

# UNCERTAINTY ON THE GALAXY-HALO CONNECTION FOR LYMAN- $\alpha$ EMITTERS AT $Z = 3.1$

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## ABSTRACT

~~We~~ In this paper we study the impact of cosmic variance and observational uncertainties in constraining the mass and occupation fraction,  $f_{\text{occ}}$ , of dark matter halos hosting Ly $\alpha$  Emitting Galaxies (LAEs) at high redshift. ~~We~~ To this end, we construct mock catalogs from an N-body simulation to match the typical size of observed fields at  $z = 3.1$  ( $\sim 1 \text{ deg}^2$ ). In our model a dark matter halo with mass in the range  $M_{\text{min}} < M_{\text{h}} < M_{\text{max}}$  can only host one detectable LAE at most. We proceed to explore the parameter space determined by  $M_{\text{min}}$ ,  $M_{\text{max}}$  and  $f_{\text{occ}}$  with a Markov Chain Monte-Carlo algorithm using ~~as observational constraints~~ the angular correlation function (ACF) and the LAEs number density as observational constraints. We find that the preferred minimum and maximum masses in our model span a wide range  $10^{10.0} h^{-1} M_{\odot} \leq M_{\text{min}} \leq 10^{11.1} h^{-1} M_{\odot}$ ,  $10^{11.0} h^{-1} M_{\odot} \leq M_{\text{max}} \leq 10^{13.0} h^{-1} M_{\odot}$ ; followed by a wide range in the occupation fraction  $0.02 \leq f_{\text{occ}} \leq 0.30$ . As a consequence the median mass,  $M_{50}$ , of all ~~models consistent with observations~~ the consistent models has a large uncertainty  $M_{50} = 3.16^{+9.34}_{-2.37} \times 10^{10} h^{-1} M_{\odot}$ . However, we find that the same individual models have a relatively tight  $1\sigma$  scatter around the median mass  $\Delta M_{1\sigma} = 0.55^{+0.11}_{-0.31}$  dex. We are also able to show that  $f_{\text{occ}}$  is uniquely determined by  $M_{\text{min}}$ , regardless of  $M_{\text{max}}$ . We argue that upcoming large surveys covering at least  $25 \text{ deg}^2$  should be able to put tighter constraints on  $M_{\text{min}}$  and  $f_{\text{occ}}$  through the LAE number density distribution width  ~~$W_{1\sigma}$~~  constructed over several fields of  $\sim 1 \text{ deg}^2$ . These results suggest that taking explicitly into account the effect of cosmic variance using cosmological simulations is a valuable tool to interpret LAEs observations at high redshift.

*Subject headings:* Galaxies: halos — Galaxies: high-redshift — Galaxies: statistics — Dark Matter — Methods: numerical

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Lyman- $\alpha$  emitting galaxies (LAEs) are central to a wide range of subjects in extragalactic astronomy. LAEs can be used as probes of reionization (for a recent review see Dijkstra 2014, and references therein), tracers of large scale structure (Koehler et al. 2007), signposts for low metallicity stellar populations (for a recent review see Hayes 2015, and references therein), markers of the galaxy formation process at high redshift (Partridge & Peebles 1967; Rhoads et al. 2000; Blanc et al. 2011) and tracers of active star formation.

In most of those cases, capitalizing the observations requires understanding how LAEs are formed within an explicit cosmological context. Under the current structure formation paradigm, the dominant matter content of the Universe is dark matter (DM). Each galaxy is thought to be hosted by a larger dark matter structure known as a halo. (Peebles 1980; Springel et al. 2005). Understanding the cosmological context of LAEs thus implies studying the galaxy-halo connection. Galaxy formation models suggest that the physical processes that regulate the star formation cycle are dependent on halo mass (e.g. Behroozi et al. 2013). Therefore, the mass becomes the most important element in the halo-galaxy connection.

The goal becomes finding the typical DM halo mass of halos hosting LAEs. In the case of LAEs there are different ways to find this mass range. One approach is theoretical, using general astrophysical principles to find the relationship between halo mass, intrinsic Ly $\alpha$  luminosities and observed Ly $\alpha$  luminosities. This approach

is usually implemented through semi-analytic models (Garel et al. 2012; Orsi et al. 2012) and full N-body hydrodynamical simulations (Laursen & Sommer-Larsen 2007; Dayal et al. 2009; Forero-Romero et al. 2011; Yajima et al. 2012).

The downside of these calculations is the uncertainty in the estimation of the escape fraction of Ly $\alpha$  photons. Given the resonant nature of the Ly $\alpha$  line, the escape fraction is sensitive to the dust contents, density, temperature, topology and kinematics of the neutral Hydrogen in the interstellar medium (ISM). The process of finding a consensus on the expected value for the Ly $\alpha$  escape fraction in high redshift galaxies is still matter of open debate (Neufeld 1991; Verhamme et al. 2006; Forero-Romero et al. 2012; Dijkstra & Kramer 2012; Laursen et al. 2013; Orsi et al. 2012; Yajima et al. 2014).

A different approach to infer the typical mass of halos hosting LAEs is based on the spatial clustering information. This approach uses the fact that in CDM cosmologies the spatial clustering of galaxies on large scales is entirely dictated by the halo distribution (Colberg et al. 2000), which in turn has a strong dependence on halo mass. Using measurements of the angular correlation function of LAEs, observers have put constraints on the typical mass and occupation fraction of the putative halos hosting these galaxies (Hayashino et al. 2004; Gawiser et al. 2007b; Nilsson et al. 2007; Ouchi et al. 2010; Bielby et al. 2016). In these studies the observations are done on fields of  $\sim 1 \text{ deg}^2$  and the conclusions derived on the halo host mass do not elaborate deeply on the uncertainty resulting from the cosmic variance on these fields. For



FIG. 1.— Cumulative halo number density distribution function over 27 mock fields. Each line corresponds to a different model with increasing values of  $M_{\min}$ . Different models produce different number density distributions. The width of the distribution increases with  $M_{\min}$ .

instance, Guaita et al. (2010) attempted to analytically estimate the uncertainty from cosmic variance following Somerville et al. (2004) and Peebles (1980). Their prescription assumed that the correlation function can be represented by a power-law  $\psi(r) = (r_0/r)^\gamma$ . Their estimation of cosmic variance strongly depends on  $r_0$  and  $\gamma$ . However,  $\gamma$  is only poorly constrained with current observations which in turns indicates that their cosmic variance estimation could not be precise.

In this paper we investigate the impact of cosmic variance in constraining the mass and occupation fraction of halos hosting LAEs at  $z = 3$ . We build mock surveys from a cosmological N-body simulation to compare them against the observations of Bielby et al. (2016) using the angular correlation function. We use a simple model to populate a halo in the simulation with a LAE assuming a minimum,  $M_{\min}$ , and maximum mass,  $M_{\max}$ , for the dark matter halos hosting LAEs. We do not assume an underlying relation between the Ly $\alpha$  luminosity and the dark matter halo mass. This approach bypasses all the physical uncertainties associated to star formation and radiative transfer. We then use the Markov Chain Monte Carlo technique to obtain the likelihood of the parameters given the observational constraints. This approach allows us to estimate cosmic variance directly from simulations without making any assumption on the correlation function behavior.

Throughout this paper we assume a  $\Lambda$ CDM cosmology with the following values for the cosmological parameters,  $\Omega_m = 0.30711$ ,  $\Omega_\Lambda = 0.69289$  and  $h = 0.70$ , corresponding to the matter density, vacuum density and the Hubble constant in units of  $100 \text{ km s}^{-1} \text{ Mpc}^{-1}$ . The values are consistent with Planck Collaboration et al. (2014) results.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The base of our method is the comparison between observations and mock catalogs. This approach allows us to

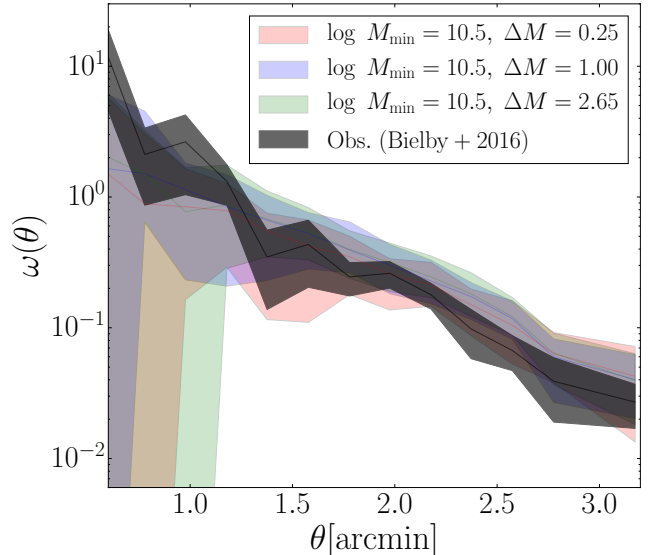


FIG. 2.— Angular Correlation functions for  $\log M_{\min} [\text{M}_\odot h^{-1}] = 10.5$  and different values of  $\Delta \log M$ . The shaded region in the models represents the  $1-\sigma$  variation due to cosmic variance. Radically different models in  $\Delta \log M$  are consistent with observations once cosmic variance is modeled in detail.

take explicitly into account cosmic variance. The comparison has four key elements. First, the observations we take as a benchmark. Second, the N-body simulation and the halo catalogs we use to build the mocks. Third, the parameters describing our model to assign a LAE to a halo. Fourth, the statistical method we adopt to compare observations and simulations. We describe in detail these four elements in the following subsections.

### 2.1. Observational constraints

Bielby et al. (2016) used narrow band imaging to detect 643 LAE candidates at  $z \sim 3$  with Ly- $\alpha$  **equivalent widths of rest-frame equivalent widths  $\geq 65\text{\AA}$**  and a Ly- $\alpha$  flux limit of  $2 \times 10^{17} \text{ erg/cm}^2/\text{s}$  ( $L \sim 7 \times 10^{42} \text{ erg/s}$ ). Using follow-up spectroscopy they found a 22% contamination fraction  $f_c$ . Their observations cover 5 (out of 9) independent and adjacent fields of the VLT LBG Redshift Survey (VLRs). The total observed area corresponds to  $1.07 \text{ deg}^2$  that translates to  $\sim 80^2 h^{-1} \text{ Mpc}^2$  in a comoving scale. Bielby et al. (2016) used the NB497 narrow-band filter whose  $77\text{\AA}$  FWHM and  $154\text{\AA}$  Full width tenth maximum (FWTM) correspond to a total observational comoving depth of  $44 h^{-1} \text{ Mpc}$  and  $82 h^{-1} \text{ Mpc}$ , respectively.

### 2.2. Simulation and halo catalog

We use results from the BolshoiP simulation (Klypin et al. 2011, 2016) performed in a cubic comoving volume of  $250 h^{-1} \text{ Mpc}$  on a side. The dark matter distribution was sampled using  $2048^3$  particles.

We chose this simulation based on three requirements. First, the simulation has cosmological parameters consistent with the most recent constraints from Cosmic Microwave Background experiments and provide public acces to the data. Second, the halo mass function from the simulation is robust down to  $10^{10} h^{-1} \text{ M}_\odot$ , which is the lower halo mass bound suggested by previous observational

studies (Hayashino et al. 2004; Gawiser et al. 2007a; Ouchi et al. 2010; Bielby et al. 2016). Third, the total volume of the simulation is at least 10 times larger the equivalent volume of a single LAE observation field. These conditions are met as we describe below.

The cosmological parameters are consistent with Planck results (Planck Collaboration et al. 2014) with a matter density  $\Omega_m = 0.307$ , cosmological constant  $\Omega_\Lambda = 0.693$ , dimensionless Hubble constant  $h = 0.678$ , slope of the power spectrum  $n = 0.96$  and normalization of the power spectrum  $\sigma_8 = 0.823$ . This translates into a particle mass of  $m_p = 1.5 \times 10^8 h^{-1} M_\odot$ . Data is available to the public through an online interface<sup>1</sup> (Riebe et al. 2013).

We use halo catalogs constructed with a Bound-Density-Maxima (BDM) algorithm. The catalogs were obtained from the publicly available Multidark database<sup>2</sup> (Riebe et al. 2013). For each halo in the box we extract its comoving position and mass. We focus our work on halos more massive than  $6.0 \times 10^9 h^{-1} M_\odot$  resolved with at least 40 particles to guarantee statistical significance and a well behaved halo mass function. We do not take into account sub-halos.

We split the simulation volume at  $z \sim 3$  into 27 smaller mock volumes mimicking the area and depth reported in Bielby et al. (2016) and described in §2.1.

### 2.3. A simple LAE model

We build the simplest possible model to assign a LAE to each DM halo without trying to compute a LAE luminosity.

First we assume that a dark matter halo can host one detectable LAE at most. This assumption is consistent with theoretical analysis of the correlation function (Jose et al. 2013) and observations that confirm a lack of class pairs in LAEs (Bond et al. 2009). Then we say that a halo will host a LAE with probability  $f_{\text{occ}}$  if and only if the halo mass is in the range  $M_{\text{min}} < M_h < M_{\text{max}}$ . We also use the variable  $\Delta \log M$  to represent the mass range width,  $\Delta \log M \equiv \log M_{\text{max}} - \log M_{\text{min}}$ .

An astrophysical interpretation of  $f_{\text{occ}}$  convolves at least four phenomena: the actual presence of a star forming galaxy in a halo, a duty cycle in the star formation rate, the escape fraction of Ly $\alpha$  radiation and its detectability as a LAE with Ly- $\alpha$  equivalent widths of  $\gtrsim 65\text{\AA}$ . We do not try to disentangle these effects and do not assume an underlying relation between the  $\alpha$  luminosity and the dark matter halo mass. We instead opt for a purely arithmetic interpretation by setting  $f_{\text{occ}}$  as the ratio between the observed number of LAEs and the number of halos within the considered mass range, that is  $f_{\text{occ}} \equiv N_{\text{LAEs}}/N_{\text{halos}}$ .

For each mock catalog we also randomly remove a fraction  $f_c = 0.22$  of the mock-LAEs and replace them with randomly distributed points to mimic the effect of interloper contamination in Bielby et al. (2016) observations. On top of that we apply rejection sampling to our LAE selection along the radial direction taking the transmission function of the NB479 filter used in Bielby et al. (2016) observations.

Figure 1 shows the cumulative halo number density for all 27 sub-volumes in the simulation, with a normalization by the median number density among fields,  $\langle n \rangle$ . Each line represents a different model  $\mathcal{M}$  with fixed  $f_{\text{occ}} = 1$  and  $\Delta \log M = 1.0$ ; and varying  $M_{\text{min}}$ . This Figure shows that the halo number density varies across sub-volumes, as an expression of cosmic variance. As a consequence, the  $f_{\text{occ}}$  also varies across the mock fields by the same factor factor.

In what follows we ~~note by the paper will describe by the letter~~  $\mathcal{M}$  a model defined by a particular choice of the two parameters  $M_{\text{min}}$  and  $M_{\text{max}}$ . For each model  $\mathcal{M}$  we define  $\tilde{f}_{\text{occ}}$  as the median occupation fraction within the the mock fields.

### 2.4. Model Selection

We explore the parameter space of the models  $\mathcal{M}$  by means of the Affine Invariant Markov Chain Monte Carlo technique using the EMCEE python package (Foreman-Mackey et al. 2013, and references therein).

The MCMC exploration is done using a total of 24 seeds and 400 iterations (9600 models) to sample the posterior probability distribution function,  $P(\mathcal{M}|\text{observations})$ , based on the Angular Correlation Function (ACF). We put a flat prior on  $\log M_{\text{min}}$  and  $\log M_{\text{max}}$  between 9.8 up to 13.4, corresponding to the halo mass range of the simulation at  $z = 3$ . We restrict the selection to models that give a minimal number density  $N_{\text{halos}} > N_{\text{LAE}}/3$ . This means that it is possible to have  $N_{\text{halos}} < N_{\text{LAE}}$  and hence  $f_{\text{occ}} \equiv N_{\text{LAE}}/N_{\text{halos}} > 1$ . We include the 1/3 factor to account for the uncertainty in the number density of LAEs due to cosmic variance, expecting it to be on the same order as the dark matter halo cosmic variance shown in Fig. 1. Our likelihood is taken proportional to  $\exp(-\chi^2_{\mathcal{M}}/2)$  where:

$$\chi^2_{\mathcal{M}} = \sum_{\theta} \left[ \frac{(\text{ACF}_{\mathcal{M}}(\theta) - \text{ACF}_{\text{obs}}(\theta))^2}{\sigma_{\mathcal{M}}^2(\theta) + \sigma_{\text{obs}}^2(\theta)} \right] \quad (1)$$

Here  $\text{ACF}_{\mathcal{M}}$  and  $\text{ACF}_{\text{obs}}$  are the ACF of the explored model  $\mathcal{M}$  and the observational ACF reported by Bielby et al. (2016), respectively.  $\sigma_{\mathcal{M}}$  is the associated 1- $\sigma$  scatter of the  $\text{ACF}_{\mathcal{M}}$  as a product of cosmic variance and  $\sigma_{\text{obs}}$  is the observational error associated to  $\text{ACF}_{\text{obs}}$ .

We ~~do not include the covariance matrix due to the practical impossibility to estimate it in a robust way. The small size of the fields and galaxies make it unfeasible the application of jackknife and bootstrap techniques (Norberg et al. 2009). An estimate from N-body simulation faces the same problem with the additional limitation that we want to solve in the first place. Namely, not knowing the range of halo masses that produces the observed clustering signal. Tests that we performed in the simulation show that, due to the small number of points to estimate the clustering, the covariance matrix is not stable, even for similar models. Using the full error covariance matrix, when not noise dominated, versus only diagonal elements usually has a small effect on clustering analyses (Zehavi et al. 2011).~~

We compute the  $\text{ACF}_{\mathcal{M}}$  using the Landy & Szalay estimator (Landy & Szalay 1993). After this, we correct the computed ACF from the contamination fraction of inter-

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.multidark.org/MultiDark/>

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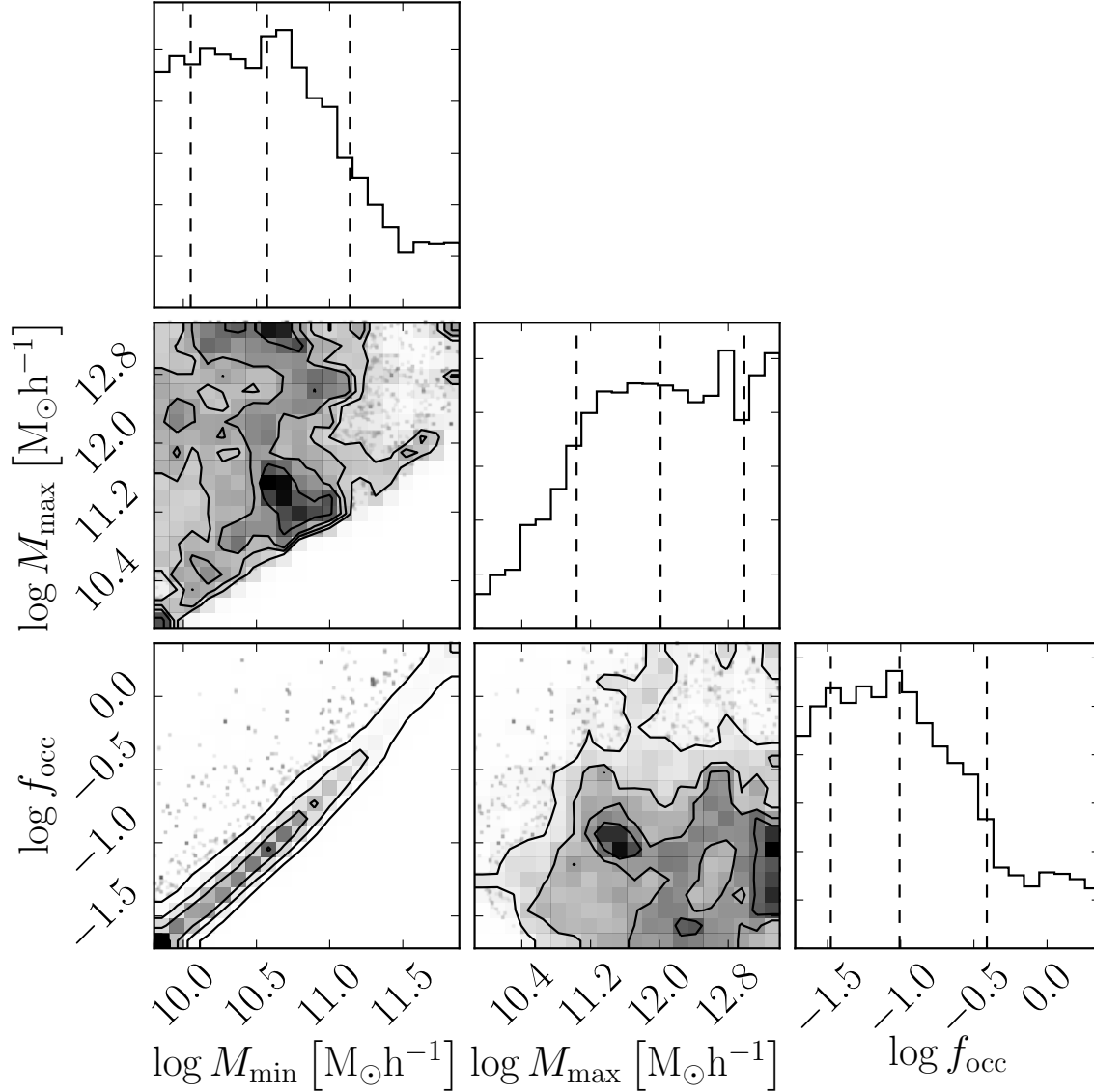


FIG. 3.— One and two dimensional projections of the posterior probability distributions of  $M_{\min}$ ,  $M_{\max}$  and  $f_{\text{occ}}$ . Vertical lines in the one dimensional projections correspond to the 14-50.84 percentiles of the distributions. Thick lines in the two dimensional planes mark the 1-2-3  $\sigma$  contours of the corresponding joint distributions. The models with  $\log f_{\text{occ}} > 0.00$  ( $f_{\text{occ}} > 1$ ) correspond to models where the number density of halos is smaller than the number of observed LAEs but we consider them as consistent because of the uncertainty in the median number density due to cosmic variance. See Fig. 1 and §2.4 for details.

lopers  $f_c$  multiplying the ACF by a factor of  $1/(1 - f_c)^2$  following the procedure described in Bielby et al. (2016).

Fig. 2 shows the observational ACF by Bielby et al. (2016) compared to the ACF in three different models with a wide range in  $\Delta \log M$ . This already shows that radically different models can be compatible with observations once cosmic variance uncertainties are modeled in detail.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Constraints on Model Parameters

Fig. 3 shows the one and two dimensional projections of the posterior probability distributions of the parameters in our LAE model. This Figure represents our main result:  $M_{\min}$ ,  $M_{\max}$  and  $f_{\text{occ}}$  cannot be tightly constrained from the available observations.

The preferred  $1 - \sigma$  range for the masses is  $10.0 < \log M_{\min} < 11.2$  and  $11.0 < \log M_{\max} < 13.0$ .  $f_{\text{occ}}$  is completely determined by  $M_{\min}$  from  $f_{\text{occ}} = 0.011 - 0.004$  when  $\log M_{\min} = 10.0$  to  $f_{\text{occ}} = 0.39 - f_{\text{occ}} = 0.38$  when  $\log M_{\min} = 11.15$ . We compute the power-law dependence between  $f_{\text{occ}}$  and  $M_{\min}$  to be

$$f_{\text{occ}} = 0.080 \cdot 0.5 \left( \frac{M_{\min}}{10^{10.3} h^{-1} M_{\odot}} \frac{M_{\min}}{10^{10} h^{-1} M_{\odot}} \right)^{0.77}. \quad (2)$$

We remind the reader that models with  $\log f_{\text{occ}} > 0.00$  ( $f_{\text{occ}} > 1$ ) correspond to cases where the halo number density is smaller than the number of observed LAEs but are still considered consistent because of the expected uncertainty in the median number density of LAEs due



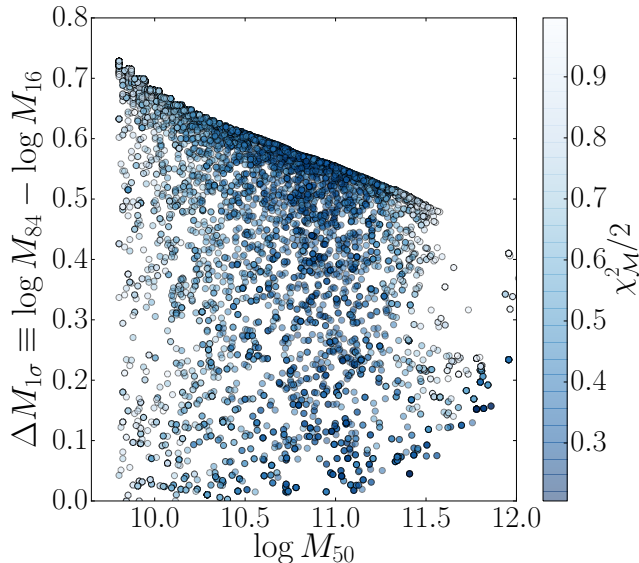


FIG. 4.— Median mass,  $\log M_{50}$ , and mass width  $\Delta \log M_{1\sigma} \equiv \log M_{84} - \log M_{16}$ , for all models with low  $\chi^2_{\mathcal{M}}/2 < 1.0$ . The median mass spans two orders of magnitude with a mean value around  $10^{10.5} h^{-1} M_{\odot}$ . The mass width  $\Delta \log M_{1\sigma}$  has a median of 0.55 dex (a factor of  $\sim 3$  in mass) with a maximum value of 0.7 dex (a factor of 5). This means that all models consistent with observations have a very narrow range in halo mass.

to cosmic variance (see Fig. 1 and §2.4).

The result in Eq.(2) can be qualitatively understood as follows. A choice of  $f_{\text{occ}} < 1$  means that the halo mass function is scaled down. If  $M_{\text{min}}$  decreases the total number of halos increases because less massive halos are more abundant. This requires smaller values of  $f_{\text{occ}}$  to keep the total number of halos hosting LAEs equal to the number of LAEs in observations.

### 3.2. Median Halo Mass and Halo Mass Width within Models

We now compute the median mass,  $\log M_{50}$ , and the  $1\sigma$  halo mass width,  $\Delta \log M_{1\sigma} \equiv \log M_{84} - \log M_{16}$ , of the LAE hosting halos for each model  $\mathcal{M}$  (here  $M_p$  represents the  $p$  percentile of the mass distribution);  $\log M_{50}$  and  $M_{1\sigma}$  allow a direct comparison between our results and previous results in the literature (e.g. Hayashino et al. 2004; Gawiser et al. 2007a; Ouchi et al. 2010; Bielby et al. 2016) that used a more simplified semi-analytical approach.

In Fig. 4 we show the  $\log M_{50}$ - $\Delta \log M_{1\sigma}$  plane for the models selected to have  $\chi^2_{\mathcal{M}}/2 < 1$ , which roughly correspond to the  $1\sigma$  region in the posterior distribution for the model parameters. The color encodes the  $\chi^2_{\mathcal{M}}/2$  value. The median mass has a wide distribution spanning two orders of magnitude.

From this distribution we obtain  $\log M_{50} = 10.8 \pm 0.6$  or equivalently  $M_{50} = 6.3^{+18.8}_{-4.7} \times 10^{10} h^{-1} M_{\odot}$ . The  $1\sigma$  uncertainty for this median value is estimated from the 16 and 84 percentile values in the  $\log M_{50}$  distribution.

Our result is consistent within the statistical uncertainties with previous estimates reported by Bielby et al. (2016) ( $M_{50} = 10^{11.0 \pm 0.6} h^{-1} M_{\odot}$ ), Gawiser et al. (2007b) ( $M_{50} = 10^{10.9 \pm 0.9} h^{-1} M_{\odot}$ ) and Ouchi et al. (2010) ( $M_{50} = 10^{10.8^{+1.8}_{-0.8}} h^{-1} M_{\odot}$ ) using semi-analytical approaches. Our result is slightly below the Bielby et al.

(2016) median mass estimation. This could probably be attributed to the fact that Bielby et al. (2016) only represent a particular field of the universe while our  $\log M_{50}$  represents the median mass of the universe after taking into account cosmic variance that allows lower mass halos to be also consistent with observations.

Figure 4 also shows something that semi-analytical approaches were not able to predict. The mass width,  $\Delta \log M_{1\sigma}$ , that is the width of the mass distribution for a given model with fixed  $M_{\text{min}}$  and  $M_{\text{max}}$ , has a median value and  $1\sigma$  uncertainty of  $\Delta \log M_{1\sigma} = 0.51^{+0.10}_{-0.30}$  dex. This means that the mass range for halos hosting LAEs is very narrow. There is only a factor of 2 to 4 between the lower and upper mass boundary of the central 68 percentile of the mass distribution. We emphasize that  $M_{\text{max}}$  can still be very large while the width is small due to the asymmetry in the dark matter halo mass function.

Summarizing, the median mass could be anything in the range  $10^{10.2} h^{-1} M_{\odot}$  and  $10^{11.4} h^{-1} M_{\odot}$  (a 2.0 dex range), but the  $1\sigma$  width of the mass distribution is highly constrained to be between 0.2 and 0.6 dex.

In Fig. 2 we show the computed  $ACF_{\mathcal{M}}$  of models with  $\log M_{\text{min}} = 10.5$  and different values of  $\Delta \log M$ . We can see that the clustering gets slightly stronger for larger values of  $\Delta \log M$ . Nevertheless, due to the large impact of cosmic variance at the volume of the current observations all the models are basically consistent within errors. The last result together with the large Poissonian observational error in the ACF explain the current difficulty to put tighter constraints in  $\log M_{\text{max}}$  in our model.

### 3.3. Constraining Dark matter halos mass with cosmic variance

Fig. 1 shows the halo number distribution (HND) in the mock fields of the simulation for different models  $\mathcal{M}$ . By simple inspection one can infer that the distribution width increases with  $M_{\text{min}}$ .

In Fig. 5 we confirm this trend by plotting the HND  $1\sigma$  width for good models ( $\chi^2_{\mathcal{M}}/2 < 1$ ) as a function of  $\log M_{\text{min}}$ . We find that considering all the 27 mock fields the  $1\sigma$  width,  $W_{1\sigma}$  increases with  $M_{\text{min}}$  following

$$W_{1\sigma} = (0.138 \pm 0.002) \times \left( \frac{M_{\text{min}}}{10^{11} h^{-1} M_{\odot}} \right)^{0.177 \pm 0.009}. \quad (3)$$

This result opens the possibility to constrain the  $\log M_{\text{min}}$  (as well as the median mass) of LAEs by simply measuring the width of the distribution of observed LAE along several observational fields. This idea has been already explored for  $z > 6$  galaxies (Robertson 2010).

To keep the validity of Eq. (3) there should at least be 27 fields (to follow the same numbers we use here) of size  $\sim 1 \text{ deg}^2$  with the same observational conditions (filters, equivalent width cuts). However, repeating the same kind of cosmic variance study for different survey strategies should help to provide a constraint of the same kind.

To keep the validity of Eq. (3) there should be of the order of 27 field or even a larger number. Each of these fields should have  $\sim 1 \text{ deg}^2$  in size and reproduce the same observational conditions of Bielby et al. (2016) in terms of filters, equivalent width cuts. However, repeating the same kind of cosmic variance study for different survey

strategies should help to provide a equivalent constraint.

### 3.4. Hints of larger uncertainties

Fig. 3 shows an interesting feature for  $M_{\min}$ . The histogram (upper left) showing the probability for this parameter given the observational constraints does not considerably decreases for lower masses. This raises the following question. Down to which values of  $M_{\min}$  does the probability significantly decreases?

Lower values of  $M_{\min}$  would imply a lower  $f_{\text{occ}}$  and larger uncertainties on the parameters  $M_{\min}$ ,  $f_{\text{occ}}$  and  $M_{50}$ . In other words, the limitations in our priors for  $M_{\min}$  (which set the limitations for the kind of numerical simulation we use) might be underestimating the uncertainties and slightly biasing our results for  $M_{\min}$ ,  $f_{\text{occ}}$  and  $M_{50}$ .

Although Fig. 4 suggest that models with lower values of  $M_{50}$ , i.e. lower values of  $M_{\min}$ , have a higher  $\chi^2_{\mathcal{M}}$  and could be thus discarded, we suggest that a proper test of this hypothesis requires performing new cosmological simulations to be able to probe  $M_{\min}$  masses below our limit of  $6 \times 10^9 h^{-1} M_{\odot}$ .

This highlights the main thesis of this paper. Namely, the high impact that cosmic variance can have on constraining the parameters of our model. With the current limitations in the cosmological simulations available to the public we cannot significantly decrease or prior on  $M_{\min}$ . We consider such test beyond the scope of this paper.

This extension to larger priors cannot change other central results of our paper, such as the relationship between  $f_{\text{occ}}$  and  $M_{\min}$ , the narrow mass range for individual models and the possibility to constraint the halo mass with cosmic variance on the number density counts. However, we suggest that future work building upon the technique presented in this paper should count with simulations that extend at least one order of magnitude below our limit  $6 \times 10^9 h^{-1} M_{\odot}$ .

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we studied the impact of cosmic variance and observational uncertainties in constraining the mass range and occupation fraction of dark matter halos hosting LAEs. To this end we used the BolshoiP N-body simulation to construct 27 mock fields with the same typical size of observed fields at  $z = 3.1$  ( $\sim 1 \text{ deg}^2$ ). In our model a dark matter halo with mass in the range  $M_{\min} < M_h < M_{\max}$  can only host one detectable LAE at most. We explored the parameter space determined by  $M_{\min}$  and  $M_{\max}$  using affine invariant Monte Carlo Markov-Chain minimization to match the observed ACF and mean number density of LAEs. It is the first time that such a thorough exploration of the cosmic variance impact on LAEs statistics is presented in the literature.

We find that once cosmic variance is taken into account, the observational data can only put weak constraints on  $M_{\min}$  and  $f_{\text{occ}}$ . When we translate these loose constraints into the median mass, we find a general consistency with previous works (Hayashino et al. 2004; Gawiser et al. 2007b; Ouchi et al. 2008) specially with the most recent one (Bielby et al. 2016).

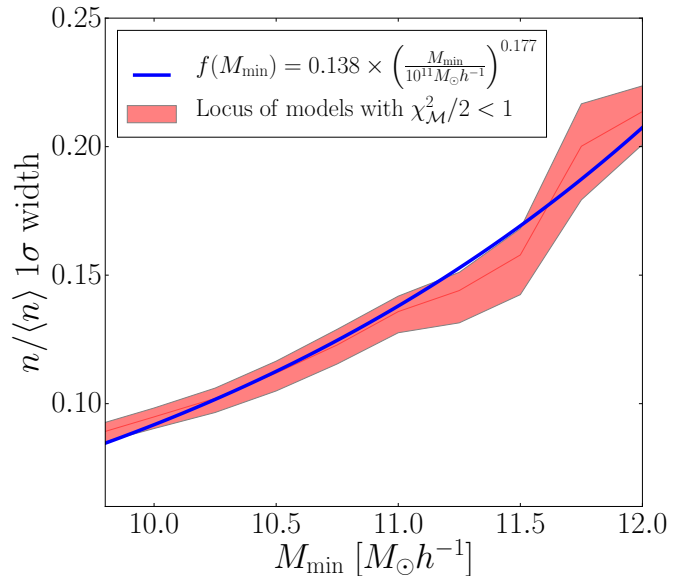


FIG. 5.—  $1\sigma$  width of the number density distribution over the as a function of  $M_{\min}$ . Only the models that have a good match with observations ( $\chi^2_{\mathcal{M}}/2 < 1$ ) are included. The strong dependence of  $\langle n \rangle$  with  $M_{\min}$  was parameterized as a power law with the parameters shown in the legend.

This work also highlights the need to explore a wider range on the prior of  $M_{\min}$  if one wants to better estimate the uncertainty on  $M_{\min}$ ,  $f_{\text{occ}}$  and  $M_{50}$ . In this paper we use priors given by previous observations, but our results suggest that once cosmic variance is explicitly taken into account, even lower values of  $M_{\min}$  might be in fact consistent with observations. We recommend that future work making use of the technique presented in this paper should extend the prior for  $M_{\min}$  to masses at least one order of magnitude below  $6 \times 10^9 h^{-1} M_{\odot}$ .

Nevertheless, our analysis allowed us to draw two results that can be used to put tighter constraints on  $M_{\min}$  and  $f_{\text{occ}}$  once upcoming large LAE surveys, such as the HETDEX project (Adams et al. 2011) and the HSC ultra deep survey, are available:

1.  $f_{\text{occ}}$  is uniquely determined by  $M_{\min}$ , regardless of  $M_{\max}$ . A precise determination of  $M_{\min}$  will thus fix  $f_{\text{occ}}$ . As a consequence of this, for a given  $M_{\min}$  the median mass is also fixed.
2. The width of the LAE number distribution function obtained over several fields of  $\approx 1 \text{ deg}^2$  is tightly correlated with  $M_{\min}$ . That measurement with next generation surveys will be able to constrain  $M_{\min}$  within a factor of  $\sim 2$ .

We also find that the  $1\sigma$  width of the mass distribution is highly constrained to be between 0.2 and 0.6 dex. This result can be used to test different models for LAEs formation in a cosmological context to better understand why observable LAEs seem to be constrained into a narrow halo mass range.

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