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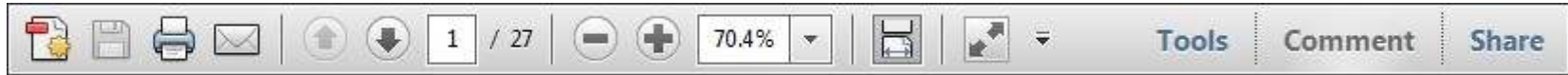
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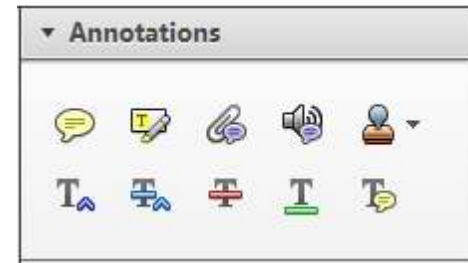
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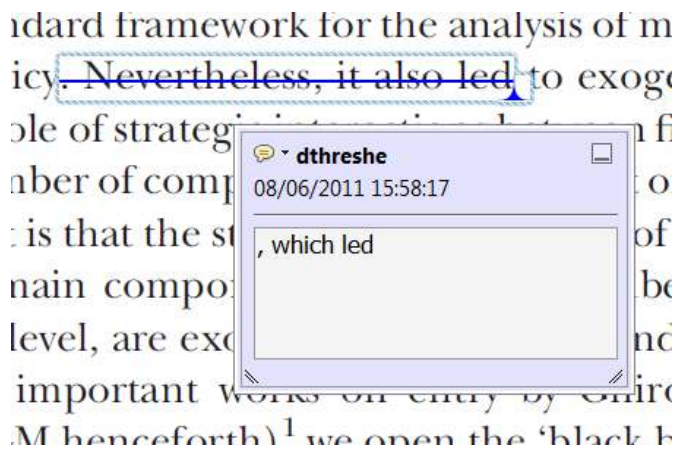
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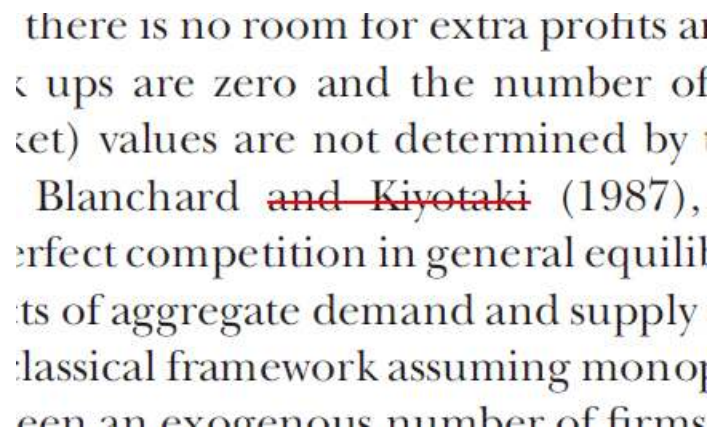
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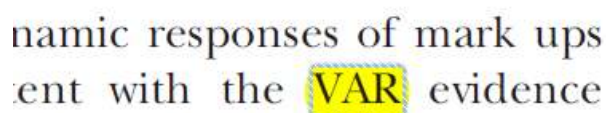
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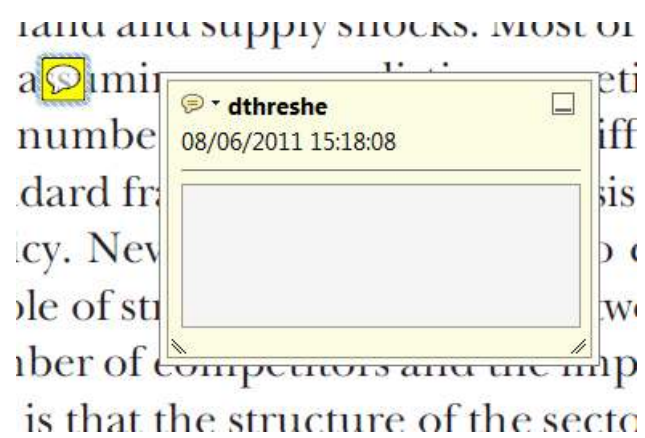
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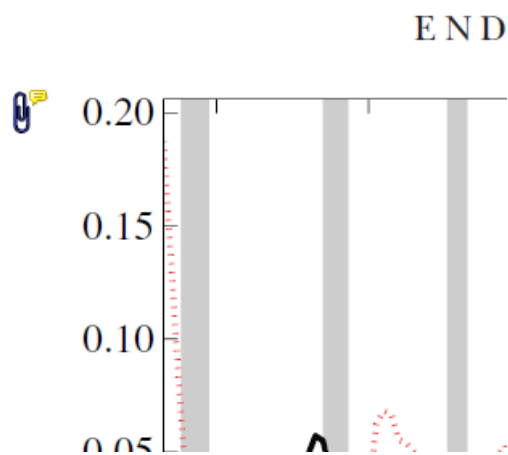
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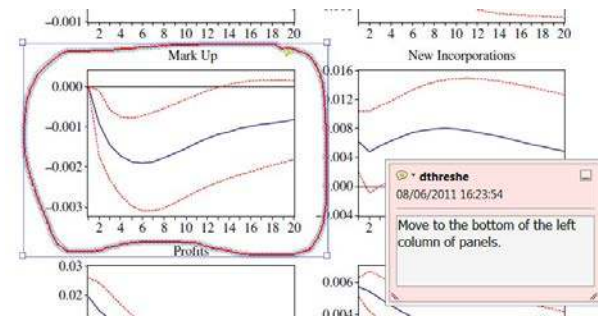
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Research Overview

Network Measures for Chemical Library Design

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ABSTRACT In this overview, we examine recent developments in network approaches to drug design. A brief overview of networks is followed by a discussion of how chemical similarity networks and their properties address challenges in drug design. Multiple methods used to assess or enhance chemical diversity for early-stage drug discovery are discussed, as well as methods that can be used for drug repositioning and ligand polypharmacology. Drug Dev Res 75 : ••–••, 2014. © 2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Key words: chemical networks; drug design; diversity; similarity

INTRODUCTION TO MOLECULAR NETWORKS

The last two decades have seen an explosion of interest in the applications of network concepts in the biological and social sciences. While traditional science takes a reductionist, bottom-up approach, seeking explanations of natural phenomena in terms of the interactions of their individual constituents, network science looks for emergent properties of systems, taking the topology of interactions or interconnections as fundamental [Csermely et al., 2013]. A network or graph—in this overview, “graph” and “network” will be used interchangeably—as any real-life system, either physical or postulated, is amenable for study using the mathematics of graph theory. The building blocks of graphs are nodes, usually represented pictorially as circles, and edges, with lines connecting nodes. In its most general sense, a graph is a mathematical object comprising a 3-tuple or triplet, given by $G = (V, E, \psi_G)$, where V is a nonempty set whose elements are termed vertices, E is a set of edges that essentially form links between vertices, and the incidence function, ψ_G ,

defines the above link by mapping each edge to a pair of vertices. The nodes may all belong to a single class, as in a unipartite graph, or to distinct classes, as in a bipartite graph. The edges may reflect an unsymmetrical relationship between the nodes, leading to a directed graph, or a symmetrical relationship, leading to an undirected graph. Molecular networks may thus be defined as graphs where the nodes represent distinct molecular entities, whether small molecules, macromolecules, or molecular fragments [Csermely et al., 2013; Bolouri, 2014].

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1 Three distinct classes of molecular networks may
2 be distinguished, based on the specific relationship rep-
3 resented by the edges:

- 4 1. Interaction networks
- 5 2. Chemical transformation/reaction networks
- 6 3. Similarity networks

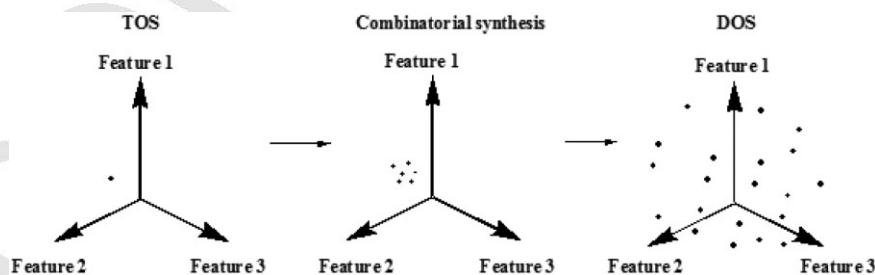
7 In *interaction networks*, the edges represent
8 physical contacts between molecules, or intermolecular
9 interactions. Such networks include protein–protein
10 interaction networks (a unipartite graph), drug–target
11 networks [Yildirim et al., 2007], and transcription
12 factor–gene binding site networks [Matys et al., 2003]
13 (bipartite graphs). Metabolic networks belong to the
14 second class, where the nodes represent metabolites
15 and the edges represent enzymatic reactions or chemi-
16 cal transformations connecting them. Both these kinds
17 of networks are widely studied in systems biology.
18 Chemical synthetic schemas, like that in Figure 1, and
19 synthetic accessibility networks [Boda et al., 2007] also
20 belong to this latter class of networks.

21 The third category includes molecular networks
22 where the edges represent a chemical or mathematical
23 similarity relationship between molecules. Chemical
24 similarity can include obvious similarity in the molecu-
25 lar framework or scaffold, and similarity in molecular
26 properties or biological activities. Often (but not always)
27 the two go together, an expression of the molecular
28 similarity principle [Pearlman and Smith, 1998; Martin
29 et al., 2002]. Molecular similarity is also amenable to
30 quantitative assessment—the subject of molecular simi-
31 larity analysis. This is accomplished through a set of
32 descriptors or molecular fingerprints (numerical repre-
33 sentations of molecular structure), together with a simi-
34 larity metric (an algorithm that computes a numerical
35 similarity measure from a pair of molecular descriptors
36 or fingerprints). It is this class of network that will be
37 the focus of the present overview. Such networks are
38 said to span a chemical space—an abstract representa-
39 tion of the molecular network. The structure and
40 dynamics of molecular networks have been extensively
41 reviewed by Csermely et al. [2013]. Network informa-

tion has been employed to predict cross-reactivity
assessment [von Eichborn et al., 2011] and for drug
repositioning [Das et al., 2010b].

MOLECULAR SIMILARITY ANALYSIS

The goal of molecular similarity analysis is to find
molecules that are chemically and structurally similar to
known drugs or drug leads. This is because structurally
similar molecules are presumed to display similar activi-
ties in biological assays (the similarity principle of quan-
titative structure–activity relationships—QSAR). Simi-
larity can be assessed using any combination of
molecular descriptors and similarity metric. There are
thousands of descriptors that can be generated with
readily available software tools, and many kinds of
descriptor representations of molecules, from constitu-
tional and topological descriptors that can be computed
simply from the chemical formula or the molecular
graph (two-dimensional structure), fragment-based
descriptors to surface area descriptors, shape descrip-
tors and electron density-derived descriptors, that are
sensitive to the molecular conformation and capture the
physics of electrostatic and nonbonded intermolecular
interactions. The advantages and shortcomings of dif-
ferent families of molecular descriptors have been the
subject of considerable research and debate [Todeschini
and Consonni, 2000; Sukumar et al., 2012]. The choice
of descriptors sensitively affects the computed simi-
larity—for instance, two molecules might be
constructed from the same molecular scaffold and thus
be very similar in size and shape, but have very differ-
ent properties because of the different chemical natures
of the functional groups or substituent atoms. Conversely,
molecules with very different molecular scaffolds might
look similar for binding to a protein, because of a simi-
lar shape and electrostatics. The pharmaceutical litera-
ture is replete with examples of drugs where one enanti-
omer is several orders of magnitude more potent than the
other, or even where one is an agonist while the other is
an antagonist [Sukumar et al., 2012]. Thus, it is not an
exaggeration to say that similarity lies in the eye of the



42
43 **Fig. 1.** Distribution of molecules obtained from different synthetic pathways (*left*: target-oriented synthesis TOS, *middle*: combinatorial
44 synthesis, and *right*: diversity-oriented synthesis DOS) in a three-dimensional chemical space.

1 beholder. In the final analysis, a choice must be made in
2 dataset representation, in terms of the myriad chemical
3 descriptors and comparison methods available. This
4 decision is usually based on prior knowledge, to strike a
5 balance between interpretation of the significance of
6 changes in that space (low-dimensional structure of the
7 chemical space) and the fidelity of reproduction [Krein
8 et al., 2012].

9 A good descriptor representation leads to a
10 smooth structure–property or structure–activity rela-
11 tionship, whereas an inappropriate descriptor represen-
12 tation for a particular application leads to a rough
13 structure–activity landscape, or the presence of “activity
14 cliffs” [Maggiore, 2006]. Such activity cliffs represent
15 failures of the similarity principle of QSAR, but they
16 also represent opportunities for medicinal chemists to
17 quantitatively improve the potency of a drug lead
18 through small structural modifications. Much interest
19 has therefore been devoted to the identification and
20 quantification of activity cliffs [Stumpfe and Bajorath,
21 2012]. One popular measure of the roughness of a
22 structure–activity landscape is the structure–activity
23 landscape index, SALI [Guha and Van Drie, 2008b]
24 (Table 1 and Fig. 2):

$$\text{SALI}_{ij} = \frac{|A_i - A_j|}{\{1 - \text{sim}(i, j)\}},$$

27 where A_i and A_j are the activities of molecules i and j in
28 some bio-assay, and $\text{sim}(i, j)$ is a coefficient of similarity
29 between the molecules i and j . The SALI is computed
30 for all pairs of molecules in a dataset, and a cutoff value
31 for SALI is chosen for constructing the SALI graph: any
32 pair of molecules i, j with SALI_{ij} greater than the cutoff
33 is connected by a SALI edge. The SALI graph thus
34 focuses attention on the steepest activity cliffs [Guha
35 and Van Drie, 2008a], i.e., pairs of structurally similar
36 molecules displaying large differences in their activities
37 toward some biological target. Plotting the SALI value
38 against the similarity threshold (the SALI curve) gives a
39 measure of the ability of a QSAR model to correctly
40 rank order pairs of molecules by activity. The value of
41 the SALI curve at the highest similarity threshold is a
42 measure of the model’s ability to correctly identify the
43 steepest activity cliffs; the value at zero similarity
44 threshold measures the ability of the model to correctly
45 rank order all the molecules.

46 From the above discussion, it should be clear that
47 activity cliffs also represent boundaries between the
48 domains of applicability of different structure–activity
49 relationships or QSAR models. Any QSAR model is
50 valid for predictions within its domain of applicability,
51 but fails when attempting to make predictions across an

activity cliff. A cluster of k molecules connected
through a similarity relationship forms an undirected
graph that forms the basis of the k -nearest neighbor
prediction method. The SALI graph, on the other hand,
is a directed network, connecting molecules across
activity cliffs, with each edge leading (by convention)
from the molecule of lower activity in the pair to that of
higher activity (Fig. 2).

Network-like similarity graphs [Wawer et al.,
2008] represent another way in which to display
structure–activity landscapes and identify discontinu-
ties therein. Here, nodes are color-coded by the
potency, and the size of each node is proportional to the
local discontinuity in potency. Such network measures
are important in the analysis and design of molecular
libraries, and for construction of structure–activity
relationships.

DESIGNING FOR MOLECULAR DIVERSITY

Strategies for designing molecular screening
libraries differ based on the available information and
objectives. If the designer already has one or more good
lead(s), the objective might be to look at molecules that
are chemically similar to known actives, i.e., to look
within the same chemical space to exploit the similarity
principle—this is known as *focused library design*. If,
however, there are no good leads, or if the known drugs
exhibit adverse side effects, the designer might be
better off casting the net wide in the hopes of finding
molecules that exploit a different mode of action. Given
the enormously high dimensions of the chemical space
spanned by all possible drug-like molecules, identifying
drug leads in this manner is an extremely difficult task
with no guarantee of success [Bohacek et al., 1996;
Triggle, 2009; Virshup et al., 2013]. There has been
much debate over the utility of combinatorial synthetic
strategies to increase molecular diversity or sample
unexplored areas of chemical space [Kodadek, 2011].

To overcome the shortcomings of traditional
combinatorial libraries, Schreiber [2000] proposed the
concept of diversity-oriented synthesis (DOS), a novel
synthetic approach to design and generate molecular
libraries possessing structural complexity and diversity.
The concept relies on the fact that small molecules
interact with biomacromolecules like DNA, RNA, and
protein at the surface. Hence, diversity in structural
framework will improve the scope of binding of these
molecules to various targets (protein–protein interac-
tions, protein–DNA/RNA interactions, and many
more), thereby improving the biological activity of the
library. Among the several strategies exploited by DOS,
one of the most effective and popular is an old idea: to
“build” the starting material and “couple” with various

TABLE 1. Similarity Coefficients and Structure-Activity Landscape Index (SALI) Values for the Graph in Figure 2

Tanimoto coefficient matrix generated from Marvin Sketch

Structure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	1.00	0.97	0.50	0.58	0.47	0.56	0.56	0.54	0.58	0.54	0.55	0.66	0.45
2	0.97	1.00	0.50	0.56	0.57	0.55	0.55	0.53	0.61	0.52	0.54	0.65	0.44
3	0.50	0.50	1.00	0.56	0.92	0.52	0.53	0.51	0.48	0.48	0.53	0.68	0.88
4	0.58	0.56	0.56	1.00	0.53	0.97	0.97	0.95	0.34	0.39	0.95	0.54	0.52
5	0.47	0.57	0.56	1.00	1.00	0.52	0.51	0.52	0.44	0.50	0.53	0.63	0.89
6	0.56	0.55	0.52	0.97	0.52	1.00	0.95	0.92	0.33	0.38	0.93	0.53	0.51
7	0.56	0.55	0.53	0.97	0.51	0.95	1.00	0.96	0.35	0.40	0.92	0.56	0.50
8	0.54	0.53	0.51	0.95	0.52	0.95	0.96	1.00	0.36	0.36	0.90	0.57	0.49
9	0.58	0.61	0.48	0.34	0.44	0.33	0.35	0.36	1.00	0.55	0.32	0.40	0.43
10	0.54	0.52	0.48	0.39	0.50	0.38	0.40	0.36	0.55	1.00	0.38	0.51	0.45
11	0.55	0.54	0.53	0.95	0.53	0.93	0.92	0.90	0.32	0.38	1.00	0.52	0.55
12	0.66	0.65	0.68	0.54	0.63	0.52	0.56	0.57	0.40	0.51	0.52	1.00	0.59
13	0.45	0.44	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.51	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
MCF-7 activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
IC50	3.2E-08	6.3E-08	9.0E-09	4.7E-06	4.8E-08	2.4E-08	1.2E-06	2.4E-07	1.7E-05	1.6E-05	1.5E-07	4.8E-04	5.9E-05
PIC50	7.49	7.20	8.05	5.32	7.32	7.62	5.93	6.62	4.77	4.80	6.83	3.32	4.23
SALI between pair of molecules	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	1	8.91	-1.11	5.11	0.33	-0.28	3.55	1.90	6.46	5.84	1.46	12.20	5.90
2	8.91	1	-1.68	4.29	-0.27	-0.93	2.81	1.24	6.21	5.02	0.79	10.98	5.34
3	-1.11	-1.68	1	6.16	8.87	0.88	4.54	2.90	6.27	6.23	2.56	14.76	31.27
4	5.11	4.29	6.16	1	-4.23	-85.00	-20.13	-24.43	0.83	0.86	-27.41	4.37	2.28
5	0.33	-0.27	8.87	-4.23	1	-0.62	2.82	1.46	4.57	5.04	1.04	10.74	29.13
6	-0.28	-0.93	0.88	-85.00	-0.62	1	31.31	13.16	4.24	4.55	11.09	9.22	6.86
7	3.55	2.81	4.54	-20.13	2.82	31.31	1	-16.07	1.78	1.88	-11.44	5.86	3.36
8	1.90	1.24	2.90	-24.43	1.46	13.16	-16.07	1	2.89	2.86	-2.09	7.72	4.69
9	6.46	6.21	6.27	0.83	4.57	4.24	1.78	2.89	1	2.86	-2.09	7.72	4.69
10	5.84	5.02	6.23	0.86	4.55	4.55	1.88	2.86	4.24	1	-3.04	2.43	0.95
11	1.46	0.79	2.56	-27.41	1.04	11.09	-11.44	-3.04	11.09	-3.04	1	2.98	1.02
12	12.20	10.98	14.76	4.37	10.74	9.22	5.86	7.72	7.72	2.43	2.98	1	5.79
13	5.90	5.34	31.27	2.28	29.13	6.86	3.36	4.69	4.69	0.95	1.02	5.79	1
14	0.45	0.44	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
15	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
16	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
17	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
18	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
19	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
20	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
21	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
22	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
23	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
24	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
25	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
26	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
27	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
28	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
29	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
30	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
31	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
32	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
33	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00
34	0.44	0.43	0.88	0.52	0.89	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.43	0.45	0.55	0.59	1.00

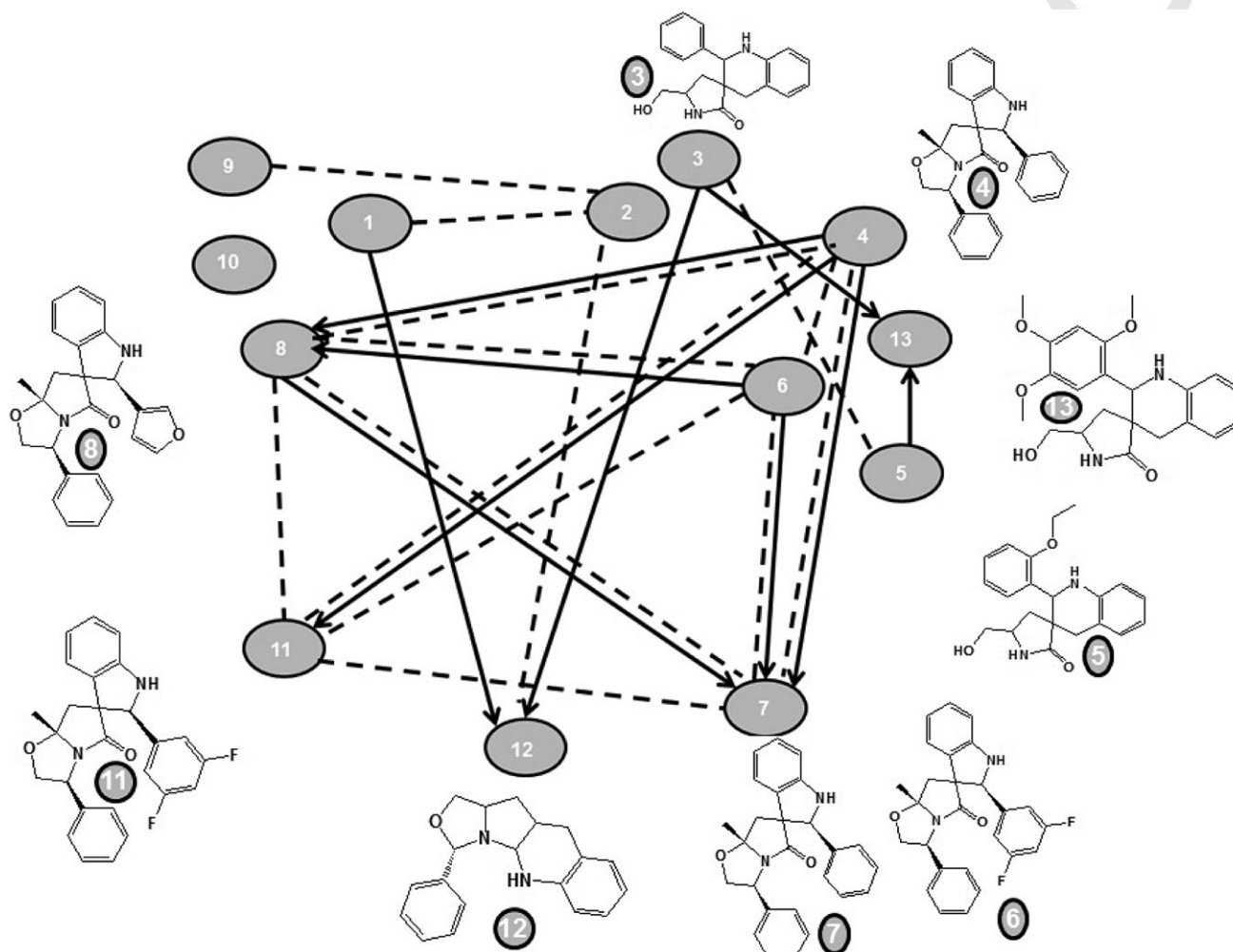


Fig. 2. Similarity network (dotted lines) and structure–activity landscape index (SALI) edges (thick arrows) computed from the data in Table 1. The similarity network was generated using Tanimoto similarity cutoff >0.6 to define an edge between a pair of nodes. The cutoff for the SALI graph was chosen such that all nodes with SALI > 12 are connected with a SALI edge pointing from the molecule of lower activity (IC₅₀) to that of higher activity. This demonstrates the existence of activity cliffs in the network due to variation in the activity between pairs of structurally similar molecules, e.g., molecules 7 and 8. It is also seen that not all structurally similar compounds are connected by SALI edges.

reagents to design a diverse set of structurally unique compounds. The compounds thus obtained from the coupling step are again paired with another set of diverse reagents to end up with skeletal, stereochemical, and biologically diverse compounds. This approach has recently been applied to the synthesis of natural product-inspired compounds [Galloway et al., 2010] and privileged scaffolds [Evans et al., 1988; Welsch et al., 2010; Surakanti et al., 2013].

Computational strategies for the design of diversity libraries have exploited substructural descriptors known as BCUT descriptors [Pearlman and Smith, 1998; Stanton, 1999] in a cell-based representation of chemistry space designed to optimize chemical diversity [Mason and Beno, 2000]. Painter et al. [2011] have

used BCUT metrics [Pearlman and Smith, 1998; Stanton, 1999] to analyze the structural diversity of a virtual library, with the objective of designing molecules that explored new regions of chemical space in a DOS strategy. They employed a large virtual library of 11,748 compounds constructed from different scaffolds obtained from a DOS strategy. Analysis of the structural diversity showed that the designed virtual library occupied new chemical space as compared to 32,700 compounds from the Mmolecular Libraries Small Molecule Repository (MLSMR: <http://mli.nih.gov/mli/secondary-menu/mlscn/ml-small-molecule-repository/>). This allowed the authors to select 53 chemically diverse compounds from the virtual library for synthesis and biological activity testing.

NETWORK MEASURES IN DRUG DESIGN AND DISCOVERY

Networks (including chemical, biological, computer, and social) fall into distinct classes, characterized by well-defined measures that are manifested in differences in the network organization, communication within the network, and evolution of the network. Small-world networks are graphs in which most vertices are not neighbors of one another, but most vertices can be reached from every other vertex in V by a small number of hops. Such classes of networks demonstrate an architecture that falls between that of the classical random graphs and the regular lattices. Random graphs are graphs constructed from randomly connected nodes. The simplest example is the Erdős–Rényi graph [Erdős and Renyi, 1959, 1960], which can be constructed from a complete graph by randomly delinking the nodes [Gilbert, 1959] or by inserting a link between randomly selected pair of nodes [Erdős and Renyi, 1960]. Random graphs characteristically follow Poisson's distribution, with high entropy and low clustering coefficients compared with scale-free networks. The probability that a randomly selected node has degree k is given by $p(k) = \frac{\lambda^k e^{-\lambda}}{k!}$, where $\lambda = \bar{k}$ is the average degree of all nodes in the network.

The structural properties of small-world networks are quantified by prescribing two metrics:

- (i) the characteristic path length $L(p)$, which gives the number of edges in the shortest path connecting two vertices from V , averaged over all pair of vertices. $L(p)$ measures the typical separation between two vertices in the network, and thus is a global property of the graph. If n be the number of vertices in the network, then the small-world property is characterized by $L \propto \log n$.
- (ii) the clustering coefficient $C(p)$, which measures the cliquishness of a typical vertex neighborhood, thus characterizing a local property. If a vertex in G has k_v neighbors, then at most $k_v(k_v - 1) / 2$ edges can exist between them, implying that each pair of neighbors of v is in turn neighbors of each other. If C_v be the fraction of these allowable edges that actually exist, then clustering coefficient C is defined as the average of C_v over all v . Any small-world network is characterized by a $C(p)$ that is much larger than that for a corresponding random network.

The shape of the degree distribution of a small-world network is Poisson like, which is similar to that of a random network. The topology of such a network is relatively homogeneous, with all vertices having nearly the same degree [Watts and Strogatz, 1998].

Scale-free networks are graphs whose vertex degree distribution follows (often asymptotically) a power law. If $P(k)$ be the fraction of vertices in the network that have degree k , then $P(k) \approx k^{-\gamma}$, where γ is the scaling parameter, typically having a value in the range [2,3] [Barabási and Albert, 1999]. The most important characteristic in a scale-free network is the occurrence of a subset of V containing vertices that have degree vertices significantly higher than the average in the graph. The highest degree vertices are the hubs in the network, and often play a central role in determining the properties of the network, and in determining the dynamics and evolution of such networks [Albert and Barabási, 2002; Park and Barabási, 2007]. The presence of hubs in biological and computer networks render such networks resistant to random failure of even a large proportion of nodes or edges [Albert and Barabási, 2002; Park and Barabási, 2007]. The global properties of such chemical space networks has been explored [Benz et al., 2008; Tanaka et al., 2009; Krein and Sukumar, 2011]. It has been demonstrated that large chemical space networks constructed with different similarity metrics show the small-world property, with power law scaling of the degree distribution at high degree [Krein and Sukumar, 2011]. The local properties of chemical space networks have also been the subject of considerable investigation [Guha and Van Drie, 2008b; Bajorath et al., 2009; Stumpfe and Bajorath, 2012] due to their implications for structure–activity relationships and lead optimization, as mentioned above.

Clusters of molecules belonging to different structure–activity relationships are often not isolated into disconnected networks, but connected by “chemical bridges,” i.e., molecules that belong to both clusters [Wawer et al., 2008]. These bridging molecules possess high “betweenness centrality” (Fig. 3), essentially describing the frequent occurrence of a vertex on the shortest paths between pair of vertices throughout the network [Freeman, 1977]:

$$C_B(v) = \sum_{s \neq v \neq t \in V} \frac{\sigma_{st}(v)}{\sigma_{st}}$$

where

$\sigma_{st} = \sigma_{ts}$ denotes the number of shortest paths from $s \in V$ to $t \in V$ (set of vertices),

$\sigma_{st}(v)$ = number of shortest paths from s to t that some $v \in V$ lies on.

Raaf and Messabih [2010] have employed betweenness centrality as an algorithm to predict the influential reactions in a metabolic reaction network (described as an “elementary network system”), and

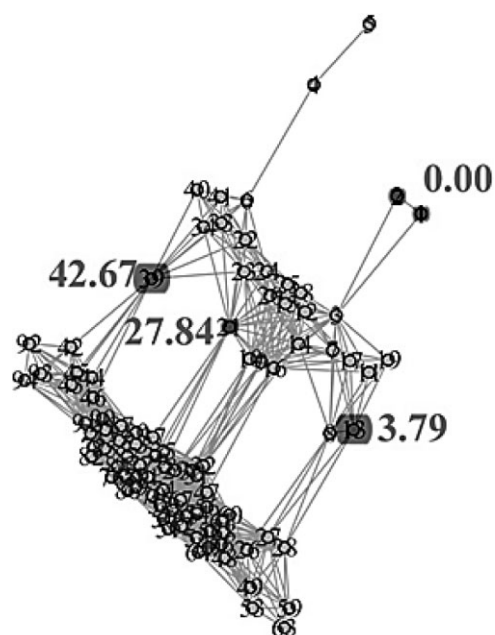


Fig. 3. Similarity network of a polymer dataset. A few nodes with high and low betweenness centrality values are identified: these bridge clusters of polymers.

also to identify the decomposition of the metabolic system to subnetwork structure. In the pertinent study, the metabolic reactions were treated as nodes, and the reaction conditions as edges.

Networks wherein clusters combine in a hierarchical manner are characterized by coexistence of modularity, local clustering, and scale-free topology. In hierarchical networks, the clustering coefficient follows $C(k) \sim k^{-1}$ (a straight line of slope -1 on a \log - \log plot). Relating local and global network measures thus enables identification of key molecules responsible for “scaffold hopping” [Rush et al., 2005; Barker et al., 2006; Renner and Schneider, 2006; Nettles et al., 2007; Vogt et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2012].

Sheftel et al. [2013] have reported the social network behavior of interconnected aminoacid residues of the β -adrenergic receptor (GPCR family) using “closeness centrality” measured. Closeness centrality describes the “neighborhoodness” [Sabidussi, 1966] of the clustered vertices in the graph:

$$C_c(v) = \frac{1}{\sum_{t \in V} d_G(v, t)},$$

where d_G = distance between the vertices v and t in graph G and $v, t \in V$ (set of vertices).

Centrality measures based on eigen-decomposition of the matrix form of networks, often

referred to as graph spectral analysis, have been used to identify clusters and subclusters in complex biological networks [Kannan and Vishveshwara, 1999; Vishveshwara et al., 2002]. The eigenvalues represent the flow of information between vertices within clusters or subclusters of the protein domain. Graph spectral analysis [Balasubramanian et al., 2006] is also used to correlate the structure and functions of protein chains in clusters.

Clique-based methods are also used to assess clustering [Barker et al., 2006; Nettles et al., 2007; Milletti and Vulpetti, 2010] where cliques are network subsets where every pair of vertices in the subset is connected by an edge. Thus, those molecules belonging to cliques have a high degree of structural similarity to one another.

Koutsoukas et al. [2014] recently conducted a benchmark study to determine the effectiveness of different descriptor sets in assessing the diversity of a molecular library in bioactivity space. These authors analyzed several popular families of descriptors, including those for pharmacophore-based descriptors, extended connectivity fingerprint descriptors [Rogers and Hahn, 2010] (ECFP4 and FCFP4), MACCS keys [Durant et al., 2002], shape-based descriptors ROCS [Grant et al., 1996; Rush et al., 2005]) and principal moments of inertia (PMI), BCUT descriptors [Pearlman and Smith, 1998; Stanton, 1999], physicochemical property descriptors and Bayes affinity fingerprints [Koutsoukas et al., 2013]. They found that a higher coverage of bioactivity space was achieved using Bayes affinity fingerprints; the latter being descriptors that represent molecules in terms of their in silico predicted bioactivity profiles against a broad spectrum of human protein drug targets. Descriptors such as PMI showed no correlation between diversity in the PMI space and diversity in bioactivity space. Studies such as this underscore the importance of the choice of descriptors in molecular diversity assessment, and that different measures of chemical diversity may not necessarily correlate with diversity in bioactivity space.

Chemogenomic approaches that consider protein target space in addition to the ligand space [Bredel and Jacoby, 2004; Mestres, 2004; Klabunde, 2007; Rognan, 2007; Das et al., 2009, 2010a; Kinnings and Jackson, 2009; Kinnings et al., 2009; Sheridan et al., 2009; Milletti and Vulpetti, 2010; Sukumar and Das, 2011] have been employed to get around the limitation that ligands that are dissimilar on the basis of structural similarity may nevertheless bind the same protein target. Network pharmacology is thus emerging as a new paradigm in drug discovery [Hopkins, 2008; Zhao and Iyengar, 2012].

EVOLUTION OF CHEMICAL SPACE NETWORKS

One of the most important mechanisms for the dynamic evolution of networks is via preferential attachment—essentially a stochastic process. As the essence of this process, the higher the degree of a vertex in the network, the more likely it is to receive new edges. Thus, the hubs show a significantly stronger ability compared with other vertices to acquire new links added to the network during its dynamic evolution [Albert and Barabási, 2002; Park and Barabási, 2007].

Molecular libraries are not designed by a series of random acts. New molecules are synthesized from existing precursors using well-established synthetic schemes. The new molecules bear a degree of chemical similarity to their precursors, but differ in important ways. Thus, the process of molecular library design is that of evolution of a network, where new nodes are added and connected to existing nodes. Preferential attachment of new nodes to existing nodes of high degree (hubs) leads to the formation of a scale-free network [Albert and Barabási, 2002; Park and Barabási, 2007], as in social networks and computer networks. The power law degree distribution and small-world nature of chemical space networks [Benz et al., 2008; Tanaka et al., 2009; Krein and Sukumar, 2011] lead one to speculate that such networks are likewise formed by preferential reuse of favored precursors or well-studied molecular scaffolds. In practice, awareness of a network's limited diversity can suggest a modification to synthetic strategy that explicitly seeks increasing chemical diversity when there is a failure to discover new leads with novel molecular scaffolds. Analysis of the network properties of chemical libraries and assessment of their molecular diversity thus assume increased significance for the design of new chemical entities.

The temporal characteristics of chemical libraries (and associated network characteristics) are also noteworthy. Public databases such as PubChem [Wang et al., 2010], ZINC [Irwin and Shoichet, 2005], and PDB [Berman et al., 2002] have grown significantly within a very short span of time. Temporal behaviors of complex systems, such as e-mail patterns and earthquakes, have been studied using measures such as memory (a measure of temporal correlations) and burstiness (a measure of intervening time distribution between consecutive events) [Goh and Barabási, 2008]. Such measures may suggest research directions for cheminformatics and provide quantification of historical biases and assay performance.

CONCLUSIONS

We have briefly reviewed the basic characteristics of molecular similarity and dissimilarity networks,

focusing on their use in the design of chemical libraries. Large chemical space networks have been shown to possess the small-world property [Krein and Sukumar, 2011] characteristic of many physical, biological, and social networks. Exploring new areas of chemical space in a finite library demands maximization of chemical diversity. Assessment of molecular similarity and chemical diversity are nontrivial problems, due to the large number of possible descriptors, and due to the presence of activity cliffs. SALI networks [Guha and Van Drie, 2008a, 2008b] quantify the roughness of a structure–activity landscape. Similarity and diversity depend sensitively upon the choice of descriptor representation and choice of similarity metrics. Chemical diversity may not translate into diversity in the bioactivity space, due to the presence of activity cliffs [Maggiore, 2006], and the efficacy of a descriptor representation in quantifying diversity in bioactivity space may further depend upon the size and nature of the chemical library [Koutsoukas et al., 2014]. Targeting diversity in bioactivity space is the objective behind DOS.

Chemogenomic and network pharmacology [Klabunde, 2007; Rognan, 2007; Hopkins, 2008; Zhao and Iyengar, 2012] are attempting to overcome the limitations of traditional structure-based and ligand-based drug discovery by utilizing structural information about both the ligands and their target proteins, where available, and exploiting structural and chemical similarities between molecules known to target a protein, as well as structural and sequence similarities between protein binding sites. Such approaches explicitly employ a network formalism.

Local graph invariants are also of interest. Hubs in a similarity network identify clusters that are well defined by a structure–activity relationship. Such molecules are expected to confer robustness to a QSAR model. Molecules that possess high betweenness centrality in a graph act as chemical bridges connecting local clusters belonging to different structure–activity relationships. Inclusion of such molecules in a training set renders a QSAR model more capable of scaffold hopping. The evolution of chemical libraries and their network invariants with time are interesting subjects that have not as yet received significant attention from the cheminformatics community, but they may hold the keys to understanding the social aspects of the discipline at designing new routes to chemical synthesis and drug discovery.

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