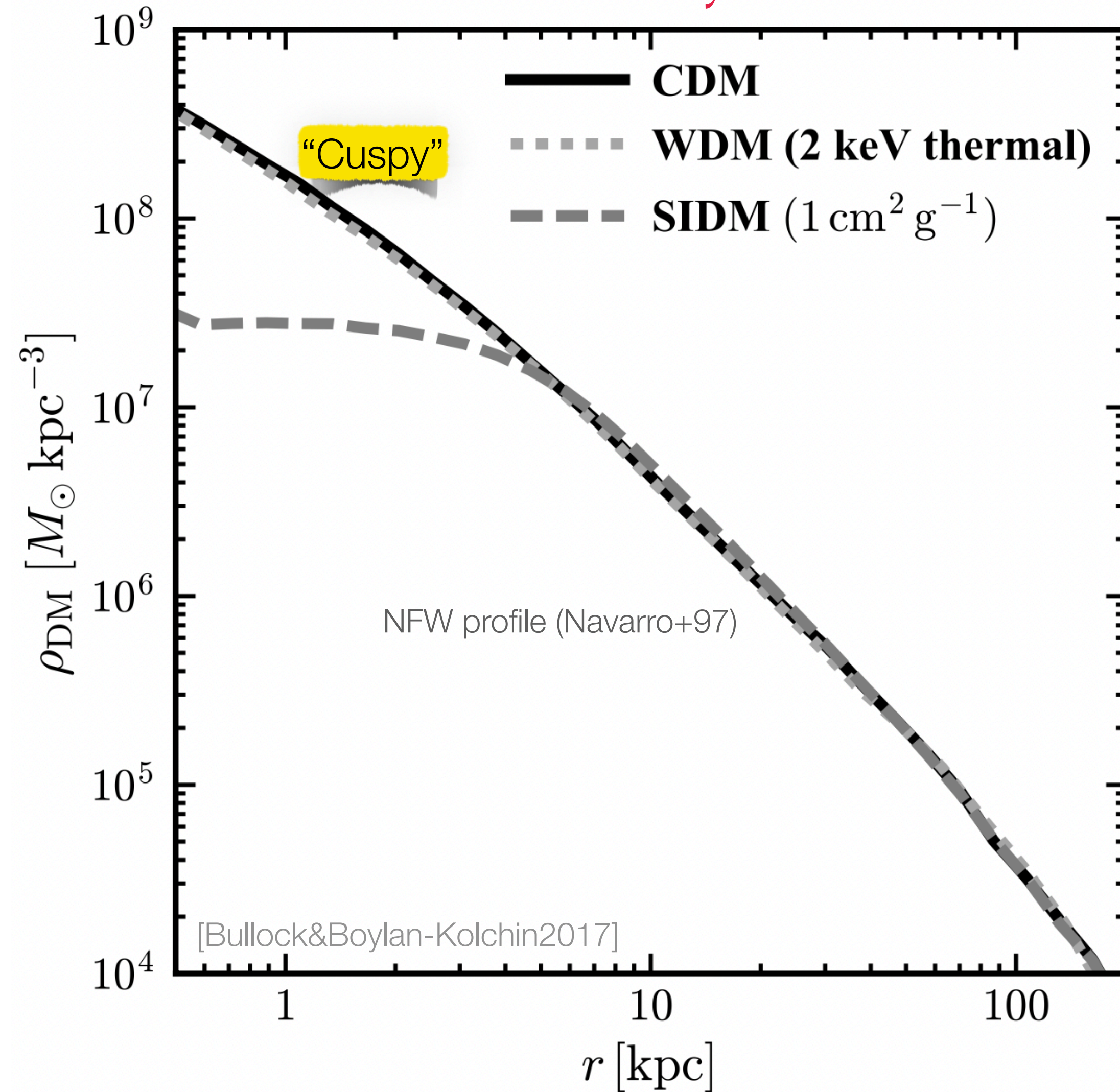


[Read+2016]



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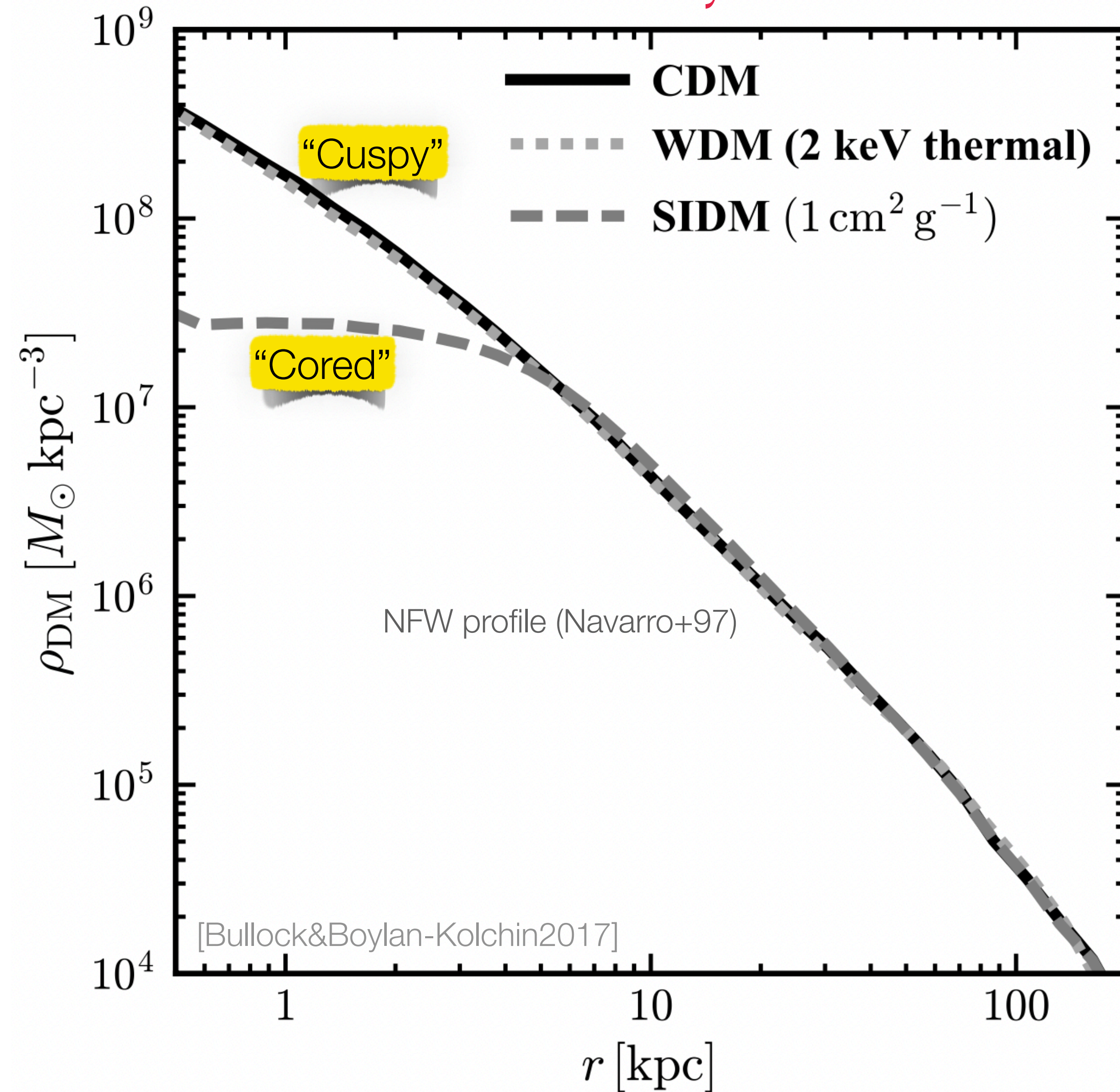


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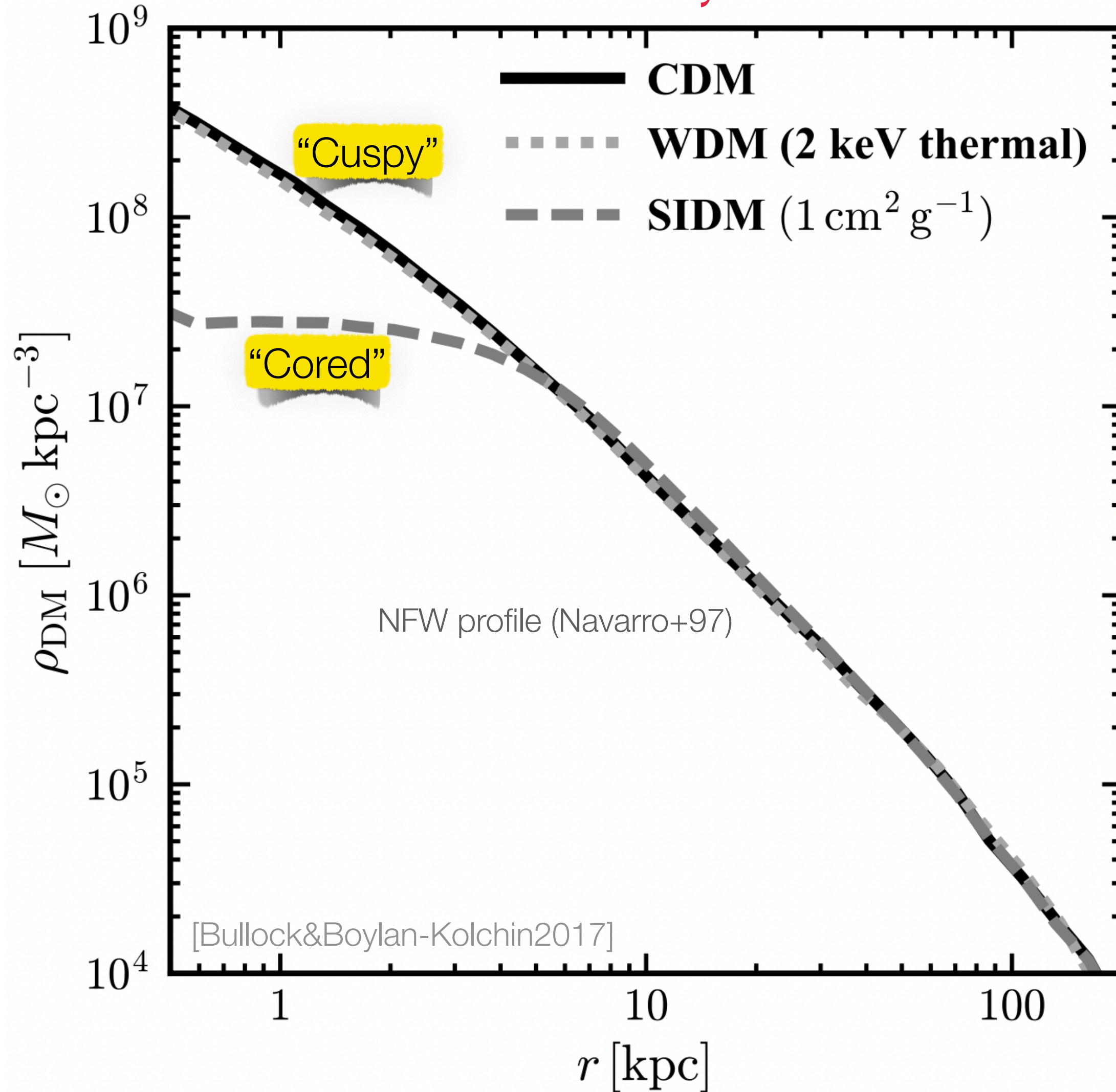


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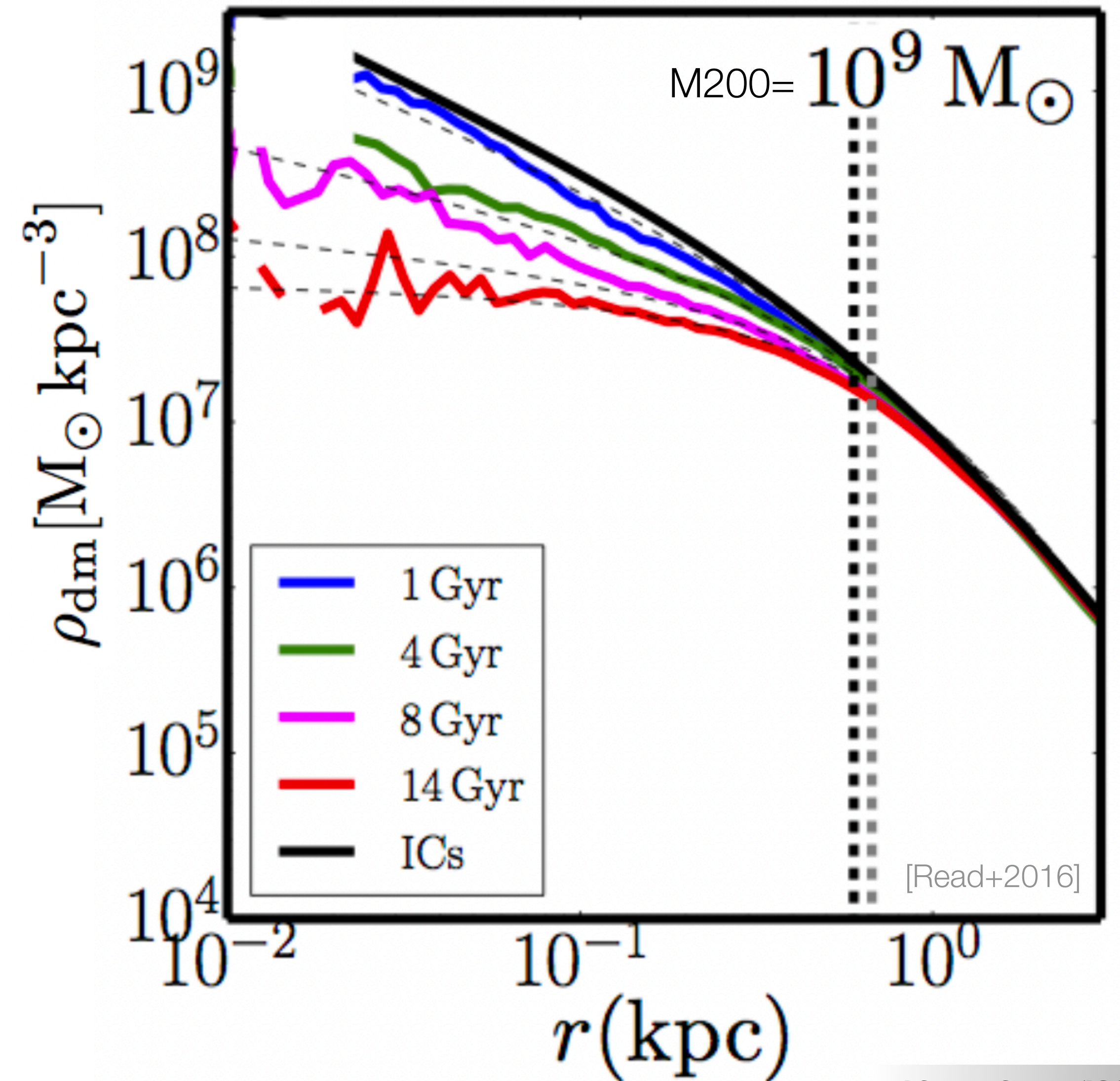


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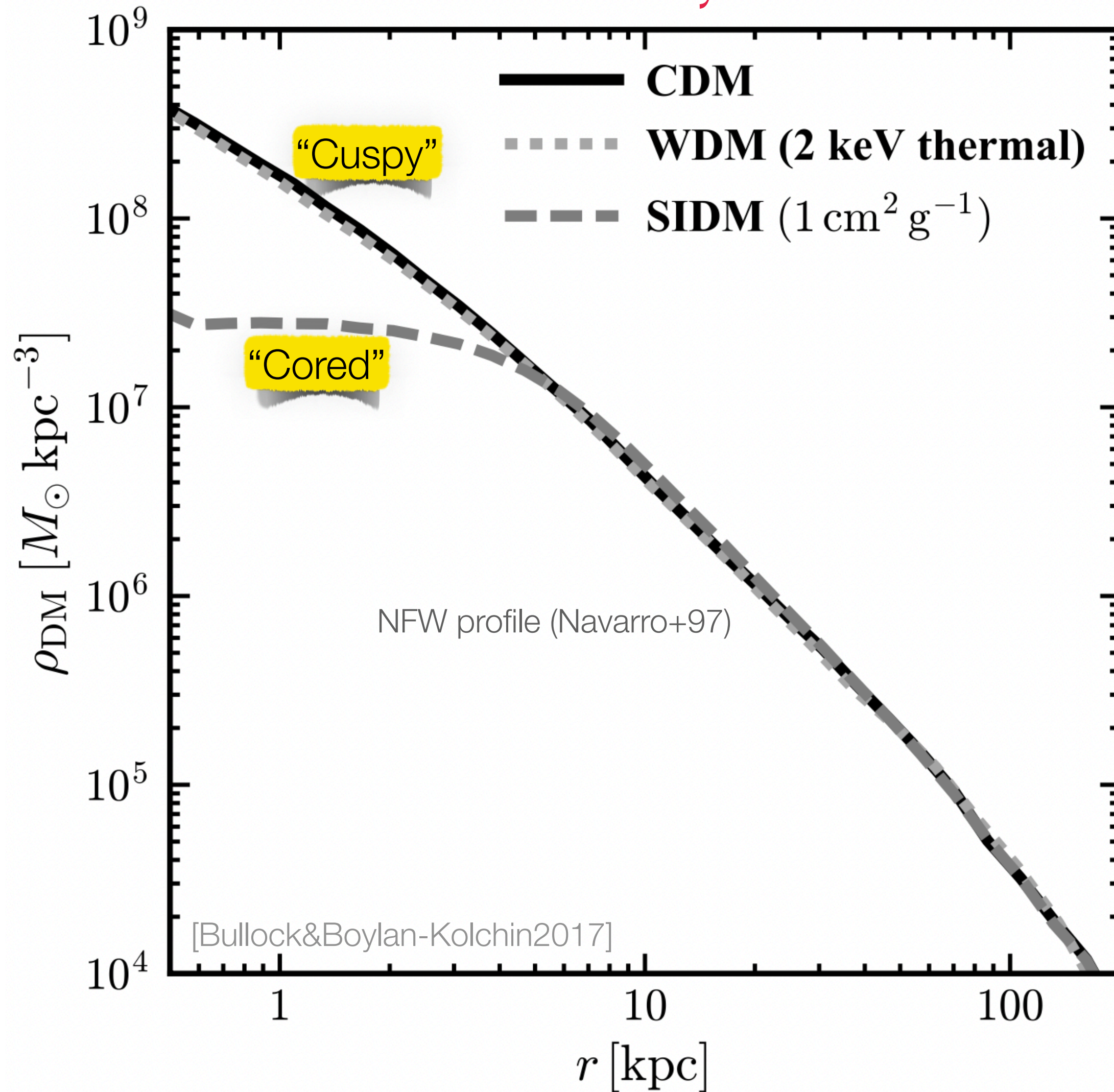
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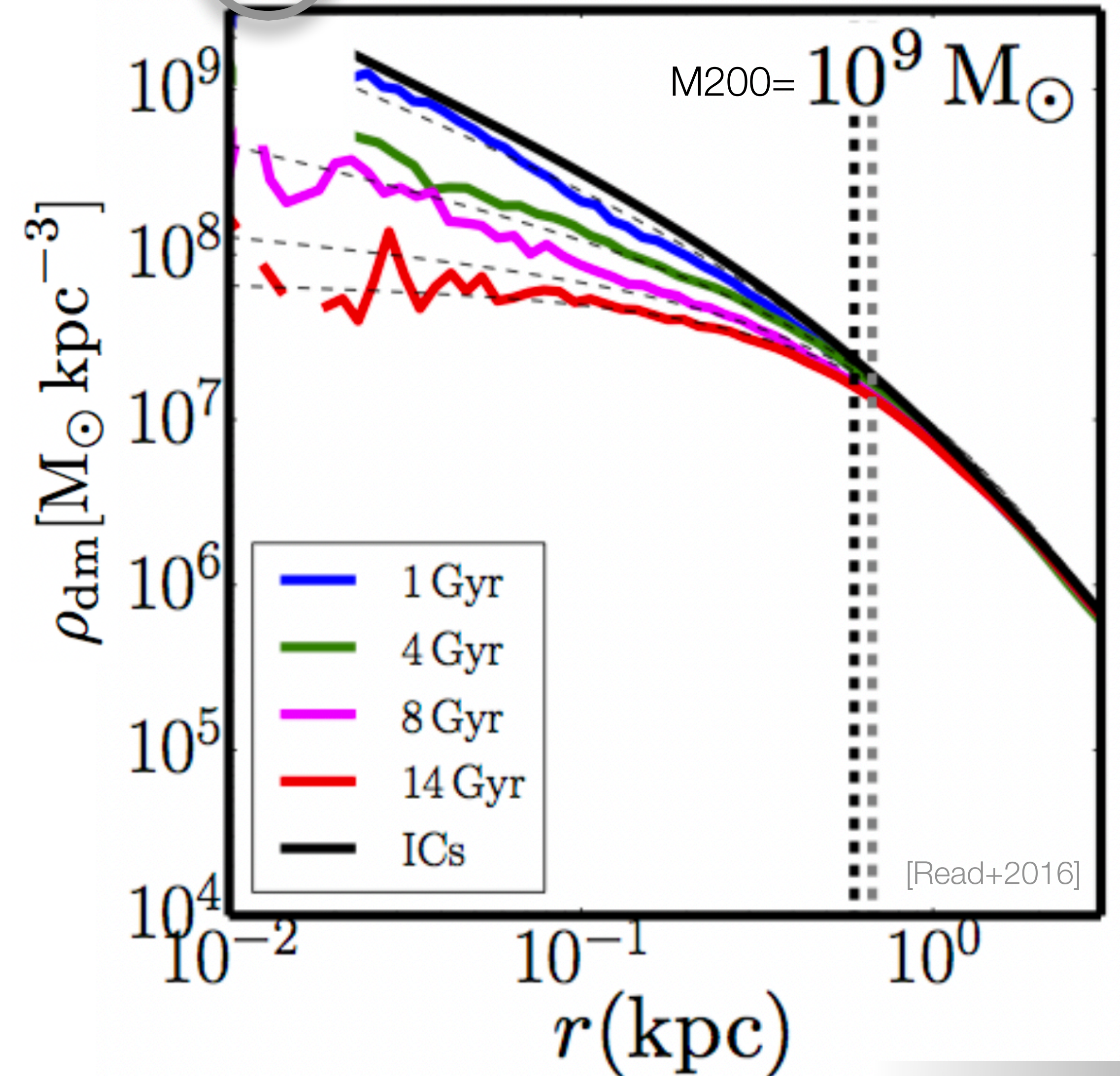
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## Pure Dark Matter-only simulations



RAMSES code with feedback from Agertz+13  
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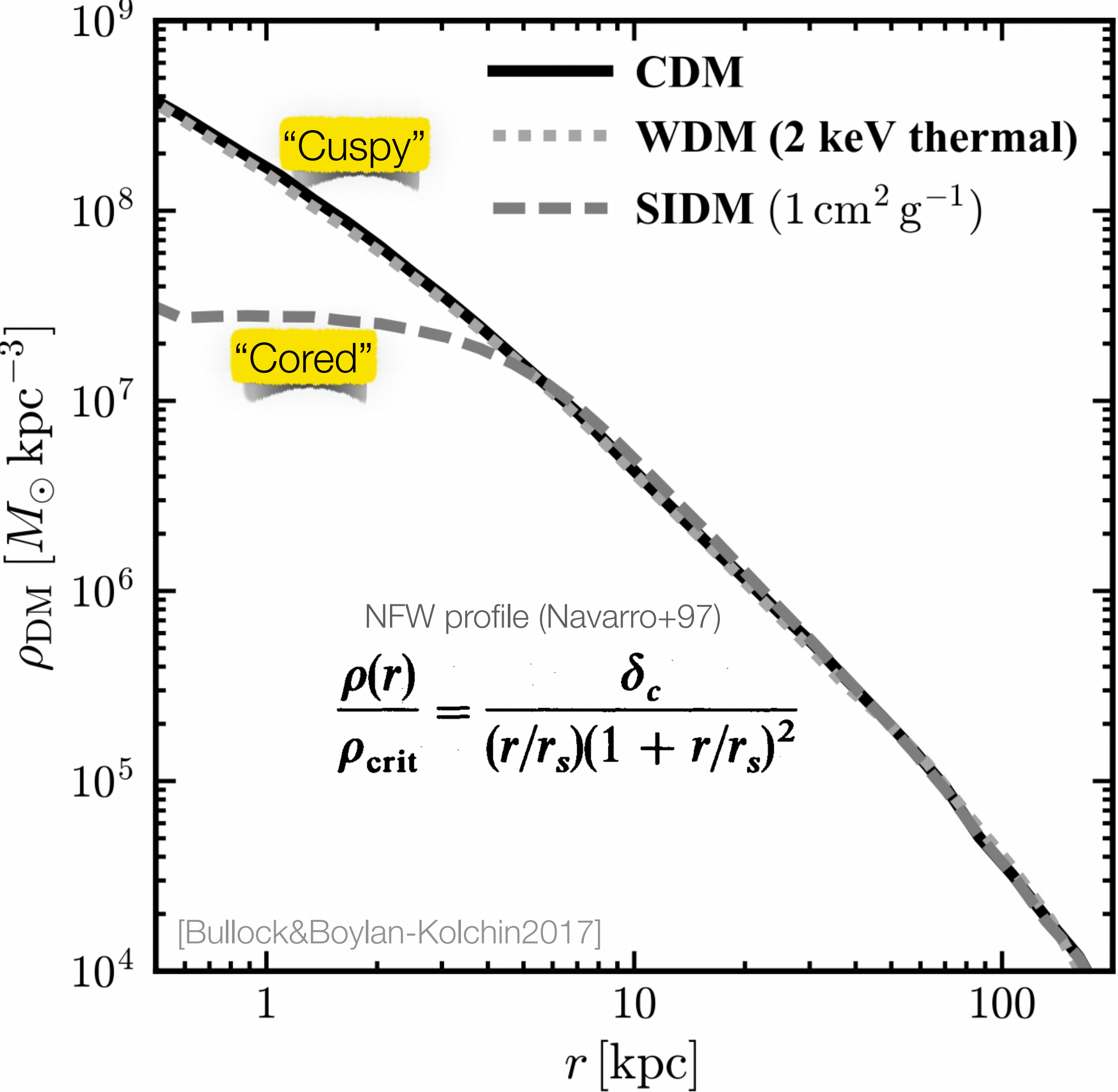
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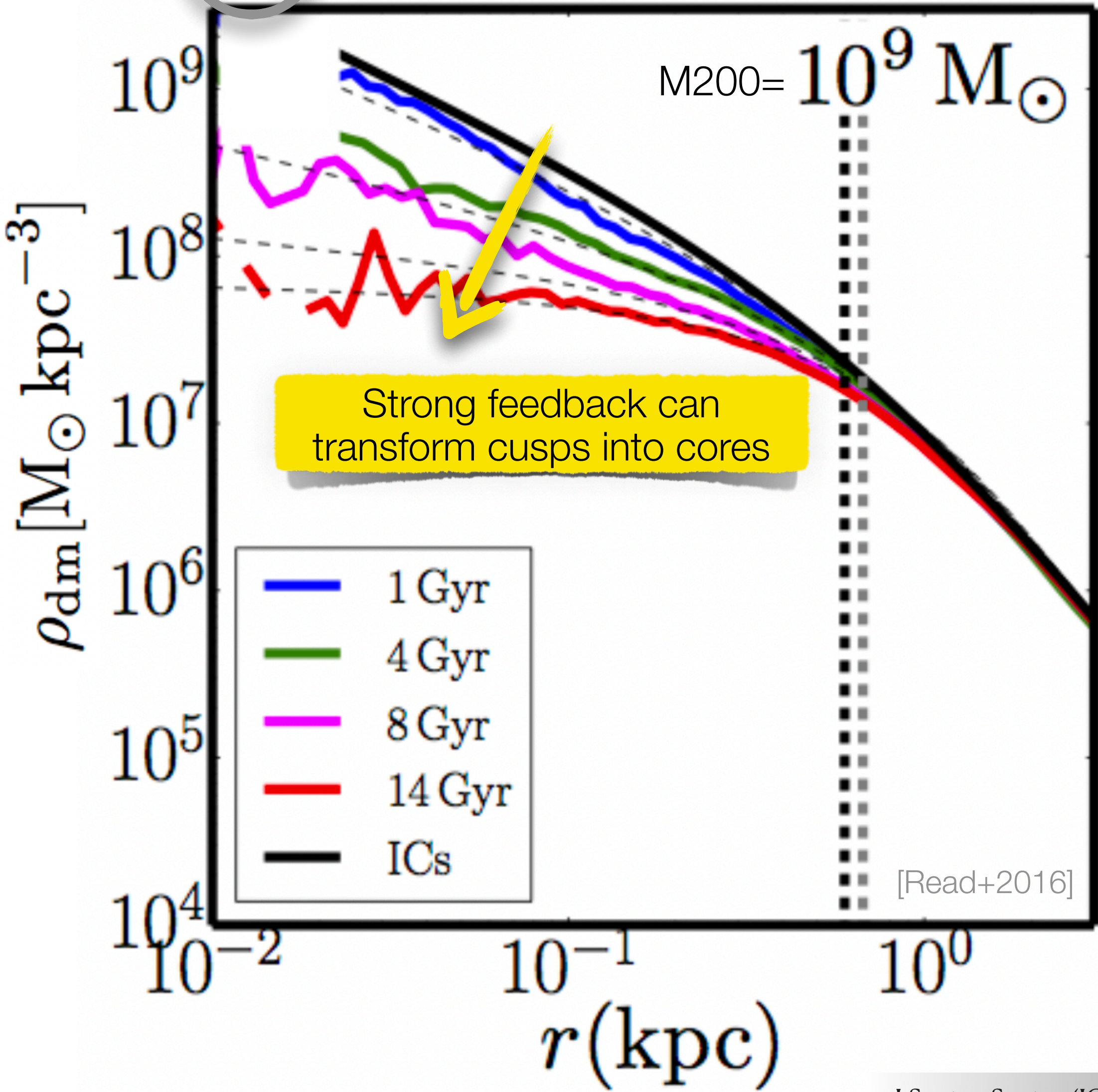
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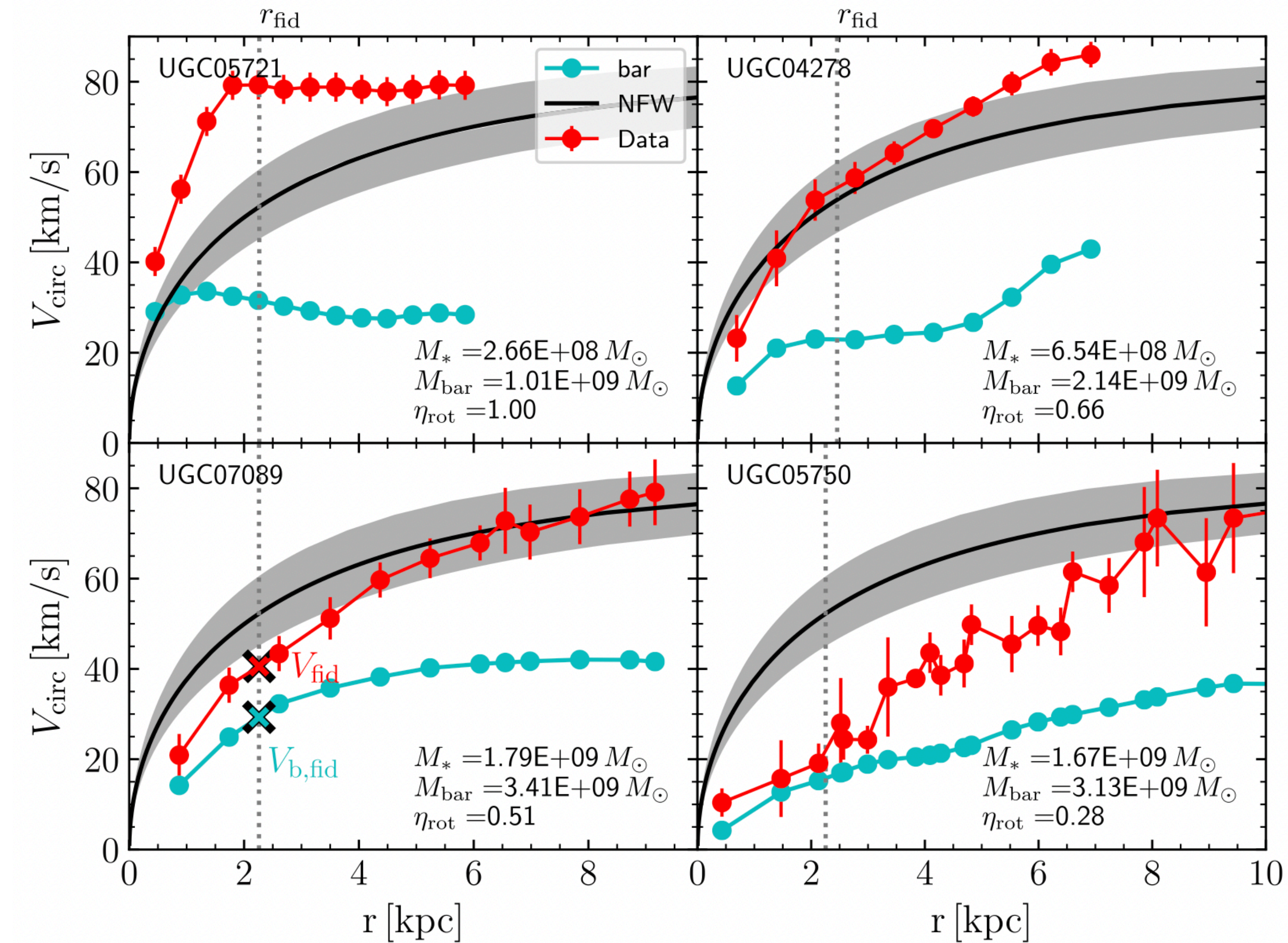
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# Diversity of dwarf rotation curves

[Santos-Santos+2020a, see also Oman+15]

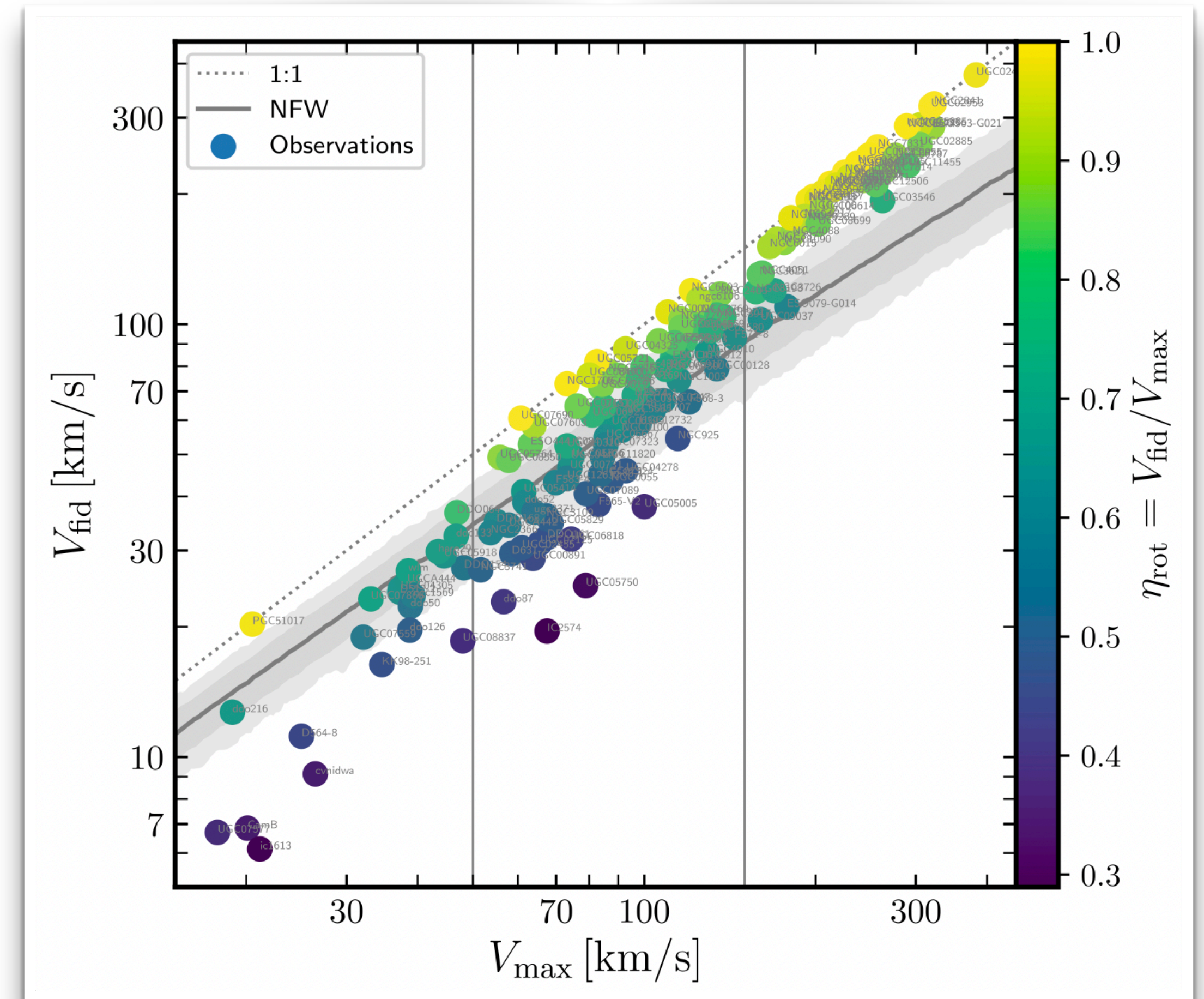
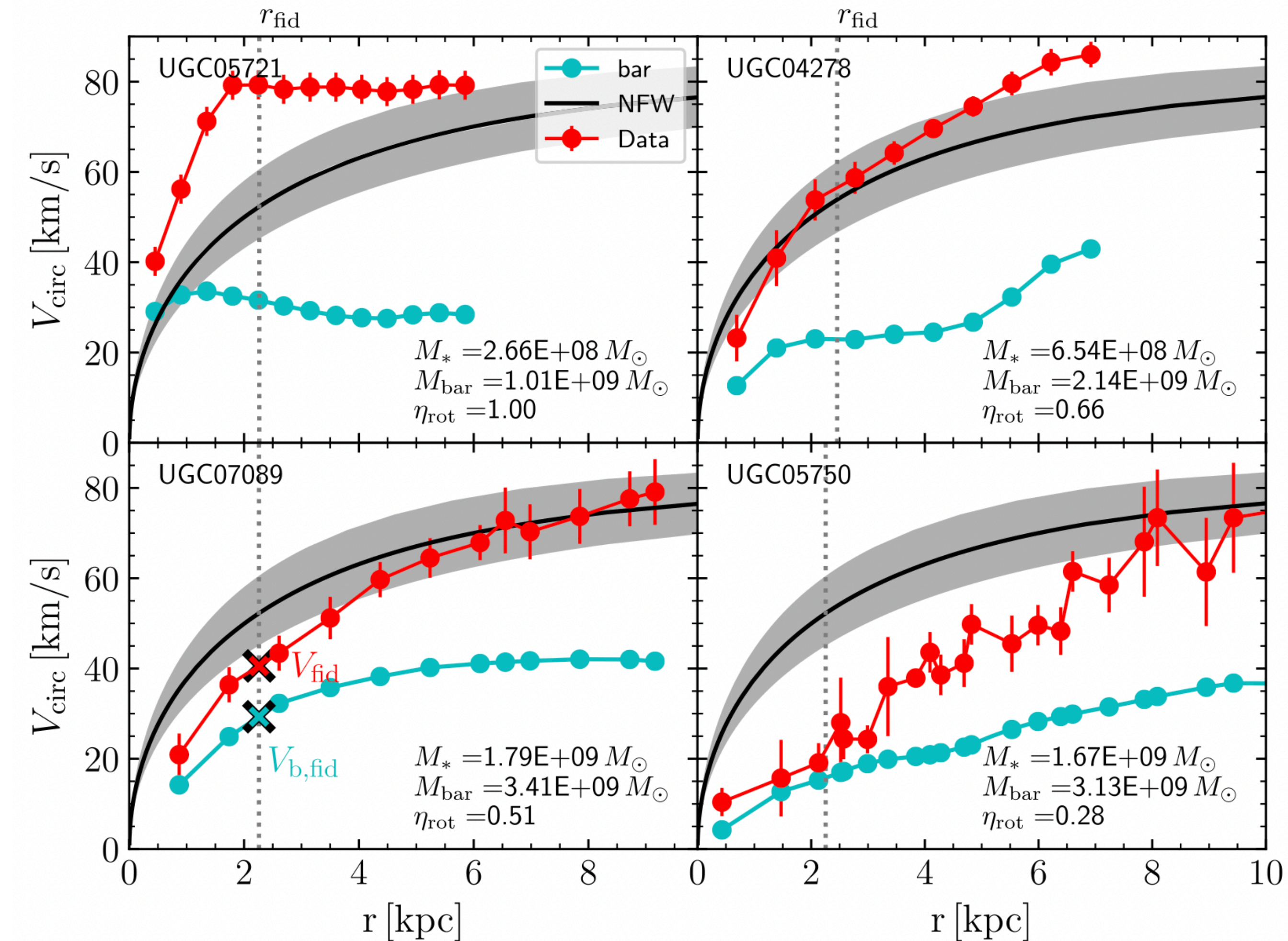


CDM predicts fixed “cuspy” rotation curve shape at given mass. Observations suggest diversity of shapes.

“Cusp-Core problem” e.g. Flores&Primack94; Moore1994; de Blok+2001; Gentile+2004; de Blok2010



# Diversity of dwarf rotation curves



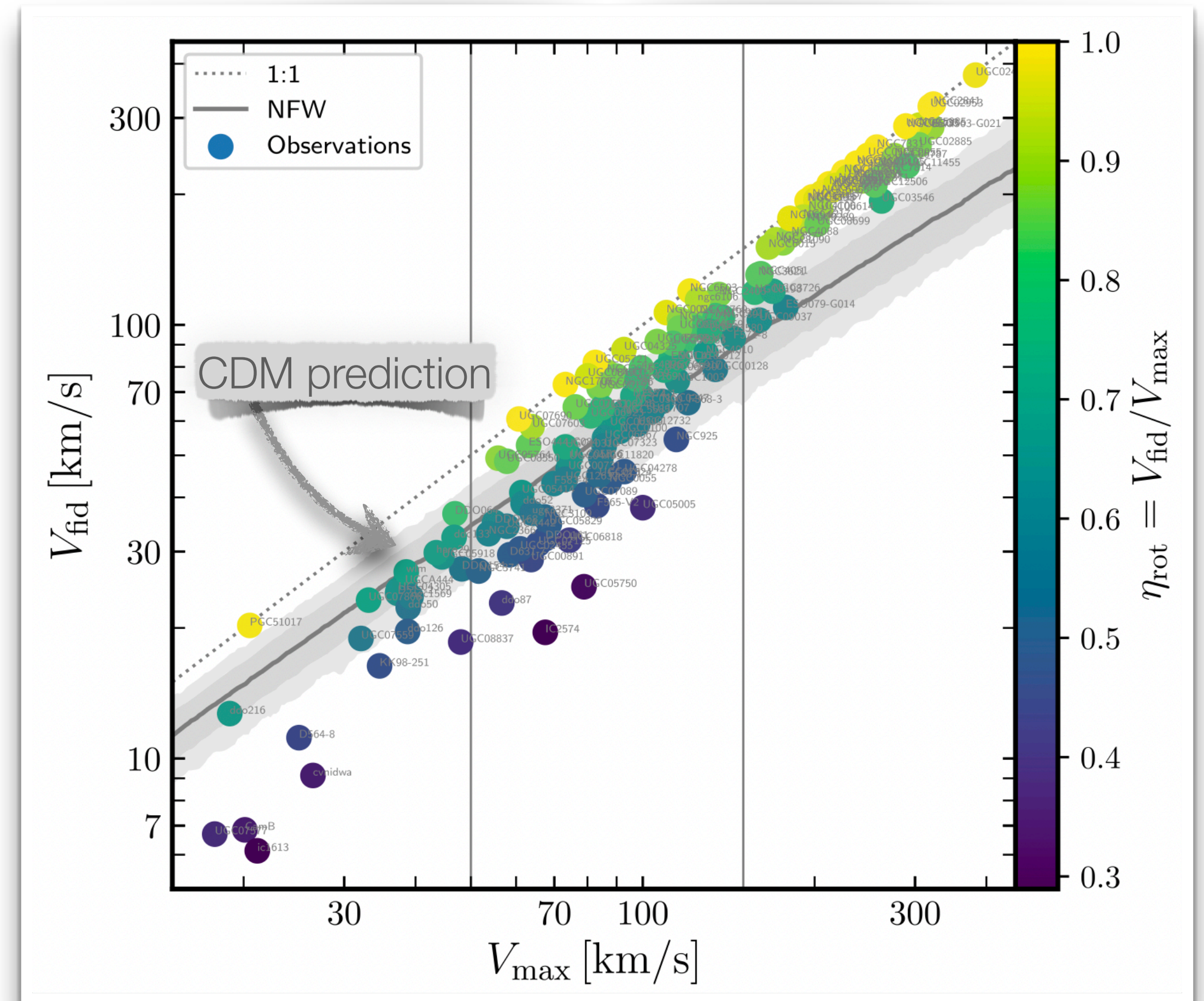
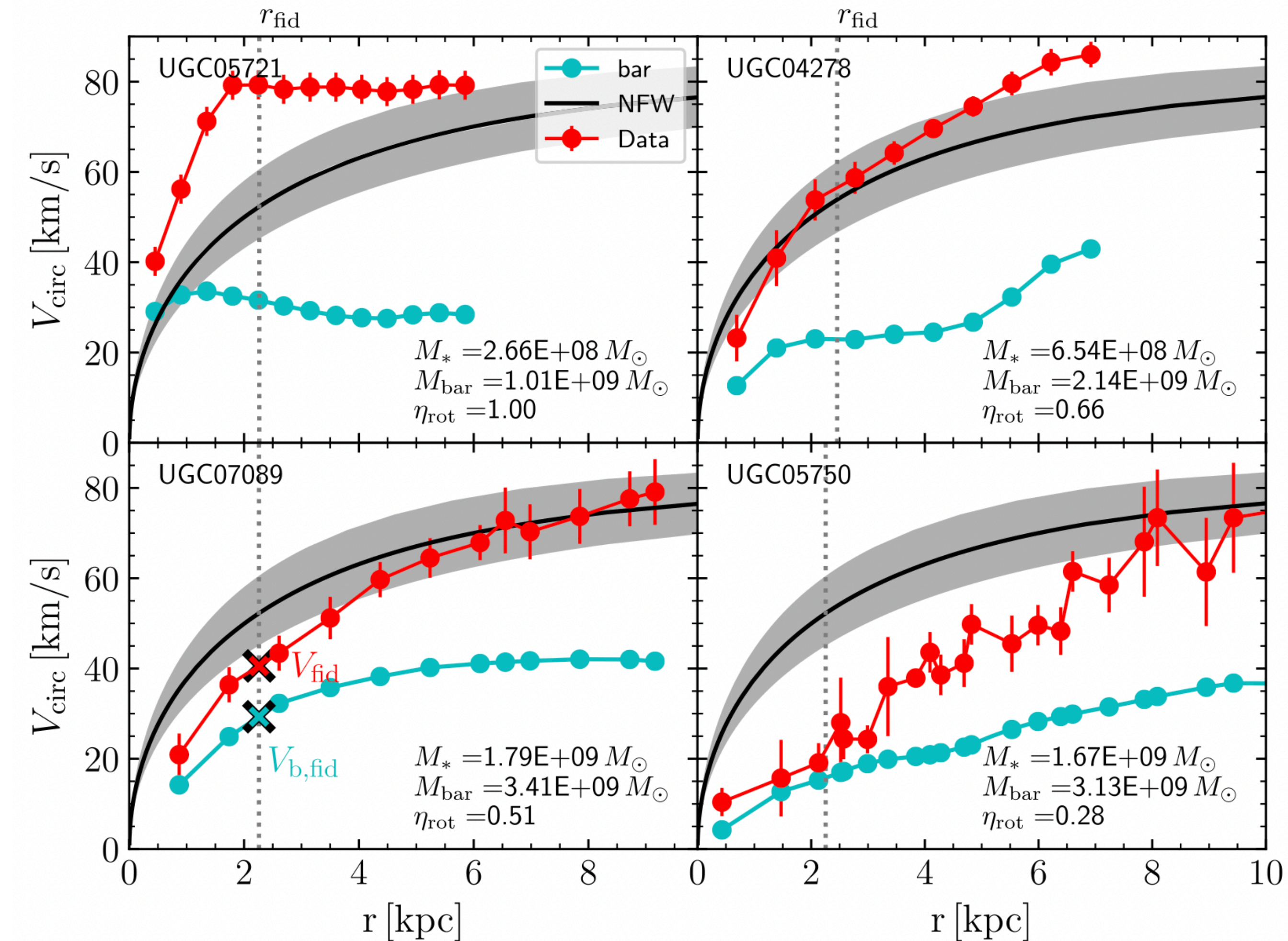
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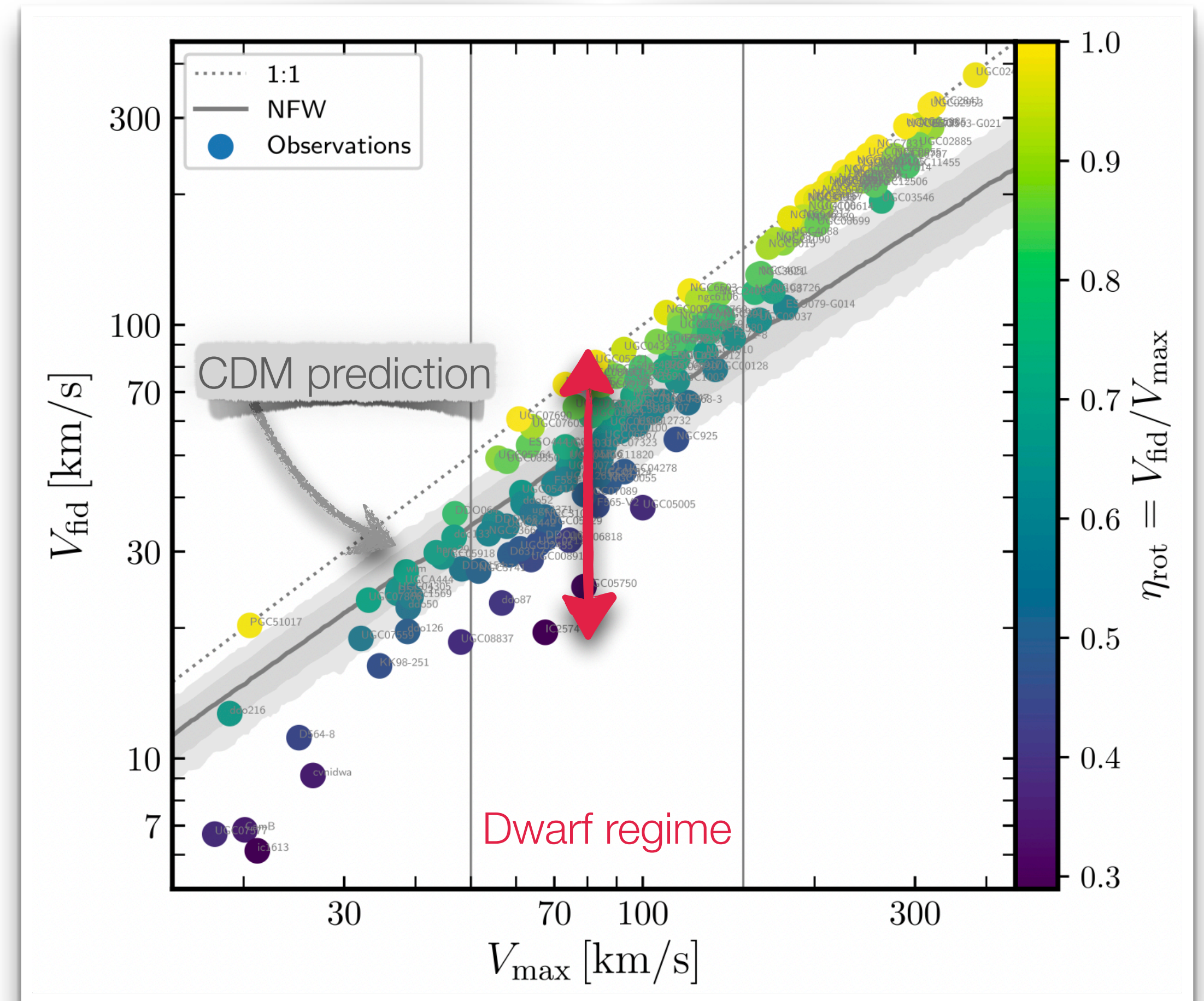
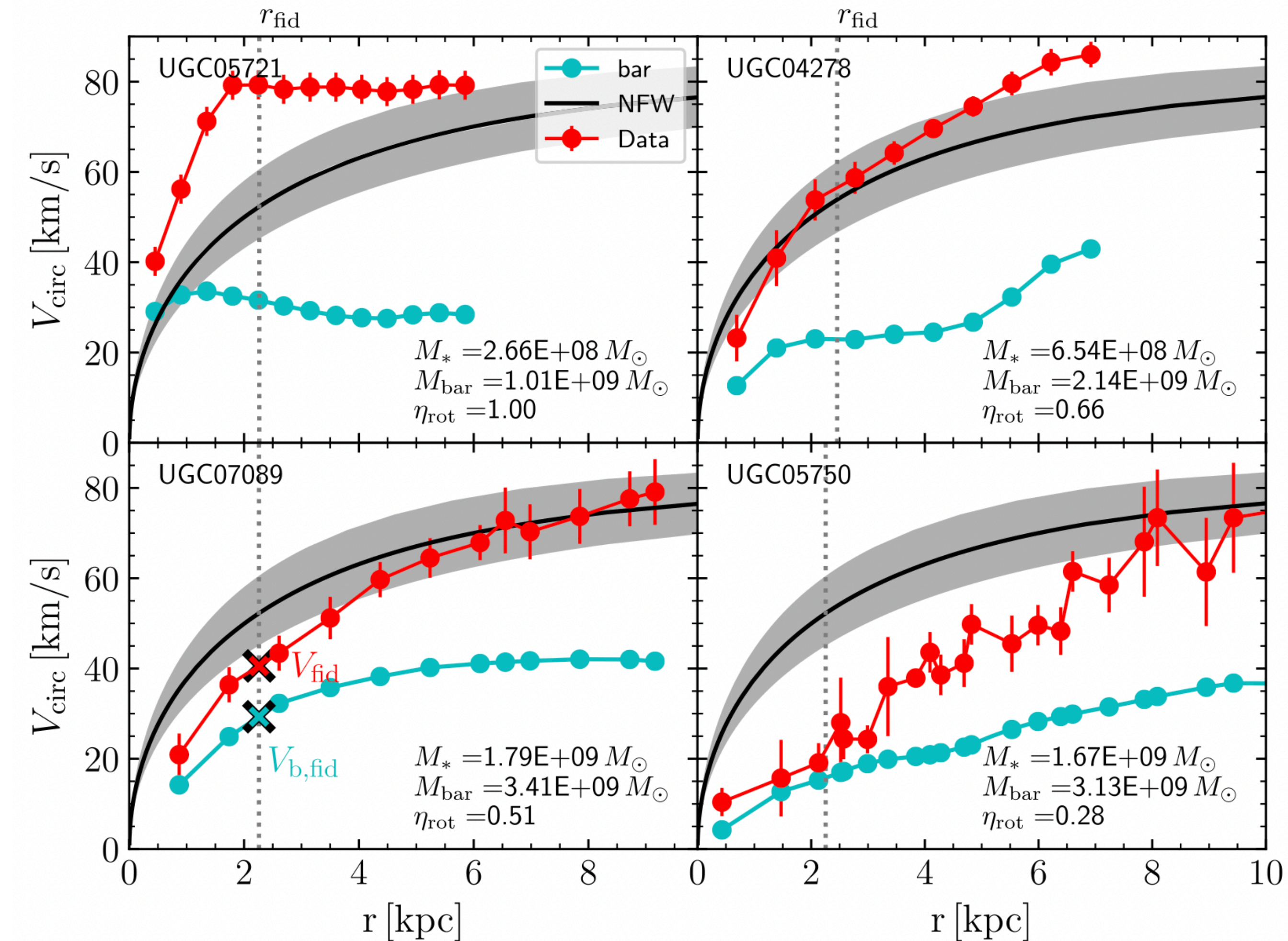
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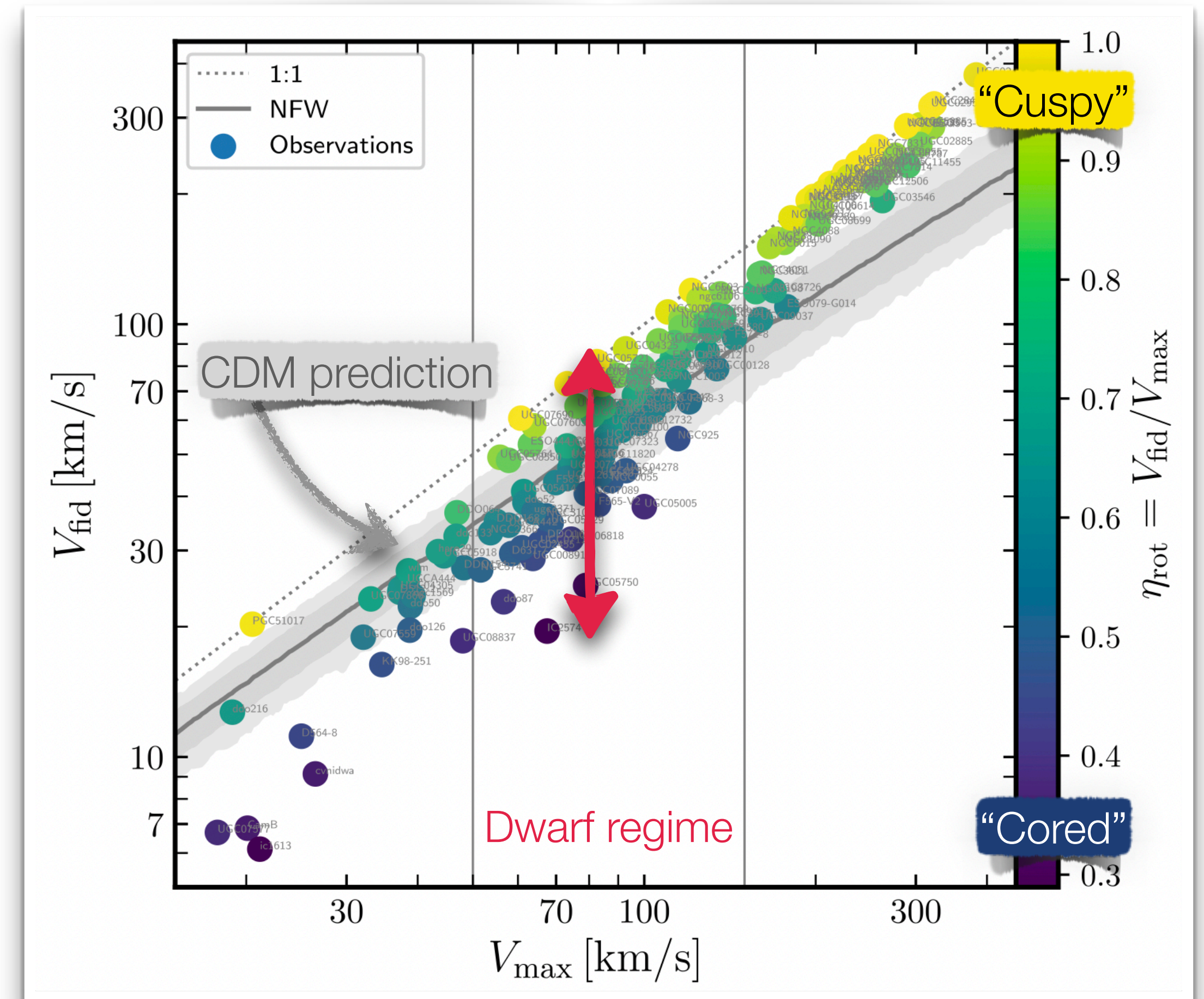
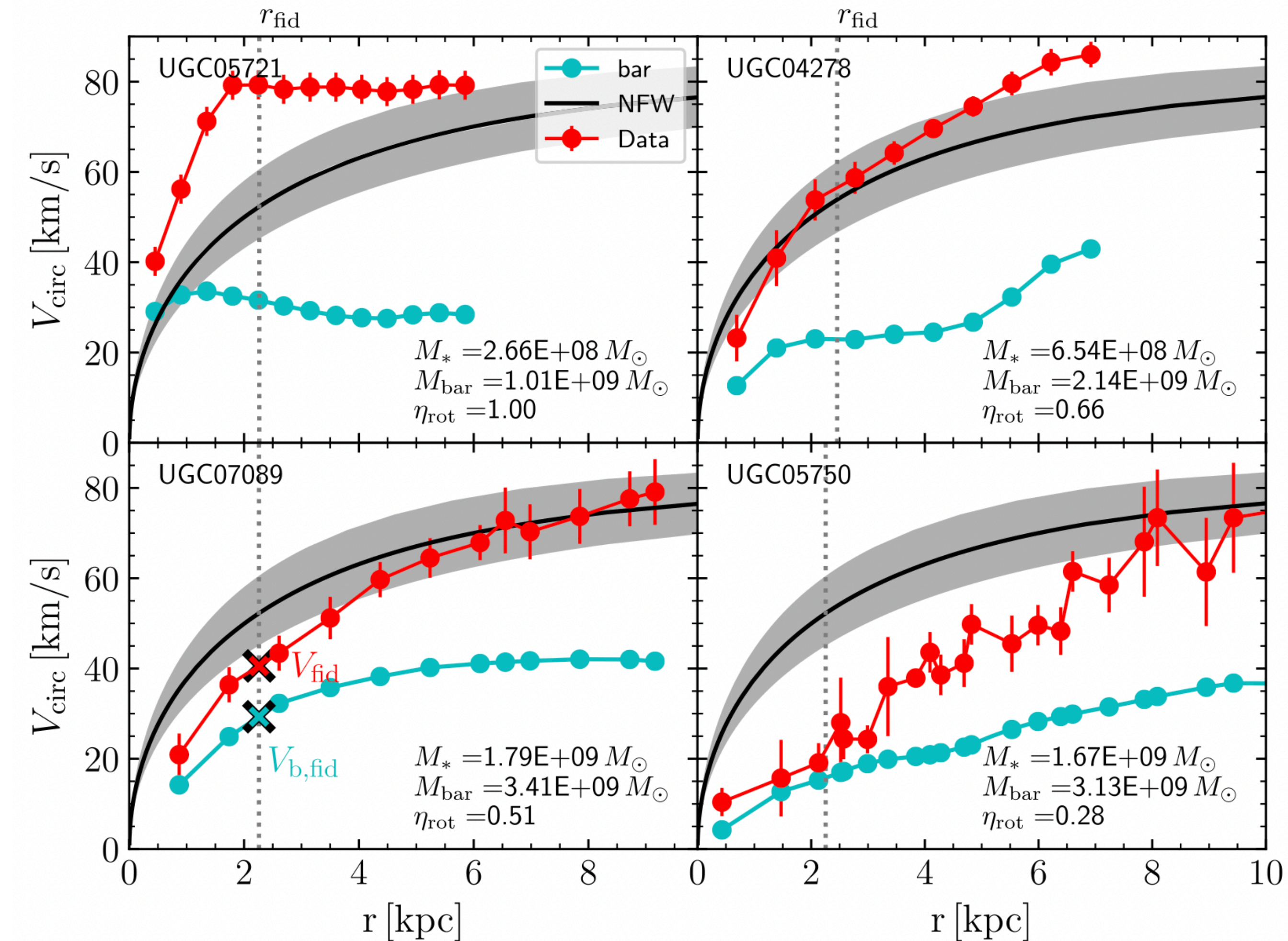
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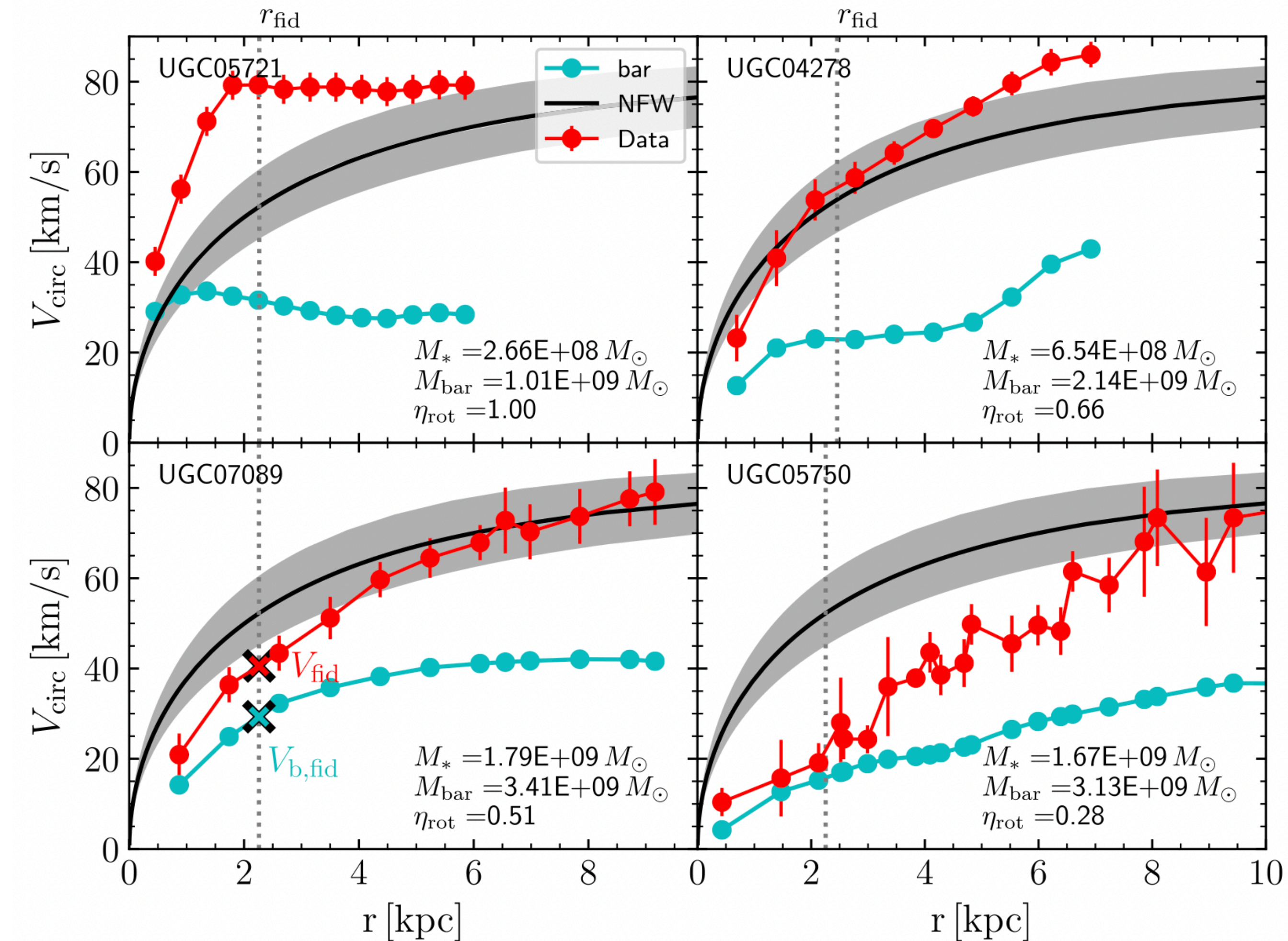


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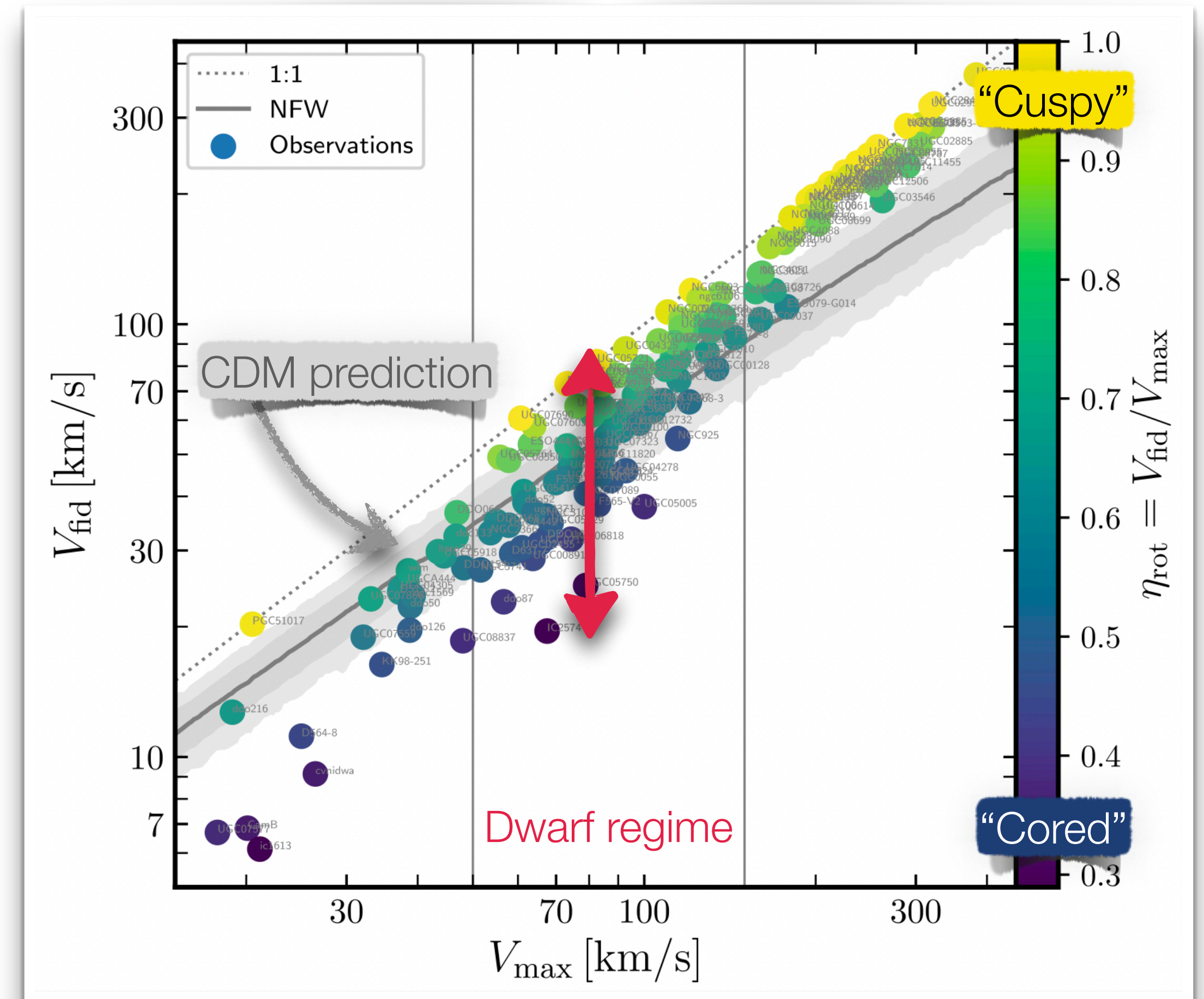


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- Baryon-induced cores+cusps?

[e.g, Navarro+96, Pontzen&Governato12, Read+16, Benitez-Llambay+19]

- Self-interacting Dark Matter?

[e.g, Spergel+2000, Rocha+2013, Tulin&Yu+2018Ren+2019, Kaplinghat+19]

- Observational uncertainties?

[e.g, Marasco+2018, Oman+2019, Roper+23]





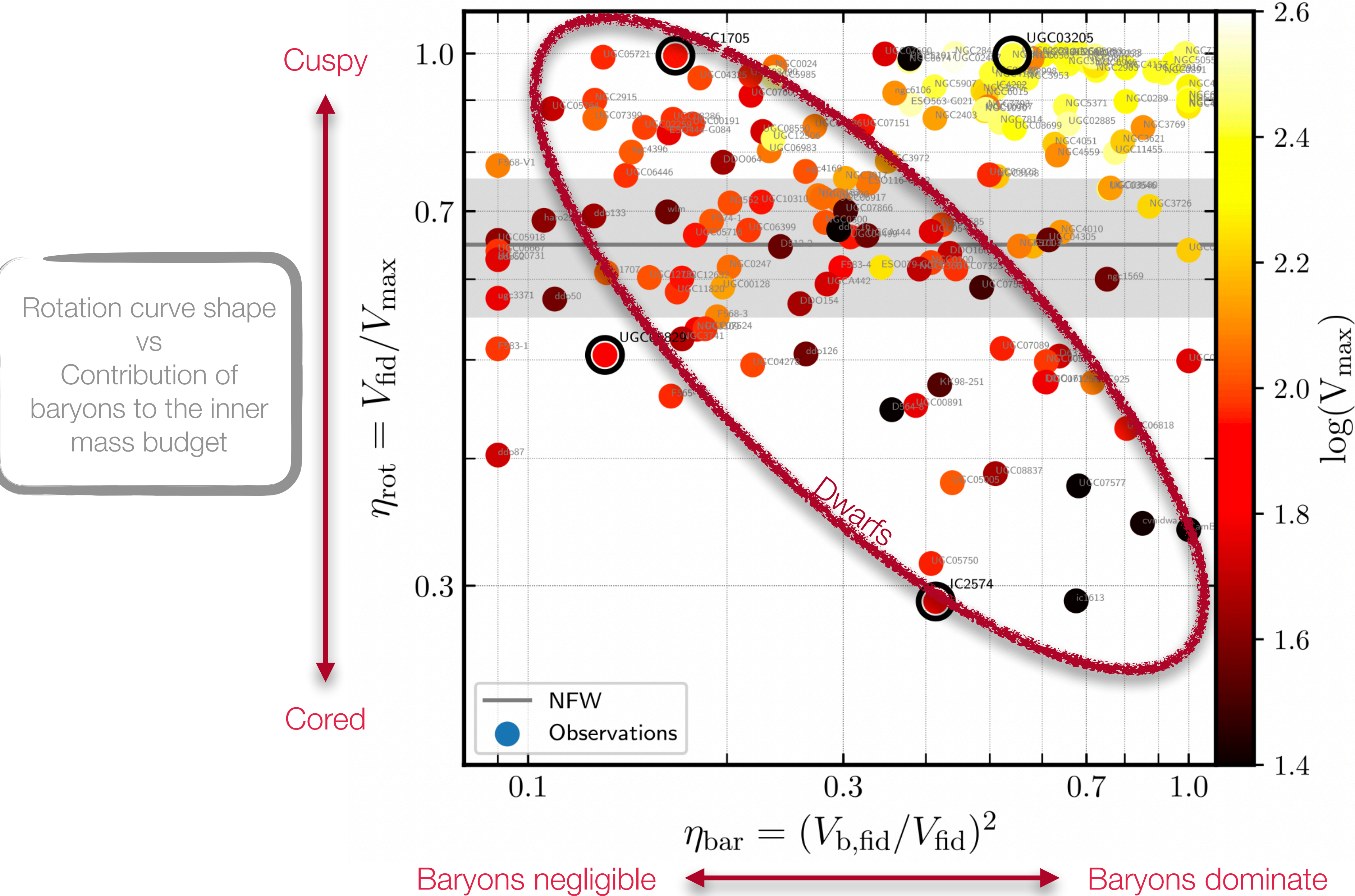






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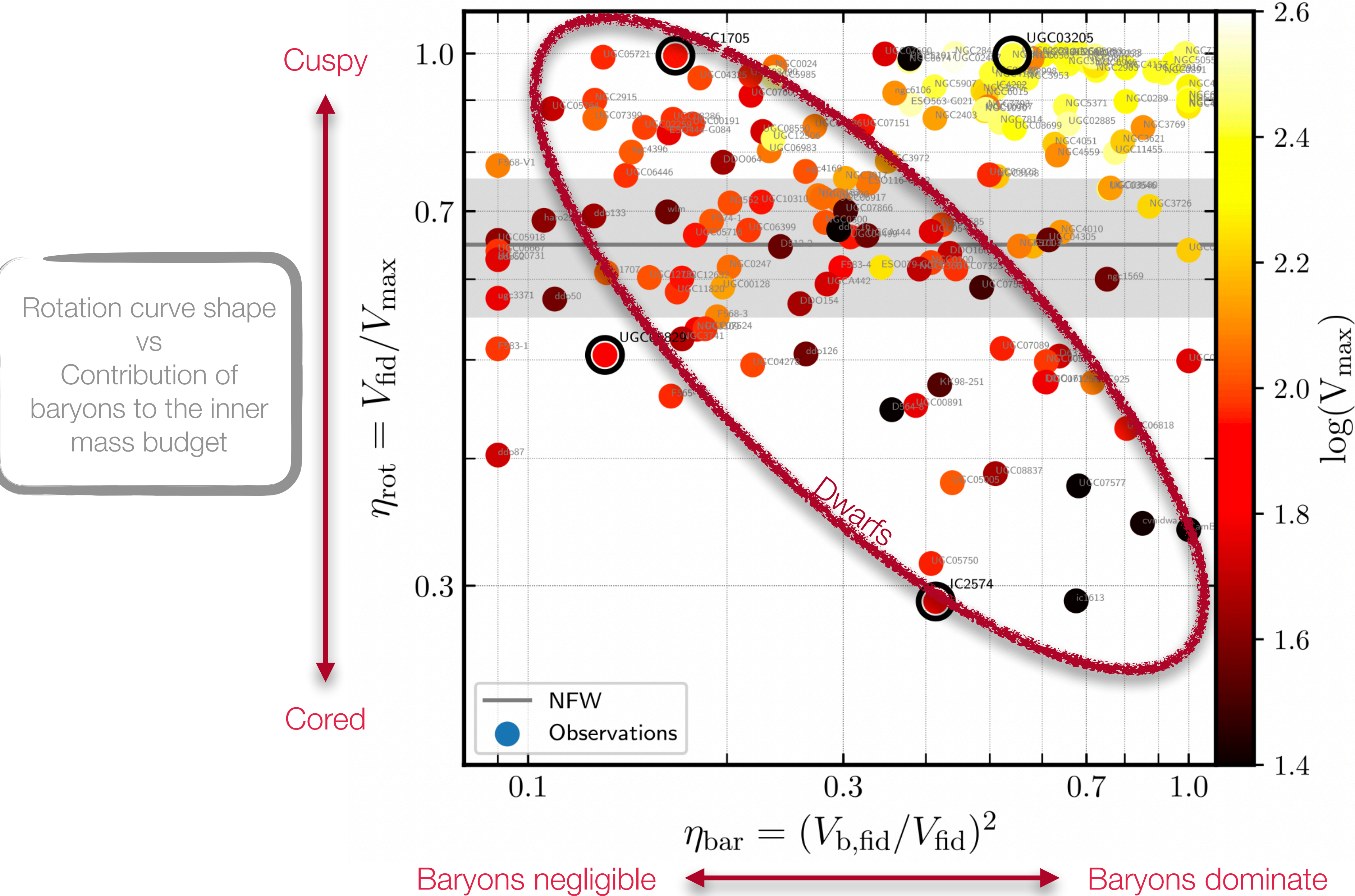
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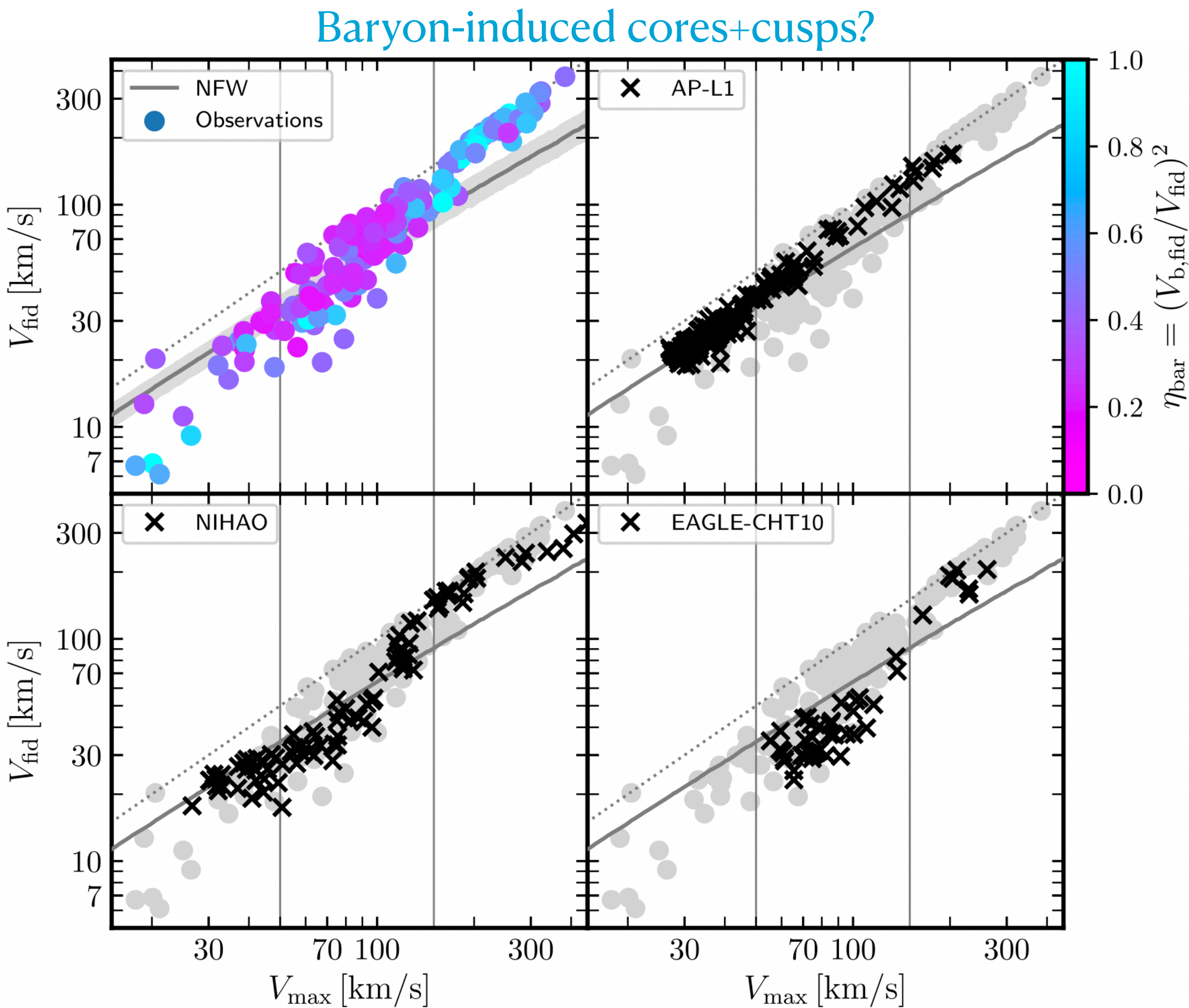
Counter-intuitive trend for  
models where baryonic  
feedback outflows  
produce dark matter  
cores



**APOSTLE-L1**  
mDM~5e4Msun; mbar~1e4Msun  
Fiducial EAGLE model with low  
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**EAGLE-CHT10**  
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# Diversity of dwarf rotation curves

[Santos-Santos+2020a]

## Baryon-induced cores+cusps?

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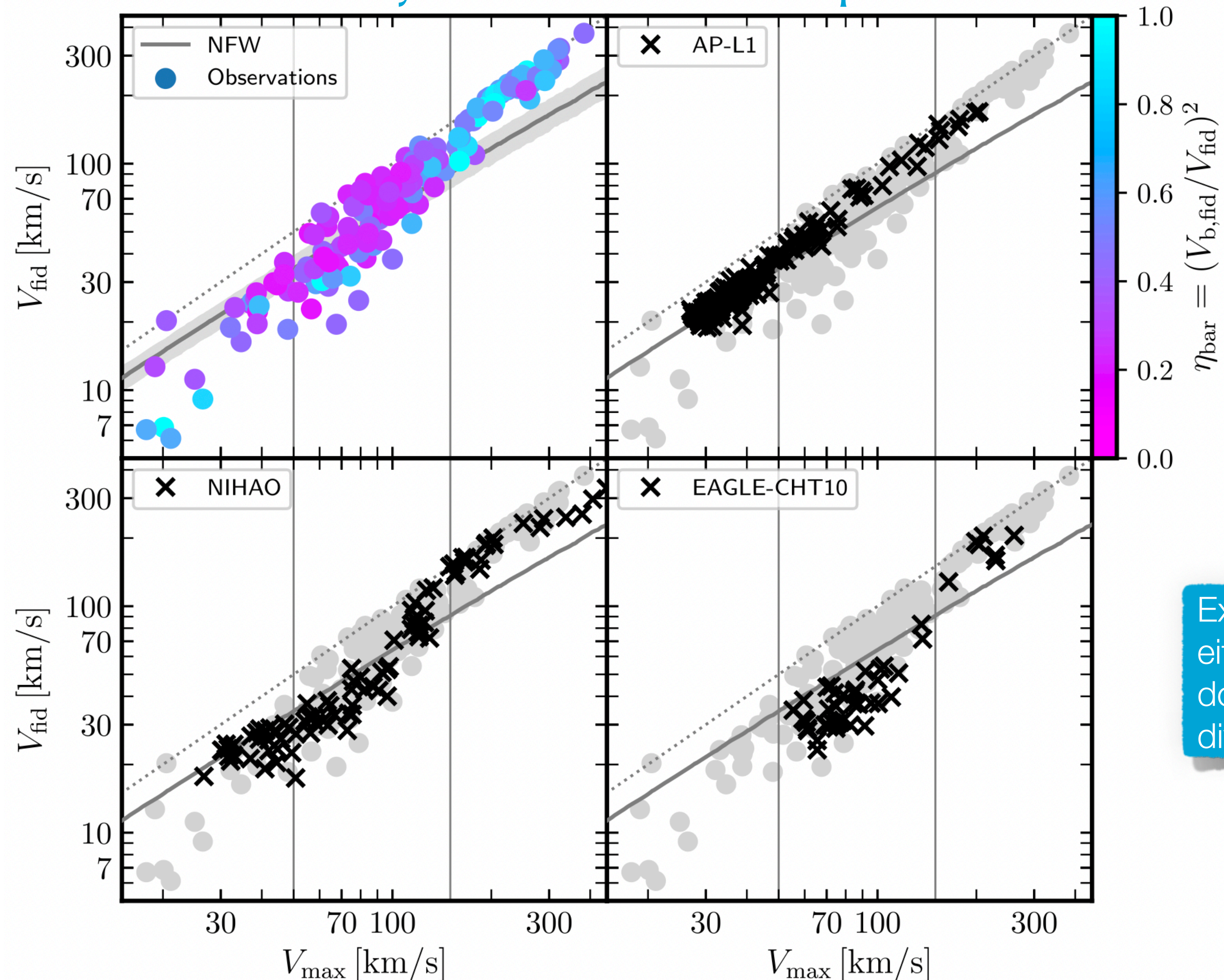
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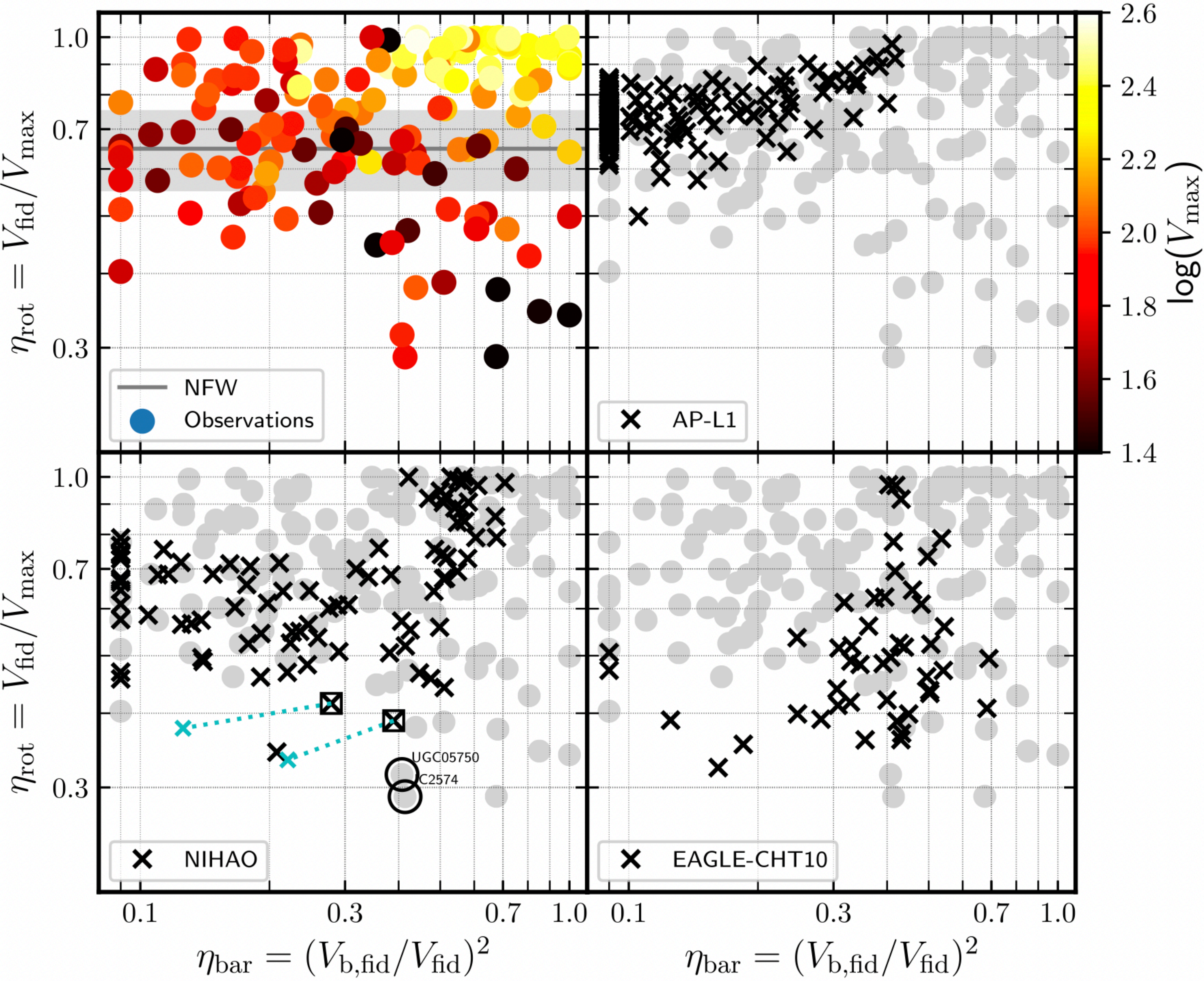
Existing models produce  
either cores or cusps, but  
do not reproduce the full  
diversity



# Diversity of dwarf rotation curves

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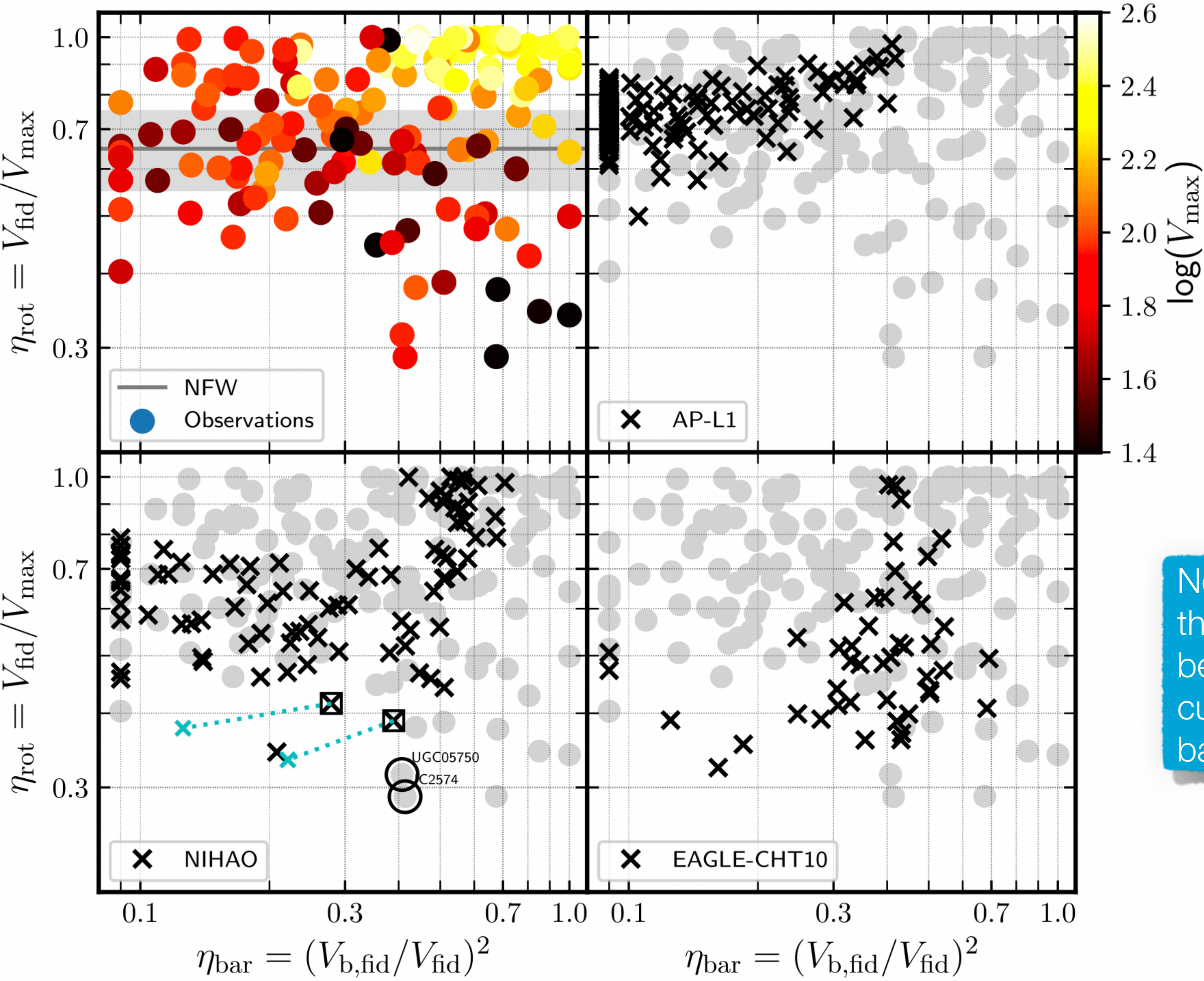




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No model reproduces the observed trend between rotation curve shape and baryonic contribution



# Diversity of dwarf rotation curves

[Santos-Santos+2020a]

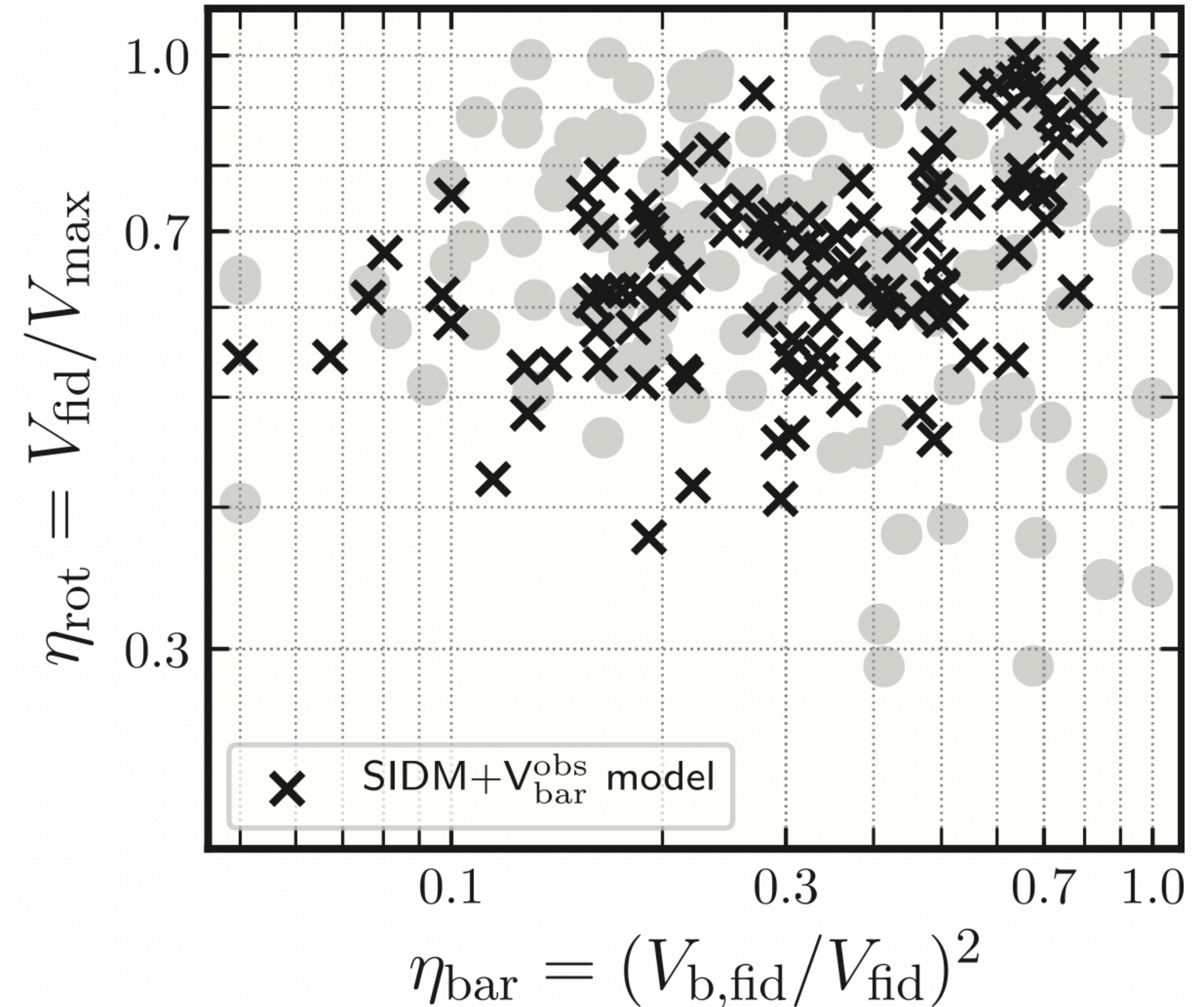
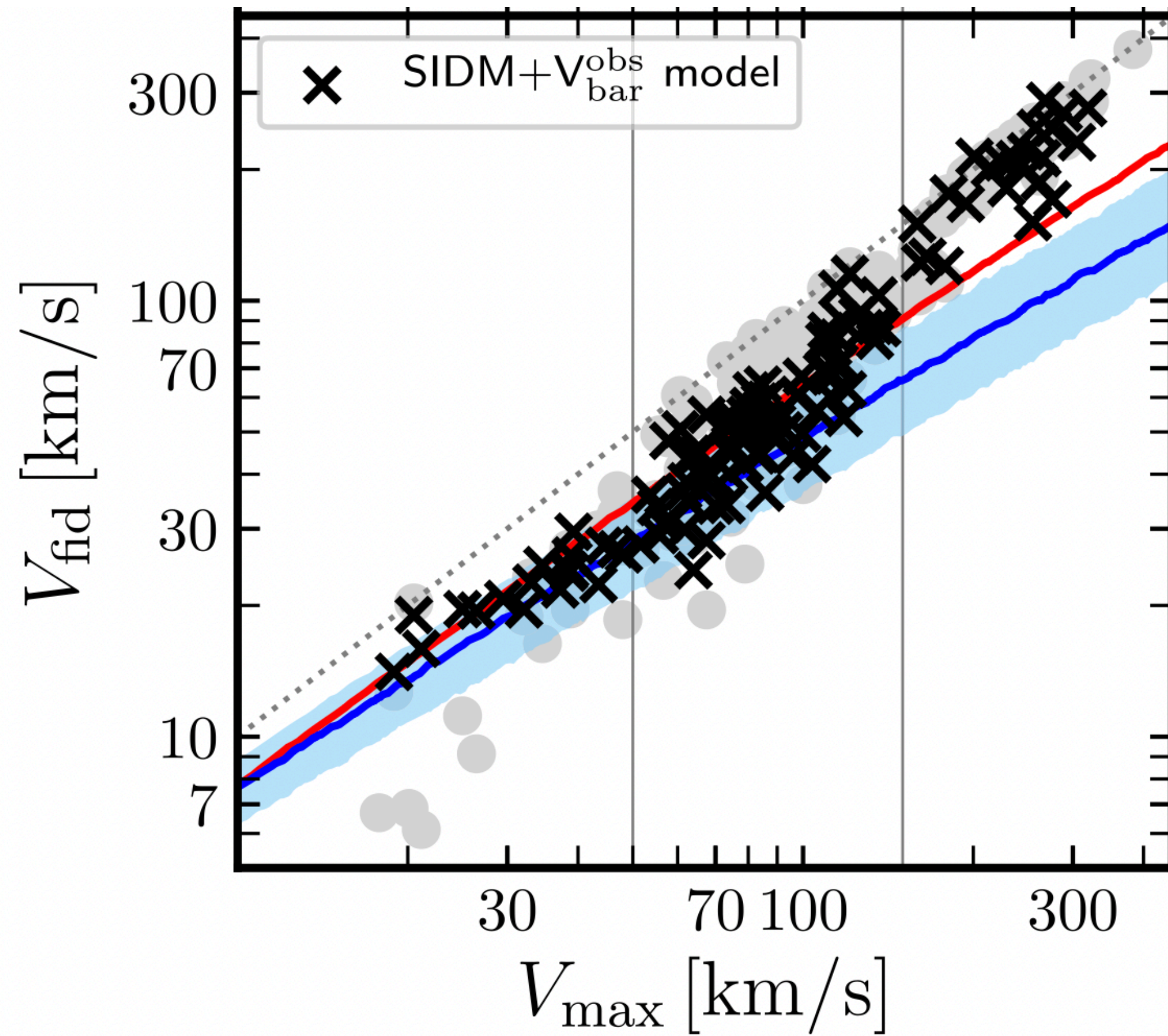
SIDM +  $V_{\text{bar}}^{\text{obs}}$  model

SIDM DM-only simulation  $\sigma=10 \text{ cm}^2/\text{g}$

+ Analytical model to add baryon effects following  
observed  $V_{\text{bar}}$  data

*In it's simplest version:  
elastic velocity-independent  
cross-section*

## Self-interacting Dark Matter?





# Diversity of dwarf rotation curves

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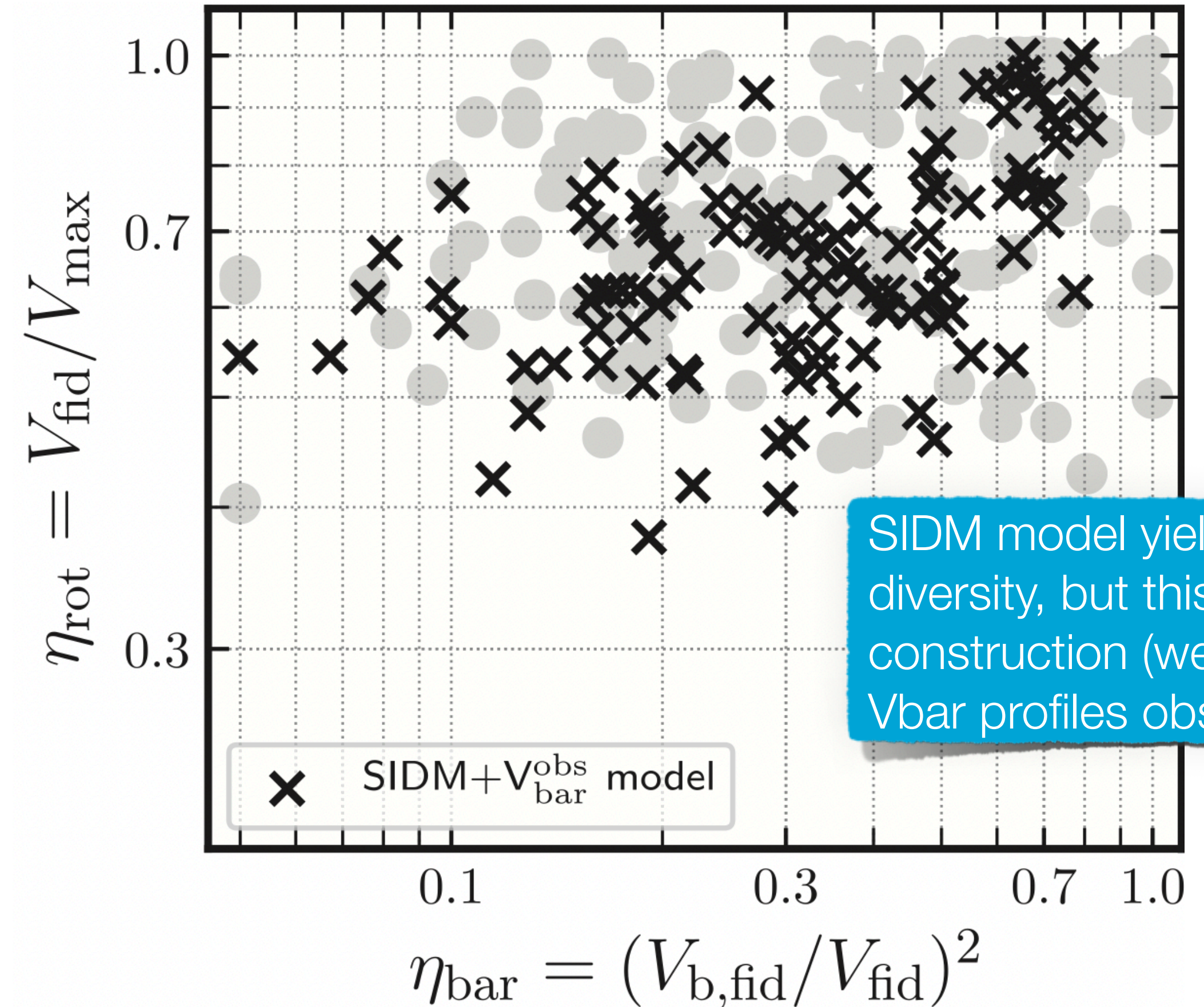
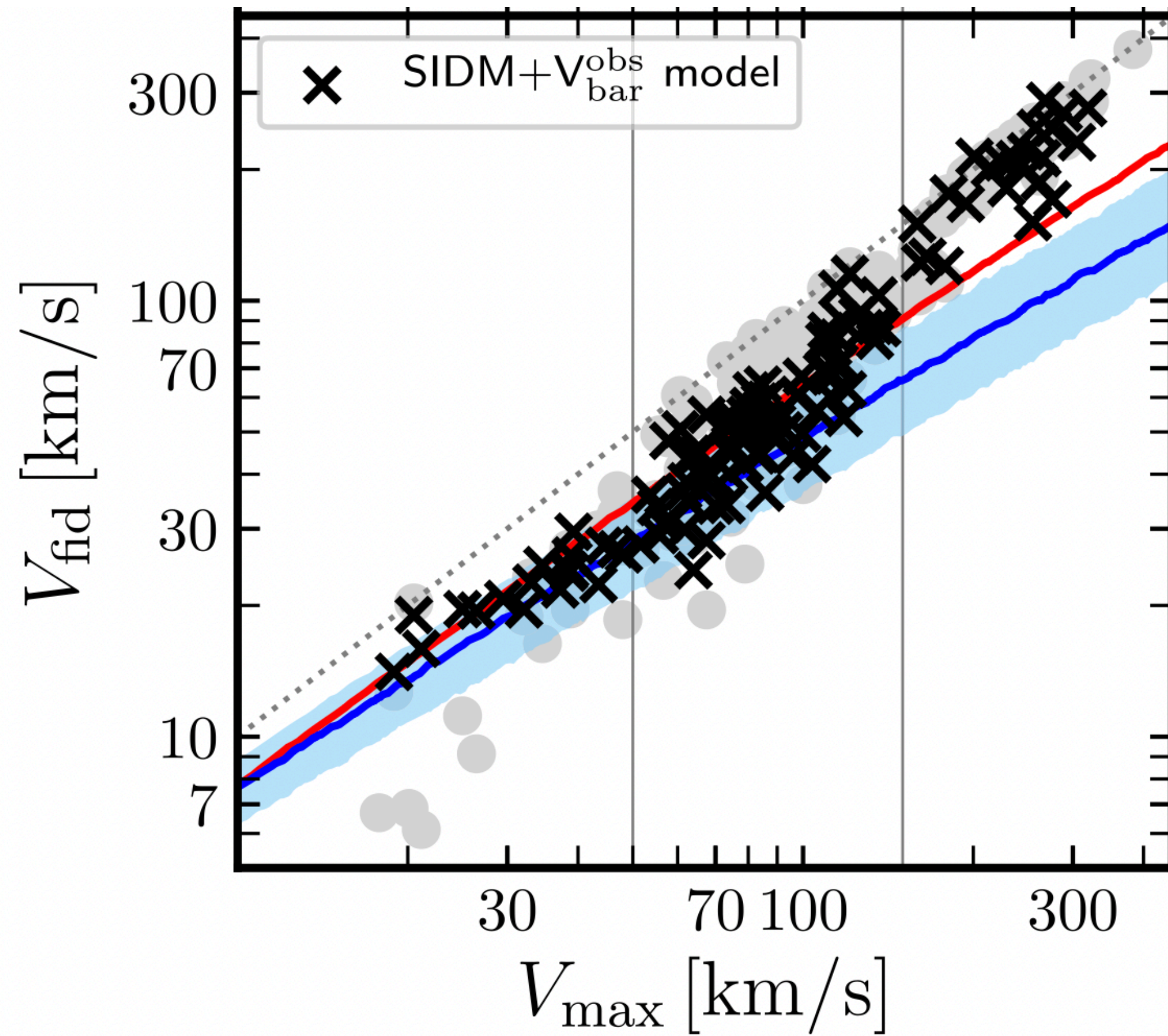
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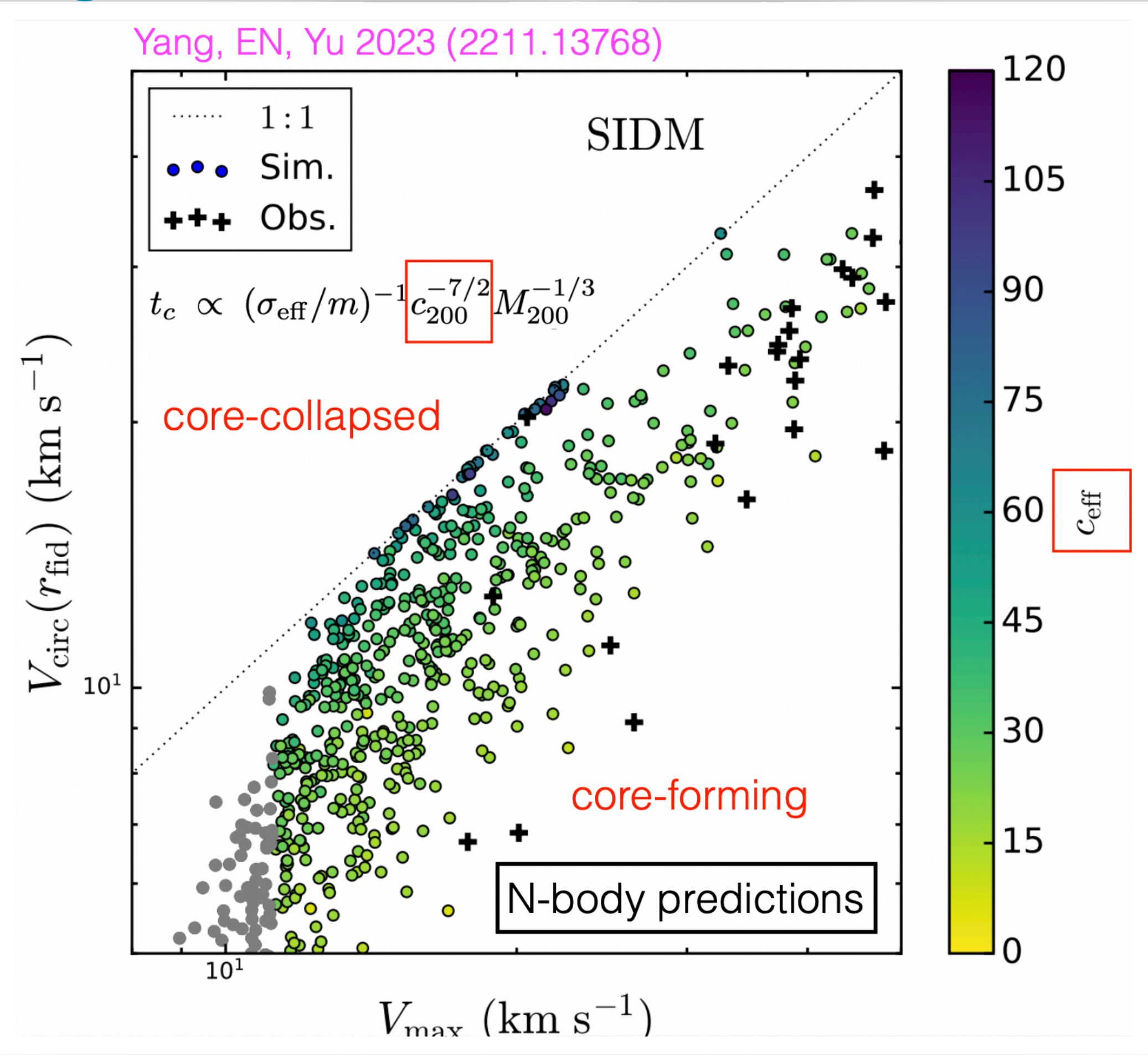
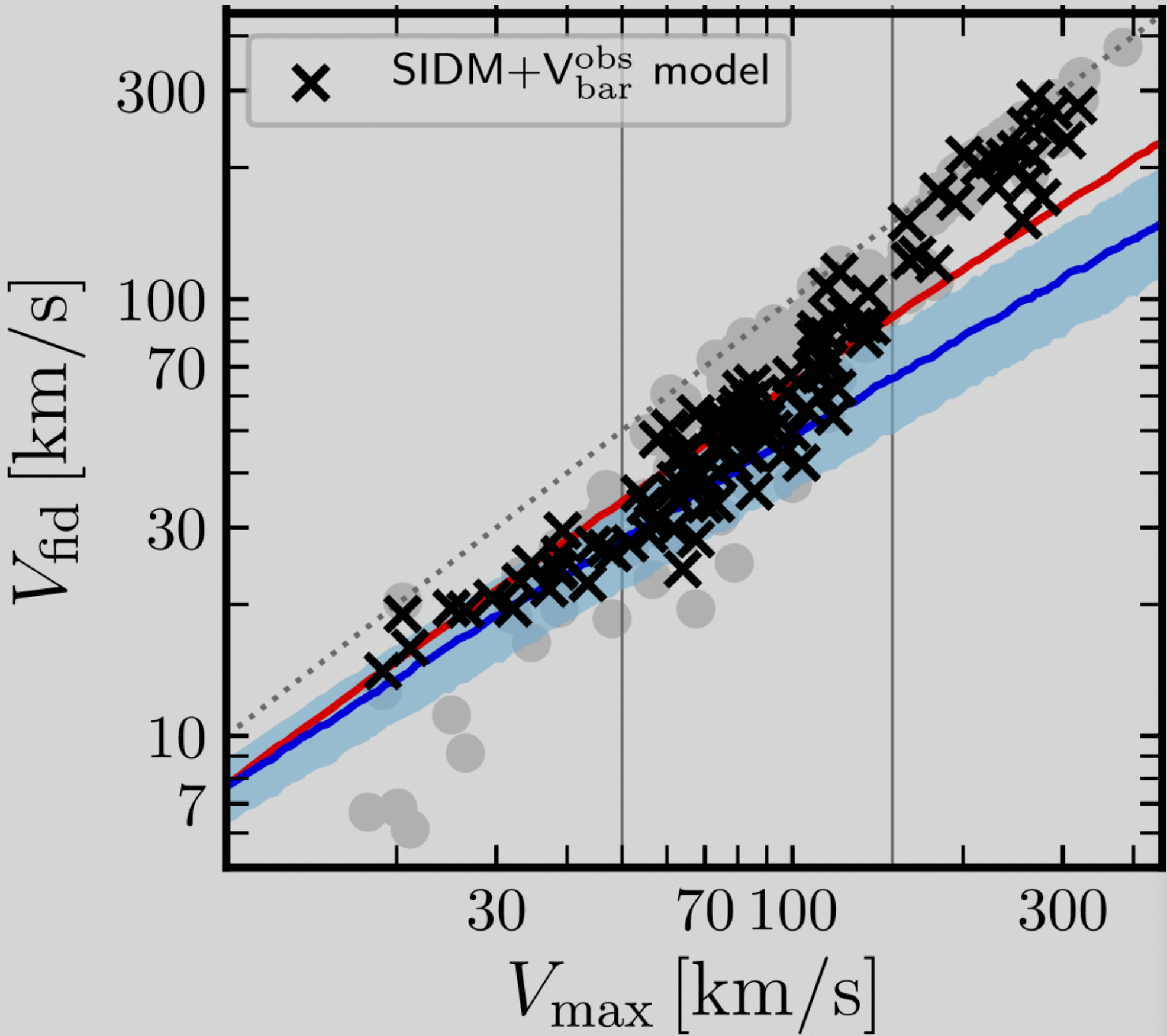


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Models more  
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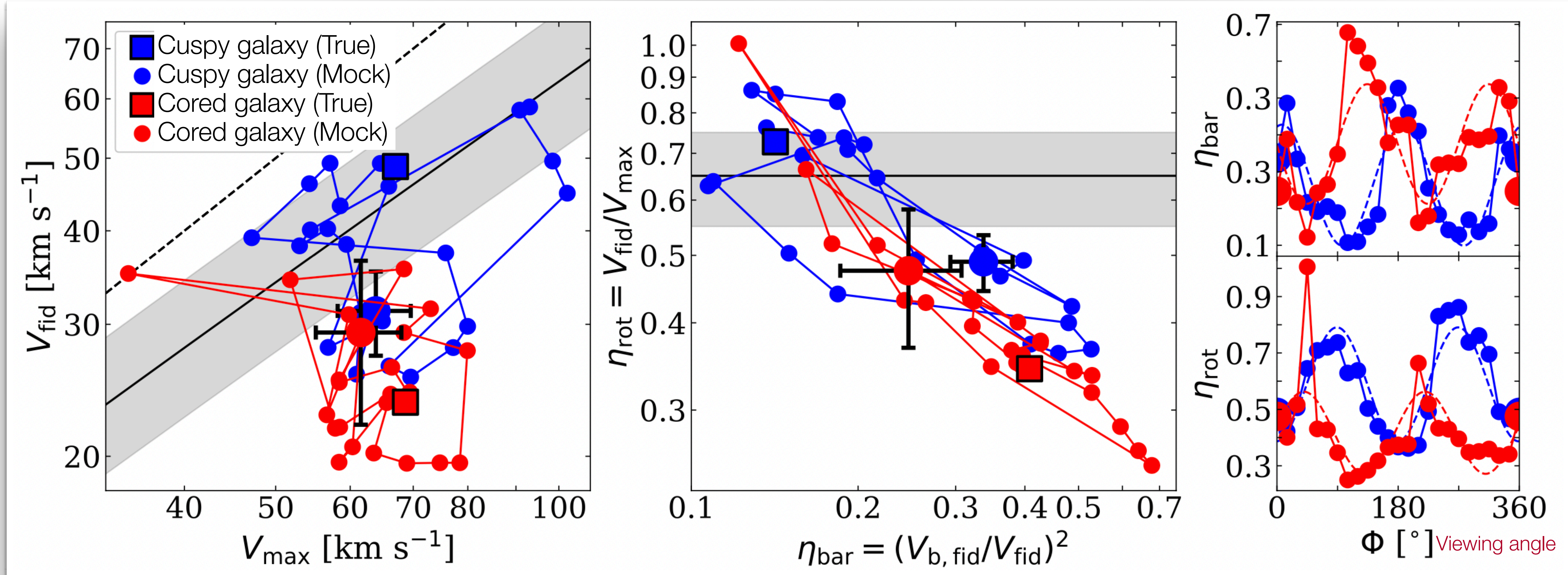


# Diversity of dwarf rotation curves

[see also Oman+19, Santos-Santos+2020a]

## Observational uncertainties?

[Roper, SS, +2023]



If we analyse simulated galaxies using **same methods as observers use**, inferred gas rotational velocities are biased towards the presence of a 'core', even when the galaxy truly hosts a 'cusp'.

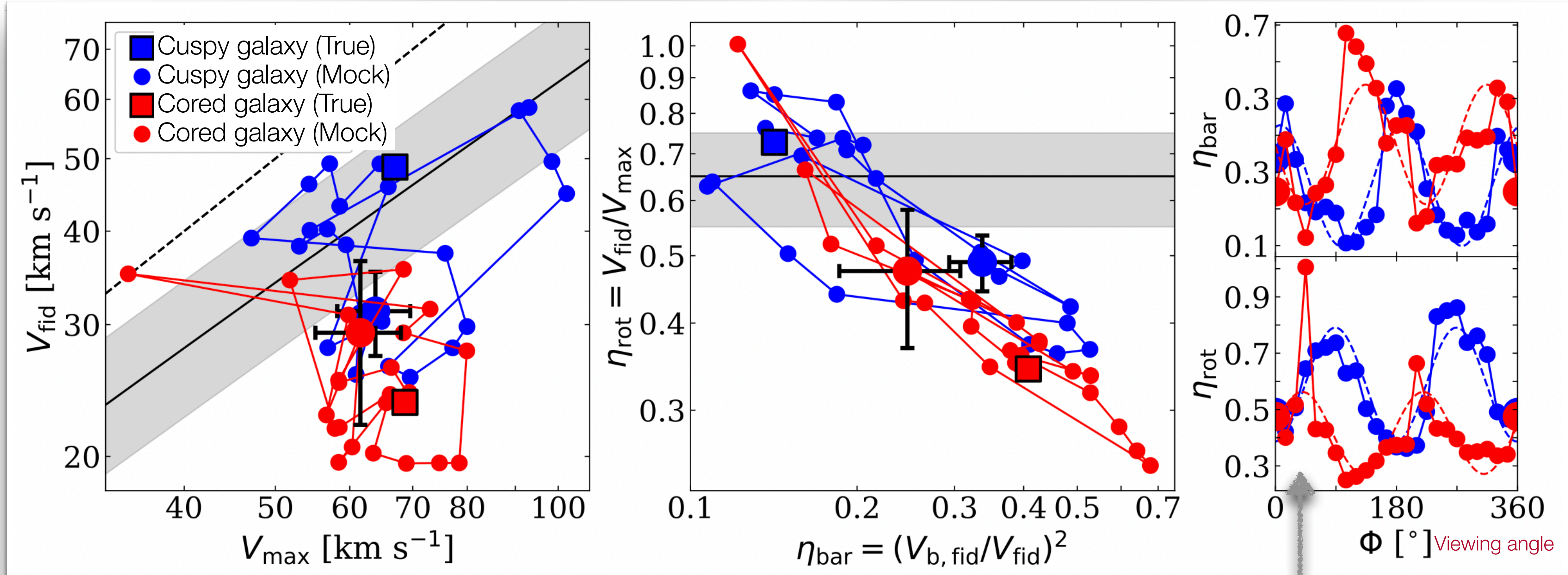


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Bisymmetric non-circular motions



# Diversity of dwarf rotation curves: **status**

- ✦ No existing model can reproduce the full diversity of observed dwarf rotation curve shapes
- ✦ Observations suggest baryons are negligible in ‘cuspy’ galaxies, and dominant in ‘cored’ galaxies. No existing model can reproduce this trend.
- ✦ Simulations suggest that gas rotational velocities measured near the centres of galaxies are affected by **non-circular motions**. Therefore, rotation curves derived from HI data do not follow the true circular velocity, and cannot be used to infer the underlying dark matter density profile.
- ✦ The presence of non-circular motions, plus HI thick disks, biases rotation curves to look more like “cores”.
- ✦ Do real galaxies also present such ubiquitous non-circular motions? Or is this an issue with our current limited modelling of galaxies?



# Diversity of dwarf rotation curves: **status**

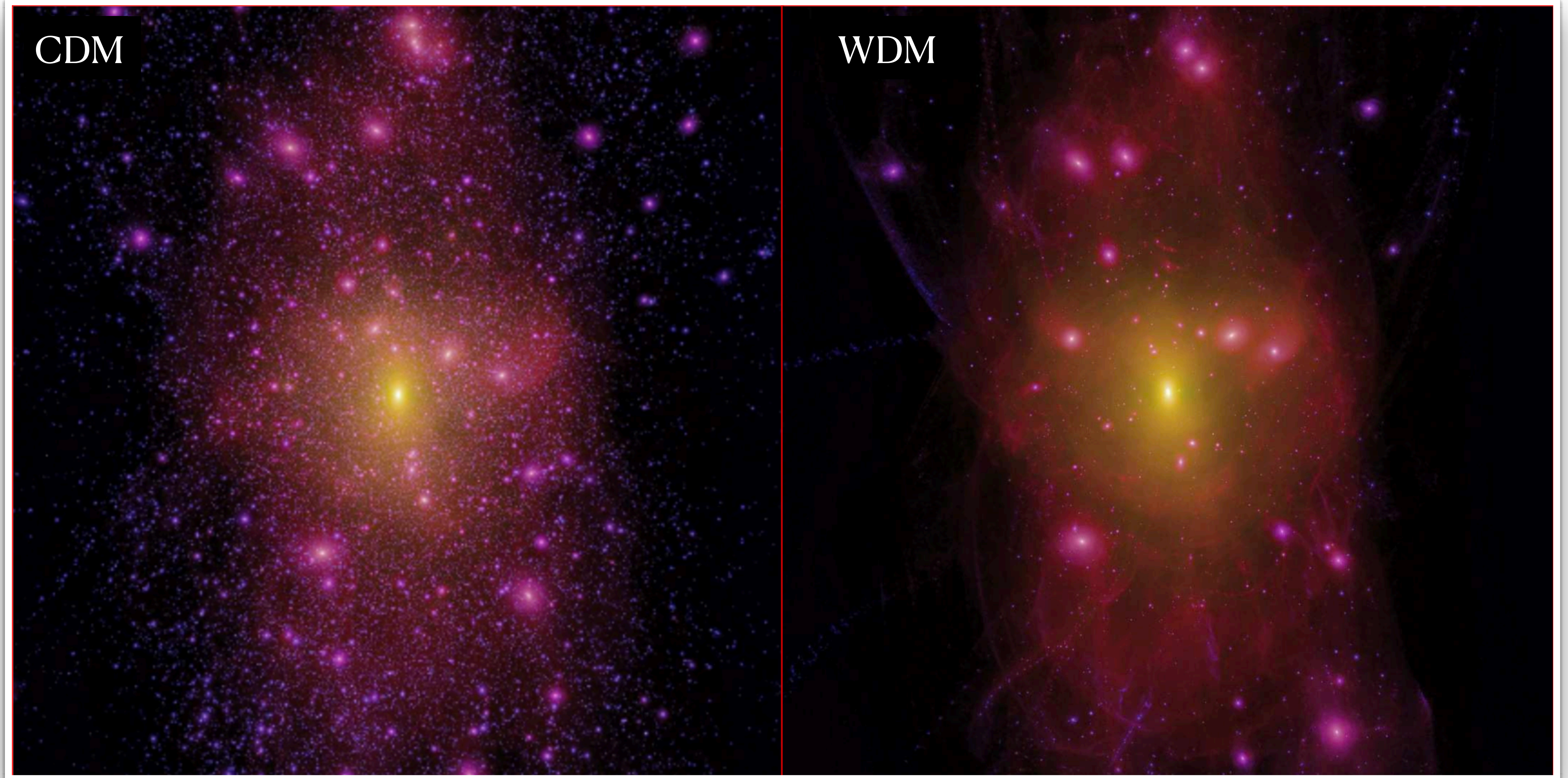
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- ✦ The presence of non-circular motions, plus HI thick disks more like “cores”.
- ✦ Do real galaxies also present such ubiquitous non-circular motions? Or is this an issue with our current limited modelling of galaxies?

If the rotation curves of observed late-type dwarfs are similarly impacted – which seems likely – a late-type dwarf population where most galaxies have DM cusps is easier to reconcile with the available data than one where most galaxies have sizeable DM cores.



# Abundance of substructure

[Lovell+2014]



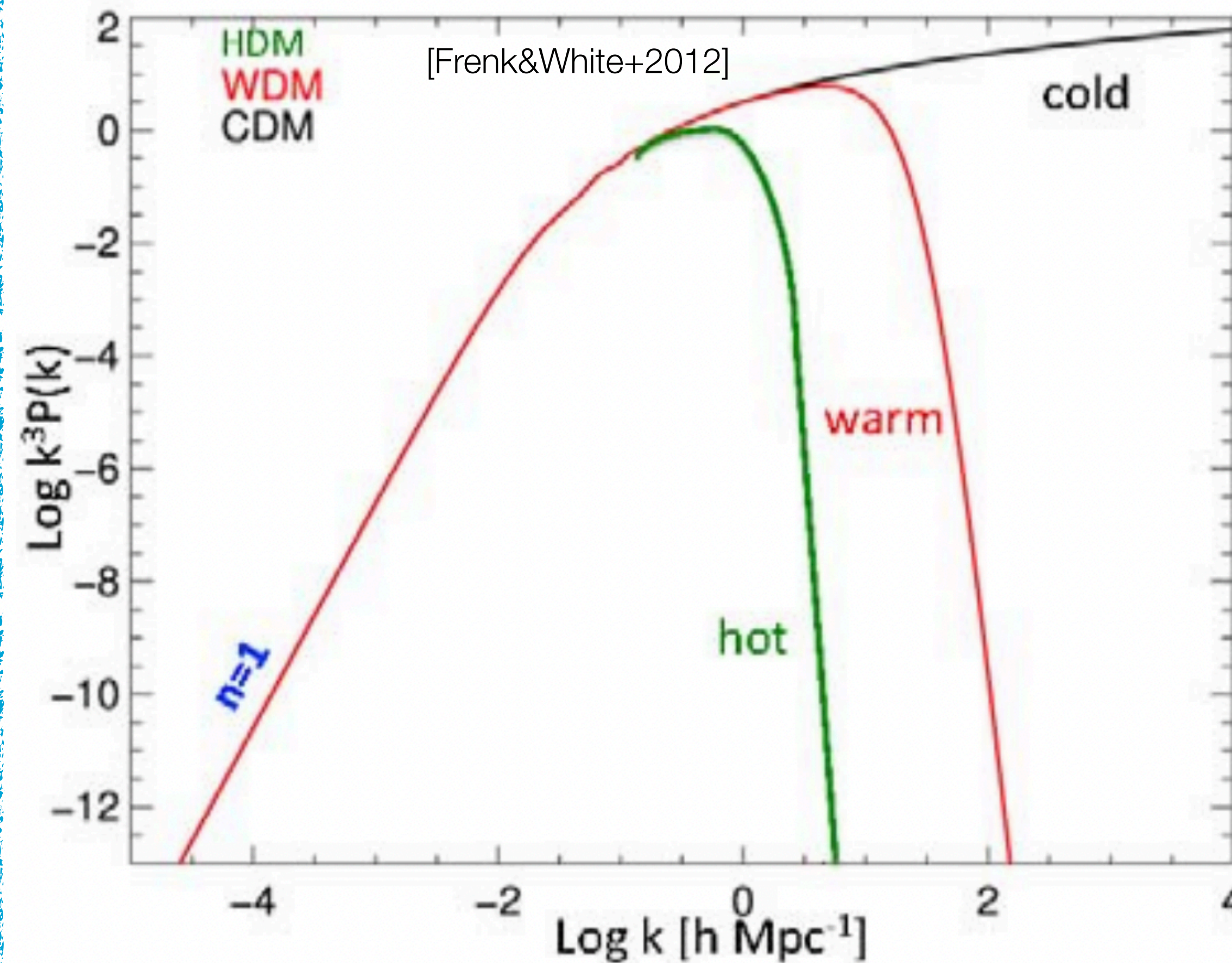


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[Lovell+2014]

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WDM



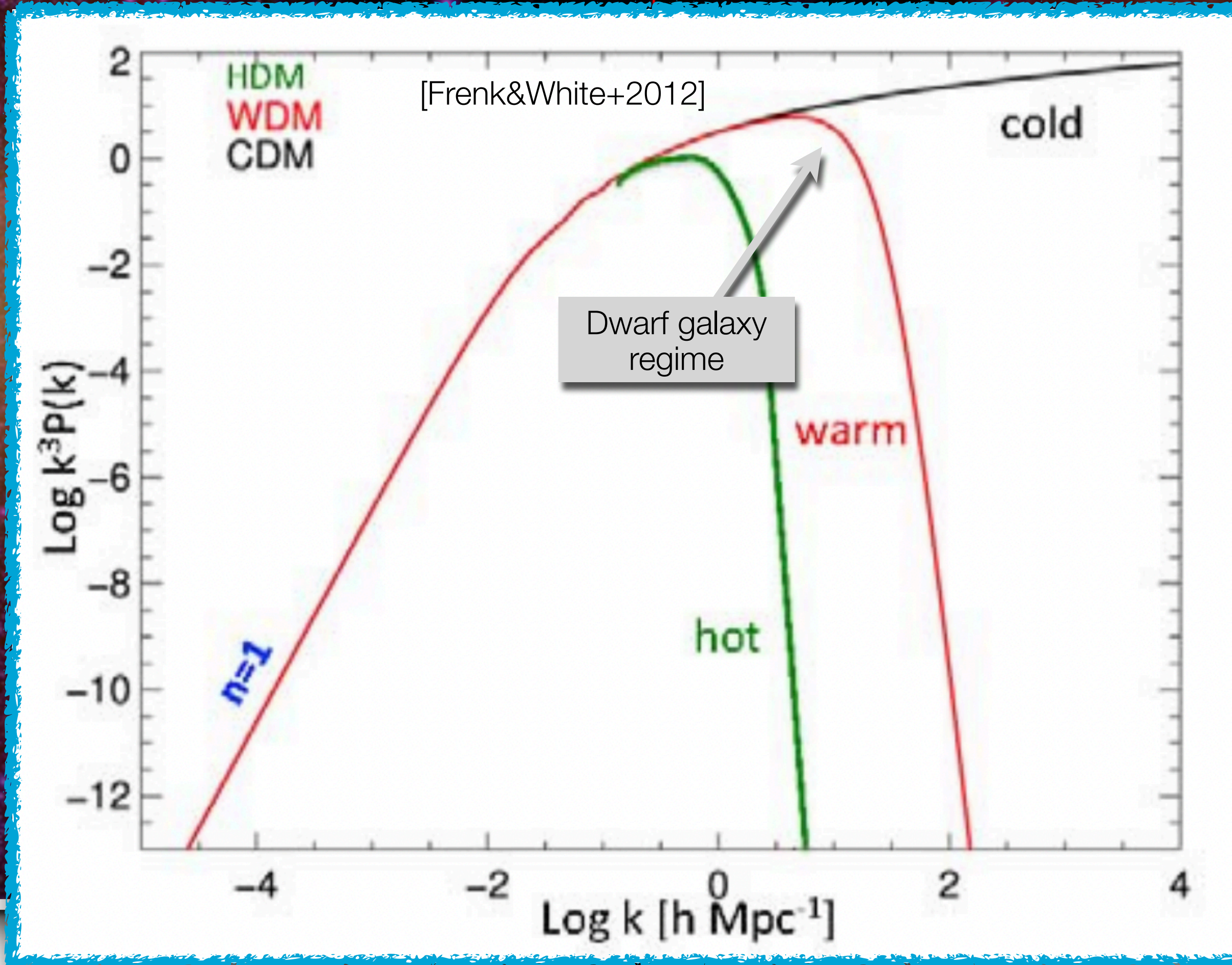


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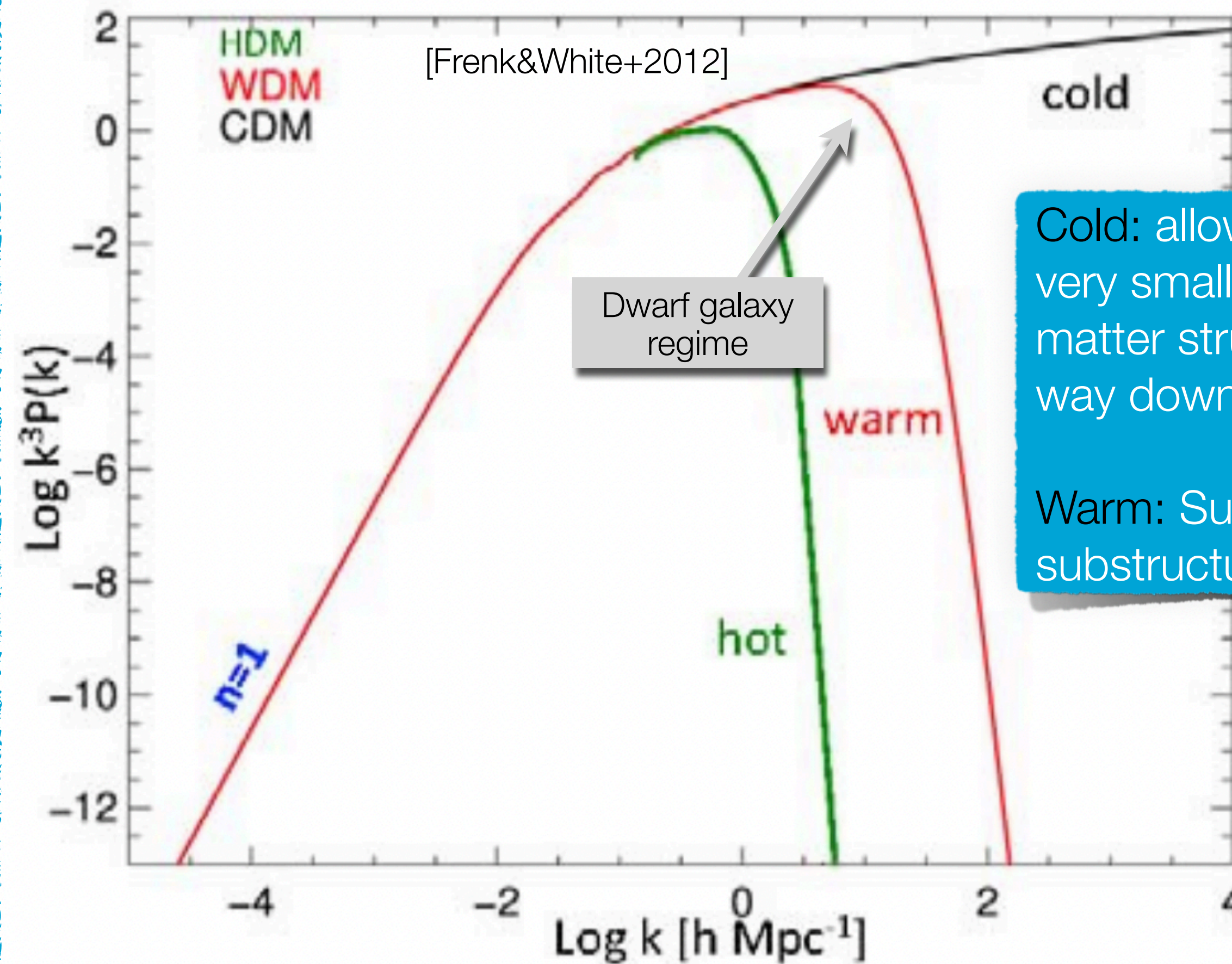


# Abundance of substructure

[Lovell+2014]

CDM

WDM



Cold: allows formation of very small bound dark matter structures, all the way down to Earth mass

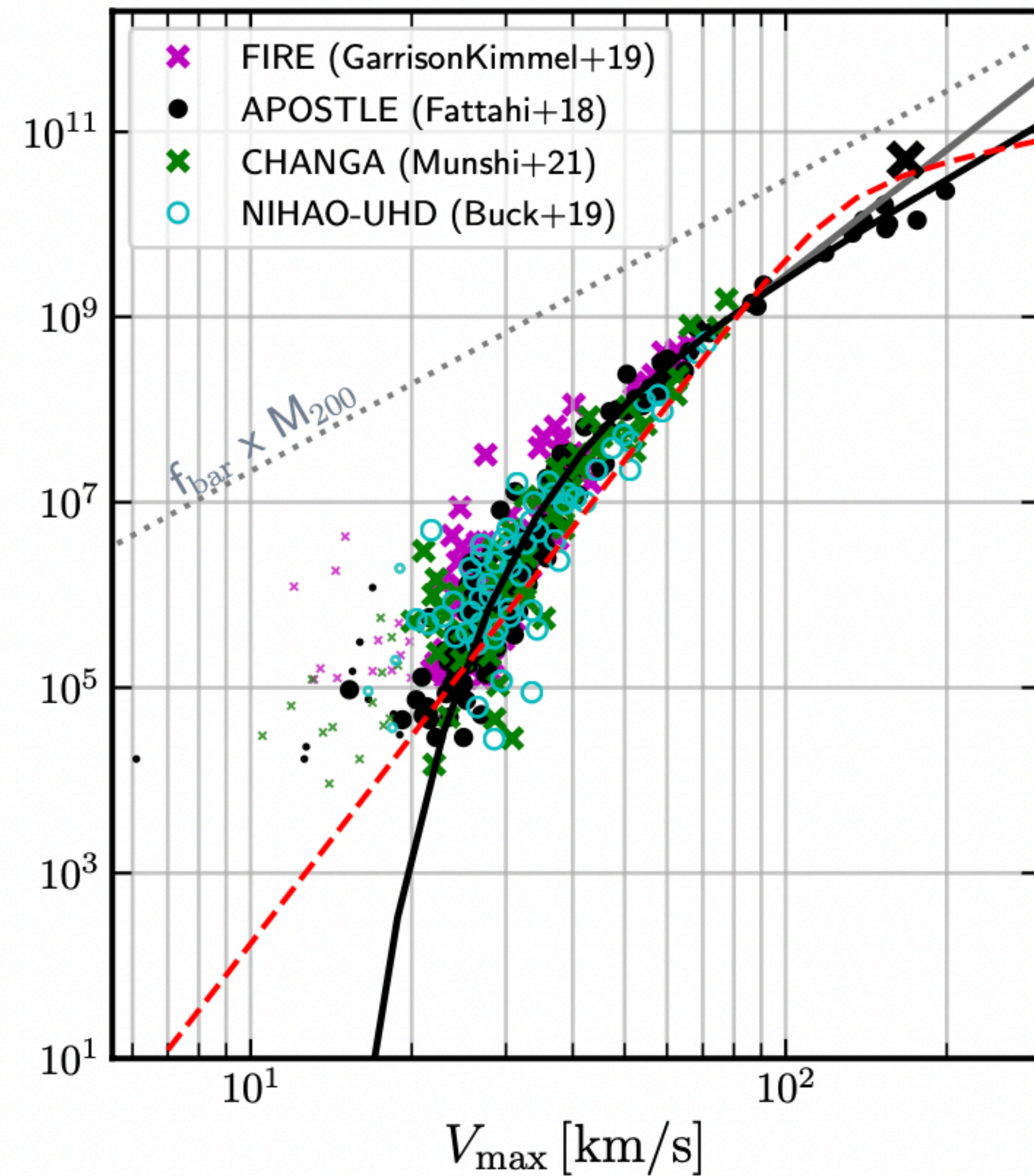
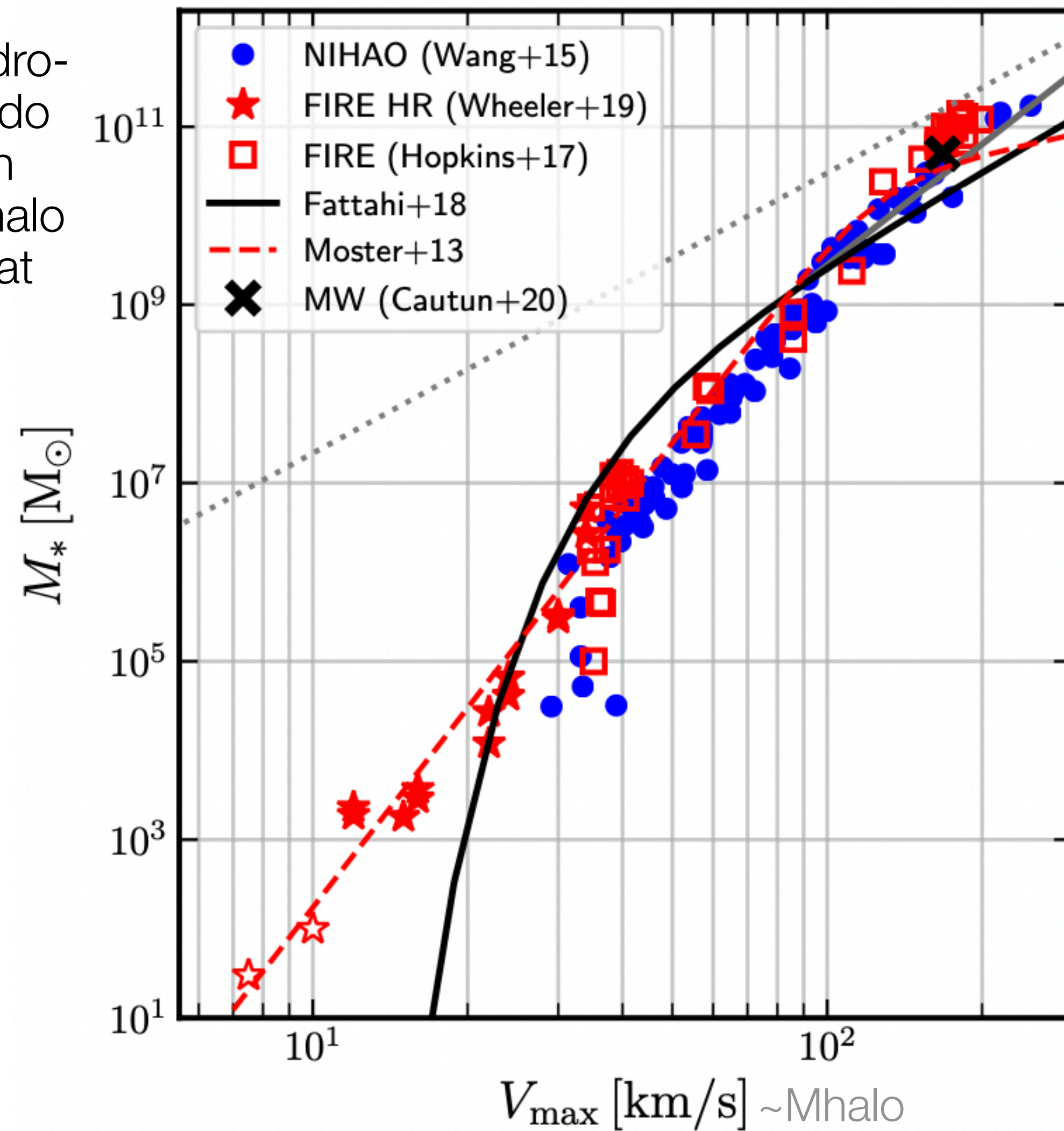
Warm: Suppression of substructure at a given scale



# $M_{\text{star}}-M_{\text{halo}}$ in the low-mass end

[Santos-Santos+2022]

Different hydro-simulations do not agree on the galaxy-halo connection at low masses

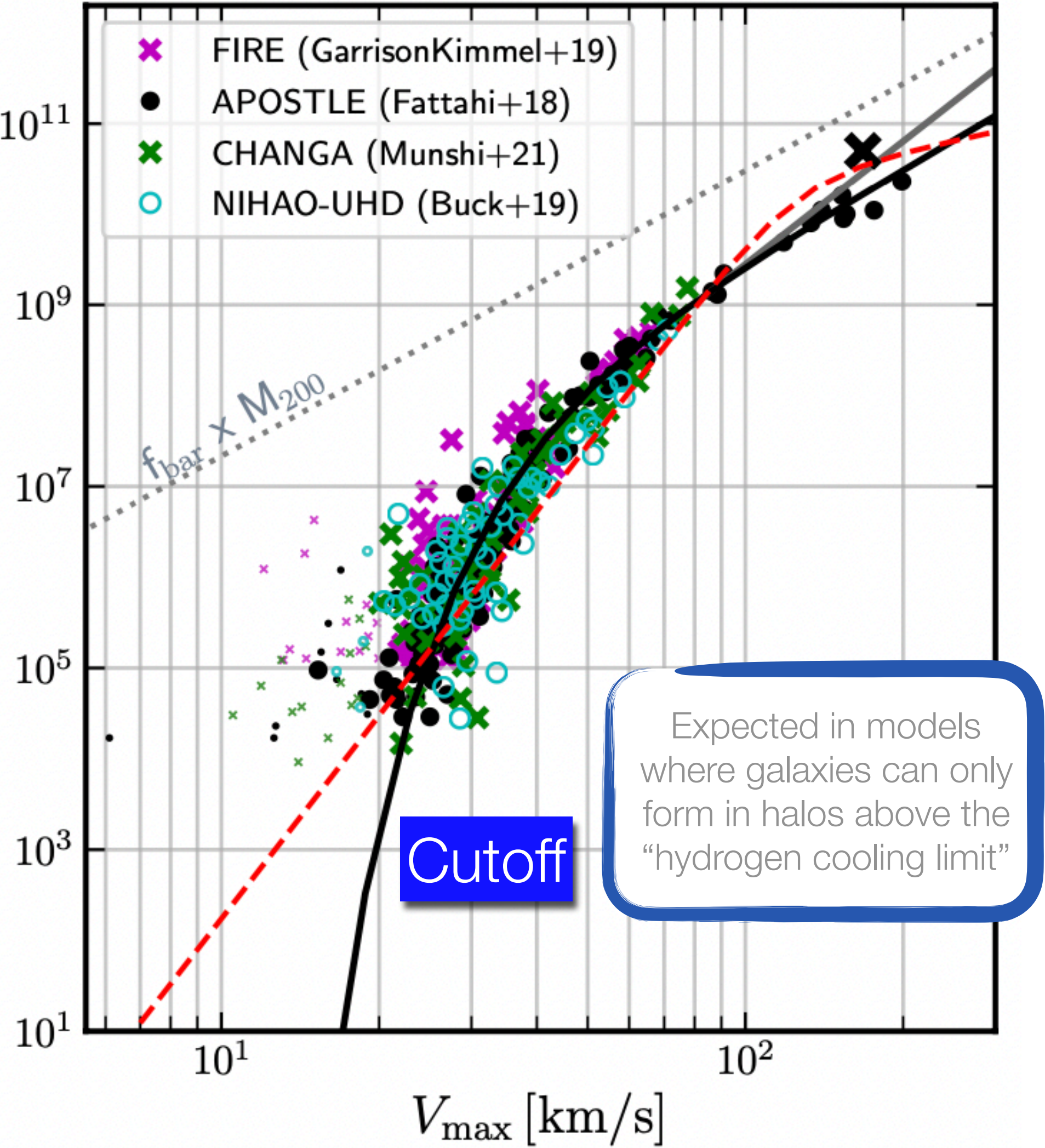
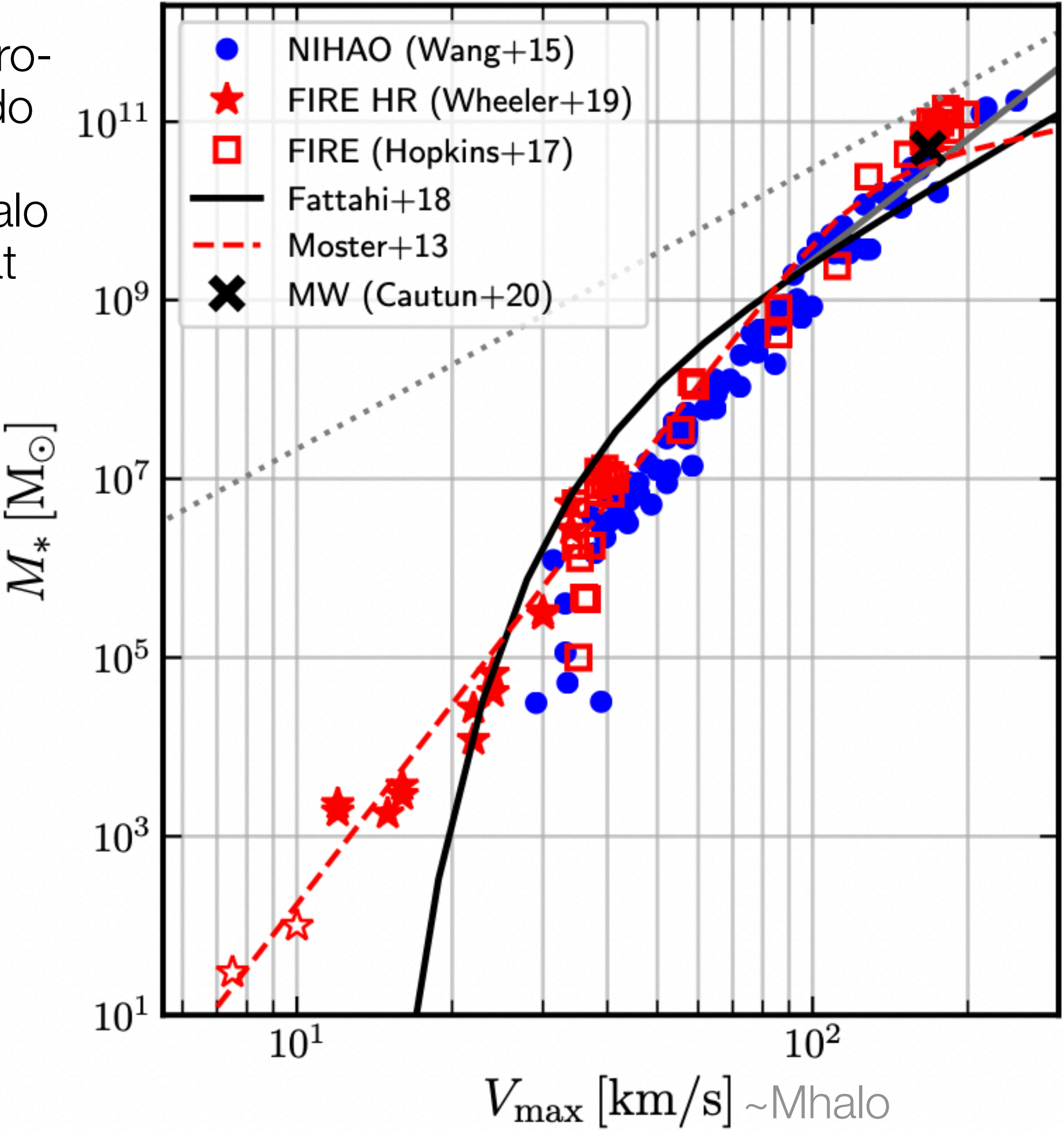




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[Santos-Santos+2022]

Different hydro-simulations do not agree on the galaxy-halo connection at low masses



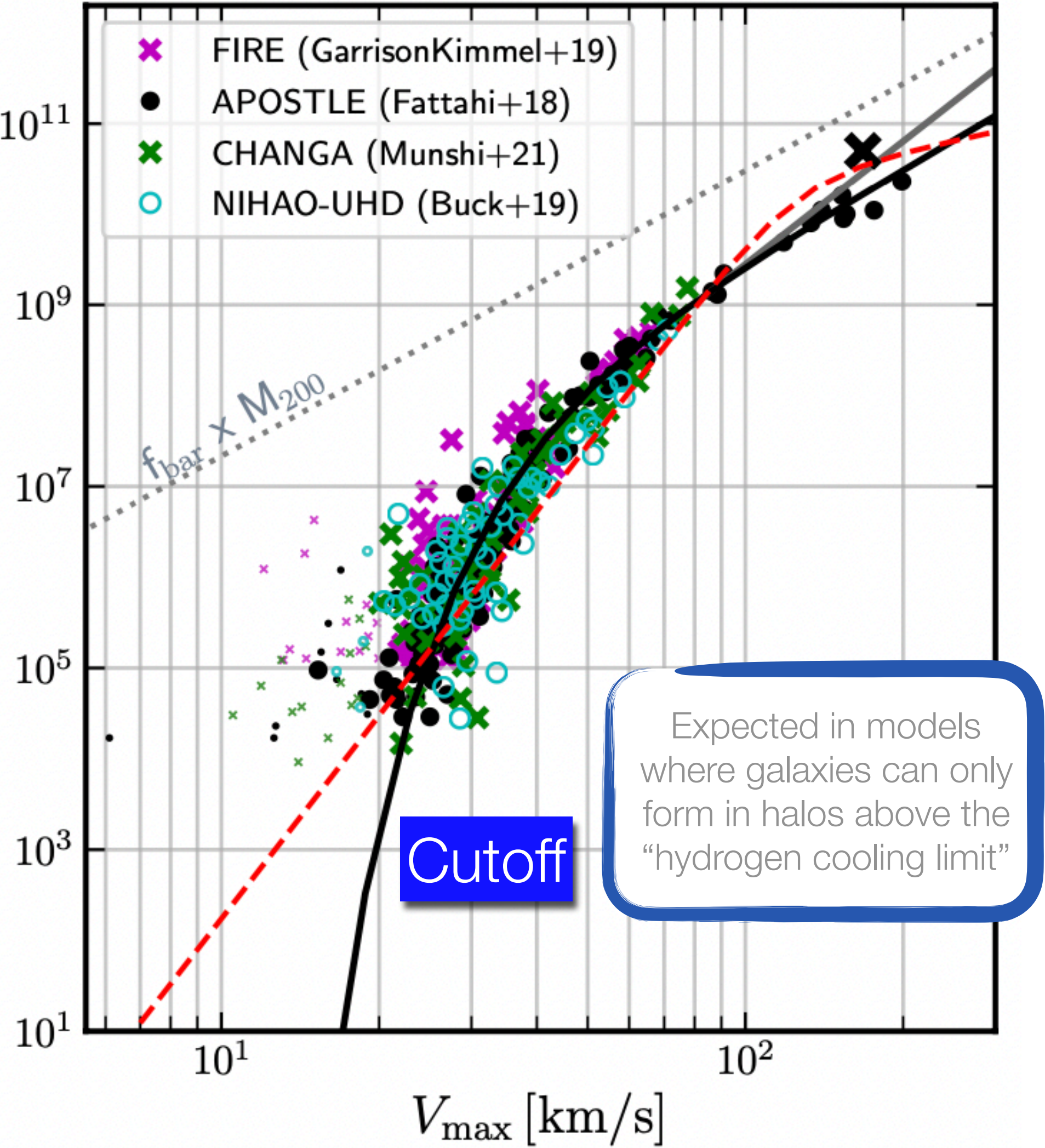
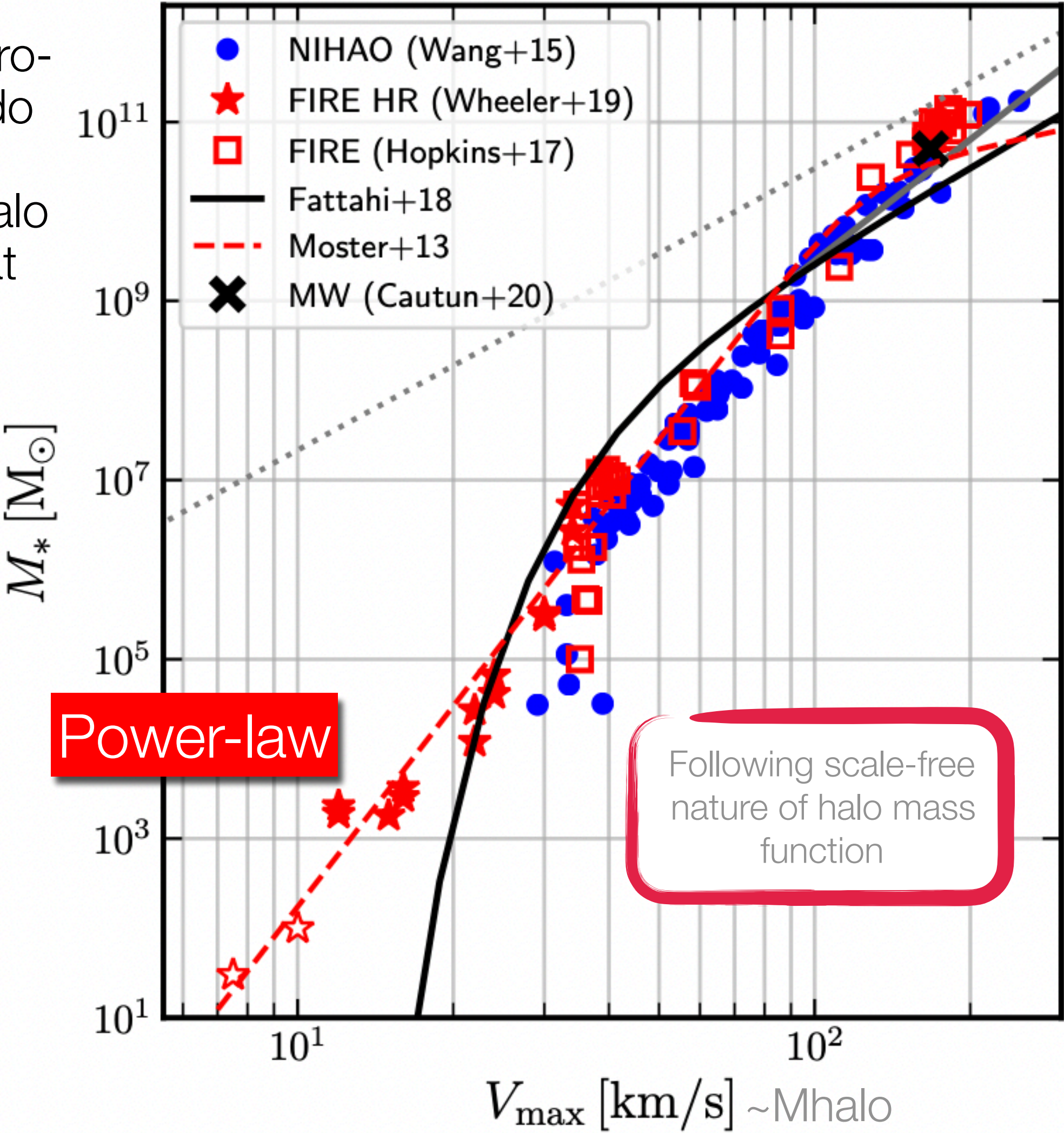
[Okamoto&Frenk09;  
Benitez-Llambay&Frenk+20]



# M<sub>star</sub>-M<sub>halo</sub> in the low-mass end

[Santos-Santos+2022]

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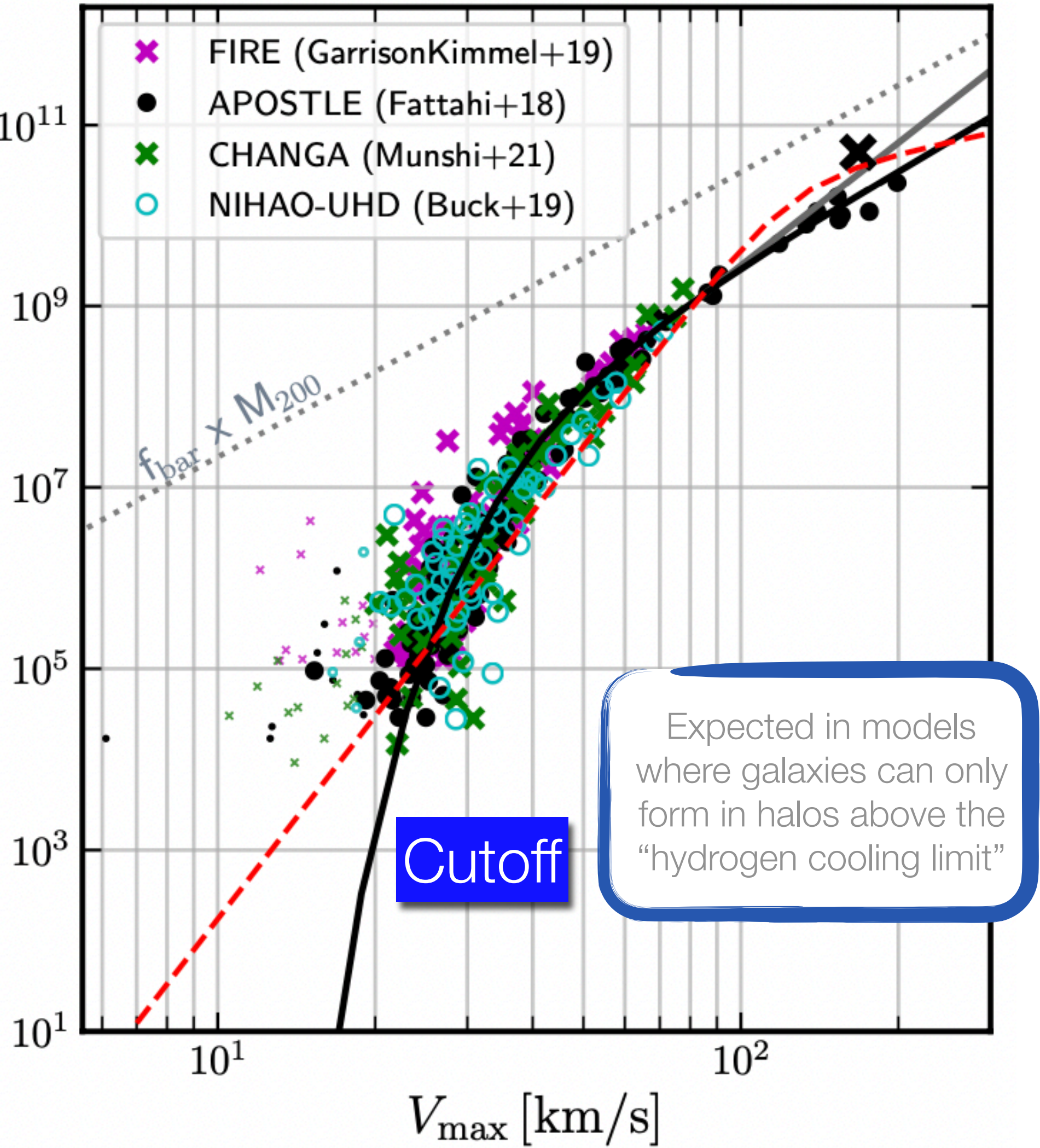
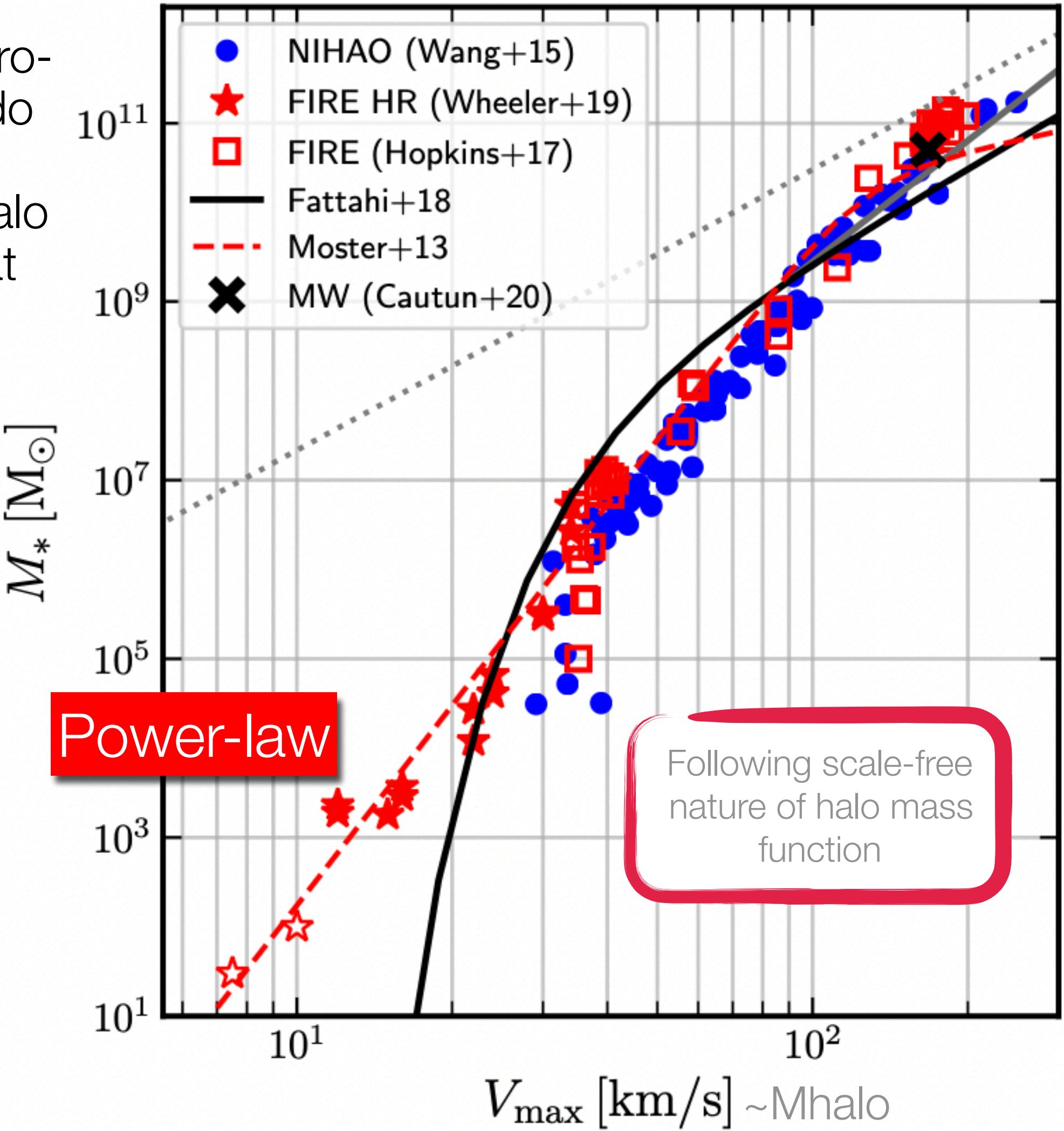
[Okamoto&Frenk09; Benitez-Llambay&Frenk+20]



# M<sub>star</sub>-M<sub>halo</sub> in the low-mass end

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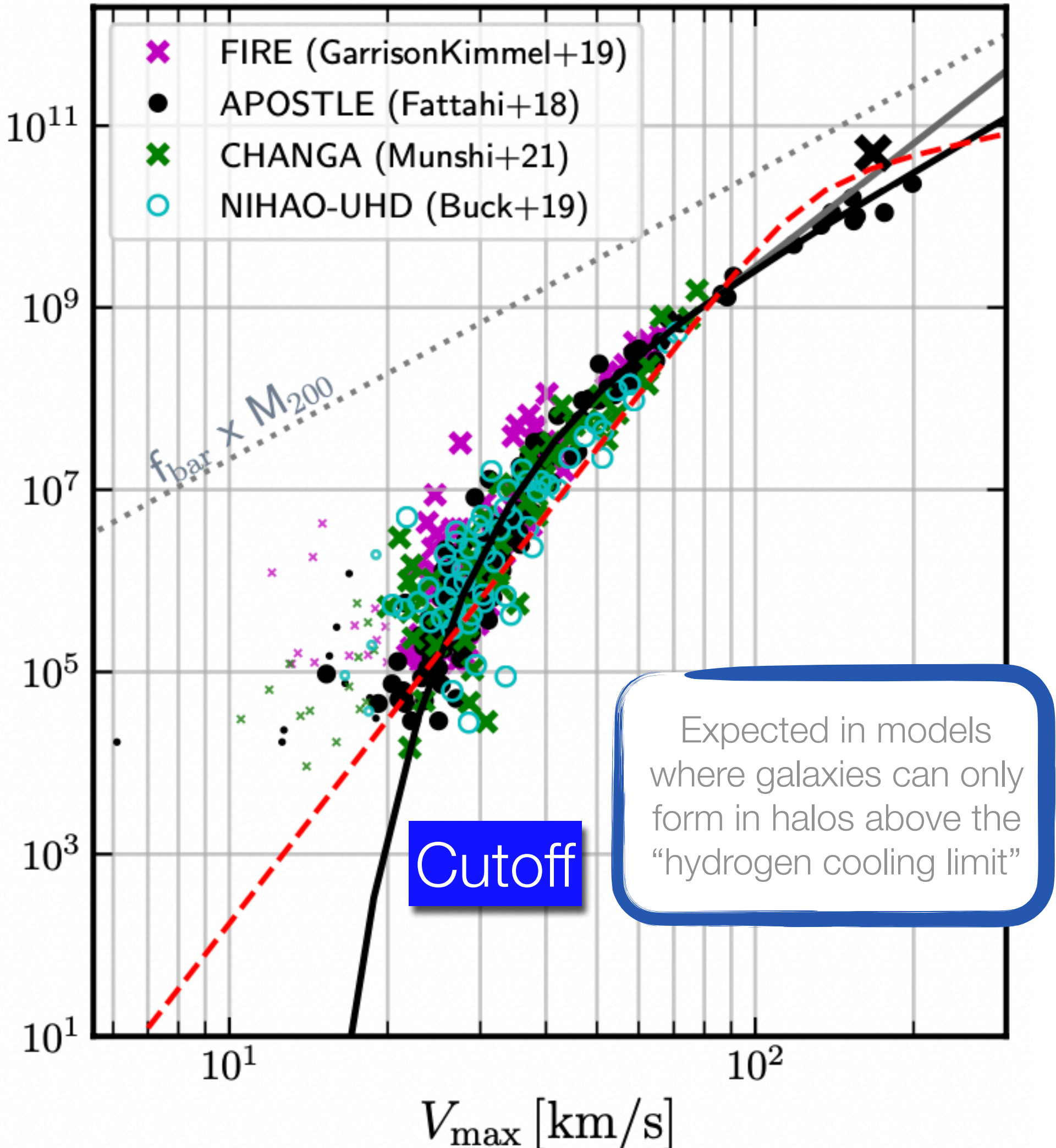
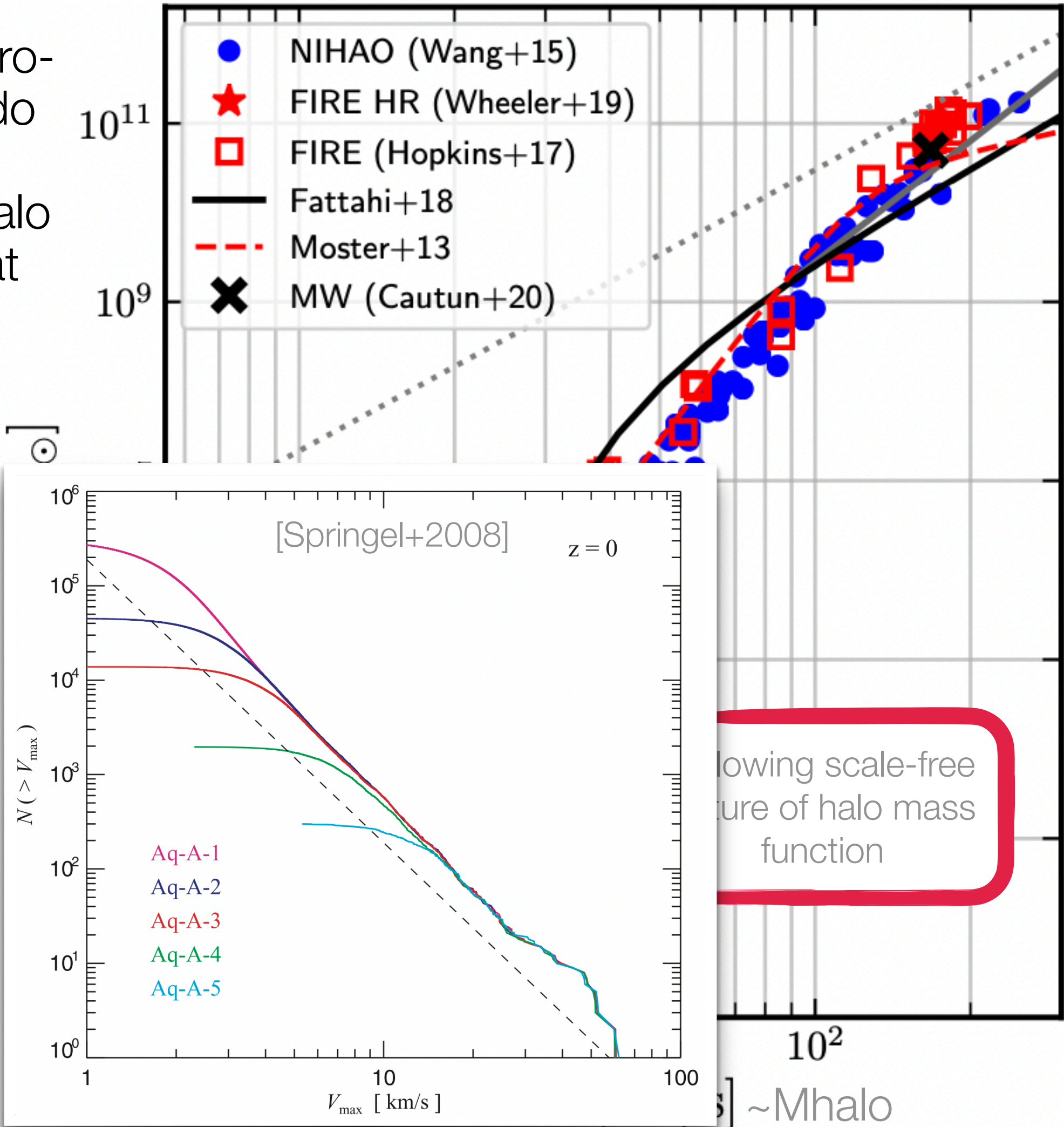
CDM subhalo mass function + M<sup>\*</sup>-M<sub>halo</sub> relation w/ scatter = Satellite luminosity function



# M<sub>star</sub>-M<sub>halo</sub> in the low-mass end

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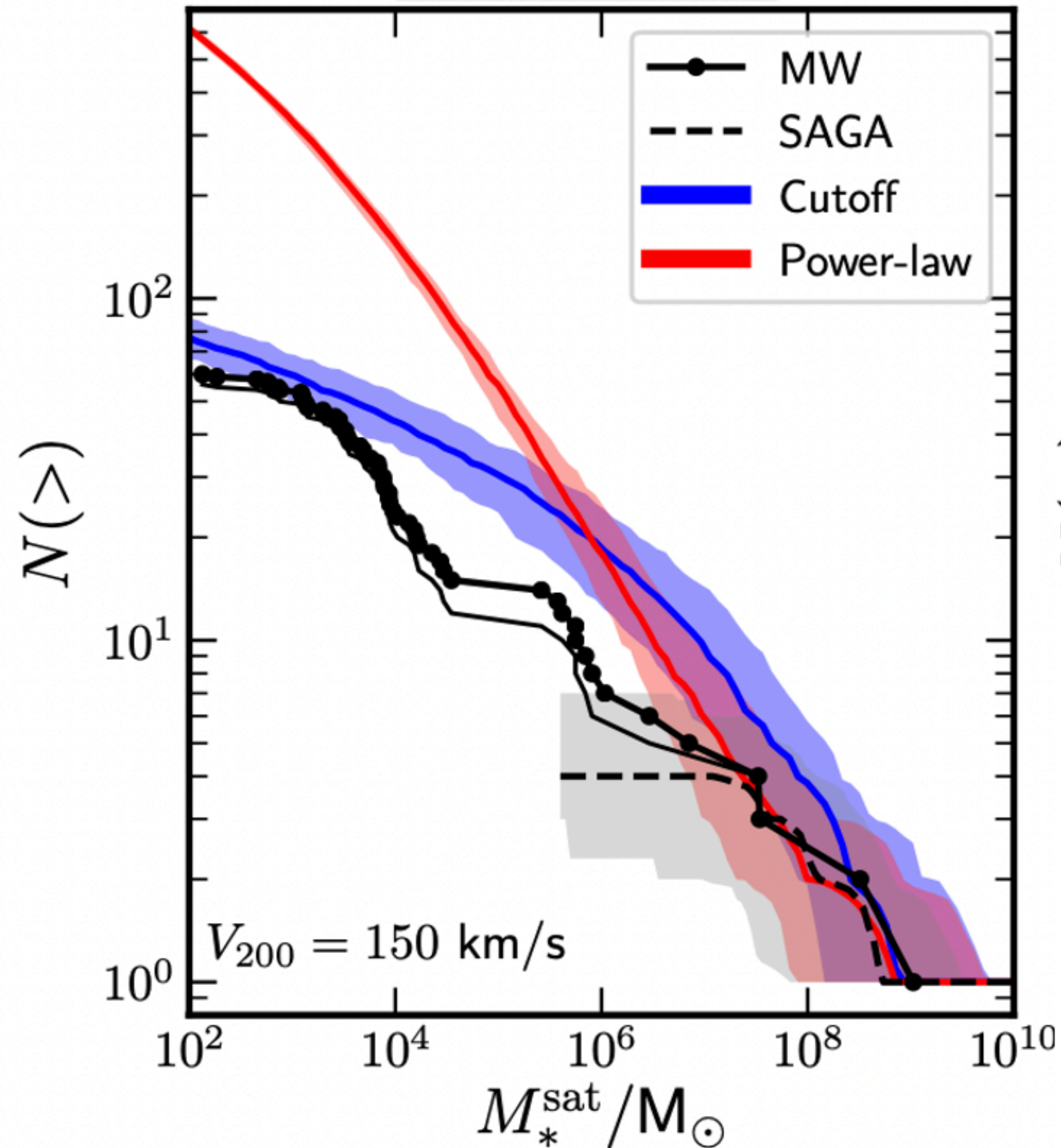


[Okamoto&Frenk09; Benitez-Llambay&Frenk+20]

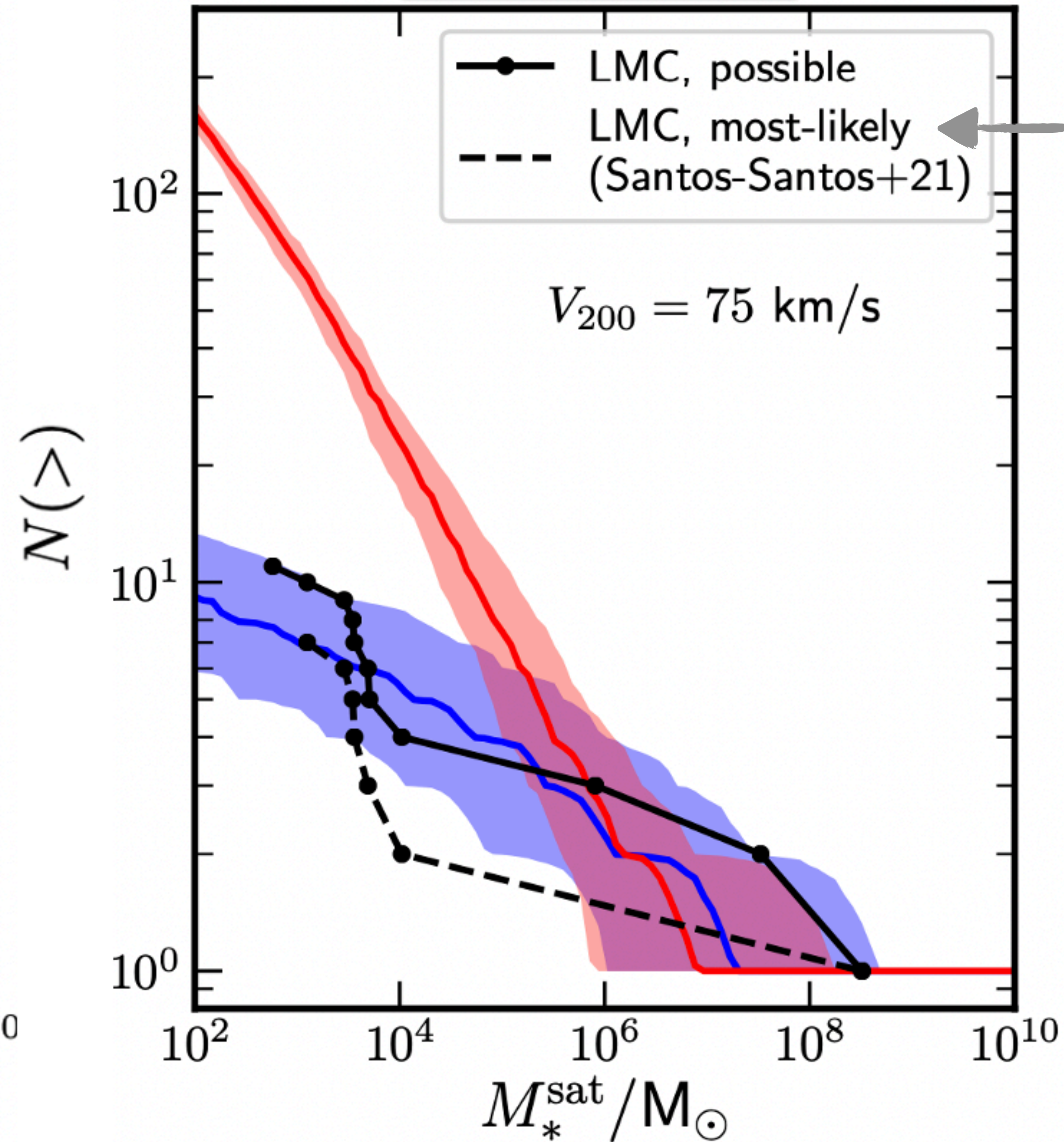
CDM subhalo mass function + M<sup>\*</sup>-M<sub>halo</sub> relation w/ scatter = Satellite luminosity function



MW-mass host



LMC-mass host



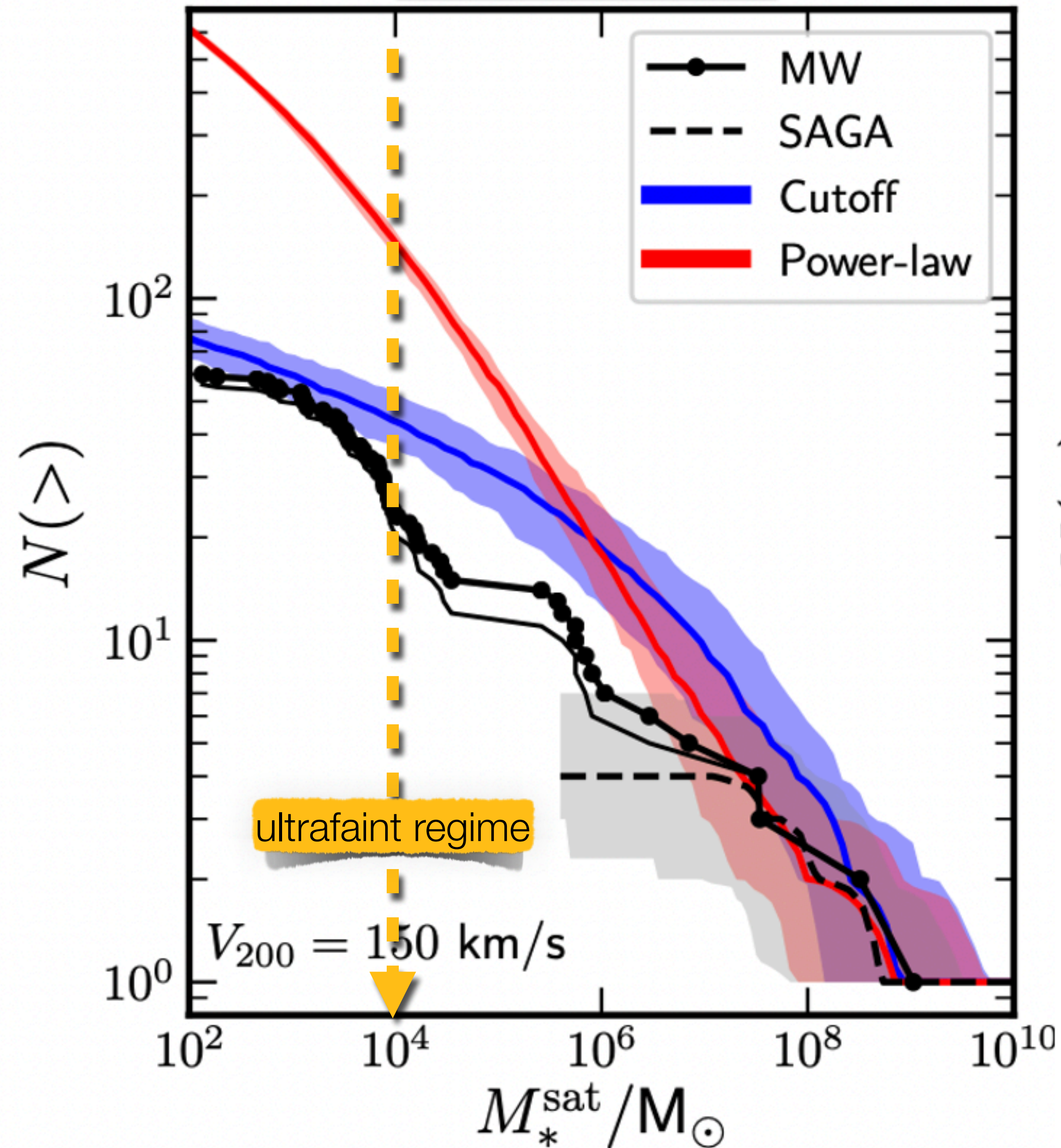
Estimates of which MW satellites were contributed by LMC



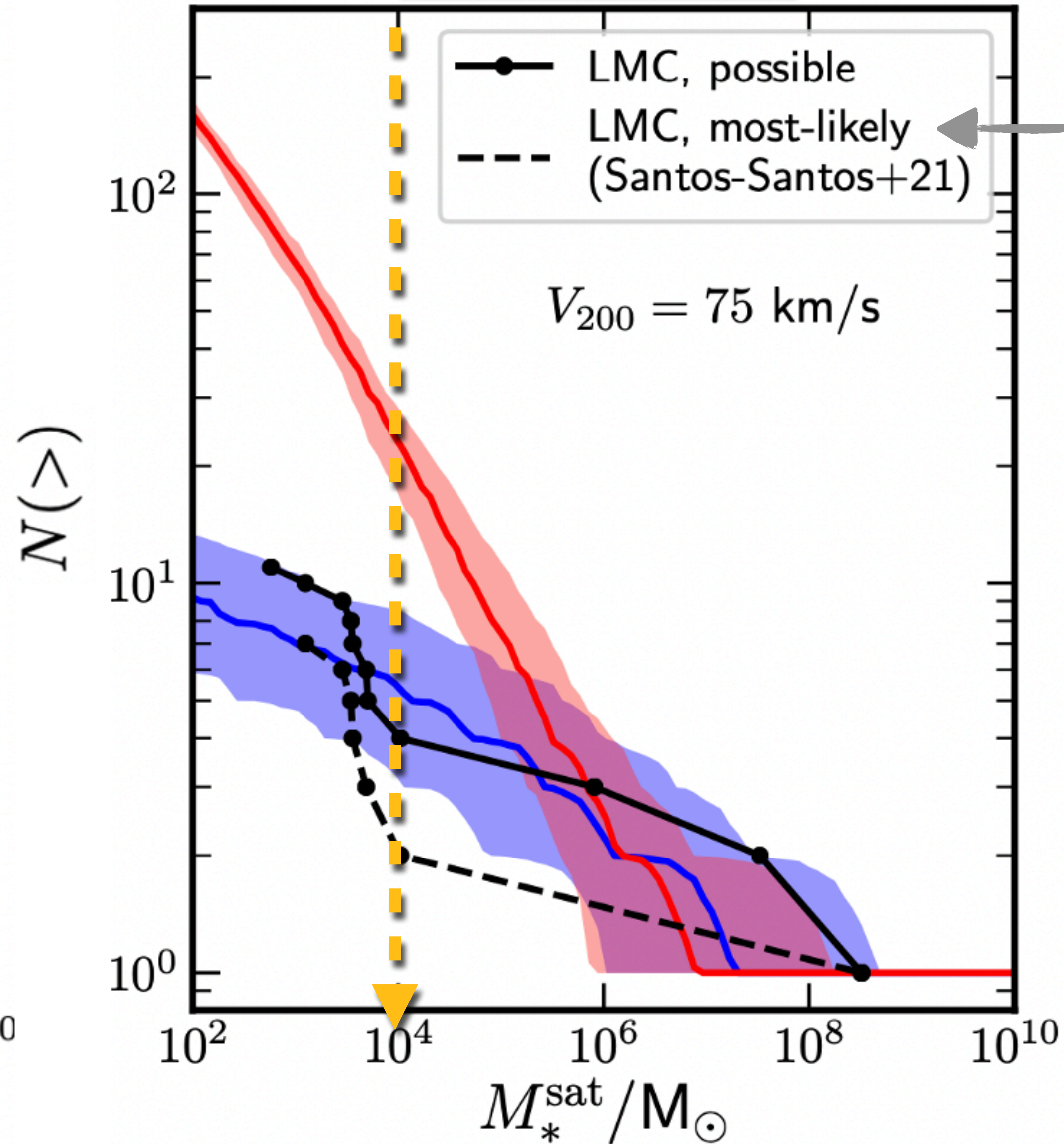
# $M_{\text{star}}\text{-}M_{\text{halo}}$ in the low-mass end

[Santos-Santos+2022]

MW-mass host



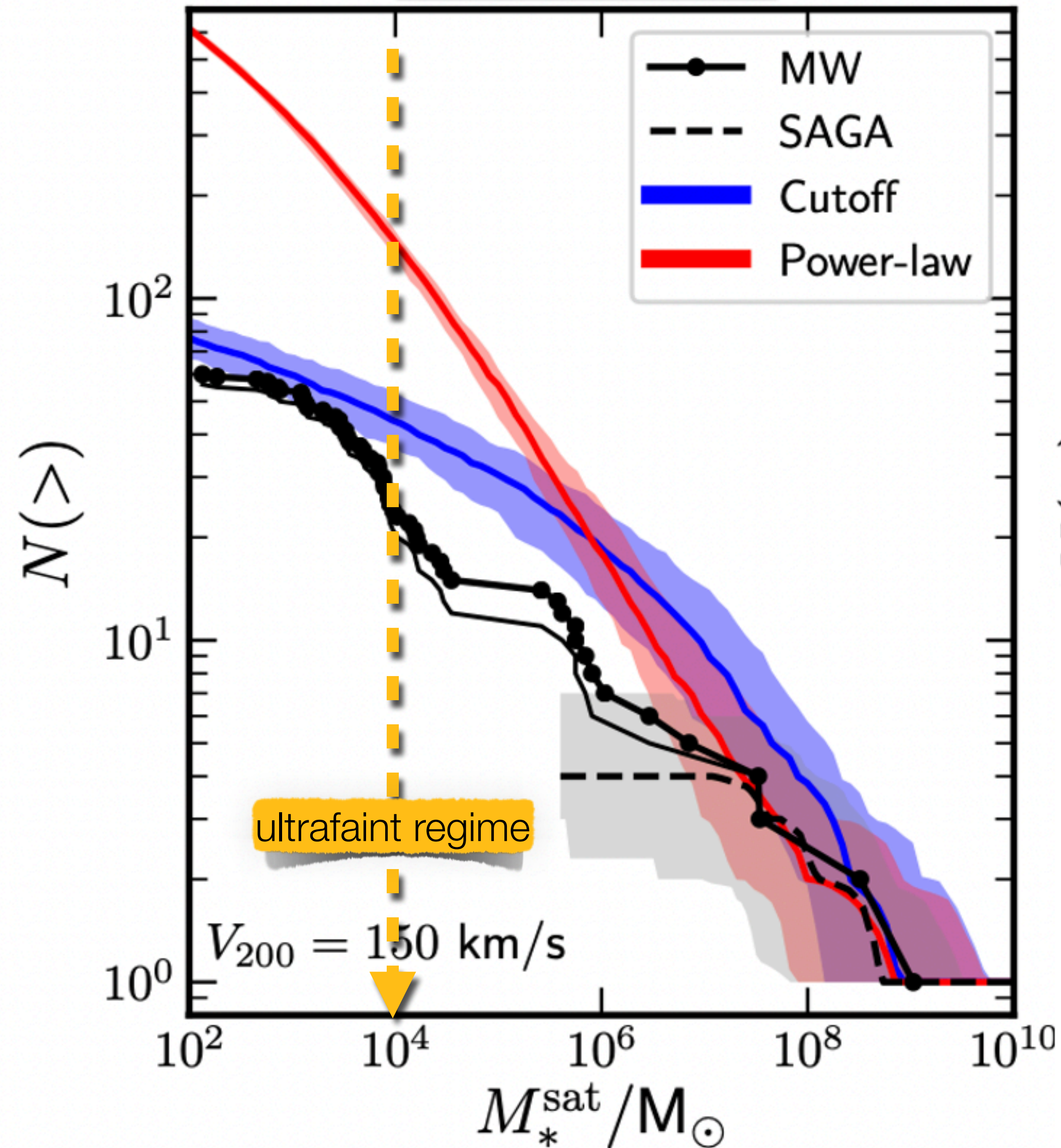
LMC-mass host



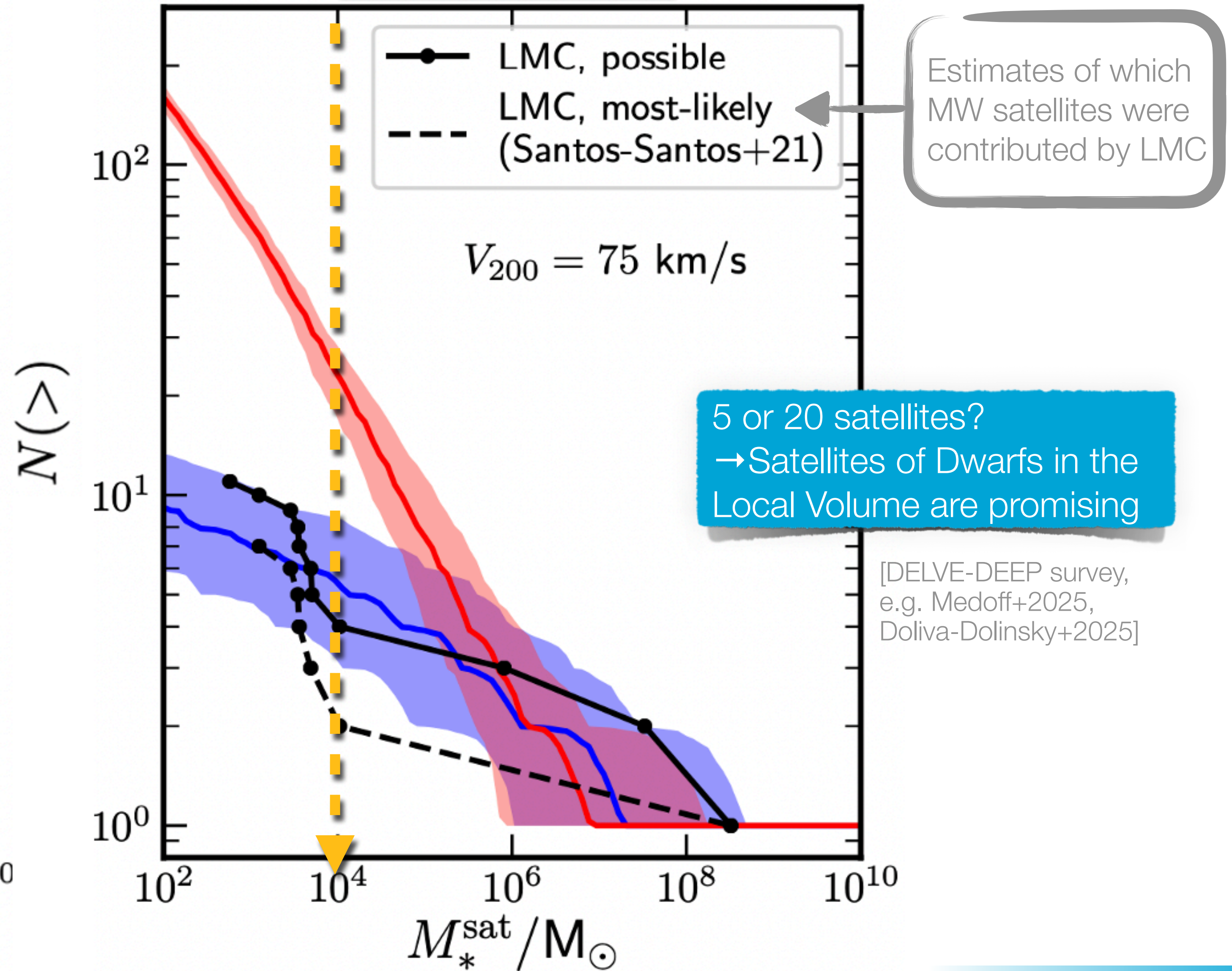
Estimates of which  
MW satellites were  
contributed by LMC



MW-mass host



LMC-mass host





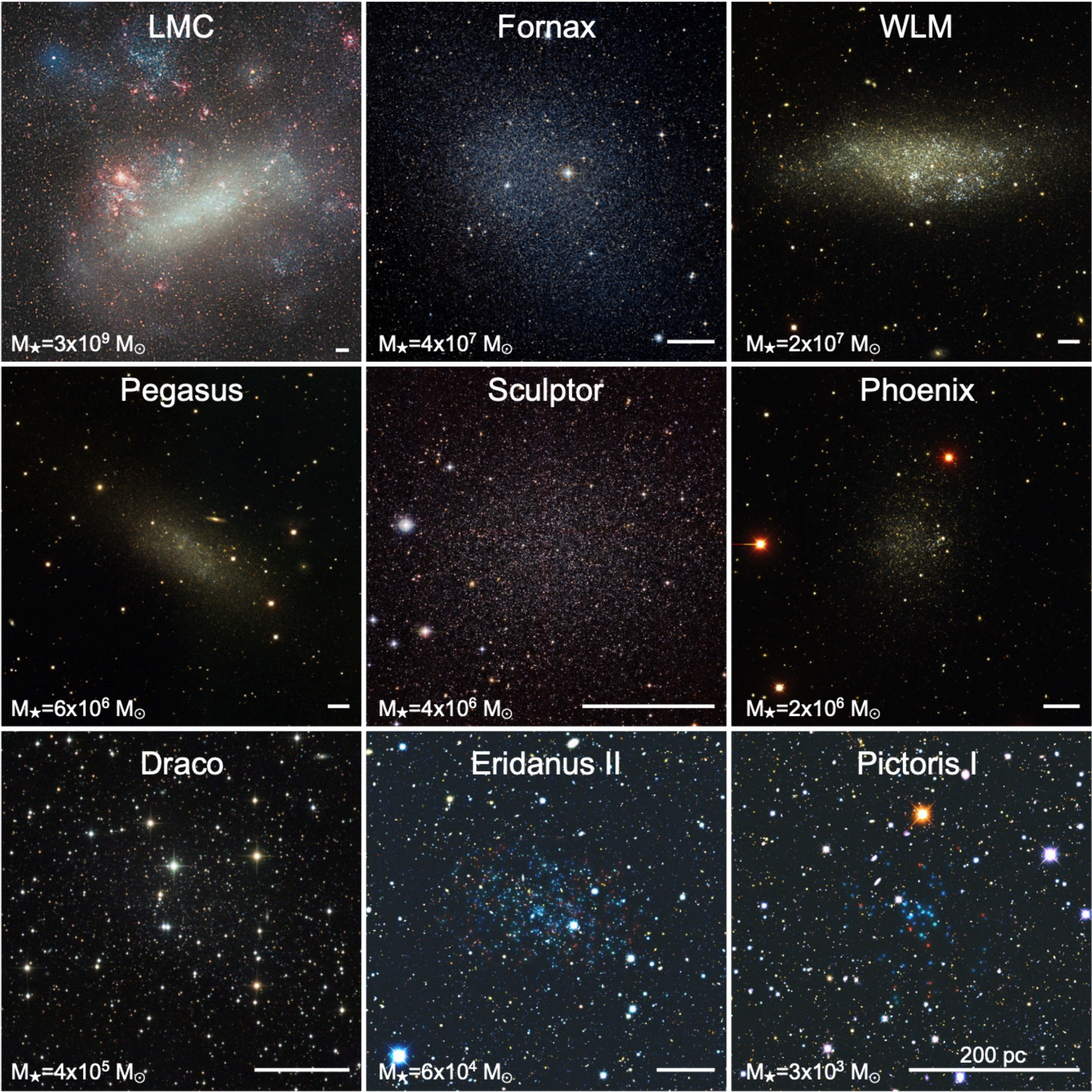
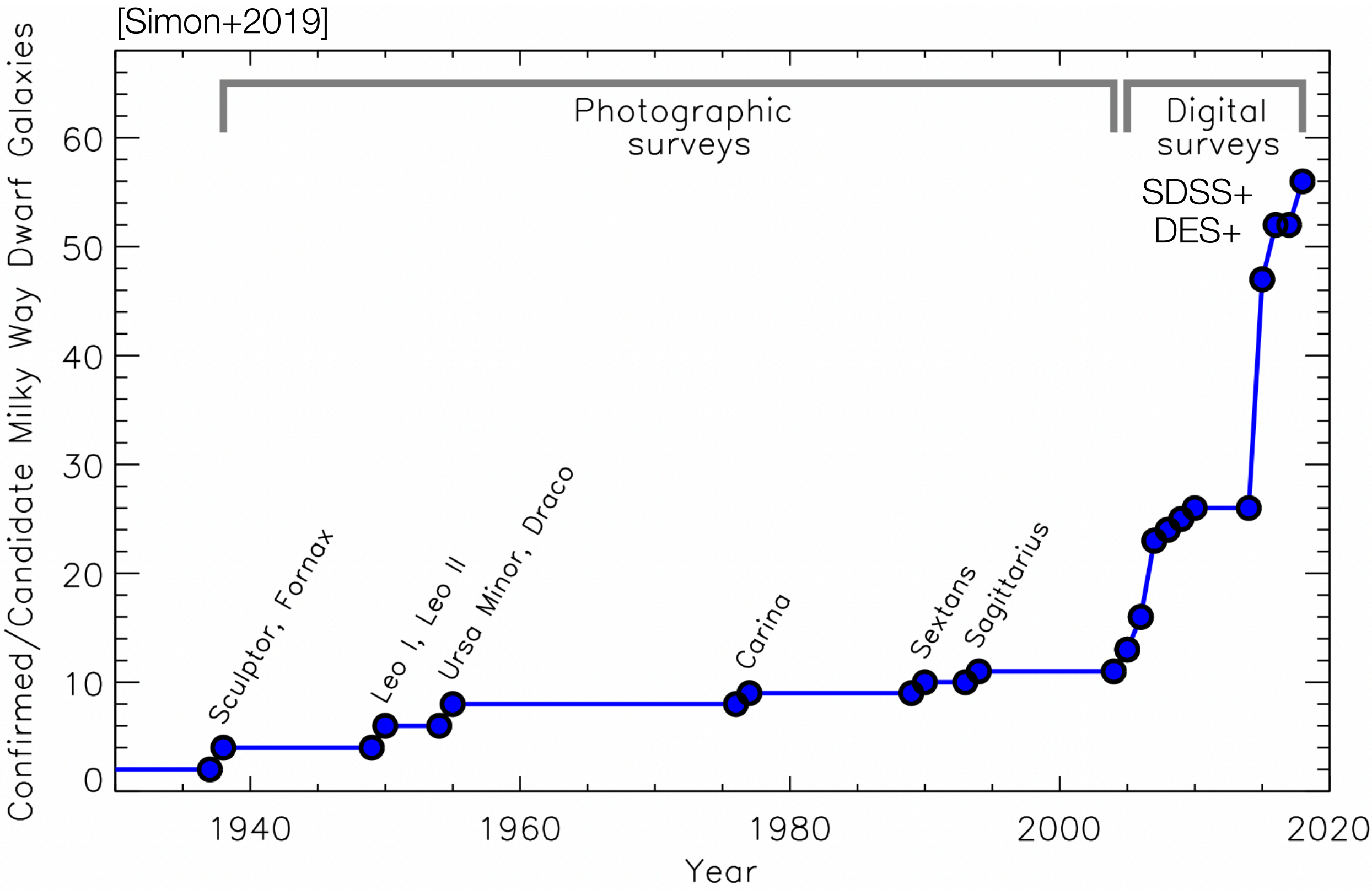
# $M_{\text{star}}-M_{\text{halo}}$ in the low-mass end: **status**

- ✦ Hydrodynamical models do not agree on the galaxy-halo connection on the low-mass end.
- ✦ Whatever assumption is chosen will have a strong impact on the predicted satellite luminosity function.
- ✦ Observations of **satellites around massive dwarfs** could help discriminate between  $M_{\text{star}}-M_{\text{halo}}$  models.
- ✦ Remaining caveats: Different dark matter models predict different underlying subhalo mass functions (CDM vs WDM) precisely in the dwarf regime of interest here.
- ✦ **What are the physical mechanisms driving galaxy formation in the smallest halos?**  
E.g. Impact of the photoionizing background / atomic hydrogen cooling dominates, or molecular cooling is also important? / Lyman-Werner radiation can dissociate molecular gas?



# Abundance and densities of MW satellites

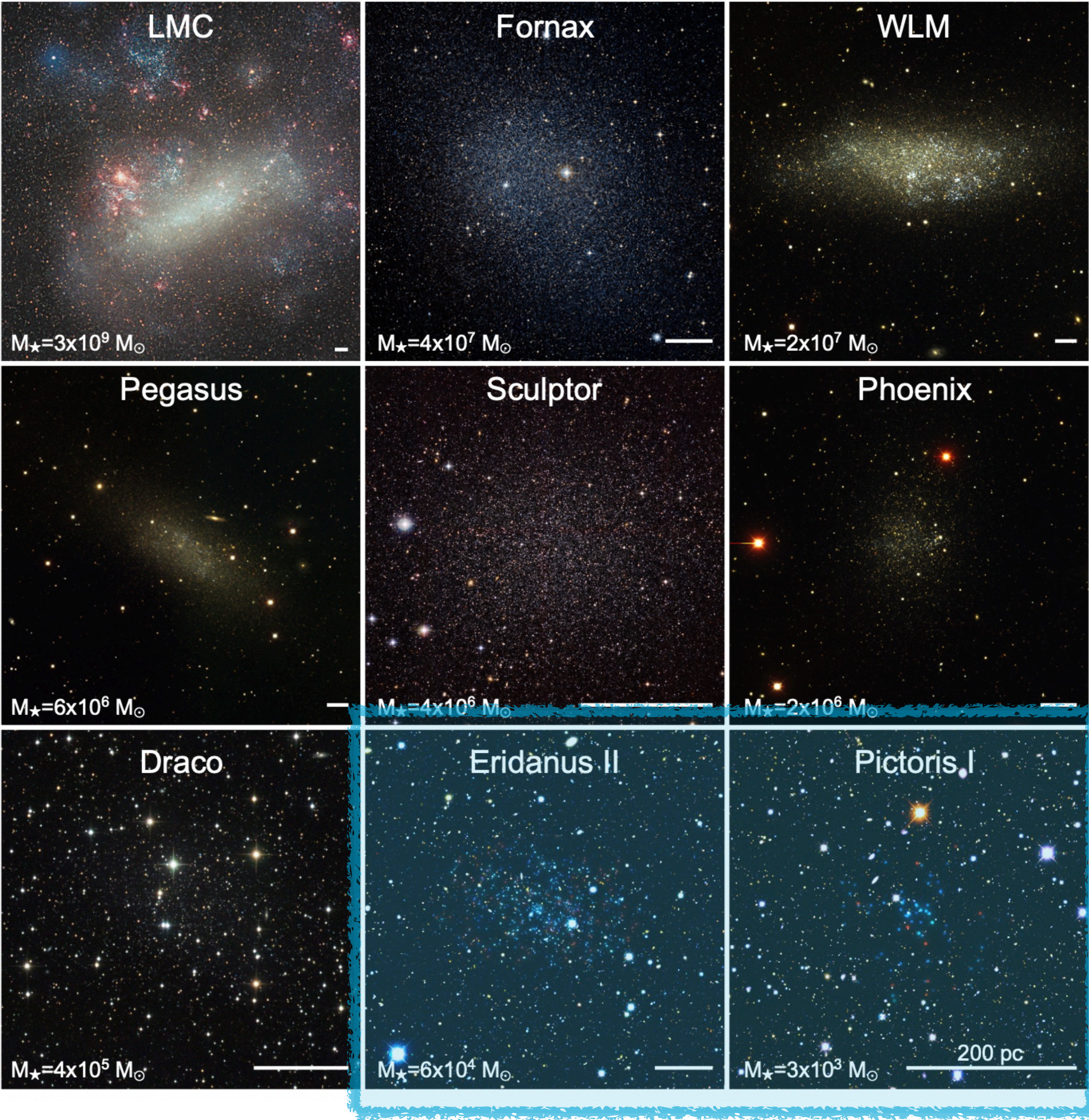
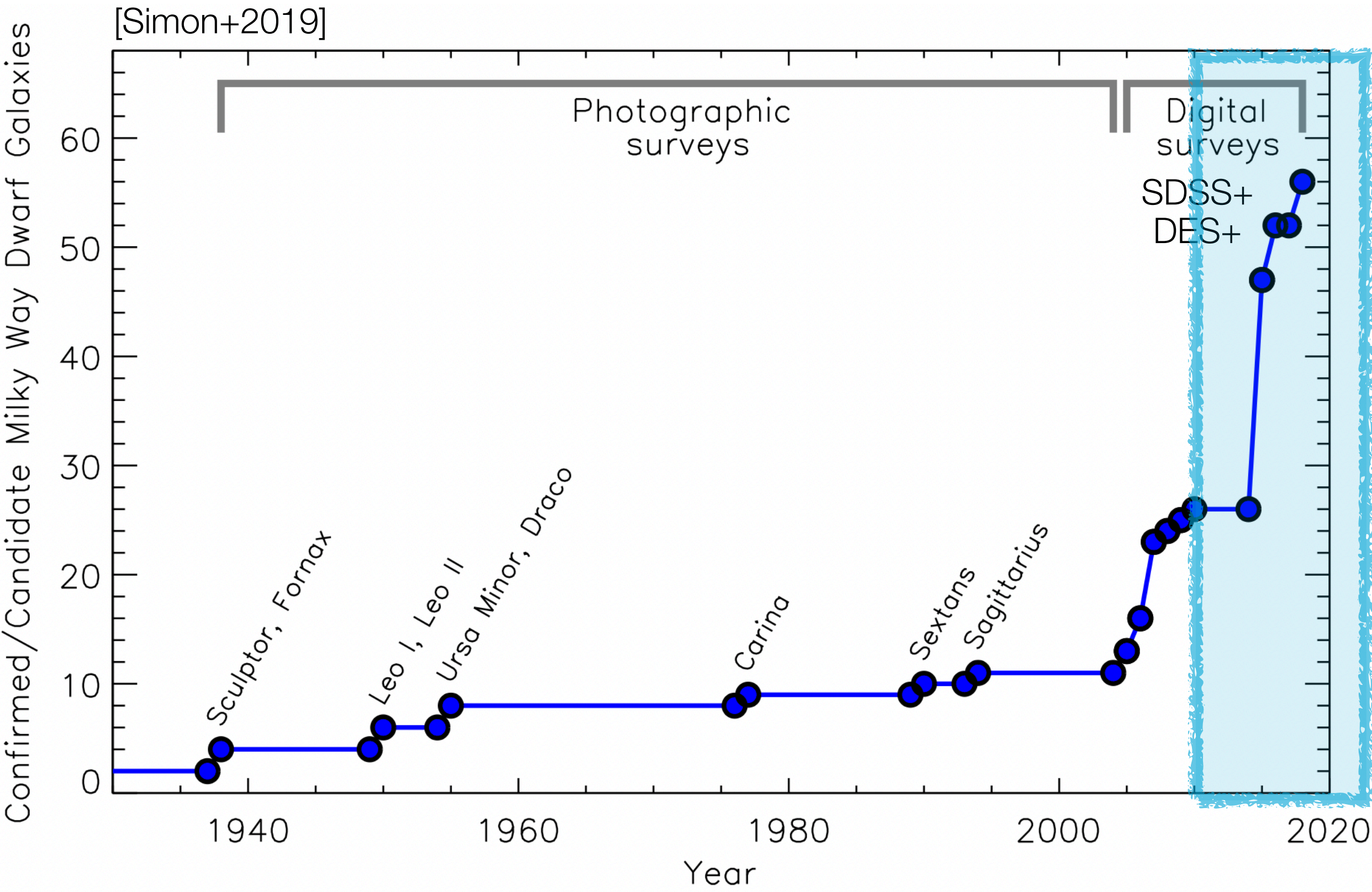
[Bullock&Boylan-Kolchin+2017]





# Abundance and densities of MW satellites

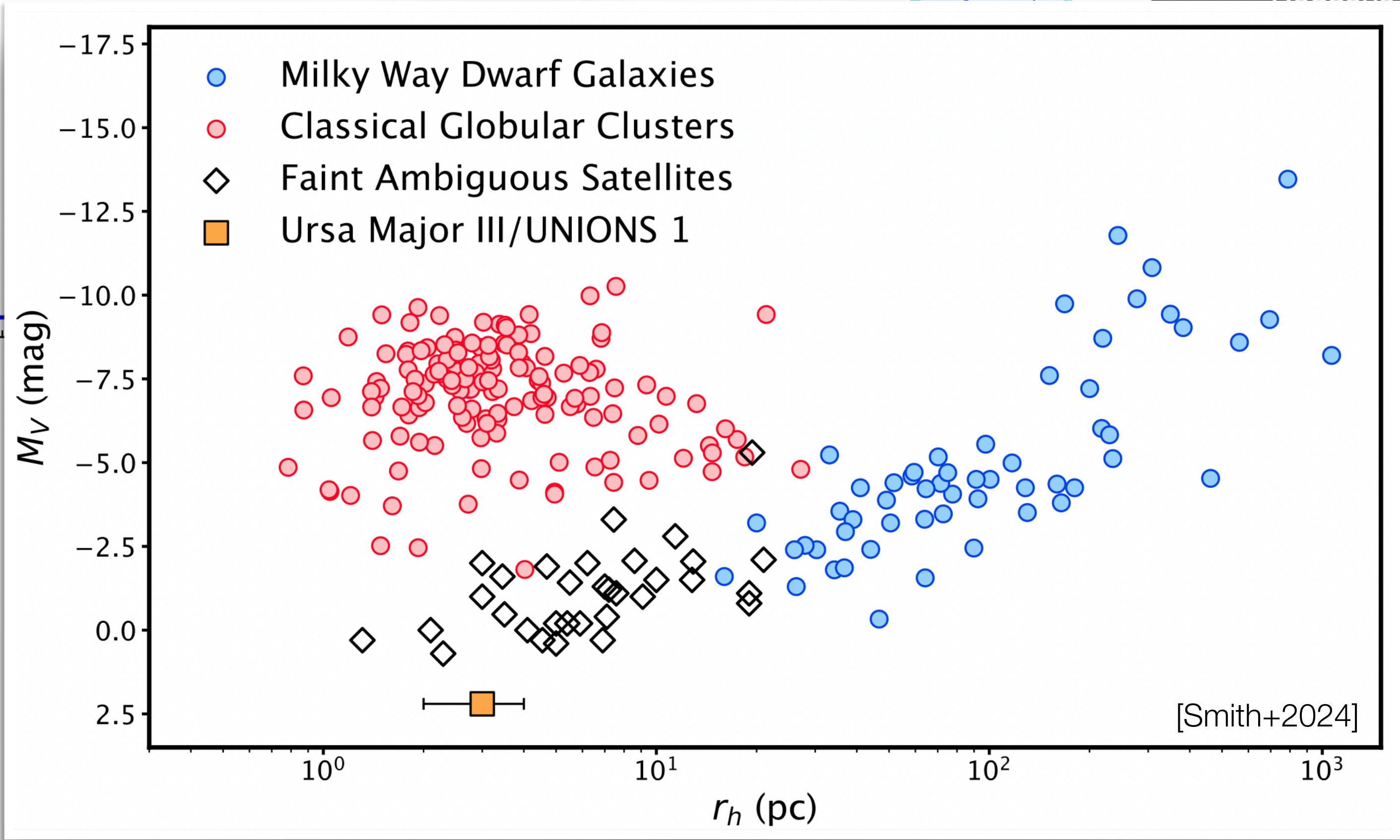
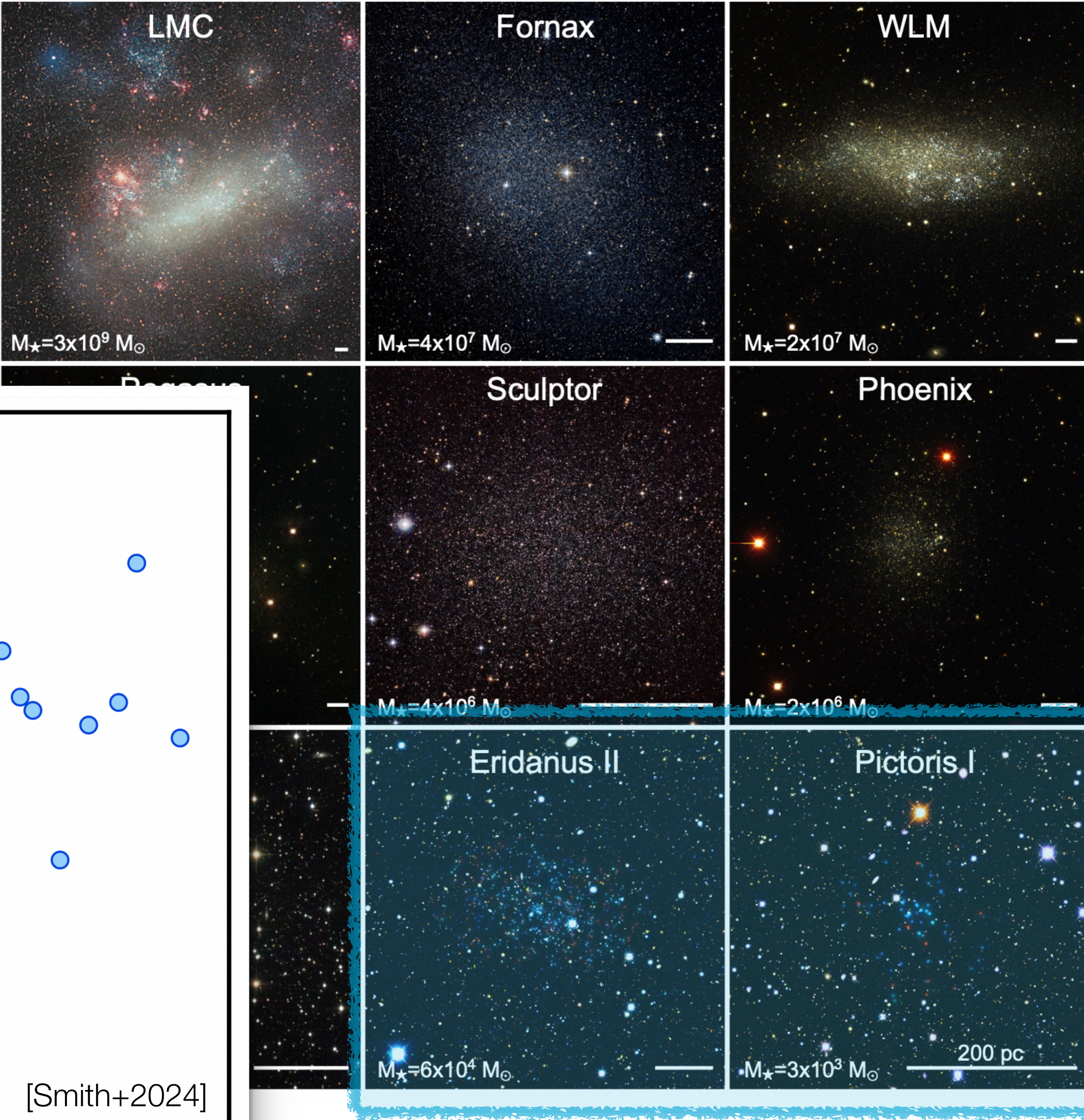
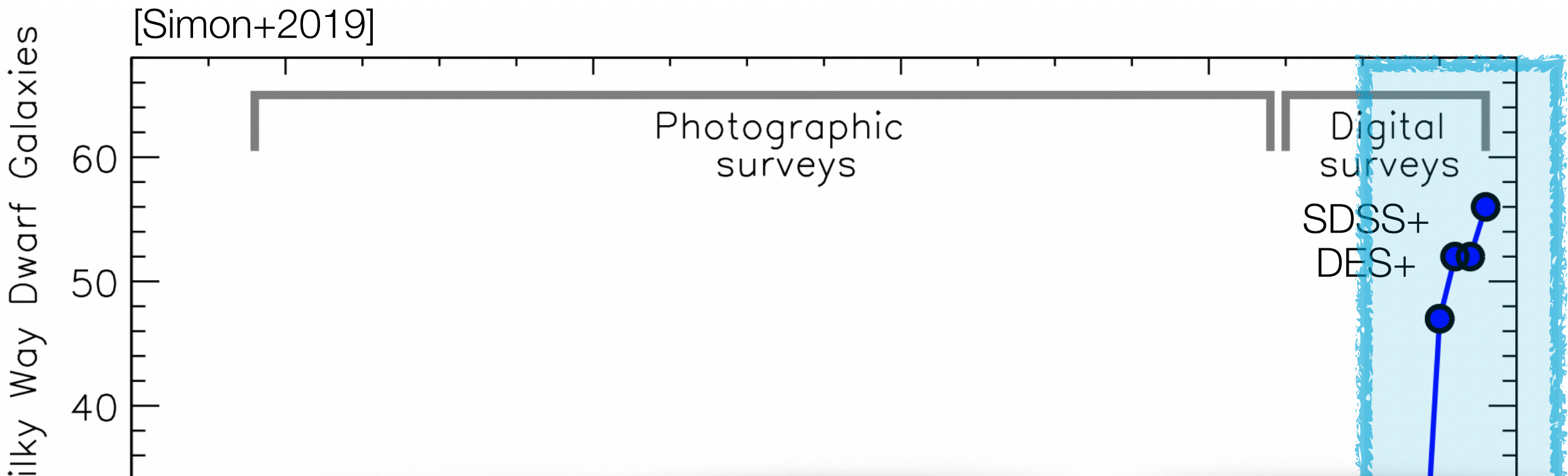
[Bullock&Boylan-Kolchin+2017]





# Abundance and densities of MW satellites

[Bullock&Boylan-Kolchin+2017]

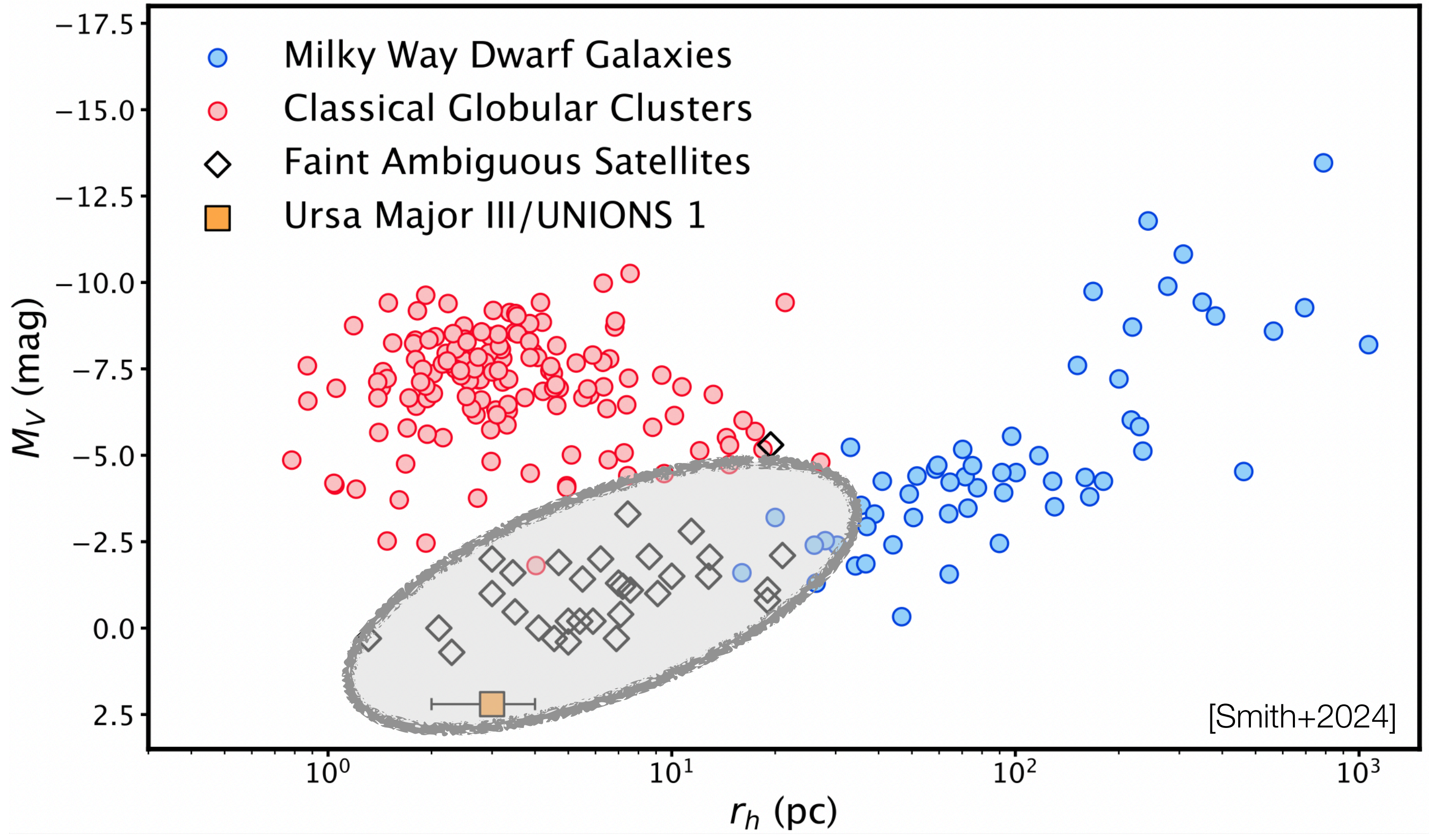
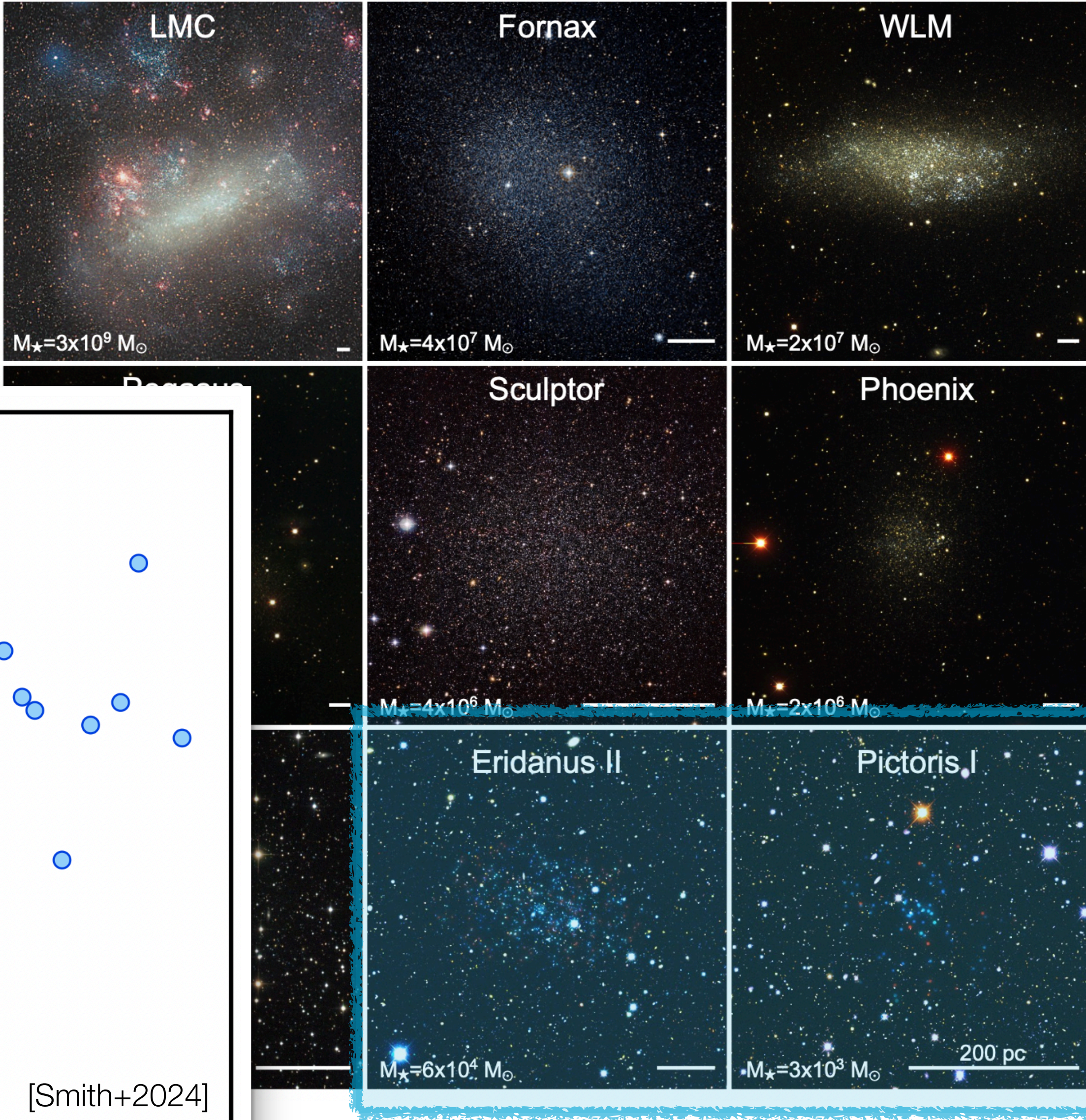
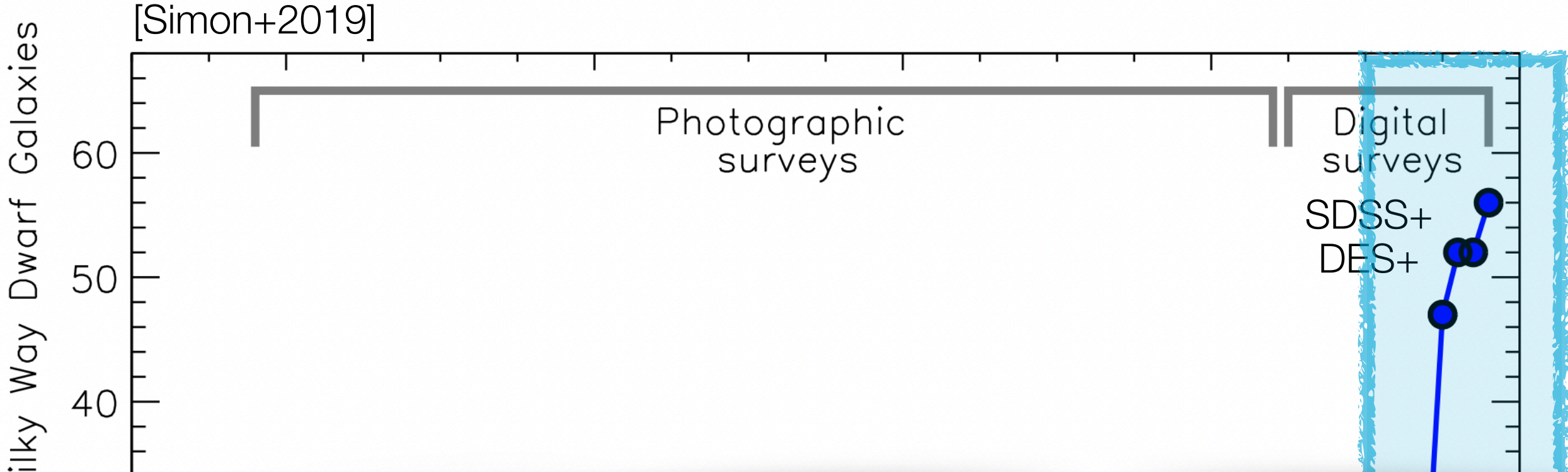


ultrafaints



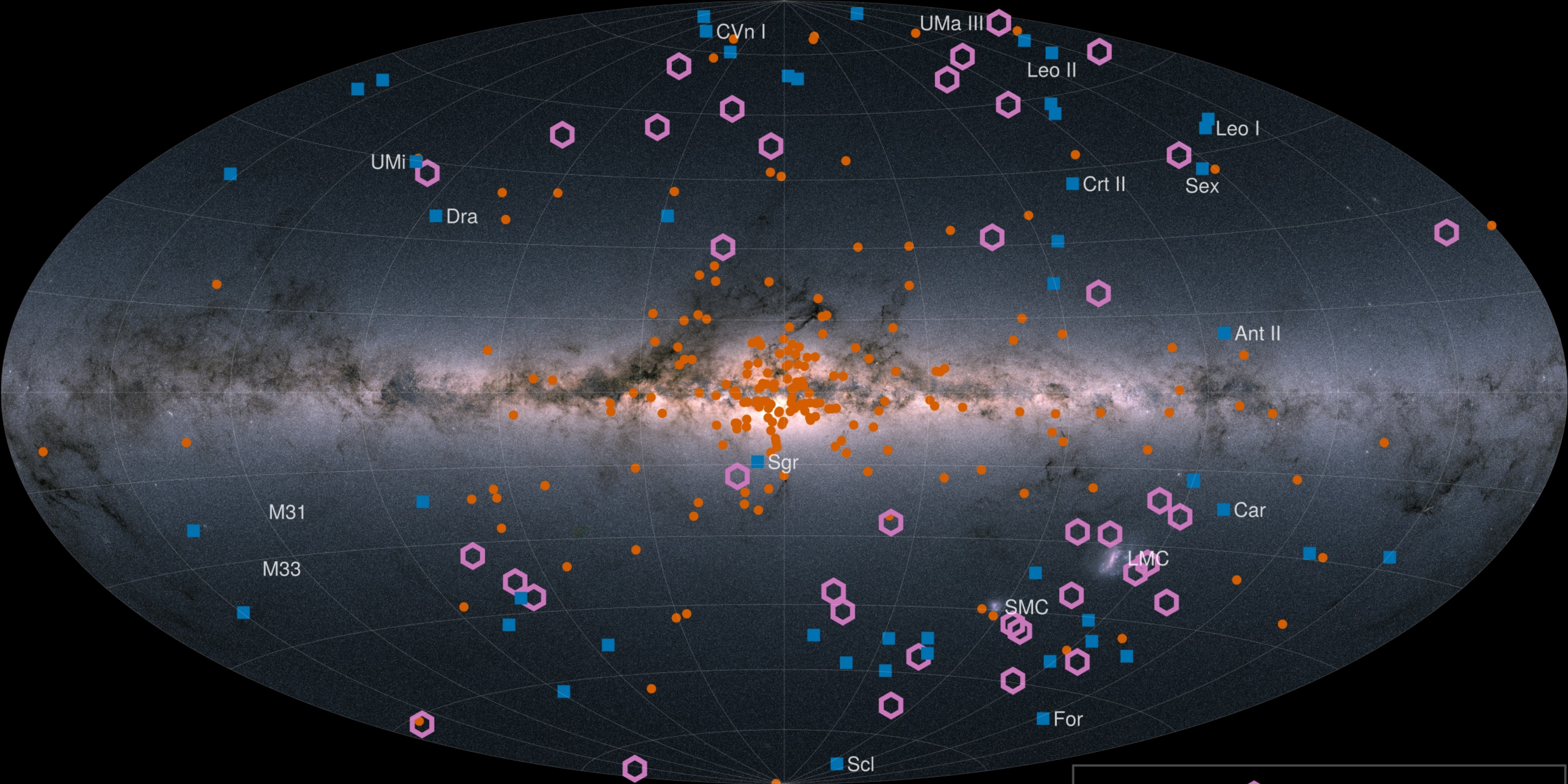
# Abundance and densities of MW satellites

[Bullock&Boylan-Kolchin+2017]



ultrafaints



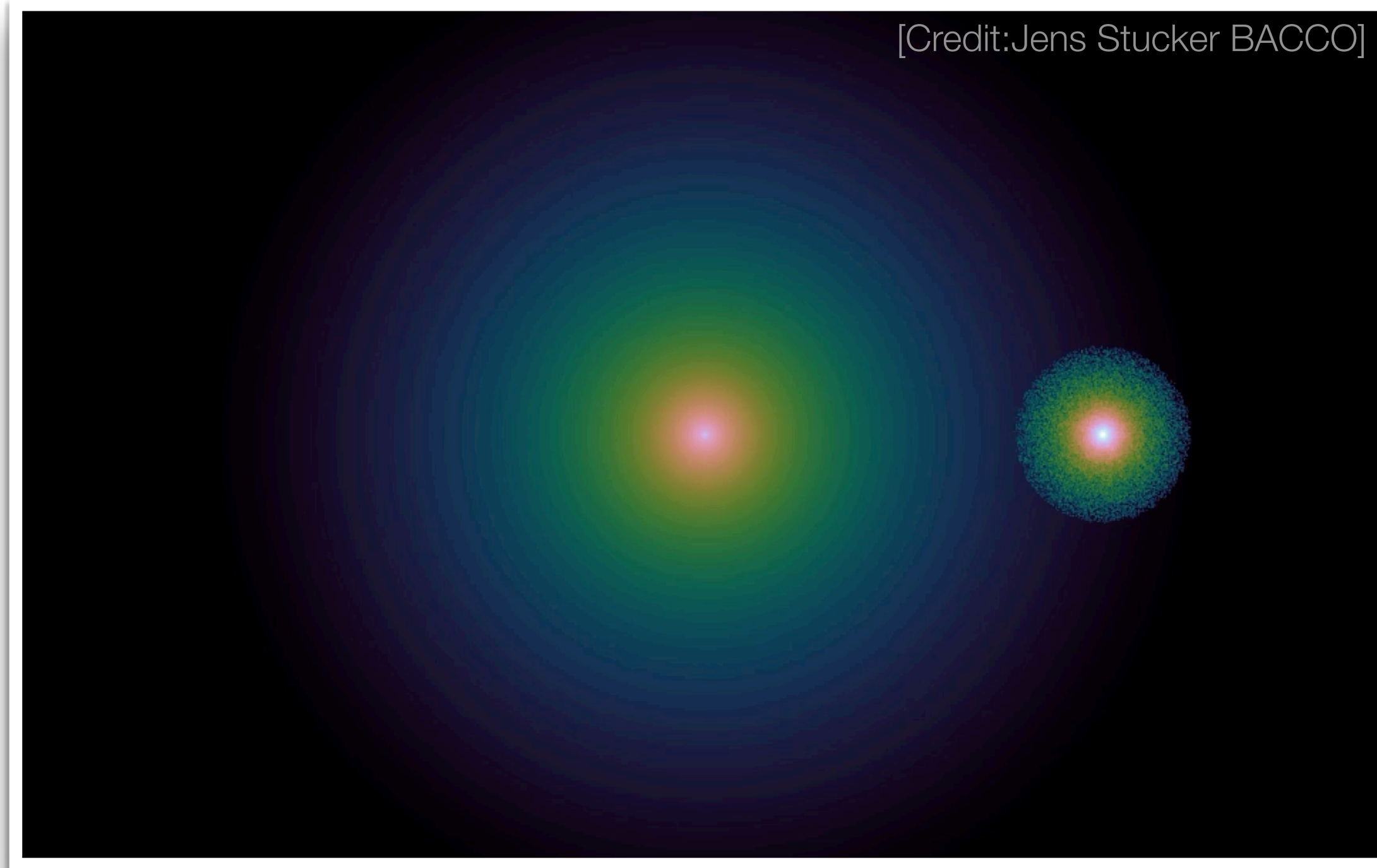




# Abundance and densities of MW satellites

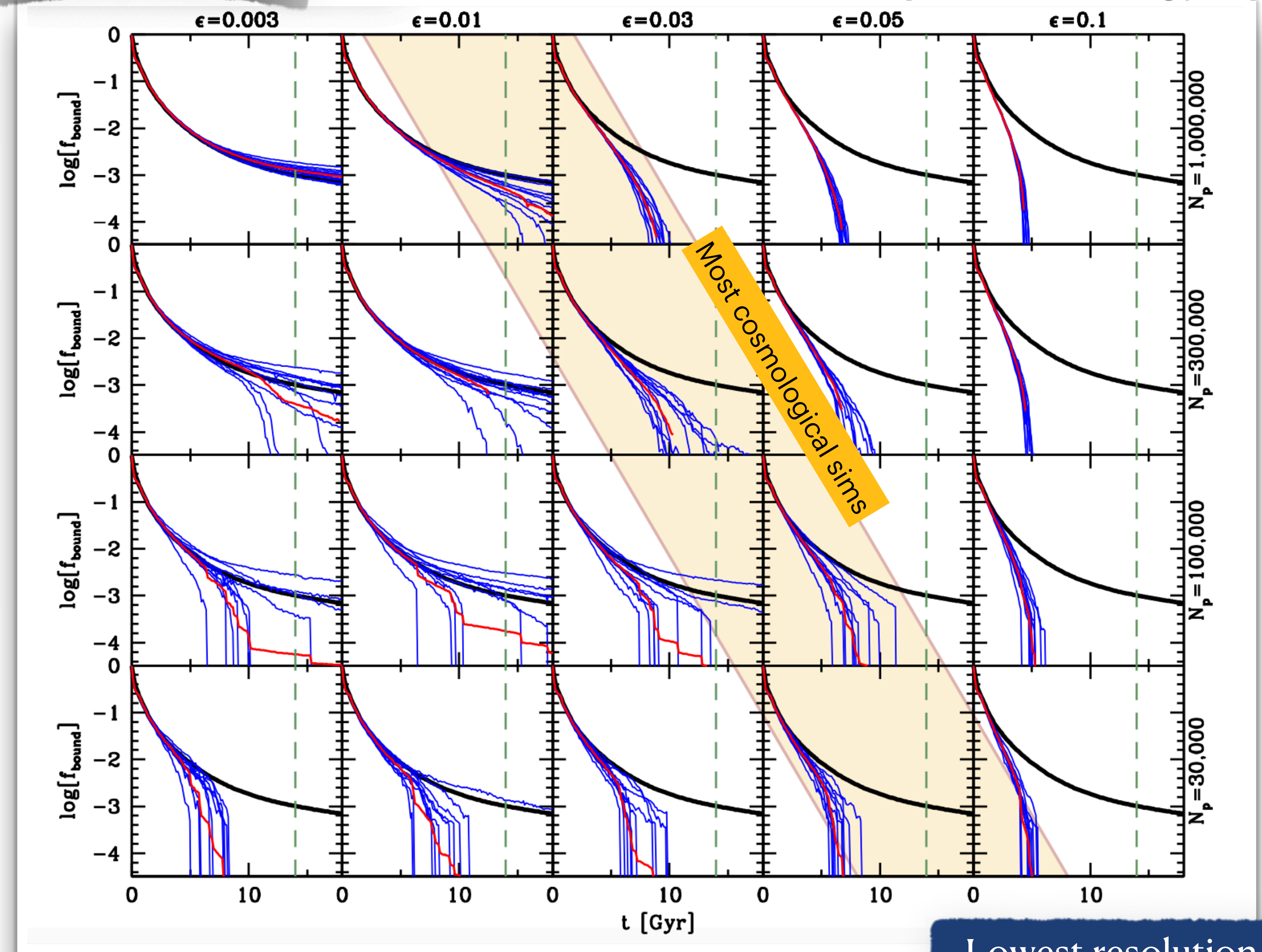


# Abundance and densities of MW satellites



Highest resolution

Subhalo bound mass vs time  
[van den Bosch & Ogiya18]



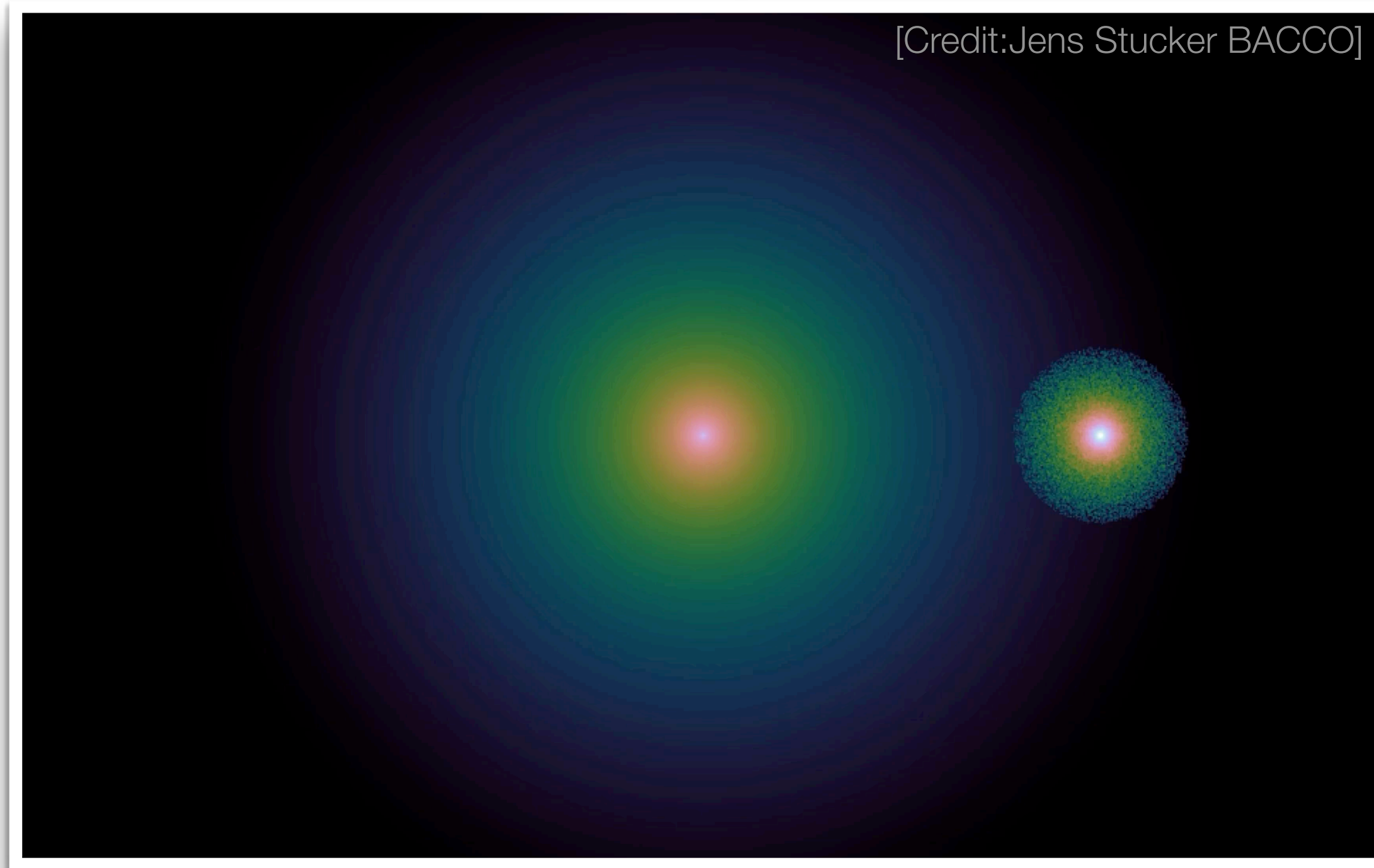
Lowest resolution

[see e.g. Peñarrubia+08,10; van den Bosch & Ogiya18; Han+18; Green & van den Bosch 19; Jiang+21; Stucker+23; He+25; Errani+20,21,22,24]



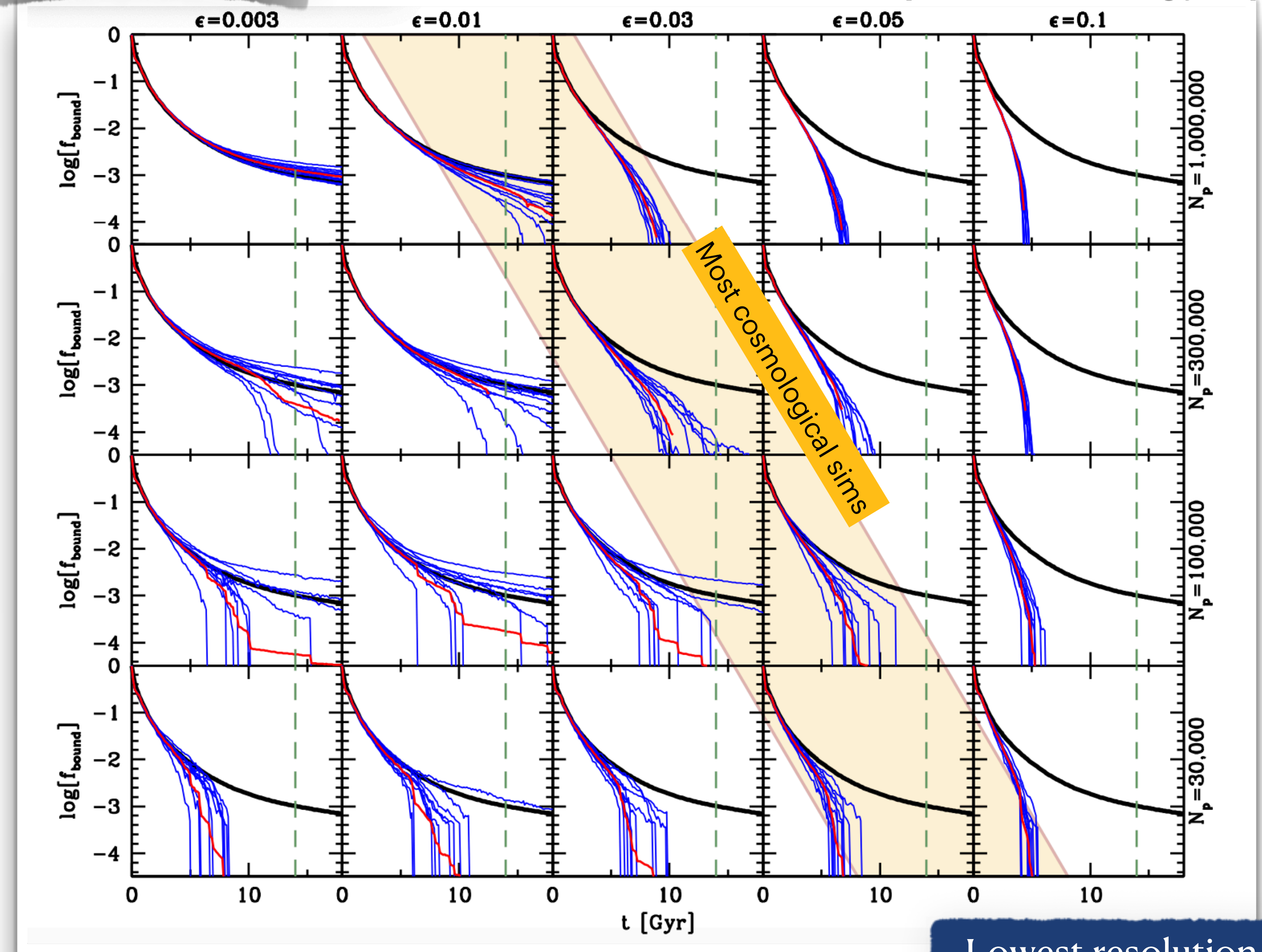
# Abundance and densities of MW satellites

Cosmological simulations suffer from artificial disruption of subhalos



Highest resolution

Subhalo bound mass vs time  
[van den Bosch & Ogiya18]

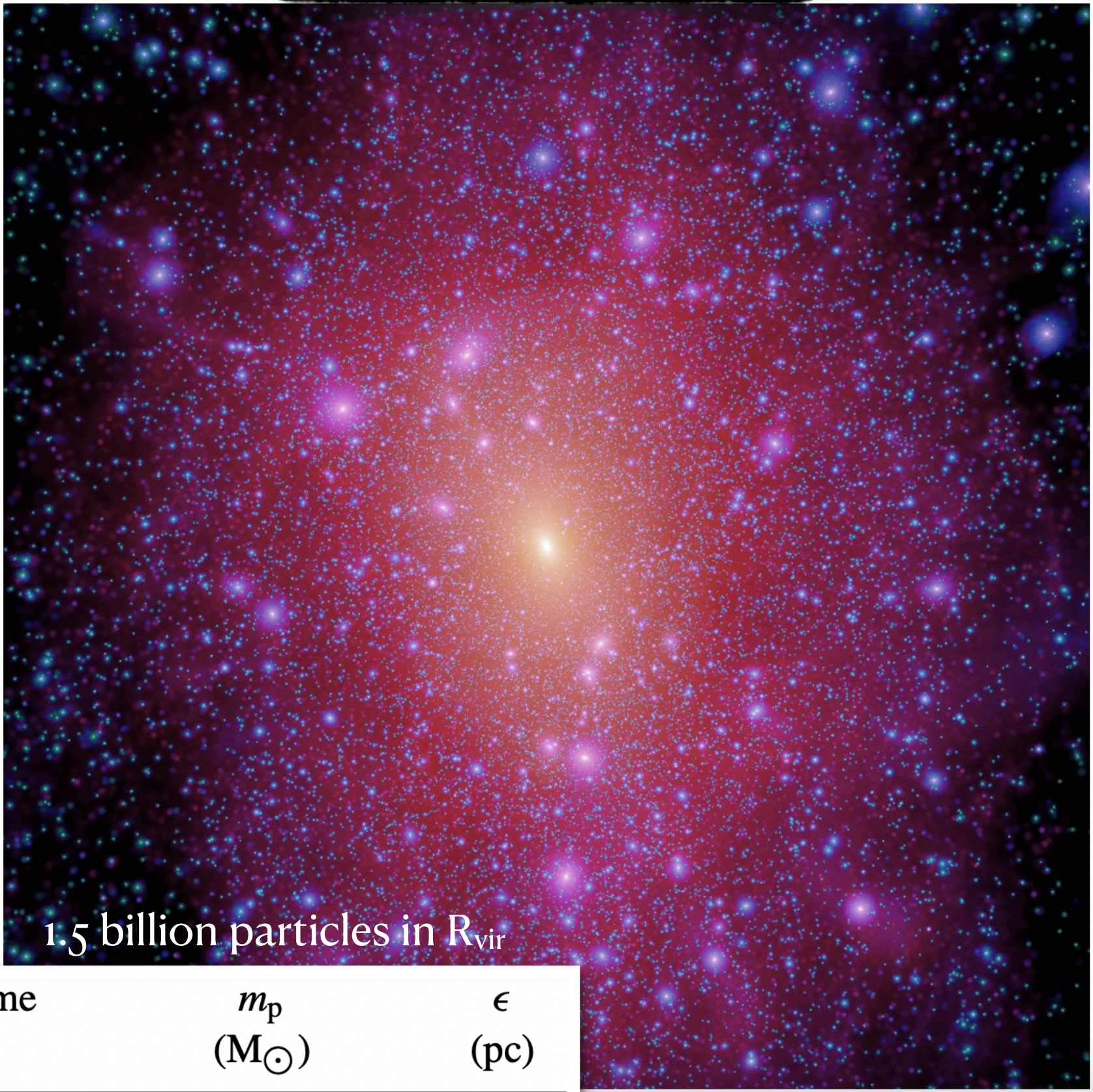


Lowest resolution

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## Aquarius project

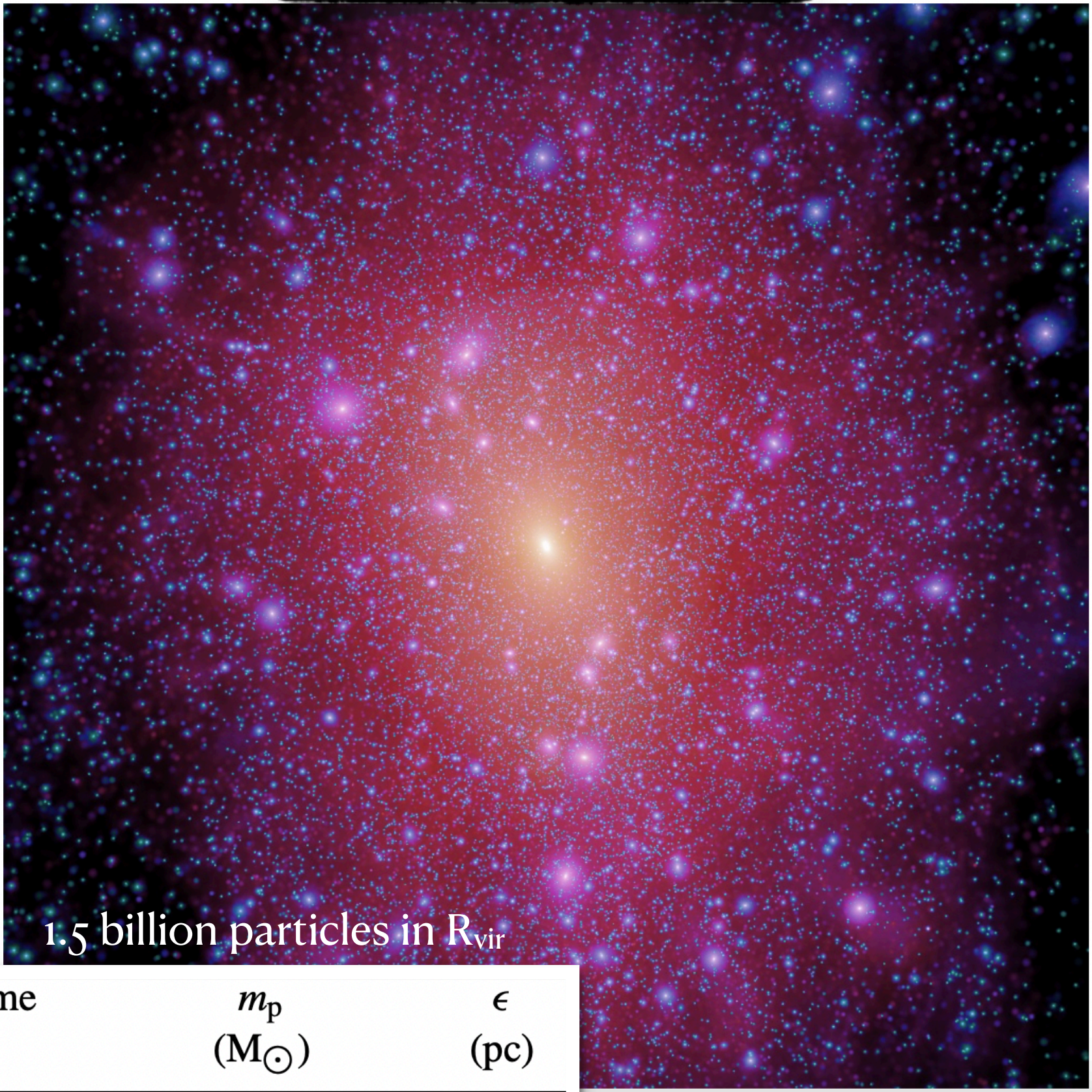


Name	$m_p$ ( $M_\odot$ )	$\epsilon$ (pc)
Aq-A-1	$1.712 \times 10^3$	20.5

Highest-resolution MW halo simulation (DM-only)



## Aquarius project

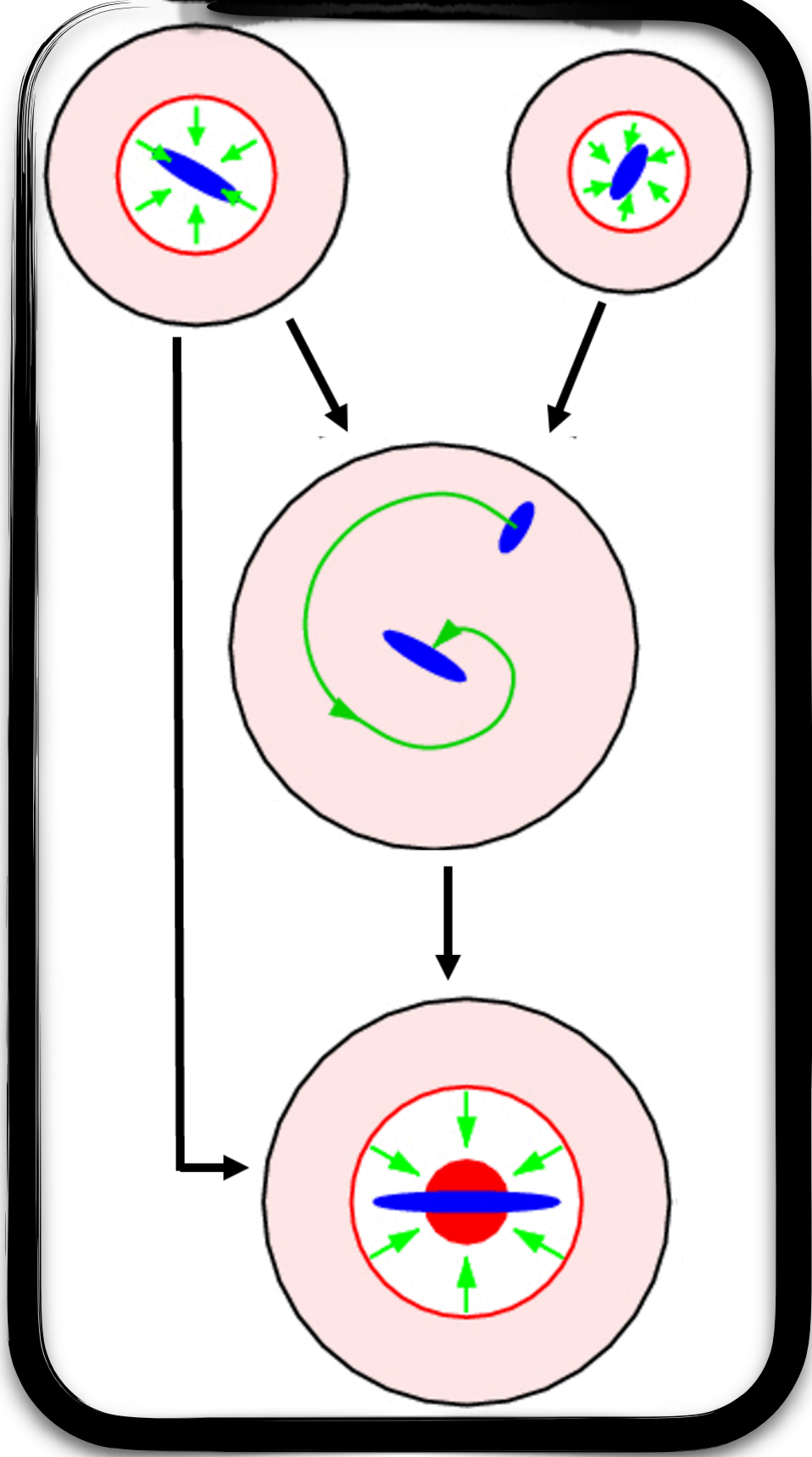


1.5 billion particles in  $R_{\text{vir}}$

Name	$m_p$ ( $M_\odot$ )	$\epsilon$ (pc)
Aq-A-1	$1.712 \times 10^3$	20.5

Highest-resolution MW halo simulation (DM-only)

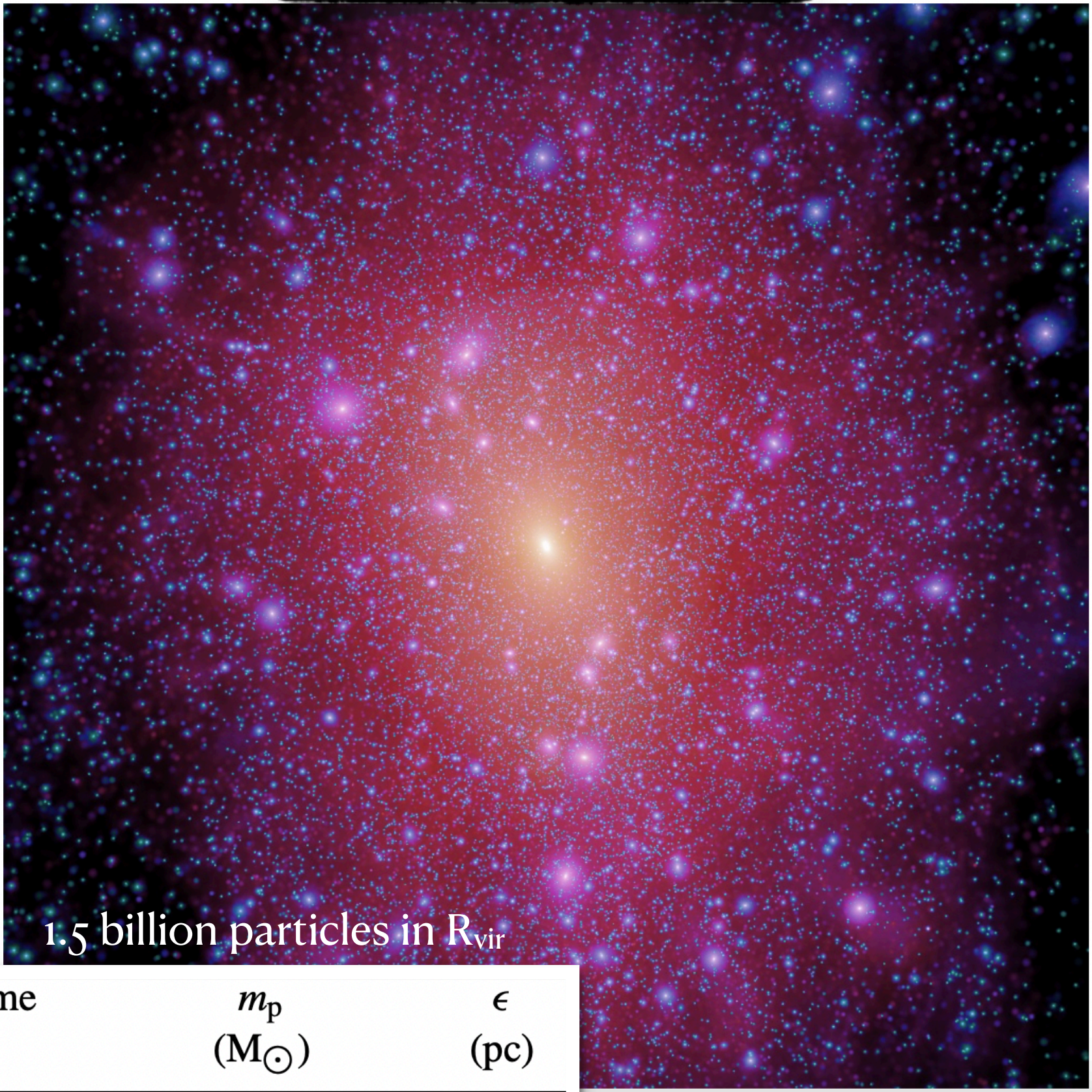
## GALFORM



Semi-analytic model for galaxy formation



## Aquarius project

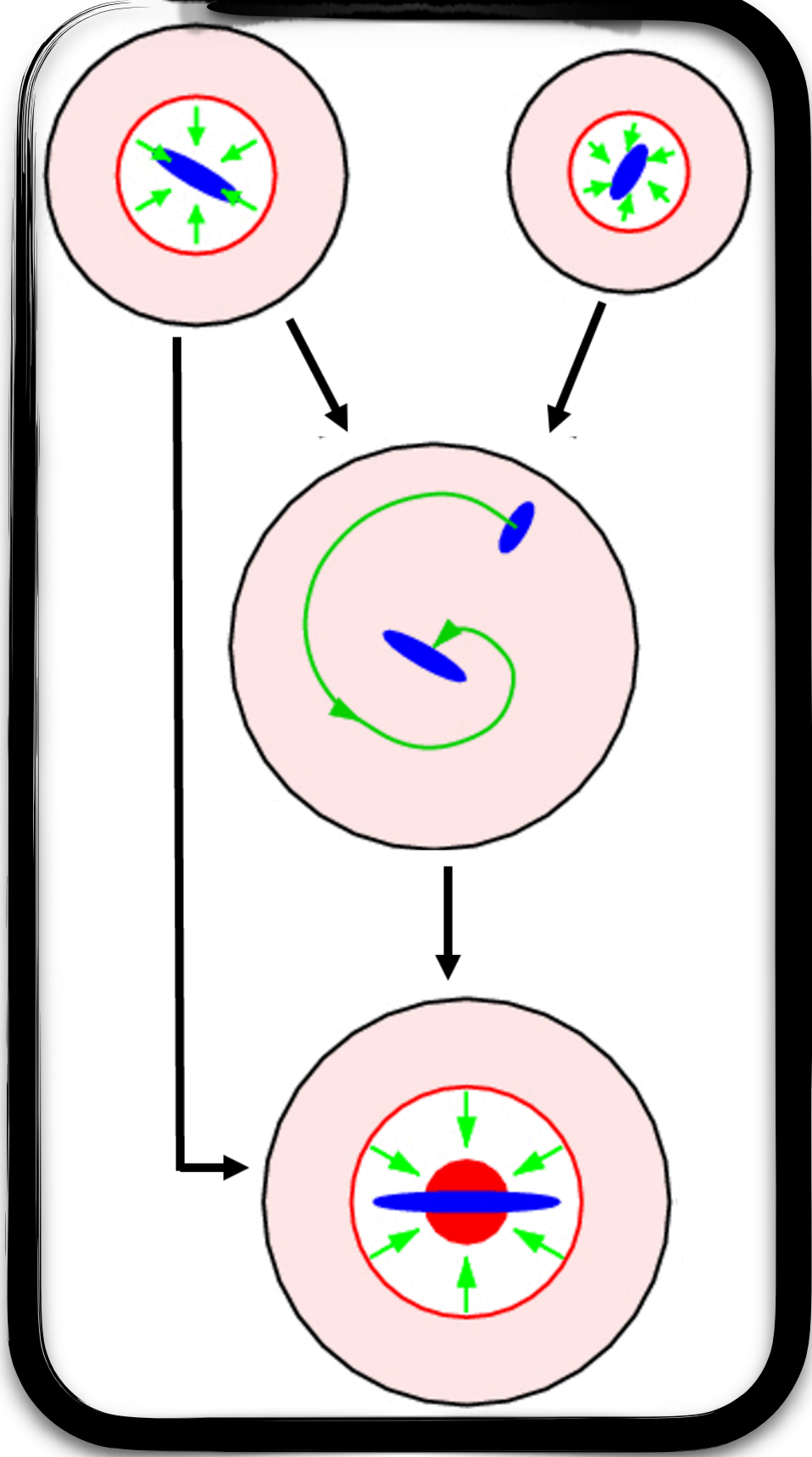


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+

## GALFORM



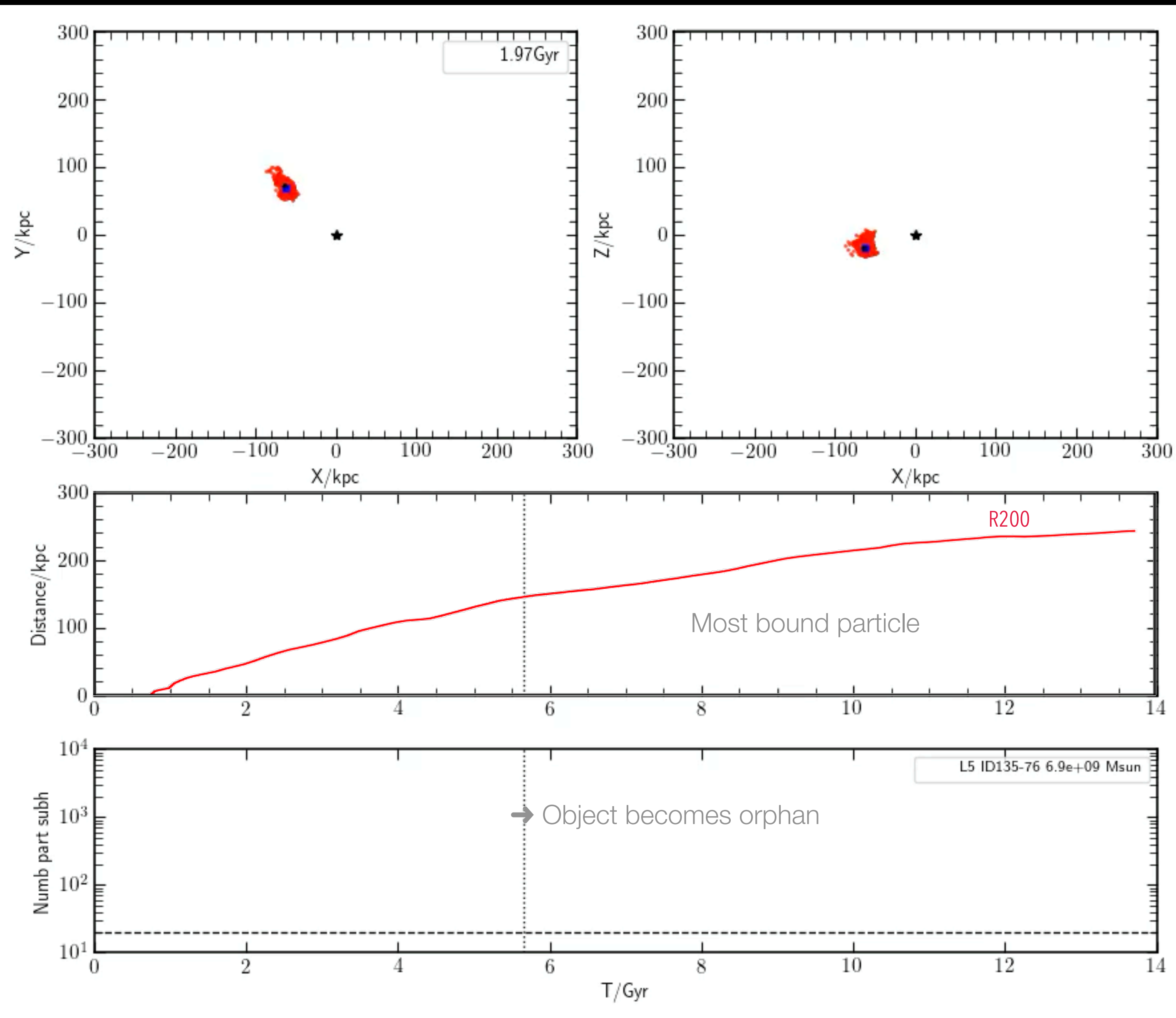
Semi-analytic model for galaxy formation

- Galform reads Aquarius merger trees and particle data, and is able to track the evolution of a galaxy after it disrupts (following the most-bound particle).
- “Type-1s” (satellites in “resolved” subhalos)
- “Type-2s/orphans” (satellites in “unresolved” subhalos).



# “Orphans”: sub-resolution galaxies

Starts at time  
when  $M=M_{\text{peak}}$   
Subfind data  
“Orphan” phase



- Very early infall times
- Small pericentres
- Short orbital periods

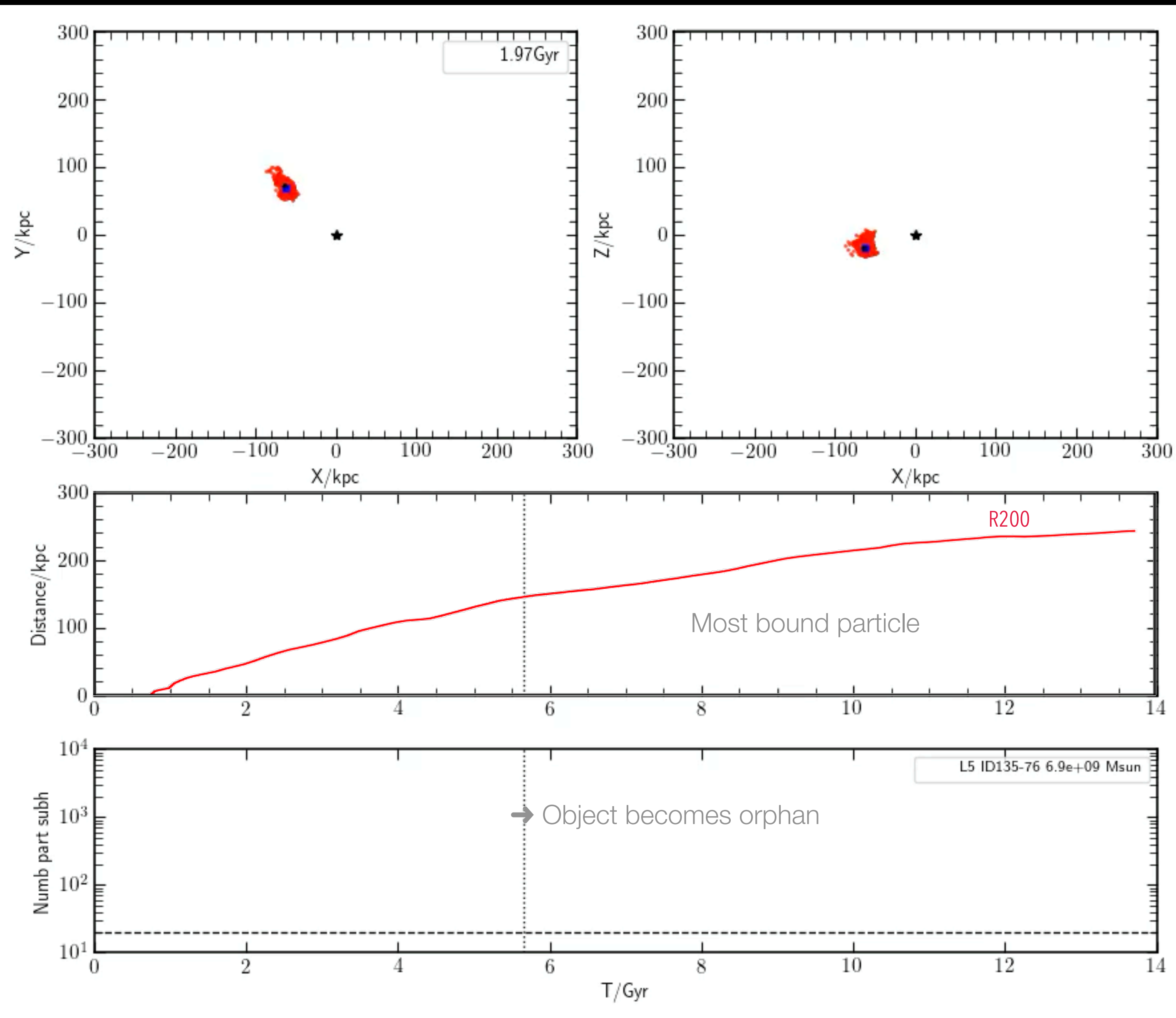
20 particles





# “Orphans”: sub-resolution galaxies

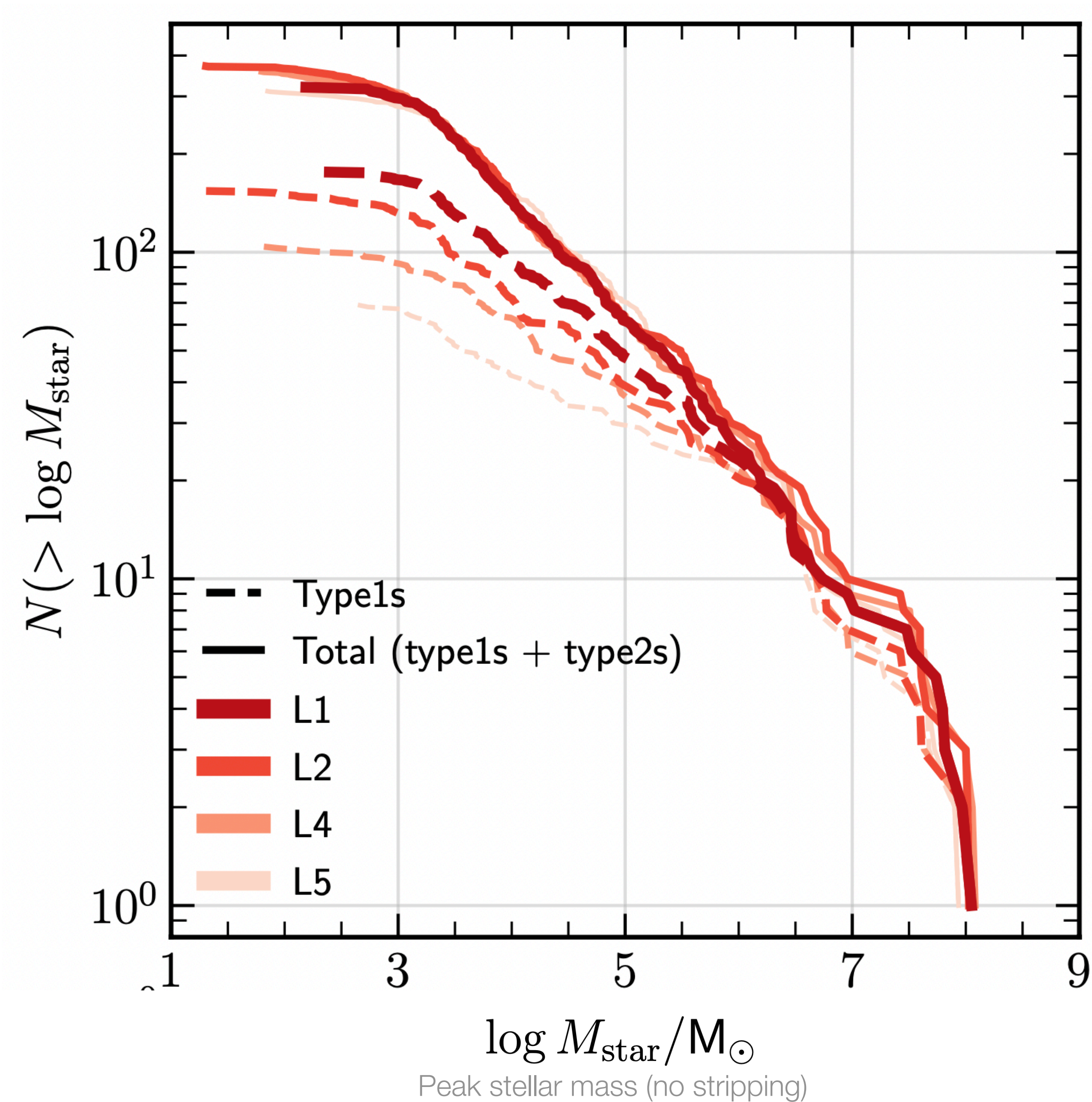
Starts at time  
when  $M=M_{\text{peak}}$   
Subfind data  
“Orphan” phase



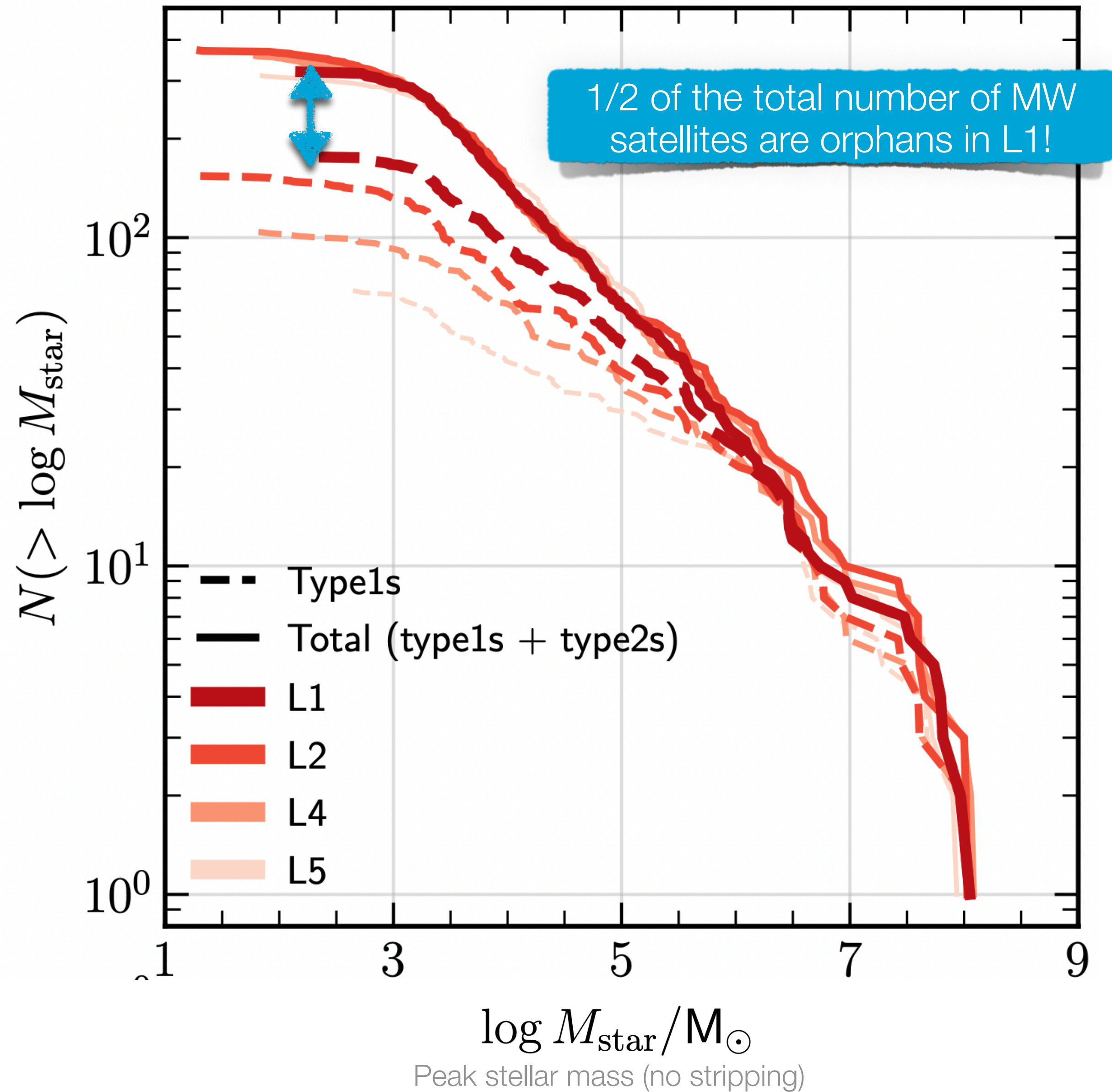
- Very early infall times
- Small pericentres
- Short orbital periods

20 particles

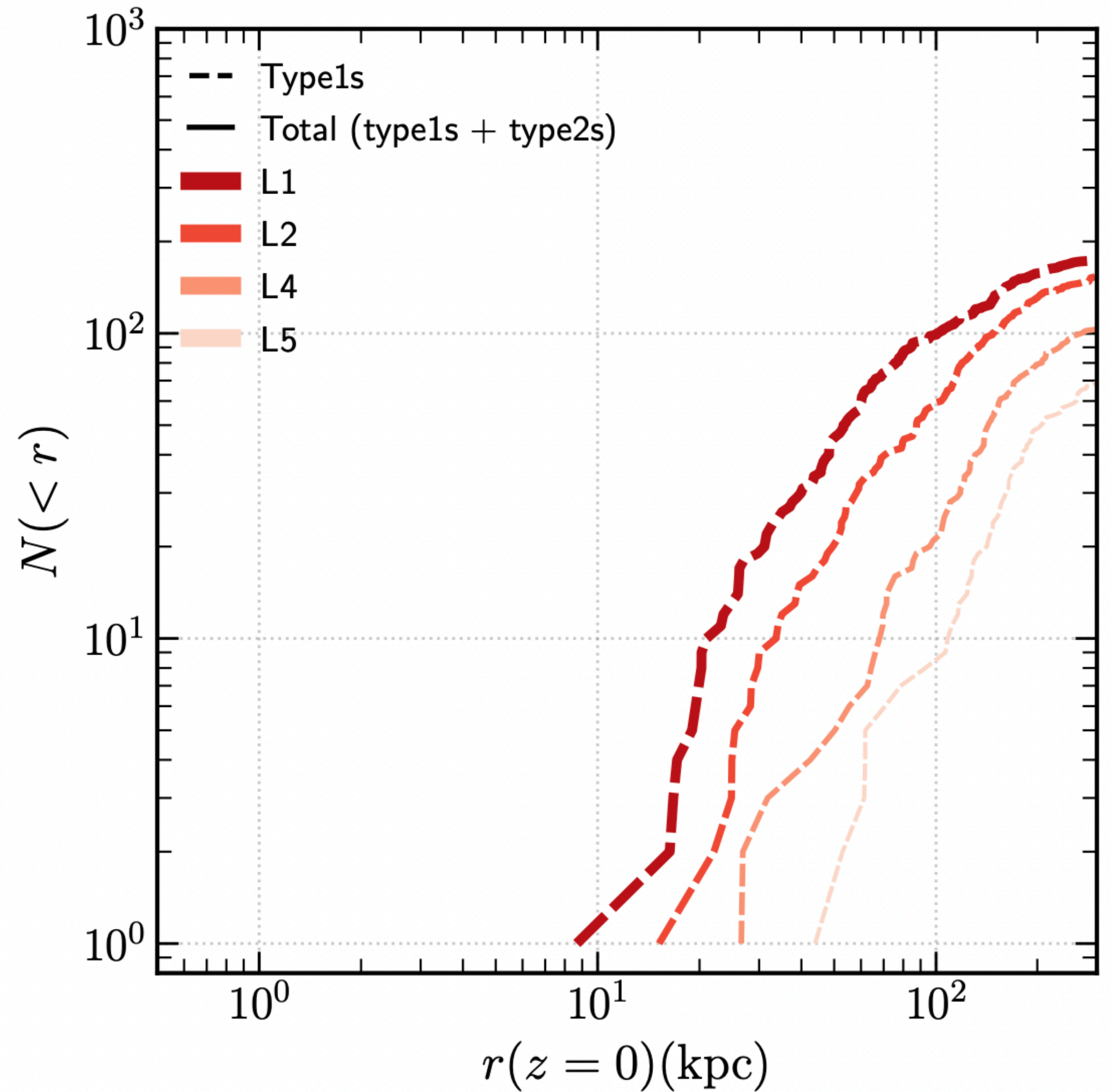
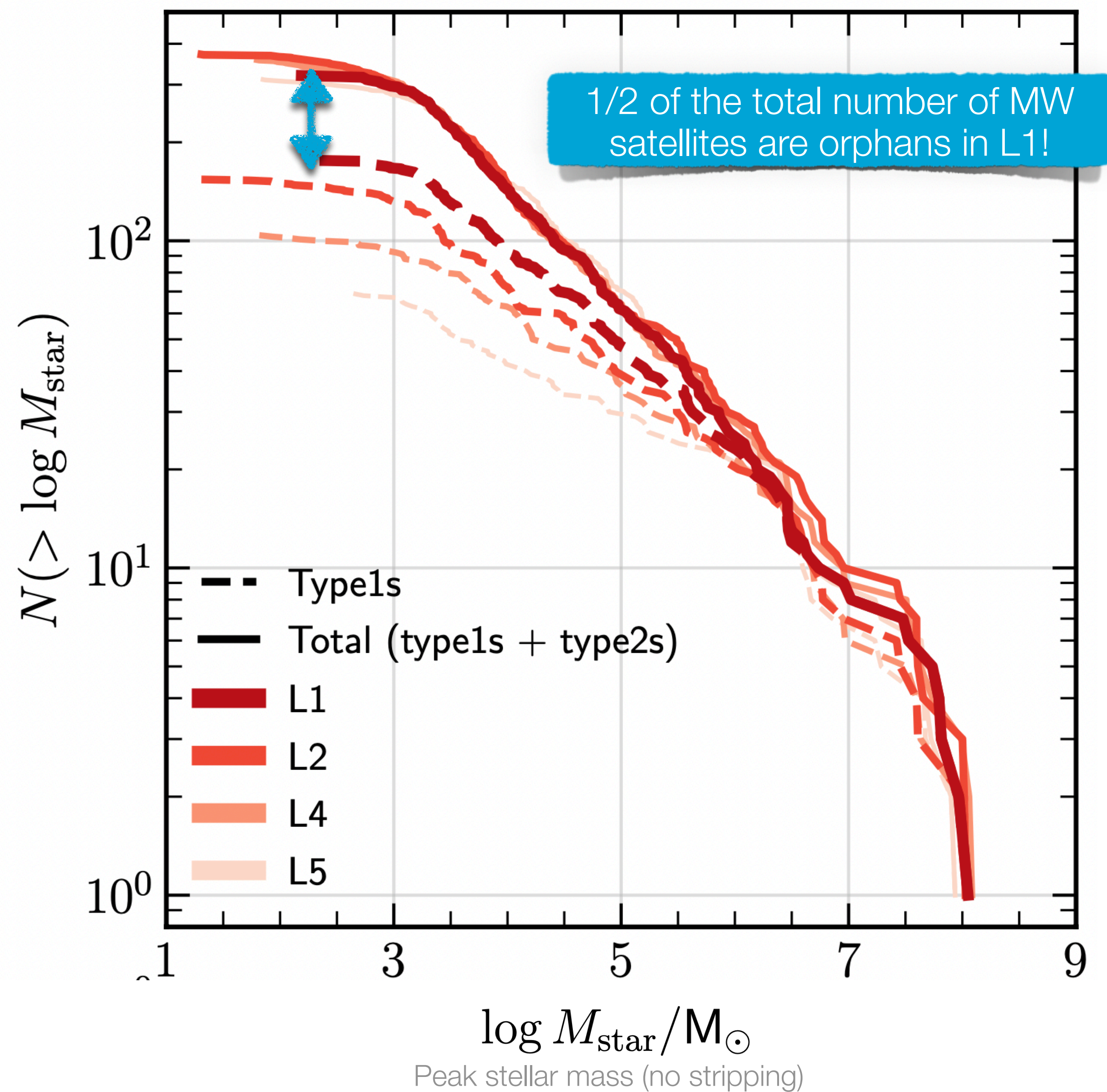




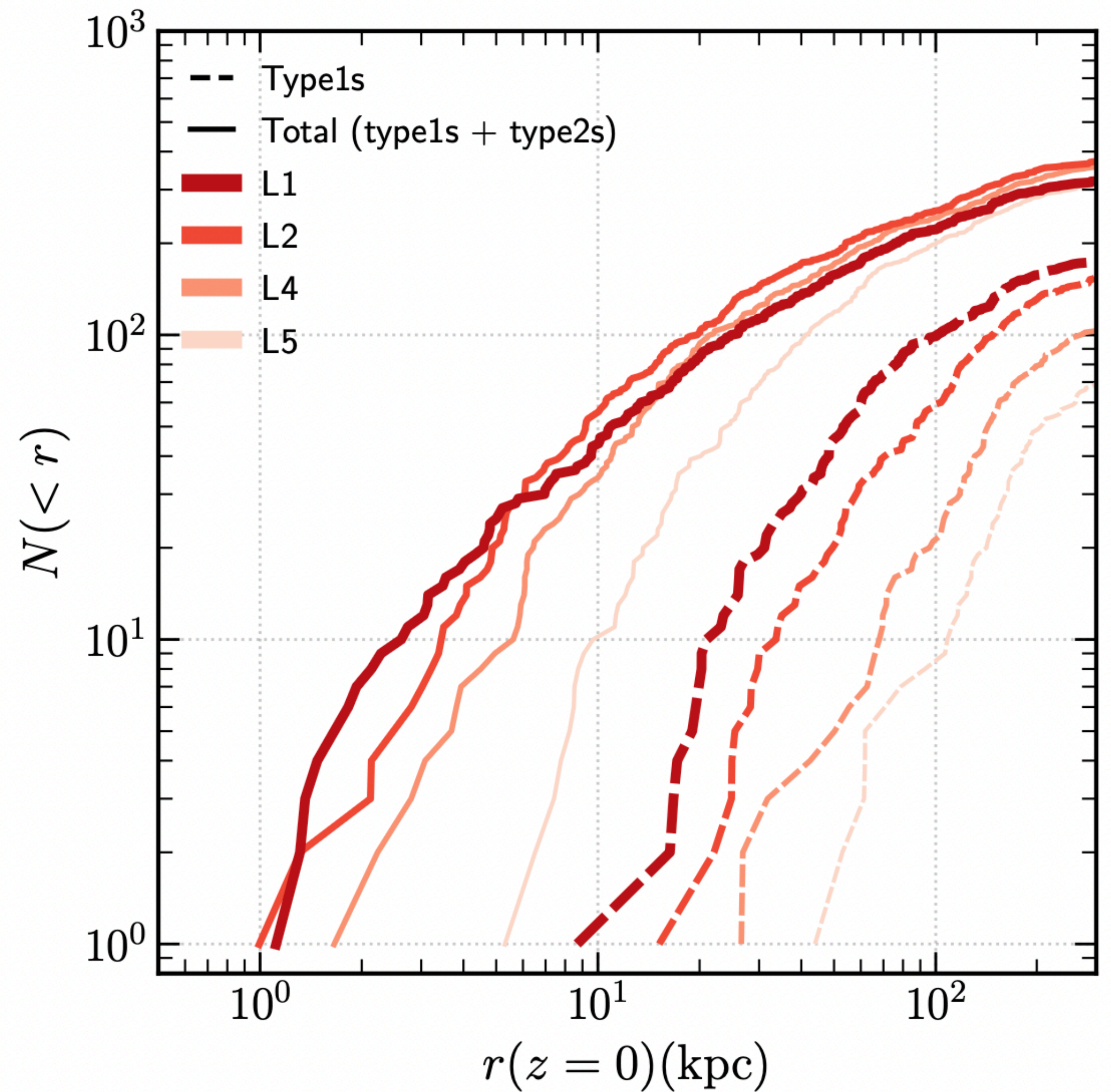
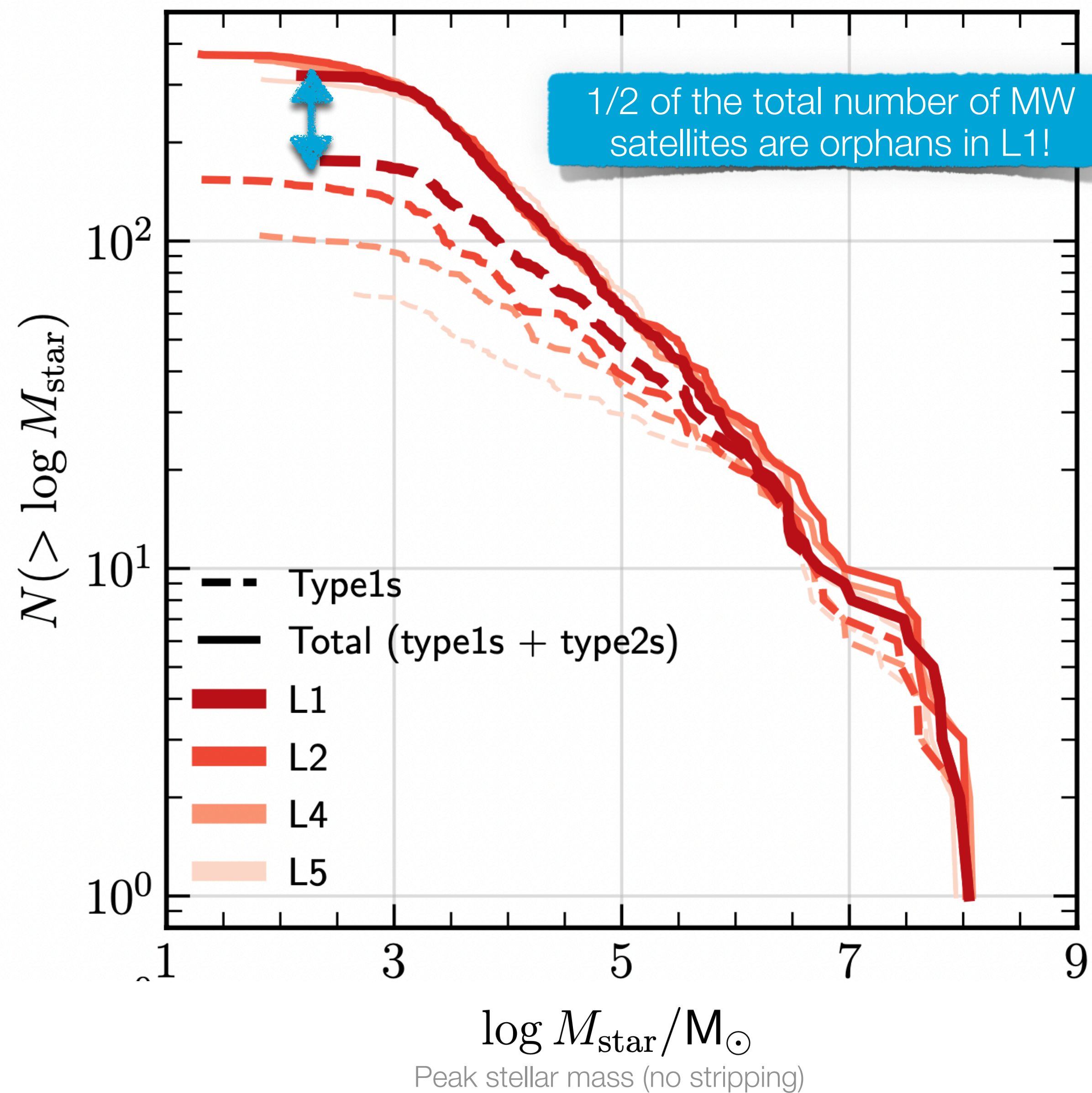




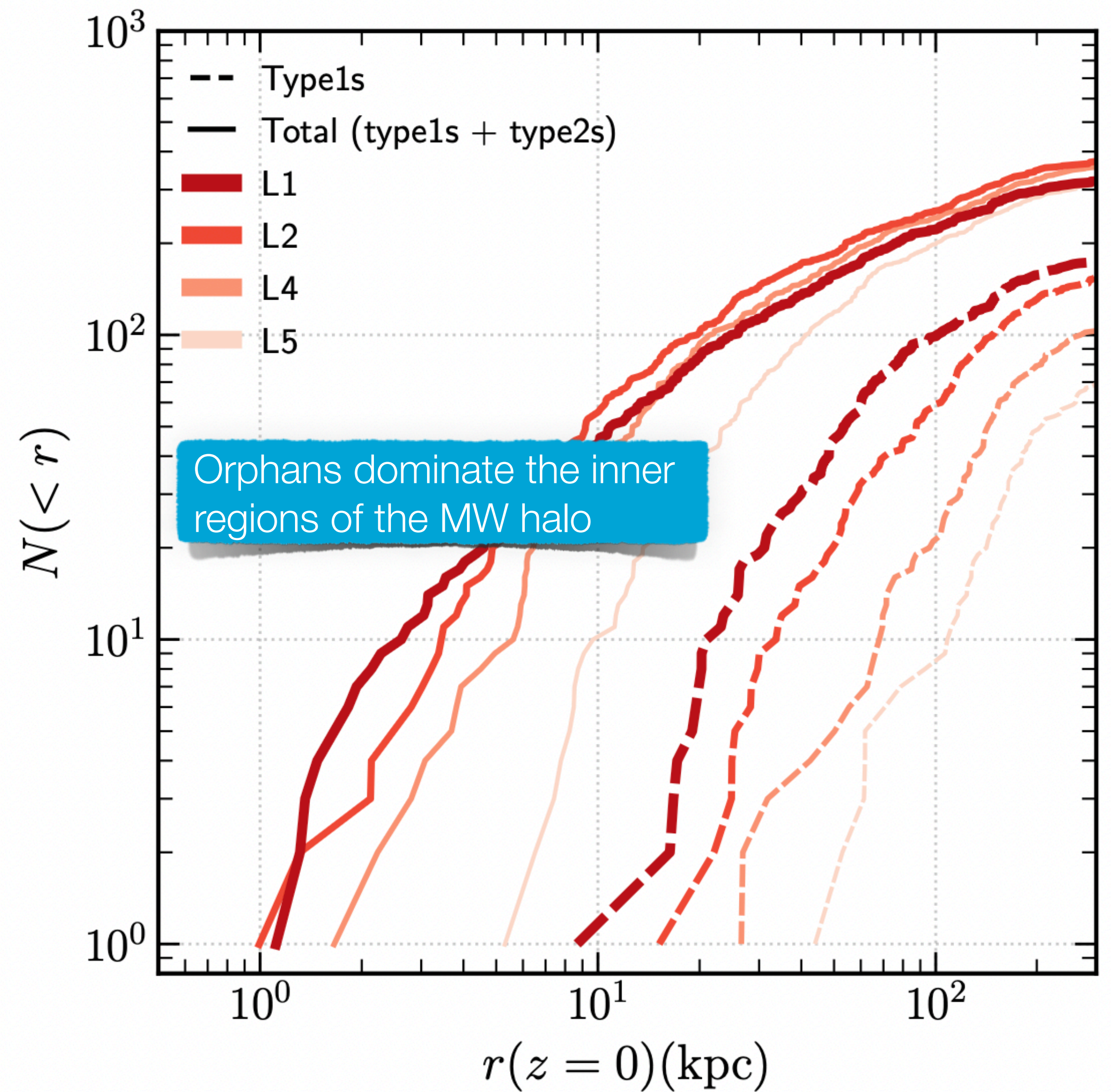
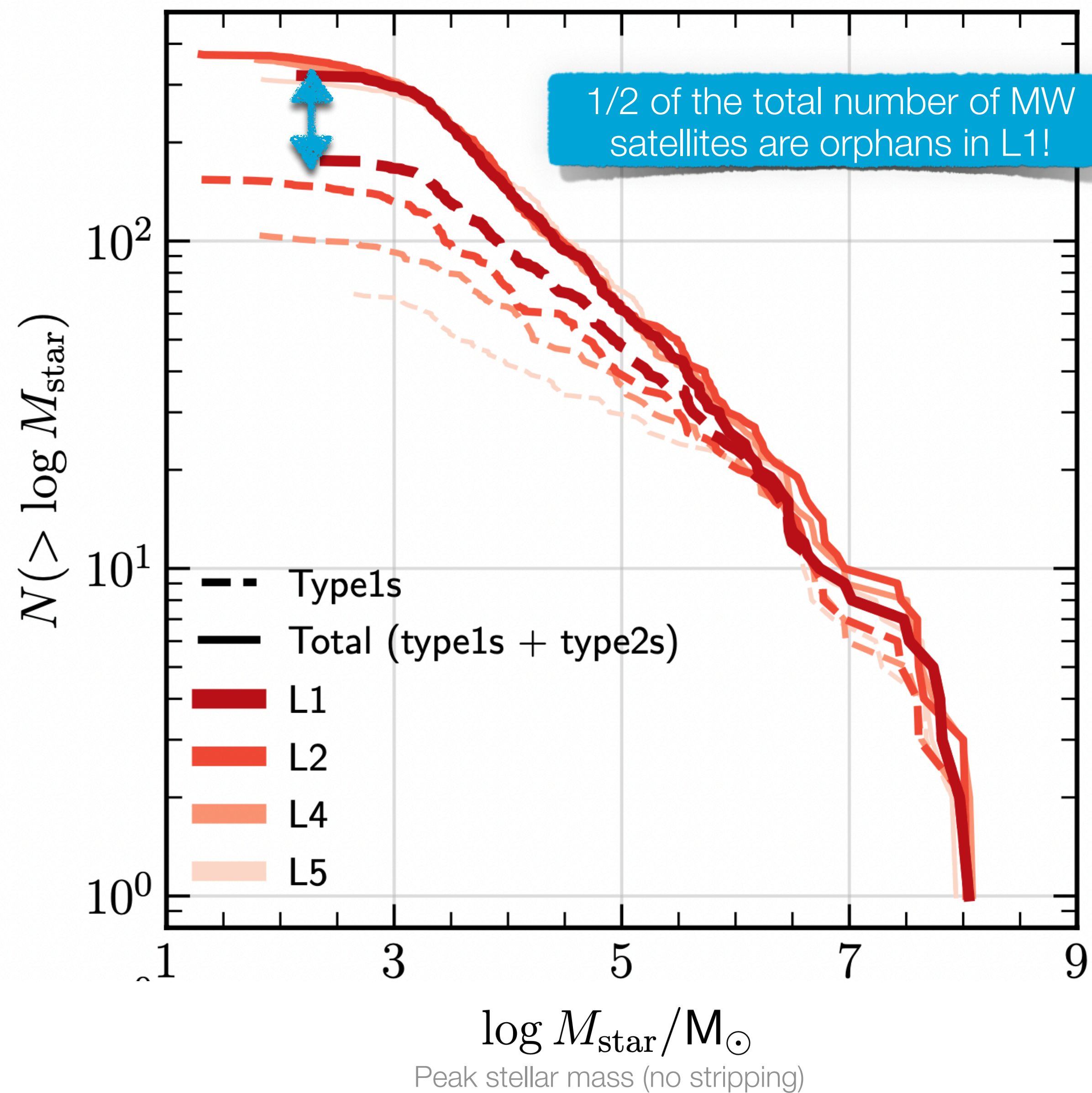






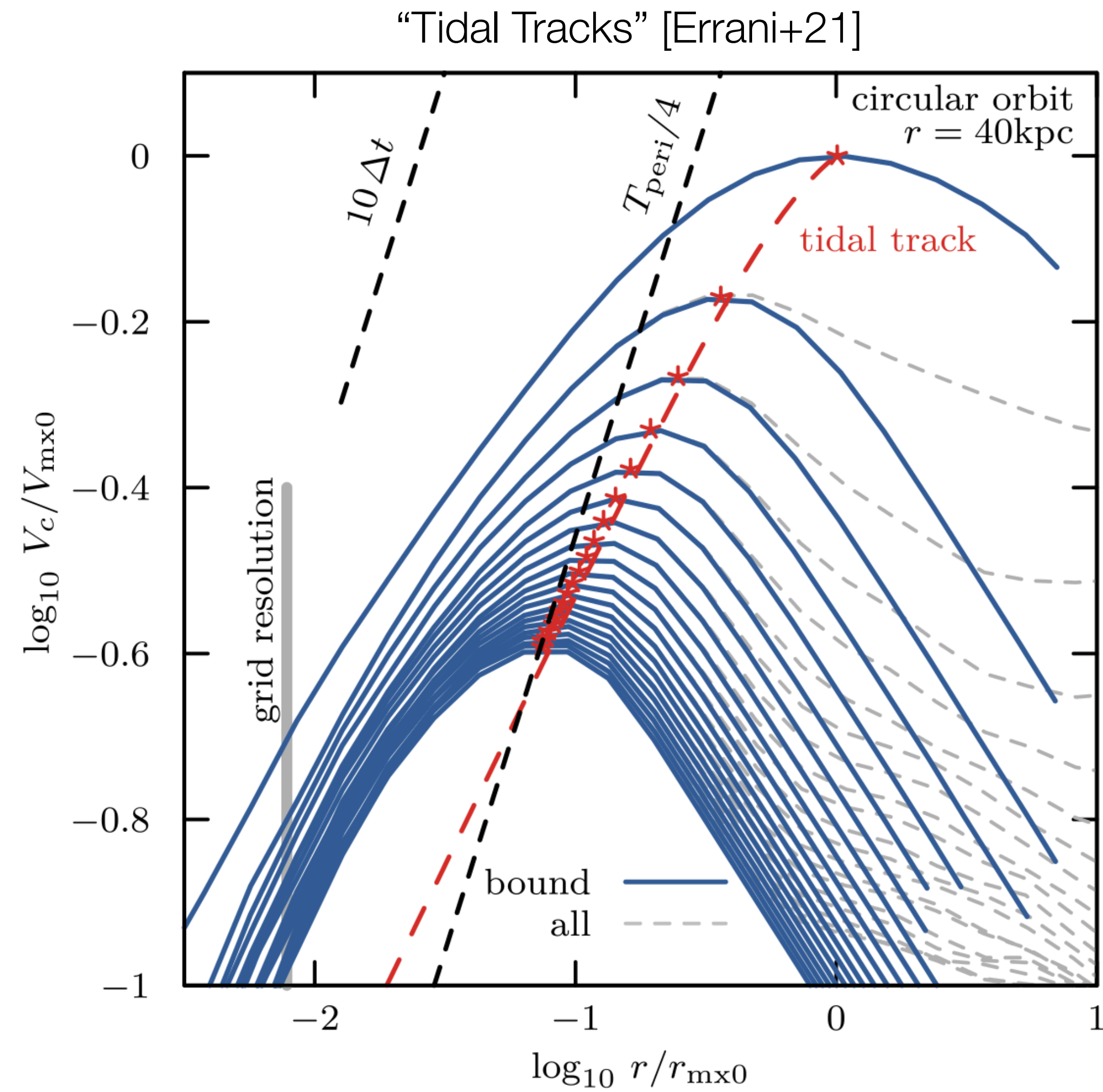






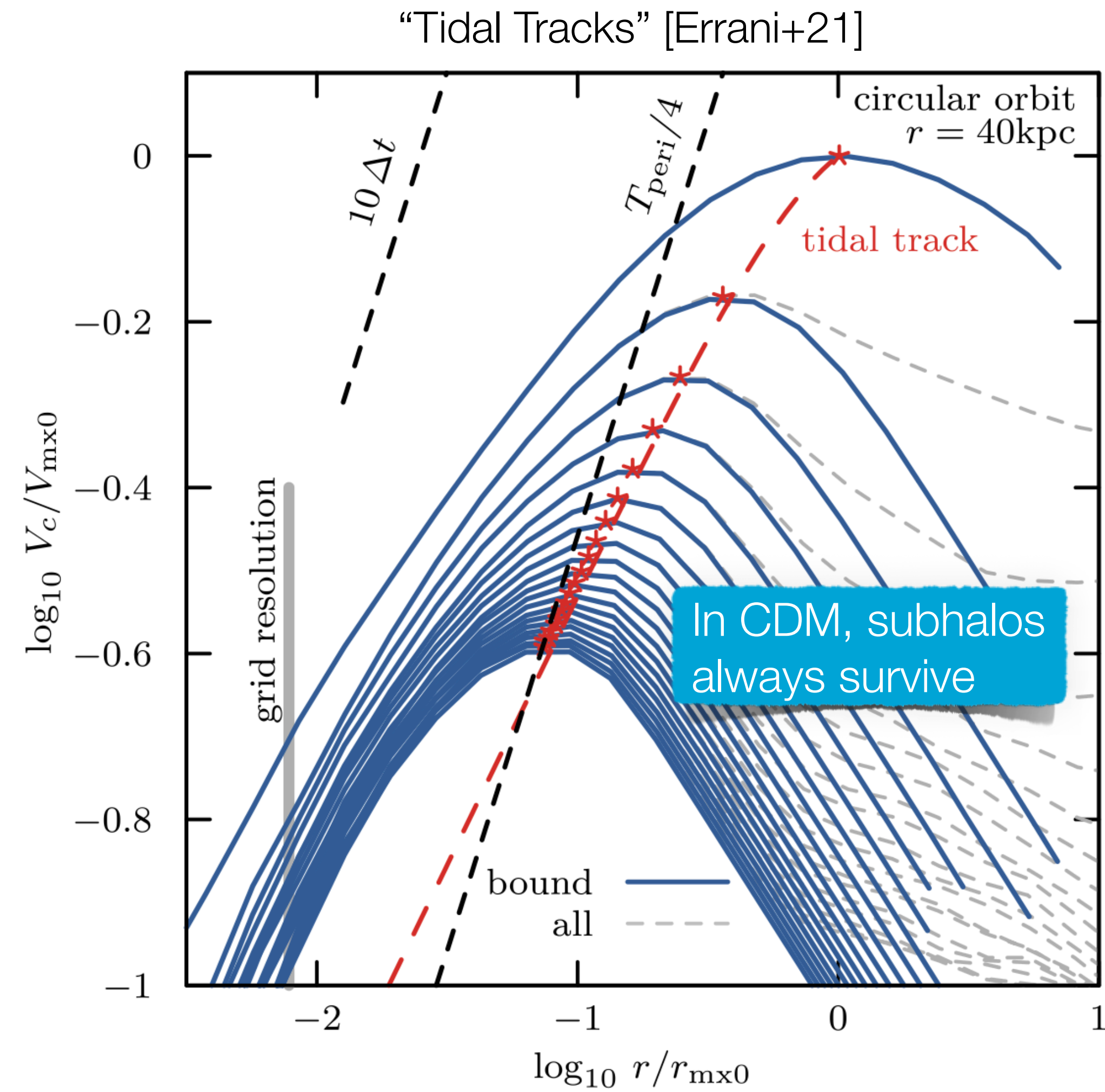


## Dark matter tidal stripping



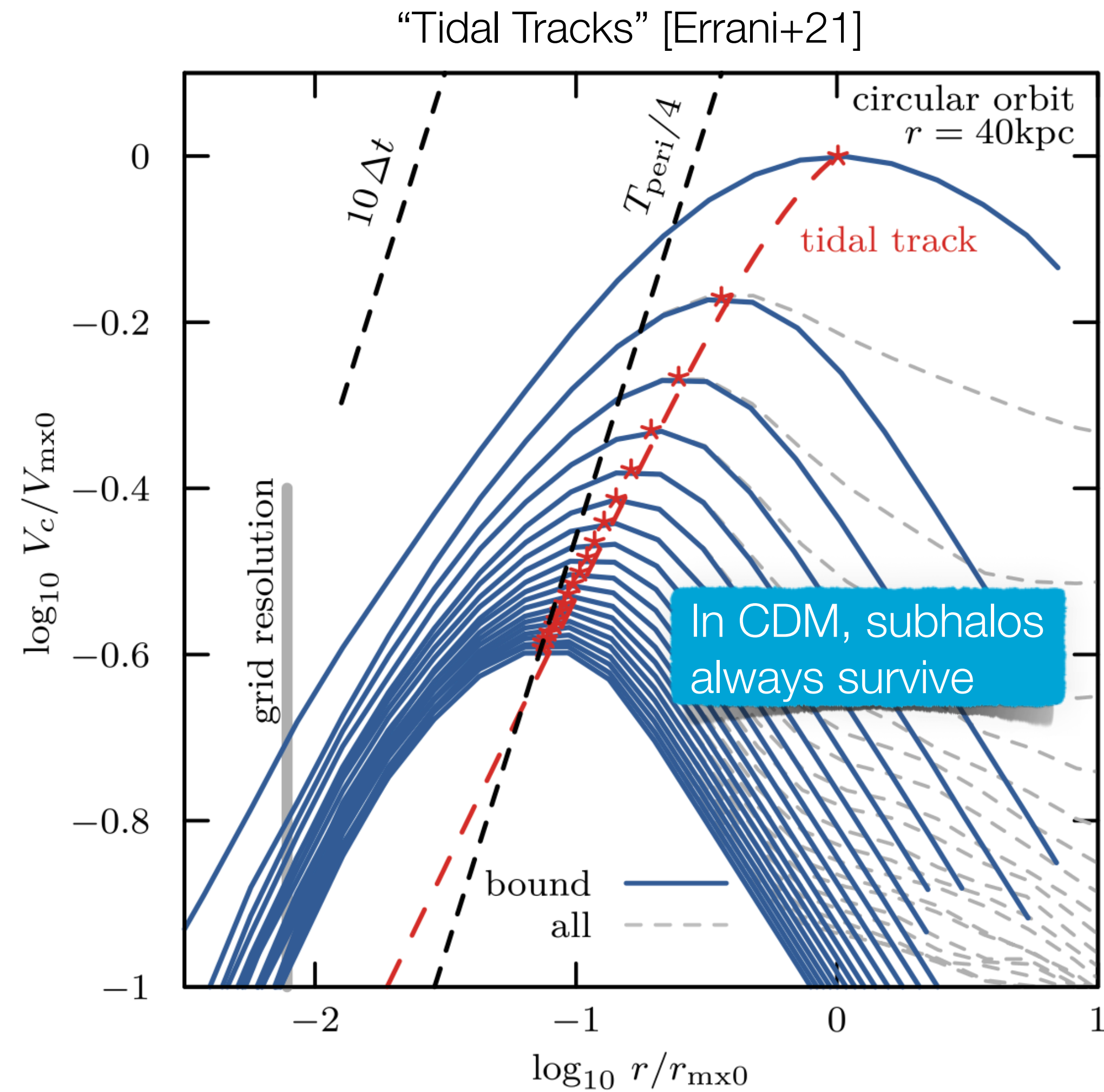


## Dark matter tidal stripping





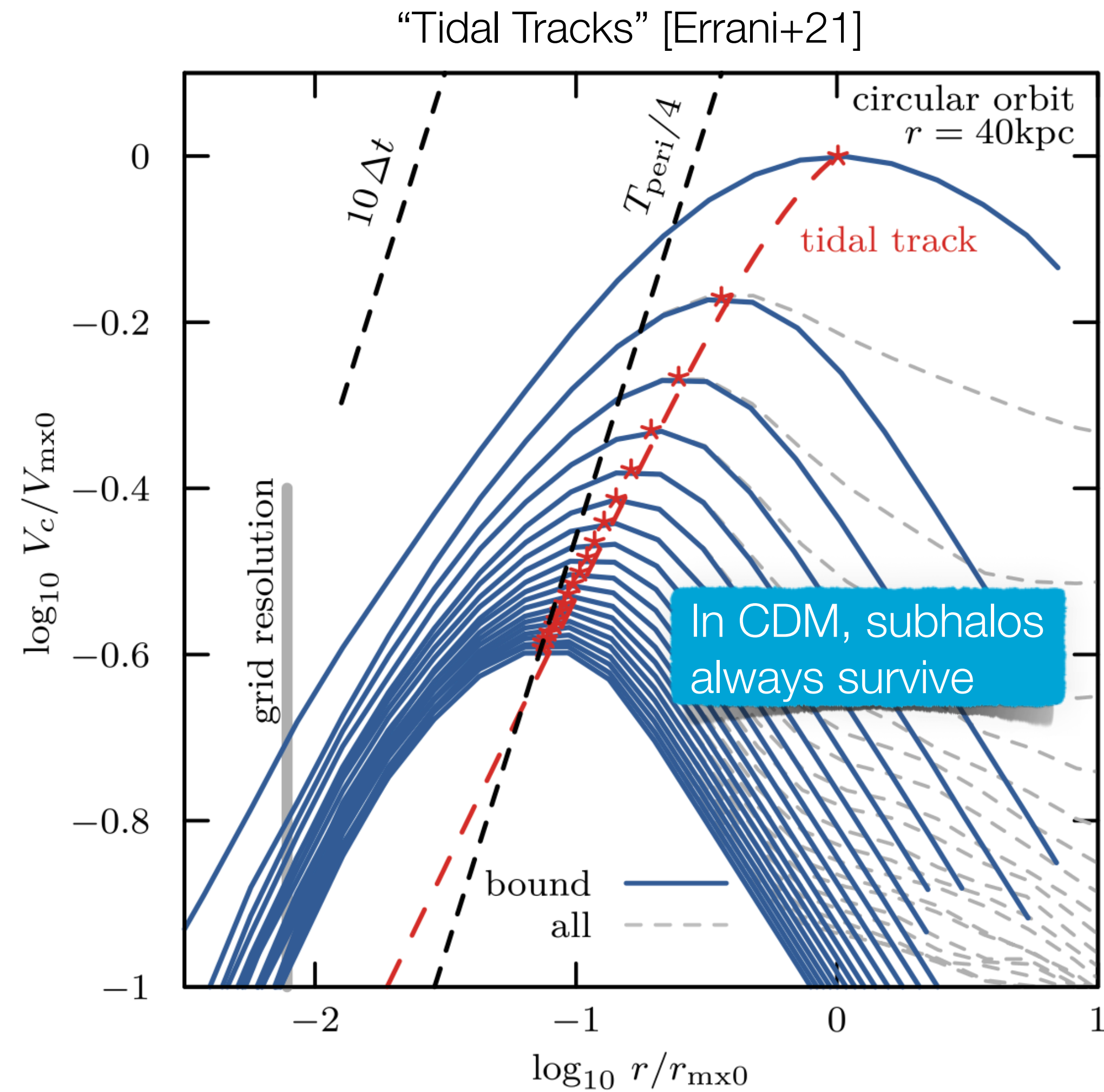
## Dark matter tidal stripping



Subhalo stripping in WDM, SIDM,...?



## Dark matter tidal stripping

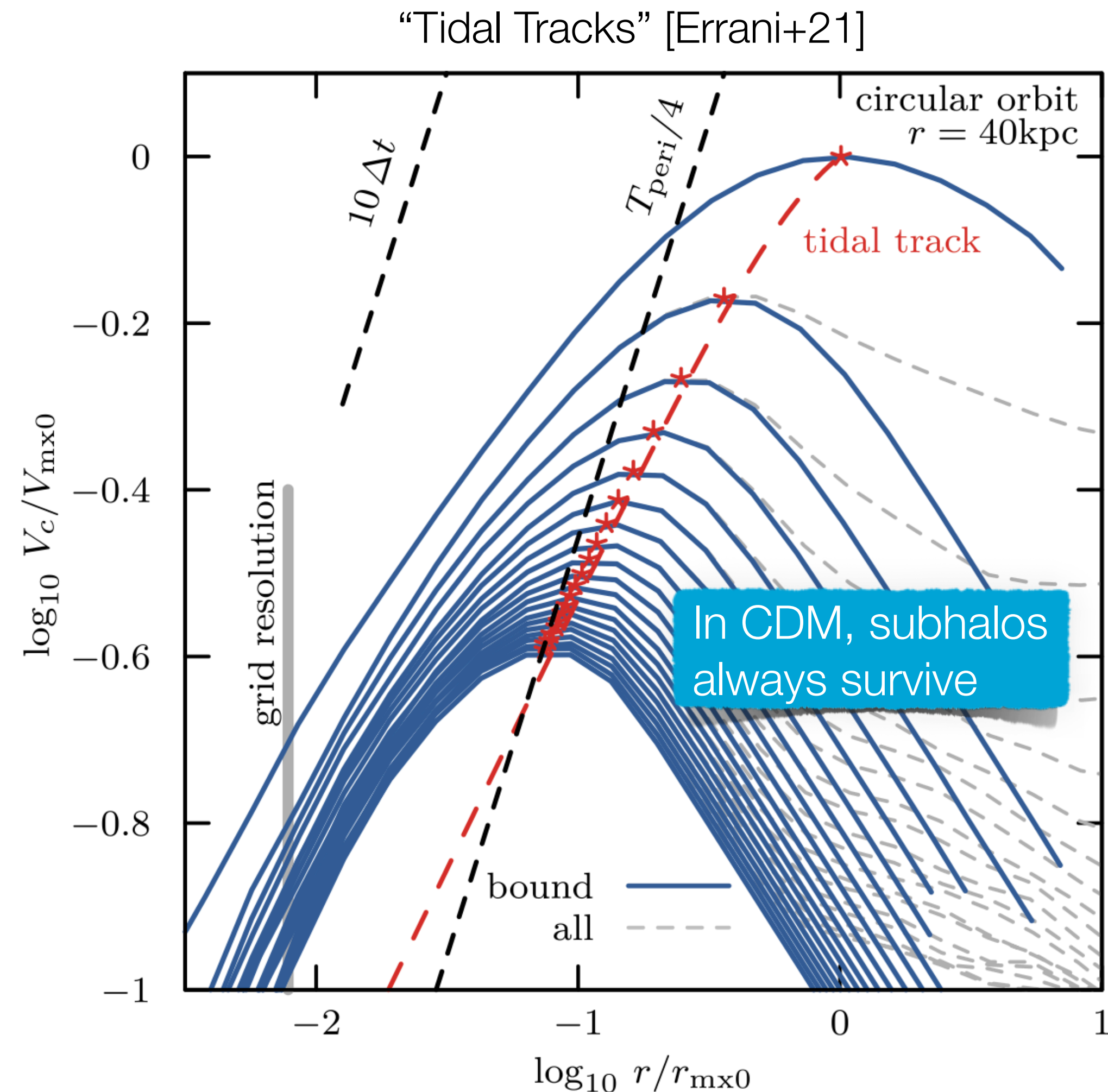


## Stellar tidal stripping?

Subhalo stripping in WDM, SIDM,...?



## Dark matter tidal stripping



## Stellar tidal stripping?

What is the initial energy distribution of stars?

What is the initial size of the stellar component?

[See Errani+22,24]

Subhalo stripping in WDM, SIDM,...?



# Abundance and densities of MW satellites: **status**

- ✦ The number of known MW satellites has rapidly increased in the last decade.
- ✦ Some confirmed galaxies, other whose nature remains “ambiguous”.
- ✦ Cosmological simulations at even the highest resolution suffer artificial subhalo fragmentation. This needs to be corrected for if we want robust predictions in the ultrafaint regime.
- ✦ Models including “orphan” galaxy tracking show that half of the total population of MW satellites are “orphans”. These are located at close distances (similar to “ambiguous” population observed).
- ✦ Comparison to  $z=0$  data requires modelling dark matter and stellar stripping. CDM stripping well understood. However, **what are the expected energy distributions of stars in dwarf galaxies?** Advanced hydrodynamical models may help respond this question.



# Tests of Cold Dark Matter at small-scales

What needs further investigation:

Physical mechanisms driving galaxy formation in the smallest dwarfs

Diversity of dwarf galaxy rotation curves

Details of gas kinematics systematics in observed dwarfs

Stellar mass-Halo mass relation in the low-mass end

Dark Matter density profiles

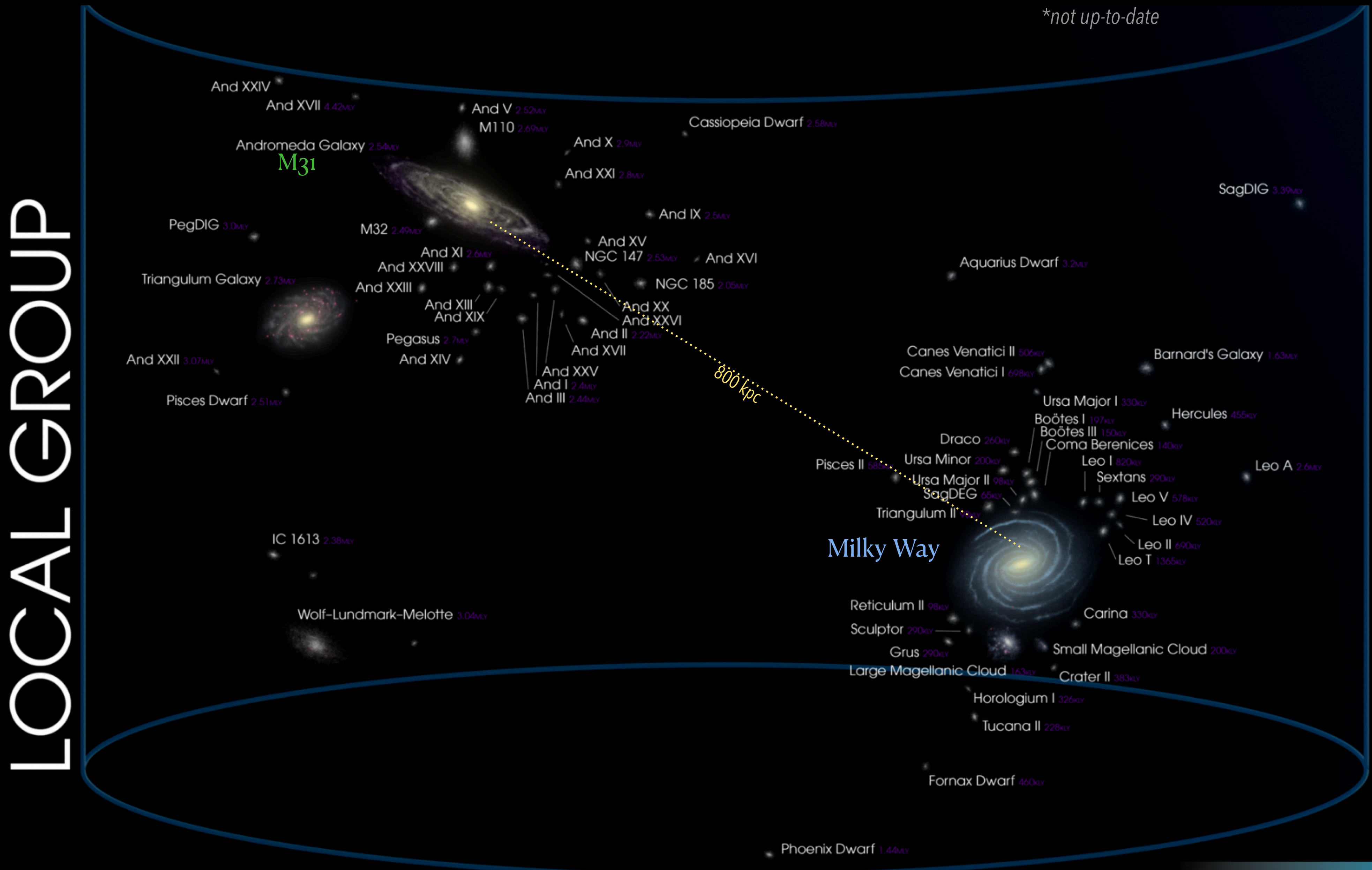
Abundance of substructure

Abundance and densities of MW satellites

Initial energy distribution and sizes of the stellar component in dwarfs

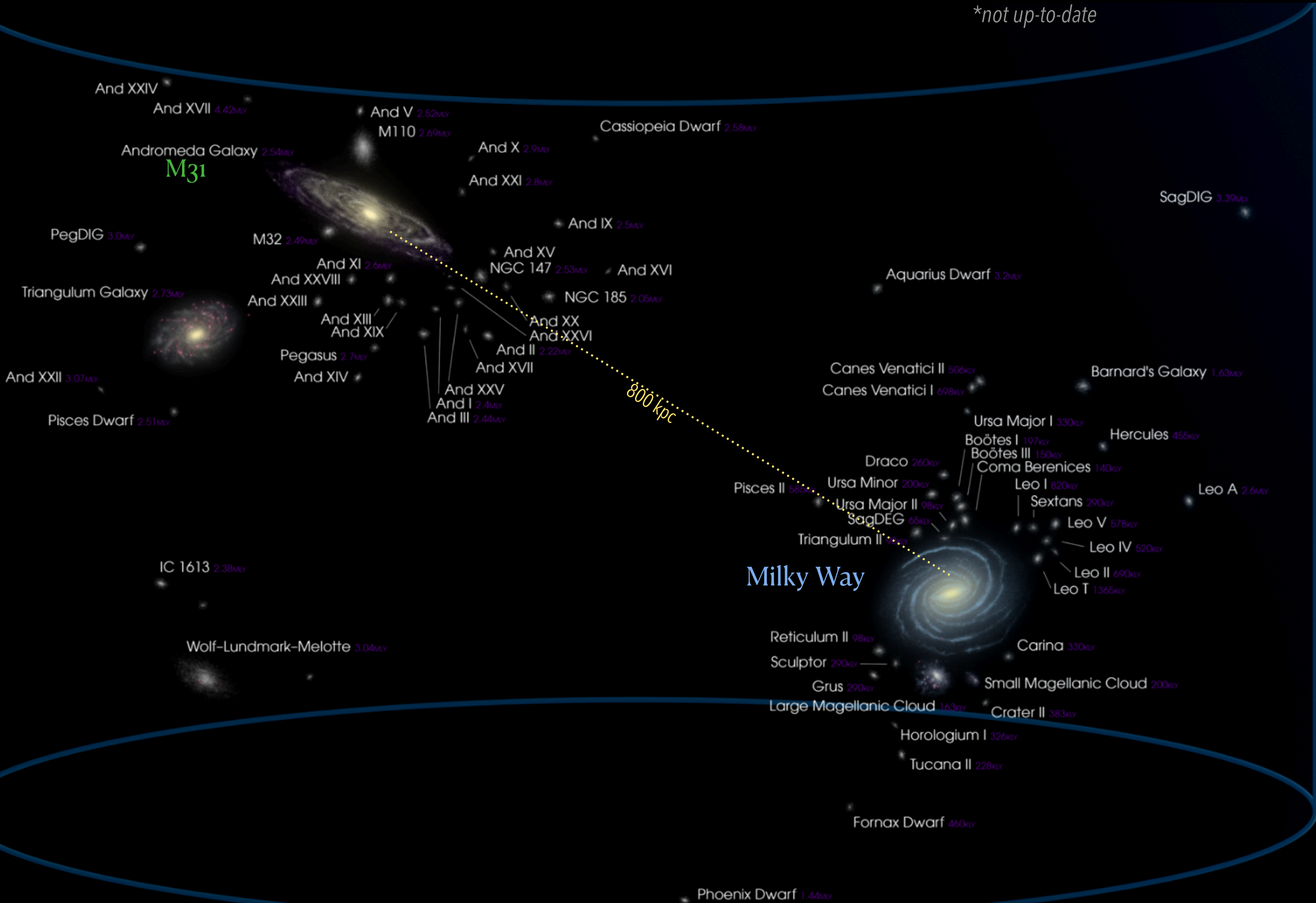
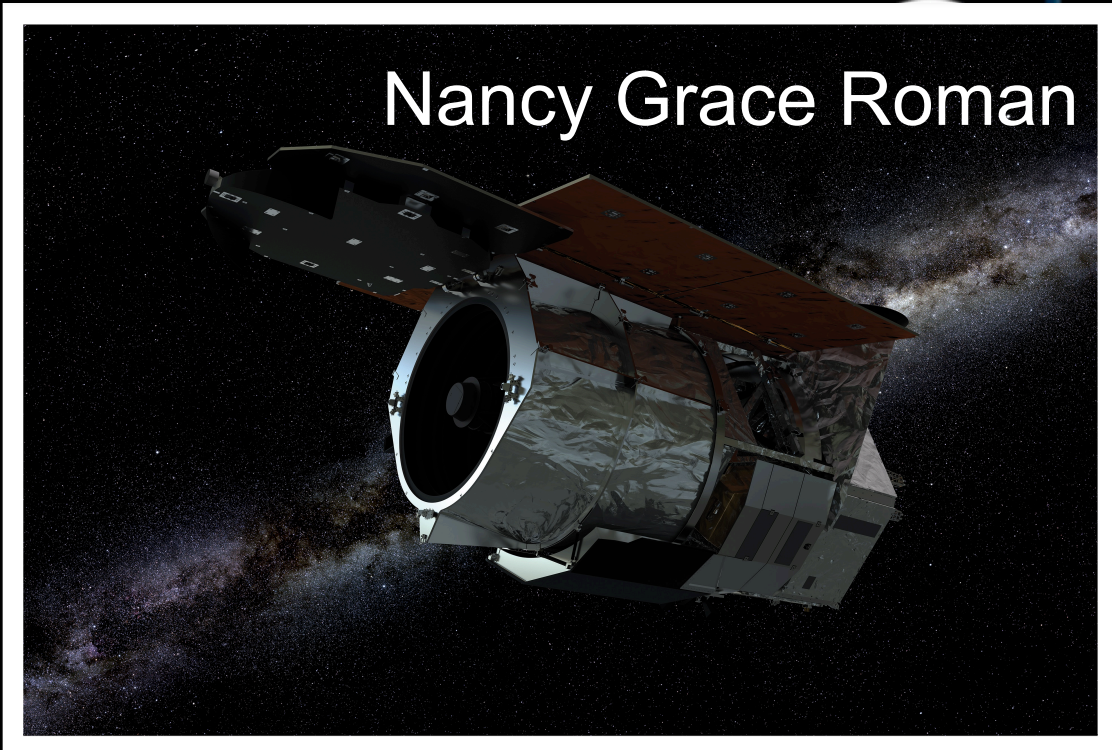


# Upcoming surveys will unveil faint galaxies





# Upcoming surveys will unveil faint galaxies





# Upcoming surveys will unveil faint galaxies





# Upcoming surveys will unveil faint galaxies

