

# Assessing the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration at the surface of photosynthetic mesophyll cells

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Received: 18 July 2022  
Accepted: 21 January 2023

*New Phytologist* (2023) **238**: 1446–1460  
doi: 10.1111/nph.18784

**Key words:** abaxial, adaxial, gas exchange, gas exchange parameters, leaf internal CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, mesophyll conductance.

## Summary

- We present a robust estimation of the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration at the surface of photosynthetic mesophyll cells ( $c_w$ ), applicable under reasonable assumptions of assimilation distribution within the leaf. We used *Capsicum annuum*, *Helianthus annuus* and *Gossypium hirsutum* model plants for our experiments.
- We introduce calculations to estimate  $c_w$  using independent adaxial and abaxial gas exchange measurements, and accounting for the mesophyll airspace resistances.
- The  $c_w$  was lower than adaxial and abaxial estimated intercellular CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations ( $c_i$ ). Differences between  $c_w$  and the  $c_i$  of each surface were usually larger than 10  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ . Differences between adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$  ranged from a few  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  to almost 50  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ , where the largest differences were found at high air saturation deficits (ASD). Differences between adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$  and the  $c_i$  estimated by mixing both fluxes ranged from  $-30$  to  $+20 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ , where the largest differences were found under high ASD or high ambient CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations.
- Accounting for  $c_w$  improves the information that can be extracted from gas exchange experiments, allowing a more detailed description of the CO<sub>2</sub> and water vapor gradients within the leaf.

## Introduction

Quantifying the intercellular CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the airspace of the leaf is key to interpreting and understanding physiological traits and genetic variation of photosynthesis. In practice, it is known that the [CO<sub>2</sub>] in the leaf airspace cannot be completely uniform (Parkhurst, 1994) except for the trivial case where there is no CO<sub>2</sub> uptake by, or release from the leaf. There is no method or technique for measuring CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations within the leaf directly, and thus we estimate [CO<sub>2</sub>] using Fick's law for gas diffusion. The convention equates intercellular CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the airspace of the leaf ( $c_i$ ; list of abbreviations in Table 1) to the [CO<sub>2</sub>] calculated using 1 : 1.6 times the estimated conductance to H<sub>2</sub>O from the internal airspace to the atmosphere. The value 1.6 comes from the ratio of H<sub>2</sub>O diffusivity in air to CO<sub>2</sub> diffusivity in air (Cowan, 1972). This calculation assumes that the airspaces within the leaf are uniformly saturated with water vapor at the leaf temperature measured on its surfaces ( $w_{\text{sat}}$ ), and then that the internal water vapor mole fraction in the substomatal cavity ( $w_i$ ) and the atmospheric water vapor mole fraction ( $w_a$ ) may be used to represent the gradient that drives the exchange (Gaastra, 1959). Therefore,  $c_i$  is expected to be the [CO<sub>2</sub>] in the substomatal cavity or nearby (Moss & Rawlins, 1963), because it is typically assumed that  $w_i = w_{\text{sat}}$ .

Thus, hypostomatous leaves have  $c_i$  estimated at the stomatal surface and amphistomatous leaves have adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$ .

Parkhurst (1994) urges that distinction be made between [CO<sub>2</sub>] in the adaxial and abaxial substomatal cavities and that CO<sub>2</sub> gradients exist in the leaf internal airspace. Over the range of CO<sub>2</sub> concentration between the surfaces, there must be a minimum CO<sub>2</sub> concentration that drives the gradient inward toward the mesophyll cell walls ( $c_w$ ) from the adaxial and abaxial surfaces. The inclusion of  $c_w$  accounting for the CO<sub>2</sub> gradients in our calculations would allow us to subtract the internal airspace resistance, thus obtaining a more accurate estimate of the chloroplast-based traits. For instance, the CO<sub>2</sub> conductance between the mesophyll airspace and the stroma within the chloroplast, the mesophyll conductance to CO<sub>2</sub>, is usually calculated using isotope discrimination techniques (Holloway-Phillips *et al.*, 2019) or chlorophyll fluorescence (Harley *et al.*, 1992) in conjunction with gas exchange measurements, relying on the precision of  $c_i$  calculations. The commonly used model for photosynthetic biochemistry (Farquhar *et al.*, 1980) relates its parameters to the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the chloroplast, the estimation of which relies on the  $c_i$  estimate and calculated mesophyll conductance to CO<sub>2</sub> (Sharkey *et al.*, 2007). The more subtle interpretations, for example of glycine and serine removal from the photorespiratory pathway (Busch *et al.*, 2020), are even more demanding on the  $c_i$  precision. Furthermore, the precision of intercellular CO<sub>2</sub> concentration determination is critical for discussing topics such as the Kok effect (Farquhar & Busch, 2017) and CO<sub>2</sub> concentration gradients in the mesophyll airspace (Parkhurst *et al.*, 1988;

**Table 1** List of abbreviations and subscripts used in the text.

Abbreviation	Name
$A$	Net CO <sub>2</sub> assimilation rate
$A_s$	Net CO <sub>2</sub> assimilation rate through the stomata
ASD	Air saturation deficit (saturated air at this temperature– $w_a$ )
$c_a$	CO <sub>2</sub> concentration in the atmosphere
$c_i$	CO <sub>2</sub> concentration in the substomatal cavity
$c_{i-Mix}$	$c_i$ estimated using the combined gas fluxes
$c_s$	CO <sub>2</sub> concentration at the surface of a leaf
$c_w$	CO <sub>2</sub> concentration at the surface of mesophyll cells
$E$	Transpiration rate
$g_{cw}$	Cuticular conductance to H <sub>2</sub> O
$g_m$	Mesophyll conductance to CO <sub>2</sub>
$g_{sw}$	Stomatal conductance to H <sub>2</sub> O
$J_a$	Electron transport rate
$L$	Length of gaseous paths from $c_i$ to $c_w$
$l$	Tour on $L$ path
$m$	Rate of change of photosynthetic uptake with $x$ ( $du/dx$ )
PAR	Photosynthetically active radiation
$r(l)$	Cumulative resistance to CO <sub>2</sub> diffusion
$r_{bc}$	Boundary layer resistance to CO <sub>2</sub> diffusion
$R_d$	Dark respiration rate
$R_{ias}$	Total mesophyll airspace resistance to CO <sub>2</sub> diffusion
$r_{ias}$	Adaxial or abaxial internal airspace resistance to CO <sub>2</sub> diffusion
$r_{sc}$	Stomatal resistance to CO <sub>2</sub> diffusion
$T$	Mesophyll thickness
TPU	Triose phosphate utilization
$u(l)$	Cumulative photosynthetic uptake
$V_{cmax}$	Maximum carboxylation rate
VPD	Vapor pressure difference ( $w_{sat}-w_a$ ) × Atmospheric pressure
$w_a$	Water vapor concentration in the atmosphere
$w_i$	Water vapor concentration in the substomatal cavity
$w_s$	Water vapor concentration at the surface of a leaf
$w_{sat}$	Saturated water vapor concentration at the leaf temperature
$x$	Transect $x$ perpendicular to the leaf surface ( $x = l/L$ )
$\Delta c_i$	Difference between adaxial and abaxial $c_i$ ( $\Delta c_i = c_{i-ad}-c_{i-ab}$ )
$\Delta c_{Mix}$	Difference between $c_{i-Mix}$ and $c_i$ ( $\Delta c_{Mix} = c_{i-Mix}-c_i$ or $\Delta c_{Mix} = c_{i-Mix}-c_{i-ab}$ )
$\Delta c_{MW}$	Difference between $c_{i-Mix}$ and $c_w$ ( $\Delta c_{MW} = c_{i-Mix}-c_w$ )
$\Delta c_w$	Difference between the $c_w$ estimated using different $m$ values ( $\Delta c_w = c_w(-0.31)-c_w(m)$ )
$\Theta$	Mean value for the proportion of $A_s$ added with the walk in $L$
$\theta(x)$	Proportional photosynthetic uptake per unit of length
$\rho(l)$	Resistance per unit of length
$\nu(l)$	Photosynthetic uptake per unit of length
Subscript -ab	The abaxial face of the leaf
Subscript -ad	The adaxial face of the leaf

Parkhurst, 1994). We propose that improved estimates of  $c_w$  be used for calculations of photosynthetic biochemistry, mesophyll conductance, etc., minimizing the uncertainty of estimating  $c_i$  from the mixing of adaxial and abaxial fluxes.

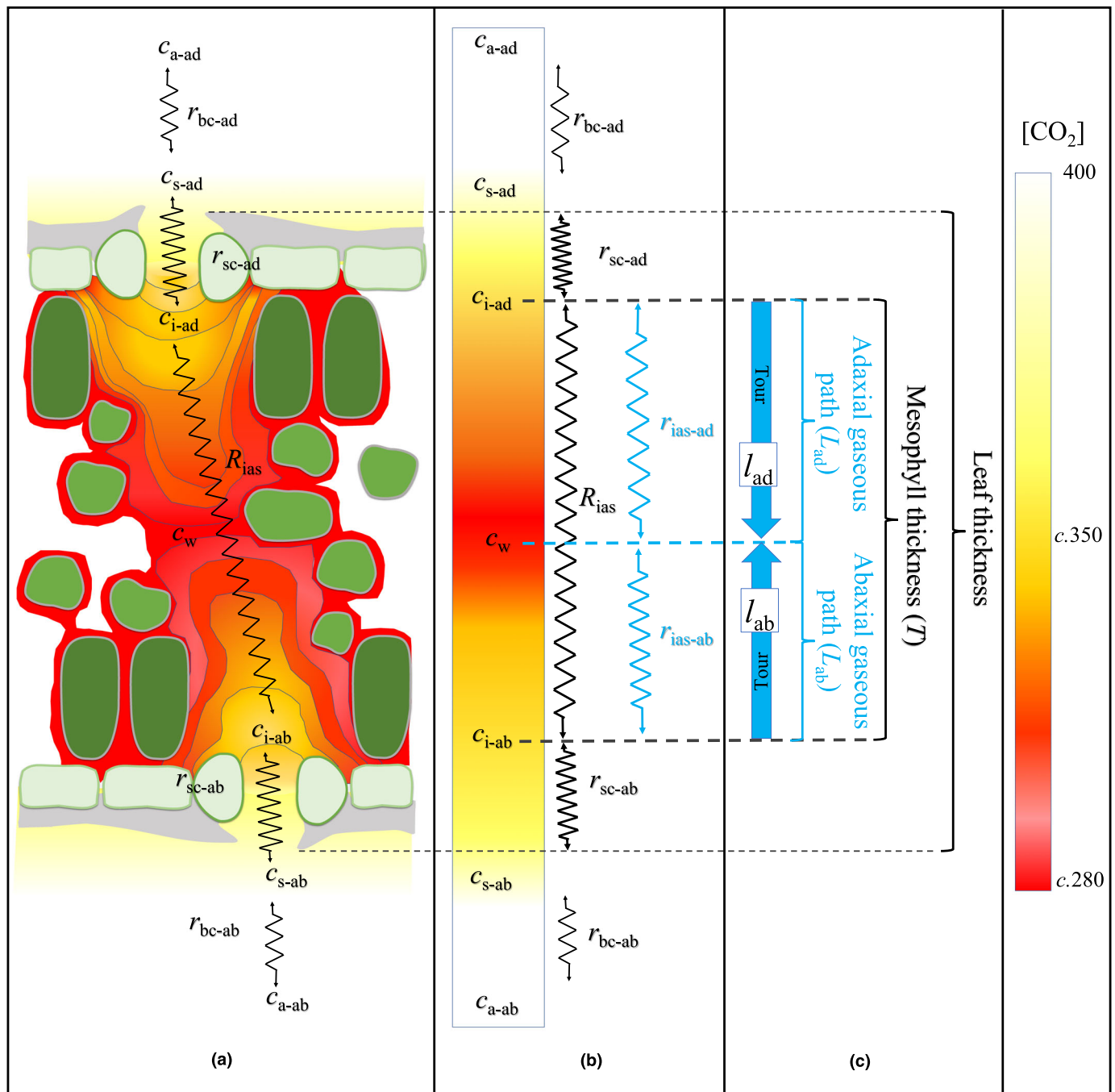
Independent measurement of adaxial and abaxial gas exchange was once more commonly used (see Jarvis & Slatyer, 1966; Jones & Slatyer, 1972; Wong *et al.*, 1985b) to estimate adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$ ; nowadays, in typical gas exchange measurements, gases from the upper and lower cuvettes are mixed assuming that the action does not affect the estimates. The widely used equations

derived by von Caemmerer & Farquhar (1981) were based on a single leaf surface; nevertheless, they are usually used assuming that they can be applied directly to gas exchange measurements mixing adaxial and abaxial leaf gas exchange. The improved theory for calculating leaf gas exchange presented by Márquez *et al.* (2021a), was also based on a single leaf surface. Once the flows are mixed, the true adaxial and abaxial flux contributions are unknown. Thus, it has been common practice to treat  $c_i$  as the [CO<sub>2</sub>] in a virtual substomatal cavity, calculated from the mix of both fluxes. Even though this practice has been common, there is not much information about its impact on the estimates of gas exchange parameters.

Here, we present a set of equations to estimate the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration that provides the sink for the fluxes inward from the adaxial and abaxial sides of the leaf ( $c_w$ ), using independent measurements of adaxial and abaxial gas exchange. We argue that  $c_w$  is essentially the lumped parameter representing the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration at the surface of photosynthetic mesophyll cells. Additionally, we evaluate the actual values of adaxial and abaxial  $w_s$ ,  $c_s$ ,  $g_{sw}$  and  $c_i$  because, consciously or not, it is implicitly assumed with common gas exchange devices and calculations that the differences between adaxial and abaxial gas exchange parameters ( $w_s$ ,  $c_s$ ,  $g_{sw}$ , and  $c_i$ ) are negligible. We hypothesize that this is incorrect and examine the errors inherent in mixing the adaxial and abaxial fluxes, explore their impact, and identify ranges of errors under different experimental conditions.

### Theory of the model

In a photosynthetically active leaf, the CO<sub>2</sub> that has entered through the stomatal pores will move toward chloroplasts in the mesophyll cells, where the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration is lower due to the active rubisco CO<sub>2</sub> fixation. Mesophyll cells are the sink of CO<sub>2</sub> and thus the CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations surrounding them are the lowest in the leaf airspace. In the path from the substomatal cavity to the chloroplast, the CO<sub>2</sub> must diffuse through the gaseous phase of the mesophyll airspace and then through the liquid phase at the surface of the cell wall to the chloroplast stroma (detailed analysis of these paths can be found in Evans & von Caemmerer, 1996; Evans *et al.*, 2009; Evans, 2021; Mizokami *et al.*, 2022). The conductance offered in the latter liquid path is usually referred to as mesophyll conductance ( $g_m$ ) and estimated assuming that the resistance and gradient in the airspace are negligible. Some general characteristics of these two phases in the path are: the resistivity (reciprocal of conductivity) to CO<sub>2</sub> diffusion through the liquid phase is 10 000 times larger than through the gaseous phase; and the thickness of the liquid phase is a couple of  $\mu\text{m}$  while the thickness of the leaf is *c.* 100 to 200  $\mu\text{m}$  or more. Thus, the total resistance of the liquid phase path is about two orders of magnitude greater than the whole gas-phase resistance in the mesophyll airspace from adaxial to abaxial substomatal cavities ( $R_{ias}$ ). However, the diffusion of CO<sub>2</sub> through the liquid path is aided by the diffusion of bicarbonate towards the site of rubisco in C<sub>3</sub> plants and the activity of the enzyme carbonic anhydrase, in a process called facilitated transfer (Enns, 1967; Cowan, 1986). Carbonic anhydrase interconverts dissolved CO<sub>2</sub>



**Fig. 1** Diagram of CO<sub>2</sub> concentration within a photosynthetically active leaf. (a) 2-D representation of the expected CO<sub>2</sub> distribution within an amphistomatous leaf, (b) 1-D representation of the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration and resistances involved in the model, and (c) representation of the adaxial and abaxial transients in the model.  $c_a$  is the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the atmosphere,  $c_s$  is the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration at the surface of a leaf,  $c_i$  is the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the substomatal cavity,  $c_w$  is the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration at the surface of mesophyll cells,  $r_{bc}$  is the boundary layer resistance to CO<sub>2</sub> diffusion,  $r_{sc}$  is the stomatal resistance to CO<sub>2</sub> diffusion,  $R_{ias}$  is the total mesophyll airspace resistance to CO<sub>2</sub> diffusion,  $r_{ias}$  is the internal airspace resistance to CO<sub>2</sub> diffusion, ad and ab subscripts stand for adaxial and abaxial, respectively.

and bicarbonate with the net effects that CO<sub>2</sub> is converted into bicarbonate near the plasma membrane, and bicarbonate is converted into CO<sub>2</sub> near rubisco (Raven & Glidewell, 1981). This effectively increases by one order of magnitude the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> transported, bringing the liquid phase path resistance down to only one order of magnitude larger than the whole gas-phase. Therefore, the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration drawdown in the gas phase is

expected to be in the order of 10 μmol mol<sup>-1</sup> and the CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations surrounding the mesophyll cells must be roughly similar, except for the few cells next to the stomatal cavity (Fig. 1a).

We can place  $c_w$  in a one-dimensional model of resistances to CO<sub>2</sub> diffusion between the adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$ , including  $R_{ias}$  and accounting for the fluxes of both sides of the leaf (Fig. 1b).

The gaseous paths from adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$  to  $c_w$  ( $L_{ad}$  and  $L_{ab}$ ) meet at some point in the mesophyll airspace such that:

$$T = L_{ad} + L_{ab} \quad \text{Eqn 1}$$

where  $T$  is the mesophyll thickness (Fig. 1c). Then, each path ( $L_{ad}$  and  $L_{ab}$ ) from  $c_i$  ( $l = 0$ ) towards the interior of the leaf perpendicular to the leaf surface is completed at their respective  $L$ . The tortuosity in the mesophyll gaseous path ( $\tau$ ) depends on the section of the walk such that it is  $\tau(l)$ , and similarly for the light intensity  $I(l)$ , and biochemical activity  $b(l)$ . Thus, the resistance per unit of length ( $\rho$ ) depends on  $\tau$ ,  $\rho(\tau)$ , and the photosynthetic uptake per unit of length ( $v$ ) depends on  $I$  and  $b$ ,  $v(I, b)$ . Then,  $\rho$  and  $v$  can be written as functions of  $l$ ,  $\rho(l)$  and  $v(l)$ ; and for each side of the leaf, we describe a function  $r(l)$  that is the cumulative resistance to  $\text{CO}_2$  diffusion along the path

$$r(l) = \int_0^l \rho(k) dk \quad \text{Eqn 2}$$

where  $k$  is a dummy variable and another function  $u(l)$  that is the cumulative photosynthetic uptake along the path as

$$u(l) = \int_0^l v(k) dk \quad \text{Eqn 3}$$

From gas exchange measurements, we know the net  $\text{CO}_2$  assimilation through the stomata ( $A_s$ ) and so

$$A_s = u(L) = \int_0^L v(k) dk \quad \text{Eqn 4}$$

We can independently estimate the total mesophyll airspace resistance to  $\text{CO}_2$  in the leaf ( $R_{ias}$ ; see [Materials and Methods](#) section for details) and as  $R_{ias}$  occurs in the whole thickness of the mesophyll ( $T$ ) we obtain

$$R_{ias} = r(T) = \int_0^T \rho(k) dk \quad \text{Eqn 5}$$

$R_{ias}$  is the sum of the adaxial (-ad) and abaxial (-ab) internal airspace resistances to  $\text{CO}_2$  diffusion,

$$R_{ias} = r_{ias-ad} + r_{ias-ab} \quad \text{Eqn 6}$$

where  $r_{ias-ad}$  and  $r_{ias-ab}$  coincide at the minimum  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration within the leaf airspace near the cell walls of photosynthetically active mesophyll cells ( $c_w$ ; Fig. 1b). Then for each side

$$r_{ias} = r(L) = \int_0^L \rho(k) dk \quad \text{Eqn 7}$$

All the  $\text{CO}_2$  molecules cross through  $l = 0$ , but the  $\text{CO}_2$  flux along  $L$  varies with the  $\text{CO}_2$  consumption along the path. In a section of the path from 0 to  $l$ , we can describe the infinitesimal

drawdown  $\delta c(l)$  in  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration associated with an infinitesimal increase  $\delta l$  at  $l$  and hence an increase in resistance of  $(dr(l)/dl) \delta l$  as a function of  $u(l)$  and  $\rho(l)$  as

$$\delta c(l) = u(l)\rho(l)\delta l \quad \text{Eqn 8}$$

Integrating from 0 to  $l$

$$\int_{c_i}^{c_l} dc = \int_0^l \rho(k)u(k)dk \quad \text{Eqn 9}$$

$$c_i - c_l = \int_0^l \rho(k)u(k)dk$$

and then from Eqn 3

$$c_i - c_l = \int_0^l \rho(k) \int v(k) dk dk \quad \text{Eqn 10}$$

The forms of equations  $\rho(l)$  and  $v(l)$  are unknown but as  $u(L) = A_s$ , we can write a cumulative distribution function for  $u(l)$  representing the changes in the photosynthetic uptake rate with the walk in  $L$ ,

$$u(l) = \int_0^l v(k) dk = A_s \int_0^l \theta(k) dk \quad \text{Eqn 11}$$

where  $\theta$  represents the ratio  $v(l) : A_s$  and  $\int \theta(k) dk$  is the proportion of  $A_s$  added within the walk ( $u(l)/A_s$ ) taking values from 0 to 1. In like manner,  $r(L) = R_{ias}$  and thus we can write a cumulative distribution function for  $r(l)$ ,

$$r(l) = \int_0^l \rho(k) dk = R_{ias} \int_0^l \varphi(k) dk \quad \text{Eqn 12}$$

where  $\varphi$  represents the ratio  $\rho(l) : R_{ias}$  and  $\int \varphi(k) dk$  is the proportion of  $R_{ias}$  added within the walk ( $r(l)/R_{ias}$ ) taking values from 0 to 1.

Substituting Eqns 11 and 12 in Eqn 10 we have

$$c_i - c_l = R_{ias} A_s \int_0^l \varphi(k) \int \theta(k) dk dk \quad \text{Eqn 13}$$

Here, we consider the resistance to  $\text{CO}_2$  diffusion as constant per unit of length in  $L$ ,  $\rho(l) = R_{ias}/L$  or  $\varphi(l) = 1/L$ , and so Eqn 13 becomes

$$c_i - c_l = A_s R_{ias} \frac{1}{L} \int_0^l \int \theta(k) dk dk \quad \text{Eqn 14}$$

$$c_i - c_l = \frac{A_s R_{ias}}{L} \Theta(l)$$

where  $\Theta$  is the double integral on the right-hand side of Eqn 14. Note that  $\Theta$  has units of length,  $l$ , and  $\int \theta(k) dk$  is a function. Thus, to find the  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration at  $l$ ,

$$c_l = c_i - \frac{r_{ias}A_s}{L} \Theta(l) \quad \text{Eqn 15}$$

The length of each  $L$  is unknown but we know that  $l$  walks on  $L$ , so we represent the  $\text{CO}_2$  path as a transect  $x$  perpendicular to the leaf surface such that  $x = l/L$ . Then, the transect moves from  $x = 0$  to 1 where  $x = 0$  is in the substomatal cavity and  $x = 1$  is at  $c_w$  (Fig. 1c). Adapting Eqns 2–15 for the transect  $x$  results in

$$c_x = c_i - r_{ias}A_s \int_0^x \int \theta(k) dk dk \quad \text{Eqn 16}$$

$$c_x = c_i - r_{ias}A_s \Theta(x)$$

Eqn 16 in the case of  $x = 1$  ( $l = L$ ) yields

$$c_w = c_i - r_{ias}A_s \Theta(1) \quad \text{Eqn 17}$$

In general, the form of  $\int \theta(k) dk$  is unknown, and factors such as light quality may affect the form of  $\theta(x)$  (see Vogelmann & Evans, 2002), but there is evidence of an almost linear decrease in the photosynthetic uptake from the stomatal cavity inward to the interior of the mesophyll (see Evans & Vogelmann, 2003). Thus, the shape of  $\theta(x)$  would be close to a linear function and  $\int \theta(k) dk$  to a quadratic function. In practice,  $\theta(x)$  could adopt any form to generate a desired shape for the proportional cumulative photosynthetic uptake,  $\int \theta(k) dk$ . We represent  $\theta(x)$  by a linear equation  $\theta(x) = m(x-0.5) + 1$ , where  $m$  is the rate of change of photosynthetic uptake with  $x$  ( $dv/dx$ ), and the constants 0.5 and 1 are selected such that  $\int_0^1 \theta(k) dk = 1$ . Thus,  $\int \theta(k) dk = 0.5(mx^2 - mx) + x + C$  with  $C = 0$ , and then  $\int_0^1 \int \theta(k) dk dk = (6x^2 - m[3x^2 - 2x^3])/12|_0^1 = (6-m)/12$ . To ensure that  $\int_0^x \theta(k) dk$  is positive in the whole transect,  $m$  is restricted to  $[-2, 2]$  and then Eqn 17 results in

$$c_w = c_i - r_{ias}A_s \frac{6-m}{12} \quad \text{Eqn 18}$$

Finally, to estimate  $c_w$  from adaxial and abaxial measurements with a known  $R_{ias}$ , assuming that  $\Theta_{ad}$  and  $\Theta_{ab}$  have the same  $m$  value, we obtain (see full derivation in Supporting Information Notes S1)

$$c_w = \frac{c_{i-ad}A_{s-ab} + c_{i-ab}A_{s-ad} - \Theta R_{ias}A_{s-ad}A_{s-ab}}{A_{s-T}} \quad \text{Eqn 19}$$

$$c_w = \frac{c_{i-ad}A_{s-ab} + c_{i-ab}A_{s-ad} - \frac{(6-m)R_{ias}A_{s-ad}A_{s-ab}}{12}}{A_{s-T}}$$

We have included a simple R script for the calculations in Notes S2.

Note that in the special case of assuming homogeneous photosynthetic uptake in the transect,  $\theta(x) = 1$  or  $m = 0$ , that is, linear cumulative photosynthetic uptake in the transect, we obtain  $A_s/2 = (c_i - c_w)/r_{ias}$ , which is equivalent to the equation presented by Parkhurst *et al.* (1988) and identical to that used by Wong *et al.* (2022) based on assimilation rate per

unit mesophyll volume if  $c_w = c_{i-ab}$ , an assumption specific to the particular experimental setup in that study.

## Materials and Methods

### Calculation of $c_i$

The impact on  $c_i$  calculations of neglecting cuticular fluxes using von Caemmerer & Farquhar (1981) equations has been discussed in previous studies (Boyer *et al.*, 1997; Boyer, 2015; Hanson *et al.*, 2016; Lamour *et al.*, 2021; Márquez *et al.*, 2021a,b). Márquez *et al.* (2021a) equations (MSF) include the cuticular conductance from the outset of the derivation, so MSF equations are used for the main analyses here. A brief recapitulation of the analyses including von Caemmerer and Farquhar calculations is included in Notes S3.

### Plant material

Seventeen plants were used during our experiments: five *Capsicum annuum* L., six *Helianthus annuus* L., and six *Gossypium hirsutum* L., and data were collected from 11 *C. annuum*, 12 *H. annuus*, and 12 *G. hirsutum* leaves. Plants were grown from seeds in 3 l pots filled with Martins (*sic*) Potting Mix (Martins Fertilizers, Yass, NSW, Australia). Five grams of slow-release Osmocote Exact fertilizer (Scotts Australia, Bella Vista, NSW, Australia) was applied at the sowing time and another 5 g was applied 8 wk later. After sowing, all plants were kept in a glasshouse under natural light, with a temperature of 28°C during the day, 20°C at night, and watered once a day. The analyses were performed on fully expanded leaves.

The adaxial and abaxial cuticular conductances to water vapor (Table 2) were estimated using the Red-light technique introduced by Márquez *et al.* (2021b).

### Measurements

Experiments were carried out on a gas exchange analysis system built by Wong *et al.* (1978, 1985a, 2022), which employs two LI-6251 gas analyzers (Li-Cor, Lincoln, NE, USA) to measure the  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration of the upper and lower cuvettes independently. Additionally, two LI-6800 gas exchange analyzers (Li-

**Table 2** Cuticular conductance to water ( $g_{cw}$ ) for the leaves used in this study (average  $\pm$  SD).

Species	$g_{cw}$ (mmol m <sup>-2</sup> s <sup>-1</sup> )		$S_r$	Source
	Adaxial	Abaxial		
<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	5 $\pm$ 1.0	5.5 $\pm$ 0.8	0.13	Measured in this study
<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	5 $\pm$ 1.1	5 $\pm$ 1.0	0.83	Furukawa (1992); Nascimento <i>et al.</i> (2016)
<i>Gossypium hirsutum</i>	1.5 $\pm$ 0.4	1.5 $\pm$ 0.5	0.5	Lei <i>et al.</i> (2018)

$S_r$ , stomatal density ration (adaxial over abaxial).

Cor) were used simultaneously to evaluate the gas exchange from the adaxial and abaxial surfaces of the leaf using the setup presented by Márquez *et al.* (2021a). The pressure in the upper and lower cuvettes was kept equal at 0.1 kPa above atmospheric.

The atmospheric conditions were set equal within each cuvette, that is, the same temperature,  $c_a$  and  $w_a$ , and thus the calculation of all the gas exchange parameters (i.e.  $g_{sw}$ ,  $w_s$ ,  $c_s$ , and  $c_i$ ) could also be performed as if the measurements were taken in a single chamber, that is, mixing the adaxial and abaxial gases. Then, the gas exchange parameters were calculated using MSF equations for single surface gas exchange and mixed adaxial and abaxial gases. This permitted us to perform precise comparisons of single and double cuvette results as well as the estimation of  $c_w$  at different atmospheric and light conditions.

We define our standard conditions to emulate benign atmospheric conditions: 1 kPa of air saturation deficit (ASD),  $c_a$  of 400  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ , and light intensity of 1000  $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ . All the leaves were measured at standard conditions to evaluate the expected  $\text{CO}_2$  gradients within the leaf of each species near natural conditions. Then, five leaves (two *G. hirsutum*, two *H. annuus* and one *C. annuum*) were selected to conduct experiments varying atmospheric and light conditions as describes below.

We applied different ASDs to the leaf to induce changes in stomatal conductance: measurements were taken on a *G. hirsutum* leaf under the nonstressful condition of 1 kPa ASD, mild stress of 1.5 kPa ASD, and moderate stress of 2 kPa. For the three conditions, the leaves were acclimatized for 30 min, with  $c_a$  set at 400  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ . An ASD response curve was performed for an *H. annuus* leaf, and readings were taken at ASDs of 1, 1.2, 1.5, 2, and 2.5 kPa when stomatal conductances of both sides of the leaf were stable (Table 3) for at least 10 min.

We applied different atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  concentrations to the leaf to induce different  $\text{CO}_2$  gradients between the atmosphere and the substomatal cavities: measurements were taken on a *C. annuum* leaf with the upper and lower chamber conditions set at 222, 425, and 859  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  and with stomatal conductance remaining stable for at least 15 min. Additionally, an  $A$ - $c_i$  curve was performed on an *H. annuus* leaf, with air saturation deficit set to 1 kPa, light intensity at 1000  $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ , and readings were taken at  $c_a$  of 400, 300, 200, 100, 50, 100, 400, 600, 800, 1000, 1000, 1500, 2000, and 50  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  with a waiting period of 5 to 8 min between concentrations.

We applied different light intensities to induce different assimilation rates at high stomatal conductance and constant atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration: a *G. hirsutum* leaf was kept at 1 kPa of ASD and 400  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  of  $c_a$  and exposed to 1000, 1500, 800, 500, 100, and 10  $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$  of light intensity, waiting 4 to 8 min between measurements.

### Estimation of mesophyll air resistance to $\text{CO}_2$ diffusion

We followed the Wong *et al.*'s (2022) approach to estimating  $R_{ias}$ , which is to keep a constant  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration in the upper cuvette at about atmospheric  $[\text{CO}_2]$  (400  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ ) and reduce the  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration in the lower cuvette until the assimilation of the lower surface reaches zero. Then, under these

**Table 3** Criteria to consider gas exchange readings as stable (when applicable).

Parameter	Units	Elapse (s)	Slope	SD
Stomatal conductance	$\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$	600	<0.001	<0.005
Assimilation rate	$\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$	300	<0.05	<0.1
Transpiration rate	$\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$	300	<0.005	<0.00001

The instrument reads each second. Elapse represents the minimum time of readings to evaluate stability; Slope is the linear trend of the data during the lapse; and SD is the standard deviation of the readings during the lapse.

**Table 4** Mesophyll air resistance to  $\text{CO}_2$  ( $R_{ias}$ ) of the leaf used in each experiment.

Species	Experiment	$R_{ias}$ ( $\text{m}^2 \text{s mol}^{-1}$ )
<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	$c_a$	7.5
<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	$c_a$	4.1
<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	ASD	4.1
<i>Gossypium hirsutum</i>	ASD	4
<i>Gossypium hirsutum</i>	Light intensity	4.5

conditions, abaxial  $c_i$  equals  $c_w$  and Eqn 18 can be used to estimate  $R_{ias}$ , having chosen  $m$  (rate of change in photosynthetic uptake with  $x$  ( $du/dx$ )). In practice, the value of  $m$  is unknown and likely to be variable between leaves, so we approximate it as  $m = -0.31$  (see Notes S4) based on the noble gas experiments of Wong *et al.* (2022). The impact of varying  $m$  in  $c_w$  estimations is discussed later.

The internal airspace resistance to  $\text{CO}_2$  diffusion of each leaf was assessed, see Table S1 for the whole list, and find the  $R_{ias}$  values estimated for the leaves used for the variable environmental condition experiments in Table 4.

### Mesophyll conductance

The variable  $J$  method (Harley *et al.*, 1992) was used to estimate mesophyll conductance to  $\text{CO}_2$  ( $g_m$ ),

$$g_m = \frac{A}{c_x - \frac{\Gamma^*[J_a + 8(A + R_d)]}{J_a - 4(A + R_d)}} \quad \text{Eqn 20}$$

where  $A$  is assimilation rate,  $R_d$  is the respiration rate under the light conditions,  $\Gamma^*$  is the  $\text{CO}_2$  compensation point in the absence of  $R_d$ ,  $J_a$  is the actual rate of photosynthetic electron transport and  $c_x$  is either  $c_{i\text{-Mix}}$  or  $c_w$ . For the purpose of the comparison of calculations of  $g_m$  using  $c_{i\text{-Mix}}$  or  $c_w$  the electron transport rate was used as a proxy of  $J_a$ , which is a rough approximation (Pons *et al.*, 2009), but close enough for the purposes of comparing results using different estimations of  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration.

### Calculation comparisons

We have compared the calculation of intercellular  $\text{CO}_2$  concentrations using different approaches. To simplify the notation, we

have defined: the difference between adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$  estimates as  $\Delta c_i$  ( $\Delta c_i = c_{i-ad} - c_{i-ab}$ ); the difference between the  $c_i$  estimated using the combined gas fluxes and the adaxial or abaxial fluxes as  $\Delta c_{Mix}$  ( $\Delta c_{Mix} = c_{i-Mix} - c_{i-ad}$  or  $\Delta c_{Mix} = c_{i-Mix} - c_{i-ab}$ ); the difference between the  $c_i$  estimated using the combined gas fluxes and  $c_w$  as  $\Delta c_{MW}$  ( $\Delta c_{MW} = c_{i-Mix} - c_w$ ); and the difference between the  $c_w$  estimated using  $m = -0.31$  and that with different  $m$  values in Eqn 19 as  $\Delta c_w$  ( $\Delta c_w = c_w(-0.31) - c_w(m)$ ).

## Results

Each species (see Table S1) presented different gradients between adaxial/abaxial  $c_i$  and  $c_w$  (Table 5), where the greatest gradient was found in the surfaces with higher stomatal density and conductance.

In general, we found that mixing adaxial and abaxial fluxes leads to an averaged result of both  $c_i$  values weighted by the assimilation rate ( $A$ ). The detailed results of the experiments described in 'Measurements' in the Materials and Methods section are presented below.

### Different atmospheric [CO<sub>2</sub>]

Different total assimilation rates were achieved by varying  $c_a$  around *C. annuum* and *H. annuus* leaves (Fig. 2a,d). The partitioning of  $A$  between adaxial and abaxial surfaces was stable in the *C. annuum* leaf, where the abaxial surface was the main driver for the changes and the adaxial surface assimilation rate remained relatively constant. In the case of the *H. annuus* leaf,  $A$  of both surfaces varied with each  $c_a$ .  $A$  increased with  $c_a$  as the latter varied from 50 to 500  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ . However, with further increases in  $c_a$ , the abaxial surfaces increased  $A$  while the adaxial surfaces decreased it, without a significant change in the total assimilation rate.  $\Delta c_i$  values in *C. annuum* were between 10 and 40  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  under the imposed  $c_a$ , and in *H. annuus*  $\Delta c_i$  values were between 2 and 7  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ .  $\Delta c_{Mix}$  estimates were between  $-5$  and 25  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  in *C. annuum*, and between  $-2$  and 5  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  in *H. annuus*.

As expected, the estimated  $c_w$  values were below the adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$ ; and  $\Delta c_{MW}$  was always positive. In *C. annuum*, the  $c_w$  tended to be near the adaxial  $c_i$  as the assimilation rate of the

**Table 5** Average CO<sub>2</sub> drawdown within the leaf (average  $\pm$  SD) measured at conditions of air saturation deficit (ASD) = 1 kPa,  $c_a = 400 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ , and light intensity of 1000  $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ .

	No. of leaves	$c_{i-ad} - c_w$ ( $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ )	$c_{i-ab} - c_w$ ( $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ )
<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	10	4.0 $\pm$ 0.7 a	10.0 $\pm$ 1.2 b
<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	10	15.0 $\pm$ 4.8 a	16.9 $\pm$ 3.0 a
<i>Gossypium hirsutum</i>	10	12.4 $\pm$ 3.3 a	18.8 $\pm$ 3.7 b

Distinct letters in the same row indicate statistical differences with a  $P$ -value  $< 0.001$  using the Student's  $t$ -test and Tukey at 95% confidence.  $c_i$  is the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the substomatal cavity,  $c_w$  is the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration at the surface of mesophyll cells, ad and ab subscripts stand for adaxial and abaxial, respectively.

adaxial surfaces was near 0; the differences between adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$  and  $c_w$  in *H. annuus* were from  $< 1 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  at low  $c_a$  up to  $c. 15 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  at high  $c_a$ .

### Different air saturation deficits

Application of three air moisture saturation deficits (ASD) to a *G. hirsutum* leaf resulted in  $\Delta c_i$  from 5 to 27  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  when ASD varied from 1 to 2 kPa (Fig. 3). The *G. hirsutum* leaf presented a fairly constant stomatal conductance to water vapor ( $g_{sw}$ ) from the upper surface of  $c. 0.06 \text{ mol m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$  whilst the lower surface  $g_{sw}$  showed more variation from 0.25 to 0.2  $\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$  at 1 kPa and 2 kPa of ASD, respectively. In an *H. annuus*, leaf nonzero  $\Delta c_i$  was evident only under ASD equal to, or  $> 1.5$  kPa (Fig. 3);  $\Delta c_i$  was as large as almost 50  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  under the highest ASD.

In both species, the calculated  $c_{i-Mix}$  remained between the values estimated separately for each side of the leaf.  $\Delta c_{Mix}$  became larger as the ASD increased (Fig. 3c,f), presenting a  $\Delta c_{Mix}$  of  $c. 20 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  in *G. hirsutum*, and as large as almost  $-30 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  in *H. annuus*.

The estimate of  $c_w$  in *G. hirsutum* was always lower than the estimated adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$ , but the difference was reduced as the ASD increased; similar observations were made in *H. annuus* but at ASD above 1.5 kPa, the estimated  $c_w$  fell between the adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$ , which is impossible. These two unusual observations might be an indication of unsaturation occurring in the mesophyll airspace of the leaf, as described by Wong *et al.* (2022), or patchy stomatal conductance (Mott & Buckley, 2000): these issues will be addressed in more detail in the discussion.

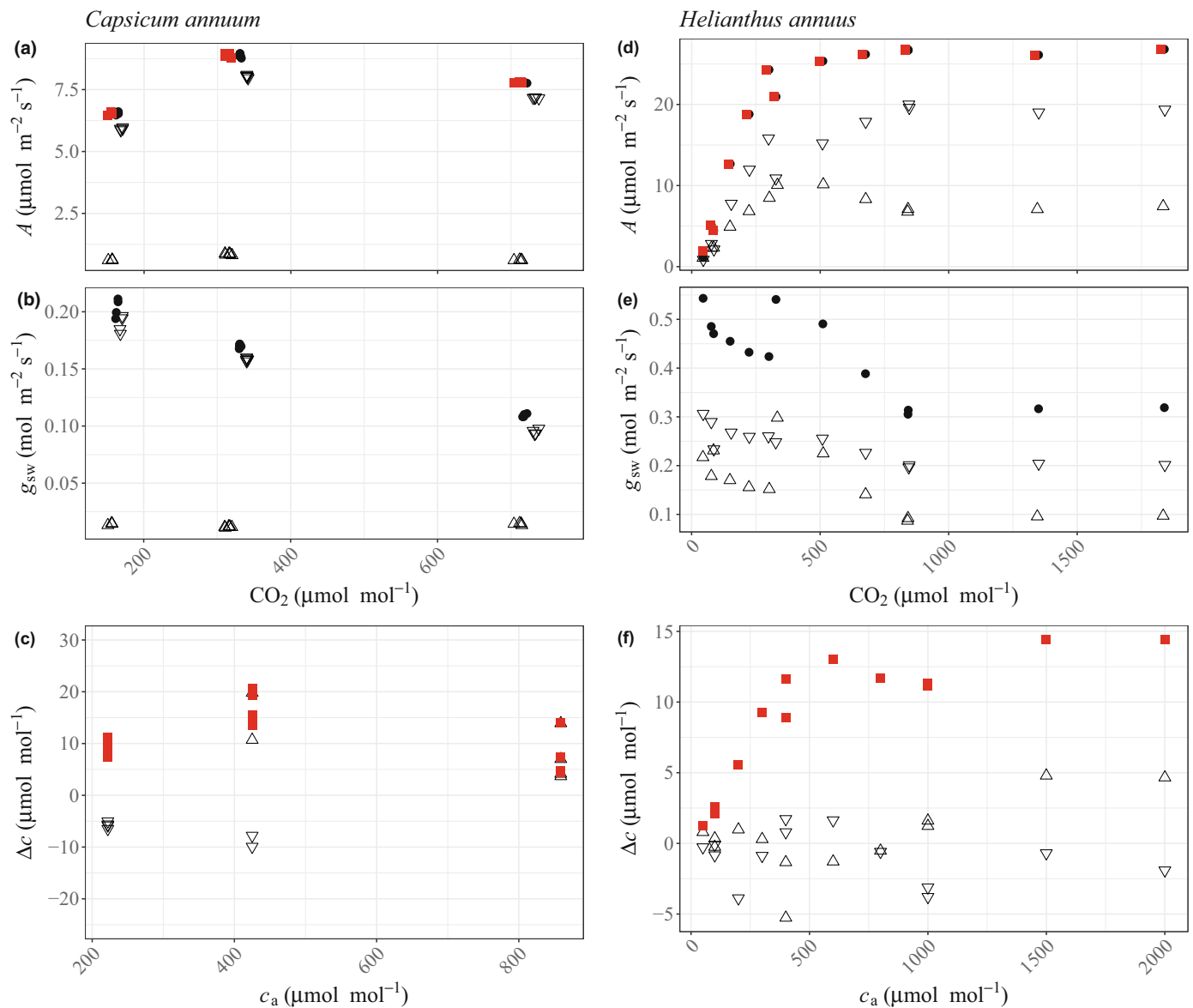
### Different light intensities

A light response curve from a *G. hirsutum* leaf showed that  $\Delta c_{Mix}$  was below 5  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  in most cases (Fig. 4). The adaxial and abaxial stomatal conductances did not change greatly during the experiment, being  $c. 0.05$  and  $0.225 \text{ mol m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$ , respectively. We found that the larger  $\Delta c_{Mix}$  occurred with measurements near the light compensation point.

As expected, the estimated  $c_w$  was below the estimated adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$ , except at the lowest light intensity where the assimilation of the adaxial surfaces was almost zero and the assimilation of the abaxial surfaces was negative. Note that at the lowest light intensity in our experiment,  $c_w$  was expected to be near the adaxial  $c_i$  but higher than the abaxial  $c_i$  to allow CO<sub>2</sub> to move from the inside of the leaf to the lower cuvette.

### Adaxial and abaxial ratios

The values obtained for  $g_{sw-ad} : g_{sw-ab}$ ,  $c_{i-ad} : c_{i-ab}$ ,  $c_{s-ad} : c_{s-ab}$ , and  $w_{s-ad} : w_{s-ab}$  were variable between species and among different environmental conditions (Table 6). Adaxial and abaxial values of  $g_{sw}$ ,  $c_i$ ,  $c_s$ , and  $w_s$  were never identical, impacting the  $c_{i-Mix}$  estimation to different degrees with no clear predictable patterns. This confirms our hypothesis that it is incorrect to assume that



**Fig. 2** Responses of *Capsicum annuum* (a–c) and *Helianthus annuus* (d–f) leaves to varying the atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration ( $c_a$ ). In (a, b, d, e), data from the abaxial surface are the inverted triangles ( $\nabla$ ); adaxial surfaces the triangles ( $\Delta$ ); mix of gases are the black dots ( $\bullet$ ) and values using  $c_w$  are the red squares ( $\blacksquare$ ). (a, d) assimilation vs calculated internal  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration using gas exchange fluxes from the abaxial surfaces, adaxial surfaces, the combination of fluxes and the estimated  $c_w$ ; (b, e) adaxial, abaxial and total stomatal conductance; and (c, f) the difference between the  $[\text{CO}_2]$  estimated from the combination of gases and each surface of the leaf ( $\Delta c_{\text{Mix}} = c_{i-\text{Mix}} - c_{i-\text{ad}}$  ( $\Delta$ );  $\Delta c_{\text{Mix}} = c_{i-\text{Mix}} - c_{i-\text{ab}}$  ( $\nabla$ ); and  $\Delta c_{\text{MW}} = c_{i-\text{Mix}} - c_w$  ( $\blacksquare$ )).

the differences between adaxial and abaxial values are negligible and proves that significant variations can be found even if the atmospheric conditions of upper and lower cuvettes are the same.

We found that the variability in  $g_{s-\text{ad}}$ ;  $g_{s-\text{ab}}$ ;  $c_{i-\text{ad}}$ ;  $c_{i-\text{ab}}$ ;  $c_{s-\text{ad}}$ ;  $c_{s-\text{ab}}$ ; and  $w_{s-\text{ad}}$ ;  $w_{s-\text{ab}}$  became even more challenging if we were to predict under non-steady-state conditions such as when stomatal conductance increases during light induction (Notes S5).

### Effect of $m$ in $c_w$ calculations

Even though varying the rate of change of photosynthetic uptake with  $x(m)$  impacts the estimation of  $R_{\text{ias}}$  (see Notes S4), it does not significantly affect the estimation of  $c_w$ , having an impact of a fraction of a  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  variability at most (Fig. 5). The

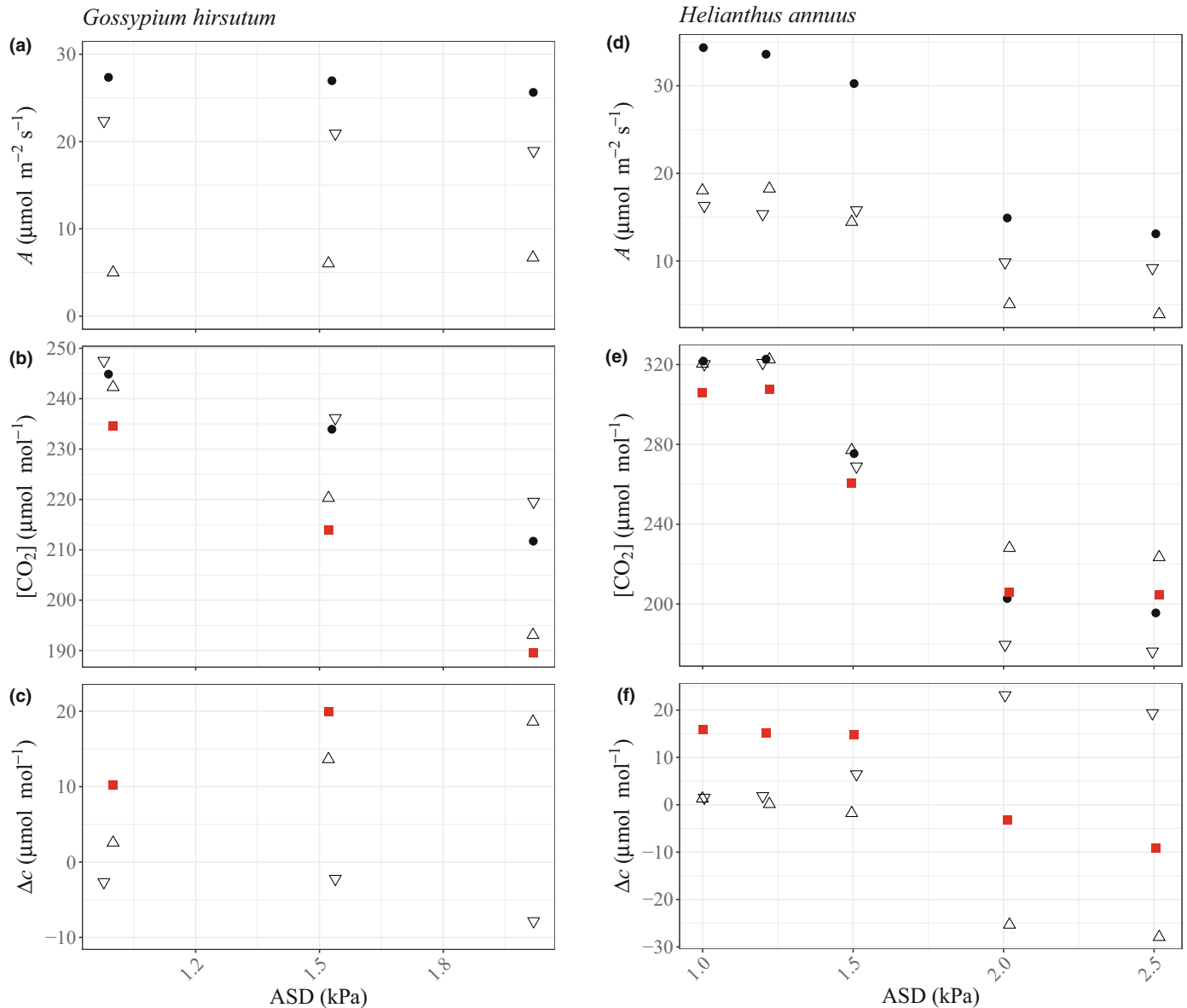
$\Delta c_w = c_w(-0.31) - c_w(m)$  shown in Fig. 5 were calculated using the same  $m$  in the calculation of  $R_{\text{ias}}$  and  $c_w$  but we observe that variations of  $m$  within  $\pm 1$  in the calculation of  $R_{\text{ias}}$  and  $c_w$  did not significantly affect the  $c_w$  estimation either (data not shown).

## Discussion

### Adaxial and abaxial gas exchange and the mix of gases

It can be seen from the measurements of internal resistance to  $\text{CO}_2$  diffusion that the species used in this study do not present significant physical impediments to diffusion within the intercellular airspace, though they do have different stomatal density ratios (see Table 2). Thus,  $\Delta c_{\text{Mix}}$  ( $\Delta c_{\text{Mix}} = c_{i-\text{Mix}} - c_{i-\text{ad}}$  or



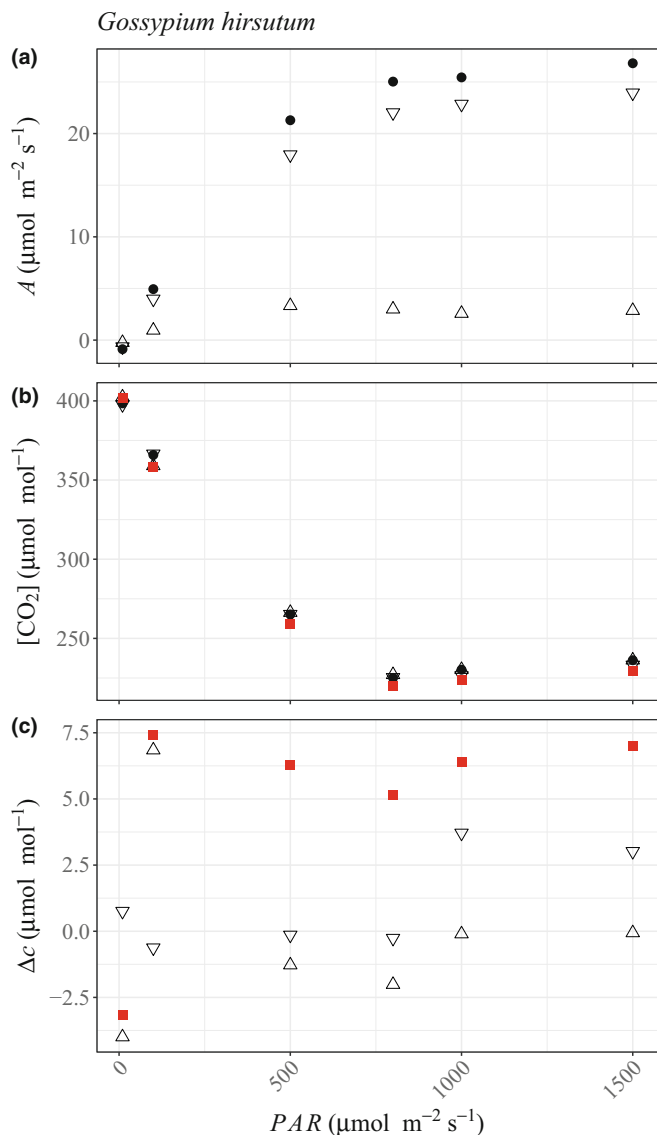


**Fig. 3** Responses of *Gossypium hirsutum* (a–c) and *Helianthus annuus* (d–f) leaves to varying the air saturation deficit (ASD). In (a, b, d, e), data from the abaxial surface are the inverted triangles (▽); adaxial surfaces the triangles (△); mix of gases are the black dots (●), and values using  $c_w$  are the red squares (■). (a, b) assimilation rate vs ASD; (b, e) calculated leaf internal  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration using gas exchange fluxes from the abaxial surfaces ( $c_{i-ab}$ , inverted triangles), adaxial surfaces ( $c_{i-ad}$ , triangles), the combination of fluxes ( $c_{i-Mix}$ , black dots), and the estimated  $c_w$  (red squares) vs ASD; and (c, f) the difference between the substomatal  $[\text{CO}_2]$  estimated from the combination of gases and each surface of the leaf ( $\Delta c_{Mix} = c_{i-Mix} - c_{i-ad}$  (△);  $\Delta c_{Mix} = c_{i-Mix} - c_{i-ab}$  (▽); and  $\Delta c_{MW} = c_{i-Mix} - c_w$  (■)).

$\Delta c_{Mix} = c_{i-Mix} - c_{i-ab}$ ) can be attributed mostly to different resistances to  $\text{CO}_2$  diffusion between the adaxial and abaxial surfaces. During our experiments, ASD below 1.2 kPa and  $c_a$  equal to or below  $400 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  gave  $\Delta c_{Mix}$  below  $5 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  in *H. annuus*; but for *G. hirsutum* only at low light intensities was  $\Delta c_{Mix} > 5 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  and for *C. annuum* under all the conditions  $\Delta c_{Mix}$  was  $> 5 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ . These results indicate that leaf features such as the stomatal density ratio affect the reliability of the  $c_{i-Mix}$  estimation unpredictably. This highlights the risk of error from combining the adaxial and abaxial fluxes as mixing the fluxes hides differences resulting from the physical structure of the leaf, especially in plants under stress.

In amphistomatous leaves, when stomata are open and under no stress, it has been shown that the ratio  $c_{i-ad} : c_{i-ab}$  is close to one (Mott & O'Leary, 1984; Wong *et al.*, 1985b,c; Parkhurst *et al.*, 1988). However,  $c_{i-ad} : c_{i-ab}$  diverges from one in leaves that present internal leaf structures affecting gas diffusion between adaxial and abaxial stomatal cavities (Farquhar & Raschke, 1978; Long *et al.*, 1989) and, as was shown here, when the stomatal density ratio (adaxial : abaxial) is substantially different from one (see *C. annuum*).

After mixing the gases, we must adjust the calculations accordingly to account for the differences between the adaxial and abaxial surfaces. For instance, to estimate  $g_{sw}$ ,  $c_s$ ,  $w_s$ , and  $c_s$ , we can



**Fig. 4** *Gossypium hirsutum* leaf responses whilst varying the photosynthetically active radiation (PAR). (a) Assimilation light response; (b) CO<sub>2</sub> concentration within the leaf, *c<sub>i</sub>* estimated using the gas exchange fluxes from the abaxial surfaces (▽), adaxial surfaces (Δ), the combination of fluxes (●) and the estimated *c<sub>w</sub>* (■); and (c) the difference between the [CO<sub>2</sub>] estimated from the combination of gases and each surface of the leaf ( $\Delta c_{\text{Mix}} = c_{i-\text{Mix}} - c_{i-\text{ad}}$  (Δ);  $\Delta c_{\text{Mix}} = c_{i-\text{Mix}} - c_{i-\text{ab}}$  (▽); and  $\Delta c_{\text{MW}} = c_{i-\text{Mix}} - c_w$  (■)).

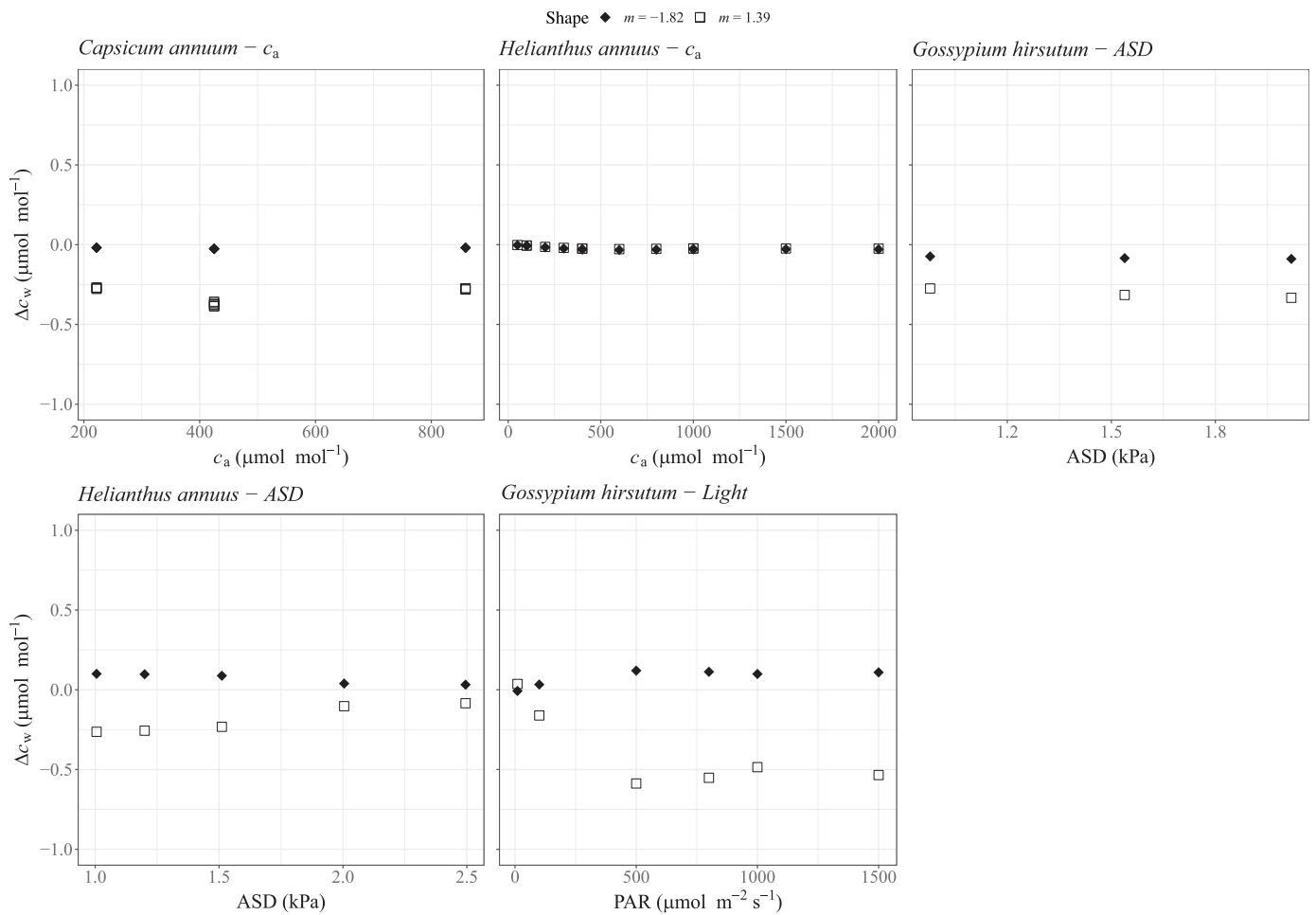
incorporate a variable that relates adaxial and abaxial characteristics, such as  $g_{\text{sw-ad}} : g_{\text{sw-ab}}$ , and  $c_{i-\text{ad}} : c_{i-\text{ab}}$  (see Notes S6). Equations in Notes S6 are a more accurate approach than assuming a single internal [CO<sub>2</sub>] at one virtual substomatal cavity when adaxial and abaxial fluxes are mixed. However, even when a leaf has a known cuticular conductance, to calculate  $g_{\text{sw}}$ , the value  $g_{\text{sw-ad}} : g_{\text{sw-ab}}$  remains unknown after the mixing, and in practice, the only known value to calculate  $c_i$  using Notes S6 equations is the total assimilation rate.

The differences between adaxial and abaxial stomatal behavior vary among species and with conditions, making it difficult to isolate a set of parameters that would allow us to predict the

**Table 6** Mixing ratios obtained from the experiments; bold values are those found at benign ambient conditions ( $c_a \approx 400 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ , PAR =  $1000 \mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$  and ASD  $\approx 1 \text{ kPa}$ ).

Plant	Experiment	$g_{\text{sw-ad}} : g_{\text{sw-ab}}$	$c_{i-\text{ad}} : c_{i-\text{ab}}$	$c_{s-\text{ad}} : c_{s-\text{ab}}$	$w_{s-\text{ad}} : w_{s-\text{ab}}$
<i>Gossypium hirsutum</i>	ASD: 1; 1.5; 2 kPa	<b>0.22</b> ; 0.27; 0.36	0.98; 0.97; 0.96	<b>1.01</b> ; 1.01; 1.01	<b>0.97</b> ; 1.00; 0.94
<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	ASD: 1, 1.2; 1.5; 2; 2.5 kPa	1.11; 1.22; 0.97; 0.66; 0.54	1.00; 1.01; 1.03; 1.27; 1.27	<b>1.00</b> ; 1.00; 1.00; 1.01; 1.01	<b>1.00</b> ; 0.99; 1.00; 0.98; 0.95
<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	$c_a$ : 222; <b>425</b> ; 859 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$	0.08; <b>0.08</b> ; 0.07	0.92; <b>0.93</b> ; 0.95	<b>1.01</b> ; <b>1.01</b> ; 1.01	0.93; <b>0.92</b> ; 0.96
<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	$c_a$ : 400; 300; 200; 100; 50; 100;	<b>0.58</b> ; 0.60; 0.64; 0.62; 0.71;	<b>1.01</b> ; 0.99; 0.97; 1.00; 0.98;	<b>1.01</b> ; 1.01; 1.01; 1.00; 0.99;	<b>1.00</b> ; 1.00; 1.00; 1.01; 1.00;
	400; 600; 800; 1000; 1000; 1500;	0.99; <b>1.20</b> ; 0.88; 0.62; 0.44;	0.99; <b>1.02</b> ; 1.01; 1.00; 0.99;	0.99; <b>1.00</b> ; 1.01; 1.01;	<b>1.01</b> ; <b>1.00</b> ; 1.00; 1.00;
	2000 $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$	0.46; 0.47; 0.48	0.99; 1.00; 1.00	1.01; 1.01; 1.01; 1.00	1.00; 1.00; 1.00
<i>Gossypium hirsutum</i>	PAR: 1000; 1500; 800; 500; 100;	<b>0.11</b> ; 0.12; 0.13; 0.18;	<b>1.00</b> ; 1.01; 1.01; 1.00;	<b>1.01</b> ; 1.01; 1.01; 1.01; 1.00;	<b>1.01</b> ; 1.00; 0.98; 0.98; 1.01; 1.02
	10 $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$	0.18; 0.19	0.98; 1.01	1.00	

Ratio of adaxial over abaxial stomatal conductance ( $g_{\text{sw-ad}} : g_{\text{sw-ab}}$ ), substomatal cavity CO<sub>2</sub> concentration ( $c_{s-\text{ad}} : c_{s-\text{ab}}$ ), CO<sub>2</sub> concentration at the surfaces of the leaf ( $c_{s-\text{ad}} : c_{s-\text{ab}}$ ), and water vapor concentration at the surface of the leaf ( $w_{s-\text{ad}} : w_{s-\text{ab}}$ ). Experimental conditions varying the air saturation deficit (ASD), atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration ( $c_a$ ), and photosynthetically active radiation (PAR).



**Fig. 5** Variability of  $c_w$  using different  $m = -1.82$  and  $1.39$  in Eqn 19. Data from Figs 1–3.  $\Delta c_w = c_w(-0.31) - c_w(m)$ .  $\Delta c_w$  for the experiments varying the atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration ( $c_a$ ), the air saturation deficit (ASD), and the photosynthetically active radiation (PAR).

behavior of  $g_{\text{sw-ad}} : g_{\text{sw-ab}}$ ,  $c_{i-\text{ad}} : c_{i-\text{ab}}$ ,  $c_{s-\text{ad}} : c_{s-\text{ab}}$ , and  $w_{s-\text{ad}} : w_{s-\text{ab}}$ . As the stomatal density ratio (adaxial over abaxial) has an important impact on the fluxes, a tentative option is to use it to predict  $g_{\text{sw-ad}} : g_{\text{sw-ab}}$  to separate adaxial and abaxial transpiration ( $E$ ). To do so, we must assume vapor saturation within the leaf and identical adaxial and abaxial boundary layers, allowing us to estimate  $w_s$  and  $g_{\text{sw}}$  for each surface. Nevertheless, even in conditions where the gradient  $w_i - w_a$  is the same for both surfaces, the stomatal density ratio is not a good approximation of the stomatal evaporation ratio and  $g_{\text{sw-ad}} : g_{\text{sw-ab}}$  (Anderson & Briske, 1990). Thus, this approach would need to account for the stomatal aperture ratio (adaxial over abaxial), which is known to be variable, for example, between 0.75 and 0.9 (Aston, 1978; Pemasada, 1979; Pearson *et al.*, 1995; Wang *et al.*, 1998) and as we observed here, is not constant for a single leaf under different conditions. Furthermore, the stomata can differ in depth even at a known stomatal aperture ratio and stomatal density ratio. For the estimation of  $c_s$  and  $c_{i-\text{ad}} : c_{i-\text{ab}}$ , we have the same issues described above in addition to the unknown  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration in the internal leaf airspace.

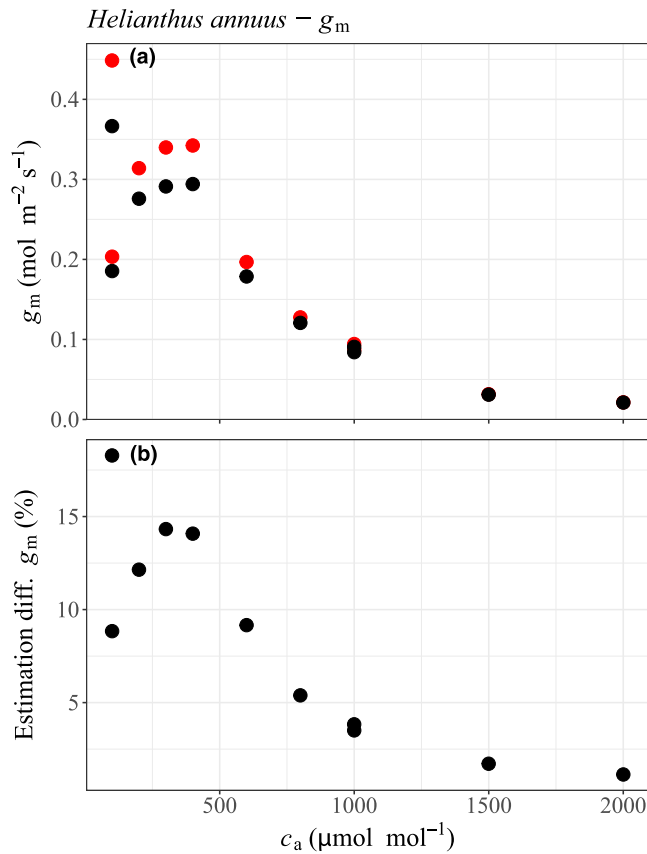
In some cases, part of the impact of abaxial and adaxial fluxes is incorporated at the time of calculating stomatal conductance to

$\text{H}_2\text{O}$ , using a correction factor that relates the abaxial and adaxial stomatal conductances ( $K = g_{\text{sw-ab}}/g_{\text{sw-ad}}$ ) (Li-Cor, 2020). This correction factor is used to account for the impact of differences in adaxial and abaxial stomatal conductance, and the boundary layer conductance ( $g_{\text{bw}}$ ) of each surface on the total conductance to water. However,  $K$  does not include the impact of the actual partition of fluxes on the adaxial and abaxial surfaces and requires previous knowledge of the adaxial and abaxial  $g_{\text{sw}}$ . Yet, in most cases,  $K$  has a minor impact on the calculations because  $g_{\text{bw}}$  is large within the chamber and assumed identical for each surface.

This means that using leaf features as a guide to artificially splitting adaxial and abaxial fluxes after a combined measurement makes it challenging to obtain more reliable results than those from previous assumptions when adaxial and abaxial fluxes were mixed. Thus independent gas exchange measurements of the adaxial and abaxial surfaces must be preferred.

### Two sides, one $\text{CO}_2$ concentration $c_w$

As expected from our theory,  $c_w$  was *c.*  $10 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$  lower than the adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$  when estimated at about ambient atmospheric  $c_a$  (*c.*  $400 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ ) (see Table 5). Assessing the



**Fig. 6** Estimation of mesophyll conductance to CO<sub>2</sub> ( $g_m$ ) from data in Fig. 2. (a) Calculations of  $g_m$  using  $c_w$  (red) and  $c_{i-Mix}$  (black). (b) Difference between  $g_m$  estimated using  $c_w$  and  $c_{i-Mix}$  ( $\text{Diff. } g_m = 100|g_m(c_w) - g_m(c_{i-Mix})|/g_m(c_w)$ ).

gas exchange of each surface independently allows us to explore physiological responses accounting for the behavior of each side, but also brings us to the practical issue of ending up with two different  $c_i$  values, which might be a problem for some common calculations. The impact of including  $c_w$  on the calculation varies; for instance, we found in our experiments a minor effect in the estimation of biochemical parameters but a larger effect in the estimation of mesophyll conductance to CO<sub>2</sub>. See both examples below.

$A-c_i$  curves are usually fitted to the data using the Farquhar *et al.* (1980) model, obtaining the biochemical parameters of maximum carboxylation rate ( $V_{cmax}$ ), the maximum rate of carboxylation allowed by the potential electron transport ( $J_a$ ) at a particular light intensity and temperature, triose phosphate utilization (TPU), and dark respiration ( $R_d$ ). In the  $A-c_i$  curve presented in Fig. 2d, we found two estimated values for  $c_i$ : adaxial and abaxial. Thus, the fitting can give us two possible outcomes for each parameter. Assuming infinite mesophyll conductance, we obtain (ad & ab):  $V_{cmax} = 102.8$  and  $97.5$ ;  $J = 129.3$  and  $128.3$ ; TPU =  $9.3$  and  $9.2$ ; and  $R_d = 1.6$  and  $1.4 \mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ . The introduction of  $c_w$  instead of  $c_i$  into the calculation of the biochemical parameters gives a single value for each of them:  $V_{cmax} = 104.2$ ;  $J = 129.5$ ; TPU =  $9.3$ ; and  $R_d = 1.4 \mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ . Thus, the differences in the estimation of biochemical parameters

were small, but in some cases, these levels of uncertainty might not permit the most demanding interpretation of different biological trends.

The inclusion of  $c_w$  facilitates mesophyll conductance ( $g_m$ ) estimations by accounting for  $R_{ias}$ . In a rough calculation using the variable  $J$  method to estimate  $g_m$  (Harley *et al.*, 1992), equating  $J$  to ETR obtained with fluorescence measurements, we can see that the  $g_m$  values estimated using  $c_w$  differ from those estimated using  $c_{i-Mix}$  (Fig. 6a). At atmospheric  $c_a$  ( $400 \mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ ), we found that the  $g_m$  estimated from  $c_{i-Mix}$  was *c.* 15% lower than the  $g_m$  estimated using  $c_w$ . Estimations using  $c_w$  were higher than those using  $c_{i-Mix}$  in all the measurements, ranging from 18% to 1% difference in the estimates (Fig. 6b). The inclusion of  $c_w$  gives a more detailed description of the CO<sub>2</sub> gradients within the leaf and a better interpretation of the gaseous and liquid paths of CO<sub>2</sub> diffusion.

### High air saturation deficit measurements

Extra care must be taken with water-stressed leaves, as estimations of gas exchange are based on the assumption of  $w_i$  being at saturated conditions ( $w_i = w_{sat}$ ) and that the whole surface of the leaf contributes to the exchange. However, it has been shown that under high ASD, patchiness (Mott & Buckley, 2000), or unsaturation may occur (Cernusak *et al.*, 2018), and the mixture of adaxial and abaxial fluxes might mask the occurrence of both. The failure of one or both of these assumptions compromises the validity of the results, making their identification crucial (Rockwell *et al.*, 2022). The measurements presented in Fig. 3 for *G. hirsutum* and *H. annuus* both exhibit oddities. *Gossypium hirsutum* presented considerably different  $c_w$  at different ASD without significant changes in total assimilation rate and a reduction in the difference between adaxial  $c_i$  and  $c_w$  while ASD increased without a significant reduction in adaxial assimilation. *Helianthus annuus* estimation of  $c_w$  presented values between the adaxial and abaxial  $c_i$  while the ASD increased, which is impossible as  $c_w$  would have opposite gradients with each  $c_i$ . These two oddities are likely to be caused by unsaturation or patchiness and the principles presented by Wong *et al.* (2022) may help to identify when either of them occurs.

Wong *et al.* (2022) estimated unsaturation by cancelling out the assimilation rate on one surface of the leaf and assuming constant  $R_{ias}$ , and that the photosynthetic capacity is not affected by the increase of vapor pressure difference (VPD). They then used iteration to find a  $w_i$  that satisfies the expected adaxial-abaxial  $c_i$  difference at different ASD. We can generalize these principles using Eqn 19 to derive an equation for  $w_i$  (Eqn S7.6 in Notes S7), and then use data from a [CO<sub>2</sub>] response curve at low VPD to estimate the target  $c_w$  for a given total assimilation rate. Using this approach, we found that the data of *G. hirsutum* in Fig. 3 presented a value of  $c_w$  lower than the one expected from the relation  $A/c_w$  measured under low ASD. Then, modifying the expected  $c_w$  in order to match the  $A/c_w$  measured under low VPD it appeared that  $w_i < w_{sat}$  (Fig. 7). We found that using the same approach but with a normal  $A/c_i$  does not provide consistent results, even though sometimes it seems like a reasonable proxy

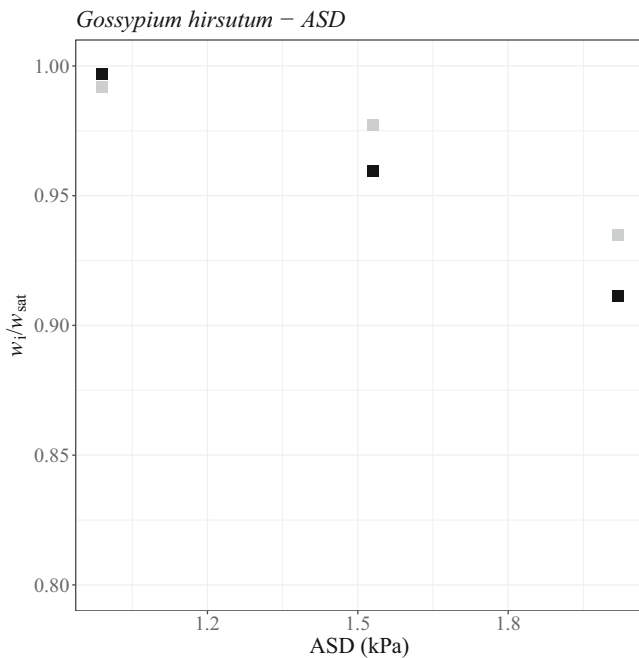


Fig. 7 Estimation of unsaturation from data in Fig. 3 using  $A-c_w$  (black) and  $A-c_i$  (grey) curves. ASD, air saturation deficit.

to detect unsaturation. On the contrary, *H. annuus* in Fig. 3 presented a value of  $A$  lower than the one expected from the  $A/c_w$  measured under low VPD, which is consistent with a leaf experiencing patchiness. Note that the correction in  $w_i$  using the equation presented in Notes S7 for *H. annuus* in Fig. 3 to match the relation  $A/c_w$  measured under low VPD would be  $w_i > w_{sat}$ , which is not possible because moisture would condense.

The calculations to estimate unsaturation shown in Fig. 7 are given in Notes S8 but more research is needed to evaluate and validate them under a broader range of conditions and for more species. Our future research will focus on the occurrence of unsaturation and patchiness, and how to account for it using the equations in this paper. The methods presented here may help improve the information extracted from gas exchange data, including the occurrence of unsaturation under any experimental setup that can measure adaxial and abaxial surfaces independently. Unfortunately, independent adaxial and abaxial measurement has not been a common practice recently and most devices do not include this feature. A possible alternative is to use the modification of two commercial LI-6800 devices presented by Márquez *et al.* (2021a) that allows measurements of both surfaces of the leaf simultaneously, as in this study.

### Model insights

We presented Eqn 19 to estimate  $c_w$  accounting for  $A_s$  and  $R_{ias}$ , which is a bounded equation for  $\int v(k)dk$  and  $\rho(l)$  from our general derivation Eqn 10. The measured  $R_{ias}$  includes the effect of the tortuosity in the mesophyll gaseous path ( $\tau$ ) due to structures within the leaf such that  $r = r(l, \rho(\tau))$  and  $\tau = \tau(l)$ . Equivalently,  $A_s$  comprises the effect of light intensity, light capturing efficiency and the biochemical activity in the

photosynthetic tissue in the mesophyll such that  $u = u(l, v(I, b))$ ,  $I = I(l)$  and  $b = b(l)$ . Thus,  $\rho(l)$  and  $v(l)$  are complex to determine independently; however, we took advantage of the fact that their evaluations from 0 to  $L$  are known. Interestingly, the estimation of  $c_w$  showed stability even when the shape of  $\int v(k)dk$  was varied significantly. This is due to the structure of Eqn 19, which is searching for a value that satisfies the gradient of  $\text{CO}_2$  between surfaces accounting for a known total resistance ( $R_{ias}$ ), and which in practice encompasses a narrow range of values, as can be seen in Fig. 5. The impact of  $r(l)$  on  $c_w$  calculations was not directly tested but the test performed in  $\Theta(l)$  varying  $m$  (Fig. 5) suggests that it should be minor. In general, the variation of  $v(l)$  is expected to be larger than that of  $\rho(l)$  with progress along the path,  $L$ .

In practice, Eqns 10 or 16 could be used to estimate any  $[\text{CO}_2]$  in the transect from the stomatal cavity to  $c_w$ ; however, for those calculations, the bounds for  $\int v(k)dk$  and  $\rho(l)$  are likely to be less flexible than those used for estimating  $c_w$ . For instance, the shape of the cumulative photosynthetic uptake ( $\int v(k)dk$ ) plays a major role in the estimations of concentrations in the transect other than  $c_w$ , as can be deduced from Notes S4. A similar argument applies for the assumption of constant  $\rho(l)$ , constant resistance to  $\text{CO}_2$  diffusion per unit of length, where the shape of  $\rho(l)$  may play a more significant role in calculating a  $c_i$  other than  $c_w$ .

Finally, our model uses  $c_i$  as input, and thus it carries the assumptions used to estimate the leaf surface resistance, to calculate  $c_i$  from gas exchange measurements. The use of models for estimating  $c_i$  such as von Caemmerer & Farquhar (1981) and Márquez *et al.* (2021a), usually assume that the  $\text{CO}_2$  concentrations in the substomatal cavities are similar, that the stomatal cavity is at saturated conditions at leaf temperature and that the whole leaf surface is involved in the exchange (no patchiness). Regarding the latter two assumptions, in ‘High air saturation deficit measurements’ in the Discussion section, we have presented a method that can be used to evaluate the validity of these assumptions in the measurements and how to differentiate them.

### Conclusion

The use of a device that includes measurements of the gas exchange independently on each side of the leaf allowed us to account for the mesophyll airspace resistances in the calculations of  $\text{CO}_2$  concentrations within the leaf, permitting estimation of the  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration at the surface of photosynthetic mesophyll cells ( $c_w$ ). Accounting for  $c_w$  improves the information that can be extracted from gas exchange experiments, allowing us to provide a more detailed description of the  $\text{CO}_2$  and vapor gradients within the leaf.

The miscalculations arising from the mixing of adaxial and abaxial fluxes are usually overlooked, especially when the measurements are made on plants with high stomatal conductance or under stable conditions. However, we have shown that these errors are variable, and even mild stresses or changes in  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration might significantly impact the  $c_i$  calculation regardless of the stable gas exchange conditions. We showed that it is an incorrect generalization that there is a negligible difference between adaxial and abaxial

stomatal cavity  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration when the adaxial and abaxial atmospheric conditions ( $c_a$  and  $w_a$ ) are identical. Parity of  $c_i$  between the two sides only occurs in some cases and seems to depend on leaf structure. Mixing of gases from the upper and lower cuvette is a source of error in  $c_i$  calculations commonly found in leaf gas exchange measurements and the correction of this error after mixing is not feasible. Thus, the mix of adaxial and abaxial fluxes should be avoided in experiments that require high reliability of internal leaf  $[\text{CO}_2]$  estimations.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank ANID, Doctorado Becas Chile/2015 Folio: 72160160, the ARC Centre of Excellence for Translational Photosynthesis and the ARC for DP210103186 for funding the research; Suan Chin Wong for providing technical support; ANU Plant Services for taking care of the plant material. Open access publishing facilitated by Australian National University, as part of the Wiley - Australian National University agreement via the Council of Australian University Librarians.

## Competing interests

None declared.

## Author contributions

DAM, HS-W, LAC, and GDF conceived the study. DAM designed the experiments. DAM undertook the experimental work and data analysis. DAM and GDF developed the theory and modeling. All authors contributed to concept development. DAM wrote the manuscript with help from all authors.

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## Data availability

All generated and analyzed data from this study are included in the published article and its [Supporting Information](#). Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to GDF.

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## Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

**Notes S1** Derivation of  $c_w$  from adaxial and abaxial gas exchange measurements.

**Notes S2** R script to calculate  $c_w$ .

**Notes S3** Impact of neglecting small fluxes in vCF equations.

**Notes S4** Noble gases data from Wong *et al.* (2022).

**Notes S5** Light induction.

**Notes S6** Derivation of total  $g_{sw}$ , adaxial, and abaxial  $c_i$ ,  $c_s$ , and  $w_s$ .

**Notes S7** Derivation to estimate  $w_i$ .

**Notes S8** Estimation of unsaturation.

**Table S1** Estimations of  $c_w$  for 30 leaves (10 of each species) at conditions of ASD = 1 kPa,  $c_a$  = 400  $\mu\text{mol mol}^{-1}$ , and light intensity of 1000  $\mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ .

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