

# Galaxies

## 1. Basics & Nomenclature

The basic phenomenology of galaxies is necessary to understand before embarking on their detailed study. In the broadest terms, galaxies are gravitationally bound collections of stars, gas, and dark matter. Their masses range from extremely small, a few  $10^6 M_\odot$  in dark matter, up to around  $10^{13} M_\odot$  in dark matter. Baryonic mass in the form of stars and cold gas is only about 5% of the dark matter mass, smaller than the cosmic mean fraction. The extent of stars and gas ranges from a few tenths of a kpc to 10s of kpc; the extent of the dark matter appears to be much larger. Galaxies the size of the Milky Way have number densities such that their mean separation is about 5 Mpc.

Theoretically, it appears that galaxies form near the centers of dark matter halos and subhalos that form as dark matter collapses gravitationally from the initial density perturbations. To zeroth order galaxy phenomenology can be explained by the relationship of galaxies to their host halos and subhalos.

In the optical, a critical quantity characterizing a galaxy is its luminosity. The luminosity is typically measured from light in an image associated with the galaxy, either by summing light with a circular or elliptical aperture or by fitting the amplitude of a model. Aperture fluxes can be defined in multiple ways. The most robust is the Petrosian definition used by the Sloan Digital Sky Survey. Most aperture fluxes need to be corrected for the effect of the point spread function, especially at small galaxy sizes. At faint fluxes, aperture fluxes defined to contain most of the expected light tend to be noisy.

Model fluxes are higher signal-to-noise and can be constructed to account for the point spread function and any inherent ellipticity in the model. Inaccuracy in the model can on the other hand result in systematic errors in the flux.

The *luminosity function*  $\Phi(L)$  of galaxies characterize their luminosity distribution. A simple approximation to this function is the Schechter function:

$$\Phi(L)dL = \left(\frac{\phi_0}{L_*}\right) \left(\frac{L}{L_*}\right)^\alpha \exp(-L/L_*) dL \quad (1)$$

where  $L_*$  is similar to the Milky Way luminosity and  $\alpha \sim -1.3$  is the *faint end slope*. A better approximation is a broken power law at the faint end, which gets steeper at lower luminosities. The luminosity function depends on band pass, because the colors of galaxies depend on luminosity. A similar function characterizes the stellar mass function.

The *stellar mass function*  $\Phi(M_*)$  characterizes their distribution in total stellar mass. Estimates of stellar mass depend on broad-band observations and/or spectroscopic observations combined with models of the underlying stellar population. Broadly speaking, the stellar mass is

proportional to the light multiplied by a mass-to-light ratio. The mass-to-light ratio depends on the age, metallicity, dust content, and other properties of the stellar population, with the trend in all cases for the redder populations to have higher mass-to-light ratios. Stellar mass is defined as the current stellar mass in objects above the hydrogen burning limit, including remnants such as white dwarfs and neutron stars, but not including any mass returned through winds or supernovae to the interstellar medium.

As a function of redshift, the luminosity function and stellar mass function change. The stellar mass function in general needs to grow with cosmic time, since star formation proceeds within galaxies over time. The luminosity function however tends to decrease with cosmic time, since the rate of star formation decreases and the mass-to-light ratio tends to grow.

The spectral energy distributions of galaxies depend on their luminosity. The simplest characterization of these spectral energy distributions are from the broad-band color. At the highest luminosities, low redshift galaxies tend to be uniformly red, indicating an old stellar population. At the lowest luminosities, they tend to be primarily blue, indicating a young stellar population, except in those cases where they are satellites of a larger galaxy. At intermediate luminosities (around  $L_*$ ) both populations exist and the color distribution is said to be *bimodal*.

The internal structure of galaxies also varies. Very broadly speaking, the stellar components of galaxies are:

- *disks*: an extended, flattened, rotating distribution of stars and (usually) gas. Disks often have spiral structure through them, with star formation concentrated on the spiral arms.
- *bulges*: generally puffy, velocity dispersion supported collections of stars near the centers of galaxies, thought to arise through the destruction of merging galaxies.
- *pseudobulges*: generally flatter, more exponential collections of stars near the centers of galaxies, thought to arise through internal processes within disks.
- *bars*: elongated structures near the centers of galaxies, thought to arise through dynamical instabilities of bulges or pseudobulges.

Disks tend to have an exponential radial profile when azimuthally averaged:

$$I(r) = I_0 \exp(-r/r_e) \quad (2)$$

where for the Milky Way  $r_e \sim 3$  kpc. When observed at an *inclination* that is  $i < 90^\circ$ , the two-dimensional image is projected into an ellipse on the sky that can be characterized by an *axis ratio*, which if the disk were transparent and infinitely thin would have a straightforward relationship with the inclination.

Bulges have a range range of radial profiles that can be characterized by the Sérsic profile:

$$I(r) = I_0 \exp \left[ - (r/r_e)^{1/n} \right] \quad (3)$$

where  $n \sim 1 - 4$  but can be larger than that.  $n = 1$  is the same as an exponential profile, and  $n = 4$  is a special profile known as the *de Vaucouleurs* profile. Bulges are typically ellipsoidal or triaxial systems, seen at some angle, so that their axis ratios do not simply translate into an inclination.

The size of a galaxy is often quantified by the *half-light radius* or *effective radius*, which is the radius containing 50% of the estimated total light within a circular or elliptical annulus. Another common measure of size is  $D_{25}$ , which is the radius of the isophote as which the surface brightness in  $B$  becomes 25 mag arcsec<sup>-2</sup>; this definition is not suitable at high redshift because surface brightness is not conserved.

A related measurement is the surface brightness. For example, the *half-light surface brightness* is the mean surface brightness within the half-light radius. The *central surface brightness* is the surface brightness at the center, only measurable if the center is smooth relative to the resolution of the image.

Internal structure has traditionally been characterized by a measure of morphology. Definitions of galaxy morphology vary among investigators, but the broad classifications of elliptical (or E), lenticular (or S0), or spiral (ranging from Sa through Sd) are common.

Elliptical galaxies are red, puffy, and generally velocity dispersion supported. They lie on the red sequence in color space (but S0 and Sa galaxies are there as well). They are very much like bulges unencumbered by disks. They contain small amounts of cold gas, typically about 1% of the stellar mass, and also warm and hot gas. Their Sérsic indices  $n$  vary from around 1 at low luminosities (*dwarf ellipticals*, or *dE* galaxies) up to 4 or more for higher luminosities (*giant ellipticals*, sometimes *gE* galaxies). There is a rare class of low luminosity elliptical with  $n \sim 4$ , known as *compact elliptical*, or *cE*, galaxies.

Lenticular galaxies are red but disk like, though not as thin as true disks. They can be hard to distinguish from ellipticals when seen face on, but commonly have bars or rings, and their stellar distribution commonly has a distinct dropoff in its outer parts (i.e. the exponential profile effectively stops). They also have little gas.

Disk galaxies can be blue or red, but generally consist of thin disks of gas and stars (a few 100 pc thick). The gas is typically a mix of ionized, neutral, and molecular gas, the latter occurring in molecular clouds. Much ionized gas surrounds star forming regions that are often embedded in the molecular clouds, while warm ionized gas does exist elsewhere in the disks.

The centers of disk galaxies can consist of a range of interesting structures, including bars, bulges, and pseudobulges. High luminosity galaxies tend to have large bulges, and low luminosity galaxies weak ones. Spirals have a morphology classification that ranges from Sa to Sd, but there are different choices in different catalogs as to what the classification indicates. They generally are meant to capture the pitch angle of the spiral arms, their organizational structure, and the prominence of the bulge. The Reference Catalog classifications of de Vaucouleurs tend to emphasize

the bulge, whereas the Revised Shapley-Ames Catalog of Sandage and Tammann depends more strongly on the spiral arms.

A common quantitative measure of morphology is the bulge-to-total ratio  $B/T$ , which is the result of fitting a bulge and disk model to a galaxy. By definition, this quantity ranges from zero to one, and pure disk galaxies lie at zero and elliptical galaxies lie at one. A model independent, related quantity is the *concentration*, defined by  $r_{90}/r_{50}$ , the 90% to 50% radius ratio.

The dark matter content of galaxies is revealed by their dynamics and in some cases by gravitational lensing. Elliptical galaxies are supported by a combination of rotation and velocity dispersion; interpreting the dynamical masses of elliptical galaxies is complex but achievable. The best evidence to date suggests that massive elliptical galaxies have high mass-to-light ratios, which indicates either a non-standard IMF that changes with stellar mass, or the presence of dark matter. Disk galaxies are primarily supported by rotation. Particularly in their outer parts, the gas dynamics is relatively straightforward to interpret and unambiguous signatures of dark matter are present.

Two major scaling relations quantify the relationship between luminosity and dynamics: The *fundamental plane* of giant elliptical galaxies, the relationship between size, luminosity, and velocity dispersion, which takes the approximate form:

$$r_e \propto \sigma^\alpha I_e^{-\beta} \quad (4)$$

which implies a plane in the three-dimensional space of the logarithms of these quantities. The exercises below explore the implications of this relationship.

The *Tully-Fisher law* disk galaxies near  $L_*$  relates their luminosities and their peak circular velocities, as measured with optical or radio observations. Since the colors of disk galaxies depend on luminosity, the slope of this relationship depends on the band that the luminosity is measured in. In the  $I$ -band, the relationship is equivalent to  $L \propto v^{3.1}$ . At low luminosities, the velocity is independent of  $L$  (but is dependent on the total baryonic mass).

Luminous galaxies all seem to have a supermassive black holes at their centers, with evidence for the black holes from active galactic nucleus emission (called *Seyfert galaxies*) but also from dynamical signatures through stellar dynamics, reverberation mapping, and central masers.

**spectra?**

## 2. Commentary

The description here relies on our best understanding of underlying physical properties, but these properties are imperfectly measured.

Unusual galaxies exist: ellipticals with gas disks, polar ring galaxies, etc. central star bursts. ULSBs. UCDs.

### 3. Key References

- *Blanton & Moustakas*
- *Graham paper on Sersic*

Gunn et al. (2006)

### 4. Order-of-magnitude Exercises

1. Using the numbers in the text, estimate  $\Omega_b$  and  $\Omega_m$ .
2. Estimate the stellar mass surface density for a Milky Way like disk galaxy.

### 5. Analytic Exercises

1. Petrosian quantities for Sersic galaxies
2.  $\kappa$  space
3. Tully-Fisher

### 6. Numerics and Data Exercises

1. Luminosity function vs Press-Schechter
2. Looking at galaxy images across color magnitude space
3. Spectra and colors
4. Measurement of bulge and disk
5. Axis ratios of disk galaxies and elliptical galaxies
6. Dust reddening vs. axis ratio
7. Velocity dispersion
8. Rotation curves
9. Tully Fisher
10. FP

## REFERENCES

Gunn, J. E., et al. 2006, AJ, 131, 2332