

A peer-reviewed version of this preprint was published in PeerJ on 22 June 2018.

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Marcy AE, Fruciano C, Phillips MJ, Mardon K, Weisbecker V. 2018. Low resolution scans can provide a sufficiently accurate, cost- and time-effective alternative to high resolution scans for 3D shape analyses. PeerJ 6:e5032 <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.5032>

Low resolution scans provide a sufficiently accurate, cost- and time-effective alternative to high resolution scans for interspecific 3D shape analyses

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Background. Advances in three-dimensional (3D) shape capture technology have made powerful shape analyses, such as geometric morphometrics, more feasible. While the highly accurate micro-computed tomography (μ CT) scanners have been the “gold standard,” recent improvements in 3D surface scanner resolution may make this technology a faster, more portable, and cost-effective alternative. Several studies have already compared the two scanning devices but all use relatively large specimens such as human crania. Here we perform shape analyses on Australia’s smallest rodent species to test whether a 3D surface scanner produces similar results to a μ CT scanner.

Methods. We captured 19 delicate mouse crania with a μ CT scanner and a 3D surface scanner for geometric morphometrics. We ran multiple Procrustes ANOVAs to understand how variation due to scan device compared to other sources of variation such as biologically relevant sources and operator error. We quantified operator error with morphological disparity and repeatability. Finally, we tested whether the different scan datasets could detect intra-specific variation using cross-validation classification. Shape patterns were visualized with Principal Component Analysis (PCA) plots.

Results. In all Procrustes ANOVAs, regardless of factors included, differences between individuals contributed the most to total variation. This is also reflected in the way individuals disperse on the PCA plots. Including only the symmetric component of shape increased the biological signal relative to variation due to device and due to error. 3D scans create a higher level of operator error as evidenced by a greater spread of their replicates on the PCA, a higher morphological disparity, and a lower repeatability score. However, in the test for small intra-specific differences, the 3D scan and μ CT scan datasets performed identically.

Discussion. Compared to μ CT scans, we find that even very low resolution 3D scans of very small specimens are sufficiently accurate to capture variation at the level of interspecific differences. We also make three recommendations for best use of low resolution data. First, we recommend analyzing the symmetric component of shape to decrease signal from operator error. Second, using 3D scans generates more random error due to increased landmarking difficulty, therefore be conservative in landmark choice and avoid multiple operators. Third, using 3D scans introduces a source of systematic error relative to μ CT scans, therefore do not combine them when possible and especially in studies with little variation. Our findings support increased use of low resolution 3D images for most morphological

studies; they are likely applicable to low resolution scans of large specimens made in a medical CT scanner, for example. As most vertebrates are relatively small, we anticipate our results to bolster more researchers designing affordable large scale studies on small specimens with 3D surface scanners.

1 **Low resolution scans provide a sufficiently accurate, cost- and time-effective alternative to**
2 **high resolution scans for interspecific 3D shape analyses**

3
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Abstract

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22 improvements in 3D surface scanner resolution may make this technology a faster, more
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24 devices but all use relatively large specimens such as human crania. Here we perform shape
25 analyses on Australia’s smallest rodent species to test whether a 3D surface scanner produces
26 similar results to a μ CT scanner.

27 **Methods.** We captured 19 delicate mouse crania with a μ CT scanner and a 3D surface scanner
28 for geometric morphometrics. We ran multiple Procrustes ANOVAs to understand how variation
29 due to scan device compared to other sources of variation such as biologically relevant sources
30 and operator error. We quantified operator error with morphological disparity and repeatability.
31 Finally, we tested whether the different scan datasets could detect intra-specific variation using
32 cross-validation classification. Shape patterns were visualized with Principal Component
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35 individuals contributed the most to total variation. This is also reflected in the way individuals
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37 biological signal relative to variation due to device and due to error. 3D scans create a higher
38 level of operator error as evidenced by a greater spread of their replicates on the PCA, a higher
39 morphological disparity, and a lower repeatability score. However, in the test for small intra-
40 specific differences, the 3D scan and μ CT scan datasets performed identically.

41 **Discussion.** Compared to μ CT scans, we find that even very low resolution 3D scans of very
42 small specimens are sufficiently accurate to capture variation at the level of interspecific
43 differences. We also make three recommendations for best use of low resolution data. First, we
44 recommend analyzing the symmetric component of shape to decrease signal from operator error.
45 Second, using 3D scans generates more random error due to increased landmarking difficulty,
46 therefore be conservative in landmark choice and avoid multiple operators. Third, using 3D
47 scans introduces a source of systematic error relative to μ CT scans, therefore do not combine
48 them when possible and especially in studies with little variation. Our findings support increased
49 use of low resolution 3D images for most morphological studies; they are likely applicable to
50 low resolution scans of large specimens made in a medical CT scanner, for example. As most
51 vertebrates are relatively small, we anticipate our results to bolster more researchers designing
52 affordable large scale studies on small specimens with 3D surface scanners.

53

54

Introduction

55 An organism's shape reveals many facets of its biology, including its evolution, ecology, and
56 functional morphology. In the past three decades, geometric morphometrics has revolutionized
57 the field of shape research with better analysis and visualization of shape complexity (Rohlf &
58 Marcus 1993; Zelditch et al. 2012). As imaging technology continues to advance, three-
59 dimensional (3D) data have become extremely common in geometric morphometric studies,
60 especially in the cases in which 2D data poorly represent the actual 3D object (Buser et al. 2017;
61 Cardini 2014; Fruciano 2016; Reig 1996). 3D capture methods include very high resolution yet
62 high cost and time-intensive options like micro-computed tomography (μ CT) scanning. In
63 contrast, 3D surface scanning offers lower acquisition costs and faster scanning, but has the

64 disadvantage of generally lower resolution, which limits its use on very small specimens (Fig. 1).
65 For confident use of surface scans in small specimens, it is therefore important to assess the
66 measurement error introduced by choosing a 3D surface scanner for geometric morphometrics.
67
68 Most vertebrates would be considered small, for example about two thirds of mammals are
69 below 10kg (Weisbecker & Goswami 2010), which would translate to small skeletal specimens.
70 Therefore, morphometric studies proposing large sample sizes must be very well funded to use a
71 μ CT scanner or have a low-cost option, such as a 3D surface scanner. Previous studies have
72 compared μ CT scans to 3D surface scans, however, these were all done in large animals,
73 primarily primates (Badawi-Fayad & Cabanis 2007; Fourie et al. 2011; Katz & Friess 2014;
74 Robinson & Terhune 2017; Sholts et al. 2010; Slizewski et al. 2010). While these studies found
75 low error and high repeatability in 3D surface scans similar to μ CT scans, there was a suggestion
76 that higher error occurred in the sample's smaller specimens (Badawi-Fayad & Cabanis 2007;
77 Fourie et al. 2011). Other recent studies have conducted 3D geometric morphometric studies on
78 small vertebrate skulls but nearly all have relied exclusively on μ CT scanning (Cornette et al.
79 2013; Evin et al. 2011). The only exception we are aware of is Munoz-Munoz et al. (2016),
80 which successfully used photogrammetry – a technique combining 2D photographs into a 3D
81 model – to analyze domestic mouse skulls (*Mus musculus domesticus*, C Linnaeus, 1758).
82 Photogrammetry, like 3D surface scanning, is a low-cost alternative to μ CT and comes with its
83 own trade-offs in time and scan resolution (Katz & Friess 2014). Compared to the new
84 generation of blue light surface scanners, photogrammetry requires more time for image
85 acquisition and for file processing (Katz & Friess 2014). A previous study on a single macaque
86 specimen reported inconsistent levels of error across operators and scanners, which contributed

87 to the lack of general pattern for differences across scanners/resolutions (Shearer et al. 2017).
88 However, using an interspecific dataset, Fruciano et al. (2017) reported higher repeatability for
89 the higher resolution scans and 2.07-11.26% of total variance due to scan type (depending on
90 device, operator and landmark set combination). We expect that small specimens would
91 exacerbate any variation due to device and the interaction of device with other factors, such as
92 landmark choice and operator. More work comparing these different methods – μ CT scanning,
93 3D surface scanning, and photogrammetry – will allow researchers to make an informed
94 decision. For example, for those with time constraints in museum collections, a fast 3D surface
95 scanner may be the best option if the resolution is suitable for specimen size.

96

97 The lower resolution of 3D surface scanners may increase both random and systematic
98 measurement error, which is exacerbated by small specimens because operators may have more
99 difficulty identifying landmark locations (Arnqvist & Martensson 1998; Fruciano 2016).
100 Random error increases variance without changing the mean; this “noise” dilutes biologically
101 informative patterns and, in principle, decreases statistical power (Arnqvist & Martensson 1998;
102 Fruciano 2016). By contrast, systematic error is non-randomly distributed, thus changing the
103 mean and introducing bias to the data (Arnqvist & Martensson 1998; Fruciano 2016). Error
104 assessment can be done with repeated measures of the same individuals (e.g. Fruciano et al.
105 2017; Munoz-Munoz & Perpignan 2010; Robinson & Terhune 2017) or by comparison to a “gold
106 standard” or ideal representation of the specimens (Fruciano 2016; Slizewski et al. 2010;
107 Williams & Richtsmeier 2003) such as can be achieved with a high resolution μ CT scan.
108 Repeated measure designs can uncover this systematic error, for example, if one 3D capture
109 method differs from another in a specific, non-random, pattern (Fruciano 2016; Fruciano et al.

110 2017). Furthermore, designs including repeated measures of the same individuals allow
111 partitioning of variance into components, quantifying error due to scan type as compared to
112 biologically-relevant sources of variation such as asymmetry (Fruciano 2016; Klingenberg et al.
113 2002; Klingenberg & McIntyre 1998).

114

115 In this study, we quantify the error introduced by studying specimens of a size at the very lower
116 limits of surface scanner resolution. This situation could also arise when using relatively large
117 specimens, which are nonetheless at the lower limit of a medical CT scanner's resolution for
118 example. We test whether the complex shape of very small specimens can be adequately
119 captured using an HDI109 3D surface scanner with a stated resolution of 80 μm as compared to a
120 μCT scanner with a resolution of 28 μm . To do so, we use the delicate mouse (*Pseudomys*
121 *delicatulus*, J Gould, 1842), one of the smallest rodents in the world with a 55-75 mm head-and-
122 body length (Breed & Ford 2007). The miniscule *P. delicatulus* crania (~20mm) are at the edge
123 of the HDI109 3D surface scanner's range thus providing an extreme test of this scanning
124 method (Fig. 1, Fig. 2).

125

126

Methods

127 Data collection

128 We selected 19 adult individuals, male and female, of *Pseudomys delicatulus* from the
129 Queensland Museum in Brisbane, Australia (specimen numbers and sexes in Additional File 1:
130 Table S1). The cranium from each individual was scanned at the Centre for Advanced Imaging at
131 the University of Queensland in a μCT scanner (Siemens Inveon PET/CT scanner). The scanner
132 was operated at 80 KV energy, 250 μA intensity with 540 projections per 360°, a medium-high

133 magnification with bin 2 was applied, and 2000 ms exposure time. The samples were scanned at
134 a nominal isotropic resolution of 28 μm . The data were reconstructed using a Feldkamp
135 conebeam back-projection algorithm provided by an Inveon Acquisition workstation from
136 Siemens (IAW version 2.1). Surface models were obtained using Mimics Research version 20.0.
137

138 Each cranium was also scanned by 3D LMI's HDI109 blue light surface scanner with a
139 resolution of 80 μm . For brevity, we will refer to this method as 3D scanning. For this method,
140 the cranium was placed on a rotary table providing the scanner with 360 views. To capture the
141 entire shape, the cranium was scanned in three different orientations: one ventral view with the
142 cranium resting on the frontals and two dorsal views with the cranium tipped to each side, resting
143 on an incisor, auditory bulla, and zygomatic arch. To assist others in replicating our HDI109 3D
144 surface scanning on small specimens, we have included a Standard Operating Procedure with our
145 settings (Additional File 2: Supplementary Methods).

146

147 We duplicated the digital file for each unique individual-scan method combination three times
148 such that each individual was represented by 6 replicates, giving a total sample of 114 replicates
149 (Fig. 2a). Each replicate was landmarked in Viewbox version 4.0 (dHAL software, Kifissia,
150 Greece; www.dhal.com; Polychronis et al. 2013). To capture shape, we placed 58 fixed
151 landmarks, 145 sliding semi-landmarks, and 86 sliding patch points (3D meshes defined by
152 semi-landmark borders) for a total of 289 points (Fig. 3, Additional File 3: Table S2). We used
153 the template feature in Viewbox to semi-automate the placement of semi-landmark curves and to
154 fully automate the placement of patch points. Our landmark design covered most important
155 biological structures except for the zygomatic arch (Fig. 3); we avoided this fine structure

156 because dehydration and loss of support from surrounding muscles during skeletonization almost
157 certainly causes specimen preparation error (Schmidt et al. 2010; Yezerinac et al. 1992).

158

159 **Data analysis**

160 The landmark coordinates for all 114 replicates were aligned using a generalized Procrustes
161 superimposition implemented in the R package *geomorph* (v. 3.0.5) (Adams 2016; Adams &
162 Otarola-Castillo 2013). Superimposition of each set of landmark coordinates removes differences
163 in size, position, and orientation, leaving only shape variation (Rohlf & Slice 1990). Semi-
164 landmarks and patches were permitted to slide along their tangent directions to minimize
165 Procrustes distance between replicates (Gunz et al. 2005). The resulting Procrustes tangent
166 coordinates were used as shape variables in all subsequent shape analyses. All our statistical
167 analyses were performed either in R (v. 3.3.3) using the R packages *geomorph* (v. 3.0.5) (Adams
168 2016; Adams & Otarola-Castillo 2013) and *Morpho* (v. 2.5.1) (Schlager 2017) or using MorphoJ
169 (v. 1.06d) (Klingenberg 2011).

170

171 First, asymmetry is a known source of variation within a sample (Klingenberg et al. 2002), so we
172 tested for it with MorphoJ's general Procrustes ANOVA function and subsequently removed it
173 (Fig. 2b). Isolating symmetric shape has been done in other 3D surface scanner studies where
174 operator and device error have been of the same magnitude as asymmetric error (Fruciano et al.
175 2017). Variation due to asymmetry is more impacted by operator error because of its smaller
176 effect sizes compared to variation among individuals (Fruciano 2016; Fruciano et al. 2017;
177 Klingenberg et al. 2010; Leamy & Klingenberg 2005). This suggests that low resolution studies
178 on asymmetry would be negatively impacted. For this reason, we performed all subsequent

179 analyses on the symmetric shape component. We then performed a PCA on the symmetric shape
180 variables to visualize the variation between individuals, within scan method replicates, and
181 between scan method replicates. As an exploratory analysis, PCA can help intuitively visualize
182 both random error (greater spread of one scan method replicate compared to the other) and
183 systematic error (repeated pattern of one scan method shifting relative to another). However,
184 further analyses are necessary to quantify these sources of error.

185

186 Second, our replicate design allowed us to assess whether an operator digitizing one type of scan
187 was more variable in landmark placement than when digitizing scans from the other device (Fig.
188 2c). We did so by computing the Procrustes variance for each individual/device combination. In
189 *geomorph*, Procrustes variances are calculated for each set of observations (i.e. replicates) as the
190 sum of the diagonal elements of the set's covariance matrix divided by the number of
191 observations (Adams 2016; Zelditch et al. 2012). We computed Procrustes variance for each
192 combination of individual and device so that Procrustes variance reflects only variation due to
193 digitization. We then compared Procrustes variance between devices using a box plot and the
194 permutational procedure implemented in *geomorph*. Next we quantified digitization consistency
195 by computing repeatability (i.e. the intraclass correlation coefficient using the Procrustes
196 ANOVA mean squares) for each device as suggested by Fruciano (2016). This value is normally
197 comprised between 0 and 1, with values close to 1 indicating much larger variation due to the
198 factor used in computing the Procrustes ANOVA (in our case, variation among individuals)
199 compared to residual variation (in our case, variation among digitizations). In other words,
200 comparing repeatability between devices gives a similar information to the one obtained by the
201 box plots of Procrustes variance but on a more easily interpretable scale from 0 to 1.

202

203 Finally, we investigated whether there is a difference between devices in a commonly used shape
204 analysis: the detection and correct classification of sexual dimorphism (Fig. 2c). We began with
205 a Procrustes ANOVA in R on the symmetric component for the subset of individuals with sex
206 information ($n = 11$ distinct individuals; $n = 66$ replicates). This allowed us to gauge the
207 magnitude of the effect of sexual dimorphism compared to other sources of variation, as well as
208 test for significant differences in mean shape between males and females. Then with *Morpho*, we
209 averaged the shape of each replicate triad for each device, performed a between group PCA
210 using sex as group and then a cross-validation of classification accuracy (Schlager 2017).

211

212

Results

213 Analyses of shape variation

214 Our Procrustes ANOVA results indicate that variation among individuals (%Var = 47.4)
215 contributes the most, with asymmetry (fluctuating and directional), device, and operator error
216 contributing the remainder, in order of greatest to least (Table 1). The %Var values indicate that
217 directional asymmetry contributes a similar amount of variation as other sources of non-
218 biological variation and that fluctuating asymmetry accounts for much less than digitization error
219 and variation between devices (Table 1). This means that using analyses of asymmetry using a
220 combination of μ CT and 3D surface scans would likely be unreliable in specimens the size of
221 delicate mice or for specimens scanned at a similarly low resolution. Furthermore, since
222 digitization error is large compared to the components of asymmetric variation, even a single
223 device yet low resolution study of asymmetry would likely be unreliable unless appropriate
224 arrangements are made to reduce error (Fruciano 2016).

225

226 The Procrustes ANOVA on the symmetric component of shape reports the individual shape
227 representing biological variation is 73.3% (Table 2). Differences between scan devices represent
228 14.5% and the residuals encompassing differences among replicates or operator error represent
229 12.2% of total variance (Table 2). Thus, our Procrustes ANOVA shows that most of the variation
230 is represented by biological variation but the significance of the variation due to device may
231 indicate systematic error.

232

233 The PCA of our symmetric dataset revealed that the first 3 principal components (PCs) account
234 for 47.1% of total variation (PC1 = 26.4%, PC2 = 11.9%, PC3 = 8.9%, $n = 114$) (Fig. 4). Each of
235 the remaining PCs accounted for 5% or less of total variation therefore we only considered the
236 first three. Positive values along PC1 correspond to a larger braincase relative to the rostrum
237 (Fig. 5a). Positive values along PC2 correspond to a wider frontal bone (Fig. 5b). Finally,
238 positive values along PC3 correspond to a more convex, dorsally-curved ventral surface (Fig.
239 5c).

240

241 The plot of PC1 and PC2 supports the results from the symmetric Procrustes ANOVA in that
242 most of the visible variation is between clusters of each individual's replicates. Indeed,
243 regardless of scanning device, replicates from the same individual cluster together (Fig. 4a). For
244 most individuals, replicates occupy non-overlapping morphospaces except for those around the
245 crowded mean shape (Fig. 4a). Within each individual's morphospace, μ CT replicates usually
246 form a tighter cluster than the 3D replicates (Fig. 4a). This pattern suggests that using μ CT scans
247 introduces less random error than using 3D scans. Furthermore, within an individual, 3D scan

248 replicates tend to cluster closer to other 3D replicates while μ CT scan replicates tend to cluster
249 closer to other μ CT replicates (Fig. 4a). This supports the interpretation for a systematic
250 difference between scan method shape means reported the Procrustes ANOVA's significant scan
251 variation component (Table TK). Indeed, for most individuals, 3D scan replicates score higher
252 than their μ CT scan replicates on both PC1 and PC2. This suggests the systematic error may be
253 driven by 3D scans overestimating both braincase volume and frontal bone width relative to μ CT
254 scans (Fig. 4a, Fig. 5a,b).

255

256 Overall, plots of the scores along the first two components mirror and provide intuitive
257 visualization to the patterns observed in the analyses using Procrustes ANOVA. The plot of PC1
258 and PC3 highlights another possible systematic difference between 3D and μ CT scans (Fig. 4b).
259 The PC3 axis displaces μ CT replicates from 3D replicates such that individuals no longer occupy
260 distinct morphospaces (Fig. 4b). On the PC3 axis, μ CT scan replicates consistently score higher,
261 which corresponds to a more dorsally curved ventral surface relative to 3D scan replicates (Fig.
262 4b, Fig. 5c). Along with PC1 and PC2, PC3's result strengthens the signal for a general pattern
263 of a difference in the degree of surface curvature captured by 3D and μ CT scanners, which could
264 be contributing to the systematic error reported by the Procrustes ANOVA (Table 2). In
265 summary, despite a small but morphologically significant source systematic error, both the
266 Procrustes ANOVA and the PCA report that most variation comes from a biological signal, the
267 differences between individuals.

268

269 **Analyses of variance and error**

270 To compare the digitization error in each scanning device dataset, we calculated the Procrustes
271 variance among the replicate triads of each individual. We found that Procrustes variance is
272 significantly ($p < 0.001$) higher in 3D scans (1.34×10^{-4}) than μ CT (4.81×10^{-5}) scans (Fig. 6). This
273 means that digitizations are more variable in 3D scans than in μ CT which is consistent with
274 decreased clustering in 3D scans relative to μ CT scans in the PCAs (Fig. 4).

275

276 The repeatability scores for each scan dataset mirrored the Procrustes variance results but with a
277 more intuitive number on a 0-1 scale. We found that the μ CT scan dataset had a repeatability of
278 0.927 and the 3D scan data had a repeatability of 0.814 (Table 3). This means operators have an
279 easier time repeating their digitizations (i.e. landmark placements) with μ CT scans than with 3D
280 scans.

281

282 **Analyses with a biological example: sexual dimorphism**

283 A subset of our dataset had sex information ($n = 11$; $f = 7$, $m = 4$), allowing us to perform a test
284 on whether using different scan devices to detect a very subtle intra-specific signal produces
285 different results. Our symmetric Procrustes ANOVA on individuals, sex, and device found that
286 differences between individuals is still the largest component (Table 4; $Rsq = 0.691$) with
287 variation due to device ($Rsq = 0.172$) and sex/residuals ($Rsq = 0.137$) contributing similar
288 amounts. Variation due to device is larger than variation due to sex, which suggests that 3D
289 scans and μ CT scans should not be combined for similar analyses. However, the between group
290 PCAs do not suggest marked sexual dimorphism to begin with plots (Fig. 7). Therefore, the
291 subtlety of this biological signal could be the main reason for the relatively low contribution of sex
292 to total variation. Finally, we performed a cross-validation test on the between group PCAs to

293 assess which scan dataset can more reliably identify sexes based on shape (Table 5). The results
294 show that in this case, 3D scans and μ CT scans perform identically (overall classification
295 accuracy = 64%).

296

297

Discussion

298 In this study, we contrasted very high resolution μ CT scans with their extreme opposite: 3D
299 surface scans of very small specimens. Our low versus high resolution datasets allowed us to
300 assess whether the low resolution scans still allow defensible investigations of biological shape
301 variation. We found that despite the low quality of the 3D scans, sufficient amounts of biological
302 variation are present to perform, at the very least, interspecific comparisons. In datasets with
303 only very slight intra-specific differences does the ability to distinguish biological signal from
304 error's "noise" occur. For example, the subtle sexual dimorphism in our small sample was only
305 just detected. However, we present three considerations to make before using low resolution
306 datasets. First, we found that we needed to remove the signal from asymmetry to investigate
307 shape variation more confidently. This makes low resolution datasets a poor choice for studies
308 on asymmetry. Second, using 3D scans creates more random error due to increased landmarking
309 difficulty, therefore care should be taken in landmark choice, and possibly landmarking software
310 and operator choice. Digitization error may also be reduced by taking averages of repeated
311 measurements (Arnqvist & Martensson 1998; Fruciano 2016). Third, using 3D scans also
312 introduces a source of systematic error relative to μ CT scans, therefore we recommend not
313 combining them whenever possible (see also Fruciano et al. 2017), and especially in studies on
314 small intra-specific variation. In summary, with a few precautions listed above, we expect that

315 for studies with similarly sized skulls or similarly low resolution scans, the variation due to error
316 will be sufficiently low for successful detection of interspecific shape differences.

317

318 **Measurement error and 3D scan reliability**

319 Systematic error between the two scan devices is shown by consistent displacement patterns in
320 the PCA. Indeed, across all three PC axes, the scans differ in how they measure concavity around
321 the braincase, frontal, and ventral surface. This systematic pattern could suggest that the 3D
322 scanner technology errs on adding volume to the digital specimen relative to the μ CT scan but it
323 could also be the other way around with the μ CT scan distorting the images. Furthermore, even
324 when using the symmetric component of shape, the percent of variation contributed by scan
325 device is quite substantial at about 14.5%. Because scan device contributes this much to variation
326 and because systematic error between scan device exists, researchers expecting very small
327 variation due to biological sources would be advised not to combine 3D scan and μ CT scan
328 datasets. However, overall each individual's 3D and μ CT replicates almost always occupied
329 distinct areas of the morphospace, supporting their comparability for most morphometric studies.

330

331 While the two scan methods are usually comparable, using the low resolution 3D scans
332 introduces more digitization error than the higher resolution μ CT scans, which likely reflects
333 increased user error due to lower resolution in 3D scans. This increased random error is reflected
334 in both the larger point clouds of 3D replicates relative to μ CT replicates in the PCAs as well as
335 the higher morphological disparity and lower repeatability score of 3D scans. As expected, we
336 found that the low resolution 3D scans were more difficult to landmark because key cranial
337 features such as sutures and smaller processes were less distinct (Fig. 1 versus Fig. 3).

338 Nevertheless, our 3D scan repeatability score of 0.82 appears consistent with the literature: it is
339 much lower than 3D scanned human-sized skulls – above 0.95 (Badawi-Fayad & Cabanis 2007;
340 Fourie et al. 2011) but it is within the range of 3D scanned macropodoids (e.g., kangaroos) –
341 0.78-0.98, depending on device and landmark choice (Fruciano et al. 2017). This trend of
342 decreasing repeatability with decreasing body size may reflect measurement error becoming a
343 larger percentage of overall size (Robinson & Terhune 2017). Relatedly, recent work has shown
344 that unreliable landmarks, or those with greater variability in placement, significantly decrease
345 repeatability (Fruciano et al. 2017). This may be especially true for small specimens, for which
346 small variations from the landmark location represent a larger percentage of their overall size.

347

348 This study did not look at multiple operator error which can be considerable, particularly if
349 difficult landmarks are included (Fruciano et al. 2017). If inter-operator error were combined
350 with the resolution-driven measurement error found here, it is possible that biological signal
351 would diminish to a degree that could not support even interspecific comparisons.

352

353 **Measurement error compared to biological variation**

354 The challenge of any quantitative measurement study is to minimize measurement error
355 introduced from various sources (in our case, device, resolution, and observer) relative to the
356 “true” signal of biological variation. In the case of inter-observer error, which is one
357 measurement error source, several studies suggest that interspecific variation overwhelms inter-
358 observer such that it does not pose an issue with the correct interpretation of results (Robinson &
359 Terhune 2017).

360

361 In our test on the detectability of sexual dimorphism relative to scan device, we showed that
362 while variation contributed by each was similar (and that from scan device slightly higher), both
363 scan datasets detected a small sexually dimorphic pattern and they performed equally. This
364 suggests that 3D scans may even be acceptable for detecting some intra-specific patterns. This
365 was a small sample ($n = 11$) therefore further study with larger datasets would improve
366 confidence for using 3D scans for intra-specific studies. Nevertheless, it is promising that 3D
367 scans and μ CT scans performed similarly even at such a small sample size.

368

369 **Choosing a digitization method: 3D surface scanning versus μ CT versus photogrammetry**

370 With many options for digitizing 3D specimens available, decisions on the acquisition mode
371 must consider price, scanning time, processing time, portability, and scan resolution. The one-off
372 investment of a relatively high resolution 3D surface scanner such as the HDI109 provided a
373 model portable enough to take on airplanes and has fast scanning and processing times. Our
374 model took 10 minutes from starting the scan to the finished surface file, but note that larger
375 specimens requiring multiple sub-scans will take longer. These fast acquisition times are an asset
376 in collection efforts that rely on expensive and time-limited museum travel. For example, one of
377 us (AEM) digitized over 100 individuals in one week using the same scanning protocol.
378 However, the quality and speed of scanning varies by model; for example, other 3D surface
379 scanners could take over 45 minutes to capture one specimen and may also require more effort to
380 process scans (Katz & Friess 2014).

381

382 Compared to 3D surface scanners, μ CT scanners provide much higher resolution, which in this
383 study translated into less measurement error. However, μ CT facilities are not widely accessible,

384 not mobile, and tend to be more expensive. Depending on the facility, μ CT scanning involves
385 transport to the facility, scanning either by the operator, processing scans into image stacks, and
386 finally loading scans into specialized (and frequently high-cost) software to do the 3D
387 reconstruction. These reconstructions can be time consuming especially if the cranium needs to
388 be separated from the mandibles. Finally, specimens need to be loaned from their collections for
389 μ CT acquisition, which requires specimen transport and curator permission and is particularly
390 difficult when large numbers of specimens from distant locations need to be scanned.

391

392 This study did not investigate photogrammetry, which is another and increasingly popular
393 method for digitizing 3D shape. This method uses software to align 2D photographs taken from
394 many different views into a 3D file. Photogrammetry is much cheaper and more portable than 3D
395 surface scanning since it only requires a camera of suitable resolution and very affordable photo-
396 alignment software like Agisoft PhotoScan (Agisoft LLC, St. Petersburg, Russia;
397 www.agisoft.com). The trade-offs are that in our experience, photogrammetry takes at least three
398 times longer to acquire the photos, it involves higher risk of human error or inconsistency during
399 photography, and it requires an order of magnitude more time to align the photos into a 3D
400 digital file. While photo-alignment can be done at convenience after photography, the greater
401 time required to capture enough photos may be a deciding factor for researchers with time
402 limitations in museum collections. As for scan resolution, photogrammetry may perform better
403 than 3D surface scanners in some cases (Fourie et al. 2011) or at least provide an acceptable
404 alternative (Katz & Friess 2014; Muñoz-Muñoz et al. 2016).

405

406

407 **Conclusions**

408 In summary, the best 3D capture method will vary based on the study's design, expected effect
409 size for the biological variation of interest, and the researcher's limitations on time, money, and
410 travel. In addition to image resolution requirements, it is wise to assess the time it will take to
411 capture and process each specimen as well as portability needs. Here, we have shown that a 3D
412 surface scanner can provide an acceptable alternative to a μ CT scanner for assessing biological
413 signal of 3D shape even in small specimens that are at the limits of 3D scanner resolution.
414 Furthermore, as previously suggested (e.g., Fruciano 2016), exploratory pilot studies of
415 measurement error are advisable when practically possible. We recommend a preliminary test on
416 multiple devices – including surface scanners – of how levels of error compare to biological
417 signal and whether there is substantial systematic error. Doing so may provide a defensible
418 alternative to an expensive and time consuming large-scale acquisition of μ CT scans.

419

420 **Acknowledgements**

421 We would like to thank Cruise Speck for assistance with Viewbox software and Dr. Heather
422 Janetzki for hosting us in the mammal collections at the Queensland Museum.

423

424 **Abbreviations**

425 Landmark (LM)

426 Micro-computed tomography (μ CT)

427 Principal component analysis (PCA)

428 Principal component (PC)

429 Three-dimensional (3D)

430

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Figure 1

Low resolution 3D surface scans of delicate mouse crania.

(A) Dorsal view. (B) Lateral view. (C) Ventral view. See Figure 3 to compare with the much higher resolution of μ CT scans. All crania are rendered in Viewbox v. 4.0.

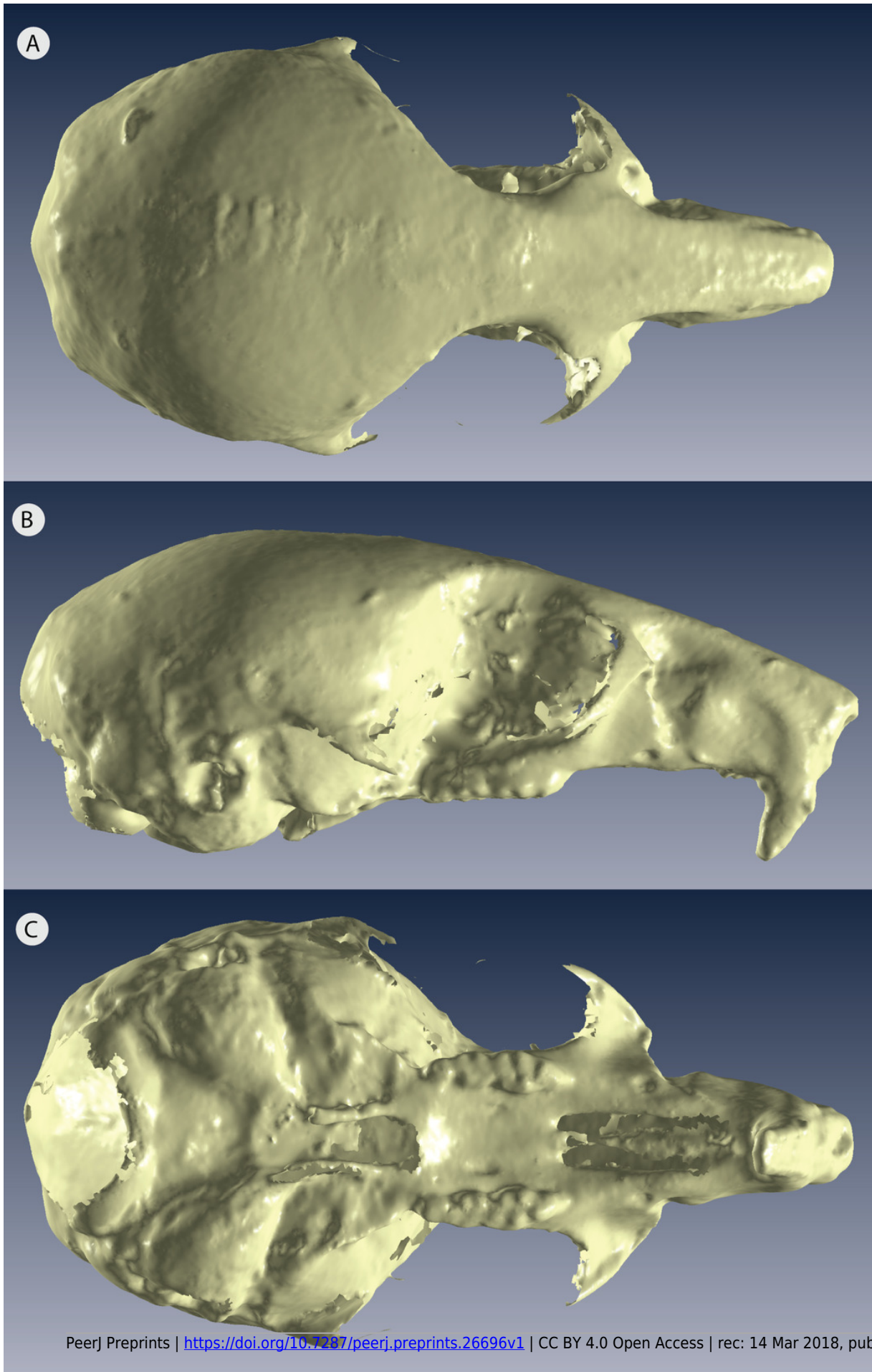


Figure 2

Methods flow diagram highlighting the relationship between our questions and our analyses.

(A) All delicate mouse (*Pseudomys delicatulus*) crania were sourced from the Queensland Museum in Brisbane, Australia. Landmarks (LMs) capture homologous points, semi-landmarks (semi-LMs) capture curves between landmarks, and patch points capture surfaces between landmarks and semi-landmarks. (B - D) These sections of questions and associated figure and table numbers summarize how we organize the paper, particularly the Results, into three sets of related analyses.

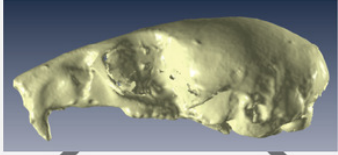
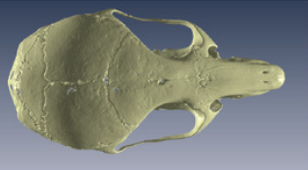
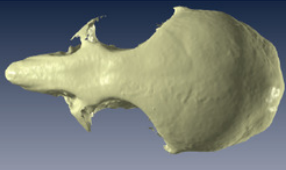
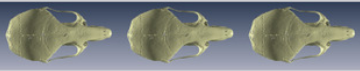
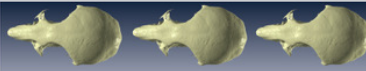
A Data Collection (n = 19)	
	Table S1
μCT scan and 3D scan	
	Fig. 1 Add'l File 2
	
Replicate each scan x3	
	
Landmark (n = 114)	
58 LMs, 145 semi-LMs, 86 patch pts	Fig. 3 Table S2
B Analyses of shape variation	
How does variation due to scan device compare to other sources?	Table 1
... and when variation due to bilateral asymmetry is removed?	Table 2
How does variation for the symmetric shape component look?	Figs. 4 & 5
C Analyses of variance and error	
Does variation among repeats of an individual differ by scan type?	Fig. 6
Does repeatability (i.e. operator error) differ by scan type?	Table 3
D Analysis of intra-specific variation	
How much sexual dimorphism appears to exist in our sample?	Table 4 Fig. 7
Does one scan type provide a better basis of sex identification?	Table 5

Figure 3

Positions of landmarks for geometric morphometric analyses.

Locations of fixed landmarks (black points), sliding semi-landmarks (red points) and sliding surface patches (purple points) on a μ CT scanned individual. (A) Dorsal view of the cranium. (B) Lateral view. (C) Ventral view. Definitions are given in Table S2.

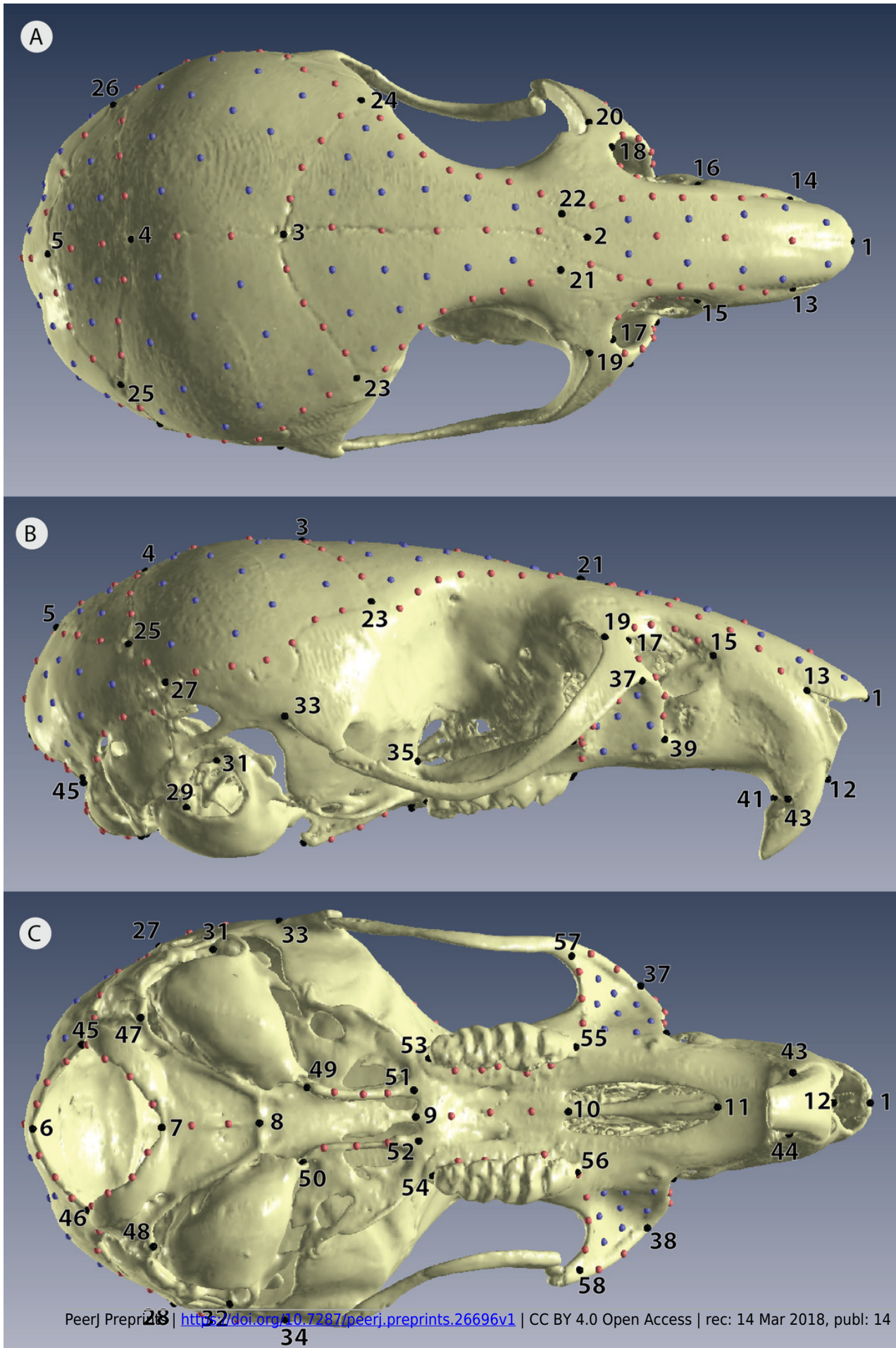


Figure 4

Exploratory PCA plots of shape variation showing differences among individuals, scan devices, and replicates of the same scan device.

A) PC1 versus PC2 and **B)** PC1 versus PC3. Each individual has a unique color shared by all of its 6 replicates. Each replicate's point is labeled for its scan device, either "CT" for μ CT scanned or "3D" for 3D surface scanned. Each axis reports the total variance explained by that principal component: 26.4% for PC1, 11.9% for PC2, and 8.9% for PC3.

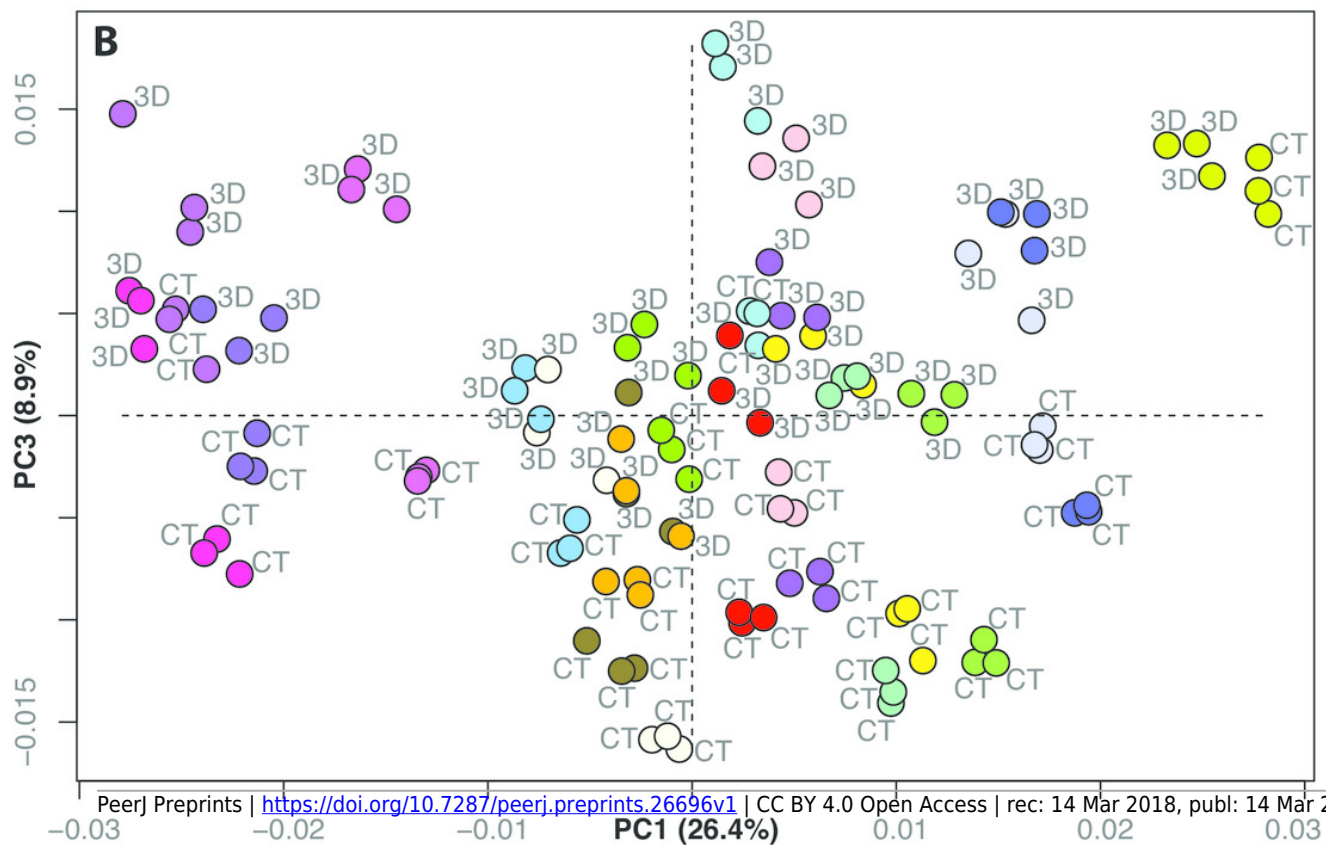
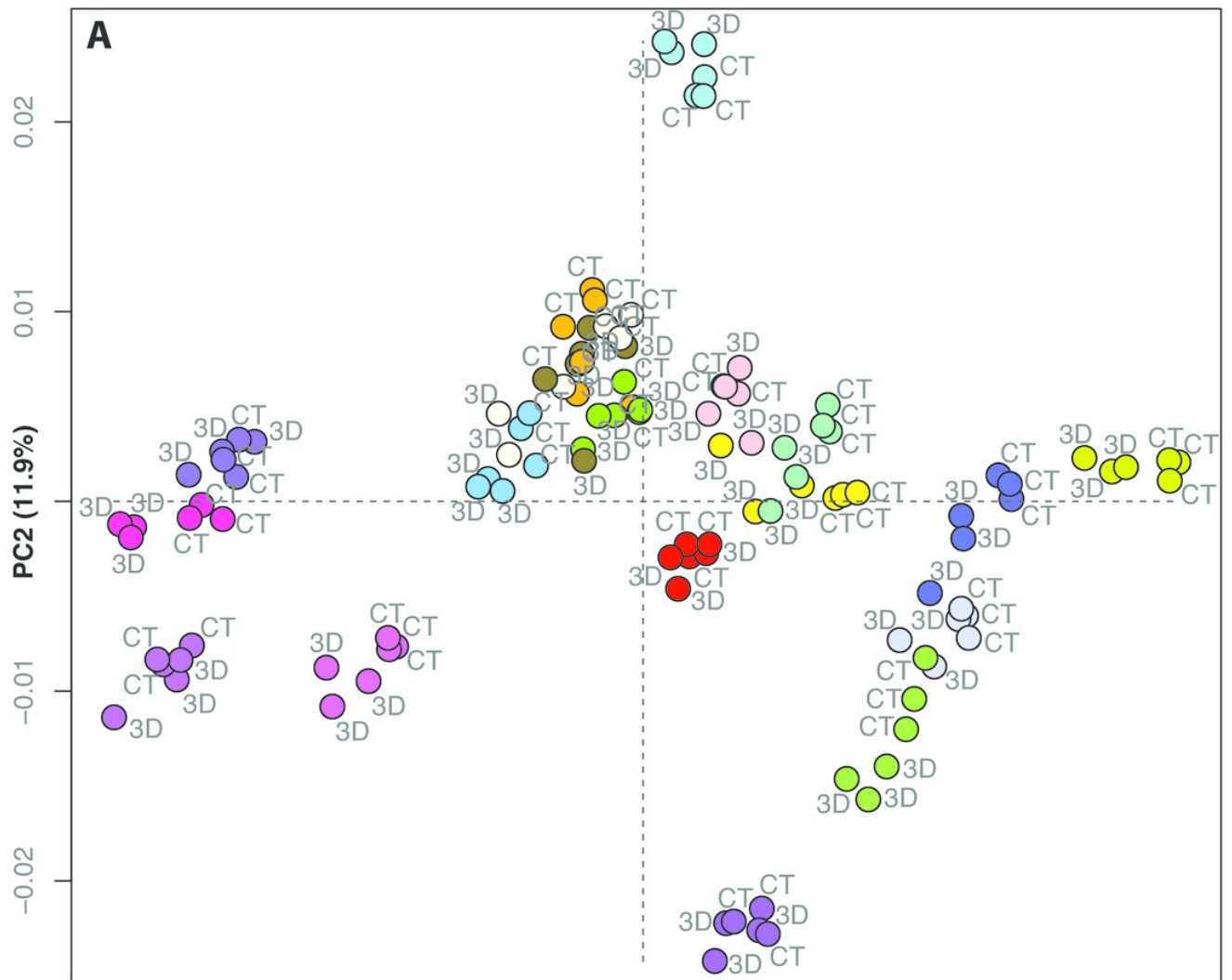


Figure 5

3D warp-grids for the three most important principal components, showing minimum and maximum shapes for each PC.

The left hand cranium shows the minimum negative value for the PC and the right hand cranium shows the maximum positive value. (A) Positive values along PC1 (26.4% variance) correspond to a larger braincase relative to the rostrum. (B) Positive values along PC2 (11.9% variance) correspond to a wider frontal bone. (C) Positive values along PC3 (8.9% variance) correspond to a more dorsally-curved ventral surface.

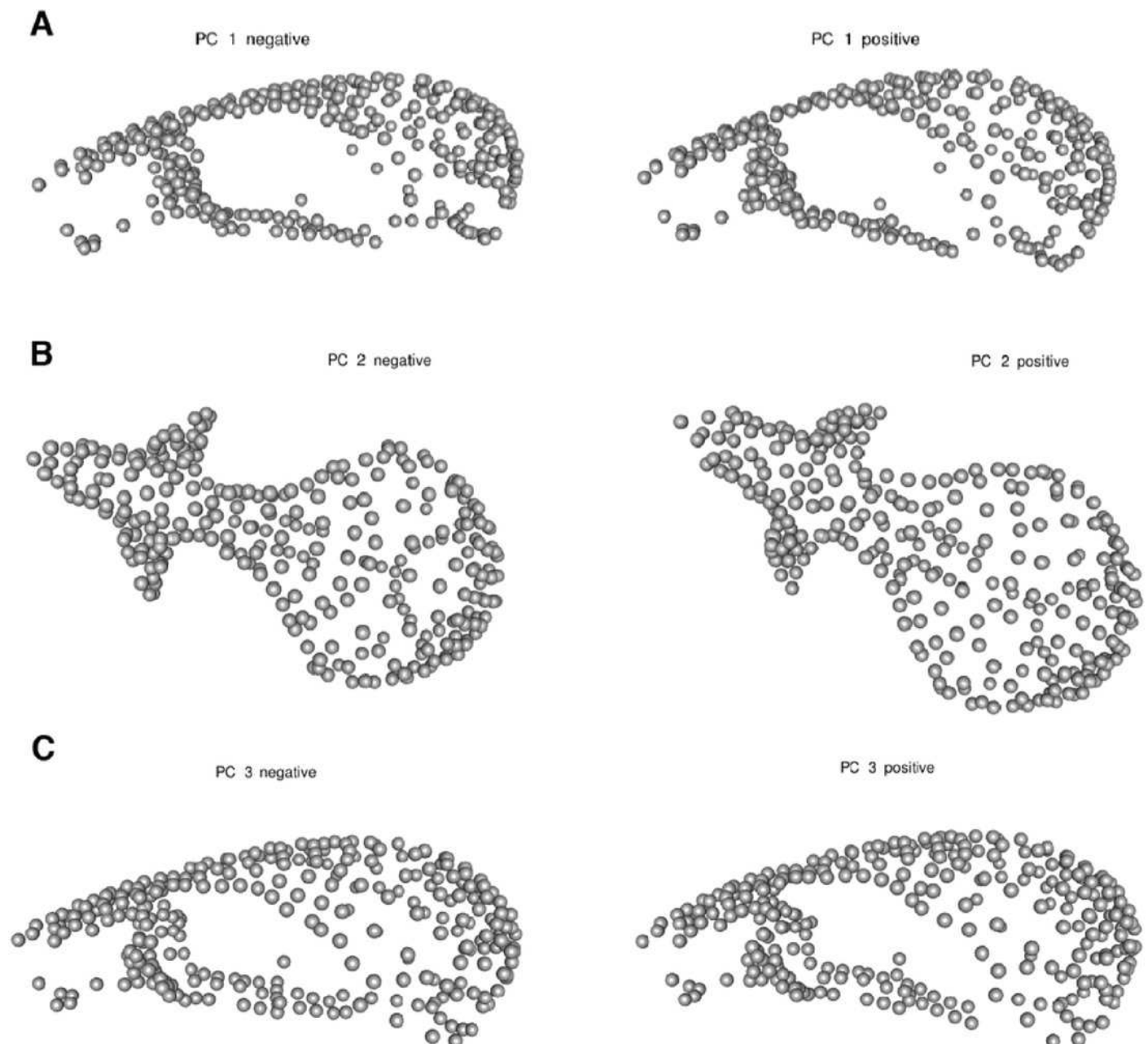


Figure 6

Morphological disparity -- as measured by shape variation among replicate scan triads -- by scanning device reflects operator error.

This box plot summarizes the morphological disparity (also known as the Procrustes variance) among the three replicates of an individual for each scan type. The mean Procrustes variance for 3D scans was 1.34×10^{-4} and 4.81×10^{-5} for μ CT scans. This is a significant difference ($p < 0.001$)

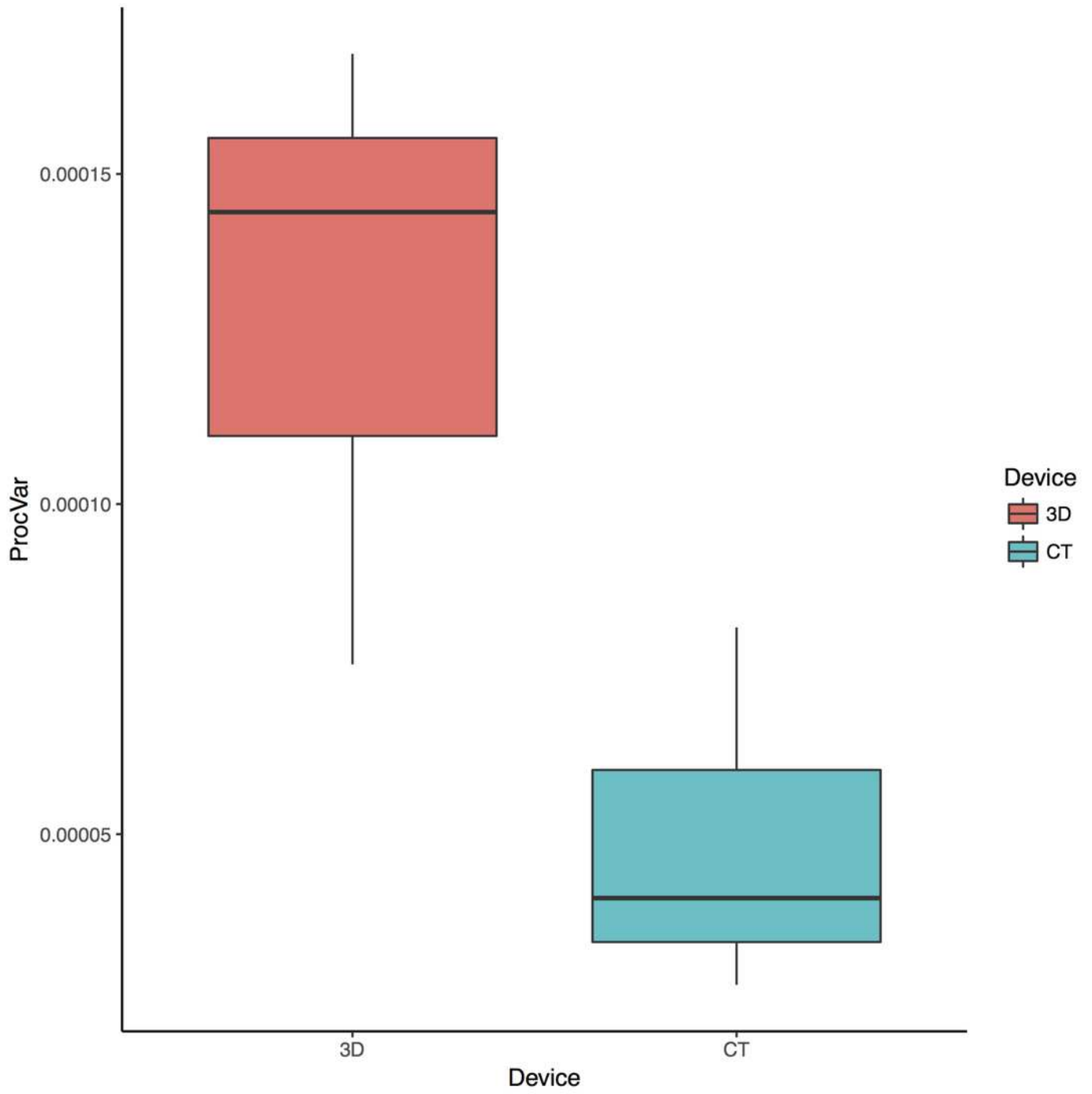


Figure 7

Intra-specific variation as shown by PCAs of 3D and μ CT scan datasets colored by sex.

PCA provides an exploratory visualization of shape variation between males and females in our subsample with sex information (n=11). Males (n=4) are plotted in light silver and females (n=7) are plotted in dark gold. Results from the cross-validation test can be found in Table 5.

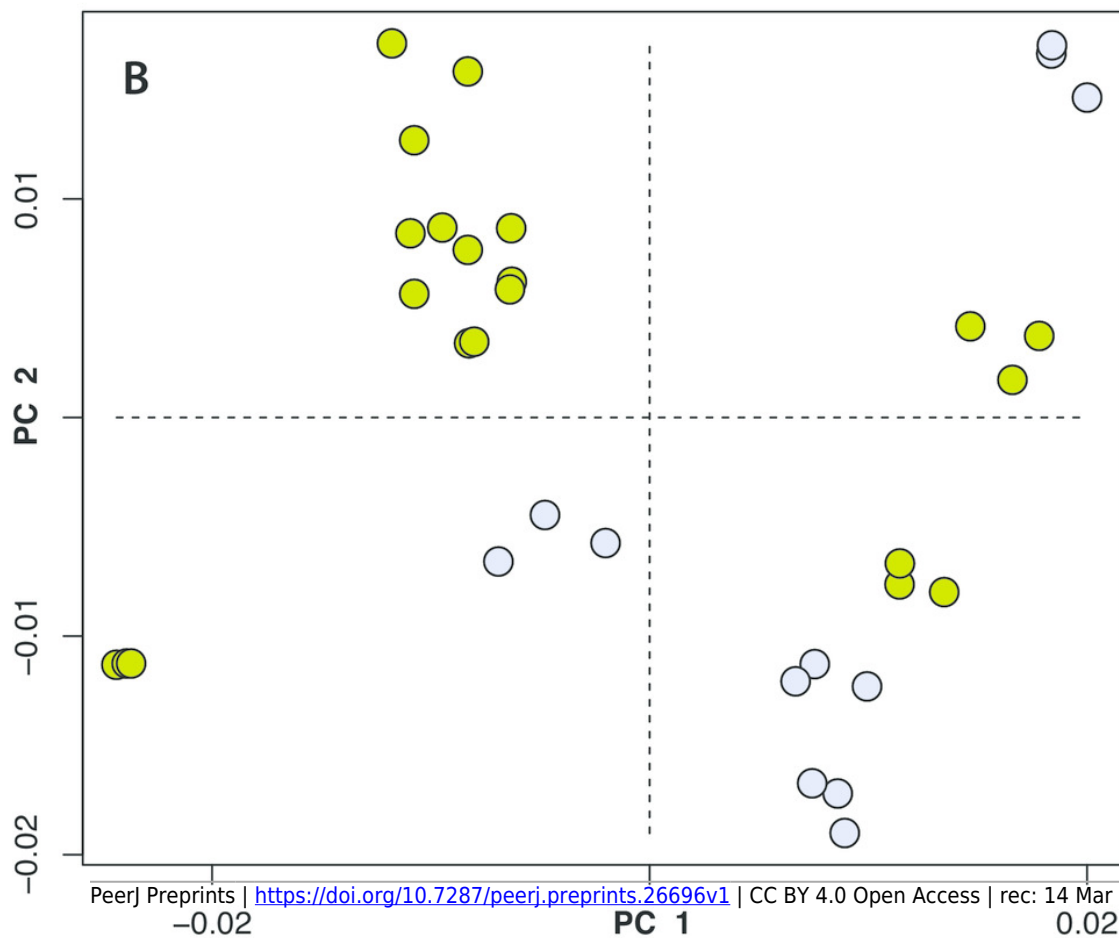
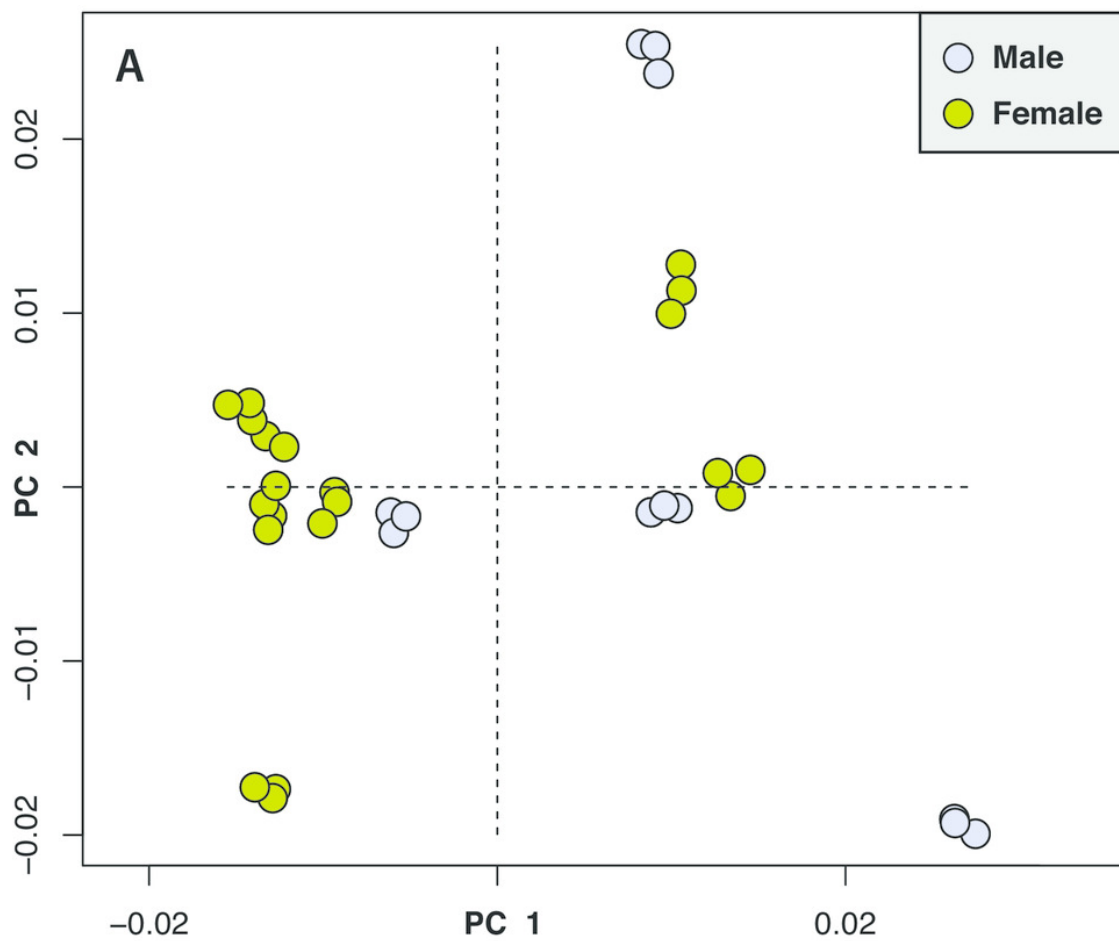


Table 1 (on next page)

General Procrustes ANOVA on sources of shape variation including asymmetry.

The %Var column of this Procrustes ANOVA demonstrates the relative contribution of each factor to overall variation. It is calculated from the sum of squares for each factor divided by the total sum of squares for all factors.

	Df	SS	MS	%Var	F	Pr(>F)
Individual	7740	0.06188221	7.9951E-06	47.4	11.12	<.0001
Side	400	0.0255547	6.38868E-05	19.6	88.89	<.0001
Ind * Side	7200	0.00517466	7.187E-07	4.0	0.55	1
Device	15770	0.02065404	1.3097E-06	15.8	4.79	<.0001
Res / Rep	63080	0.01723758	2.733E-07	13.2		

1

Table 2 (on next page)

Procrustes ANOVA on the sources of shape variation using the symmetric component of shape.

The R-squared column of this Procrustes ANOVA demonstrates the relative contribution of each factor to overall variation. The shape variation of this dataset is visualized in Figures 4 and 5.

	Df	SS	MS	Rsq	F	Z	Pr (>F)
ind	18	0.062014315	0.00344524	0.73269356	25.31699532	21.2972812	0.001
ind: dev	19	0.01228211	0.00064643	0.14511204	4.75020269	23.624144	0.001
Residuals	76	0.010342389	0.000136084				
Total	113	0.084638816					

1

Table 3 (on next page)

Comparison of operator error in 3D scan and μ CT scan datasets using Procrustes ANOVAs and repeatability scores.

The repeatability score is a value that reflects the ease of digitizing in a repeated measure study design. It is calculated from the Procrustes ANOVA using formulas for the intra-class correlation coefficient. The Procrustes ANOVAs were found by subsetting the dataset by scan device and performing separate generalized Procrustes and bilateral symmetry alignments.

(A) Results from the μ CT-only dataset. (B) Results from the 3D-only dataset.

A								
	Df	SS	MS	Rsq	F	Z	Pr(>F)	Repeatability
μCT_ind	18	0.034310829	0.001906157	0.92599563	26.41573276	18.27750829	0.001	0.927
Residuals	38	0.002742077	7.22E-05					
Total	56	0.037052906						
B								
	Df	SS	MS	Rsq	F	Z	Pr(>F)	Repeatability
3D_ind	18	0.035295179	0.001960843	0.822025177	9.750741438	15.83823468	0.001	0.814
Residuals	38	0.00764168	0.000201097					
Total	56	0.042936859						

1

Table 4(on next page)

Symmetric Procrustes ANOVA with sex as a factor to assess relative contribution of intra-specific variation to overall shape variation.

This Procrustes ANOVA allows comparison of the relative contribution to total variation from sex and from scan device (R-squared column).

	df	SS	MS	Rsq	F	P
Ind	8600	0.03179244	3.6968E-06	0.6914	4.43	<.0001
Device	9460	0.00790042	8.351E-07	0.1718	5.03	<.0001
Sex/Res	37840	0.00628842	1.662E-07	0.1368		
Total	55900	0.04598128				

1

Table 5 (on next page)

Between group PCA classification test to assess whether one scan device dataset performs better at identifying sexes based on shape.

This analysis averages shape among replicates, computes a between-group PCA separately for μ CT and 3D datasets, and runs a cross-validation classification test. The results indicate whether one type of scan dataset is more successful at classifying males versus females based on the shape variation present in the dataset. It also returns a kappa statistic; a kappa value over 0.20 indicates “fair” agreement between the two datasets. Shape variation visualized by sex can be seen in Figure 7.

Cross-validated classification results in frequencies						
CT	f	m		3D	f	m
f	5	2		f	5	2
m	2	2		m	2	2
Cross-validated classification results in %						
CT	f	m		3D	f	m
f	71	29		f	71	29
m	50	50		m	50	50
Overall classification accuracy (%)						
CT	64					
3D	64					
Kappa statistic						
CT	0.214					
3D	0.214					

1