# Chapter 1

# Introduction:

# Groucho – A Multifunctional Regulator of Drosophila Development

## Introduction

The Groucho/TLE (Gro) family of of corepressors play crucial roles in development throughout metazoans. Groucho, the sole *Drosophila melanogaster* member of this protein family, was first discovered in the context of a slight hypomorphic allele which resulted in the formation of extra supraorbital bristles reminiscent of the bushy eyebrows of Groucho Marx {Lindsley, 1968 #3055}. Subsequent research on Gro in *Drosophila* has served to characterize this factor’s central importance to developmental gene regulation in response to a variety of developmental programs and signaling pathways. As a corepressor, Groucho has no documented direct ability to bind DNA in a sequence-specific manner, instead relying on recruitment to genomic loci through interaction with a diverse array of transcriptional repressors. Groucho is essential to the correct patterning and development of *Drosophila* and is required for viability. Similar roles have been identified in vertebrates {Paroush, 1994 #172}.

Groucho consists of five domains, two of which are highly conserved {Turki-Judeh, 2012 #2385}. The N-terminal Q (glutamine rich) domain is one of the two conserved domains. The Q-domain is responsible for the formation of tetramers, and possibly higher-order oligomers of Gro {Chen, 1998 #267}. Additionally, the Q-domain mediates a subset of interactions with transcriptional repressors, including the TCF/Lef family of proteins {Brantjes, 2001 #3058}. Assays involving Grg3, a mouse homolog of Gro, on *in vitro* chromatin arrays showed that Q-domain mediated tetramerization is not required for recruitment of Gro to chromatin, but is required for subsequent aggregation of chromatinized fragments. However, assays in cell culture revealed that oligomerization-deficient mutants of Gro exhibited similar binding peak widths as wild-type Gro {Kaul, 2014 #2204}. The structure of the Q-domain of TLE1, a human homologue of Gro, was recently solved, revealing the domain to form a dimer of dimers {Chodaparambil, 2014 #3057}. Though this explains the observation that *Drosophila* Gro forms a tetramer, the current model of oligomerization fails to account for the observation of higher-order oligomerization.

The WD-domain is the second conserved domain of Gro and comprises the C-terminus of the protein. The WD-domain consists of a seven-bladed β-propeller domain, and is responsible for the majority of Groucho interactions with DNA-binding repressors. The majority of these interactions are mediated through binding of the WD-domain to short peptide motifs {Jennings, 2006 #3059}, the most well-characterized of which are the Engrailed homology domain (Eh1) and WRPW motifs.

The central region of Groucho is divided into three domains, the GP, CcN, and SP domains. The GP domain binds to a histone deacetylase (HDAC1/Rpd3), which is involved with some but not all Groucho-repressive activity {Chen, 1999 #3061}. The CcN domain is involved in Gorucho regulation, containing multiple Ck2 and Cdc2 phosphorylation sites {Nuthall, 2002 #3062}. The SP domain contains multiple sites phosphorylated in response to MAPK signaling, resulting in down-regulation of Groucho activity via nuclear export {Hasson, 2005 #3064}. This down-regulation of Groucho repressive activity can persist following relief of signaling, which has been hypothesized to function as a cellular memory, ensuring gene activation even after signaling has weakened or ceased {Helman, 2011 #2938}. There is evidence that the central regions of Groucho are intrinsically disordered {Turki-Judeh, 2012 #2966}, which has emerged as a common strategy among eukaryotic protein domains participating in extensive protein-protein interactions, exposing signaling motifs, and/or accepting posttranslational modifications {Dunker, 2008 #3091}.

Groucho interacts with numerous transcriptional repressors, and through these interactions, is capable of participating in a diverse variety of developmental patterning determinations, as well as the reception and interpretation of multiple signaling pathways. *Drosophila* possesses one Groucho gene, which is maternally expressed and deposited into the embryo during oogenesis, ensuring Groucho availability and activity from the very onset of embryonic development {Paroush, 1994 #3090}. In vertebrates, Gro/TLE family proteins play similar roles in development. The genomes of humans and mouse both contain four Gro/TLE family proteins, TLE1-4 and Grg1-4, respectively {Stifani, 1992 #3065} {Mallo, 1993 #3066}. These Gro family members serve non-redundant roles during vertebrate development. An additional, truncated member, AES, is expressed in humans, where it associates with full-length TLE to down-regulate the cellular response to Wnt signaling {Itatani, 2015 #123}. In humans, Gro/TLE is involved in such processes as organ development, adipogenesis, neurogenesis, hematopoiesis, and osteogenesis {Bajoghli, 2005 #3068} {Villanueva, 2011 #1659} {Javed, 2000 #3070} {Metzger, 2012 #2956}.

In *Drosophila,* Groucho’s roles in signaling pathway response are well documented. The factor plays a role in Ras/MAPK, Notch, Decapentapletic (dpp), and Wingless/Wnt signaling. Groucho activity is down-regulated via the Ras/MAPK pathway in response to signals iniitated at EGFR, FGFR, and Torso receptors {Hasson, 2005 #3064}. This relief of Groucho-mediated repression is critical to the cellular response to RTK signaling and is thought to precipate a cellular memory, where Groucho attenuation is thought to persist after loss of signaling {Cinnamon, 2008 #242}.

Under the absence of Notch signaling, Groucho represses E(spl) complex genes through interactions with Hairy, which is itself associated with Su(H) {Delidakis, 1991 #3082}. Upon activation of Notch signaling, Notch displaces Hairy binding at Su(H) sites, relieving Groucho repression and initiating expression of E(spl) genes. Groucho then interacts with E(spl) to repress a number of proneural genes {Preiss, 1988 #3083} {Wurmbach, 1999 #3084}.

Groucho is also critical to signaling via Decapentaplegic (dpp), a *Drosophila* TGF-β homolog whose diffusion over long distances is essential to patterning during embryogenesis and later during appendage development {Upadhyai, 2013 #2339}. The dpp morphogen is expressed dorsally in the embryo and is critical to the specification of the presumptive mesoderm in that portion of the embryo {Ferguson, 1992 #3088}. Groucho, through interaction with Dorsal, is essential in repressing ventral expression of *dpp* {Schwyter, 1995 #3038}*.* In the absence of dppsignaling, Brinker (brk) represses a subset of dpp target genes through two independent repressive mechanisms, one involving dCtBP (a short-range corepressor), and the other involving Gro {Hasson, 2001 #3033}. Upon activation of dpp signaling, Brinker becomes repressed by Schnurri in dorsal regions of the embryo, while continuing to be expressed in ventrolateral regions {Marty, 2000 #3089}.

Finally, Groucho participates in Wingless/Wnt signaling, through interactions with Tcf/Lef family proteins to regulate cell-fate choice {Cavallo, 1998 #3071} {Roose, 1999 #3086}. In unstimulated cells, Groucho assists in repressing Tcf/Lef target genes through interactions with the Q-domain {Clevers, 2006 #3085}. Upon activation, nuclear beta-catenin (Armadillo) concentration increases, which binds to Tcf, releasing Groucho and leading to gene activation. In this context, Groucho is essential in guarding against spurious activation of Wnt target genes in unstimulated cells {Daniels, 2005 #3087}.

It is primarily through the the spatially and temporally precise mediation of gene transcription in response to these extracellular signals that Groucho becomes fundamental to embryonic patterning. Many early embryonic patterning effectors can be divided into dorsal-ventral and anterior-posterior programs, though these processes are complex and heavily interconnected {Jaeger, 2012 #3103}, requiring the coordinated regulation of dozens of transcriptional activators, repressors, and co-regulators {Mannervik, 2014 #2280}. Definition of the the dorsal-ventral axis, which is critical to germ layer development, is the maternally-contributed gradient of nuclear Dorsal along this axis {Roth, 1989 #1112}. On the ventral side of the embryo, high concentrations of nuclear Dorsal initiate transcriptional programs designating the mesoderm {Gonzalez-Crespo, 1993 #3043}. In ventrolateral regions, modest Dorsal concentrations contribute to a neuroectodermal fate {Ip, 1992 #3042}. The strength, spacing, grouping geometry, and distribution of adjacent binding sites are cruicial to the correct interpretation of the Dorsal gradient {Zeitlinger, 2007 #3025}. Groucho is critical for repression of a subset of Dorsal-target genes, and is one method by which Dorsal is switched from an activator to a repressor {Dubnicoff, 1997 #2366}.

Groucho is also crucial to specification of the anterior-posterior axis. Early in development, the transcriptional groundwork is laid for the segmentation of the adult fly via multiple gradients, beginning with Bicoid and Nanos, which specifes the expression of multiple gap genes, which in turn give rise to a striped pattern of pair rule genes, which then specify the expression of multiple segment polarity genes {Levine, 2008 #3104}. Groucho is critical to the viable specification of this axis through multiple direct interactions with transcription factors, including engrailed, a segment polarity gene. Groucho is involved in terminal patterning of the embryo through interaction with Capicua {Ajuria, 2011 #2947}, a process regulated by Ras/MAPK signaling {Chen, 2009 #3073} {Paroush, 1997 #3074}. Groucho activity is not limited to the embryo, as it participates in patterning of the imaginal discs during larval morphogenesis through the control of dpp signaling {Winkler, 2010 #2964}.

While a great deal is known about the developmental participation and interactors of Gro, the mechanism (or mechanisms) by which Gro achieves repression have remained elusive. Multiple models have been proposed to explain Groucho’s ability to fully and reversibly initiate and maintain short- and long-range repression, yet a fully picture, able to account for observations of Groucho behavior has not emerged.

**Figure 1-1. Groucho interacts with numerous transcriptional co-regulators.** Groucho interacting partners are involved in diverse and interconnected aspects of *Drosophila* development, including anterior-posterior and dorsal-ventral patterning and the interpretation of extra-cellular signaling. These interactions are largely mediated through interactions between short peptide motifs and the Gro WD-domain. Some factors, notably Dorsal, require the participation of additional factors to facilitate Gro recruitment.

**Fig. 1-1**

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| **Interacting Protein** | **Biological Role** | **Citation** |
| Capicua | RTK signaling; embryonic terminal gene expression | {Jimenez, 2000 #3093} |
| Huckebein | Embryonic terminal gene expression | {Goldstein, 1999 #3094} |
| Hairy | Segmentation/ Anterior-posterior patterning | {Paroush, 1994 #3090} |
| Runt | Segmentation/ Anterior-posterior patterning | {Aronson, 1997 #3095} |
| Even-skipped | Segmentation/ Anterior-posterior patterning | {Kobayashi, 2001 #3076} |
| Odd-skipped | Segmentation/ Anterior-posterior patterning | {Goldstein, 2005 #3096} |
| Sloppy-paired 1 | Segmentation/ Anterior-posterior patterning | {Andrioli, 2004 #3097} |
| Engrailed | Segmentation/ Anterior-posterior patterning | {Jimenez, 1997 #3075} |
| Knirps | Segmentation/ Anterior-posterior patterning | {Payankaulam, 2009 #2955} |
| Goosecoid | Segmentation/ Anterior-posterior patterning | {Jimenez, 1999 #3092} |
| Dorsal | Dorsal-ventral patterning | {Dubnicoff, 1997 #2366} |
| Brinker | Dorsal-ventral patterning | {Zhang, 2001 #3099} |
| Ind | Dorsal-ventral patterning | {Von Ohlen, 2007 #3101} |
| Vnd | Dorsal-ventral patterning | {Cowden, 2003 #3102} |
| Su(H) | Notch signaling | {Barolo, 2002 #3072} |

## References