

Parton Distribution Functions + Some Fun ML

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Machine Learning for High Energy Physics, 2026
TIFR, Mumbai

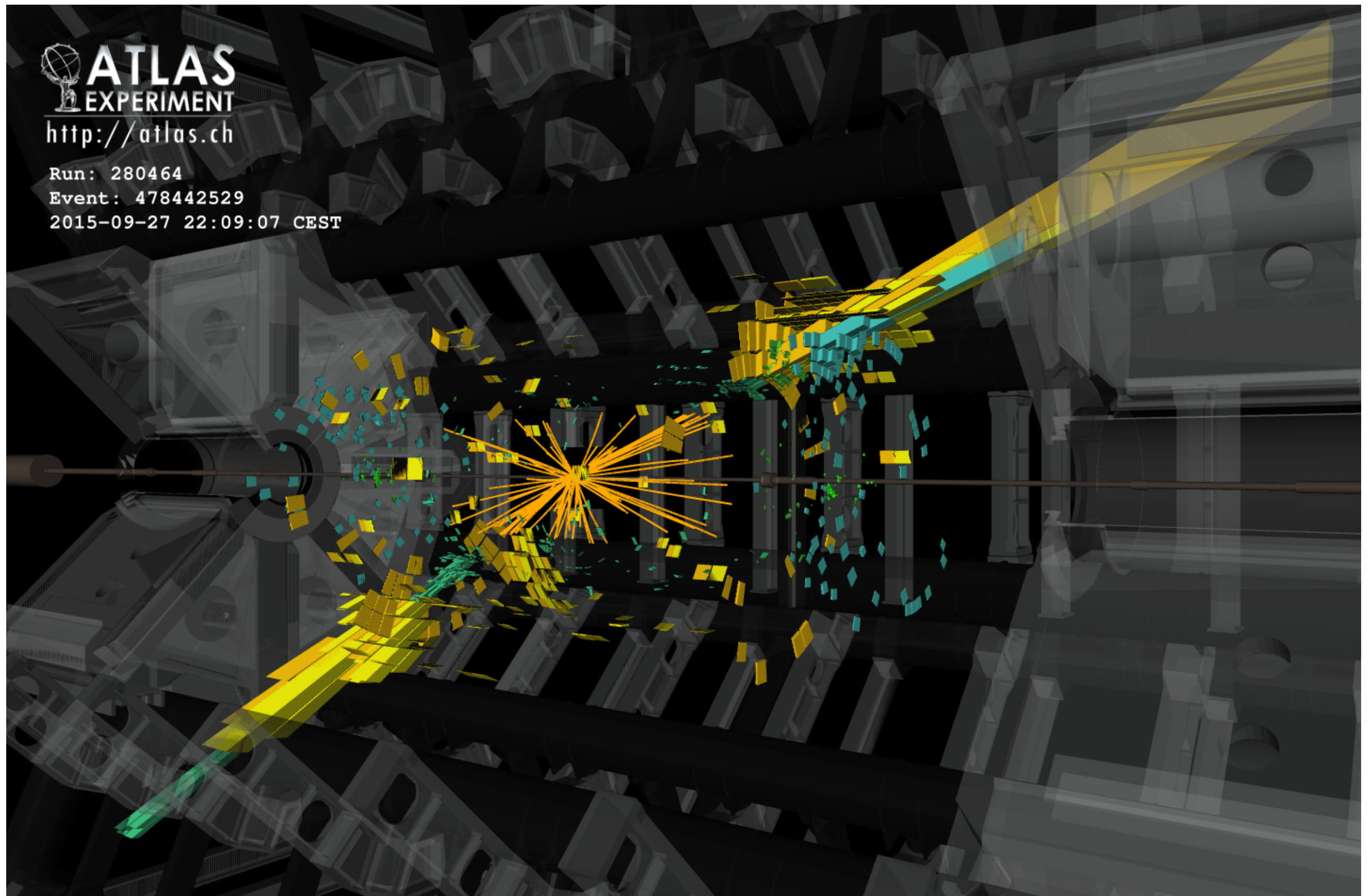
06/07/2026



Anusandhan
National
Research
Foundation



How a collider event looks like?



What is our best explanation?

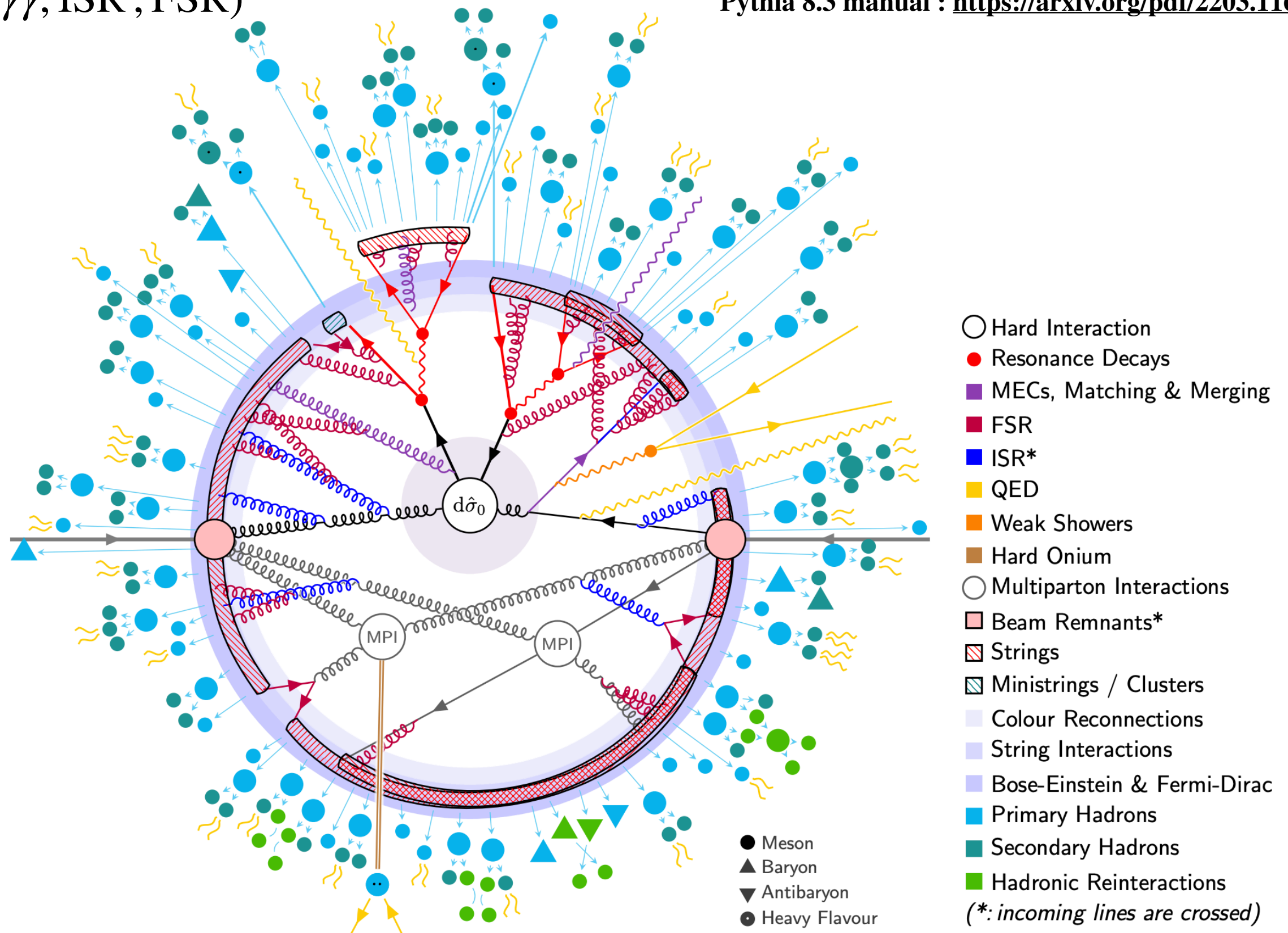
$\gamma (\pi^0 \rightarrow \gamma\gamma, \text{ISR}, \text{FSR})$

Pythia 8.3 manual : <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2203.11601>

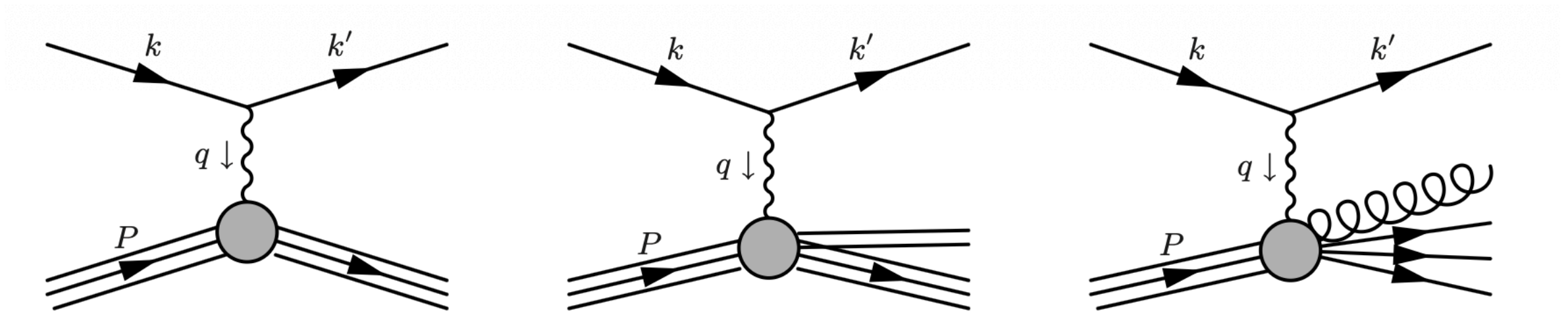
K_L, K_S

$\pi^\pm$

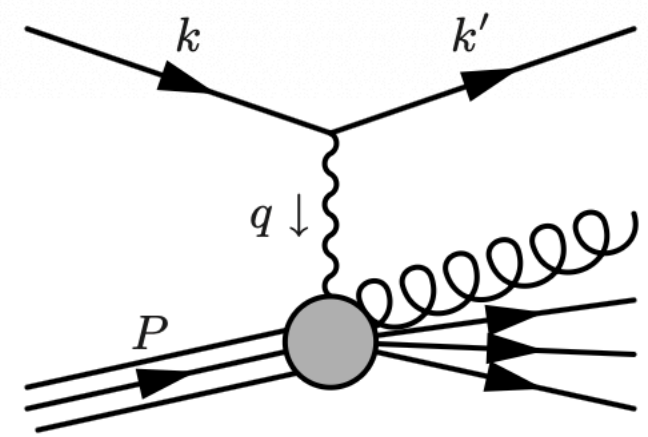
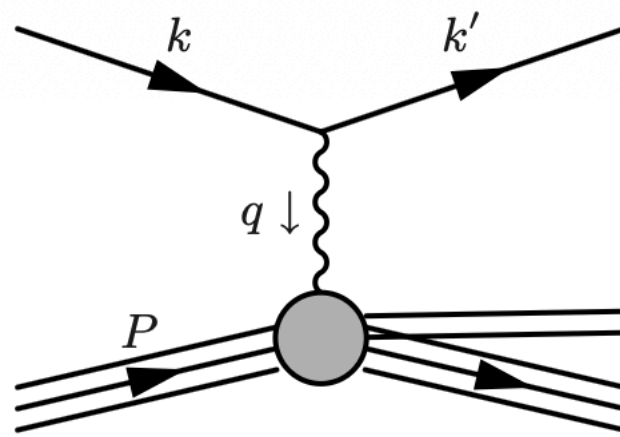
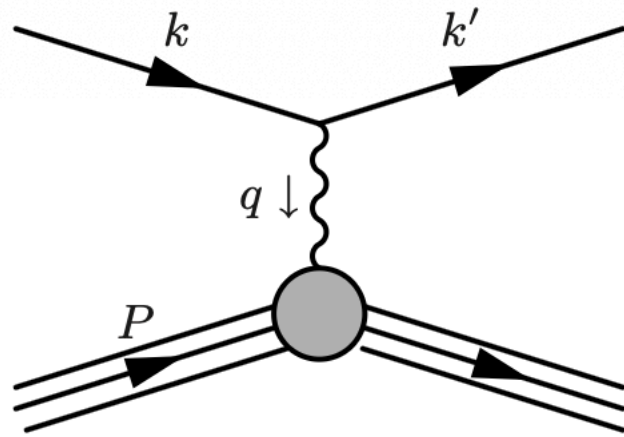
$l^\pm$



How do we try to make sense?

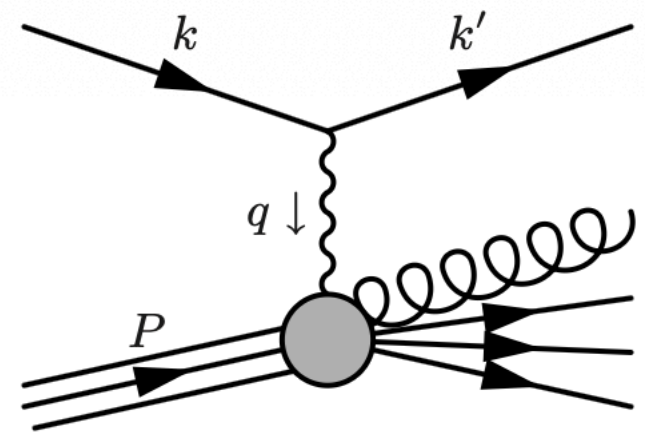
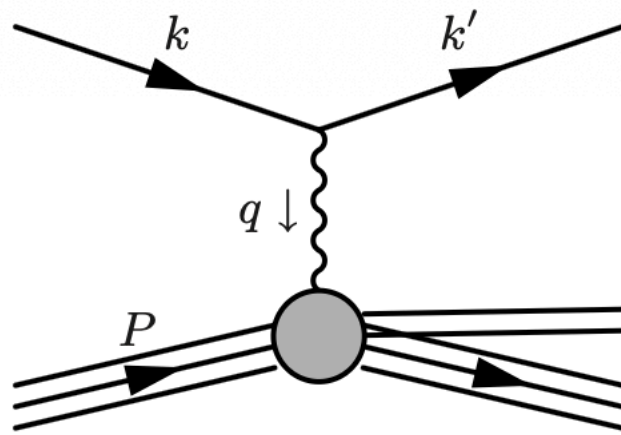
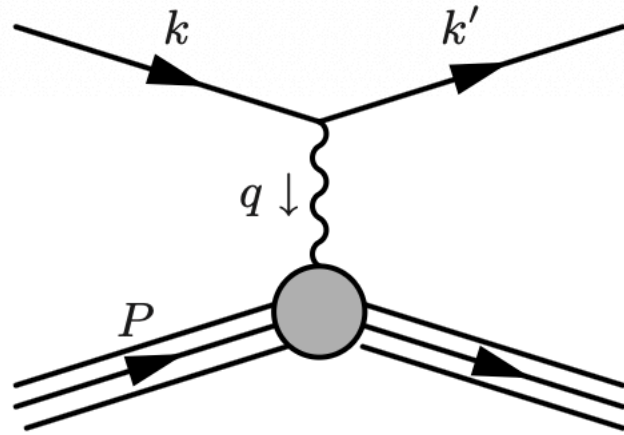


How do we try to make sense?



$$\left(\frac{d\sigma}{d\Omega dE'} \right)_{\text{lab}} = \frac{\alpha_e^2}{8\pi E^2 \sin^4 \frac{\theta}{2}} \left[\frac{m_p}{2} W_2(x, Q) \cos^2 \frac{\theta}{2} + \frac{1}{m_p} W_1(x, Q) \sin^2 \frac{\theta}{2} \right]$$

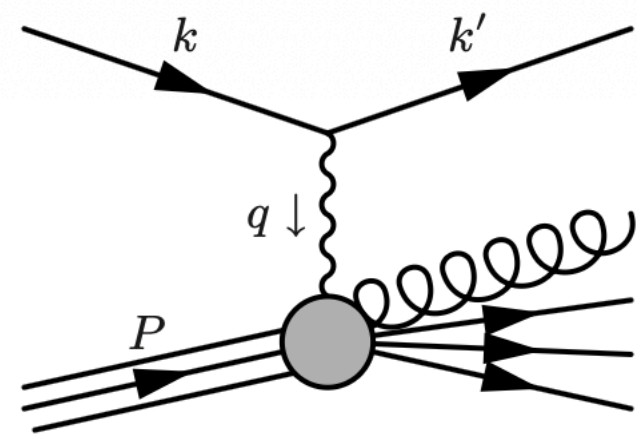
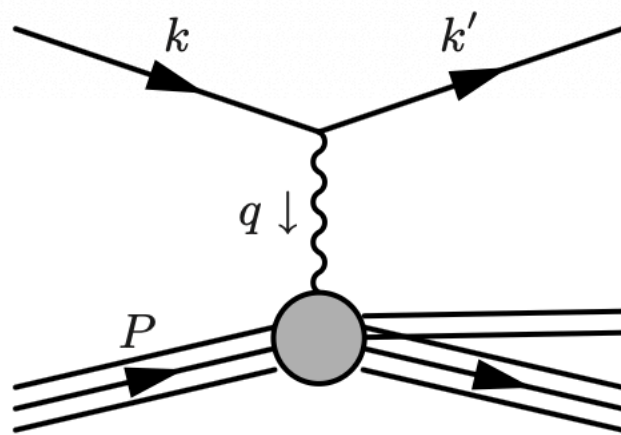
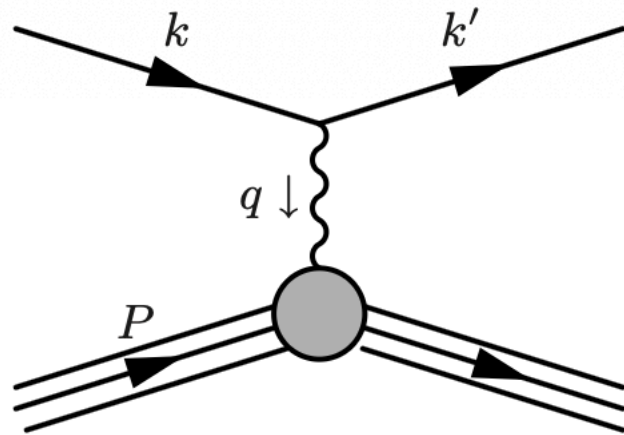
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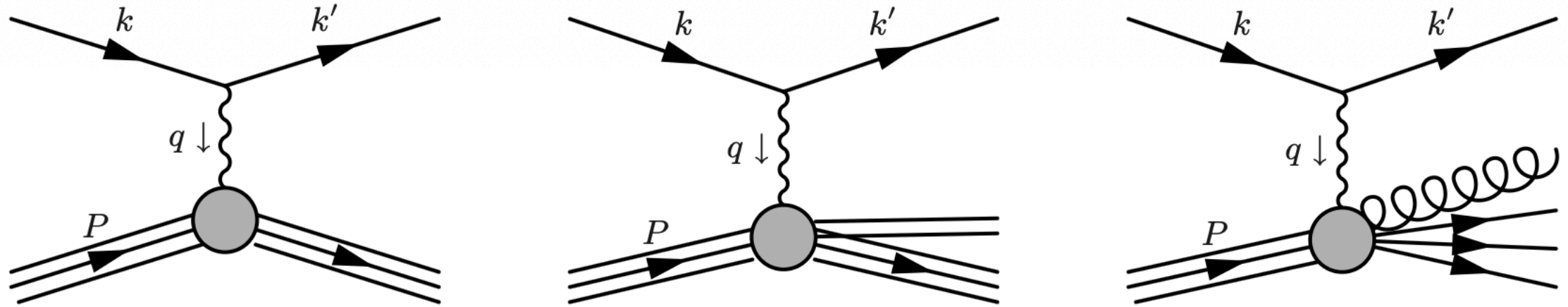


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$$\left(\frac{d\sigma(e^- P \rightarrow e^- X)}{d\Omega dE'} \right)_{\text{lab}} = \sum_i f_i(x) \frac{\alpha_e^2 Q_i^2}{4E^2 \sin^4 \frac{\theta}{2}} \left[\frac{2m_p}{Q^2} x^2 \cos^2 \frac{\theta}{2} + \frac{1}{m_p} \sin^2 \frac{\theta}{2} \right]$$

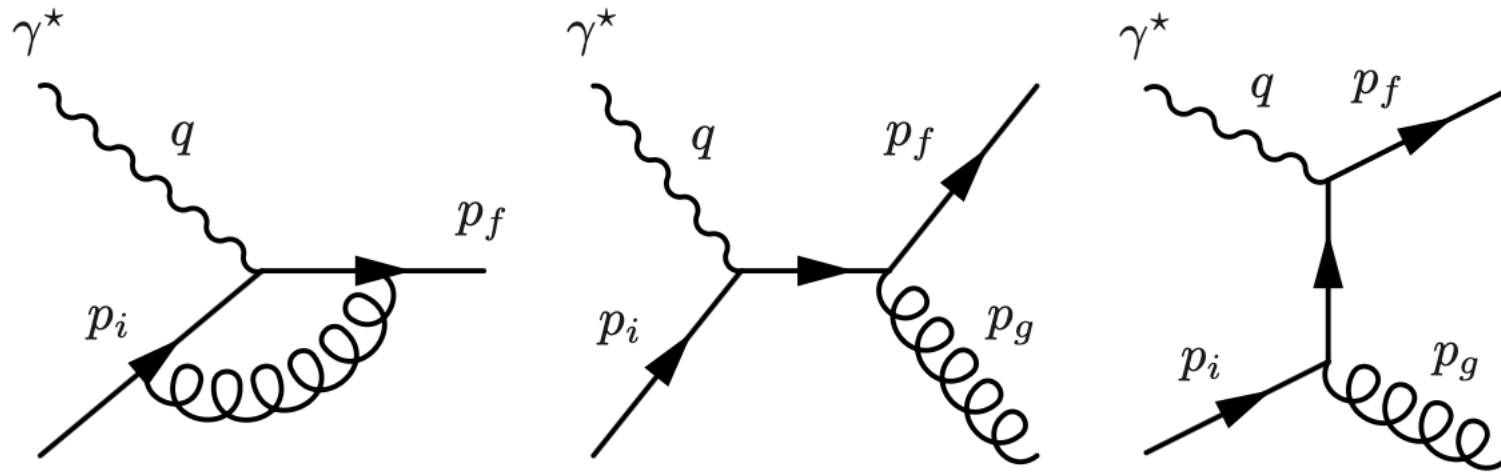
There are non-perturbative prescriptions



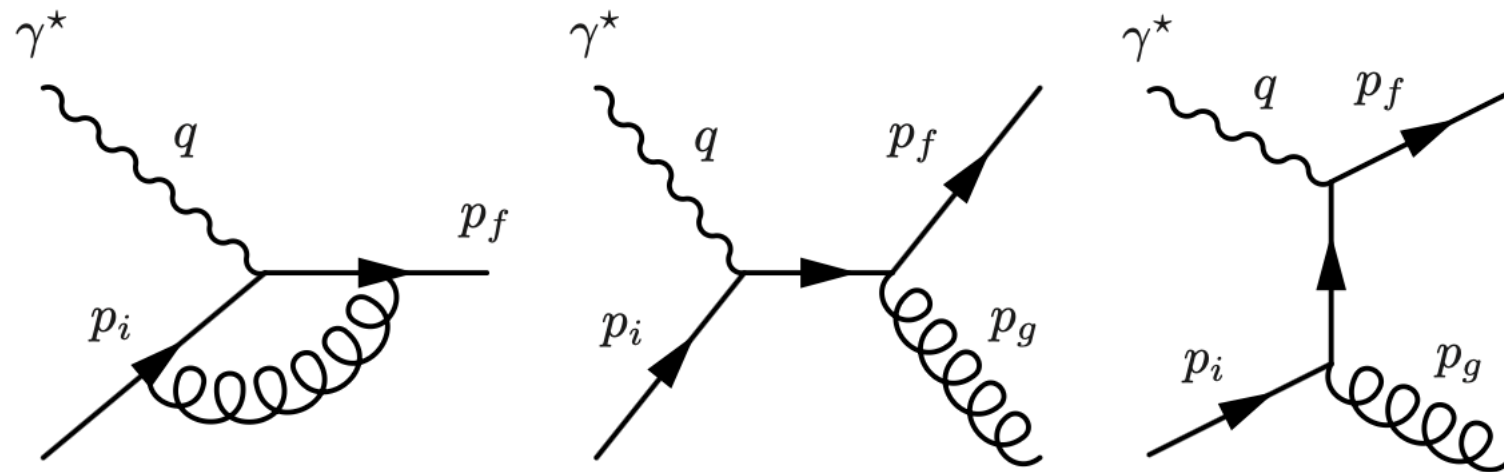
$$W_n = P \exp \left\{ i g_s n_\nu \int_0^t ds A^\nu(s n^\mu) \right\}$$

$$f_q(\xi) = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \frac{dt}{2\pi} e^{-it\xi(n \cdot P)} \langle P | \bar{\psi}_q(t n^\mu) \frac{\not{n}}{2} W_n \psi_q(0) | P \rangle.$$

Some non-trivial properties of PDFs

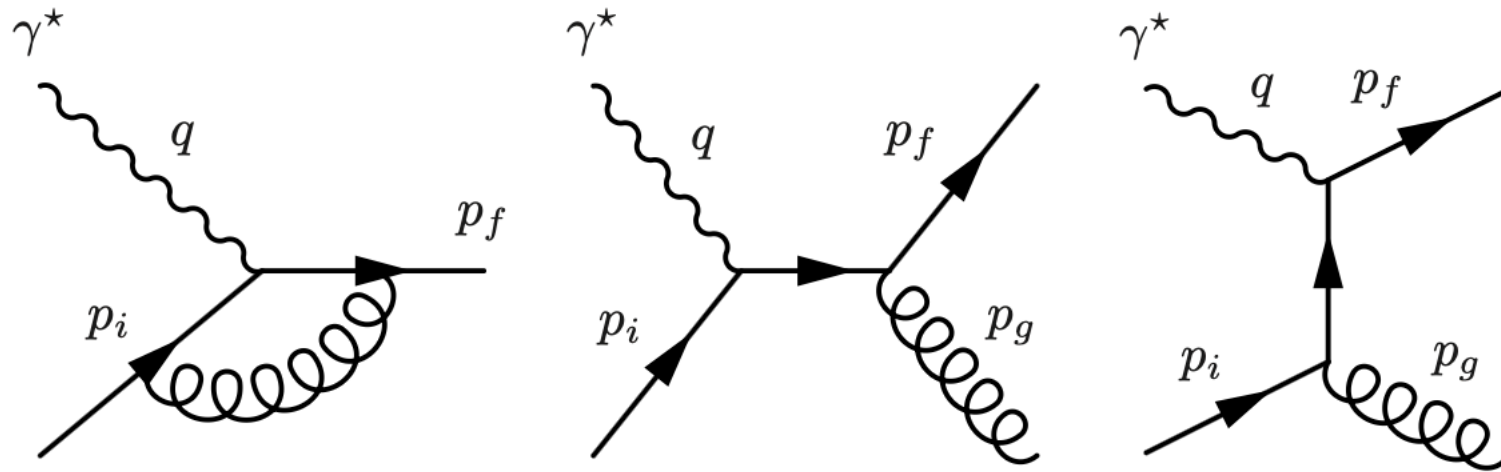


Some non-trivial properties of PDFs



$$\mu \frac{d}{d\mu} \begin{pmatrix} f_i(x, \mu) \\ f_g(x, \mu) \end{pmatrix} = \sum_j \frac{\alpha_s}{\pi} \int_x^1 \frac{d\xi}{\xi} \begin{pmatrix} P_{q_i q_j}(\frac{x}{\xi}) & P_{q_i g}(\frac{x}{\xi}) \\ P_{g q_j}(\frac{x}{\xi}) & P_{g g}(\frac{x}{\xi}) \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} f_j(\xi, \mu) \\ f_g(\xi, \mu) \end{pmatrix}$$

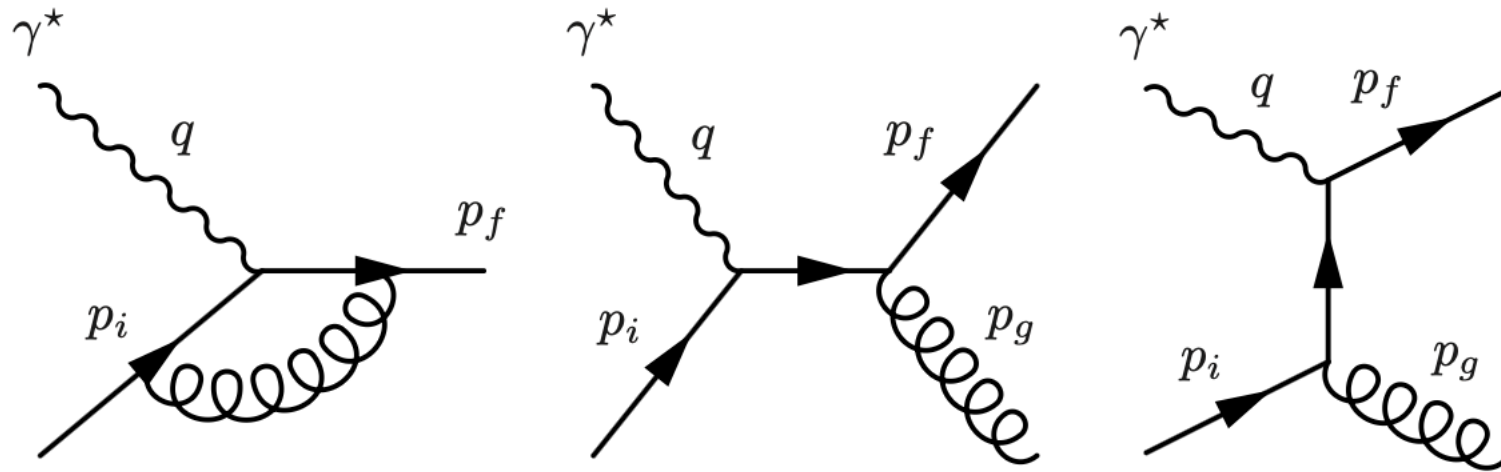
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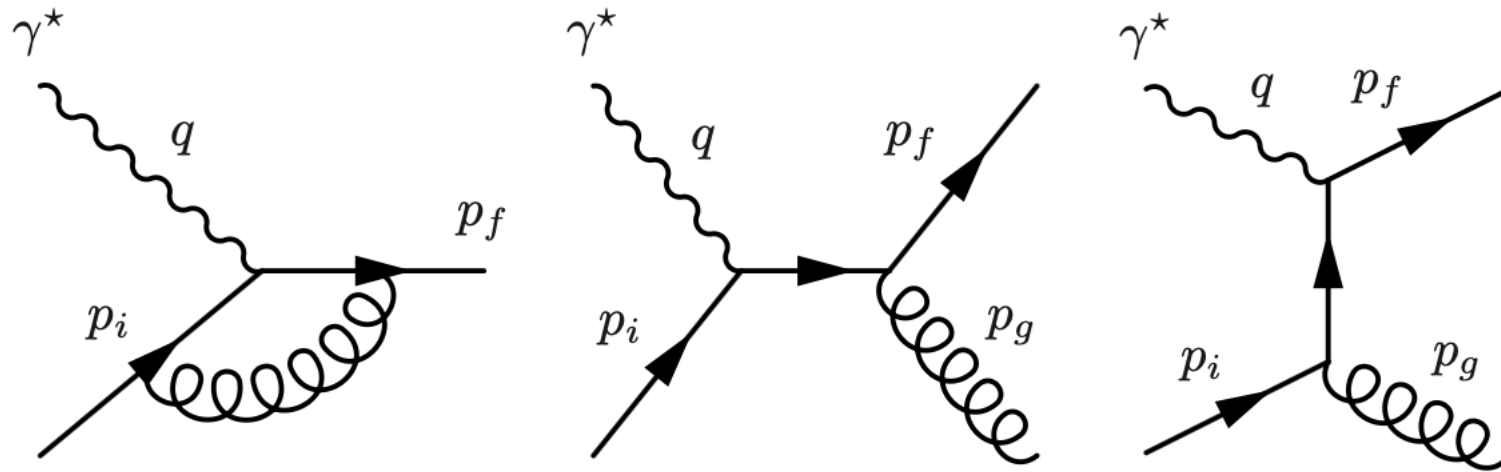


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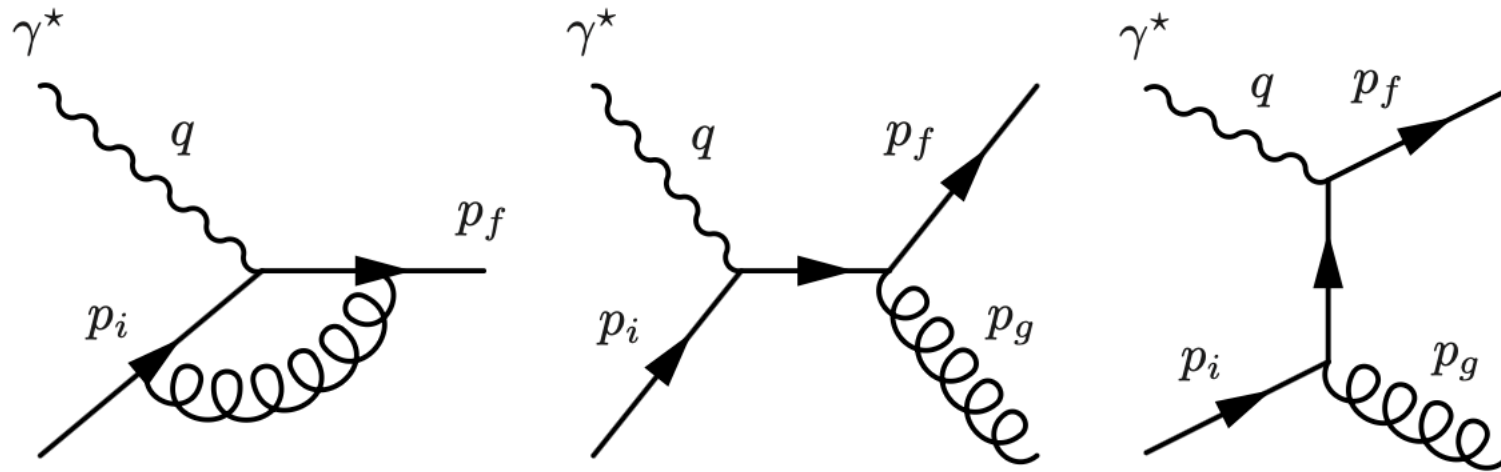
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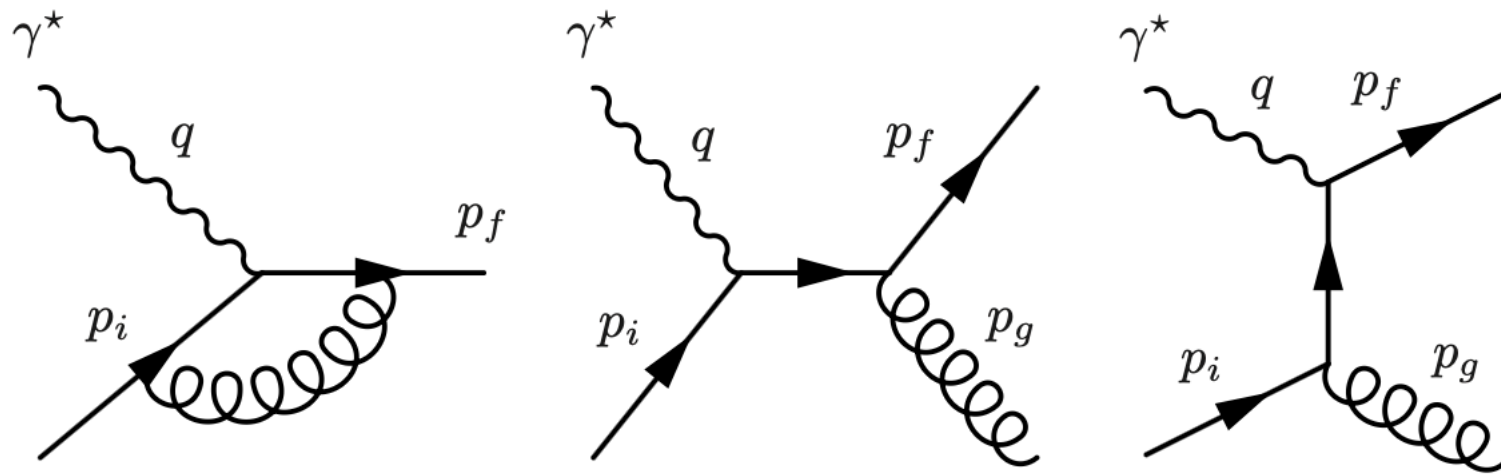
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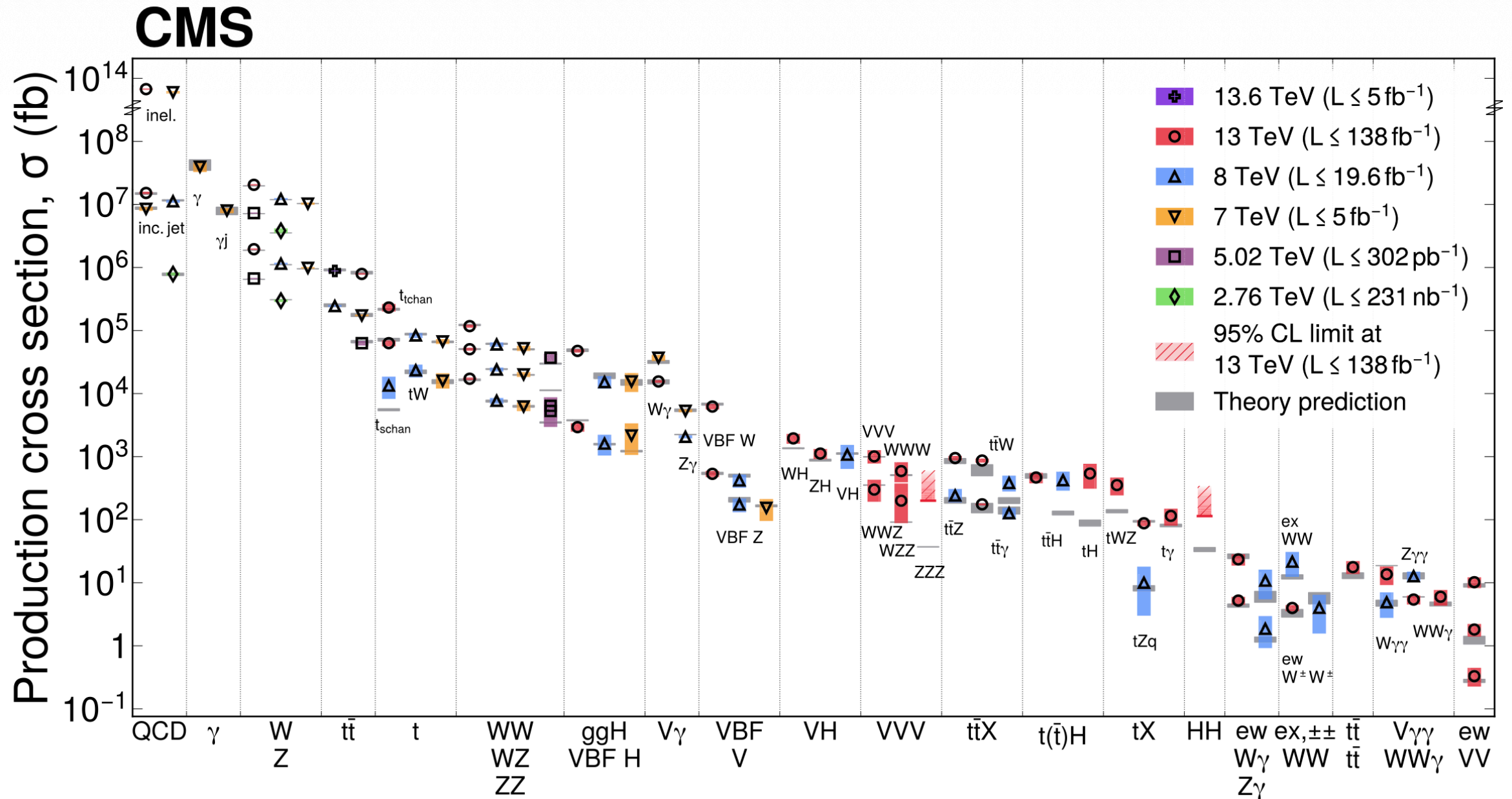
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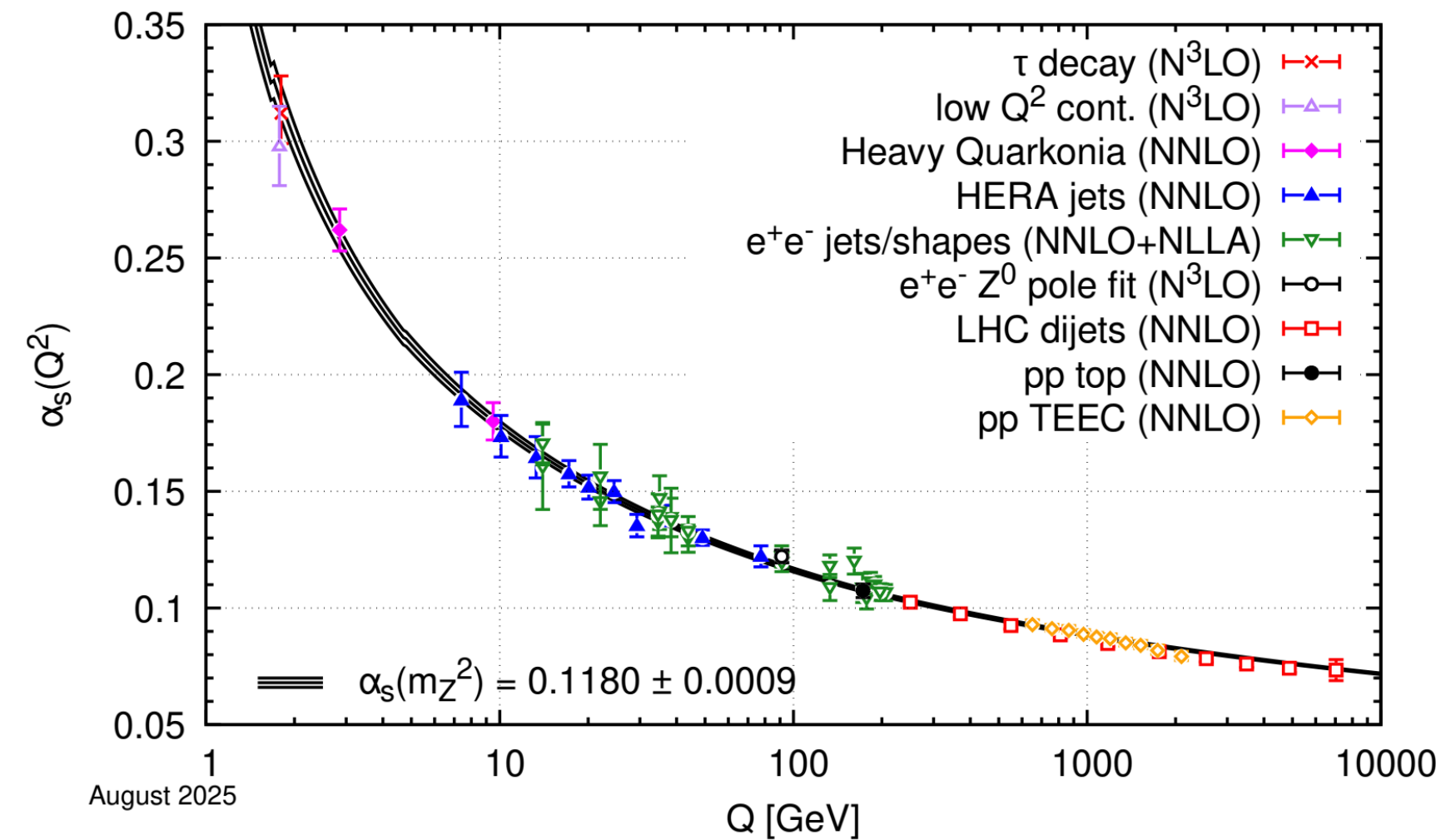
$$\beta_0 = \frac{11}{3} C_A - \frac{4}{3} T_F n_f.$$

The utility of PDF's

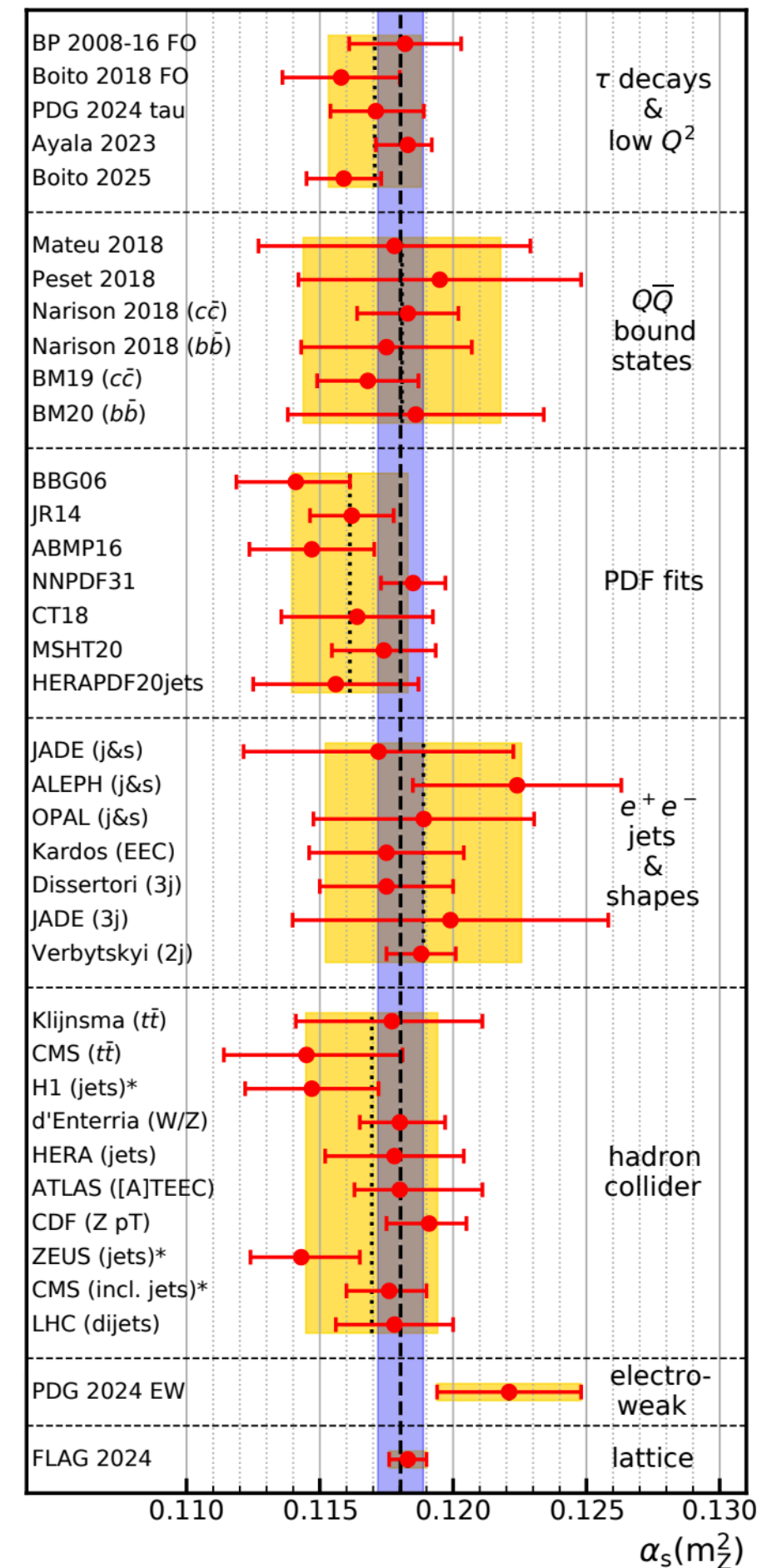


$$\sigma(h_1 h_2 \rightarrow W + X) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \alpha_s^n(\mu_R^2) \sum_{i,j} \int dx_1 dx_2 f_{i/h_1}(x_1, \mu_F^2) f_{j/h_2}(x_2, \mu_F^2) \times \hat{\sigma}_{ij \rightarrow W+X}^{(n)}(x_1 x_2 s, \mu_R^2, \mu_F^2) + \mathcal{O}\left(\frac{\Lambda^2}{m_W^4}\right),$$

What is required?



August 2025



August 2025

What does PDF fitting mean?

- choose a factorisation scheme (e.g. $\overline{\text{MS}}$), an order in perturbation theory (LO, NLO, NNLO) and a ‘starting scale’ Q_0 where pQCD applies (e.g. 1-2 GeV)
- parametrise the quark and gluon distributions at Q_0 , e.g.

$$f_i(x, Q_0^2) = A_i x^{a_i} [1 + b_i \sqrt{x} + c_i x] (1 - x)^{d_i}$$

- solve DGLAP equations to obtain the pdfs at any x and scale $Q > Q_0$; fit data for parameters $\{A_i, a_i, \dots, \alpha_s\}$
- approximate the exact solutions (e.g. interpolation grids, expansions in polynomials etc) for ease of use; thus the output ‘global fits’ are available ‘off the shelf’, e.g.

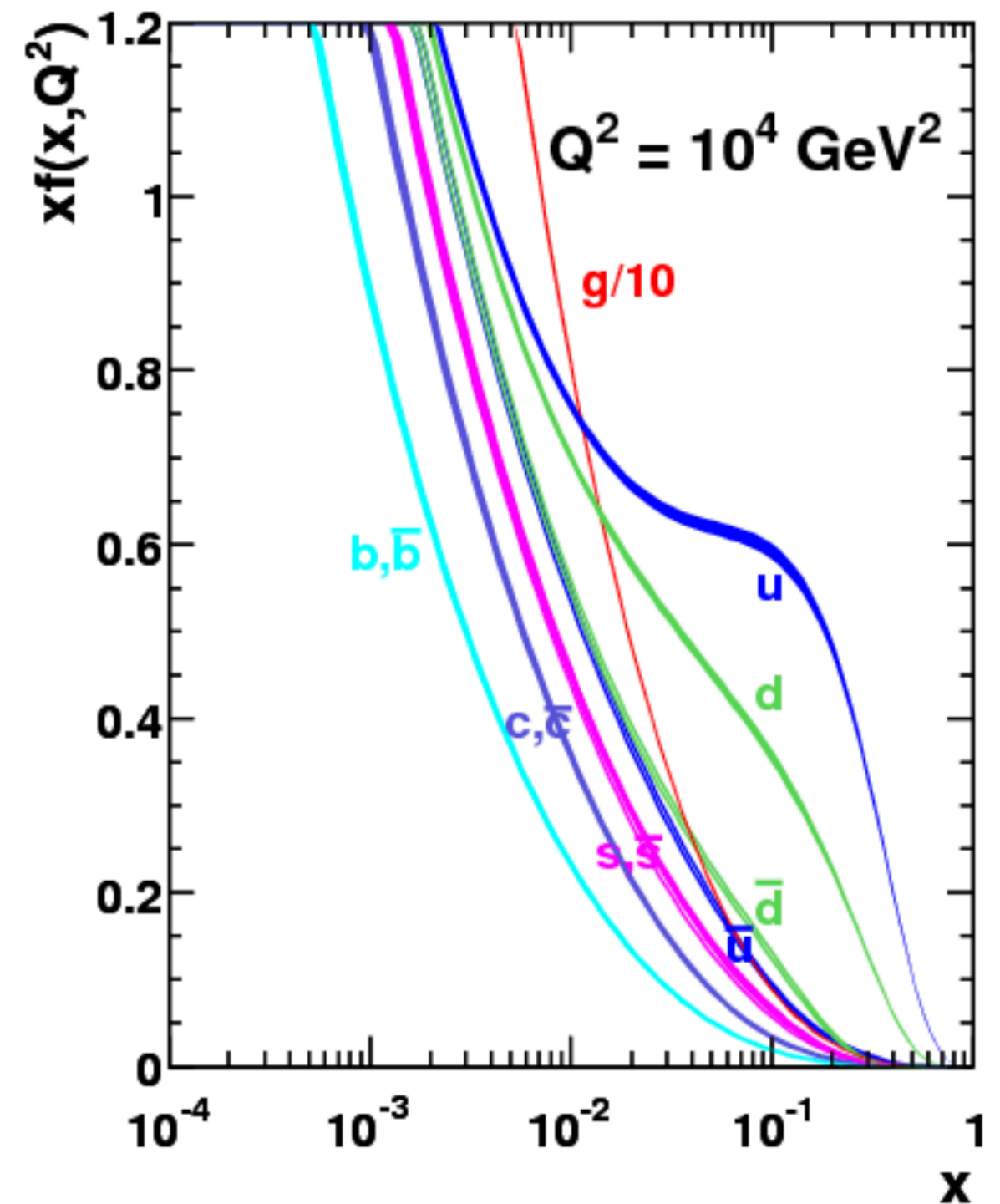
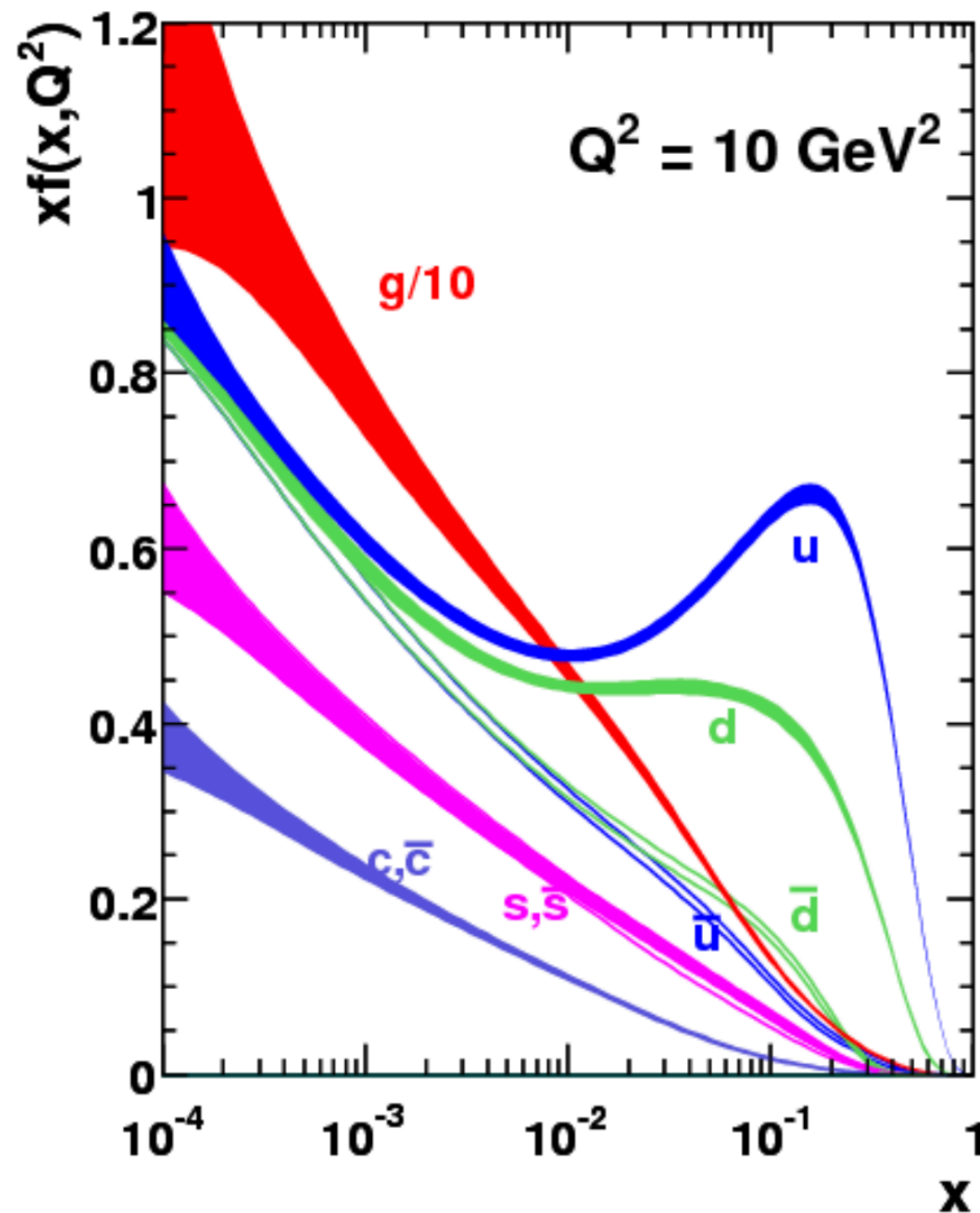
SUBROUTINE PDF (X , Q , U , UBAR , D , DBAR , ... , BBAR , GLU)

input |

output

How do the PDF's look like?

MSTW 2008 NLO PDFs (68% C.L.)



PDF with uncertainties

- most groups produce ‘pdfs with errors’
- typically, 20-40 ‘error’ sets based on a ‘best fit’ set to reflect 1σ variation of all the parameters* $\{A_i, a_i, \dots, \alpha_S\}$ inherent in the fit
- these reflect the uncertainties on the **data** used in the global fit (e.g. $\delta F_2 \approx 3\% \rightarrow \delta u \approx 3\%$)
- however, there are also systematic pdf uncertainties reflecting theoretical assumptions/prejudices in the way the global fit is set up and performed (see earlier slide)

* e.g. $f_i(x, Q_0^2) = A_i x^{a_i} [1 + b_i \sqrt{x} + c_i x] (1 - x)^{d_i}$

Global PDF fit parametrization

- Two distinct methodologies on the market to parameterising PDFs: **Neural Nets** (NNPDF) or **Explicit Parameterisation** (CT, MSHT).

- ♦ **MSHT20**: **52** free parameters in terms of Chebyshev polynomials.

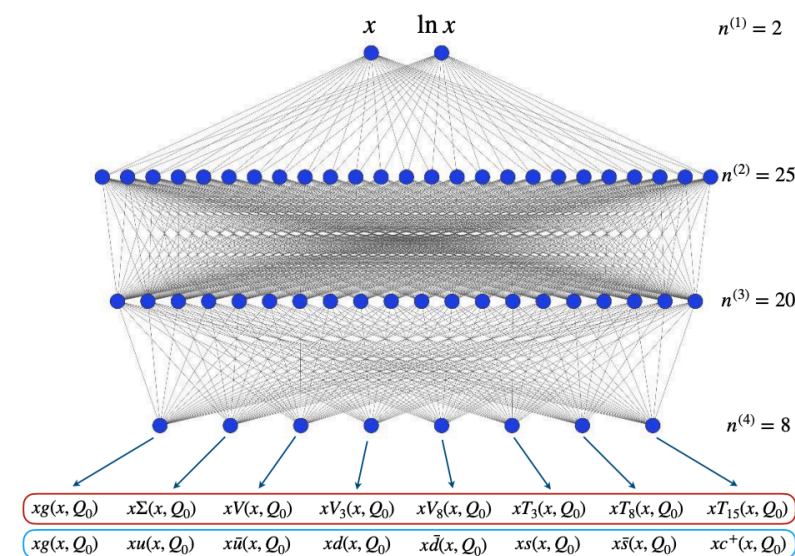
$$xf(x, Q_0) = Ax^\delta(1-x)^\eta \left(1 + \sum_{i=1}^6 a_i T_i(y(x)) \right),$$

- ♦ **CT18**: **29** free parameters in term of Bernstein polynomials. Variations considered and PDF uncertainty expanded to account for these.

- ♦ Less flexible in general - need to be sure flexible enough! Allows direct handle on uncertainties in Hessian framework.

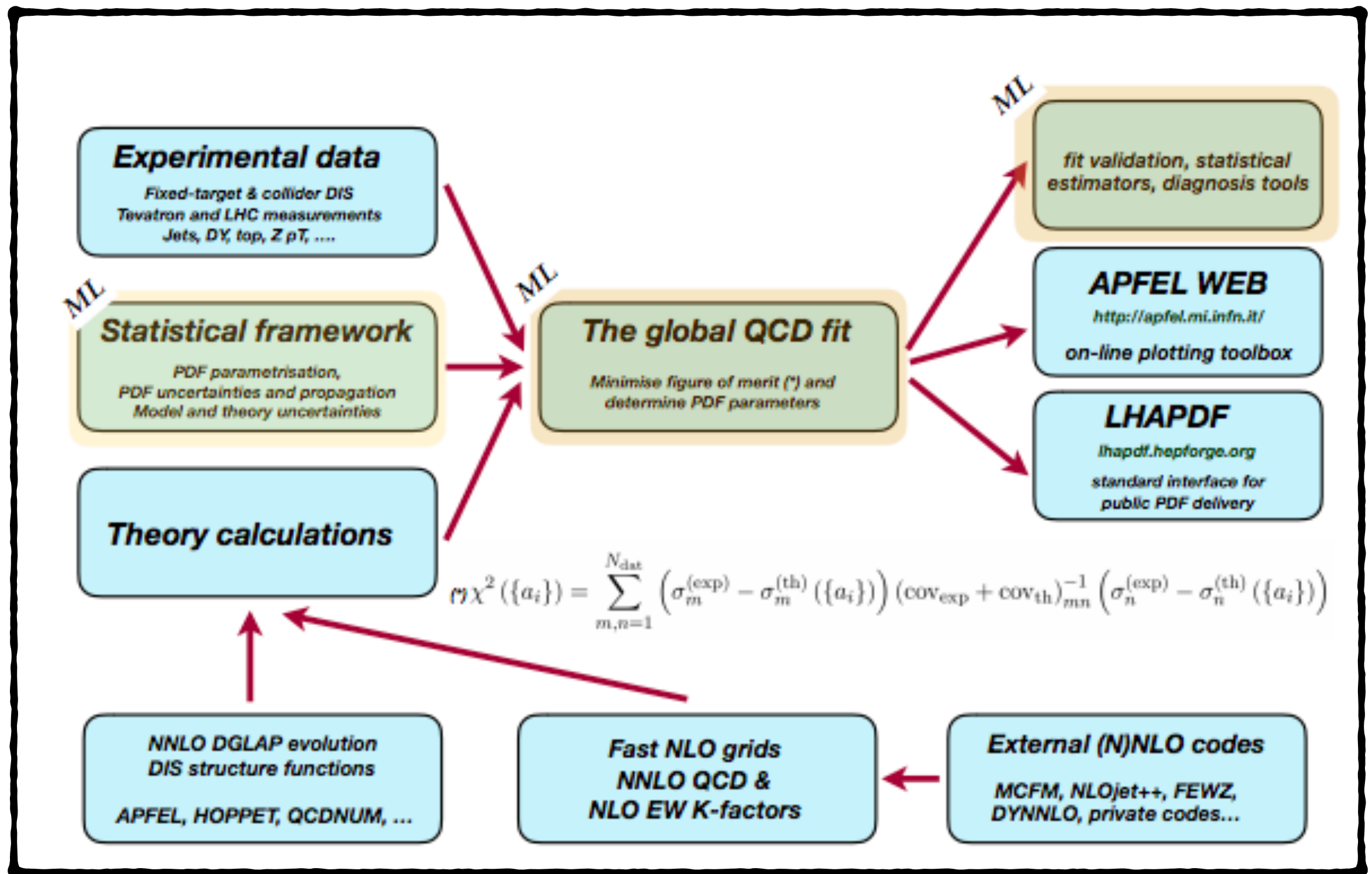
$$f_i(x, Q_0) : A_f x^{a_f} (1-x)^{b_f} \times \begin{cases} \rightarrow \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_{f,i} P_i(y(x)), & \text{CT, MSHT...} \\ \rightarrow \text{NN}_i(x) & \text{NNPDF} \end{cases}$$

- ★ **NNPDF4.0**: **763** free parameter Neural Net.



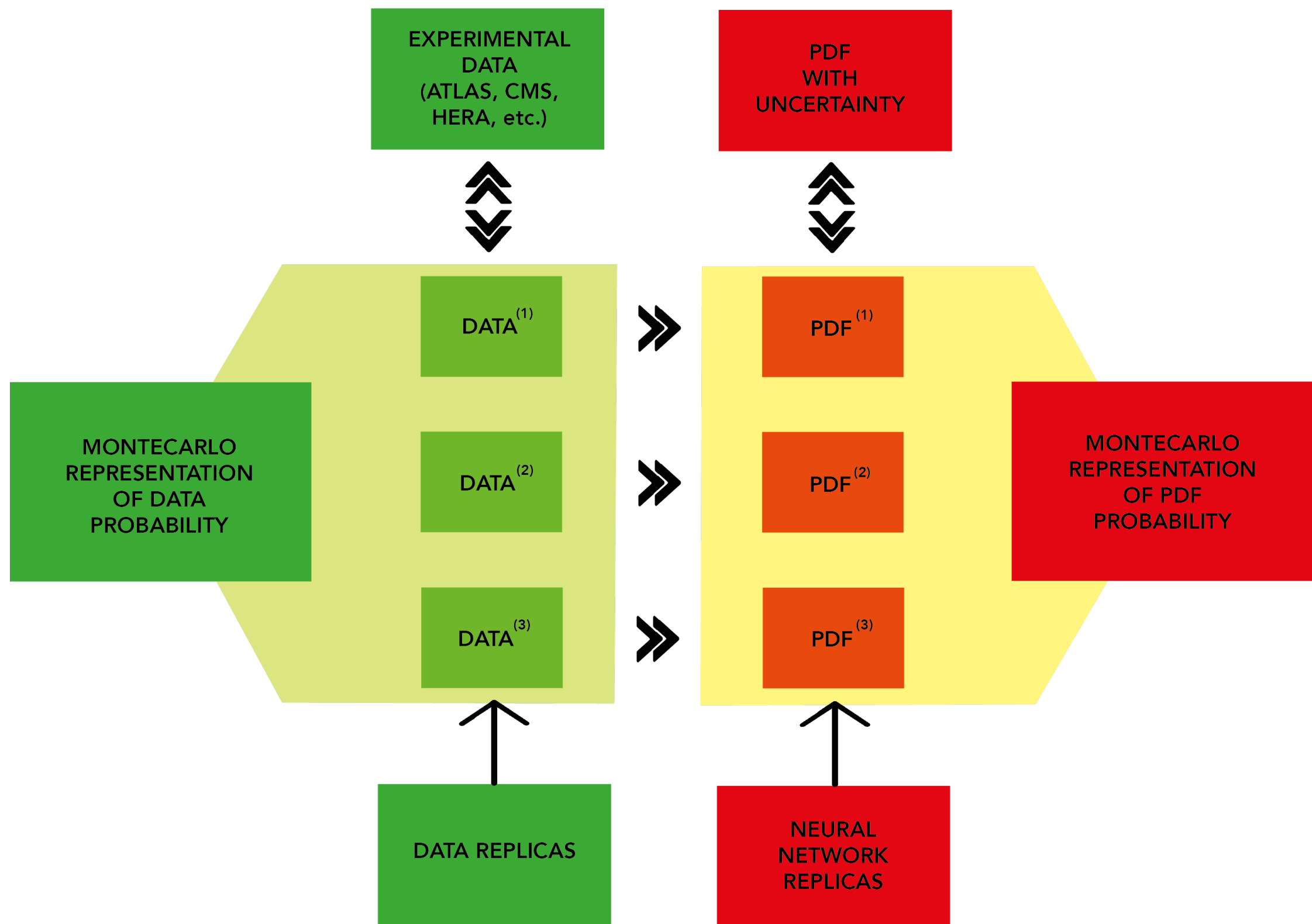
- ★ Increased flexibility, but needs robust optimisation + stopping (avoid over and under fitting).

Steps adapted with NNPDF - 1



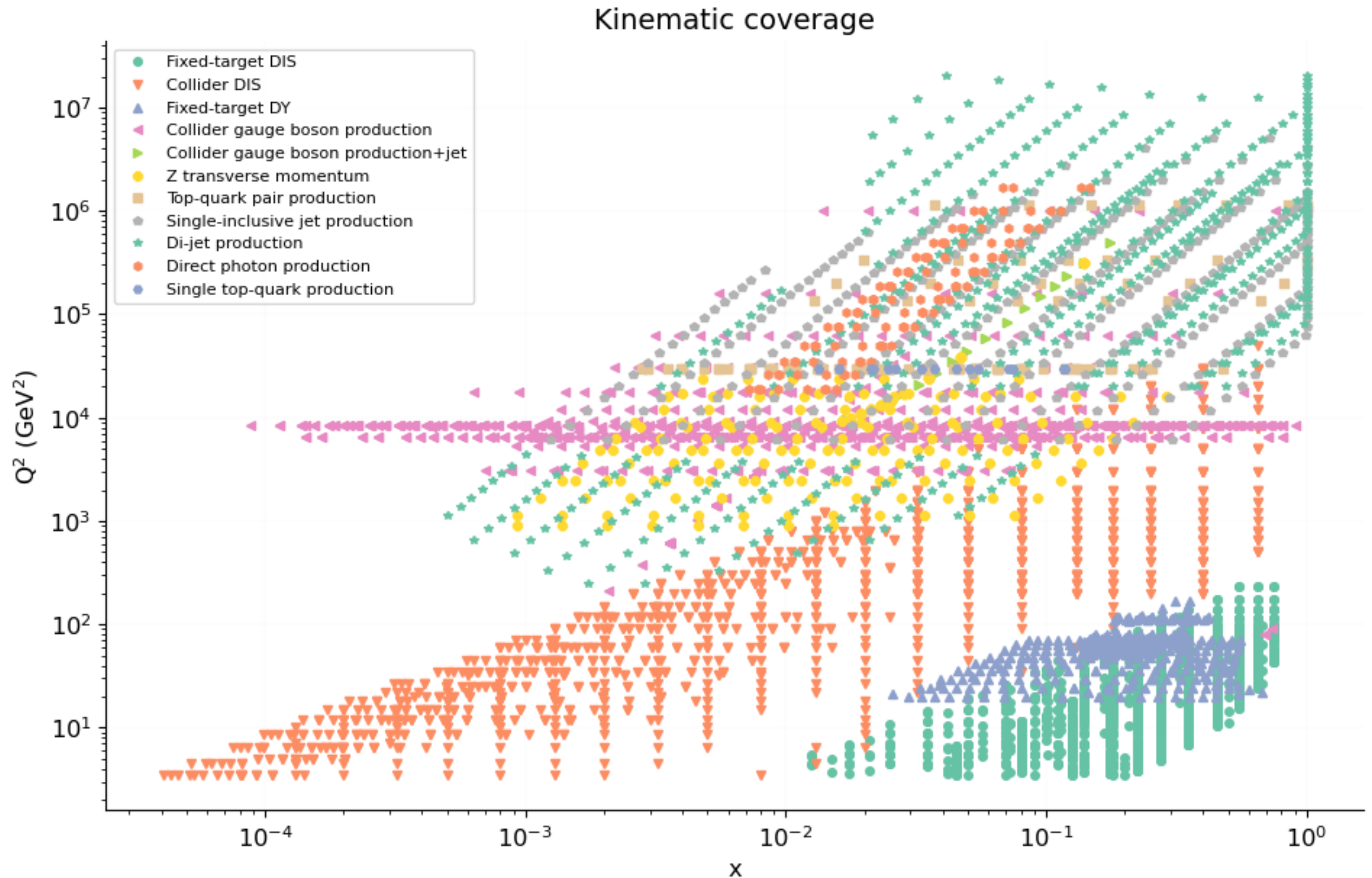
The NN based approach is cross verified with parametric fits.

Steps adapted with NNPDF - 2

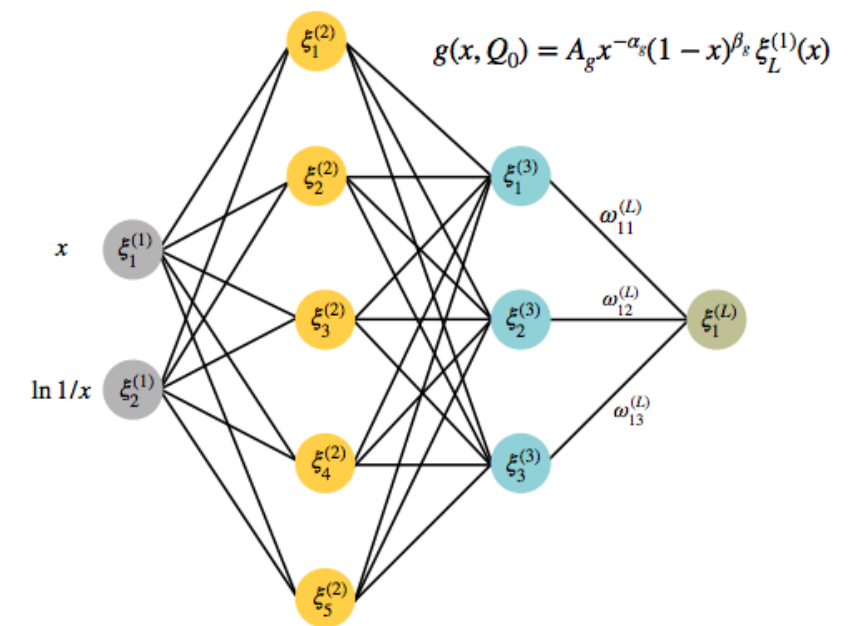
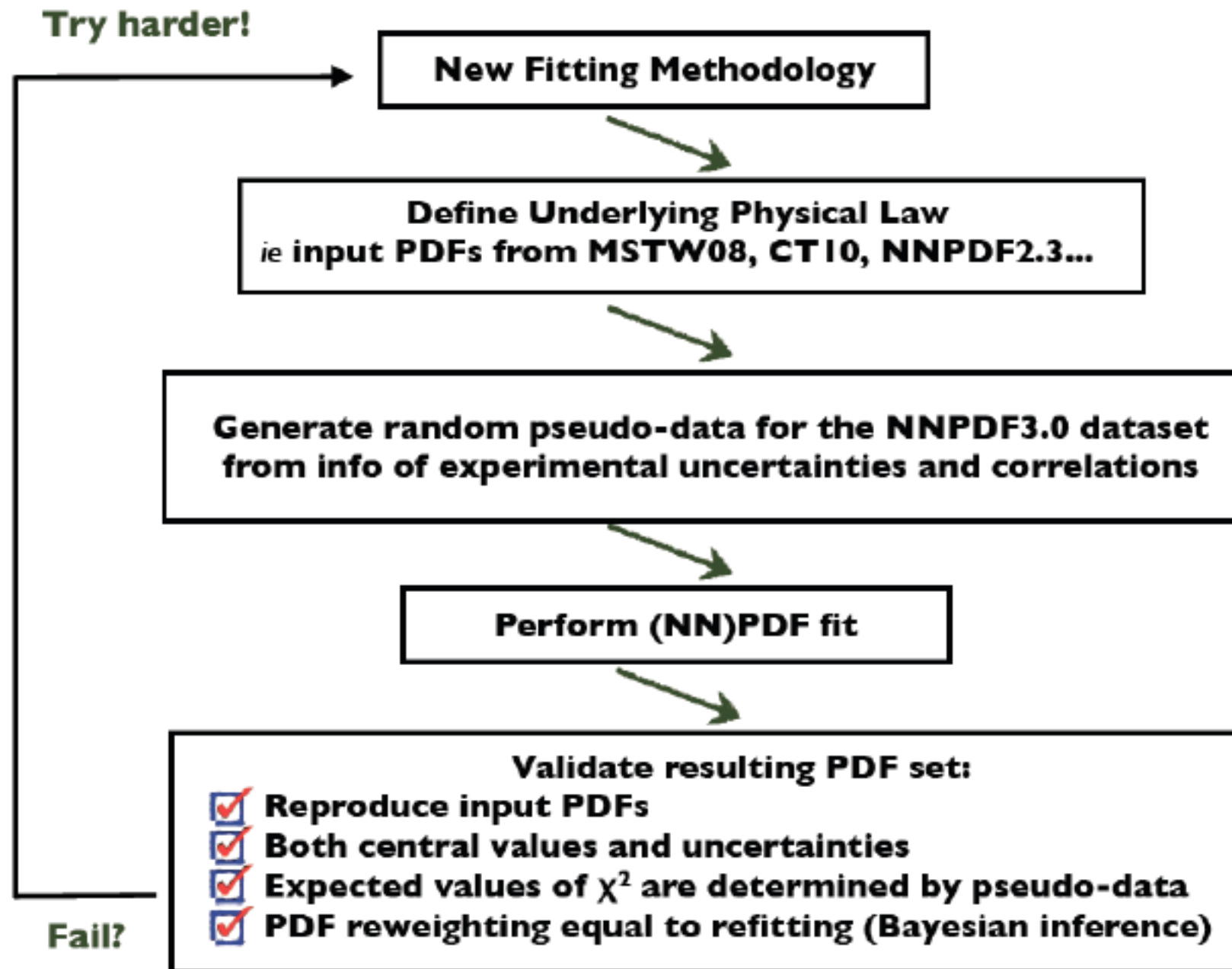


The data replicas are generated from experimental mean & variance.

Datasets in use



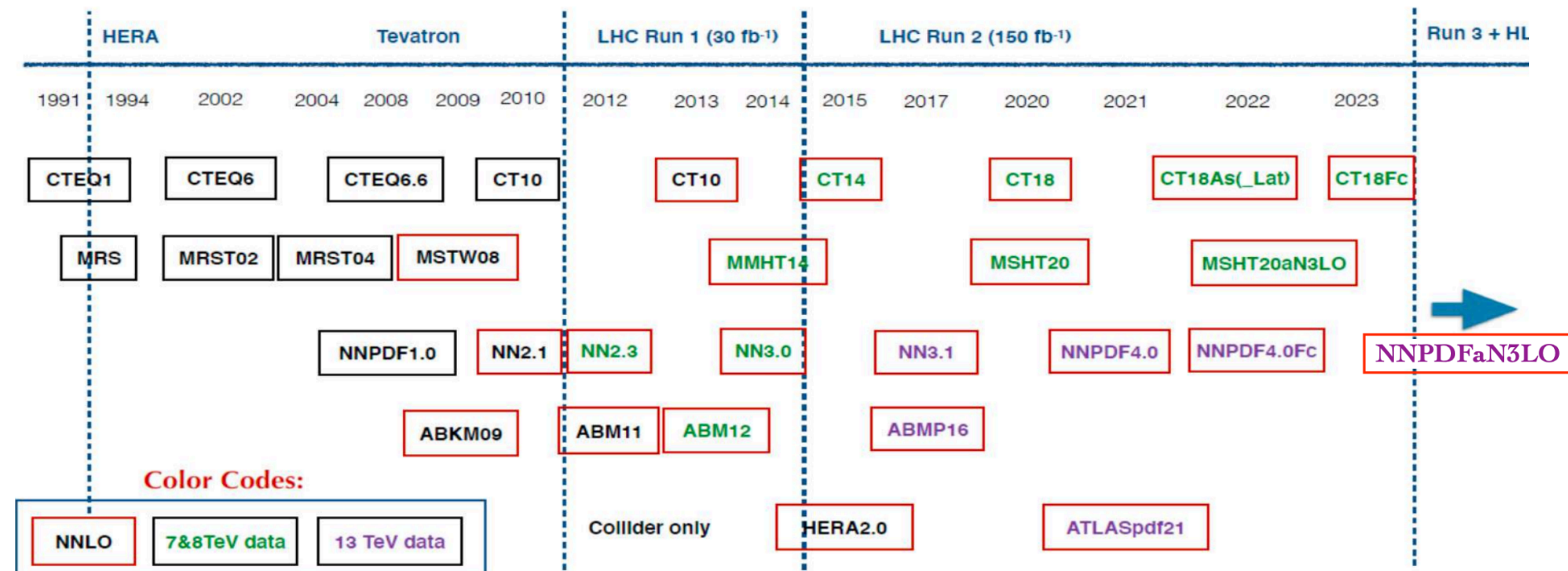
NNPDF optimization



Our current hold on PDF sets

- Multiple PDF analyses, with different methodologies and datasets.
- Major releases from 3 global fitters (**CT**, **MSHT**, **NNPDF**) ~ 2 or more years ago. But they have been busy:

- ★ Major push to approximate **N³LO** + theoretical uncertainties
- ★ **QED/EW** corrections standard
- ★ Many dedicated studies



Where do we stand?

