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## **Nuclear Envelope Influences On Genome Organization**

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**Key words:** Nuclear envelope (NE), nuclear periphery, inner nuclear membrane (INM), chromatin organization, chromosome positioning, gene regulation.

**Abbreviations used:** nuclear envelope (NE), nuclear envelope transmembrane protein (NET), inner nuclear membrane (INM), lamin B-receptor (LBR), lamina-associated polypeptide 2 (LAP2).

**Abstract**

The nuclear periphery is a specialized environment in the nucleus that contributes to genome organization and correspondingly to gene regulation. Mammalian chromosomes and certain genes occupy defined positions within the nucleus that are heritable and tissue-specific. Genes located at the nuclear periphery tend to be inactive and this negative regulation can be reversed when they are released from the periphery in certain differentiation systems. Recent work using specially designed systems has shown that genes can be artificially tethered to the nuclear periphery by an affinity mechanism. The next important step will be to identify the endogenous nuclear envelope and chromatin proteins that participate in affinity-driven nuclear envelope tethering and determine how they are regulated.

## **Introduction**

Chromosomes in mammalian cells tend to occupy defined positions within the 3D-framework of the nucleus. The Bickmore laboratory first demonstrated this by showing that in fibroblasts chromosome 18 tends to be located at the nuclear periphery while chromosome 19 tends to be internal [1]. Subsequently the Misteli laboratory found that the chromosomes involved in tissue-specific tumor translocations were positioned adjacent to one another during interphase in those particular tissues [2]; thus different cell types favor certain chromosome groupings. The Bridger laboratory has further shown that chromosome positioning with respect to the nuclear periphery is altered in aging cells [3]. Peripheral localization of DNA is generally thought to correlate with silencing because i) gene poor chromosomes tend to be at the periphery [1], ii) most dense chromatin tends to be at the periphery as assessed by electron microscopy, and iii) much late-replicating DNA is at the periphery [4].

Only a portion of a chromosome located at the periphery actually interacts with the nuclear envelope (NE), the double membrane system that defines the nuclear compartment. In lymphocytes, gene poor regions and inactive genes of chromosome 7 are proximal to the NE compared to active genes that are more internal [5]. Additionally, internal chromosomes can extend loops outward that reach to the NE [6]. Thus chromosomes adopt a wide range of conformations and interactions. The logical purpose of combining chromosome-positioning patterns with such chromosome plasticity would be that it plays a role in gene regulation.

## **Specific Gene Regulation from the Nuclear Periphery**

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Several individual genes move to and from the nuclear periphery correlating with their activation state. The immunoglobulin heavy chain *IgH* locus remains inactive at the NE in early lymphocyte lineages but moves to the nuclear interior concomitant with the initiation of V(D)J recombination [7]. Similarly the *Mash1* (*Ascl1*) gene moves away from the NE when it needs to be activated for neural development [8]. *Mash1* contains heterochromatic epigenetic marks and replicates late when at the periphery and these switch to active chromatin marks and early replication when the locus is in the interior, but it is unclear whether the change in chromatin marks drives the movement or vice-versa. The cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator (*CFTR*) gene, however, could be induced to move away from the NE upon treatment with trichostatin A, which promotes histone hyperacetylation [9]. Although this suggests that alterations in epigenetic marks can drive the movement of genes to and from the NE, *CFTR* is internal and active in some cell types and treatment of these cells with a transcriptional repressor that inhibits RNA polymerase promoted movement of *CFTR* to the periphery [9]. Thus the question of whether transcription factors or local epigenetic marks dominate in gene positioning remains unresolved. In either case, to position a gene at the NE these transcription factors or epigenetic marks must interact with proteins of the NE.

The protein complement of the NE includes an intermediate filament lamin polymer that directly underlies the membrane [10] and hundreds of transmembrane proteins, many of which are unique to the inner nuclear membrane (INM) [11]. Many different aspects of genome regulation have been linked to the NE: lamins and several INM proteins can influence replication [12,13], transcription [14,15], and signaling cascades [16,17]. Specific interactions have been shown between several INM proteins and both negative and positive transcriptional regulators [15,18,19]. Thus,

though the predominant effects of NE tethering discussed above were in gene silencing, NE localization can also direct gene activation: the *PLP*, *ERBB-2*, *COL1A1* and *IFN- $\gamma$*  genes all become activated at the nuclear periphery when respectively glial, breast, bone and immune cells differentiate [20-23].

### **An Affinity Mechanism for NE Tethering of Genes**

Three elegant recent studies used different artificial systems to inducibly tether genes to the NE [24-26]. In all systems, bacterial lac operator (lacO) sequences were inserted into the mammalian genome in different loci that were not typically close to the NE. The lac repressor (lacI) binds lacO sequences with high specificity and affinity; so these cells were transfected with lacI fused to a reporter alone or fused to the reporter plus the NE proteins lamin B1 [25], LAP2 $\beta$  [24], or emerin [26]. Lamin B1 is part of the intermediate filament polymer under the NE while LAP2 $\beta$  and emerin are NE transmembrane proteins predominantly at the INM. Expression of the simple lacI-reporter fusion had no effect on the position of the lacO locus within the 3-dimensional organization of the nucleus; however when lacI was also fused to the NE proteins, the locus moved to the nuclear periphery [24-26] (Figure 1).

Movement to the periphery was not observed during interphase: instead repositioning of the locus required the cells to go through mitosis (Figure 1). While chromosomes undergo moderate shape changes during interphase, they generally do not move significantly in bulk. In contrast, chromosomes undergo dramatic movements in mitosis. At the end of mitosis, many INM proteins bind to mitotic chromosomes and this helps drive NE reassembly as these proteins are embedded in mitotic vesicles [27,28]. Thus, before chromosome decondensation, affinity binding of the lacO array with lacI-NE proteins would bring the lacO-integrated chromosome

in contact with the reforming nuclear membrane. Indeed, though the lacO array is only a small part of the chromosome, tethering just this region to the NE was able to pull the entire chromosome to the periphery [24]. This is a very important observation as it shows that minimal directed high affinity interactions have the potential to drastically change the nuclear landscape. It is also noteworthy that with the advent of the high affinity interaction, other presumably weaker interactions were lost as chromosome 4 moved away from the periphery when chromosome 11 containing lacO repeats moved to the periphery [24]. Thus genes/ chromosomes compete for place based on the strength of affinity interactions. The lacO-lacI binding is disrupted by IPTG (isopropyl  $\beta$ -D-1-thiogalactopyranoside), allowing the heritability of lacO repositioning to be assessed. Apparently the affinity interaction must be maintained because treatment of cells with IPTG resulted in loss of peripheral localization.

Transcription from a marker gene inserted in the lacO array was reduced when the array was at the periphery [24,26]. Some adjacent genes were also inhibited while others were unaffected, indicating that additional factors direct the mechanism of inhibition [24]. One such factor is the ability of the INM proteins that were fused to lacI to recruit specific transcriptional repressors germ cell-less, Btf and Lmo7, that each has target gene specificity and cell type specificity [15,18,19]. Thus gene repression may be an indirect effect from groupings of transcriptional repressors at the periphery. Disrupting peripheral tethering with IPTG restored the lost transcriptional activity [24,26].

## **Identification of Endogenous Proteins Involved in Affinity Tethering of Chromatin**

## Nuclear Envelope Epigenetics

An affinity mechanism likely also functions in the tethering of endogenous genes and chromosomes to the periphery. Knockdown of lamin B1 results in release of chromosome 18 from the periphery in human cells [29]. Though disruption of lamins may yield pleiotropic effects, this result makes some sense because the volume of a whole chromosome would predispose that its anchor was stable (e.g. an intermediate filament polymer), a predominant protein (~3,000,000 copies of lamins per average mammalian nucleus; [30]), and that the chromosome partner was abundant (lamins bind histones H2A/H2B [31]). Nonetheless, something must be missing from this model because lamin B1 is distributed uniformly throughout the nuclear periphery in nearly all cell types and histones H2A/H2B are distributed throughout all chromosomes. Thus this fails to explain why specifically chromosome 18 is at the periphery while 19 tends to the interior. The postulate of a missing partner is supported by observations using a set of three different antibodies to different regions of lamin B1. In various tissues different combinations of two antibodies recognized lamin B1, but the epitope recognized by the third antibody was masked. Thus, distinct regions of lamin B1 were bound to different partners in the various tissues [32]. This suggests that either chromosome 18 has histone modifications that increase its affinity for lamin B1 in the cell types where it is at the periphery or other as yet unidentified proteins are involved. The only other NE proteins shown to tether chromatin are the SUN proteins that recruit telomeres [33,34].

An affinity mechanism directing the tethering of specific chromatin to the NE in certain cell types would predispose that a unique combination of a NE protein and a specific chromatin protein occur in that cell type. For example, a type of chromatin such as epigenetically modified heterochromatin might have a higher affinity for a NE protein than euchromatin and this NE protein would be expressed highest in cell types



that have heterochromatin at the periphery. Individual genes associated with a particular differentiation pathway could also have specific affinity for the NE. For example the Msx1 protein interacts with the histone H1 variant H1b, which is in several muscle-specific genes and this interaction keeps these genes repressed until the commencement of myogenesis [35]. If either Msx1 or the H1b histone variant or the complex they form has significantly higher affinity for a specific NE protein, which is expressed differentially, this could direct specific tethering of that gene to the periphery.

The fundamentals of this hypothesis are supported by several examples of chromatin interactions with NE proteins. In addition to the lamin interaction with core histones mentioned above, several INM proteins have been found to interact with specific chromatin proteins and/ or post-translational modifications on chromatin proteins. The lamin B receptor (LBR) interacts specifically with heterochromatin protein 1 (HP1)  $\alpha$  and  $\gamma$  [36] and histones H3/H4 [37]. Moreover LBR was found to pull down chromatin with a strong preference for silencing modifications [38]. Conversely, HP1 appears to have a higher affinity for NE proteins compared to other parts of the nucleus because microinjected HP1 $\alpha$  accumulated at the periphery before eventually being distributed to other nuclear locations [39]. Barrier-to-autointegration factor (BAF) is a protein that modifies the condensed state of chromatin by crosslinking DNA/histones [40]. BAF binds the mammalian INM proteins LAP2 $\beta$ , emerin and MAN1 [41-43].

Thus far, no endogenous NE proteins or chromatin proteins have been found that are involved in tethering of individual genes to the periphery. To identify additional NE proteins involved in tethering chromatin to the NE we have engaged a visual screen with lacO insertions and lacI reporters, but without fusing the reporter to

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a NE protein. Instead roughly 40 INM proteins identified in a proteomic study of the NE [44] were overexpressed in cells that carried lacO insertions in different areas of the genome and the position of the locus was assayed for proximity to the NE. Several proteins were identified that when upregulated in the NE resulted in preferential accumulation of the marked chromatin region at the NE (NZ, W. Bickmore and ECS, unpublished observations). Future studies will focus on determining if these proteins have higher affinities for specific genes and/ or chromatin proteins.

### **Summary**

Twelve different NE proteins have now been linked to human disease including lamins, INM proteins and associated soluble proteins [45,46]. NE diseases affect many different tissues including muscle, brain, fat cells, heart, skin, bone, immune cells, and also include the aging disease progeria. A favored hypothesis for how NE proteins can cause disease is alteration of gene expression due to physical disruption of regulatory contacts at the NE. This hypothesis is supported by observations that the myoD and Rb pathways are misregulated in NE-related muscular dystrophies [47,48], and that cells from patients with different NE diseases have altered distribution of dense peripheral chromatin [49-51]. Thus, determining the proteins involved in affinity tethering of specific chromatin to the NE has significant implications for the understanding of human disease.

Much work also still needs to be done to clarify whether the nuclear envelope silences genes (i) by sterically reducing accessibility to factors, (ii) by inactivating transcriptional regulators through sequestration, (iii) by bringing genes into an already silenced environment rich with enzymes that propagate inactive chromatin, or (iv) by recruiting already silenced chromatin. To fully understand genome regulation and

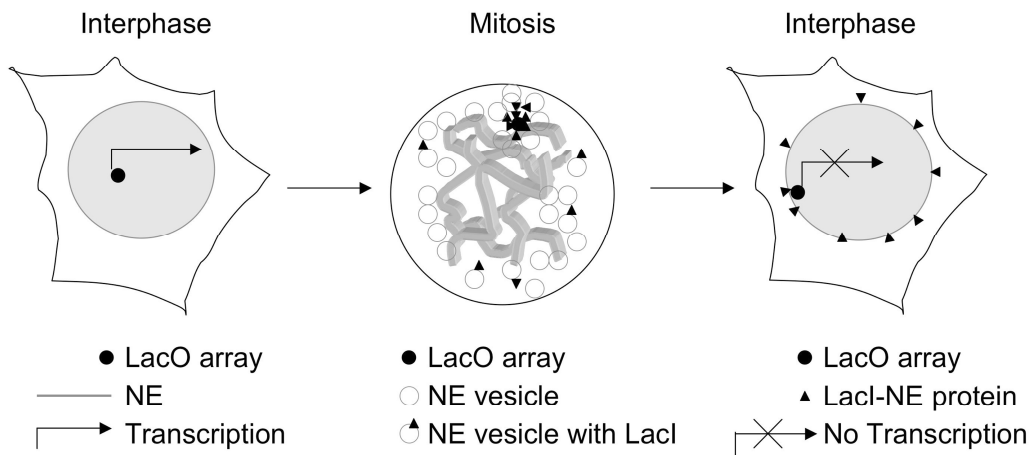
how it changes in differentiation will require further addressing the 3-dimensional constraints on the genome that, in part, appear to result from interactions at the NE.

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**Legends to Figures and Tables**

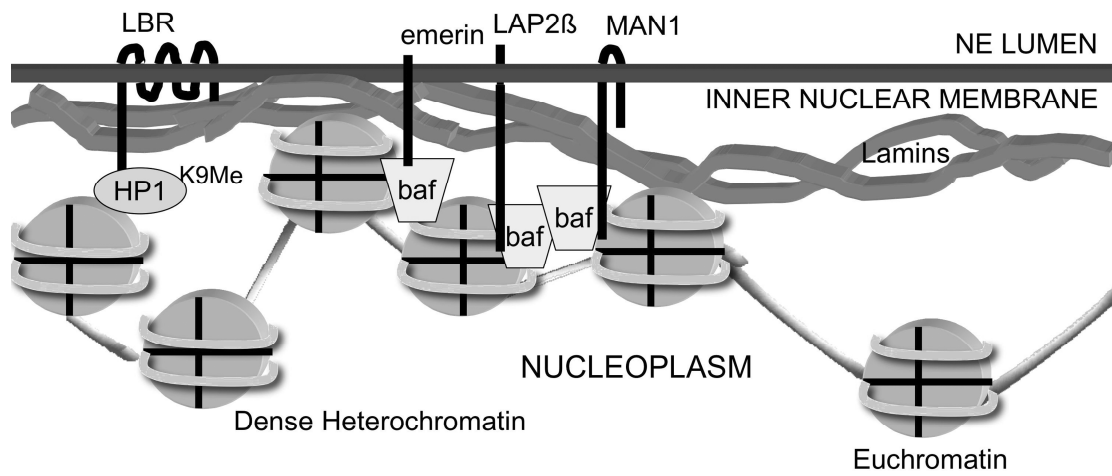
Fig. 1.



Affinity mechanism for tethering of specific chromatin at the NE.

In the lac operator system a gene inserted with the lacO locus is active when in the nuclear interior (left cell), but becomes repressed when recruited to the periphery by binding to lacI fused to a NE protein (right cell). Movement to the periphery requires going through mitosis (middle cell) where membrane vesicles carrying the NE protein-lacI fusion bring the lacO locus in association with the reforming nuclear membrane through an affinity mechanism.

Fig. 2.



Endogenous inner nuclear membrane proteins could use their affinity for certain chromatin proteins to recruit and tether chromosomes to the periphery. For example, lamins bind core histones, LBR binds to epigenetically marked histones and HP1, and emerin, LAP2β, and MAN1 bind the BAF DNA crosslinker. Differences in the interactions between INM proteins and their chromatin partners could result in different types of chromatin (silenced/active) accumulating at the periphery.

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