

Naturalistic Stimulation Evokes Homotopic Functional Connectivity Patterns in the Auditory Cortices That Are Not Present in Resting State



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Nima Zargarnezhad^{1,2*}, Caroline Chadwick^{1,2}, Jörn Diedrichsen^{1,3}, Ingrid Johnsrude^{1,2}

¹ Western Centre for Brain and Mind, Western University, London, Canada - ² Department of Psychology, Western University, London, Canada

³ Department of Computer Science, Western University, London, Canada

Introduction and Background

- **Functional Connectivity (FC)** is explored as a biomarker for neurological conditions, capturing abnormalities that structural imaging often misses.^[1]
- **Resting-State (RS)** connectivity is widely used but suffers from variability: participants' sensory, perceptual, and cognitive states differ, making benchmark activity patterns hard to establish.^[1,2]
- Naturalistic paradigms [e.g., **Movie-Watching (MW)**, narrative listening] present identical stimuli to all participants → align cognitive processes → synchronize neural activity.^[2]
- This synchronization appears in the **Blood Oxygen-Level Dependent (BOLD)** signal across sensory regions.^[2,3] (**Figure 1**)

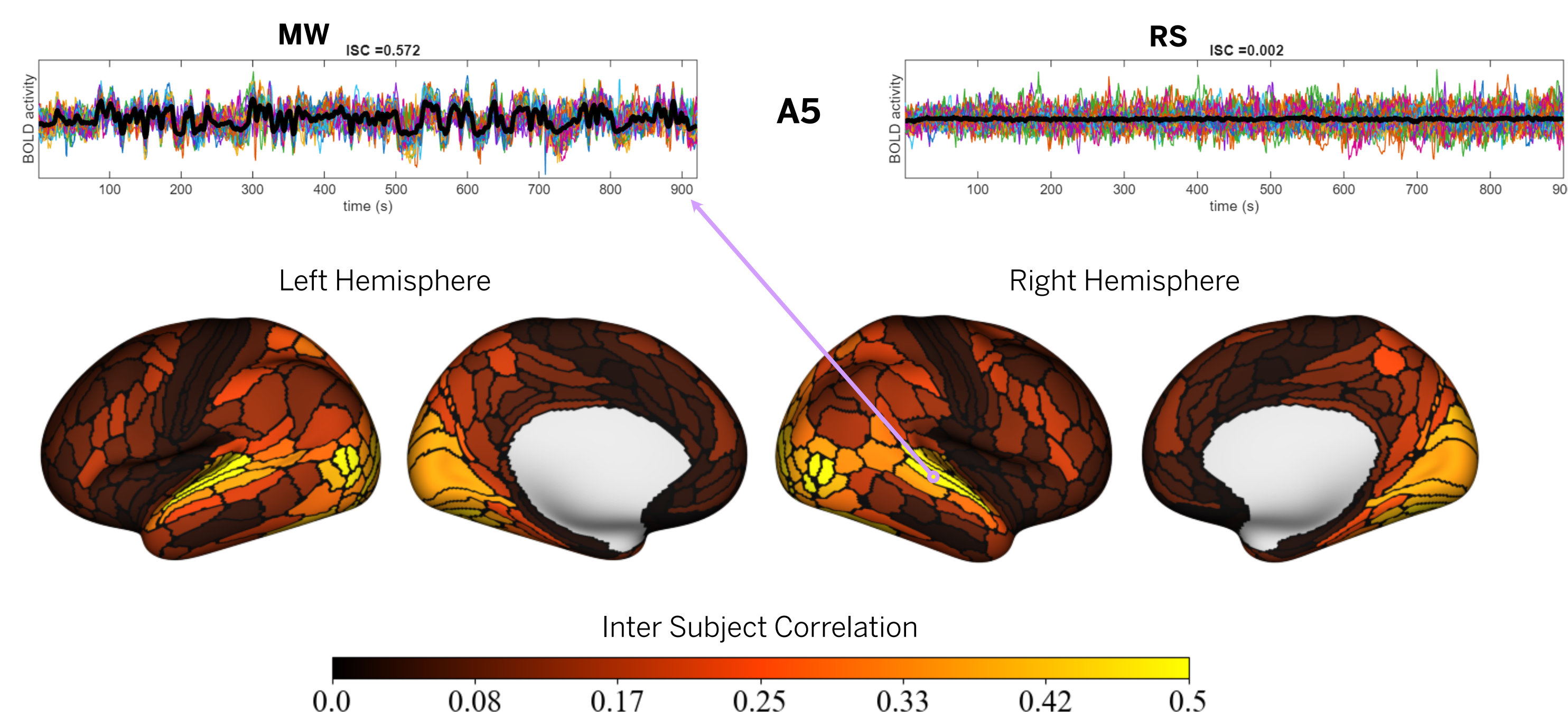


Figure 1. Inter-Subject Correlation (ISC): Average Pearson correlation of BOLD time series between participants within each region of interest during MW. **Top:** Right A5 area BOLD time series for all participants (MW and RS). Thick black line = group average.

- **Homotopic regions** (homologous, mirror regions across the 2 hemispheres) are strongly (physically) coupled through the corpus callosum and other commissures. **Homotopic Functional Connectivity (HFC)** is normally very strong^[4] and so may be sensitive to abnormal activity. (**Figure 2**)

Objective: To investigate HFC and its temporal dynamics in RS and MW, aiming to identify robust patterns (as potential biomarkers).

Materials

- **Participants:** 79 healthy, young, unrelated adults (41 female) from Human Connectome Project (HCP) S1200 release^[5]
- **Acquisition & Preprocessing:**
 - TR = 1 s, 7T Siemens MAGNETOM scanner
 - Preprocessed with HCP pipeline, normalized to bilaterally symmetric fsLR template^[6]
 - Parcellated into **7 cortical networks** and **360 Regions of Interest (ROIs)** based on the Glasser multimodal atlas^[7]
- **Conditions:**
 - **RS:** 4 × 15 min sessions; rest in the scanner and fixation on “+”
 - **MW:** 4 × 15 min sessions; short film clips (64–259 s, mix of independent and Hollywood films)

Conclusions and Discussion

- **HFC is stronger during MW than RS**, especially in the auditory cortex.
- **Dynamic HFC** synchronizes across participants during MW while there is no synchrony during RS in auditory and visual cortices.
- **Future direction:** Further investigation to clarify whether the observed synchronized connectivity is driven directly by movie stimulation or reflects a byproduct of synchronized neural activity across hemispheres.

References

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- [3] Hasson U, Nir Y, Levy I, Fuhrmann G, Malach R. Intersubject synchronization of cortical activity during natural vision. *Science.* 2004 Mar 12;303(5664):1634–40.
- [4] Zuo X-N, Kelly C, Di Martino A, Mennes M, Margulies DS, Bangaru S, et al. Growing together and growing apart: regional and sex differences in the lifespan developmental trajectories of functional homotopy. *J Neurosci.* 2010 Nov 10;30(45):15034–43.
- [5] Van Essen DC, Smith SM, Barch DM, Behrens TEJ, Yacoub E, Ugurbil K, et al. The WU-Minn Human Connectome Project: an overview. *Neuroimage.* 2013 Oct 15;80:62–79.
- [6] Glasser MF, Sotiropoulos SN, Wilson JA, Coalson TS, Fischl B, Andersson JL, et al. The minimal preprocessing pipelines for the Human Connectome Project. *Neuroimage.* 2013 Oct 15;80:105–24.
- [7] Glasser MF, Coalson TS, Robinson EC, Hacker CD, Harwell J, Yacoub E, et al. A multi-modal parcellation of human cerebral cortex. *Nature.* 2016 July 20;536(7615):171–8.

Analysis and Results

HFC is stronger in MW than in RS in the auditory cortex

HFC Estimation: Pearson correlation between homotopic ROI time series → averaged across participants & sessions for each condition.

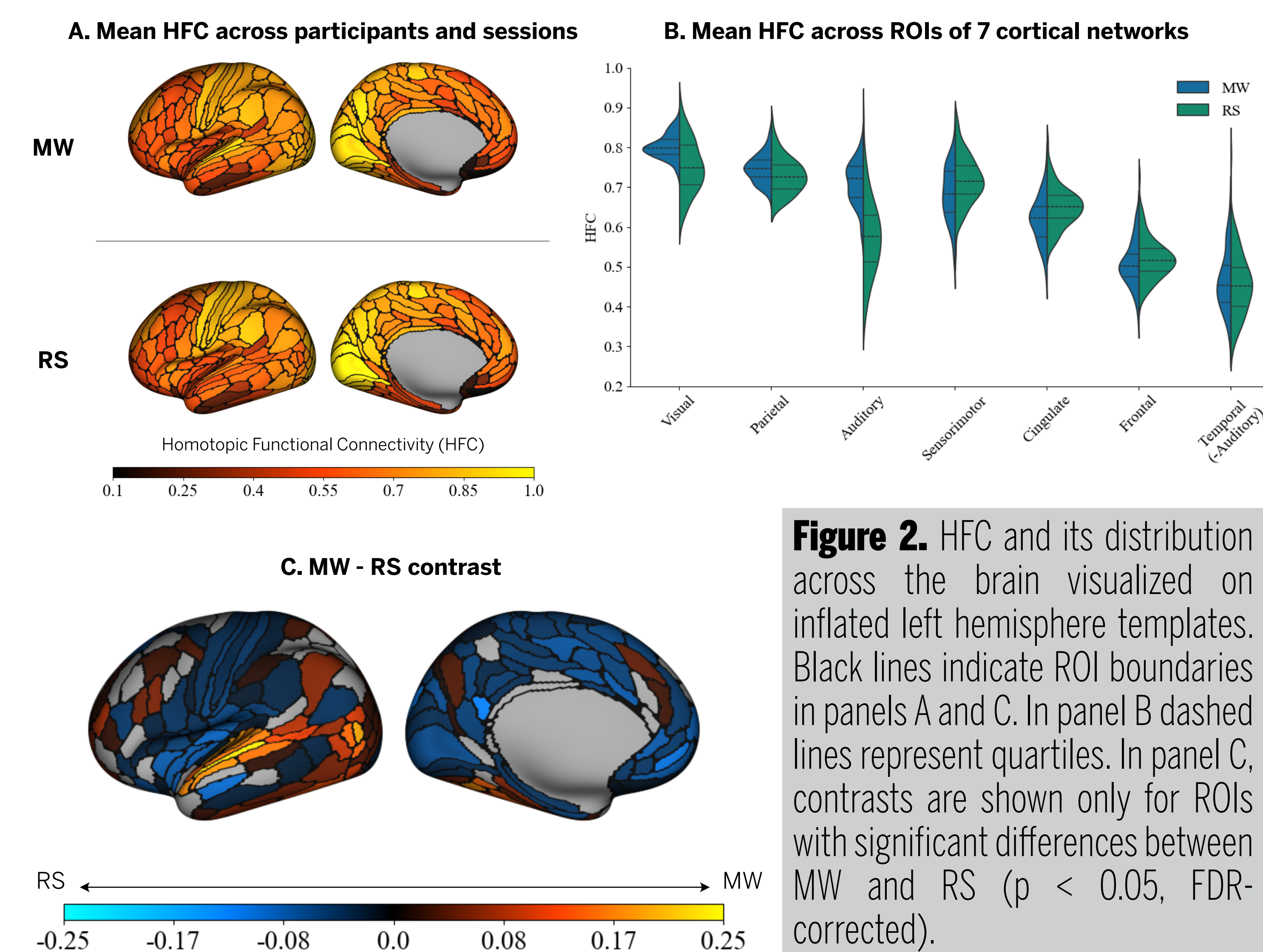


Figure 2. HFC and its distribution across the brain visualized on inflated left hemisphere templates. Black lines indicate ROI boundaries in panels A and C. In panel B dashed lines represent quartiles. In panel C, contrasts are shown only for ROIs with significant differences between MW and RS ($p < 0.05$, FDR-corrected).

Temporal dynamics of HFC synchronize in auditory & visual cortices during MW (and not RS)

1. **Temporal profiles** for each homotopic ROI pair: Dynamic HFC estimated using non-overlapping **30-s windows** (30 TRs).
2. **Synchrony** was indexed by the average pairwise correlation of temporal profiles across participants (ISC of temporal profiles).

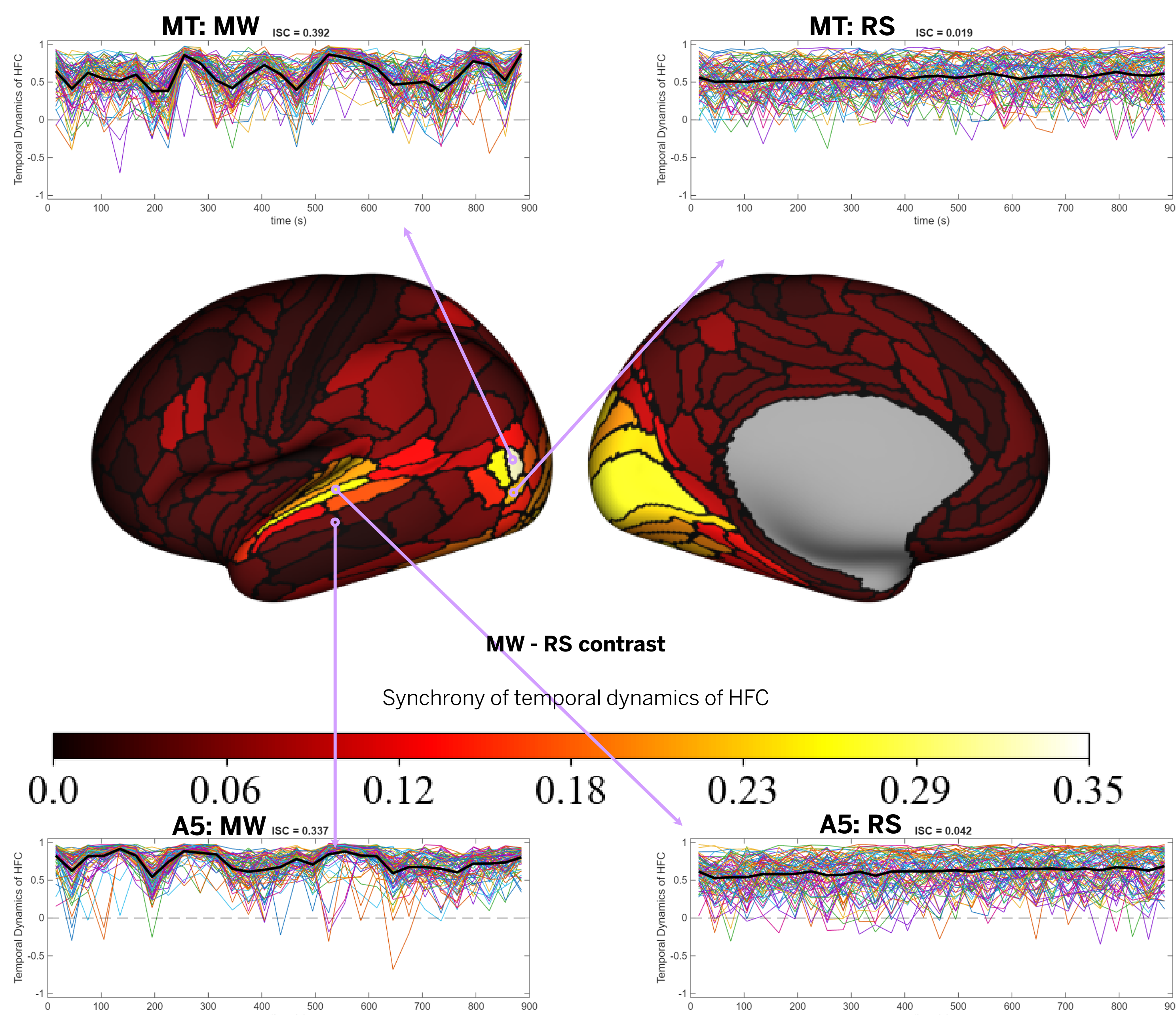


Figure 3. Synchrony of dynamic HFC across participants during MW vs. RS on inflated left-hemisphere template show strongest synchronization in **MT, V1, MST, and A5** in MW that don't exist in RS. Temporal profiles of some of these ROIs are plotted for one MW and one RS session (thick black line = group average).

Cortical Network	Average synchronization change in ROIs (MW-RS)
Visual Cortex	0.18
Auditory Cortex	0.16
Each of the remaining networks	<0.07