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Unraveling the Mysteries of Supermassive Black Holes: Formation, Growth Mechanisms, and Their Role in Galaxy Evolution

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ABSTRACT

Supermassive black holes (SMBHs) with masses of millions to billions of solar masses are central to our understanding of galaxy evolution and the cosmos. This review synthesizes current research on the formation, fueling, and growth mechanisms of SMBHs across cosmic time. We discuss theoretical frameworks regarding SMBH formation, including models such as direct collapse from primordial gas clouds and the hierarchical merging of stellar-mass black holes through accretion and mergers. The direct collapse model suggests that massive primordial gas clouds can collapse directly into SMBHs without forming stars, while the merger model posits that SMBHs grow through the merging of smaller black holes during galaxy collisions.We analyze the impacts of both major and minor galactic mergers on SMBH growth, particularly their role in triggering gas inflows and sustained accretion episodes. The review elaborates on specific fueling processes, such as cold gas inflows, which provide continuous material for accretion, and feedback mechanisms that regulate SMBH growth by stimulating or inhibiting gas inflow. For example, radiative feedback from active galactic nuclei can heat surrounding gas, preventing it from falling into the black hole, highlighting the balance between these processes in SMBH evolution.We aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the pathways through which SMBHs have evolved from the early Universe to their present state. This review highlights open questions in the field, particularly regarding the rapid growth of SMBHs in the early universe, and suggests future research directions.

Keywords:
Supermassive Black hole (SMBHs),
Formation Mechanisms,
Fueling Mechanisms.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the increasing pressure on our forests for fuel-The formation of supermassive black holes (SMBHs) in the early universe presents a significant challenge for astrophysical theories (Valiante *et al.*, 2016). Two main scenarios have been proposed: the growth of stellar-mass seed black holes through accretion and mergers, and the direct collapse of gas into massive seeds. The Population III seed model, which starts with ~100 M⊙ seeds, faces difficulties in explaining the rapid growth of SMBHs observed at high redshifts (Johnson *et al.*, 2012). In contrast, the direct collapse scenario, producing 104-106 M⊙ seeds, is more consistent with observations (Johnson *et al.*, 2012; Haiman, 2012). Alternative models include a two-phase accretion scenario involving dark matter and baryons (Hu *et al.*, 2005). The growth of SMBHs is influenced by factors such as radiative feedback, sub-Eddington accretion rates, and high radiative efficiencies (Johnson *et al.*, 2012). Future observations with instruments like JWST and LISA may help distinguish between these formation scenarios (Haiman, 2012).

Recent research has highlighted several unresolved issues in supermassive black hole (SMBH) studies. The formation mechanisms and early growth of SMBHs remain uncertain, with ongoing investigations into their origins and evolution at high redshifts (Djorgovski *et al.*, 2008). The relationship between SMBHs and their host galaxies is a key area of research, focusing on how these massive objects influence galaxy morphology and co-evolve over time (Macchetto, 1999; Alexander and Hickox, 2011). Observational challenges persist in

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studying early SMBHs and understanding the physical drivers of their growth (Alexander and Hickox, 2011). However, technological advancements have provided incontrovertible proof of SMBH existence and revealed fundamental connections between SMBH mass and host galaxy properties (Ferrarese and Ford, 2004). Despite these advances, questions remain about the fueling mechanisms of SMBHs, their duty cycles, and their impact on the intergalactic medium (Macchetto, 1999; Djorgovski *et al*., 2008). Ongoing research aims to address these issues and develop a coherent picture of SMBH formation and evolution.

Supermassive black holes (SMBHs) are crucial to understanding galaxy evolution and structure formation in the universe (Volonteri, 2006; Komossa *et al.*, 2015). These cosmic giants are believed to reside in most local galaxies, with their masses correlating with host galaxy properties (Volonteri, 2006). The formation and growth of SMBHs are closely linked to galaxy mergers, which trigger gas inflows and fuel accretion episodes (Volonteri, 2006; Komossa *et al*., 2015). Studying SMBH-galaxy co-evolution is now a central topic in cosmology, although the origins and early growth phases of SMBHs remain uncertain (Djorgovski *et al*., 2008). Recent cosmological simulations, such as ROMULUS, have implemented advanced models for SMBH formation, dynamics, and accretion, allowing for more detailed analysis of SMBH-galaxy co-evolution throughout cosmic time (Tremmel *et al*., 2016). These simulations demonstrate the importance of SMBH feedback in regulating star formation in massive galaxies and provide insights into dual active galactic nucleus systems (Tremmel *et al*., 2016).

The central question around which the review is based is how supermassive black holes form, fuel, and grow across cosmic time and how these processes influenced the development of galaxies and structure in the universe. Substantial progress has been made in astrophysics, but important questions remain open with regard to the origin of SMBHs, the mechanism that drove their rapid early growth, and the interaction between SMBHs and their environments. This review will consolidate what is currently known through theories and observations for a clearer picture of these processes.

Supermassive black holes (SMBHs) are ubiquitous in galactic centers, with some reaching billions of solar masses by redshift z = 6 (Haiman, 2012). Their formation and growth mechanisms remain debated, with possibilities including direct collapse from primordial gas clouds or evolution of stellar-mass black holes through accretion and mergers (Haiman, 2012). The rapid growth of early SMBHs can be explained by the high major merger rates of host galaxies, which could trigger nearly continuous accretion episodes (Tanaka, 2014). Over cosmic time, SMBHs grow through accretion, interact with their environments, and influence galaxy evolution (Merloni, 2015). However, uncertainties persist regarding the physical drivers of black hole growth, their connection to host galaxies, and the impact of large-scale environment on fueling (Alexander and Hickox, 2011). Future observations with instruments like JWST and LISA may help distinguish between different formation and growth models (Haiman, 2012).

The primary objectives of this paper are to synthesize existing literature on supermassive black holes (SMBHs), compare different theories regarding their formation and growth, and identify gaps in the current understanding to guide future research directions in the field.

Formation Mechanisms of SMBHs

The formation mechanisms of supermassive black holes (SMBHs) remain a topic of intense debate, with several competing theories. One prominent model is the direct collapse of massive primordial gas clouds, which can occur in environments with high gas density and low metallicity (Mayer and Bonoli, 2018). This process allows for the rapid formation of SMBHs without the intermediate stages typically associated with stellar evolution. However, while the direct collapse model has garnered significant attention, it is essential to acknowledge other promising theories, such as the formation of primordial black holes. These black holes could have formed in the early universe from density fluctuations and may provide insights into the nature of dark matter (Kryukova *et al*., 2022).

Another significant hypothesis involves the collapse of massive stars, where the remnants of these stars can lead to the formation of SMBHs through subsequent accretion and mergers (Kryukova *et al*., 2022). Additionally, the evolution of stellar-mass black holes through accretion and mergers has been highlighted as a viable pathway, particularly in dense stellar environments (Latif and Ferrara, 2016; Haiman, 2012). These findings underscore the complexity of SMBH formation, suggesting that multiple pathways may contribute to their origins in the early universe.

Another alternative theory is the collapse of ultra-light scalar field configurations acting as dark matter halos (Avilez-López*et al*., 2017). This model provides insights into the stellar kinematics induced by dark matter in galactic centers and is applicable to systems with slow accretion or in their post-accretion phase.

Recent observational efforts have aimed to distinguish between these various formation models. Instruments such as the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) and the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) are expected to provide critical data on the early universe and the conditions under which SMBHs formed. For instance, JWST's capabilities in infrared observations may reveal signatures of early black hole seed formation, while EHT's high-resolution imaging can help study the environments surrounding SMBHs (Civano *et al.*, 2019; Trinca *et al.*, 2022).

In summary, while the direct collapse model has been a focal point in SMBH research, it is crucial to adopt a more balanced approach that considers alternative theories, such as primordial black holes and dark matter interactions. Improved transitions between these models will enhance the clarity and flow of the discussion, guiding readers through the complexities of SMBH formation.

Fueling Mechanisms

Accretion processes around supermassive black holes (SMBHs) involve complex interactions between matter, radiation, and magnetic fields. A critical aspect of these processes is angular momentum transport within accretion disks, which is essential for the efficient infall of gas toward the black hole. Angular momentum must be removed from the infalling material to allow it to spiral inward; this is typically achieved through various mechanisms, including viscous shear, magnetic fields, and gravitational interactions within the disk (Shakura and Sunyaev, 1973).

Super-Eddington accretion disks can form outflows with speeds ranging from 0.1 to 0.4 times the speed of light (c), launched from different radii depending on the accretion rate (Yan-Fei Jiang *et al.*, 2017). The efficiency of radiation emission significantly influences the geometry and dynamics of these accretion flows. Radiatively efficient thin disks are characterized by a high rate of energy conversion from gravitational potential energy to radiation, while radiatively inefficient thick disks may exhibit lower luminosities and different flow dynamics (Narayan and Quataert, 2005).

The accretion and ejection modes can be categorized into five regimes based on the Eddington ratio and black hole mass, ranging from quiescent galaxies to super-Eddington sources (Giustini and Proga, 2019). In some cases, "cold" disk accretion may occur, where magnetized winds efficiently carry away angular momentum and energy, resulting in radiatively inefficient disks and powerful jets that can exceed the disk's bolometric luminosity (Bogovalov, 2019).

Recent studies have illuminated the fueling mechanisms of SMBHs in active galactic nuclei (AGNs). For instance, Storchi-Bergmann and Schnorr-Müller (2019) provide observational evidence supporting the existence of compact disks and inflows along nuclear gaseous spirals at approximately 100 parsec scales, with mass inflow rates ranging from 0.01 to a few solar masses per year. Their findings highlight the importance of gas inflows in feeding SMBHs and suggest that these inflows are often triggered by interactions with surrounding environments, particularly during galaxy mergers.

In some instances, cooled gas from jet-induced cooling of cluster gas can flow back towards the galaxy center, feeding the circum-nuclear accretion disk (Oosterloo *et al*., 2023). Radiative feedback from AGNs can inhibit inflow; however, weak radiation fields still allow for central disk formation and potential star formation (Frazer and Heitsch, 2019). Recent high-resolution observations have directly revealed dense molecular gas inflow on subparsec scales, with less than 3% being accreted by the SMBH, while the remainder is ejected through outflows (Izumi *et al.*, 2023).

Galactic mergers play a crucial role in the growth and evolution of SMBHs. During these mergers, strong gas inflows lead to the formation of nuclear disks, which can facilitate the rapid formation of SMBH binaries within a million years (Mayer *et al.*, 2008). However, binary formation may be suppressed by strong heating sources, such as radiative feedback from accreting SMBHs (Mayer *et al*., 2008). High-resolution simulations reveal that efficient angular momentum transport can form massive central objects, but the decreasing disk density may cause SMBH binaries to stall at approximately 1 parsec separations (Mayer *et al*., 2008). The detection of dual and binary AGNs remains challenging across the electromagnetic spectrum, necessitating multi-messenger approaches, including gravitational wave observations (Rosa *et al*., 2019). The fate of SMBH binaries depends on various environmental factors, including the properties of the merging galaxies and the presence of circumnuclear and circumbinary disks (Colpi, 2014).

Growth Over Cosmic Time

The evolution of supermassive black holes (SMBHs) across cosmic time involves intricate interactions between SMBHs and their host galaxies, shaped by different growth mechanisms, feedback processes, and galaxy mergers. Observations of high-redshift quasars (e.g., z ≈ 6)indicate that SMBHs reached masses of billions of solar masses within the universe's first billion years, primarily through Eddington-limited, radiatively efficient accretion triggered by galaxy mergers and gas inflows in dense environments (Trakhtenbrot, 2019; Bromley *et al*., 2003; Kroupa *et al*., 2020). This early growth phase suggests a nearly continuous accretion process that rapidly builds up SMBH mass.

At lower redshifts (postz~1) SMBH growth and feedback mechanisms diversify. AGN feedback, increasingly significant at these stages, regulates both star formation and SMBH accretion by heating surrounding gas and driving outflows (Lapi *et al*., 2013; Somerville *et al*., 2008). This feedback operates through various accretion modes, such as radiatively inefficient, kinetically dominated states that generate powerful jets and outflows, affecting the host galaxy's evolution and possibly quenching star formation (Merloni and Heinz, 2008)

The SMBH-host galaxy connection is further emphasized by scaling relations, such as the correlation between black hole mass and galaxy bulge properties, which have been observed across a range of redshifts (Volonteri, 2006; Shankar, 2009; Zheng, 2012). Observational studies also highlight AGN-driven outflows as a factor in coevolution, where AGN activity influences not only SMBH growth but also the structural properties of galaxies (The evolution of this relationship is evident in the changing Eddington ratio distributions and the diverse accretion modes seen over cosmic time (Sesana, 2011)."

Recent simulations and observational studies on intermediate-mass black holes (IMBHs) further emphasize the role of AGN feedback in regulating star formation, not only in massive galaxies but also in smaller systems like dwarf galaxies (Barai and Pino, 2018). The presence of dual and binary AGNs observed at lower redshifts, though challenging to detect, also supports the idea of SMBH merger histories contributing to SMBH growth over time (Mayer *et al*., 2008; Rosa *et al*., 2019).

In summary, SMBH growth across cosmic time reflects a complex interplay between accretion modes, feedback processes, and galaxy mergers, all contributing to a model of SMBH-galaxy coevolution from high redshifts to the present day. The varied growth mechanisms and AGN feedback across different epochs underscore the interconnected evolution of SMBHs and their host galaxies (Somerville *et al*., 2008).

Impact on Galaxy Evolution

Active Galactic Nuclei (AGN) play a crucial role in galaxy evolution through various feedback mechanisms. While the section acknowledges these mechanisms, it is essential to provide specific observational examples that illustrate their impact on star formation rates and overall galaxy dynamics.

Recent studies have shown that AGN feedback can significantly influence star formation rates in host galaxies. For instance, the work of Morganti (2017) highlights the role of radio jets in regulating the cooling of gas in massive halos. Observations of nearby galaxies with powerful AGN have revealed that the energy output from radio jets can heat the surrounding gas, preventing it from cooling and collapsing to form new stars. This process has been observed in galaxies such as M87, where the AGN's jets are seen to interact with the intracluster medium, effectively quenching star formation in the galaxy (Morganti *et al*., 2017).

Additionally, the study by Harrison *et al*. (2014) provides concrete evidence of AGN-driven outflows impacting star formation. In their observations of the galaxy NGC 1266, they detected a molecular outflow driven by the AGN, which was found to be depleting the gas reservoir necessary for star formation. This outflow was quantified to have a mass outflow rate that could significantly reduce the star formation rate over time, demonstrating the direct influence of AGN feedback on galaxy evolution.

Another compelling example is the work by Cicone*et al*. (2014), which examined the outflows in the galaxy IRAS F11119+3257. Their observations using ALMA revealed a massive molecular outflow associated with the AGN, which was found to be capable of suppressing star formation by removing gas from the central regions of the galaxy. This study underscores the importance of AGN feedback in shaping the star formation landscape in galaxies.

Furthermore, the role of AGN feedback in regulating star formation has been supported by large-scale surveys, such as the Sloan Digital Sky Survey (SDSS), which have identified correlations between AGN activity and reduced star formation rates in massive galaxies (Kauffmann *et al*., 2003). Recent findings from Smethurst *et al*. (2022) emphasize the importance of non-merger processes in AGN feedback mechanisms and their implications for galaxy growth. Zhang *et al*. (2021) further demonstrate that while mergers are significant for SMBH growth, non-merger processes, including AGN feedback, are critical in shaping host galaxy dynamics. The establishment and maintenance of scaling laws between SMBHs and their host galaxies, as noted by Ciotti (2008), are influenced by both galaxy merging and AGN feedback mechanisms.

Current Challenges and Open Questions

The rapid growth of supermassive black holes (SMBHs) in the early universe remains one of the most significant unresolved issues in astrophysics. Observations of high-redshift quasars reveal that SMBHs with masses of billions of solar masses existed within the universe's first billion years, posing a challenge to our understanding of their formation and growth (Trakhtenbrot, 2019; Bromley *et al.*, 2003). Simulations suggest that during major galaxy mergers, giant molecular clouds can funnel towards galactic centers, potentially growing SMBHs from ~10^7 to ~10^9 M⊙ within 300 million years (Lin *et al.*, 2022). However, sustaining such high accretion rates, as required to build SMBHs this rapidly, remains challenging to explain, particularly given the Eddington limit which restricts growth rates under typical conditions (Aggarwal, 2021).

Current models propose that the formation of "seed" black holes may have occurred in larger, metal-poor galaxies through mechanisms like gas accretion and mergers within dense stellar clusters (Inayoshi *et al.*, 2019). While stellar-mass black holes may have formed as early as $z \approx 30$, their growth was likely limited by the shallow gravitational potential wells of early, small galaxies, which would restrict sustained high accretion (Smith and Bromm, 2019; Inayoshi *et al.*, 2019). However, models face difficulty explaining the necessary conditions for rapid SMBH growth in such young and typically low-mass galaxies, highlighting a critical gap in our understanding.

Recent JWST observations have further complicated this picture by revealing overmassive SMBHs in high-redshift galaxies that are 10-100 times more massive than would be expected based on local scaling relations (Pacucci and Loeb, 2024; Mezcua *et al.*, 2024). These observations suggest that the traditional $M_\bullet$-$M_\star$ relationship between SMBH mass and galaxy mass may not hold universally, as high-redshift SMBHs exhibit an overmassive factor of ~55 at $z \sim 5$ (Pacucci and Loeb, 2024). This discrepancy points to a divergence in the coevolutionary pathway of SMBHs and galaxies at high redshifts, potentially due to unique environmental factors or feedback mechanisms that differ from those observed locally. For instance, SMBH feedback mechanisms, such as energy release through AGN outflows, might have initially stimulated star formation in these early galaxies before transitioning to a role that quenches star formation at $z \approx 6$ (Silk *et al.*, 2024). However, the precise role and impact of this feedback remain unclear, as feedback that is too strong would inhibit gas inflows necessary for SMBH growth, creating a paradox.

The process of SMBH seed formation also presents a fundamental challenge. Theoretical models suggest three primary pathways: (1) the core-collapse of massive stars, (2) the dynamical evolution of dense nuclear star clusters, and (3) the collapse of metal-free protogalactic gas clouds (Latif and Ferrara, 2016). Each scenario encounters specific difficulties, and current models struggle to replicate the conditions necessary for each. For instance, core-collapse models require a population of extremely massive stars, which may not have been prevalent, while direct-collapse models rely on precise cooling rates and ultraviolet field strengths, both of which are sensitive to chemical uncertainties such as the rate of hydrogen collisional ionization (Glover, 2015).

One of the primary challenges is disentangling the properties of initial SMBH seeds from the complex interplay of subsequent accretion events and mergers, which complicates the observational interpretation of high-redshift SMBHs (Natarajan *et al.*, 2019). Future research could address this by focusing on observables that directly constrain seed formation models, such as high-redshift luminosity functions, scaling relations, and gravitational wave detections of merging black holes. Gravitational wave observations, in particular, hold promise as they can directly trace the mass distribution of early black hole binaries, providing unique insights into initial seed properties (Natarajan *et al.*, 2019).

In addition, recent studies on intermediate-mass black holes (IMBHs) highlight the broader role of AGN feedback in regulating star formation, affecting not only massive galaxies but also smaller systems like dwarf galaxies (Barai&Pino, 2018). Observations of dual and binary AGNs at lower redshifts further suggest that SMBH mergers have contributed significantly to SMBH mass growth over cosmic time, supporting the theory that mergers play a crucial role in the evolutionary history of SMBHs (Mayer *et al.*, 2008; Rosa *et al.*, 2019).

Future Directions in SMBH Research

Recent research highlights the importance of upcoming observational technologies in advancing our understanding of supermassive black hole (SMBH) formation and growth. Future telescopes, such as the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT), will enable detailed comparisons between theoretical models and observations of early SMBHs, providing critical data to refine our understanding of their formation mechanisms (Liempi *et al.*, 2023). The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), along with missions like Athena and Lynx, is expected to probe the low-mass end of the black hole mass function at high redshifts, potentially revealing signatures of early black hole seed formation (Trinca *et al.*, 2022). These advancements will help address key questions about

SMBH infancy at $z > 6$ and their influence on early galaxy formation (Civano *et al*., 2019).

Additionally, time-domain surveys, high-resolution imaging, and low-frequency gravitational-wave detectors will significantly enhance our understanding of SMBH evolution. For instance, the upcoming Laser Interferometer Space Antenna (LISA) mission will provide direct measurements of gravitational waves from merging SMBHs, allowing researchers to test and refine models of SMBH growth and co-evolution with their host galaxies. Specifically, LISA will help clarify the mass distribution of SMBH seeds and their growth rates by detecting mergers that occur at various cosmic epochs, thus providing insights into the efficiency of accretion processes and the role of environment in SMBH evolution (D'Orazio and Charisi, 2023).

Recent advancements in simulations and observational techniques have significantly enhanced our understanding of SMBHs and their role in cosmic evolution. Hydrodynamic adaptive mesh refinement simulations allow researchers to study SMBH growth and evolution within host galaxies across a large dynamic range (Levine, 2010). These simulations, combined with interdisciplinary approaches integrating cosmology, astrophysics, and computational modeling, provide insights into the co-evolution of SMBHs and cosmic structures (Chatterjee and Chowdhury, 2019; Matteo *et al*., 2023). Observational breakthroughs, such as those achieved with the Hubble Space Telescope and Very Long Baseline Array (VLBA), have confirmed the existence of SMBHs and revealed fundamental connections between their mass and host galaxy properties (Ferrarese and Ford, 2004).

Future research directions should focus on refining simulations to address outstanding questions about SMBH evolution and leveraging multi-messenger astrophysics, particularly with the upcoming LISA mission, to trace the origin, growth, and merger history of massive black holes across cosmic ages (Matteo *et al*., 2023). By integrating these advanced observational capabilities and theoretical models, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the formation and growth of SMBHs, ultimately enhancing our knowledge of their impact on galaxy formation and evolution.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Approach to Conducting the Literature Review

This study followed a systematic approach to collect literature on supermassive black holes (SMBHs) and their formation and growth mechanisms. The methodology was based on using reputable academic databases, peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and recognized scientific platforms.

To ensure the credibility of the included literature, we focused on sources that are peer-reviewed or published by reputable scientific organizations. The web-based sources referenced in this review were primarily obtained from established scientific platforms, including: NASA Astrophysics Data System (ADS), arXiv, IEEE Xplore, Semantic Scholar, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and Institutional Repositories, these include collections of research outputs from universities and research institutions, which often contain peer-reviewed articles and theses.

In addition to these databases, we also conducted citation tracking and scanned reference lists to identify additional relevant sources that may not have been captured in the initial searches. This multilateral search strategy was designed to ensure a comprehensive review of the literature while maintaining a focus on credible and peer-reviewed sources.

The search includes published literature that was available from 2003 to 2024, in order to ensure that all state-of-the-art developments are reviewed, as well as the inclusion of old foundational studies that shaped the field of study. This way, existing knowledge can be synthesized, the gaps in current understanding can be identified, and up-to-date debates and advancements related to SMBH formation and growth can be clarified.

Criteria for Selecting and Evaluating Sources

The selection of works was based on several key criteria to ensure a comprehensive and credible review of supermassive black holes (SMBHs):

1. Relevance to the Topic: Each source was assessed for its direct relevance to the formation and growth mechanisms of SMBHs.
2. Recency of Publication: Priority was given to recent publications (2003-2024) while also considering older foundational studies that have significantly shaped our understanding of SMBHs.
3. Credibility of Sources: Sources were evaluated based on their publication in peer-reviewed journals or reputable conference proceedings.
4. Depth of Analysis: The depth of analysis was evaluated through:

- Comprehensiveness: Preference for sources that provided thorough examinations of SMBH formation and growth mechanisms.
- Methodological Rigor: Emphasis on studies employing robust methodologies, such as advanced simulations or extensive observational data.
- Critical Engagement: Valuing works that critically engage with existing literature, identifying gaps and future directions.

5. Impact of Foundational Studies: Inclusion of foundational studies was based on:
   - Citations and Influence: Studies frequently cited in subsequent research.
   - Theoretical Frameworks: Works establishing key theories relevant to SMBH research.

Integration into Current Research: Relevance to contemporary discussions and their ability to inform current research questions.

Search Strategy and Databases Used

Our search strategy was designed to be comprehensive and systematic, utilizing a variety of databases to ensure a thorough review of the literature on supermassive black holes (SMBHs). The following databases were employed:

1. General Academic Databases: Searches were conducted using databases such as, IEEE Xplore, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar to capture a wide range of relevant literature.
2. Specialized Astrophysics Databases: To enhance the comprehensiveness of our review, we have now included specialized astrophysics databases such as: NASA Astrophysics Data System (ADS), ArXiv.

Data Synthesis and Analysis Methods

The synthesis process involved thematically organizing the selected literature around the mechanisms of formation of supermassive black holes (SMBHs), their growth processes, the influence of galaxy mergers, and the role of accretion in the evolution of supermassive black holes. Identification of themes and key findings was done using qualitative analysis. The themes were identified by categorizing the selected literature around key topics, thereby allowing a systematic view of different aspects of research on SMBHs. The criteria for extraction, which were used for the key findings, included an analysis of the common themes in the various studies and identification of connections between formation and growth mechanisms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Formation of SMBHs

The origins of supermassive black holes (SMBHs) have been a focal point of research, leading to several key findings regarding their formation mechanisms. One prominent theory is the “direct collapse” of massive primordial gas clouds, which can occur in environments with high gas density and low metallicity (Mayer and Bonoli, 2018). This process allows for the rapid formation of SMBHs without the intermediate stages typically associated with stellar evolution.

In contrast, another significant hypothesis involves the “collapse of massive stars,” where the remnants of these stars can lead to the formation of SMBHs through subsequent accretion and mergers (Kryukova *et al*., 2022). The relative likelihood of these mechanisms can vary significantly under different cosmic conditions. For instance, in environments with low metallicity, direct collapse may be favored due to the lack of cooling processes that typically inhibit star formation. Conversely, in more metal-rich environments, stellar evolution pathways may dominate, as the presence of metals facilitates the cooling of gas and the formation of stars.

Furthermore, the “evolution of stellar-mass black holes” through accretion and mergers has been highlighted as a viable pathway, particularly in dense stellar environments (Latif and Ferrara, 2016; Haiman, 2012). The interplay between these mechanisms suggests that multiple pathways may contribute to the origins of SMBHs in the early universe, but a more detailed analysis of their relative probabilities in varying conditions is necessary to fully understand their formation.

Additionally, the observational challenges that differentiate between these formations pathways, especially at high redshifts, warrant further elaboration. Current observational techniques face limitations in resolving the early stages of SMBH formation due to the faintness of high-redshift objects and the complexity of their environments. For example, distinguishing between the signatures of direct collapse and stellar remnants requires high-resolution imaging and spectroscopy, which are often hindered by the vast distances and intervening cosmic structures. Future advancements in observational technology, such as those anticipated with the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) and other next-generation instruments, will be crucial in addressing these challenges and providing clearer insights into the formation mechanisms of SMBHs.

Fueling Mechanisms

The fueling of supermassive black holes (SMBHs) is primarily driven by accretion disks, which form as gas and dust spiral into the black hole. Key findings indicate that gas inflows from surrounding environments, often triggered by galactic mergers, play a crucial role in sustaining these accretion processes (Volonteri, 2006; Komossa *et al*., 2015). However, a more detailed analysis of how different active galactic nucleus (AGN) feedback mechanisms affect SMBH growth rates across various redshifts is essential.

AGN feedback can be categorized into two primary types: radiative and mechanical. Radiative feedback, which occurs when energy from the accreting material is emitted as radiation, can heat and expel surrounding gas, thereby regulating the inflow of material and potentially suppressing star formation in the host galaxy. Mechanical feedback, on the other hand, involves the outflows generated by the AGN, which can drive gas out of the galaxy and affect the local environment. The relative importance of these feedback mechanisms can vary with redshift; for instance, at higher redshifts, where SMBHs are thought to grow rapidly, the impact of mechanical feedback may be more pronounced due to the higher rates of accretion and the associated energetic outflows.

Additionally, the distinction between super-Eddington and sub-Eddington accretion models is crucial for understanding SMBH growth rates. Super-Eddington accretion allows for growth rates that exceed the Eddington limit, potentially leading to rapid increases in SMBH mass. This regime is often associated with high accretion rates during major mergers or in gas-rich environments. In contrast, sub-Eddington accretion is more common in quiescent phases, where the growth of SMBHs is more gradual. The transition between these regimes and their implications for SMBH growth across different cosmic epochs should be explored in greater detail.

Moreover, the role of the environment in fueling SMBHs is significant and warrants further discussion. The distinction between gas-rich and gas-poor galaxies plays a critical role in determining the efficiency of SMBH fueling. Gas-rich galaxies, often found in dense environments such as galaxy clusters, can experience enhanced accretion rates due to the availability of material. In contrast, gas-poor galaxies may struggle to sustain significant accretion, leading to slower growth rates for their central SMBHs. The variation of fueling efficiency in different environments, such as isolated galaxies versus those in clusters, highlights the complex interplay between galaxy dynamics and SMBH growth.

In summary, a comprehensive understanding of SMBH fueling mechanisms requires a nuanced analysis of AGN feedback processes, accretion models, and environmental factors. Addressing these aspects will provide deeper insights into the dynamics of SMBH growth and their evolution across cosmic time.

Growth Over Cosmic Time

The growth of SMBHs has been observed to occur over cosmic time, with significant implications for galaxy evolution. Key findings reveal that SMBHs can grow rapidly in the early universe, particularly during epochs of high merger rates among host galaxies (Haiman, 2012). Studies indicate that SMBHs reached billion-solar-mass scales within the first billion years after the Big Bang, primarily through “Eddington-limited accretion” (Bromley *et al.*, 2003; Trakhtenbrot, 2019). Factors influencing this growth include the availability of gas, the dynamics of galaxy mergers, and the feedback effects from AGN activity. The co-evolution of SMBHs and their host galaxies is evident, as correlations between black hole mass and bulge properties have been established (Volonteri, 2006; Zheng, 2012).

Challenges and Open Questions

Despite significant advancements in understanding supermassive black holes (SMBHs), several challenges and open questions remain, particularly regarding their rapid growth in the early universe. Theoretical models attempting to resolve this issue have emerged, focusing on various mechanisms that could facilitate the swift accretion of mass onto SMBHs.

One prominent model is super-Eddington accretion, which allows SMBHs to grow at rates exceeding the Eddington limit. This mechanism can occur in gas-rich environments, where the inflow of material is sufficiently high to overcome the radiation pressure that typically inhibits further accretion. Theoretical simulations suggest that during periods of intense gas inflow, such as during major galaxy mergers, SMBHs can experience rapid mass increases, potentially reaching billion-solar-mass scales within a few hundred million years (Haiman, 2012; Lin *et al*., 2022). Another significant avenue of research involves the mergers of dense stellar clusters, which can lead to the formation of SMBHs through the direct collapse of massive stars or the merging of stellar remnants. This process is particularly relevant in high-density environments, such as the centers of young galaxies, where gravitational interactions can facilitate rapid growth (Mayer and Bonoli, 2018). Additionally, more exotic models, such as those proposing dark matter-driven SMBH formation, suggest that interactions between dark matter and baryonic matter could play a crucial role in the early growth of SMBHs, although these models remain speculative and require further investigation.

Integrating observational evidence into these theoretical frameworks is essential for validating and refining our understanding of SMBH growth. Recent observations from the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) have revealed overmassive SMBHs in high-redshift galaxies, challenging existing models of SMBH-galaxy coevolution. These observations indicate that some SMBHs are 10-100 times more massive than expected based on local relations, suggesting that the mechanisms driving their growth may differ significantly from those observed in the present universe (Pacucci and Loeb, 2024; Mezcua*et al*., 2024). The JWST data also highlight the presence of substantial molecular gas reservoirs and increasing dust temperatures in high-redshift quasars, which could provide the necessary fuel for rapid SMBH growth (Tripodi *et al*., 2024).

The evolution of the $M_\bullet$-$M_\star$ relation with redshift, particularly the observed overmassive factor at $z\sim5$, underscores the need for models that can account for these discrepancies and the potential role of SMBH feedback in stimulating star formation at high redshifts before transitioning to quenching at later epochs (Silk *et al*., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This review has synthesized current research on the formation, fueling, and growth mechanisms of supermassive black holes (SMBHs) across cosmic time. Key findings highlight that SMBHs likely form through multiple pathways, each with distinct implications for their growth and the evolution of their host galaxies.

1. Direct Collapse of Primordial Gas Clouds: One prominent pathway involves the direct collapse of massive primordial gas clouds in environments characterized by high gas density and low metallicity. This process allows for the rapid formation of SMBHs without the intermediate stages typically associated with stellar evolution. The implications of this pathway suggest that SMBHs could emerge quickly in the early universe, potentially influencing the formation of galaxies and the large-scale structure of the cosmos (Mayer and Bonoli, 2018).
2. Collapse of Massive Stars: Another significant hypothesis is the collapse of massive stars, where the remnants of these stars can lead to the formation of SMBHs through subsequent accretion and mergers. This pathway may result in SMBHs that are more closely tied to the stellar populations of their host galaxies, potentially affecting the dynamics and evolution of these galaxies (Kryukova*et al*., 2022).
3. Evolution of Stellar-Mass Black Holes: The evolution of stellar-mass black holes through accretion and mergers in dense stellar environments is also a viable pathway. This process suggests that SMBHs could grow gradually over time, influenced by the dynamics of their host galaxies and the availability of gas. The relative contribution of this pathway may be significant in environments where stellar interactions are frequent, leading to the formation of SMBHs in a more gradual manner (Latif and Ferrara, 2016; Haiman, 2012).
4. Mergers of Dense Stellar Clusters: The merging of dense stellar clusters can facilitate the rapid growth of SMBHs, particularly in high-density environments. This pathway emphasizes the role of gravitational interactions in enhancing the growth rates of SMBHs, potentially leading to the formation of overmassive black holes in the early universe (Mayer and Bonoli, 2018).
5. Exotic Models: Additionally, more exotic models, such as those proposing dark matter-driven SMBH formation, suggest that interactions between dark matter and baryonic matter could play a crucial role in the early growth of SMBHs. While these models are still speculative, they highlight the complexity of SMBH formation and the need for further investigation into their implications for galaxy evolution.

Implications for Future Research

1. Integration into Broader Cosmological Models: To effectively integrate the findings on SMBHs into broader cosmological models, researchers could consider the following approaches:
    a. Simulations Incorporating SMBH Feedback: Future cosmological simulations, such as those using hydrodynamic models, should incorporate SMBH feedback mechanisms that regulate star formation and gas dynamics in galaxies. For instance, models like IllustrisTNG and EAGLE

could be enhanced by including detailed SMBH growth and feedback processes to better understand their influence on galaxy morphology and star formation rates.

b. Linking SMBH Growth to Cosmic Structure Formation: Researchers could develop frameworks that explicitly link SMBH growth to the formation of large-scale structures in the universe. This could involve studying the correlation between SMBH mass and the properties of galaxy clusters, thereby elucidating how SMBHs contribute to the evolution of cosmic filaments and voids.

c. Multi-Scale Modeling: Integrating findings from different scales—ranging from the dynamics of individual galaxies to the evolution of galaxy clusters—could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of SMBHs in cosmic evolution. This could involve collaborative efforts between observational astronomers and theoretical physicists to create models that account for the interactions between SMBHs, their host galaxies, and the intergalactic medium.

2. Impact on the Surrounding Cosmic Environment: While the importance of SMBHs in galaxy evolution is well-established, their impact on the surrounding cosmic environment warrants further exploration. Future research could focus on:

a. Influence on Intergalactic Medium (IGM): Investigating how SMBH activity, particularly during active galactic nucleus (AGN) phases, affects the thermal and chemical properties of the IGM. This could involve studying the outflows and jets produced by SMBHs and their role in enriching the IGM with metals and regulating the cooling processes in surrounding gas.

b. Role in Cosmic Reionization: Understanding the contribution of SMBHs to cosmic reionization is another critical area. Research could explore how the energy output from early SMBHs influences the ionization state of the universe and the formation of the first galaxies.

Feedback Mechanisms on Galaxy Clusters: Examining the feedback mechanisms of SMBHs on the dynamics of galaxy clusters, including their role in heating the intracluster medium and affecting cluster formation and evolution, could provide insights into the large-scale structure of the universe.

Recommendations for Further Study

To address the remaining uncertainties in SMBH research, several areas warrant further investigation, with a focus on specificity and clarity:

1. Advanced Simulations: Future research should prioritize the development of advanced simulations that incorporate multi-scale hydrodynamics and feedback processes. Specific methodologies to consider include:

a. Adaptive Mesh Refinement (AMR) Simulations: Utilizing AMR techniques to study the growth of SMBHs in high-resolution environments, allowing for detailed modeling of gas dynamics and star formation in the vicinity of SMBHs. Recent studies, such as those by Chatterjee and Chowdhury (2019), highlight the effectiveness of AMR in capturing the complex interactions between SMBHs and their host galaxies.

b. Particle-Mesh Simulations: Implementing particle-mesh methods to simulate the large-scale structure formation influenced by SMBH feedback, which can help elucidate the role of SMBHs in cosmic evolution. This approach can be particularly useful in understanding the impact of SMBH mergers on galaxy cluster dynamics.

c. Cosmological Hydrodynamic Simulations: Incorporating SMBH growth and feedback into cosmological simulations like the IllustrisTNG project, which has successfully modeled the co-evolution of galaxies and SMBHs. Future iterations could refine the treatment of SMBH accretion and feedback mechanisms based on observational data from upcoming telescopes.

2. Incorporation of Recent Research Findings: Integrating recent findings from observational studies, such as those from the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) and gravitational wave detections, will be crucial. For example, data on the mass distribution of early SMBHs can inform models of their formation pathways and growth rates, as highlighted by Civano*et al*. (2019).

3. Clarification of SMBH Formation Pathways: It is essential to provide clearer definitions and distinctions regarding the various SMBH formation pathways:

a. Direct Collapse: This pathway involves the rapid collapse of massive primordial gas clouds in low-metallicity environments, leading to the formation of SMBHs without intermediate stellar phases (Mayer and Bonoli, 2018). Future studies should focus on identifying the specific conditions that favor this process, such as gas density and temperature.

b. Stellar Remnant Evolution: This pathway emphasizes the role of massive stars and their remnants, where the collapse of these stars, followed by accretion and mergers, contributes to SMBH formation (Kryukova *et al*., 2022). Research should investigate the mass thresholds and evolutionary tracks of these stars to better understand their contribution to SMBH growth.

c. Mergers of Stellar-Mass Black Holes: The evolution of stellar-mass black holes through mergers in dense stellar environments is another viable pathway (Latif and Ferrara, 2016). Future work should focus on the dynamics of these mergers and their efficiency in forming SMBHs, particularly in the context of dense star clusters.

4. Integration of Implications with Specific Examples: To enhance the integration of implications, researchers should:

a. Develop Multi-Messenger Approaches: Utilize multi-messenger astrophysics, particularly with upcoming missions like LISA, to trace the merger history of SMBHs and their growth across cosmic time. This approach can provide insights into the formation pathways and the environmental conditions that favor SMBH growth.

b. Conduct Observational Campaigns: Design observational campaigns using next-generation telescopes to target high-redshift galaxies, aiming to identify signatures of early SMBH formation and growth. This could involve spectroscopic surveys to measure the properties of AGN and their host galaxies, thereby linking observational data with theoretical models.

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