Asymmetric cortical extension shifts cleavage furrow position in *Drosophila* neuroblasts

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**ABSTRACT** The cytokinetic cleavage furrow is typically positioned symmetrically relative to the cortical cell boundaries, but it can also be asymmetric. The mechanisms that control furrow site specification have been intensively studied, but how polar cortex movements influence ultimate furrow position remains poorly understood. We measured the position of the apical and the basal cortex in asymmetrically dividing *Drosophila* neuroblasts and observed preferential displacement of the apical cortex that becomes the larger daughter cell during anaphase, effectively shifting the cleavage furrow toward the smaller daughter cell. Asymmetric cortical extension is correlated with the presence of cortical myosin II, which is polarized in neuroblasts. Loss of myosin II asymmetry by perturbing heterotrimeric G-protein signaling results in symmetric extension and equal-sized daughter cells. We propose a model in which contraction-driven asymmetric polar extension of the neuroblast cortex during anaphase contributes to asymmetric furrow position and daughter cell size.

**INTRODUCTION**

During development, asymmetric cell division is used repeatedly to generate daughter cells that differ in size and fate (Knoblich, 2008). Daughter cell size asymmetry, which may be important for maintaining progenitor growth potential (Jorgensen and Tyers, 2004), can result from asymmetric positioning of the cleavage furrow (Glotzer, 2004). The site on the cortex where the cleavage furrow forms can be specified by the mitotic spindle (Oliferenko et al., 2009; von Dassow, 2009). For example, in the *Caenorhabditis elegans* zygote the spindle is displaced posteriorly at the end of metaphase and the furrow forms accordingly, leading to large anterior and small posterior daughter cells (Albertson, 1984; Keating and White, 1998; Glotzer, 2004). However, the position of the furrow depends not only on the site of furrow selection, but also on the relationship between the site of spindle specification and its position relative to the poles of the cell. Thus it is possible that an asymmetric furrow could result from specification of a furrow site at the center of the cell followed by asymmetric movement of the cortex at the cell poles. The morphology changes during mitosis can be dramatic, prompting us to explore the role of polar cortical movements in furrow position.

The study of furrow positioning has focused on how the site on the cortex that will become the cleavage furrow is selected by the mitotic spindle (Glotzer, 2004; von Dassow, 2009). The spindle pathway for furrow site selection is initiated at the central spindle by the centralspindlin complex consisting of the kinesin Pavarotti (ZEN-4 in *C. elegans*), the RACGAP50 Tumbleweed (CYK-4 in *C. elegans*), and the RhoGEF Pebble (ECT-2 in *C. elegans*). At the cell cortex, centralspindlin activates a narrow band of GTP-loaded Rho GTPase (Bement et al., 2006), ultimately leading to recruitment and activation of actomyosin to initiate cleavage furrow constriction. Astral microtubules can sharpen the site of furrow selection by inhibiting activation of Rho at the poles.

In addition to the spindle-directed equatorial constriction that occurs during cleavage furrowing, other morphological changes can happen late in mitosis. Symmetrically dividing cells, such as cultured S2 cells, round up at the beginning of mitosis but elongate at the poles late in anaphase (Hickson et al., 2006; Kunda et al., 2008; Rosenblatt, 2008; Figure 1A). The elongation that results from polar extension (i.e., outward displacement of the cortex) allows the spindle to expand into the polar regions as
anaphase progresses (Rosenblatt et al., 2004; Hickson et al., 2006). The degree to which the polar cortex extends in cells that divide asymmetrically has been less characterized. Here, we use neuroblast asymmetric cell division as a model system for investigating the role of polar extension in cleavage furrow position and daughter cell size.

Drosophila neuroblasts are progenitors of the CNS, dividing to generate a larger apical cell that retains the neuroblast fate and a smaller basal ganglion mother cell (GMC) that assumes a differentiated fate (Doe, 2008; Knoblich, 2008). Neuroblasts divide rapidly, and daughter cell size asymmetry may be a mechanism for retaining sufficient resources to allow neuroblast self-renewal. The difference in fate of the two cells results from the polarization of fate determinants into separate apical and basal cortical domains that are precisely separated by the cleavage furrow (Knoblich, 2008). For example, the protein Miranda is localized to the basal cortex in metaphase and becomes segregated into the basal daughter cell as part of the machinery that confers GMC fate (Rolls et al., 2003; Lee et al., 2006; Atwood et al., 2007).

In addition to the spindle-directed pathway that controls targeting of furrow components such as centralspindlin to the equatorial cortex, neuroblasts possess a spindle-independent pathway that targets furrow components to the basal cortex (Cambernard et al., 2010). Shortly before the spindle directs recruitment to the equator, the spindle-independent pathway initiates contraction of the basal cortex (which becomes the GMC following abscission). A similar
polar domain containing myosin II has recently been identified in
C. elegans Q neuroblasts (Ou et al., 2010), which also divide to gen-
erate unequal-sized progeny, suggesting that the domain could be
part of a common mechanism fordaughter cell size asymmetry.
Although the "asymmetric contraction" pathway is active in both
Drosophila and C. elegans, and thus may be widely used in other
systems, little is known about its mechanism. In particular, we know
little about the cortical properties of the myosin-enriched (basal)
and myosin-depleted (apical) neuroblast cortex.

RESULTS
Neuroblasts elongate asymmetrically during anaphase
We imaged larval brain neuroblasts expressing a green fluorescent
protein (GFP) fusion to the cortical marker Discs Large (Dlg-GFP) or
myosin II regulatory light chain (Spaghetti squash in Drosophila;
Sqh-GFP) as a cortical marker to measure polar extension during
mitosis (where "polar extension" refers to displacement of the cor-
text at the poles, without regard to the underlying mechanism). In
contrast to the equal polar extension observed in symmetrically di-
viding cells (Rosenblatt et al., 2004; Hickson et al., 2006), neuroblast
cortical extension is highly asymmetric (Figure 1, B and C). The neu-
roblast apical cortex (associated with the larger daughter cell that
retains the neuroblast fate) extends significantly during anaphase,
whereas the basal cortex (associated with the smaller differentiated
cell) undergoes very little extension (Figure 1, B and D, and Supple-
mental Movie S1). On average, the apical pole extends over three-
fold more than the basal pole (2.0 vs. 0.6 μm). Thus polar extension
in neuroblasts in intact tissue is highly asymmetric.

To ensure that asymmetric cortical extension was not a conse-
quence of physical constraints imposed by the surrounding tissue,
we measured cortical extension in cultured embryonic neuroblasts.
These cells are dissociated from their surrounding tissue but con-
tinue to undergo asymmetric divisions (Siegrist and Doe, 2006). We
found that cultured embryonic neuroblasts underwent asymmetric
cortical extension similar to their counterparts in the larval brain
(Figure 1D and Suplemental Movie S1). We conclude that neuro-
blast asymmetric extension is an intrinsic property of the asymmetric
cell division. Thus anaphase cortical extension differs significantly
between symmetrically dividing cells and asymmetrically dividing
neuroblasts. Whereas symmetrically dividing cells expand equally at
both poles, neuroblast asymmetric divisions preferentially expand at
the pole that becomes the larger daughter cell.

Asymmetric cortical extension is not caused solely
by membrane synthesis
Neuroblast asymmetric cortical extension could occur by the pref-
erential creation of new membrane at the apical surface. In this
model the total surface area of the two daughter cells should be
significantly larger than the surface area of the neuroblast before
asymmetric cortical extension. To test this model, we measured the
total surface area of the cell using three-dimensional recon-
struction as a function of the cell cycle. We observed that the total
surface area of the two daughter cells at the completion of cytotki-
nesis is only ∼10% larger than the surface area of the metaphase
neuroblast (Figure 1E). In contrast, the difference in surface area of
the two daughter cells is much more extreme (Figure 1F). For ex-
ample, the surface area of a representative neuroblast at meta-
phase was 923 μm², and upon completion of cytokinesis the result-
ing neuroblast and GMC had surface areas of 828 and 163 μm²,
respectively. Thus preferential membrane synthesis at the apical
cortex is not sufficient to explain the asymmetric cortical extension
that we observe, although it could contribute to the effect. Note
that our measurements do not rule out a role for biased membrane
flux.

Asymmetric cortical extension is independent
of astral microtubules
To identify the cellular components responsible for cell-intrinsic
asymmetric polar extension, we first focused on a possible role for
the mitotic spindle, as it controls many of the morphological changes
that occur during mitosis (von Dassow, 2009). At the poles, astral
microtubules contact the cortex and could be responsible for con-
trolling the asymmetric polar extension observed in neuroblasts. For
example, asymmetric growth of the apical spindle could "push" the
apical cortex outward. We examined whether astral microtubules
are required for the difference in polar extension seen at the apical
and basal neuroblast cortex by examining sas4 mutants, which lack
astral microtubules (Basto et al., 2006). As shown in Figure 2A, the
cortical extension in sas4 occurs predominantly at the apical pole,
similar to wild-type neuroblasts. We conclude that astral microtu-
bules are not required for asymmetric cortical extension.

Cortical extension occurs at the onset of apical
myosin II depletion
We examined the localization of the cortical factor myosin II to de-
termine whether it could be important for polar extension in neuro-
blasts. In symmetrically dividing cells, myosin II is uniformly cortical
in prophase but becomes confined to the equatorial region by late
anaphase (Rosenblatt et al., 2004). Neuroblasts exhibit a similar pat-
tern of myosin II localization, except that myosin II is retained at the
basal cortex during anaphase along with Anillin and Pav, which are
normally restricted to the furrowing region (Cabernard et al., 2010).
In examining the localization of myosin II, we noticed a striking cor-
rrelation with the loss of Sqh-GFP signal at the apical cortex and
the onset of cortical extension, whereas myosin II remained at the basal
cortex where extension was limited (Figure 2, B–D). Preferential api-
clearing is not observed for the control proteins Dlg-GFP and
Moe-RFP (Supplemental Figure S2). Furthermore, asymmetric corti-
cal extension is not dependent on Sqh overexpression, as it also
occurs in sqh mutants expressing Sqh-GFP (Figure 2C). The reten-
tion of myosin II on the basal cortex, along with the limited cortical
extension at this location, prompted us to hypothesize that the basal
domain containing furrow components inhibits cortical extension,
limiting cortical extension to the apical cortex.

Asymmetric cortical extension requires a G-protein/Partner
of Insuteable—regulated basal furrow domain
As the onset of cortical extension is highly correlated with the loss
of myosin II, we hypothesized that the "basal furrow domain" contain-
ing myosin II, Anillin, and Pavarotti, might be responsible for the
preferential extension of the apical cortex. This domain is not regu-
lated by the spindle but is instead controlled by cortical polarity
factors such as Partner of Insuteable (Pins; Cabernard et al., 2010).
We examined cortical extension in symmetrically dividing pins mu-
tants to determine how loss of the basal myosin domain influences
extension. We confirmed that neuroblasts lacking Pins fail to form
the basal myosin domain (Cabernard et al., 2010; Figure 2E). We
find that these neuroblasts extend equally at both the apical and
basal poles during anaphase (Figure 2, F and G). We conclude that
Pins, which is required for the basal furrow domain, is also required
for asymmetric polar extension. The known role of Pins in regulating
asymmetric daughter cell size (Yu et al., 2000) suggests that these
three processes—the basal furrow domain, asymmetric polar elon-
gation, and daughter cell size asymmetry—are tightly coupled.
To further test the relationship between the basal furrow domain, asymmetric cortical elongation, and daughter cell size, we examined another genetic background in which neuroblasts divide symmetrically. Overexpression of the Pins-binding Gαi protein induces a high rate of symmetric divisions (Yu et al., 2000; Schaefer et al., 2001; Nipper et al., 2007). We imaged larval brain neuroblasts expressing Gαi under the control of the neuroblast-specific worniu-GAL4 driver to determine whether elevated Gαi levels concurrently alter the basal furrow domain and cortical extension prior to symmetric cell division. We found that the basal furrow domain failed to form in approximately half the neuroblasts, and neuroblasts lacking the domain expanded equally at both poles during anaphase (Figure 3, A–C and E, and Supplemental Movie S3). To determine whether the effect on the basal cortical intensity at anaphase start (determined as in C). Equatorial contraction indicates the time point at which the initiation of furrow ingression was observed. (E) Kymograph of Sqh-GFP in pins<sup>P89</sup> mutant neuroblasts. Brackets denote polar extension during anaphase. (F) Quantification of anaphase cortical extension in pins<sup>P89</sup> mutant neuroblasts. Error bars, 1 SD. (G) Time dependence of cortical myosin signal and cortical position for pins<sup>P89</sup> mutant neuroblasts. Annotations as in D.

**Asymmetric cortical extension requires alignment of the spindle with the basal furrow domain**

We examined cortical extension in mud mutants to examine the consequence of decoupling the spindle-directed and basal furrows on polar extension. Mud orients the spindle with the polarity axis, and loss of mud function leads to randomization of spindle position (Guan et al., 2000; Bowman et al., 2006; Izumi et al., 2006; Siller et al., 2006). In mud mutant neuroblasts with misaligned spindles, structures resembling polar bodies form at the basal furrow domain prior to equatorial contraction from the spindle-directed furrow (Cabernard et al., 2010). We examined cortical extension in this context to determine whether the basal furrow domain must be aligned with the spindle for asymmetric cortical extension. We found that although the cortex opposite the basal furrow domain begins to expand, subsequent spindle-induced equatorial furrowing overcomes this extension and ultimately leads to symmetric extension at the spindle poles and daughter cell size (Figure 3F). Thus coupling of both spindle-independent and Pins are required for the basal furrow domain and asymmetric polar extension and daughter cell size.
spindle-dependent contractile pathways is required for asymmetric polar extension.

Asymmetric cortical extension does not require spindle-directed equatorial contraction

Our results suggest that the basal furrow domain is required for asymmetric cortical extension. The basal domain could bias cortical extension toward the apical pole in at least two possible ways. The basal domain could increase the rigidity of the basal cortex, thereby focusing cortical extension induced by spindle-induced equatorial contraction to the apical cortex. Alternatively, the basal domain itself could be responsible for extension at the apical cortex. To distinguish between these models, we treated neuroblasts with Colcemid to depolymerize microtubules, thereby inhibiting formation of the spindle and the spindle-directed furrow (Brinkley et al., 1967; Cabernard et al., 2010). To allow these neuroblasts treated with Colcemid to pass through the spindle checkpoint without a spindle, the Colcemid treatments were done in a rod background (Basto et al., 2000; Chan et al., 2000; Savoian et al., 2000; Cabernard et al., 2010). The presence of the basal furrow domain alone is sufficient for asymmetric cortical extension, as anaphase cortical extension is indistinguishable from wild-type neuroblasts (Figure 4A and B). Thus we conclude that spindle-directed equatorial contraction is not required to produce asymmetric cortical extension.

DISCUSSION

Morphological changes that occur during mitosis involve both positive and negative signals that emanate from the mitotic spindle. For example, in C. elegans the first division yields unequal-sized daughter cells (Albertson, 1984; Keating and White, 1998; Glotzer, 2004). At the metaphase-to-anaphase transition the spindle midzone is displaced toward the posterior end of the zygote and is believed to positively influence furrow formations, whereas astral microtubules repress furrowing at the poles (Albertson, 1984; Keating and White, 1998; Glotzer, 2004). Thus asymmetric positioning of the spindle before anaphase ultimately leads to a displaced furrow and unequal-sized daughter cells. In neuroblasts, however, the spindle is symmetrically positioned before anaphase, suggesting that other mechanisms are responsible for neuroblast asymmetric division (Cai et al., 2003; Kaltschmidt et al., 2000; Siller and Doe, 2009). Recently, components normally restricted to the cleavage furrow were found to be localized to the neuroblast basal cortex (Cabernard et al., 2010). We found that this “basal furrow domain” restricts cortical extension that normally happens at both poles during the division of many small, symmetrically dividing cells. This restriction of cortical extension limits the size of the future basal cell while allowing the future apical cell to expand during anaphase (Figure 4C).

The contribution of asymmetric cortical extension to daughter cell size explains why asl and cnn mutants, which lack astral microtubules, divide asymmetrically although they have a symmetric spindle (Bonaccorsi et al., 1998; Basto et al., 2006). We argue that the asymmetric spindle poles (large apical pole, small basal pole) observed in wild-type neuroblasts late in the cell cycle (Fuse et al., 2003) are a consequence, not a cause, of asymmetric cortical extension. Lack of basal cortical extension prevents the spindle from growing at this pole, whereas it is free to grow at the apical pole. In
All mutant chromosomes were balanced over CyO actin:GFP, TM3 actin:GFP, Ser, e, or TM6B Tb. We used Oregon R as wild type and the following mutant chromosomes and fly strains: Sqh:GFP (Royou et al., 2002), worGal4 (Albertson and Doe, 2003), UAS-Cherry:Jupiter (Cabernard and Doe, 2009), worGal4 and UAS-Dlg:GFP (Koh et al., 1999), UAS-Gxi and UAS-GαiQ205L (Schafer et al., 2001; kindly provided by J.A. Knoblich), mud (Guan et al., 2000), pins (Yu et al., 2000), FRT82B Sas-4 (Basto et al., 2006), rod (Basto et al., 2000), UAS-His2A-mRFP (Emery et al., 2005), UAS-moe-RFP (Schwabe et al., 2005), and UAS-Jupiter-GFP (Karpova et al., 2006). All crosses were performed at 25°C except UAS-Gxi crosses, which were performed at room temperature and transferred to 30°C approximately 8 h prior to imaging.

**Cell culture**

Drosophila S2 cells were maintained at room temperature in Schneider’s medium (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (Sigma-Aldrich). Cells were transiently transfected with pMT-Zeus-Cherry with Effectene (Qiagen, Valencia, CA) according to the manufacturer’s instructions, and expression was induced with 0.5 M copper sulfate 20 h prior to imaging. Immediately before imaging, cells were resuspended in Schneider’s medium supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum.

**In vitro neuroblast culture**

Primary cell cultures were made from embryos aged 6–8 h as previously described (Grosskortenhaus et al., 2005). They were then prepared for live imaging by resuspension in Chan and Gehrings balanced saline solution supplemented with 2% FBS.

**Live imaging**

Second or third larval brains were prepared for imaging as previously described (Siller et al., 2005). Five to nine Z steps were collected at 1- to 2-μm intervals every 6–12 s. Live imaging was performed using a spinning disk confocal microscope equipped with a Hamamatsu EM-CCD camera (Hamamatsu, Japan) using a 63 × 1.4 numerical aperture oil immersion objective. Pixel intensity measurements were performed using ImageJ (National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD). A linear photobleaching correction was added, using the intensity of a region outside the cell as a reference. Cortical extension was determined by measuring the position of the cell edges at the poles with a section from the middle of the cell as determined by examination of sections throughout the cell.

Colcemid treatment was performed on the strain +; worGal4, UAS-Cherry:Jupiter, Sqh:GFP, rod (Cabernard et al., 2010), using a final concentration of 0.1 μM/ml, with live imaging beginning immediately after treatment.

Three-dimensional reconstructions for surface area analysis were done using the BoneJ plugin for ImageJ with a sampling value of 2 (Doubé et al., 2010).
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