Sahand_Adibnia_NucleoTIDE_Hackathon_Project_Documentation

The formation of neuromelanin in the brain is a phenomenon that is known to be unique to humans [1]. Animals do not accumulate the pigment. It is observed to form only in certain catecholaminergic neurons, namely the dopaminergic neurons of the substantia nigra pars compacta (SNpc) [2]. Interestingly, neuromelanin is closely linked to Parkinson's disease, as it is these dopaminergic neuromelanin-containing neurons that are exclusively lost in Parkinson's [2].

Currently, it is assumed that neuromelanin formed in dopaminergic neurons is a product of dopamine oxidation, a process not known to be catalyzed by any particular enzymes [3-5]. However, studies in animal models have failed to produce neuromelanin by solely increasing dopamine levels and dopamine oxidation [1]. Additionally, neuromelanin does not form in all catecholaminergic neurons. In fact, the dopaminergic neurons of the ventral tegmental area (VTA) generally lack neuromelanin [2], suggesting that some other molecular mechanism may be involved in neuromelanin formation.

The goal of this project is to use bioinformatics and gene expression data to give some insight into the formation of neuromelanin. Learning more about these molecular pathways may even provide some insight into the mechanisms that cause the selective death of neuromelanin-containing neurons in Parkinson's disease. The primary method by which this is achieved is by analyzing differences in gene expression between the SNpc, a brain region containing a large population of melanized dopaminergic neurons, and the VTA, a brain region containing a large population of non-melanized dopaminergic neurons.

The Allen Human Brain Atlas (https://human.brain-map.org/microarray/search) provides microarray expression data of numerous different brain regions in 6 neurologically and neuropathologically normal individuals, including the SNpc and VTA. It also provides a function that does differential expression analysis of different brain regions, outputting p-values and fold change values for each probe. However, it only outputs the fold change for probes that are upregulated in the target structure with respect to the contrast structure. Therefore, this search had to be done twice: once with the SNpc as the target structure and the VTA as the contrast structure, and another time with the VTA as the target structure and the SNpc as the contrast structure. This data could be directly downloaded from the site. However, it could only be downloaded 2000 probes at a time. This was rather tedious, and knowing that many probes are not significantly differentially expressed anyway, only the first 10000 probes with the highest fold change were downloaded, giving a total of 20000 probes.

READING IN P-VALUES AND FOLD CHANGE OF TOP 10000 DIFERENTIALLY EXPRESSED PROBES

```
library(readr)
library(dplyr)

##
## Attaching package: 'dplyr'

## The following objects are masked from 'package:stats':
##
## filter, lag
```

```
## The following objects are masked from 'package:base':
##
##
      intersect, setdiff, setequal, union
# SNpc target, VTA contrast
files_1 <- list.files(path = "/Users/rezaadibnia/Desktop/PD NM Project/mDBR - VTA vs SNpc/SNpc target,
SNt_VTAc_probe_list <- lapply(files_1, read_csv)</pre>
##
## -- Column specification ------
##
    id = col_double(),
    name = col character(),
##
    'gene-id' = col_double(),
##
    'gene-symbol' = col_character(),
##
##
     'gene-name' = col_character(),
    'entrez-id' = col_double(),
##
    chromosome = col_character(),
##
    'start-position' = col_character(),
##
    'end-position' = col_character(),
##
##
    p = col_double(),
    'fold-change' = col_double()
##
## )
##
## -- Column specification -----
## cols(
##
    id = col_double(),
    name = col_character(),
##
##
    'gene-id' = col_double(),
    'gene-symbol' = col_character(),
    'gene-name' = col_character(),
##
##
    'entrez-id' = col_double(),
##
    chromosome = col_character(),
##
    'start-position' = col_character(),
    'end-position' = col_character(),
##
##
    p = col_double(),
##
    'fold-change' = col_double()
## )
##
##
## -- Column specification -------
## cols(
##
    id = col_double(),
##
    name = col_character(),
##
    'gene-id' = col_double(),
##
    'gene-symbol' = col_character(),
    'gene-name' = col_character(),
##
##
    'entrez-id' = col_double(),
##
    chromosome = col_character(),
    'start-position' = col_character(),
##
##
    'end-position' = col_character(),
##
    p = col_double(),
```

```
'fold-change' = col_double()
## )
##
##
## -- Column specification -------
## cols(
    id = col double(),
##
##
    name = col_character(),
##
     'gene-id' = col_double(),
    'gene-symbol' = col_character(),
##
    'gene-name' = col_character(),
    'entrez-id' = col_double(),
##
##
    chromosome = col_character(),
    'start-position' = col_character(),
##
##
    'end-position' = col_character(),
##
    p = col_double(),
##
    'fold-change' = col_double()
## )
##
##
## -- Column specification -------
    id = col_double(),
##
    name = col_character(),
##
    'gene-id' = col_double(),
##
    'gene-symbol' = col_character(),
##
    'gene-name' = col_character(),
    'entrez-id' = col_double(),
##
##
    chromosome = col_character(),
    'start-position' = col_character(),
##
    'end-position' = col_character(),
##
##
    p = col_double(),
    'fold-change' = col_double()
##
## )
SNt_VTAc_probes <- data.frame(bind_rows(SNt_VTAc_probe_list))</pre>
# VTA target, SNpc contrast
files_2 <- list.files(path = "/Users/rezaadibnia/Desktop/PD NM Project/mDBR - VTA vs SNpc/VTA target, S.
VTAt_SNc_probe_list <- lapply(files_2, read_csv)</pre>
##
## -- Column specification ------
## cols(
##
    id = col_double(),
##
    name = col_character(),
##
     'gene-id' = col_double(),
     'gene-symbol' = col_character(),
##
##
    'gene-name' = col_character(),
    'entrez-id' = col_double(),
##
##
    chromosome = col_character(),
##
    'start-position' = col_character(),
##
    'end-position' = col_character(),
    p = col_double(),
##
```

```
'fold-change' = col_double()
## )
##
##
## -- Column specification ------
## cols(
    id = col double(),
    name = col_character(),
##
##
    'gene-id' = col_double(),
    'gene-symbol' = col_character(),
##
    'gene-name' = col_character(),
    'entrez-id' = col_double(),
##
    chromosome = col_character(),
##
##
    'start-position' = col_character(),
##
    'end-position' = col_character(),
##
    p = col_double(),
##
    'fold-change' = col_double()
## )
##
##
##
    id = col_double(),
    name = col_character(),
##
##
    'gene-id' = col_double(),
    'gene-symbol' = col_character(),
    'gene-name' = col_character(),
##
    'entrez-id' = col_double(),
##
##
    chromosome = col_character(),
    'start-position' = col_character(),
##
    'end-position' = col_character(),
##
##
    p = col_double(),
    'fold-change' = col_double()
##
## )
##
##
## -- Column specification -------
## cols(
##
    id = col_double(),
##
    name = col_character(),
    'gene-id' = col_double(),
    'gene-symbol' = col_character(),
##
    'gene-name' = col_character(),
##
##
    'entrez-id' = col_double(),
    chromosome = col_character(),
    'start-position' = col_character(),
##
    'end-position' = col_character(),
##
##
    p = col_double(),
    'fold-change' = col_double()
##
## )
##
## cols(
```

```
##
     id = col_double(),
     name = col_character(),
##
##
     'gene-id' = col_double(),
     'gene-symbol' = col_character(),
##
##
     'gene-name' = col_character(),
     'entrez-id' = col_double(),
##
     chromosome = col character(),
##
     'start-position' = col_character(),
##
##
     'end-position' = col_character(),
##
     p = col_double(),
##
     'fold-change' = col_double()
## )
VTAt_SNc_probes <- data.frame(bind_rows(VTAt_SNc_probe_list))</pre>
```

CORRECTING P-VALUES AND TRANSFORMING FOLD CHANGES The definition of the fold change of B with respect to A is B/A. Therefore, the fold change of A with respect to B is A/B. In other words, the fold change of gene expression in the SNpc with respect to the VTA is equal to 1/(the fold change of gene expression in the VTA with respect to the SNpc). By taking the reciprocal of the fold change values with VTA target and SNpc contrast, we get the equivalent fold change for SNpc target and VTA contrast, allowing us to combine the differential expression analysis of all 20000 probes into one data frame.

```
# BH-correcting p-values (Benjamini-Hochberg Procedure)
SNt_VTAc_probes$p <- p.adjust(SNt_VTAc_probes$p, method="BH")
VTAt_SNc_probes$p <- p.adjust(VTAt_SNc_probes$p, method="BH")

# Converting VTA target, SNpc contrast fold change to SNpc target, VTA contrast fold change
VTAt_SNc_probes$fold.change <- 1/(VTAt_SNc_probes$fold.change)

# Combining the data frames containing p values and fold change
p_and_FC <- data.frame(bind_rows(SNt_VTAc_probes, VTAt_SNc_probes))
p_and_FC <- p_and_FC[,c(4,10:11)]</pre>
```

VISUALIZING DIFFERENTIALLY EXPRESSED PROBES - VOLCANO PLOT

```
library(ggplot2)

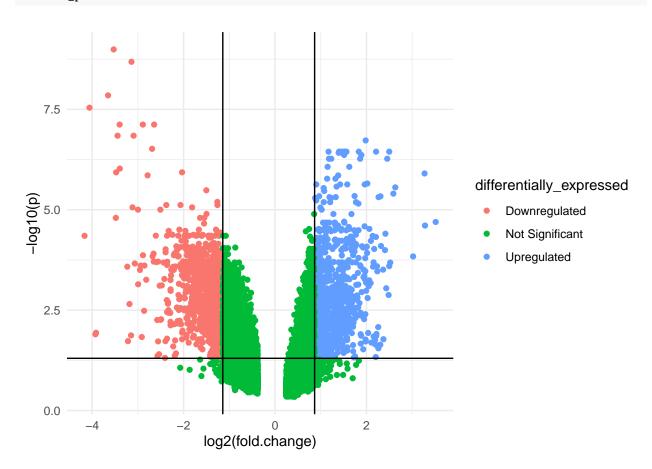
# Vertical lines for log2(fold change) thresholds, horizontal line for the p-value threshold
# Top 10% of upregulated probes and bottom 10% of downregulated probes are chosen
horz_min = quantile(log2(VTAt_SNc_probes$fold.change), 0.10)
horz_max = quantile(log2(SNt_VTAc_probes$fold.change), 0.90)

# Add a column to p_and_FC data frame indicating whether probe is upregulated, downregulated, or not si
p_and_FC$differentially_expressed <- "Not Significant"

# If log2Foldchange > horz_max and pvalue < 0.05, set as "UP"
p_and_FC$differentially_expressed[log2(p_and_FC$fold.change) > horz_max & p_and_FC$p < 0.05] <- "Upregu
# If log2Foldchange < horz_min and pvalue < 0.05, set as "DOWN"
p_and_FC$differentially_expressed[log2(p_and_FC$fold.change) < horz_min & p_and_FC$p < 0.05] <- "Downregu
# Construct volcano plot
volcano_plot <- ggplot(data=p_and_FC, aes(x=log2(fold.change), y=-log10(p), col=differentially_expressed geom_point() +
theme minimal() +</pre>
```

```
geom_vline(xintercept=c(horz_min, horz_max), col="black") +
geom_hline(yintercept=-log10(0.05), col="black")

# The significantly differentially expressed probes are found in the upper-left and upper-right corner
volcano_plot
```



FILTERING FOR P < 0.05 and FC > 90th PERCENTILE (TOP 10%) p-values were previously corrected when constructing the volcano plot

```
library(dplyr)

# Filters for top 10% of genes with highest FC compared to all probes, not just significantly different

# SNpc target, VTA contrast
SNt_VTAc_probes <- SNt_VTAc_probes %>% filter(SNt_VTAc_probes$p < 0.05 & SNt_VTAc_probes$fold.change > # VTA target, SNpc contrast
VTAt_SNc_probes <- VTAt_SNc_probes %>% filter(VTAt_SNc_probes$p < 0.05 & VTAt_SNc_probes$fold.change < # VTAt_SNc_probes *- VTA
```

READING IN EXPRESSION DATA FOR TOP 10000 DIFFERENTIALLY EXPRESSED PROBES This data is actually not necessary to overall analysis, but is good to have for reference.

```
library(readr)
library(dplyr)
```

```
read_csv_labeled_header <- function(file) {</pre>
 labels = c("Probe_IDs", "SN_1", "SN_2", "SN_3", "SN_4", "SN_5", "SN_6", "VTA_1", "VTA_2", "VTA_3", "V
 read_csv(file, col_names = labels)
}
# SNpc target, VTA contrast
files_expr_1 <- list.files(path = "/Users/rezaadibnia/Desktop/PD NM Project/mDBR - VTA vs SNpc/SNpc tar
SNt_VTAc_expr_list <- lapply(files_expr_1, read_csv_labeled_header)</pre>
##
## -- Column specification -------
   Probe_IDs = col_double(),
    SN_1 = col_double(),
##
##
    SN_2 = col_double(),
    SN 3 = col double(),
##
##
    SN_4 = col_double(),
##
    SN_5 = col_double(),
##
    SN_6 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_1 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_2 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_3 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_4 = col_double(),
    VTA_5 = col_double(),
    VTA_6 = col_double()
##
## )
##
## -- Column specification -------
## cols(
##
    Probe_IDs = col_double(),
##
    SN_1 = col_double(),
    SN 2 = col double(),
##
##
    SN_3 = col_double(),
    SN_4 = col_double(),
##
##
    SN_5 = col_double(),
##
    SN_6 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_1 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_2 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_3 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_4 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_5 = col_double(),
    VTA_6 = col_double()
##
## )
##
##
## -- Column specification ------
## cols(
##
   Probe_IDs = col_double(),
## SN 1 = col double(),
## SN_2 = col_double(),
## SN_3 = col_double(),
    SN_4 = col_double(),
```

```
##
    SN_5 = col_double(),
##
    SN_6 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_1 = col_double(),
    VTA_2 = col_double(),
##
##
    VTA_3 = col_double(),
    VTA_4 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_5 = col_double(),
    VTA_6 = col_double()
##
## )
##
##
## -- Column specification -------
## cols(
    Probe_IDs = col_double(),
##
##
    SN_1 = col_double(),
##
    SN_2 = col_double(),
##
    SN_3 = col_double(),
##
    SN_4 = col_double(),
##
    SN_5 = col_double(),
##
    SN_6 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_1 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_2 = col_double(),
    VTA_3 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_4 = col_double(),
##
##
    VTA_5 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_6 = col_double()
## )
##
##
## -- Column specification -------
## cols(
##
    Probe_IDs = col_double(),
##
    SN_1 = col_double(),
##
    SN_2 = col_double(),
##
    SN_3 = col_double(),
##
    SN_4 = col_double(),
##
    SN_5 = col_double(),
##
    SN_6 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_1 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_2 = col_double(),
    VTA_3 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_4 = col_double(),
    VTA_5 = col_double(),
##
##
    VTA_6 = col_double()
## )
SNt_VTAc_expr <- data.frame(bind_rows(SNt_VTAc_expr_list))</pre>
# VTA target, SNpc contrast
files_expr_2 <- list.files(path = "/Users/rezaadibnia/Desktop/PD NM Project/mDBR - VTA vs SNpc/VTA targ
VTAt_SNc_expr_list <- lapply(files_expr_2, read_csv_labeled_header)</pre>
##
```

```
## cols(
##
    Probe_IDs = col_double(),
##
    SN 1 = col double(),
##
    SN_2 = col_double(),
##
    SN_3 = col_double(),
##
    SN 4 = col double(),
##
    SN 5 = col double(),
##
    SN_6 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_1 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_2 = col_double(),
    VTA_3 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_4 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_5 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_6 = col_double()
## )
##
##
## -- Column specification -------
## cols(
##
    Probe IDs = col double(),
##
    SN_1 = col_double(),
##
    SN_2 = col_double(),
    SN_3 = col_double(),
##
##
    SN 4 = col double(),
##
    SN_5 = col_double(),
    SN_6 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_1 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_2 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_3 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_4 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_5 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_6 = col_double()
## )
##
##
## cols(
##
    Probe_IDs = col_double(),
##
    SN_1 = col_double(),
    SN_2 = col_double(),
##
##
    SN 3 = col double(),
    SN_4 = col_double(),
##
##
    SN_5 = col_double(),
##
    SN_6 = col_double(),
    VTA_1 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_2 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_3 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_4 = col_double(),
##
    VTA_5 = col_double(),
    VTA_6 = col_double()
##
## )
##
##
## -- Column specification -------
```

```
## cols(
##
     Probe_IDs = col_double(),
##
     SN 1 = col double(),
     SN_2 = col_double(),
##
##
     SN_3 = col_double(),
     SN 4 = col double(),
##
     SN 5 = col double(),
##
     SN_6 = col_double(),
##
##
     VTA_1 = col_double(),
##
     VTA_2 = col_double(),
##
     VTA_3 = col_double(),
     VTA_4 = col_double(),
##
##
     VTA_5 = col_double(),
     VTA_6 = col_double()
##
## )
##
##
## -- Column specification ---
## cols(
##
     Probe_IDs = col_double(),
##
     SN_1 = col_double(),
     SN_2 = col_double(),
##
     SN_3 = col_double(),
##
     SN 4 = col double(),
##
     SN_5 = col_double(),
##
##
     SN_6 = col_double(),
##
     VTA_1 = col_double(),
     VTA_2 = col_double(),
##
     VTA_3 = col_double(),
##
##
     VTA_4 = col_double(),
##
     VTA_5 = col_double(),
##
     VTA_6 = col_double()
## )
VTAt_SNc_expr <- data.frame(bind_rows(VTAt_SNc_expr_list))</pre>
```

JOINING EXPRESSION AND PROBE DATA FRAMES INTO ONE Note that probe data frames contain p-values and fold changes.

```
library(dplyr)

SNt_VTAc_expr <- SNt_VTAc_expr %>% inner_join(SNt_VTAc_probes, by = c("Probe_IDs" = "id"))
VTAt_SNc_expr <- VTAt_SNc_expr %>% inner_join(VTAt_SNc_probes, by = c("Probe_IDs" = "id"))
expr <- data.frame(bind_rows(SNt_VTAc_expr, VTAt_SNc_expr))</pre>
```

After filtering for probes that had p-values < 0.05 and significant fold changes, the probes needed to be aligned to individual genes. To do this, the expression data for all probes in all brain regions in all 6 donors had to be downloaded from Allen Human Brain Atlas (AHBA). The probes lacking Entrez IDs were first filtered out. Conveniently, AHBA provides a presence/absence flag that determines whether a certain probe's expression is well above the background levels or not. This flag was used to filter out any probes that are not expressed above the background in less than 1% of all samples. There may be multiple probes that align to the same gene, but only one probe per gene can be selected. Therefore, a systematic method was used

to align probes to genes using the collapseRows function from the WGCNA package, similar to methods previously used in the literature [6]:

- If there is only one probe for a gene, that one is chosen
- If there are two probes for one gene, the one with the max variance across all samples is chosen (method = maxRowVariance)
- If there more than two probes for one gene, the probe with the highest connectivity (summed adjacency) is chosen (connectivityBasedCollapsing = TRUE)

ALIGNING PROBES TO GENES

```
# Map probes to genes
# First download 'Complete normalized microarray datasets' for all six donors from http://human.brain-m
# Store the downloaded files in a AHBA download directory
library(WGCNA)
## Loading required package: dynamicTreeCut
## Loading required package: fastcluster
##
## Attaching package: 'fastcluster'
## The following object is masked from 'package:stats':
##
##
       hclust
##
## Attaching package: 'WGCNA'
## The following object is masked from 'package:stats':
##
##
       cor
######## Load data ########
# Set donor names
donorNames <- c("donor9861", "donor10021", "donor12876", "donor14380", "donor15496", "donor15697")
names(donorNames) <- donorNames</pre>
# Location of AHBA directories
ahba_download <- "/Users/rezaadibnia/Desktop/AHBA Full Data/Microarray" # Where downloaded files are st
# Read in probe info (files are the same for each donor)
probeInfo <- read.csv(pasteO(ahba_download, "/normalized_microarray_donor9861/Probes.csv")) # Same for
# Read expression data for each donor (probes x samples)
brainExpr <- lapply(donorNames, function(d){</pre>
  file1 <- paste0(ahba_download, "/normalized_microarray_", d, "/MicroarrayExpression.csv")
```

```
e <- read.csv(file1, header = FALSE)
  rownames(e) <- e[,1]
  e < -e[,-1]
  file2 <- paste0(ahba_download, "/normalized_microarray_", d, "/SampleAnnot.csv")
  sample_annotation <- read.csv(file2)</pre>
  colnames(e) <- sample_annotation$structure_id</pre>
})
####### Filter probes based on concatenated expression data from all donors ########
# Probes with missing Entrez IDs
probes_missing_entrezID <- is.na(probeInfo$entrez_id) # same in all donors</pre>
print(paste(sum(probes_missing_entrezID), "probes with missing entrez IDs"))
## [1] "10521 probes with missing entrez IDs"
# Probes with expression well above background in at least 1% of samples in all donors
pa_call <- lapply(donorNames, function(d){</pre>
  file <- paste0(ahba_download, "/normalized_microarray_", d, "/PACall.csv")</pre>
  pa <- read.csv(file, header = FALSE)</pre>
  rownames(pa) <- pa[,1]</pre>
  pa[,-1]
})
pa_concat <- Reduce(cbind, pa_call)</pre>
sum <- rowSums(pa concat)</pre>
low_presence <- sum < 0.01*ncol(pa_concat)</pre>
print(paste(sum(low_presence), "probes present in <1% of samples"))</pre>
## [1] "6068 probes present in <1% of samples"
# Concatenate data across all donors and filter probes by ID
expr_concat <- Reduce(cbind, brainExpr)</pre>
expr concat <- expr concat[!(probes missing entrezID | low presence),]</pre>
probeInfo <- probeInfo[!(probes_missing_entrezID | low_presence), ]</pre>
probe2gene <- collapseRows(expr concat,</pre>
                             rowGroup = probeInfo$entrez id,
                             rowID = probeInfo$probe_id,
                             method = "maxRowVariance",
                             connectivityBasedCollapsing = TRUE
selected_probes <- probe2gene$selectedRow</pre>
entrez_id <- probeInfo$entrez_id[selected_probes]</pre>
entrez_order <- order(entrez_id)</pre>
probeInfo <- probeInfo[selected_probes, ]</pre>
probeInfo <- probeInfo[entrez_order,]</pre>
```

ALIGNING SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENTIALLY EXPRESSED PROBES TO GENES

```
library(dplyr)

# Combine data frames by probe ID to filter out all probes not corresponding to a gene
final_expr <- expr %>% inner_join(probeInfo, by = c("Probe_IDs" = "probe_id"))

# Remove unnecessary and repeated columns
final_expr <- final_expr[,-c(14, 18:21, 24:29)]
final_expr$fold.change <- sort(final_expr$fold.change, decreasing = TRUE)

final_expr[,c(15, 17:18)]</pre>
```

```
##
        gene.symbol
                               p fold.change
## 1
              AGTR1 2.017857e-05 11.44100000
## 2
              FEZF1 1.250000e-06 9.65900000
## 3
              LMOD3 1.452381e-04 8.11800000
## 4
               NPNT 2.771875e-06
                                  6.19600000
## 5
             CELSR1 3.971429e-06
                                  6.01800000
## 6
              RSP02 2.067010e-04
                                  5.74200000
## 7
               PYGL 3.581818e-07
                                   5.65300000
## 8
             ATP2A3 9.025070e-04
                                  5.40100000
## 9
               OC90 3.955056e-05
                                   5.33600000
## 10
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## 627
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## 631
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## 634
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## 635
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## 637
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## 638
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## 639
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## 640
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## 641
## 642
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## 643
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## 645
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## 646
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## 648
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## 649
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## 685
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## 686
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## 687
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## 688
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## 689
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## 690
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## 691
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## 692
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## 693
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##
  694
              P2RX7 1.175299e-02
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  695
          MATN1-AS1 2.563818e-03
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##
## 696
               CLMN 2.226277e-03 0.07949758
```

Among the 696 genes found to be significantly upregulated or downregulated in the SNpc relative to the VTA were genes linked to dopamine, including dopamine receptor 2 (DRD2, BH-corrected p=1.095541e-04, FC = 3.341), dopamine receptor 5 (DRD5, BH-corrected p=1.169231e-06, FC = 0.2442002), dopamine active transporter (SLC6A3, BH-corrected p=8.355197e-03, FC = 4.784) and vesicular monoamine transporter (SLC18A2, BH-corrected p=0.01238258, FC = 4.656). The SLC18A2 gene codes for the VMAT2 enzyme, which transports dopamine into monoaminergic vesicles to prevent it from oxidizing [1]. VMAT2 activity has been shown to be inversely proportional to neuromelanin levels, so one may assume that higher SLC18A2 expression would contribute to less neuromelanin. However, the opposite case is evident here. With fold change = 4.656, SLC18A2 is actually upregulated in the SNpc, which contains neuromelanin, with respect to the VTA, which does not. This suggests that there may be more at play in neuromelanin formation than just the action of VMAT2.

Ideally, further analysis should be done on these 696 genes to determine which molecular pathways they are involved in. This includes gene set enrichment analysis and assigning gene ontology terms to groups of these genes. Due to time limitations, this could not be accomplished within the hackathon.

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