

# Treatment of the X chromosome in mapping multiple quantitative trait loci

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## 12 **ABSTRACT**

13     Statistical methods to map quantitative trait loci (QTL) often neglect the X chromosome and  
14     may focus exclusively on autosomal loci. But the X chromosome often requires special treatment:  
15     sex and cross-direction covariates may need to be included to avoid spurious evidence of linkage,  
16     and the X chromosome may require a separate significance threshold. In multiple-QTL analyses,  
17     including the consideration of epistatic interactions, the X chromosome also requires special care  
18     and consideration. We extend a penalized likelihood method for multiple-QTL model selection,  
19     to appropriately handle the X chromosome. We examine its performance in simulation and by  
20     application to a large eQTL data set. The method has been implemented in the package R/ql.

## INTRODUCTION

The X chromosome is often neglected in methods to map quantitative trait loci (QTL), yet it often requires special treatment. For example, in an intercross between two inbred strains, A and B, the offspring have genotypes AA, AB, or BB on the autosomes, but on the X chromosome males are hemizygous A or B, while females have genotypes either AA or AB, if their paternal grandmother was from strain A, or genotypes AB or BB, if their paternal grandmother was from strain B. These differences introduce three difficulties: the treatment of the male hemizygous genotypes, the potential for spurious evidence for X chromosome linkage due to a sex or cross-direction difference in the phenotype, and the need for separate thresholds for statistical significance for the X chromosome and the autosomes, due to a difference in degrees of freedom in the linkage tests. Similar considerations apply in genome-wide association studies (Zheng *et al.* 2007; Clayton 2008; Hickey and Bahlo 2011).

Broman *et al.* (2006) described the necessary modifications to single-QTL analysis by interval mapping (Lander and Botstein 1989). They identified additional covariates that need to be considered in the null model with no QTL, to avoid spurious linkage. They identified appropriate linkage tests for various configurations of an intercross or backcross, ensuring that the null model is nested within the alternative, single-QTL model. And they described an approach to obtain separate permutation-based significance thresholds for the autosomes and X chromosome.

Many of the difficulties with the X chromosome are further exacerbated in the consideration of multiple-QTL models. Multiple-QTL models have a number of advantages for QTL mapping, including the potential for increased power to detect QTL, the ability to separate linked QTL, and the possibility of identifying epistatic interactions among QTL. But, for example, in the consideration of epistatic interactions, the degrees of freedom for the test for epistasis can vary dramatically depending on whether both loci are on autosomes, both are on the X chromosome, or one is on the autosome and one is on the X chromosome (Broman and Sen 2009).

We describe an approach for multiple-QTL model selection, including the investigation of

47 epistatic interactions, that deals appropriately with the X chromosome. We build upon the  
48 penalized likelihood approach of Broman and Speed (2002) and Manichaikul *et al.* (2009). We  
49 use permutation tests (Churchill and Doerge 1994) with two-dimensional, two-QTL genome  
50 scans, to derive separate thresholds for the main effects for QTL on the autosomes and X  
51 chromosome, and for pairwise epistatic interactions, depending on whether both, one, or neither  
52 QTL is on the X chromosome.

53 We use computer simulations to assess the performance of our approach. We further illustrate  
54 the approach through application to a large expression quantitative trait locus (eQTL) study. The  
55 method has been implemented in the widely-used package R/qtl (Broman *et al.* 2003).

## 56 METHODS

We consider the case of a backcross or an intercross derived from two inbred lines and of a continuously varying quantitative trait with normally distributed residual variation. Broman and Speed (2002) introduced the use of a penalized LOD score criterion for multiple-QTL model selection in this context. They focused on additive QTL models and placed a linear penalty on the number of QTL. Their criterion was

$$\text{pLOD}(\gamma) = \text{LOD}(\gamma) - T_m |\gamma|_m$$

57 where  $\gamma$  denotes an additive QTL model,  $|\gamma|_m$  is the number of QTL in the model, and  $\text{LOD}(\gamma)$  is  
 58 the  $\log_{10}$  likelihood ratio for the model  $\gamma$  versus the null model of no QTL. The penalty  $T_m$  was  
 59 chosen as the  $1 - \alpha$  quantile of the genome-wide maximum LOD score in a permutation test (see  
 60 Churchill and Doerge 1994), and they sought the model with maximum pLOD.

61 This approach could be modified to allow different penalties for QTL on the X chromosome  
 62 than those on autosomes, using significance thresholds as in Broman *et al.* (2006), with  $T_{mA}$  and  
 63  $T_{mX}$  being the  $1 - \alpha_A$  and  $1 - \alpha_X$  quantiles, respectively, of the maximum LOD scores across the  
 64 autosomes and the X chromosome, from a permutation test. Broman *et al.* (2006) took  
 65  $\alpha_i = 1 - (1 - \alpha_i)^{L_i/L}$ , where  $L_X$  is the length of the X chromosome,  $L_A$  is the total lengths of the  
 66 autosomes, and  $L = L_A + L_X$ .

67 Manichaikul *et al.* (2009) extended the penalized LOD score approach to consider models  
 68 with pairwise interactions among QTL. They imposed a hierarchy on the models, with the  
 69 inclusion of a pairwise interaction requiring the inclusion of both corresponding main effects. We  
 70 will also impose this hierarchy. They used the same main-effect penalty as in Broman and Speed  
 71 (2002), but added a penalty on interaction terms. They considered heavy and light penalties on  
 72 interactions. The heavy interaction penalty was taken as the  $1 - \alpha$  quantile of the LOD score for  
 73 the interaction term in a two-dimensional, two-QTL scan of the genome, under the null  
 74 hypothesis of no QTL. The light interaction penalty was derived as the  $1 - \alpha$  quantile for the

75 LOD score comparing a two-locus interactive model to a single-QTL model, but then subtracting  
76 off the main effect penalty.

77 The light interaction penalty has the advantage of giving greater power to detect interactive  
78 QTL, but with an increased rate of false interactions. Exclusive use of the light penalty gave a  
79 high rate of false positive QTL, and so they used a compromise: considering a QTL model as a  
80 graph with nodes being QTL and edges being pairwise interactions, they allowed no more than  
81 one light interaction penalty for each connected component and placed heavy penalties on all  
82 other interactions.

83 In adapting the approach of Manichaikul *et al.* (2009) to handle the X chromosome, we  
84 propose a similar penalized LOD score, but with separate thresholds for interactions in three  
85 regions A:A, A:X, X:X. Broman *et al.* (2006) identified sex and cross-direction covariates that  
86 should be included under the null hypothesis; we include these covariates under all models. The  
87 ad hoc system of heavy and light penalties on interaction terms, suggested by Manichaikul *et al.*  
88 (2009), becomes unmanageable when separate interaction penalties are considered for the three  
89 regions, and so we allow light penalties only for interactions for which both QTL are on  
90 autosomes; any QTL involving the X chromosome must be a heavy penalty.

91 The main effect penalties are as described above. The interaction penalties are based on  
92 significance levels  $\alpha_{AA}$ ,  $\alpha_{AX}$ ,  $\alpha_{XX}$ , based on the areas of the corresponding regions. For region  $i$ ,  
93 we use  $\alpha_i = 1 - (1 - \alpha)^{S_i/S}$ , where  $S_{AA} = L_A^2/2$ ,  $S_{AX} = L_A L_X$ ,  $S_{XX} = L_X^2/2$ , and  
94  $S = S_{AA} + S_{AX} + S_{XX}$ .

95 In the following, we denote the method of Manichaikul *et al.* (2009) treating the autosomes  
96 and X chromosome the same as XeqA (for X chromosome and autosomes treated equally), and  
97 the proposed approach, treating the X chromosome separately, as XneA.

98 The proposed approach requires a permutation test with a two-dimensional, two-QTL genome  
99 scan, keeping track of the maximum LOD score in the three regions, A:A, A:X, and X:X. And as  
100 the quantiles for the A:X and X:X regions are much farther out in the tail, we will need to perform  
101 many more permutations for the A:X and X:X regions in order to get accurate estimates of the

penalties. In Broman *et al.* (2006), they suggested using a factor  $L_A/L_X$  additional permutations for the X chromosome as for autosomes. Following that approach, we would require  $(L_A/L_X)^2$  as many permutations for the X:X region as for the A:A region.

To search the space of QTL models, we use forward selection up to a model with 10 QTL, followed by backward elimination to the null model. At each step of forward selection, we scan the genome for an additional additive QTL, and then for each QTL in the current model, we scan the genome for a QTL that interacts with that QTL. We step to the model that gives the largest penalized LOD score, even if it results in a decrease relative to the current model. In the end, we select the model with maximum penalized LOD score, among all models considered in the search.

## Data and software availability

Software implementing the proposed methods have been incorporated into the R/qtl package, which is available at its website (<https://rqtl.org>), at GitHub (<https://github.com/kbroman/qtl>), and at the Comprehensive R Archive Network (CRAN, <https://cran.r-project.org>). The data from Tian *et al.* (2016), considered in the Application section below, are available at the Mouse Phenome Database, at <https://phenome.jax.org/projects/Attie1>. The detailed code we used for the simulations and in the application are available at [https://github.com/kbroman/Paper\\_qtlX](https://github.com/kbroman/Paper_qtlX).

## SIMULATIONS

To investigate the performance of our proposed approach, we conducted a computer simulation. We compare the Type I error rate and power, including the relative rates of Type I errors on autosomes versus the X chromosome.

We consider a backcross with 250 individuals, split evenly between males and females, using a genome modeled after the mouse, with markers at a 10 cM spacing. We considered a variety of small QTL models: a single QTL, two additive QTL, or three additive QTL all on autosomes; a single QTL or two additive QTL on the X chromosome; two interacting QTL on autosomes; and two interacting QTL with one on an autosome and one on the X chromosome. In all cases, the percent phenotypic variance explained by each QTL was approximately 8%. We used Haley-Knott regression (Haley and Knott 1992) and stepwise model selection. Analyses were performed with R/qtl version 1.42-8 (Broman and Speed 2002) and R version 3.5.3 (R Core Team 2020).

First we use simulation to derive the various penalties for the XeqA and XneA methods. For the XneA methods, we performed 1,056 simulation replicates for the A:A region, 8,544 replicates for the A:X region, and 276,192 replicates for the X:X region. The estimated penalties are shown in Table 1. These penalties are used to perform stepwise model selection. The results, based on 1,000 simulations, are displayed in Figure 1. Figure 1A shows the Type I error rate for main effect QTL. Treatment of the X chromosome separately from the autosomes (XneA) results in a smaller Type I error rate than when all chromosomes are treated equally (XeqA). The XeqA method has high Type I error rate particularly when the simulated model has two main QTL on X chromosome.

Figure 1B shows the  $\log_2$  ratio of Type I error rates, for the autosomes versus the X chromosome. The proposed XneA method serves to balance type I error rates on the autosomes and the X chromosome, while the XeqA method shows increased type I error on the X chromosome.



Figure 1C shows the type I error rate for interactions. The XneA method is conservative, with below-target rates of type I errors. The XeqA method has high false type I error rates for interactions, particularly in the case of two QTL on the X chromosome.

Figure 1D shows the power to detect QTL. For autosomal QTL, the two approaches have similar power. The XneA method has lower power to detect X chromosome QTL. This is the trade-off to control the Type I error rate on the X chromosome.

## APPLICATION

To illustrate our method regarding the X chromosome in multiple-QTL model selection, we consider the eQTL data of Tian *et al.* (2016). The data concern a mouse intercross between the diabetes-resistance strain C57BL/6J (abbreviated B6) and the diabetes-susceptible strain BTBR  $T^+tf/J$  (abbreviated BTBR). There were approximately 500  $F_2$  offspring, all genetically obese through introgression of the leptin mutation ( $Lep^{ob/ob}$ ). Genome-wide gene expression data were available on six tissues, assayed with custom two-color Agilent microarrays; here, we focus on liver expression, for which there was data on 483  $F_2$  mice. Mice were genotyped with the Affymetrix 5K GeneChip, giving 2,057 informative markers.

The  $F_1$  parents were derived from a cross between a female BTBR and a male B6. Thus the female  $F_2$  offspring all have an X chromosome from BTBR and so are either homozygous BTBR or heterozygous. The males have a Y chromosome from B6 and are hemizygous B6 or BTBR on the X.

We first used computer simulation to estimate penalties for the XeqA and XneA methods. For all mice in the study, we simulated standard normal phenotypes, independent of genotype, and performed two-dimensional, two-QTL genome scans with sex as an additive covariate to estimate the various penalties. We performed 1,056 simulation replicates for the A:A region, 9,504 replicates for the A:X region, and 335,328 replicates for the X:X region. The numbers of replicates were chosen based on the areas of the corresponding regions, with  $L_A/L_X \approx 19$ . Penalties using  $\alpha = 0.05$  are displayed in Table 1. Note that the number of degrees of freedom for the main-effect QTL test on the X chromosome, 6, is less than that on the autosomes, 8, and so the main effect penalty on the X chromosome is lower. The interaction penalty for two QTL on the X chromosome is lower than the heavy interaction penalty for two QTL on autosomes, but the penalty for interactions between autosomal and X chromosome QTL is highest.

We considered the 37,827 gene expression microarray probes with known genomic location (including 1,433 on the X chromosome, 21 on the Y chromosome, and 9 mitochondrial probes).

The gene expression values were transformed to normal quantiles. We performed single-QTL genome scans and identified 10,814 microarray probes (29%) with at least one significant QTL at  $\alpha = 0.05$ , allowing separate significance thresholds on the autosomes and X chromosome. For the multiple-QTL analyses, we will focus on these 10,814 microarray probes.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the estimated number of QTL by the two methods, as well as the estimated number of pairwise interactions. As we focused on microarray probes with at least one significant QTL in a single-QTL genome scan allowing separate autosome and X chromosome thresholds, it is no surprise that all of these microarray probes showed at least one QTL by the XneA method.

There were 56 microarray probes that showed no QTL by the XeqA method. All of these showed a single QTL on the X chromosome by the XneA method. This can be explained by the fact that the main effect penalty for the X chromosome is considerably smaller than that for the autosomes (Table 1).

In general, these expression traits show a large number of QTL. While about half show a single QTL, about a quarter show 2 QTL and another quarter show 3 or more QTL. The number of interactions, however, is quite small. Less than 4% of expression traits show an interaction, and about 0.1% have two or more interactions.

The two methods gave identical results for the vast majority of the microarray probes: 10,290 (95.2%) gave the same QTL model by the two methods, and just 524 (4.8%) gave different models. For 257 microarray probes (2.4%), the XneA results were nested within the XeqA results, while for 98 microarray probes (0.9%), the XeqA results were nested within the XneA results. Another 169 (1.6%) had more complex differences, with some gains and losses on both sides. In 139 of the 524 cases where the two methods gave different results, part of the difference included the X chromosome: 86 microarray probes gained an X chromosome QTL by the XneA method, while 53 lost an X chromosome QTL.

As one example of the kinds of differences observed, consider microarray probe 10003837305, which is on chromosome 1 at 152 Mb (63.2 cM), though not in a known gene. The

205 results by the two methods are in Table 3, with the results by the XeqA method on the left, and  
206 those for the XneA method on the right. By the XeqA method, there are two QTL on chromosome  
207 7, one of which interacts with a locus on the X chromosome. With the XneA method, the QTL on  
208 chromosome 7 with the 7:X interaction is omitted, and instead there is an interaction between the  
209 other chromosome 7 QTL and the locus on chromosome 10. The position of the chromosome 10  
210 QTL shifts a bit, but the positions of most other QTL do not change much. Note that the QTL on  
211 chromosome 1 is very close to the genomic location for this microarray probe.

212 Figure 2 shows LOD profiles for the two models for this microarray probe, with results for the  
213 XneA method in green. Each curve shows the  $\log_{10}$  likelihood when varying the position of the  
214 given QTL, keeping all other QTL fixed at their estimated positions, versus the model where the  
215 given QTL is omitted (along with any interactions it is involved in). These curves show the  
216 strength of evidence for the QTL as well as an indication of their mapping precision. Again, in  
217 switching from the XeqA method to the XneA method, one of the chromosome 7 QTL is lost, as  
218 is the 7:X interaction, but a 7:10 interaction is gained, and the position of the chromosome 10  
219 QTL shifts.

## DISCUSSION

We have introduced an approach for multiple-QTL model selection that takes account of the X chromosome. It builds on the penalized LOD score method of Manichaikul *et al.* (2009), but with a separate main-effect penalty for the autosomes and the X chromosome, and separate interaction penalties for the three kinds of pairwise interactions: between two autosomal QTL, between two X chromosome QTL, and between a QTL on an autosome and one on the X chromosome.

Our approach balances false positive rates between the autosomes and the X chromosome. In our computer simulations, which concerned a backcross with both sexes, the main effect penalty is higher for the X chromosome than for autosomes, and so the new approach gives a loss of power to detect QTL on the X chromosome. The application to the eQTL dataset of Tian *et al.* (2016) concerned an intercross with both sexes but just one cross direction, and so the main effect penalty was lower for the X chromosome than for autosomes, and so the new approach gave some additional QTL on the X chromosome.

In the eQTL application, for the vast majority of expression traits, the separate treatment of the X chromosome gave identical results. This is as expected: the penalties (Table 1) have relatively small changes, and these changes will only affect the results when loci or interactions have LOD scores in the small range between these penalty values.

In the eQTL application, many expression traits showed multiple QTL, including up to 10 QTL. (Our model search did not consider models with more than 10 QTL.) However, there were few expression traits for which we identified epistatic interactions. The high degrees of freedom of the test for epistatic interactions in an intercross, as well as large search space, result in large penalties on interactions and so low power to detect interactions.

Software implementing our approach has been incorporated into R/qtl (Broman *et al.* 2003), an add-on package to the general statistical software R (R Core Team 2020).

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Table 1: Estimated penalties for the simulations and the application, for the XeqA and XneA methods.

<b>Penalty</b>	<b>Simulations</b>		<b>Application</b>	
	<b>XeqA</b>	<b>XneA</b>	<b>XeqA</b>	<b>XneA</b>
$T_{mA}$	2.98	2.88	3.85	3.90
$T_{mX}$		3.61		3.51
$T_{iAA}^H$	4.83	4.34	6.69	6.59
$T_{iAA}^L$	2.28	1.83	3.73	3.62
$T_{iAX}$		5.74		7.21
$T_{iXX}$		5.15		4.88

Table 2: Distribution of the estimated number of QTL and pairwise interactions for the liver expression data from Tian *et al.* (2016), for the 10,814 gene expression microarray probes with at least one QTL by the XneA method.

<b>No. QTL</b>	<b>XeqA</b>	<b>XneA</b>	<b>No. interactions</b>	<b>XeqA</b>	<b>XneA</b>
0	56	0	0	10408	10419
1	5212	5432	1	392	380
2	2566	2518	2	12	13
3	1444	1397	3	2	2
4	732	712			
5	390	373			
6	205	194			
7	114	116			
8	46	45			
9	26	25			
10	23	2			

Table 3: Comparison of the selected QTL models by the XeqA and XneA methods, on probe 10003837305.

(a) XeqA					(b) XneA				
	name	chr	pos	LOD		name	chr	pos	LOD
Q1	1@60.0	1	60.0	5.4	Q1	1@59.3	1	59.3	5.0
Q2	7@2.5	7	2.5	10.7	Q2	7@18.6	7	18.6	15.1
Q3	7@20.1	7	20.1	5.8	Q3	9@31.6	9	31.6	5.6
Q4	9@31.6	9	31.6	7.1	Q4	10@24.0	10	24.0	8.7
Q5	10@3.0	10	3.0	4.0	Q5	13@14.4	13	14.4	4.4
Q6	13@14.4	13	14.4	5.4	Q6	17@13.1	17	13.1	5.7
Q7	17@19.6	17	19.6	7.1	Q7	X@56.4	X	56.4	34.5
Q8	X@57.4	X	57.4	42.1	Q2:Q4	7@18.6:10@24.0	7:10		7.0
Q2:Q8	7@2.5:X@57.4	7:X		6.4					

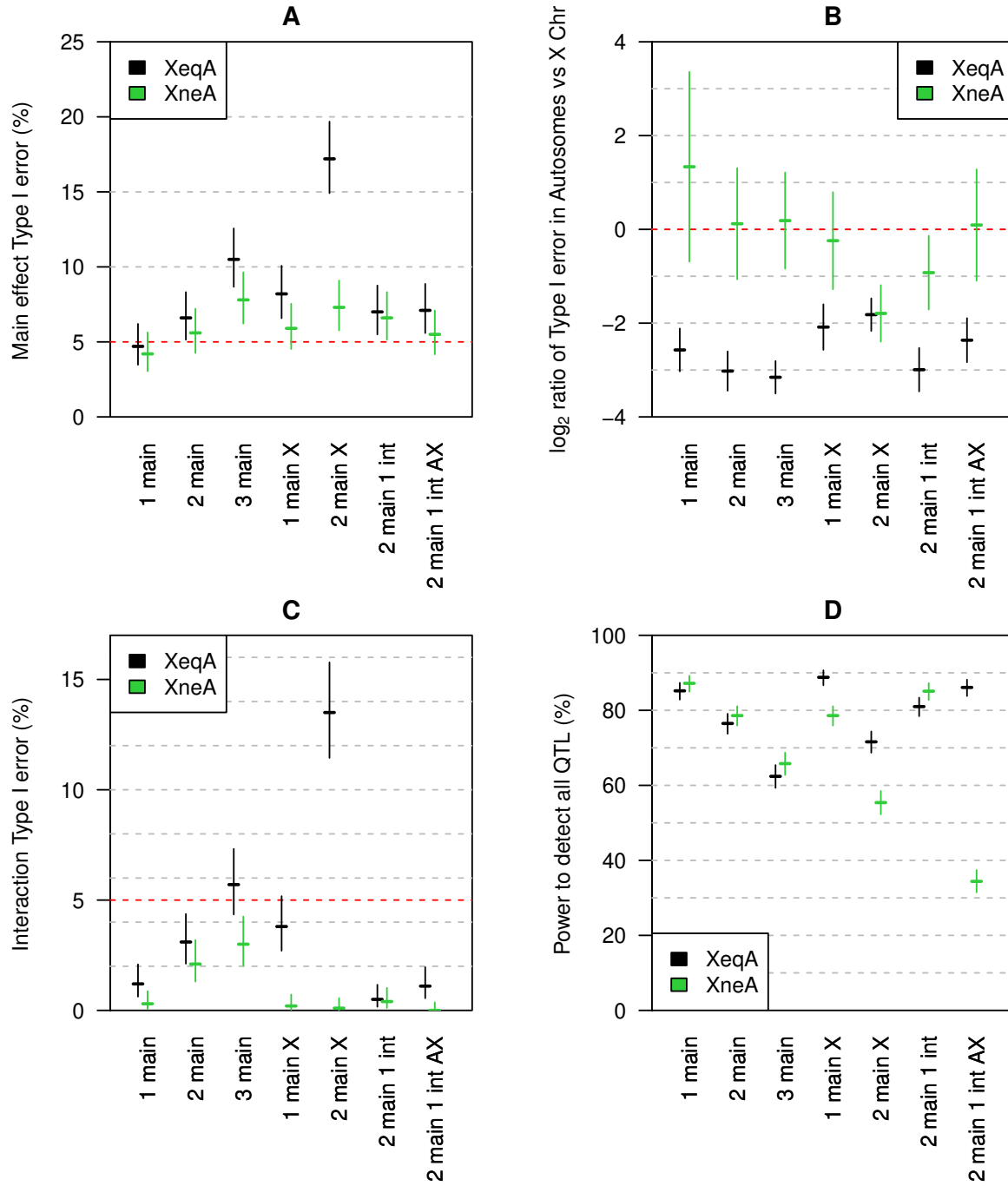


Figure 1: Simulation results: Type I error and power of these methods across simulated models. Black is the method treating the X chromosome and autosomes the same (XeqA); green is the method treating the X chromosome and autosomes differently (XneA). The estimates and 95% confidence intervals are based on 1000 simulations. A: Type I error for main effects. B: log<sub>2</sub> ratio of the Type I error of main effects for autosomes versus the X chromosome. C: Type I error for interactions. D: Power to detect QTL.

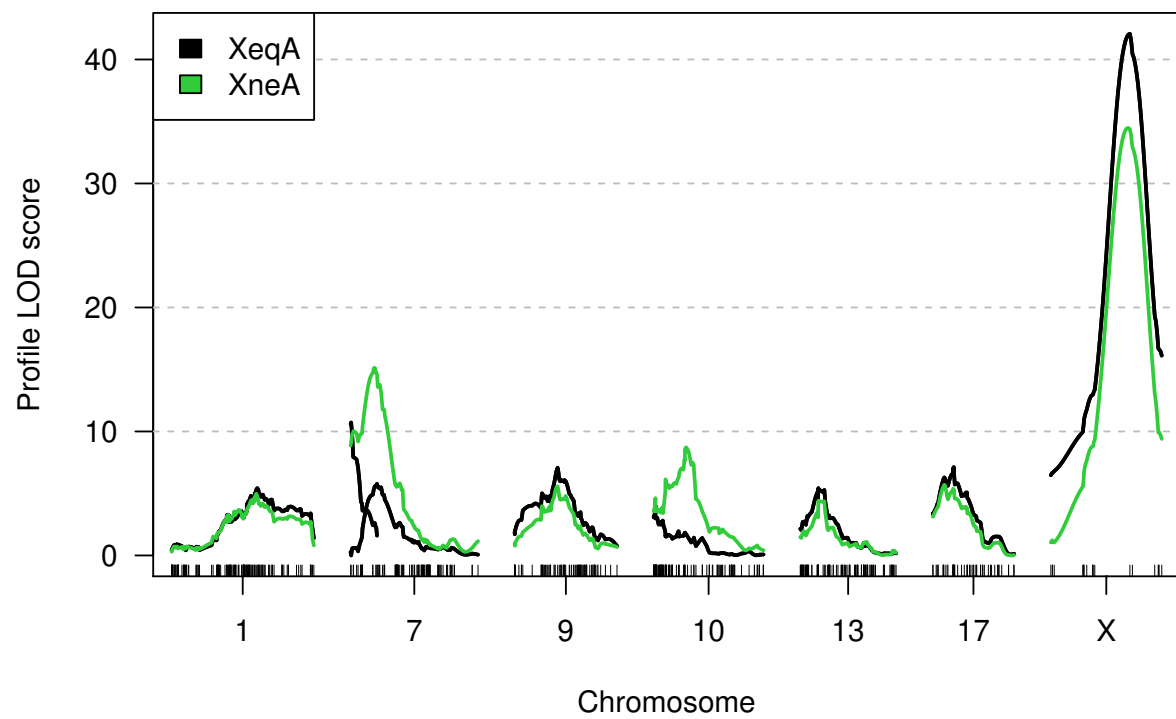


Figure 2: LOD profile of output models from XeqA and XneA methods on probe 10003837305.