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Insights into Leptopilina Spp. Immune-Suppressive Strategies Using Mixed-omics and Molecular Approaches

Brian Wey The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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INSIGHTS INTO LEPTOPILINA SPP. IMMUNE-SUPPRESSIVE STRATEGIES USING MIXED-OMICS AND MOLECULAR APPROACHES

by

BRIAN WEY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Biology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2021

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Facility in Biology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Date **Sanna Goyert, Ph.D.**

Chair of Examining Committee

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Date Cathy Savage-Dunn, Ph.D. Executive Officer

Advisor: Shubha Govind, Ph.D.

Supervisory Committee:

Karen Hubbard, Ph.D.

Shaneen Singh, Ph.D.

Keith Hopper, Ph.D.

The City University of New York

ABSTRACT

INSIGHTS INTO LEPTOPILINA SPP. IMMUNE-SUPPRESSIVE STRATEGIES USING MIXED-OMICS AND MOLECULAR APPROACHES

by BRIAN WEY

Advisor: Shubha Govind, Ph.D.

Host-parasite interactions influence the biology of each over the course of evolution. Parasite success allows for the passage of potent virulence strategies from generation to generation. Host success passes stronger immunity and resistance strategies to the following generations as well. Only by studying both partners within their natural contexts can we begin to understand the relationship between the two and how immune mechanisms and virulence strategies interact as a molecular arms race.

In this work, we focus on a natural host-parasite pair, the *Drosophila-Leptopilina* model. *Leptopilina* species are parasites of several fruit fly species, including *Drosophila melanogaster*. This model offers many advantages, including the well-annotated *Drosophila* genome, the genetic and transgenic tools available for *Drosophila*, and the ease of culturing these insects in the lab.

The wasps *Leptopilina heterotoma*, *Leptopilina boulardi*, and *Leptopilina victoriae* utilize somewhat distinct immune-suppressive strategies to suppress the host defenses. These are mediated in part through virus-like particles (VLPs) that are injected into the host larva along with the wasp egg. VLPs target hosts' blood cells. The primary *Leptopilina* species studied within this work is *L. heterotoma*, a wasp that is successful against a wide range of *Drosophila* species. Its infection leads to the destruction of almost all larval blood cells, blocking encapsulation and antimicrobial peptide production in *D. melanogaster*. *L. heterotoma*'s VLPs contain ~400 proteins; some are predicted to carry out conserved cellular processes or may modulate the immune response. To understand the nature of VLPs and *L. heterotoma*'s unique immune suppression strategy, this work has utilized mixed-omics, transgenic, and RNA interference (RNAi) approaches.

In Chapter 1, we characterized the expanded particle proteome, the whole-body transcriptome, and sequenced the *L. heterotoma* genome to search for evidence of virus-related proteins within the

particle's expanded proteome. We found no viral coat proteins within the expanded particle proteome. In addition, more than 90% of VLP proteins had coding regions within the wasp genome.

In an Addendum to Chapter 1, we compared the recently published *L. boulardi* VLP proteome to that of the *L. heterotoma* VLP/MSEV proteome to better understand the similarities of both particles and their extracellular vesicle character. While both wasps only share approximately 30% of their particle proteins, the overall extracellular vesicle profile and distribution of proteins across classes is similar. A search of highly assembled wasp genomes improved our published assessment of the proportion of *L. heterotoma* MSEV proteins that are encoded by the wasp genome. This observation also held for the *L. boulardi* VLP proteins, reinforcing the extracellular nature of these particles.

In Chapter 2, we focus on the virulence function of a key *L. heterotoma* spike protein, p40. In transgenic expression, a full-length construct of p40 localized to cell membranes while a truncated construct (without the putative transmembrane domain) was found to be secreted, supporting previous structural predictions of p40. The secreted protein prevented encapsulation of eggs of a closely related wasp *L. victoriae*, which normally elicits strong encapsulation in *D. melanogaster*. RNA interferencemediated knockdown of p40 significantly reduced *L. heterotoma*'s ability to suppress encapsulation as a larger proportion of p40RNAi-infected wild type hosts showed strong encapsulation. Together, these results underscore the importance of p40 in *L. heterotoma*'s ability to prevent encapsulation and ensure offspring survival.

Parasitic wasps are keystone species and some species are utilized to control agricultural pests. By providing genomics, transcriptomics and proteomics analyses, this work expands the utility of the *Drosophila-Leptopilina* model; the released data will facilitate studies in novel areas of host-parasite biology. It also illuminates virulence strategies and the evolution of virulence factors of these wasps.

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A great thank you to Dr. Johnny Ramroop and Dr. Mary Ellen Heavner for teaching me about flies, the lab, and for laying the groundwork for the projects within. Another thank you to all the other members of the Govind Lab that I have had the pleasure of working with. Jennifer, Zubi, Joyce, Kushagra, Thuriah, Jackson, Brandon, Alitzel, Lady, Carlo, and Riyami, thank you for making each day interesting, different, and a constant learning experience.

In Chapter 1, Dr. Keith Hopper and Dr. Kameron T. Wittmeyer assisted with many portions including additional genome assembly, KAT analysis used in Figure 2 and Supplemental Figure 1, and helpful discussions. Sequencing of *L. heterotoma* VLP proteins and enrichment analysis was performed by Dr. Mary Ellen Heavner. Initial sequencing of *L. heterotoma* genome was performed by Dr. Thomas Briese. Bioinformatics work was conducted in-house and with the BIOMIX Shared Computing Cluster at Delaware Biotechnology Institute, University of Delaware. This chapter was published in G3: Genes, Genomes, Genetics under the title "Immune suppressive extracellular vesicle proteins of Leptopilina heterotoma are encoded in the wasp genome."

The *Leptopilina boulardi* VLP protein sequences analyzed in an Addendum to Chapter 1 were provided by Dr. Julien Varaldi (University of Lyon, France). Bioinformatics work was conducted in-house and with the BIOMIX Shared Computing Cluster at Delaware Biotechnology Institute, University of Delaware.

In Chapter 2, initial cloning of p40 and design of original p40 primers was performed by Dr. Johnny Ramroop. Western blot in Figure 1 was performed by Carlo Sevilla. Gateway destination vectors for transgenic flies were obtained from the Drosophila Genomics Resource Center, supported by NIH grant 2P40OD010949-10A1. Western blot in Figure 1 was performed by Carlo Sevilla. Tumor burden assay and viability assay performed by Carlo Sevilla and Kushagra Vashist. Asif Siddiq helped with the preparation of figures.

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- 15.2: Recombinant 15.2
- BV: Bracovirus
- *Cg*: *Collagen*
- *CyO*: Curly of Oster
- *da*: *daughterless*
- EVE: Endogenous viral element
- FM7: First Multiple 7
- GFP: Green fluorescent protein
- *hopTum-L* : *hopscotchTumor-lethal*
- IV: Ichnovirus
- *Lh*: *Leptopilina heterotoma*
- *Lb*: *Leptopilina boulardi*
- LbFV: Leptopilina boulardi Filamentous Virus
- *Lv*: *Leptopilina victoriae*
- mCD8: Murine Cluster of Differentiation 8
- mCD8-GFP: Murine Cluster of Differentiation 8-green fluorescent protein
- mRFP: Monomeric red fluorescent protein
- MSEV: Mixed strategy extracellular vesicle
- *msn*: *misshapen*
- myr-mRFP: Myristoylated monomeric red fluorescent protein
- PBS: Phosphate buffered saline
- PDV: Polydnavirus
- RFP: Red fluorescent protein
- *v*: *vermillion*
- VLP: Virus-like particle
- *w*: *white*
- *y*: *yellow*

INTRODUCTION

Parasitioids and their Hosts

Heterologous animal-animal interactions, and even animal-bacterial interactions, are often studied at many different levels, including cost-benefit. Such studies have revealed examples and mechanisms of not only predation (feeding on prey species) and pathogenicity (process and progress of infection by microbes), but also symbiosis, or how the two parties live together. Symbiosis is further divided into three categories: parasitism – where only one party benefits, mutualism – where both parties benefit equally, and commensalism – where neither party is affected positively or negatively (reviewed by Leung et al. in (*1*)). All three divisions of symbiosis can be observed within the class Insecta.

Commensalism is usually observed in insect-bacterial interactions, such as the association of the intracellular bacterial genus *Wolbachia* with many insects (*2*). Commensal relationships can also be observed between two insect species, for example, species of foraging ants which follow each other's chemical trails to food (*3, 4*). In general, commensalism appears to be a tolerance of interaction without a very large cost or gain on fitness. Other works have also delineated that animal hosts may adapt to parasites such that the burden of parasitism is not as severe (implying a lesser penalty on fitness and survival), eventually leading to what Leung et al. call a "superficial" commensalism (*1, 5*).

Mutualism is observed in the relationship between particular species of aphids and ants (reviewed by Stadler et al. in (*6*)). Aphids are parasites of plant species because they consume sap which directly harms the growth of the plant host; however, this method of feeding produces an excrement called honeydew (*6*). Ants collect honeydew from aphids as food (*6*). In return, depending on the species, ants tend, cultivate, and/or protect aphids from their predators and parasites to ensure their food supply of honeydew from the aphids (*6*). In some cases, aphids will tolerate damage to their wings from ants as part of the relationship (*6*).

As for parasitism, insects can be parasites (as in the blood-feeding mosquito *Aedes aegypti* (*7*)) and/or become parasitized (such as fruit flies in the genus *Drosophila* by Plasmodium, mites, nematodes,

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and wasps *(8-10)*). Classical insect parasites feed on their host, but may not directly kill them (*1, 10*)), whereas parasitoids, kill their host.

Parasitoids are insects which generally attack juvenile (embryonic, larval or pupal) stages of the host, although adult hosts can also be attacked and parasitized. They feed on host tissue and consume the entire host (usually in the case of insect hosts) (*11, 12*). The host serves as the primary food source for the parasitoids' larval stages and may be the sole major feeding the parasitoid does in the life cycle (*11, 12*). Insect parasitoids can be further divided into ectoparasitoids (parasitoids that develop outside the host) or endoparasitoids (parasitoids that develop within the host) (*11, 12*). Furthermore, ectoparasitoids tend to be idiobionts, which arrest or stop the growth of the host in order to prevent dislodging or death of the parasite from host movement. Whereas endoparasitoids are koinobionts which do not pause host growth (*12, 13*). Both kinds of parasitoids typically possess a dual life cycle, where the larval stage is the parasitoid, feeding on a host, while the adult stage is free-living (*12*).

Oviposition by Hymenopteran parasitoids involves laying their eggs inside a host by injecting them into the host body with a needle like structure called an ovipositor (*12*). In addition to the egg, the wasps introduce factors to counter the hosts' immune defense mechanisms: venom proteins, virus-like particles (VLPs), or domesticated viruses (*8, 9, 12, 14-31*). Successful development of the parasitoid offspring depends on the success of the adult female's strategy in using the above mechanisms to suppress the host immune response to prevent death of offspring. Further obstacles to parasitization include host behavioral immunity such as methods of self-medication via alcohol-containing substrate feeding, decrease in egg laying and production, and even rolling to avoid oviposition (*32-35*). Understanding this biological arms race-- between host defense and parasite offense, within a natural context, is vital for studies in both immunity and virulence/pathology as it can allow further dissection of how immune and virulence strategies arose. Such studies can also help identify species which may fill similar ecological niches and can be used to reduce the threat of invasive species.

This dissertation focuses on the interactions between *Drosophila* host species and wasp parasitoid species using the Leptopilina-Drosophila host-parasite model.

The Leptopilina-Drosophila Host-Parasite Model

The wasp genus *Leptopilina* is within the family Figitidae and contains at least seven species (*36*). Wasps of this genus parasitize fruit flies of the genus *Drosophila* (*9, 36-38*). Of these, three *Leptopilina* species are well characterized in studies of host-parasite interactions and immune suppression strategies: *Leptopilina heterotoma* (*Lh*) (Fig 1), *Leptopilina boulardi* (*Lb*), and *Leptopilina victoriae* (*Lv*) (*36*). Experiments on host range and success of parasitism (as defined by percentage of wasp offspring emerging out of total number of infections), *Lh* is considered to be a generalist parasite, capable of parasitizing many different *Drosophilia* species with high success, and *Lb* is considered to be a specialist parasite, highly successful only on flies of the melanogaster group (Fig 1) (*9*).

Lh, *Lb*, and *Lv* share similar developmental stages and the most extensive observations on developmental timing were made by Kopleman and Chabora in *Lb* with some observations made in *Lh* by Small et al. and are described in part here (*39, 40*). Usually, females chemically detect that a host has been parasitized; however, superparasitism (multiple instances of oviposition by the same female within one host) can still occur in the wild. In some strains of *Lb*, superparasitism is associated with a behavioraltering virus known as Leptopilina boulardi Filamentous Virus (LbFV) (*41-44*). The early stage wasp larva hatches and feeds on host hemolymph for two to three days until the host pupariates (*39, 40*). In the instance of superparasitism, one wasp larva dominates, while the development of the supernumerary individuals is arrested and they are killed, allowing for development of one parasitoid in each host (*9, 45*). The mechanisms underlying wasp selection, developmental arrest and the elimination of the animals are not understood. Developing *Leptopilina* wasps then feed on the larval hemolymph as endoparasites and eventually on the prepupal and pupal host stages, until the entire host is consumed, at around ten days post oviposition (*39, 40*). Utilizing the host pupal case, one wasp grows, finishes development and ecloses as a free-living adult from the fly's pupal case instead of the adult fly (*39*) (Fig 1).

Anti-parasitoid Immunity in *Drosophila*

The major anti-parasitoid response in Drosophila is the encapsulation of wasp eggs, or of early wasp larvae, by the host blood cells called hemocytes. Wild *D. melanogaster* live on rotting fruit and are subject to infection by microbes (bacteria, viruses, and fungi) and attack by parasitoid wasps.

Immunological responses to both microbes and metazoan parasites are initiated by the two branches of innate immunity, the cellular branch and the humoral branch, each controlled by highly conserved NF-kB signaling (*46-51*). Toll, initially discovered as part of the maternally-encoded embryonic dorsal-ventral patterning pathway, also plays a role in both pathways in response to parasitism (*52*). The cellular branch is executed by three hemocyte types: the macrophage-like plasmatocyte, the lamellocyte involved in encapsulation and melanization, and the crystal cells that carry out melanization and wound healing (*49, 51*). The cellular immunity is responsible for phagocytosis of microbes and formation of capsules around juvenile parasite stages (*29, 40, 47, 48, 53-57*).

Fly hemocytes are produced from three tissues. The initial larval circulating hemocytes are produced from embryonic mesoderm (*49, 51, 58*). Hemocytes produced in response to immune challenge are produced from the anterior lobe of the immune sensing organ called the lymph gland (LG) and from circulating precursors (*50, 58, 59*). The anterior lobe possesses a cortical zone (CZ) of mostly differentiated cells surrounding a medullary zone (MZ) of progenitor cells kept in quiescence by the posterior signaling center (PSC) (*50*). The posterior lobes of the LG contain progenitor cells which will become hemocytes for the adult fly stage (*50*). A third population of hemocytes exists as sessile, or noncirculating, and are largely found in sub-epidermal compartments (*60*). These sessile cells originate from the circulating hemocytes and are maintained in a niche created by the peripheral nervous system (*61*). The Toll/NF-kB pathway is activated in the PSC upon parasitization and react to reactive oxygen species (ROS) produced in the LG, particularly by the PSC niche, to cause cell differentiation (*52, 62*).

Plasmatocytes are the predominant hemocyte population in unchallenged *Drosophila* larvae (*49, 51*) (Fig 2). They circulate in the hemolymph and phagocytose bacteria and dead cells (*49, 51*). Plasmatocytes can also be found in the sessile compartments (*60*). Lamellocytes are not normally seen in circulation in high numbers in *D. melanogaster* larvae until after parasitism or nematode infection and are usually produced in two ways: (a) already differentiated plasmatocytes transdifferentiate into lamellocytes; or (b) and progenitor cells, found in the lymph gland and in circulation, differentiate into lamellocytes (*51, 63-67*) (Fig 2). Some lamellocytes then adhere to parasite eggs and embryos to encapsulate and kill the invading parasite (*19, 63, 65-70*). Crystal cells exist as both circulating, LG, and sessile populations and

possess enzymes involved in melanization and production of reactive oxygen species in order to form melanized clots in response to wounding (*49, 51*).

The encapsulation reaction responsible for killing wasp eggs and larvae is similar to granulomas in mammalian responses to bacterial species that that evade phagocytosis (for example *Mycobacterium*) and has been observed in multiple insects and even invertebrates in general in response to pathogens and parasites that cannot be phagocytosed (*56, 57, 71-74*). As species of *Drosophila*, and many stemboring Lepidopteran species, are considered agricultural pest species, research into the encapsulation response is extensive as the search for the ideal biocontrol for these pests continues (*32, 53, 75-80*). The process of encapsulation requires the following steps: recognition (usually after a damage signal is released), adhesion, spreading (hemocytes flatten themselves along the foreign body), and degranulation (release of enzymes involved in melanization in order to kill the foreign body) (*72*).

Typically, the humoral arm of *Drosophila* immunity responds to bacterial infection by producing antimicrobial peptides from the fat body through the Toll and/or Imd pathways (Gram positive and negative bacteria respectively) (*46-48, 81*). *D. melanogaster* possesses nine different Tolls and the various receptors respond to different immune challenges (*82-84*). For example, Toll-7 responds to viruses (*85*) and Toll-8 is seen to modulate the immune response in trachea (*86*). However, the humoral response is also activated upon wasp parasitism (*52, 87*). Production of Spätzle by cells in the LG or circulating hemocytes occurs without immune challenge (*87, 88*). Production of Spätzle processing enzyme in response to wasp parasitism, activates Toll signaling, causing the release of Dorsal and Dorsal-related immune factor (the fly NF-kappa B proteins) from I-kappa B cognate protein, Cactus. This activation step promotes hemocyte proliferation, egg recognition and encapsulation (*52, 87*). Given the central roles of this conserved pathway in both the cellular and humoral responses and inflammation, modification of this pathway through various means or depletion of the hemocytes themselves, inflammatory cells, thus appear to be crucial to parasitoids to ensure offspring survival.

Immune suppression by *Leptopilina*

Research into the mechanisms used by *Lh* to successfully suppress the host immune response started with the Rizkis in 1984 by examining the effects of venom gland components on hemocytes (*89*). *Lh*, *Lb*, and *Lv* each possess a distinct venom gland composed of a long gland, connecting duct, and reservoir (*90-92*). All three wasps produce venom proteins within the long gland as well as discrete particles that are secreted in an immature form via actin-lined canals into the long gland lumen. The particles mature and develop their spikes, required for interaction with host cells, as they move to the reservoir (*29, 90, 92-95*). These particles were called "virus-like" particles (VLPs) and are linked to parasite success (*29, 93*). However, the morphology and variability of size and structure of mature VLPs, and their step-wise biogenesis and maturation suggest that the nature of these particles is non-viral. If the immune suppression caused by the VLPs is not successful, the host immune response activates. Lamellocytes aggregate to encapsulate (formation of a physical barrier/sheath around a foreign body/object) and melanize (generation and deposition of melanin as part of the process to produce reactive oxygen species) wasp eggs or larvae in the larval hosts' body cavity to kill it (*63, 72*) (Fig 1). Because VLPs are linked to parasite success, differences in the proteins within them might indicate somewhat different suppression strategies (*96-98*). In addition to immune evasion, *Lb* suppress host fly immunity either by influencing blood cell shape or function (*8, 54, 64, 94*). However, the continued presence of hemocytes appears to allow for induction of humoral response (*9, 87*). *Lb* eggs also tend to adhere to host tissue, allowing for a potential gap in the capsule from which the wasp larva may escape from (*8*). In contrast, *Lh* parasitism causes cell death in hemocytes and prevents activation of the host humoral response (*8, 9, 29, 54, 89, 90, 93, 94, 99*). Lamellocytes die from entry of *Lh* VLPs through an unknown mechanism, eventually inducing lysis (*29, 30*). Phagocytosis of *Lh* VLPs by plasmatocytes/macrophages results in terminal deoxynucleotidyl transferase dUTP nick end labeling (TUNEL)-positive cell death (*29, 30, 100*). These two distinct cell-killing effects of *Lh* VLPs on lamellocytes and macrophages are not observed after *Lb* attack of *D. melanogaster* (*8, 9, 64, 94*). Although *Lv* appears to be much more closely related to *Lh*, *Lv* parasitism still causes capsule formation through potential failure to manipulate host immune signaling (*87, 90, 91*).

The Biotic Nature of VLPs and their Potential Origins from Domesticated Insect Viruses

The strategy of using VLPs to suppress the host immune response is not unique to *Leptopilina spp*. and the origins and nature of VLPs and functionally related secretion products is a rapidly developing topic in the study of parasitoid wasps. Further enriching this discussion are wasps that have domesticated viruses for use in their immune suppression strategies.

Parasitic wasps in the superfamily Ichneumonoidea diverged more than 20 million years ago from Figitid wasps (like *Leptopilina*) (see Fig 3 for phylogenetic tree). Wasps of this superfamily parasitize a diverse range of host arthropods, and have symbiotic relationships with insect viruses under the family Polydnaviridae (*14, 15, 17, 101-107*). These wasps fall into two subfamilies: Braconidae and Ichneumonidae (*101, 108-110*). Accordingly, Polydnaviruses (PDVs) are divided into two genera, Bracovirus (BV) and Ichnovirus (IV) (*101, 111, 112*). BVs are descended from insect nudiviruses (a family of large rod-shaped, enveloped viruses with large circular genomes) and IVs are thought to have descended from large cytoplasmic DNA viruses (potentially in the family ascoviridae) (*15, 103-106, 108, 110, 113-117*). BV and IV genomes are integrated into the wasp genome and particles are produced in calyx cells found around and supporting the wasp ovary. PDVs contain circular dsDNA, and are released from calyx cells via lysis (BV) or budding (IV) (*101, 112, 117, 118*). The PDV particles are injected into the host during egg laying where they infect host cells and express viral genes to suppress host immunity (*14, 101, 102, 117, 119, 120*).

Although BV and IV genomes are integrated into these wasp lineages and reliant on wasp success for continued survival, this integration is not always perfect, and some genes may be lost over evolutionary history. Some lineages have either lost the viral capsid or produce incomplete capsids. These species then use other viral genes to produce a viral envelope for transmission of other effector proteins (*109*). For example, *Fopius arisanus,* produces incomplete capsids that fail to properly package DNA but still include virulence proteins (*110*). Another wasp, *Venturia canescenes*, produces unencapsidated immune-suppressive VLPs surrounded by a lipid envelope. These *V. canescenes* particles are thought to be of alphanudiviridae origin as 21 nudiviral genes encode the viral envelope components and proteins for VLP biogenesis (*109*).

Viral integration does not appear to be unique to ichnoviruses and bracoviruses. Using predictive methods trained on published protein data from several species of Ichneumonid and Braconid wasps and their associated viruses, Burke et al. (*121*) and located sets of the "ancient core" genes for IV, BV, and

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even for the *Leptopilina boulardi* Filamentous Virus (LbFV) in several Ichneumonid wasp genomes (*121*). LbFV manipulates wasp behavior but is not known to be immune suppressive (*42, 122, 123*).

To understand the biological nature of *Leptopilina* VLPs, their mechanisms of action, and determine their possible relation to PDVs, Heavner et al. characterized VLP proteomes from two *Lh* strains (Lh14 and LhNY) and identified a shared set of 161 proteins in three classes: Class 1 – conserved eukaryotic, Class 2 – infection and immunity related, and Class 3 – unannotated proteins (*96*). They also examined if these *Lh* proteins were expected to be present in *Lb* and a more distantly related wasp *Ganaspis hookeri.* Several similar proteins in Class 1 and 2 proteins were found in both *Lb a*nd *G. hookeri*, but very few proteins in Class 3 were shared by all three wasps (*96*). The proteome also did not contain known viral coat proteins but contains several vesicular transport and endomembrane system proteins (considered under Class 1) (*96*).

Heavner et al. also found several interesting gene families in the *Lh* VLP proteome such as a family of prokaryotic-like GTPases and a family of RhoGAPs (*96*). These results suggested that *Lh* VLPs may not be "virus-like", but instead are more akin to specialized eukaryotic vesicles for transport of virulence factors from parasite to host. Their variable morphologies and the stepwise biogenesis process of VLPs also support their organelle nature (*96*). More interesting, these GTPases and a highly produced protein called 'p40' are absent from *Lb* VLPs, implying a difference in strategy may be due to differences in proteomic profile (*96*).

In addition, in collaboration with Dr. T. Briese (Columbia Univ.) our lab characterized total nucleic acids from gradient-purified *Lh* VLPs. This analysis did not support the presence of an independent VLP "genome" (Govind and Briese labs, unpublished). Thus, Heavner et al. proposed the renaming of *Lh* VLPs to Mixed-Strategy Extracellular Vesicles (MSEVs) (*96*).

These initial results of (a) similar organizations of their venom gland morphologies (*92*), (b) homologies between proteins and transcripts between *Lh* and *Lb* (*96*), and (c) morphological similarities in mature MSEV/VLP particle suggested that *Lb* VLPs share the same biotic nature as *Lh* MSEVs. Recent studies in *Lb* VLPs have approached this topic in two different directions. Wan et al. (*95*) have published data that supports the idea of *Lb* VLPs as extracellular vesicles due to their biogenesis and have dubbed them "venosomes". Published proteomic analysis of *Lb* VLPs also indicates several proteins that are expected to be highly involved in immune suppression (serpins, superoxide dismutase, and calreticulin), as well as the important virulence protein LbGAP (*95, 98*). However, the idea that these structures have a viral origin cannot be ruled out.

LbFVs and their proposed connection to VLPs/MSEVs

The idea that *Lb* VLPs have derived from insect viruses has been proposed by Di Giovanni et al. (*98*). Following previous studies of the behavior-altering virus LbFV (known to induce superparasitism in *Lb*), Di Giovanni et al. found 13 viral ORFs related to LbFV's genes integrated into the *Lb* genome (*41, 98, 124*). These ORFs were also found to be integrated into the *Lh* and *L. claivpes* genomes (*98*). Evidence of at least one ORF (called ORF 96) was found in three other *Leptopilina* species (*98*). Molecular experiments indicate expansion of copies and increased transcription of these viral ORFs in the *Lb* venom gland as wasp larvae mature into adulthood (*98*). However, there is no evidence that these ORFs are required for *Lb* VLP biogenesis. After a proteomic analysis, Di Giovanni et al. also report that at least two of these viral proteins are found in the *Lb* VLP proteome (*98*), whereas the *Lh* MSEVs proteome published by Heavner et al. (*96*) contains a homolog of one of the two LbFV ORFs.(*98*). The viral ORF found within *Lh* MSEVs and *Lb* VLPs (LbFV ORF 85) is annotated as Ac81, expected to be involved in nucleocapsid envelopment for *Autographa californica* nuclear polyhedrosis virus (*125*). Even though we identified the same 13 ORFs integrated into the *Lh* genome in our studies, our search criteria did not identify significant similarity to any of the LbFV proteins in the expanded proteome analysis (*97*). Thus, the links between LbFV ORF-derived proteins and VLP/MSEV production or function are tenuous and further work is needed to examine the functions of these viral ORFs in the wasps' venom.

p40, a putative spike protein of Lh VLPs

In previous studies of the *Lh* venom and MSEVs, our lab identified a highly expressed protein, called 'p40' (*91*). Immuno-gold electron microscopy revealed that p40 to the surface and their spikes and p40. Notably, a p40-like protein is also found in the sister wasp species *Lv* (*91*). Microsequencing of the p40 protein and comparing its peptide sequences to the *Lh* MSEV transcriptome helped identify the coding sequence of p40 (*22, 96*). At the time of its publication, there were no proteins with high primary

sequence similarity to p40 (*22, 96*). Further bioinformatics analyses predicted that p40 possesses a signal peptide, a central domain, and a transmembrane domain (*96*).

The central domain of p40 was modeled and is expected to fold similarly to needle tip proteins, IpaD and SipD of bacterial Type Three Secretion Systems (T3SS) (*96*). T3SS are used by Gram negative bacteria like *Shigella* and *Salmonella* to evade or infiltrate host intestinal cells and macrophages and modify host cell behavior and viability (*126-128*). The similarities in p40 and IpaD/SipD locations and structures may indicate a similarity in function (*96, 97*). A comparison of IpaD (*Shigella spp*. (*129, 130*)), SipD (*Salmonella spp*. (*131, 132*)), and BipD (*Burkholderia spp*. (*133*)) activities with p40 can be found in Table 1. These comparisons will help define the function of p40 in the *Lh* infection strategy in more detail.

Advances in Molecular and Genetic Approaches to Parasitoid Research

To better understand the immune suppression strategies of *Leptopilina spp*., our and other labs have begun genomic analyses and are developing genetic tools for research. Work in other Hymenopteran genomes has revealed much about venom genes as well as the integration of PDV sequences into wasp genomes (*20, 22, 110, 134-138*). Thus, comparative genomics tools can further our understanding of the composition of VLPs/MSEVs and their and relationship with their wasps. Previous studies consisted of transcriptomic studies and estimations on genome size and karyotypes (*22, 24, 25, 139*). The genomes of *Lh* and *Lb* have been recently published, including one from our work on the *Lh* genome, where we reported genes coding for more than 90% of MSEV proteins (*97, 98, 140*).

The sequencing of these *Leptopilina* genomes now allows us to develop better genetic tools for work in this model system. In species where libraries of mutants (for ex. Keio mutant collection in *Escherichia coli* (*141*)) or genetic tools (such as the UAS-GAL4 system, FLP-FRT recombination knockout system, and P-element insertion mutation libraries in Drosophila (*142-146*)), are not readily available, RNA interference (RNAi) as a means of reverse genetic analysis is a powerful tool. RNAi has already been used in insects other than *Drosophila*, such as the beetle *Tribolium* and multiple Hymenopteran models such as *Apis mellifera* and *Nasonia vitripennis* (*26, 147-150*). Previous studies have successfully used RNAi in *Lb* as well (*151*). However, the difficulty in administration of RNAi in such small endoparasitoid wasps has been survival post injection of dsRNA. Colinet et al. obtained modest survival

rates of 30% after injection (*151*). Feeding of dsRNA to larval insect stages is a possible alternative and has been shown to work in other insect species and is a well-characterized method of administration for *Caenorhabditis elegans* research (*152-158*). Casual observations have seen extended lifespan of wasp adults when provided with honey. Experiments in food preference and foraging have found that adult females with low fat content will actively search out food and seem to prefer honey (*159*). Thus, mixing dsRNA with honey substrate after starvation is a potential avenue of dsRNA administration.

Development of CRISPR-Cas9 in Hymenoptera is also a promising method of gene editing and study. Work has been done in *N. vitripennis* to show that CRISPR does work within the system and can be used to develop stable mutant lines (*160-162*). Continued development of genetic tools in Hymenoptera can only aid in the development and utilization of *Lh* as tools and model organisms.

Description of Work

Within this work, we aim to address two key questions: what is the nature of the MSEVs *L. heterotoma* use to evade the host immune response, and what is the function of the abundant venom protein p40? To address these questions, we sequenced and assembled the genome of *L. heterotoma* and determined if the proteins found in MSEVs are encoded by the genome and not an endosymbiont or part of an unincorporated extrachromosomal DNA. We also expanded our analysis of the MSEV proteome from the Lh14 strain. This analysis did not reveal any viral proteins that may have been missed in the earlier analysis of proteomes shared between Lh14 and LhNY (*96*). These new data were published in *Genes, Genomes, and Genetics* (G3) (*97*) and is presented as Chapter 1.

As part of the rapid development in the field, new genomic and proteomic data has been made available in the last year. We analyzed the *Lb* VLP proteome (as published by Di Giovanni et al. (*98*)) and a compared it directly to the *Lh* MSEV. This analysis shows that *Lb* VLPs and *Lh* MSEVs are similar in enrichment profiles despite only a third of particle proteins being highly similar. We also utilized newly released genomic data to confirm the results of our MSEV protein search within the *Lh* genome. This comparative analysis is added as an Addendum to Chapter 1.

We then experimentally confirmed the prediction that p40 is a membrane protein and determined the importance of p40 in parasite success through use of RNA interference and infection studies using transgenic hosts. This required us to develop protocols for RNAi in *L. heterotoma*. The data and developed methods are presented here in Chapter 2.

Significance

Natural host-parasite interactions are excellent models of study, especially as a means of studying evolution of virulence factors and development of immunity. Studies in *Nasonia spp*. have paved the way in parasitoid research; being larger than *Leptopilina* and of an ectoparasitic life history, makes injections, dissections and molecular analysis easier (*163*). However, *Nasonia* are not as easily cultured due to the requirement of blowfly larval hosts which are grown on rotting meat (*20, 148, 160-162*). In contrast, several species of both Leptopilina and Drosophila are easy to raise, which opens up new possibilities for comparative parasitology studies (*9, 40*). The well-studied *Drosophila* system with numerous genetic lines and tools can be used to better understand the virulence mechanisms of *Leptopilina (142, 143)*.

Understanding the functions of wasp-specific proteins unique to a species and to family members will help understand how *Lh* may have gained a foothold and can parasitize on many *Drosophila spp*. A molecular understanding of species-specificity between the *L. heterotoma-Drosophila* parasite-host partners provides a window on the virulence mechanisms of other wasps of this genus, other parasitic wasps, and even other parasites in general. In addition, developing tools to genetically manipulate these wasps will allow us to begin dissecting the biology of the parasite in more complex ways when used in conjunction with the genetic tools available to *Drosophila*.

Parasitic wasps are of immense agricultural importance in terms of ecosystem impact and more recent invasive pest species, such as *Drosophila suzukii* (*80, 164-166*). In particular, *Lh* and *Ganaspis brasiliensis* are expected to be effective against *D. suzukii (80)*. Furthermore, many other pest species are also parasitized by their own wasp species which are also in consideration for pest control (*75, 78*). Thus, our work will provide a broad understanding of this class of host-parasite interactions and indicate the impact of usage of these wasps as biological pest control.

Figure 1: Flowchart indicating potential outcomes of *L. heterotoma* parasitism of *D. melanogaster*. A female D. melanogaster lays eggs which develop into larvae. (Path A) If the larva is parasitized and manages to activate an immune response, the wasp egg or larva is encapsulated (white arrowhead) and killed. The fly larva then continues development into adulthood and the melanized capsule can still be observed in the adult abdomen (white arrowhead). (Path B) If the wasp is successful in suppressing the immune response, the wasp larvae develops and begins feeding on host hemolymph, moving on to tissue, and eventually emerges as an adult from the host pupal case. Full grown adult *Drosophila* are typically 3 mm long. Fully grown adult *Leptopilina* females are usually less than 2 mm long in comparison. Images are not to scale.

Figure 2: Representative image of plasmatocytes (yellow arrowheads, smaller macrophage like cells) and lamellocytes (white arrows, large, flat, discoidal cells) from a smear of hemolymph from mutant *Drosophila* larvae (genotype: *y v hopTum-L /+; msnf9-GFP/Cg-GAL4, UAS-myr-mRFP*). Nuclei are stained with Hoechst (blue); actin is stained with Alexa Fluor 488 (green). Red signal is expression of myristoylated-RFP. Image taken at 40x magnification.

Figure 3: Phylogenetic tree of parasitic wasps and *A. melifera* (latter as outgroup) using cytochrome oxidase 1 protein sequences. Protein sequences were obtained from NCBI. Tree was made using phylogeny.fr workflow containing Mr Coffee, Gblocks, PhyML, and TreeDraw (*167-173*). Bootstrapping was run 100 times. Orange box indicates Figitid wasps (with VLPs) and yellow box indicates Ichneumonid wasps (with polydnaviruses).

Table 1: Comparison of T3SS needle tip proteins IpaD, SipD, and BipD to wasp protein p40. Citations indicate primary literature where these activities or traits were described.

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CHAPTER 1

Immune suppressive extracellular vesicle proteins of *Leptopilina heterotoma* **are encoded in the wasp genome**

ABSTRACT

Leptopilina heterotoma are obligate parasitoid wasps that develop in the body of their *Drosophila* hosts. During oviposition, female wasps introduce venom into the larval hosts' body cavity. The venom contains discrete, 300 nm-wide, mixed-strategy extracellular vesicles (MSEVs), until recently referred to as viruslike particles. While the crucial immune suppressive functions of *L. heterotoma* MSEVs have remained undisputed, their biotic nature and origin still remain controversial. In recent proteomics analyses of *L. heterotoma* MSEVs, we identified 161 proteins in three classes: conserved eukaryotic proteins, infection and immunity related proteins, and proteins without clear annotation. Here we report 246 additional proteins from the *L. heterotoma* MSEV proteome. An enrichment analysis of the entire proteome supports vesicular nature of these structures. Sequences for more than 90% of these proteins are present in the whole-body transcriptome. Sequencing and *de novo* assembly of the 460 Mb-sized *L. heterotoma* genome revealed 90% of MSEV proteins have coding regions within the genomic scaffolds. Altogether, these results explain the stable association of MSEVs with their wasps, and like other wasp structures, their vertical inheritance. While our results do not rule out a viral origin of MSEVs, they suggest that a similar strategy for co-opting cellular machinery for immune suppression may be shared by other wasps to gain advantage over their hosts. These results are relevant to our understanding of the evolution of figitid and related wasp species.

INTRODUCTION

Parasitic wasps are amongst the most abundant insects; they are vital to biodiversity and contribute to biological control of agricultural pests (*1, 2*). A common strategy for reproductive success of parasitic wasps is suppression of immunity in their larval hosts. Parasitic wasps produce viruses or viruslike particles in tissues associated with the ovary. Wasps of the Ichneumonoidea superfamily produce symbiotic polydnaviruses (PDVs), which package circular dsDNA. PDV (Bracovirus (BV) in braconid wasps; Ichnovirus (IV) in ichneumonid wasps) genomes are integrated within the wasp genome as islands of viral genes. Upon oviposition, PDVs suppress host immunity. BVs and IVs derive from nudivirus and large DNA cytoplasmic viruses, respectively (reviewed in (*3-5*) and references therein).

Immune-suppressive virus-like particles (VLPs) (e.g., VcVLPs in the ichneumonid *Venturia canescens* and FaENVs in the braconid *Fopius arisanus*) lack proviral DNA segments, but are of viral origin and transfer virulence proteins into host cells (*6, 7*). Viral genes encoding VLP proteins are either dispersed in the wasp genome (as in VcVLP) or present in discrete genomic areas (as in FaENV). Thus, various independent viral endogenization events have been important for successful parasitism by these wasps (*3, 5*).

Here, we focus on immune-suppressive particles of figitid wasps of the genus *Leptopilina,* that infect *Drosophila* spp. and are gaining importance as models for natural host-parasite interactions (*8*). *Leptopilina heterotoma* (*Lh*), *L. victoriae* (*Lv*), and *L. boulardi* (*Lb*) produce VLPs in their venom glands. The VLPs of *Leptopilina* spp. and their proteins have been linked to parasite success (*9-14*). Evidence for DNA in *Leptopilina* VLPs is lacking, and because of the absence of a published wasp genome, the chromosomal versus extrachromosomal location of MSEV protein genes is not known. Our goals here are (a) to describe additional proteins in the MSEV proteome and examine their relationship with PDV and other viral proteins, and (b) determine whether MSEV genes are encoded within the wasp genome.

We recently described 161 proteins in the VLPs from two *Lh* strains in three classes: conserved eukaryotic with cellular function (Class 1), infection- and immunity-related (Class 2), and unannotated (novel) proteins without similarity to known proteins (Class 3) (*15*). Class 1 proteins include several vesicular transport and endomembrane system proteins. Class 2 proteins include predicted modulators of immune response, e.g., metalloendopeptidases, RhoGAPs, a knottin-like protein, and a new family of

prokaryotic-like GTPases whose genes lack introns. A striking example of Class 3 proteins is p40, with three-dimensional structural similarity to Type 3 secretion system (T3SS) needle tip proteins, IpaD/SipD/BipD from Gram-negative bacteria, *Salmonella, Shigella* and *Burkholderia*. Earlier results have indicated that the *p40* gene (unlike the *GTPase* genes) is expected to have introns. These results suggested that *Lh* VLPs have novel properties with elements of the prokaryotic and eukaryotic secretion systems and possess a functionally diverse array of immune-suppressive proteins. We therefore renamed VLPs as Mixed Strategy Extracellular Vesicles (MSEVs). Their variable morphologies distinguish them from ordered PDV morphologies. Additionally, genes encoding abundant MSEV proteins p40 and GTPase are present even in antibiotic-treated wasps. These results favored a non-microbial nature of MSEVs (*15*).

Here, we present an analysis of an additional 246 proteins from the *Lh* 14 MSEV proteome to obtain a more comprehensive description. A combined analysis of these and previous results reinforce the idea that the MSEV proteome is enriched in exosomal proteins and that Class 3 proteins are not shared with either *Lb* or an unrelated *Ganaspis* spp. Whole-body transcriptome of adult *Lh* wasps validated the expression of the MSEV genes. *De novo* genomic assembly and analyses revealed 90% of conserved Insecta Benchmarking Universal Single-Copy Orthologs (BUSCOs), as well as a majority (375/407; ~90%) of the MSEV proteins are encoded in the wasp genome. While we cannot rule out a viral origin of MSEVs, in aggregate, our results provide a clearer understanding of the extant nature of these complex structures and strengthen the idea that specialized extracellular vesicles transfer wasp virulence factors and other parasite proteins into *Drosophila* host cells.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Insects: Isogenized *Lh* strains New York (NY; (*13, 16*)) and *Lh* 14 (*17*), were raised on the *y w* strain of *D. melanogaster* that were reared on standard cornmeal, yeast, and agar fly food at 25°C as described (*18*). Adult wasps were collected from parasitized hosts, 25 days after infection at 25^oC. Male and female wasps were stored on fly food with 70% honey on "buzz" plugs.

Analysis of MSEV super-set ORFs: Previously undescribed open reading frames (ORFs) from the *Lh* 14 MSEV proteome and sequenced as part of (*15*) (PXD005632) are analyzed in the context of the published female abdominal (*19*) and whole body (this study) *Lh* 14 transcriptomes. We have not observed any difference in venom activities of *Lh* 14 and *Lh* NY (*11, 17*), or in wasp success under laboratory conditions. The *Lh* 14 ORFs were aligned against transcripts from BioProject: PRJNA202370, Accession number GAJC0000000 (*19*) as previously described in (*15*). Proteins with an ORF and a transcript were run through the BLAST2GO (v 5.2; downloaded June 2018) annotation pipeline with an Evalue threshold of 1x10-7 (*20, 21*). Results were organized and classified based on Gene Ontology (GO) terms from UniProt and InterPro (*22-25*). Proteins were considered "virulence-related" based on GO terms indicating involvement with infection, host evasion, inflammation, and immune response. ORFs that did not return results via BLAST or InterProScan (Class 3 proteins) were run through Conserved Domain Search (CDD) on NCBI (version 3.16) (26). The E-value cut off for CDD search was 1x10⁻². Proteins were considered to have a signal peptide if one was predicted using Phobeus and Signal P (*27-30*). Transmembrane domains were considered to be present if they were predicted using Phobeus and TMHMM (*27, 28, 31, 32*).

The GhostKOALA algorithm (*33*) was used to assign KEGG ortholog (KO) numbers for the MSEV superset protein sequences. If a primary KO number failed to be assigned by GhostKOALA, a secondary number assignment with a score >= 50 was used. Redundant KO numbers were excluded.

MSEV proteins were included in the enrichment analyses only if a human ortholog exists; the gene identifiers for human orthologs were obtained from the MSEV KO and the UniProt mapping utility (*24, 34*). (Human orthologs were chosen because a robust proportion of Vesiclepedia's data is derived

from human vesicle proteomes.) The orthologs of human genes were analyzed for enrichment with the FunRich algorithm (*35, 36*) against the Vesiclepedia database (*37, 38*).

Finally, the MSEV proteome was used as a query using BLASTp for the following databases: "non-redundant" (nr), nr restricted to Taxid: Viridae (10239), nr restricted to Taxid: Polydnaviridae (10482), and nr restricted to Taxid: Unclassified Polydnaviridae (40273) (E-value threshold: 1.0x10-3 , %ID minimum: 20%, performed 04/16/2019). tBLASTn of *L. boulardi* and *G. hookeri* (previously called *Ganaspis spp. 1*) (*19*) transcriptomes was performed on 03/10/2019; the threshold for homologs in *Lb* and *G. hookeri* were 25% ID and an E-value of 1.0x10-10 .

Genomes sequencing and assembly: Library preparations, sequencing reactions, and associated validations were conducted by GENEWIZ, Inc. (South Plainfield, NJ, USA). Genomic DNA was extracted from ~50 mg of tissue (~100 wasps) of *Lh* males and females separately using mixed bead beating and PureLink Genomic DNA extraction kits following manufacturer's protocol. Quantification of extracted DNA was performed using Nanodrop and Qubit2.0 Fluorometer (Live Technologies, Carlsbad, CA, USA). Integrity of genomic DNA was verified by gel electrophoresis (0.6% agarose). DNA libraries were prepared for each wasp gender by acoustic shearing fragmentation using a Covaris S220. Fragments were end repaired and adenylated prior to adapter ligation on 3' ends (NEB NextUltra DNA Library Preparation kit, Illumina, San Diego, CA, USA). Enrichment and indexing of adapter-ligated DNA was done through limited cycle PCR. DNA library validation was performed using TapeStation (Agilent Technologies, Palo Alto, CA, USA). Libraries were quantified using Qubit 2.0 Fluorometer.

Real time PCR (Applied Biosystems, Carlsbad, CA, USA) was used to quantify DNA molar mass for each library before multiplexing in equal molar mass. DNA libraries were sequenced using a 2x150 paired-end (PE) configuration on one lane on an Illumina HiSeq 4000. Image analysis and base calling were performed using the HiSeq Control Software (HCS) on the HiSeq instrument.

The average size of inserts (without adaptors) in the Illumina library was ~300-350 bp. *De novo* assembly of reads and scaffolding of contigs was performed using ABySS 2.2 (*39*) by the New York Genome Center. *De novo* assembly of combined male/female genome was performed using Platanus-

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allee (*40*) and scaffolding was improved using AGOUTI (*41*) on the University of Delaware's BIOMIX cluster.

Sequences from *Drosophila*-associated bacteria such as *Wolbachia* spp., *Acetobacter pasteurianus,* and *Lactobacillus plantarum* were identified in both assemblies. *Wolbachia* are endosymbionts of many insects including *Leptopilina* spp. (*42-44*). *Lactobacilli* and *Acetobacter* are symbionts and commensals of sugar-consuming insects (*45, 46*). Among the three bacterial species, *Wolbachia* sequences were the most abundant. BLASTx analysis showed that predicted genes from *Wolbachia* scaffolds were associated with *Wolbachia* proteins in GenBank. These bacterial and mitochondrial sequence-containing scaffolds were identified during the NCBI submission process and were manually removed from the submission.

Evaluation of genome assemblies: Assemblies made with ABySS and Platanus-allee with AGOUTI were run through QUAST v4.0 (*47*) to determine scaffold number, N50, and GC%. All assemblies were examined for conserved genes and orthologs with BUSCO v9 (*48, 49*) using the Insecta set and training parameters set to "Nasonia". NCBI BLAST+ (v 2.7.1) was used to compare select scaffolds produced from male and female genome assemblies (*50, 51*). E-value threshold was set at 1x10-7 . E-values of alignments were considered acceptable if within the range of 0 to $1x10^{-10}$.

K-mer analysis was performed using the K-mer Analysis Toolkit (KAT) (*52*) and heat maps were used to compare multiplicity (coverage plus repeats) of K-mers to GC content of the reads, coloring bins according to the number of distinct K-mers in each. This analysis was used to determine whether there were separate clusters of multiplicity/GC content that might arise from different sources, such as contamination. BLAST (*50, 51, 53*) was used to search for homologs of a random sample of genomic scaffolds to which reads from each cluster mapped. The joint assembly of the *Lh 14* genome was compared to the published *L. clavipes* genome (Bioproject: PRJNA84205 (*54*)) through maps of 27-mer multiplicity versus GC content. Finally, 27-mer multiplicity/GC content of the scaffolds (9.6 Mb) containing MSEV genes was compared to a random subset of scaffolds (9.6 Mb) without MSEV genes. Statistical differences between *Lh 14* and *L. clavipes* genomes and between MSEV-gene containing scaffolds and non-MSEV-gene containing scaffolds were calculated using a multivariate Cramér test (*55-57*).

Gene predictions, gene annotation, and viral gene searches: Gene predictions were performed on parallel and anti-parallel strands using AUGUSTUS (v3.3.1; August 2018) (*58-60*) with the *Nasonia* training set. The AUGUSTUS readout was separated into mRNA, coding DNA sequence (CDS), and translations by gffread (*61*).

Gene predictions were annotated by performing a BLASTx of all gene predictions against the entire nr database (Downloaded on January, 2019) and InterProScan on the University of Delaware BIOMIX Cluster before using BLAST2GO (*20, 21*) to finish annotation based on BLASTx and InterProScan results.

NCBI BLAST+ (v 2.7.1) was used on a local machine to search predictions and scaffolds, cutoff was %ID >70%, E-value < 1E-50, and query coverage > 70%. MSEV genes and 1x10⁻² for Polydnavirus and Nudivirus proteins. Family *Polydnaviridae* and *Nudiviridae* protein sequences for the 11 species available on OrthoDB v9 were downloaded on February 2019 (*50, 51*).

Whole-body transcriptome sequencing and assembly: Total RNA extraction, library preparations, sequencing reactions, and bioinformatics analysis were conducted at GENEWIZ, INC (South Plainfield, NJ, USA). RNA was extracted from frozen tissue with the Qiagen RNeasy Plus Universal mini kit using manufacturer's instructions (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany). The extracted RNA was quantified using a Qubit 2.0 Fluorometer and its integrity was checked with the 4200 TapeStation (Agilent Technologies, Palo Alto, CA, USA).

RNA samples were enriched for mRNA using Oligo d(T) beads. RNA sequencing libraries were prepared using the NEBNext Ultra RNA Library Prep Kit for Illumina following manufacturer's instructions (NEB, Ipswich, MA, USA). The sequencing libraries were validated by using the Agilent TapeStation. Quantification was performed using the Qubit 2.0 Fluorometer and quantitative PCR (KAPA Biosystems, Wilimington, MA, USA).

Sequencing libraries were clustered on a single lane of a flow cell and sequenced on the Illumina HiSeq 4000 instrument using a 2x150 PE configuration. Image analysis and base calling were conducted by the HCS. Raw sequence data (.bcl files) was converted into fastq files and de-multiplexed using Illumina's bcl2fastq 2.17 software. One mismatch was allowed for index sequence identification.

The Trinity v2.5 (*62*), *de novo* assembler was used to assemble the *Lh 14* transcripts. The *de novo* assembled transcriptome was created with a minimum contig length of 200 bp per sample. Transrate v1.0.3 (*63*) was used to generate statistics for the *de novo* assembled transcriptome. EMBOSS tools getorf were then used to find the ORFs within the *de novo* assembled transcriptome. The *de novo* transcriptome assembly was then annotated using Diamond BLASTx (*64*).

The transcriptome reads were mapped to the genomic scaffolds for downstream analyses using HISAT2 or BWA (*65, 66*).

Preparation of template DNA and PCR: Male and female wasps (n=12, for each sex), were separated and washed in 70% ethanol, and then rinsed twice in deionized water. Genomic DNA (gDNA) was extracted using a Qiagen DNeasy Blood and Tissue kit following provided protocols. gDNA was eluted in Tris-EDTA buffer, pH 8.0, and stored at 4°C. The concentration of gDNA was determined by NanoDrop (Thermo Fisher).

For cDNA preparation, male and female wasps (n=12 for each sex), were separated and washed in 70% ethanol and rinsed twice in deionized water. Total body RNA was extracted using 100 µL of Trizol (Invitrogen) following manufacturer's protocols. RNA was resuspended in 0.1% DEPC treated water and treated with DNase I to remove contaminating DNA (Thermo Fisher Scientific). The RNA concentration was determined by NanoDrop (Thermo Fisher). cDNA was synthesized using Proto-Script First Strand cDNA Synthesis Kit (New England Biolabs).

Analysis of select genes: Primers for *p40 and SmGTPase01* are as follows:

p40 forward: GAATCATTGTTCGTTTGCTTGAAGAAAGAATTGG

p40 reverse: CATTATTAATGGGCCTTTACAATAATTTTAGCC

SmGTPase01 forward: CGTTGCACTACCTTGTTTGTCA

SmGTPase01 reverse: TTGTCTTTGCCCTGAGCGTT

PCRs were performed with Taq polymerase (gift of C. Li lab, CCNY), PCR buffer (300 mM Tris HCl pH 9.5, 75 mM (NH₄)₂SO₄, 10 mM MgCl₂) and deoxyribonucleotides (0.2 mM; Thermo Fisher Scientific). The PCR products were resolved on a 1% agarose gel in Tris acetic acid EDTA buffer (40 mM Tris HCl pH 7.6, 20 mM acetic acid, 1mM EDTA pH 8.0). Ethidium bromide (Sigma Aldrich)-stained gels were visualized on an ultra violet Trans-Illuminator (UVP) and gel images were taken using the DigiDocIt Imaging System (UVP). Gel images were processed in Adobe Photoshop for clarity only.

gDNA or cDNA-containing PCR products were cloned into pCR TOPO II plasmids (Invitrogen) and transformed into DH10β competent cells (New England Biolabs). For plasmid preparation, colonies were screened via PCR and positive colonies were cultured in Luria Broth with ampicillin (100 µg/mL) at 37°C overnight. Plasmids were extracted using Plasmid Miniprep kit (Qiagen) and sequenced (GENEWIZ, INC. South Plainfield, NJ, USA). Sequences were aligned using NCBI BLAST+ (*50, 51*) and Clustal Omega (*34*). Expected PCR band sizes were determined using SerialCloner (v2.6.1).

Data availability: *L. heterotoma* strains (*13, 17*) are available upon request. All supplemental files and figures can be downloaded from figshare (https://figshare.com/s/3a4598308909307c2ae0). File S1 contains details of supplemental files and tables. File S2 contains listing of accession numbers for all sequences reported in this work. Figure S1 contains the 27-mer vs GC count comparison of MSEV containing scaffolds to non-MSEV containing scaffolds. Table S1 contains annotations and related data for proteins. Table S2 contains BLAST search results of the MSEV proteome against the nr database. Table S3 contains all BUSCOs found in male, female, and joint genome assemblies. MSEV protein sequences are available upon request. Accession numbers for datasets are as follows: *Leptopilina heterotoma* strain *Lh* 14, genome assembly: Male genome: QYUB0000000, Female genome: QYUC0000000, Joint genome: VOOK00000000. *Leptopilina heterotoma* strain *Lh* 14, whole-body transcriptome: GHUQ00000000. *Leptopilina heterotoma* abdominal transcriptome by Goecks et al.: GAJC0000000. *Leptopilina clavipes* genome Bioproject: PRJNA84205. *Leptopilina heterotoma* strain *Lh* 14 proteome: PRIDE: PXD005632

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The MSEV proteome superset: A comparative study of the proteomes of the MSEVs from *Lh* 14 and *Lh* NY strains previously generated a list of 161 "common" MSEV proteins (*15*). More than 90% of the 161 proteins are part of the *Lh* 14 MSEV proteome. To describe MSEVs more completely, we characterized a larger set of 407 MSEV proteins from *Lh* 14 (161 common and 246 *Lh* 14) and define this set as the *Lh* MSEV "super-set" (Fig. 1A). Key results from annotation-based classification, analysis for signal peptide and/or transmembrane domain, and presence/absence of proteins in related wasps are summarized below and in Table S1.

The presence/absence of signal peptide (SP) alone, or SP with/without the transmembrane (TM) domain(s) in MSEV proteins reveals their possible location (i.e., potentially secreted into the venom gland lumen or associated with MSEV membrane). We therefore searched the 246 *Lh* 14 proteins for SP and TM domains. Of the 246 proteins, 55 (22.35%) have a predicted SP domain, 37 (15.04%) have a predicted TM domain, while 6 (2.44%) have both a predicted SP and TM domain.

After annotation, we found that a majority (183/246 or 74.39%) of the 246 proteins can be classified as core eukaryotic cell biology proteins (Class 1); 13/246 (5.28%) proteins as virulence- and immunity-related based on associated GO terms (*22, 25*) (Class 2); and 50/246 or 20.32 % as novel sequences without high confidence annotation (Class 3) (Table S1). A presence/absence analysis of these 246 proteins in published transcriptomes (*19*) of *Lb* or a more distantly related wasp, *G. hookeri* (for thresholds see Methods) revealed the following: only 43/246 (17.47%) *Lh* MSEV proteins are expected to be found in *Lb* and/or *G. hookeri* (Table S1). Of these, 33/43 (76.74%) proteins were in Class 1 but only 7/43 (16.27%) and 3/43 (6.98%) were in Class 2 and Class 3 categories, respectively. These results support the idea that, multiple but different, infection strategies and/or host evasion strategies might exist among different wasps infecting the same hosts. (For a complete comparison of *Lh* MSEVs to *Lb* VLPs, see Addendum to Chapter 1.)

While most of the Class 1 proteins were annotated as ribosomal or mitochondrial-related, a few were described as integral membrane proteins, vesicle trafficking protein SEC22b (E-value: 6.22E-145), and the ion channels sideroflexin 1 and 2 (E-value: 0). We also identified an apolipophorin (E-value:

1.02E-7) (Table S1). The presence of these membrane-associated proteins reinforces the vesicular nature of MSEVs.

Examples of Class 2 proteins include the neural/ectodermal development factor IMP-L2 (E-value: 5.29x10-50) and a protein involved in pain reception, CG9231 (E-value: 4.39x10-15). A viral-like Diedel protein (E-value: 1.77x10⁻⁷), viral Enhancin (E-value: 6.02x10⁻⁵), I(2)37Cc (E-value: 3.39x10⁻¹⁶⁵), odorant binding protein 56d-like (E-value: 5.64x10-50), major royal jelly protein (E-value: 8.59x10-135), and two venom acid phosphatases Acph-1 (E-value: 4.12x10⁻⁵) were also found in the Class 2 category; their cDNA sequences were published previously (*67*) (Table S1). It is possible that these MSEV proteins modulate the hosts' immune responses and/or influence host development to facilitate successful parasitism.

Within Class 3, 45 proteins (90%) lacked BLASTp and InterProScan results. However, Conserved Domain Database (CDD) (*26*) searches returned 9 hits identifying potentially functional domains (Table 1). This included (a) a CD99L2 like antigen (%ID: 24%, E-value: $3x10^{-3}$), (b) a DEAD-like helicases superfamily member (%ID: 22%, E-value 2x10-4) and (c) a herpes outer envelope glycoprotein 350 (gp350), (%ID: 28%, E-value: 4x10-3) (Table 1).

A BLASTp DELTA-BLAST of the potential gp350 domain against the nr database specifying "Vira" (taxid: 10239) under organism resulted in Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever orthonairovirus envelope glycoprotein (%ID: 30%, E-value: 2.5x10-1), Lymphocryptovirus Macaca gp350 (%ID: 29%, Evalue: 7.2x10-1), and Gallid Alphaherpesvirus 1 envelope glycoprotein J (%ID: 26%, E-value: 1.2) as top hits. BLASTp DELTA-BLAST of the potential gp350 domain against the nr database for Hymenoptera yielded an uncharacterized protein as the best hit (%ID: 24%, E-value: 8x10-6) in the ant *Vollenhovia emeryi*. This ant protein is predicted to contain calcium-binding EGF domains. The second hit in this search is from *N. vitripennis* for a predicted mucin-3A like glycoprotein (*68*) (%ID: 24%, E-value: 2x10-4). Interestingly, transcripts related to the potential *Lh* gp350-like protein are not found in the *Lb* or *G. hookeri* transcriptomes (Table S1) (*19*). Presence of this gp350-like protein in *Lh* MSEVs, but its absence in *Lb* MSEVs, suggests that it somehow contributes to differences in *Lh*/*Lb* host-parasite interactions and is therefore worthy of future studies. Complement receptor type 2 (CR2) in human B lymphocytes interacts

with gp350 during Epstein-Barr infection (*69*) and finding a verified homologue of CR2 in *Drosophila* hosts would be interesting in future research.

Because more than 200 proteins have now been added to the previously described MSEV proteome (*15*), we re-evaluated our previous enrichment analysis. In an ortholog-based comparison of the superset to human extracellular vesicle (EV) proteomes in Vesiclepedia (the most current and robust source of EV data (*37*)), we found that the largest proportion of superset proteins (49%) are proteins specifically associated with exosomes (Fig. 1B). In human and mouse EV proteomes, mitochondrial and ribosomal proteins are enriched (*37*). Accordingly, protein components of mitochondria (e.g., respiratory chain) and ribosomes (e.g., large and small subunit proteins) are found to be highly enriched in the *Lh* MSEV superset. However, we found that the significance of the enrichment was higher between the superset and exosomal proteins than mitochondrial or ribosomal proteins (Fig. 1C). These results demonstrate the similarities in the protein profiles of MSEVs and EVs.

Do *Lh* **MSEVs contain homologs of PDV or viral proteins?** Even though figitid *Leptopilina* wasps are distantly related to PDV-containing Ichneumonid and Braconid wasps (*3, 70*), an association of PDV-like viruses in figitid wasps cannot be discounted because of shared evolutionary history. Recent publications have identified capsid-less VLPs in Ichneumonidae wasps (*6, 7, 71*) and it is possible that *Lh* MSEVs have a similar viral origin. We therefore analyzed the *Lh* MSEV proteome superset against the GenBank PDV database, and then against its entire Viridae database.

To identify false positives, MSEV proteins with positive PDV hits (E-values were less than 1.0x10- 3 , %ID was 20% or greater, and query coverage was 30% or higher) were also searched against the unrestricted nr database to compare relatedness. If an MSEV protein is similar to a viral or virus-related PDV protein, we expected that, in the unrestricted nr database search, the MSEV query sequence would align again with the same viral subject sequences, but with a lower E-value (Table S2).

For PDV searches (Taxid: 10482 and Taxid: 40273), four proteins returned hits with E-values better than 1.0x10⁻²⁰ and query coverage greater than 30%. Three of these hits are conserved proteins (cytochrome P450 and histone 4) while the fourth result identified an uncharacterized *Cotesia congregata* bracovirus (CcBV) protein (%ID: 31.08%, E-value: 1.38x10-17, query coverage: 77%) (Table S2). The

unbiased BLASTp search against the entire nr database however had better results against eukaryotic proteins (E values: 0 to 2.0x10⁻⁷ and %ID from 100 to 56.25) (Table S2). In fact, the query that yielded the CcBV protein was better matched to a eukaryotic ribonuclease (%ID: 26.06%, E-value 1.14x10-16, query coverage: 84%) (Table S2). These results suggest that MSEV sequence similarities with PDV proteins may not be significant.

We also searched the *Lh* MSEV superset for presence of *L. boulardi* Filamentous Virus (LbFV) homologs (LbFV is a behavior manipulating virus of *Lb* (*72, 73*)). Of LbFV's 108 genes, 13 are present in genomes of *Lb*, *Lh* and related species, and the 13 transcripts are expressed in the *Lb* venom gland (*74*). Within our thresholds, we obtained only three (of 13) sequences with similarity to LbFV ORFs. However, these three *Lh* MSEV proteins, with hits for LbFV sequences obtained better scoring hits in the unrestricted nr database, suggesting that the *Lh* MSEV proteins are not highly related to the LbFV proteins (Table S2).

When comparing MSEV proteins to the entirety of Viridae, a total of 35 MSEV proteins had hits with %IDs ranging from 30% to 71% and E-values ranging from $1.0x10^{-22}$ to $1.0x10^{-178}$ (Table S2). However, a BLASTp search against the entire nr database found that proteins with results for viral hits had better scores when searched against the entire nr database, indicating that while viral hits are possible, they are not the best match (Table S2). This result, in addition to the fact that 372 other MSEV proteins (including the Diedel and Enhancin (Table S1)) did not return viral hits, would indicate that a majority of MSEV proteins are not closely related to viral proteins.

The whole-body transcriptome contains expressed MSEV transcripts: We performed a mixedgender whole-body transcriptome sequencing and *de novo* assembly of *Lh* transcripts. This assembly generated 104,066 transcripts. This dataset is more than three times larger than the published data derived from abdomens of female wasps that has 31,400 transcripts (*19*). A BLAST analysis of the female abdominal transcripts against the male/female whole-body transcripts showed that a majority (21,493/31,400, 68.44%) were present in the latter data set.

We searched the whole-body transcriptome for MSEV protein coding sequences using tBLASTn. Of 407 MSEV superset proteins, we identified transcripts for 371 (91.15%) proteins. Despite the ~9%

discrepancy (likely due to differences in expression levels due to different experimental conditions), these results largely verify the transcript data from (*19*) that we have based our proteomic analyses on. Of the 371 MSEV transcripts identified, 233 (62.8%) encode Class 1, 44 (11.86%) encode Class 2, and 94/371 (25.34%) encode Class 3 proteins.

Assembly of the *Lh* **genome:** We separately sequenced *Lh* 14 male and female genomic DNA and assembled the paired-end reads *de novo*, using ABySS (*39*). These assemblies have a modest scaffold N50 of 4,800 with more than 100,000 scaffolds and an average coverage of 87% (Table 2). Assembly with MaSurCa (*75*) provided similar results (data not shown), indicating that our assembly quality is limited likely due to factors such as large genome size and repetitive sequence regions (*76*). Although the N50 values and large number of scaffolds indicate that the genome is not highly assembled, we found at least 80% of BUSCOs shared in the Insecta set in both assemblies (Table 2, BUSCOs in Table S3).

While still fragmented, a *de novo* joint assembly of male and female sequences using Platanusallee and AGOUTI improved assembly and scaffolding statistics (N50: 11,906, average coverage 91.1%). The number of found BUSCOs in the joint assembly rose to 90% (Table 2, BUSCOs in Table S3).

Analysis of K-mer multiplicity versus GC content in the genome sequencing reads using the Kmer analysis tool, KAT (*52*) showed three possible clusters, although they are difficult to distinguish (Fig. 2A). Cluster 1 has high multiplicity (450-650), Cluster 2 has lower multiplicity and a wide range of GC content, and Cluster 3 has the lowest multiplicity and the highest GC content. Cluster 3 overlaps with Cluster 2 making them hard to fully separate. BLAST searches of a random sample (1,672/4,482) from Cluster 1 contigs hit insect homologs 73% (1,220/1,672) of the time, *Acetobacter* homologs 13% (216/1,672) of the time, and then a variety of mostly Eukaryotic hits. Cluster 2 represents a majority of the wasp genome (>94%), and blast hits of a random sample (316/68,173) of its contigs almost exclusively had homologs in Hymenoptera (311/316; 98%) and mostly in *L. heterotoma* (227/316; 71%). Cluster 3 is the smallest of the three and contigs from Cluster 3 had homologs exclusively in *Acetobacter* (110/110). There was no evidence for contamination from a viral source or discrete MSEV-specific set of nucleic acid sequence.

Furthermore, K-mer multiplicity versus GC content for the joint assembly of the *Lh 14* genome (Fig. 2B) showed a very similar heat map to that using the published assembly of *L. clavipes* (Fig. 2C; Bioproject: PRJNA84205 (*54*)). The two genomes have a highly similar 27-mer/GC profiles that do not differ statistically (multivariate Cramér test statistic = $114,119$, $P = 0.73$, number bootstrap-replicates = 1000). The *L. heterotoma* assembly has 27-mers with approximately twice the multiplicity of those found in *L. clavipes*, which may represent increased repeat content in *L. heterotoma* and is supported by an assembly size of over 200 Mb larger than the *L. clavipes* genome (463 Mb vs 255 Mb) (*54*).

MSEV genes are encoded in the wasp genome: Using our annotation pipeline, 28,481 predicted genes were annotated. Within the annotated genes, we found 8 genes for the body color *yellow*, 3 *major royal jelly protein* (*mrjp*) genes, 25 odorant receptor/odorant binding protein coding genes, and 94 gene predictions for *cytochrome P450*. Some of these nuclear genes are not only involved in development and cellular processes, but are also included in the MSEV proteome (Table S1 and (*15*)). A search of gene predictions for MSEV proteins via tBLASTn identified 325 of 407 (79.85%) MSEV sequences (Table 3). Of these, 153/407 (37.6%) had a percent identity of 95% or greater. Presence or removal of scaffolds with bacterial DNA sequences from either the separate male/female or the joint assembly did not affect this number, supporting the nuclear location of a majority of the MSEV genes.

As gene prediction software can potentially miss genes (*77*), we searched the genomic scaffolds directly for MSEV-coding sequence regions using known protein sequences as queries via tBLASTn before and after removal of bacterial sequences. In both cases, 375/407 (92.13%) MSEV sequences were at least 70% complete as determined by query coverage (Table 3). Of these, 191/407 (46.9%) had a percent identity of 95% or greater.

The scaffolds containing MSEV genes (Fig. S1A) were also compared to a random subset of scaffolds without MSEV genes (Fig S1B) for their 27-mer/GC profiles. These appeared to not differ statistically (multivariate Cramér test statistic = 3755 , $P = 0.80$, number bootstrap-replicates = 1000), indicating that the MSEV genes lie on scaffolds that resemble the rest of the genome.

Characterization of select MSEV genes: We spot checked small portions of the genome for gene structure predictions of MSEV virulence protein genes *SmGTPse01* (Class 2) and *p40* (Class 3). For this, we sequenced PCR products of gDNA corresponding to these genes.

The MSEV SmGTPase01 has prokaryotic-like GTPase domains and its gene is expected to lack introns (*15*). The predicted *SmGTPase01* CDS spans 936 bp, which contains the functional GTPase domain (*78*). Scaffolds from male and female genomes confirmed the absence of coding region introns (data not shown). We hypothesized that primers in 5' and 3' untranslated regions (UTRs) should amplify the exact fragment from cDNA/gDNA as template based on manual characterization of the *SmGTPase01* locus (*78*) (Fig. 3A). This prediction was borne out and we amplified an 873 bp fragment only from female cDNA and from both male and female gDNA (Fig. 3C). The sequenced PCR products were identical to corresponding sequence within the assembly and the published transcript sequence from Goecks et al. (data not shown).

The *p40* gene encodes a protein that is structurally similar to T3SS bacterial needle tip proteins IpaD/SipD from *Shigella* and *Salmonella*. However, *p40*'s genomic sequence is expected to have introns (*15*). The full p40 gene was computationally assembled and predicted within both male and female genomes. Primers designed for *p40*'s 5' and 3' UTRs (*19, 79*) (Fig. 3B), allowed amplification of *p40*'s 939 bp cDNA only in preparations from female wasp extracts, but gDNA bands at 1,630 bp were detected from reactions when either male or female genome was used as template, indicating the presence of introns (Fig. 3D). Sequencing the cloned cDNA product from females confirmed the published cDNA sequence (Heavner et al., 2017). We also cloned and sequenced the gDNA products from male and female wasps and found the sequences to be identical (data not shown).

Unlike the well-characterized *Drosophila* hosts, the biology and molecular-genetics of their parasitic wasps have remained relatively obscure with only recent characterizations of *Leptopilina* and *Ganaspis* spp. (*15, 19, 67, 74, 80-83*). Our proteomic, transcriptomic and genomic results here expand the available information on *L. heterotoma*. Bioinformatics analysis of the additional MSEV proteins does not alter the initial interpretation of the original 161 proteomic data. Genomic sequencing and analysis of scaffolds reveals that more than 92% of the MSEV genes reside on the wasp genome. We did not find evidence for MSEV gene association with endosymbiont or commensal bacterial DNA. We suspect that

the remaining ~8% are also nuclear genes and this association will be confirmed in higher quality assemblies. Altogether, these results strongly suggest that, like other subcellular structures, MSEVs are encoded in the wasp nuclear genome.

The cellular nature of *Lh* vesicles is likely to be shared by closely related *Lv* and *Lb* wasps. Our previous work has shown that the overall morphologies of *Lh* and *Lv* MSEVs are similar (*11, 13*). However, this is not the case for *Lb* MSEVs; different *Lb* strains have varying MSEV morphologies (*10, 84, 85*). Interpretation of their identity also varies. For example, Di Giovanni et al. (*74*) contend that MSEVs/VLPs are derived from a virus ancestral to the LbFV. Our analysis of the expanded proteomic superset does not lend strong support to this line of thinking.

We did not find convincing evidence of PDV or other viral structural proteins in the *Lh* MSEV proteome. However, we cannot discount that MSEVs have a viral origin as our analysis is limited by the fragmentation of the genome. It is also possible that a virus related to MSEVs may not have been identified to date. Mechanistically, eukaryotic viruses and vesicles share cellular pathways involving the endomembrane systems of their cells of origin or their target cells (*86*), leading to overlap in protein functionality, but not necessarily origin. Thus, at least some of the Class 1 proteins in the MSEV proteome may be central to MSEV biogenesis in the wasp or for their interactions with the host hemocytes' endomembrane machinery despite potentially being related to viruses. It is noteworthy that energy metabolism genes appear to be involved in rapid speciation and adaptation to new environments (*87, 88*), raising the possibility that MSEV mitochondrial proteins might contribute to this process. How *Lh* MSEVs are functionally similar to other insect or mammalian EVs remains to be explored experimentally. Functional characterization of predicted infection and immunity Class 2 proteins should explain the immune-suppressive strategies of these wasps. RNA interference, infection assays, and other experimental strategies should make this line of inquiry feasible.

Functional assignments are difficult for the unannotated Class 3 proteins. These are likely to be quite interesting, due to their different expression profiles in *Lh* versus *Lb* and *G. hookeri* species. This difference in expression may stem either from *cis* changes in their regulatory sequences, or from absence of these genes in the *Lb* or *G. hookeri* genomes. Recent comparative genomics analysis has shown that over 40% of venom genes in the closely-related species *N. vitripennis* and *N. giraulti* have diverged

significantly and up to 25% of venom genes are specific to a species (*89*). A proteomic analysis of the venom genes of *Leptopilina spp*. and a molecular understanding of their expression will provide insights into how key activities within MSEVs evolved to parasitize the range of fruit fly hosts.

A key question regarding *Lh* virulence proteins critical to wasp success is whether their genes reside in a discrete region of the genome like a "virulence island" found in some microbial genomes (*90, 91*), or whether some genes are dispersed within the genome, while others occur in one or more clusters as in wasps with PDVs (*6, 71*). More complete assemblies, scaffolded to the level of chromosomes, will describe the genome-wide distribution of these genes in *Lh* and related wasps. Key MSEV genes could serve as genetic markers in future studies. Comparative genomics will uncover additional gene family members of MSEV proteins in other *Leptopilina* wasps and enable the development of new functional genomics tools such as CRISPR-disrupted mutant alleles made in *N. vitripennis* (*92-95*). These approaches will open new avenues for understanding the biology of this host-parasite model.

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FIGURES

Figure 1. The superset of MSEV proteins: (A) *Lh* 14 MSEV proteins were annotated using BLAST2GO prior to class sorting via annotation and GO Terms. Wedges denoted as "Common," were previously published in (*15*) and represent proteins found in both *Lh* 14 and *Lh* NY MSEV proteomes. New proteins analyzed in this work are in wedges labeled "*Lh* 14 Only." A majority of proteins belong to Class 1. Table S1 lists 246 proteins added to the superset *Lh* 14 proteome. (B) and (C) Enrichment analysis of MSEV superset shows high association with exosomes and mitochondria compared to other cellular organelles according to Vesiclepedia. –log 10 (p-value) trend shown in orange for both graphs. The p-values were calculated with the Bonferroni method. (B) Percentage of MSEV genes associated with specific cellular compartments found in Vesiclepedia, relative to all MSEV genes. Of the superset proteins, 41 and 49% are associated with mitochondria and exosomes, respectively ($p = 3 \times 10^{-57}$; 1 x 10⁻⁵³). (C) Foldenrichment of the MSEV dataset in specific cellular compartments. Although many protein classes are present in the proteome, exosomal and mitochondrial proteins show more significant enrichments.

Figure 2. Analysis of K-mer coverage versus GC count. (A) Analysis of genomic reads. 27-mers generated from the cleaned Illumina reads used to assemble the *L. heterotoma* genome binned by their GC count vs multiplicity (total counts among the reads). Bins are colored by the number of distinct Kmers. Different clusters are identified as shown and described in the text. (B and C): A map of 27-mer multiplicity versus GC content of the joint assembly of the *Lh 14* genome (B) to a map from the published *L. clavipes* genome (Bioproject: PRJNA84205) (C).

Figure 3. Predicted gene structures verified by PCR amplification experiments (A, B). Diagrams showing primer locations and predicted gene structures of *SmGTPase01* (A) and *p40* (B). Black arrows indicate primer locations, light gray indicates introns, UTR regions are dark gray and labeled, exons encoding potential protein domains are labeled as shown. Cream colored regions in panel A do not have a specified domain. Diagrams were drawn using GenomeDiagram as part of the Biopython (v. 1.6) package (*96, 97*). Each row in the panels A and B diagrams corresponds to approximately 1,000 bp. For primer sequences, see methods. (C and D) Ladder is Thermo Fisher MassRuler ladder. (C) PCR products for *SmGTPase01* from male or female cDNA and gDNA. All products are 873 bp long. Male cDNA PCR was negative. (D) PCR products for *p40* from male or female cDNA and gDNA. The expected band for *p40* cDNA is 939 bp and for gDNA is 1,630 bp. Male cDNA PCR was negative. Sequence analysis of PCR amplification products confirmed gene prediction results.

TABLES

Table 1. CDD-search results of MSEV "un-annotated" proteins in the super-set. MSEV ORFs that completed the BLAST2GO pipeline and did not return any results were run through the NCBI CDD-Search Version 3.16 (Accessed: Aug. 2018). Of 45 queries, only 9 returned hits with threshold set to 1x10⁻². The ninth result came from a search with E-value threshold set to 1. Results listed are all unique, high scoring hits for each ORF that returned hits from the search.

Table 2. Assembly statistics: Statistics of male, female, and combined (male plus female) *Lh* genomes as assessed by QUASTv4.0 and BUSCOv9.0. Percent coverage was found by mapping sequencing reads back to assembly using HISAT2. The identified BUSCOs can be found in Table S1. The QUAST program was run with parameters set for eukaryotic genomes and scaffolds. The BUSCO program was run with species set to 'Nasonia.' Contigs smaller than 500 bp were excluded.

Table 3. MSEV genes found in scaffolds and predictions: Gene predictions from genome assembly scaffolds and AUGUSTUS gene predictions were searched for MSEV genes using tBLASTn. Results better than %ID >70%, E-value < 1x10-50, and query coverage > 70% were retained.

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SUPPLEMENTAL DATA

- **Figure S1:** K-mer coverage vs GC count of MSEV-containing scaffolds vs non MSEV-containing
- scaffolds. (A) MSEV scaffolds (9.6 Mb). (B) Random subset of non-MSEV scaffolds (9.6 Mb). See Fig 2
- for plot details.

6 **Table S1:** Lh 14 Proteins of the MSEV Superset. 246 proteins were annotated using BLAST2GO prior to 7 sorting into classes and additional analysis. Table indicates in-house query accession number, class,

8 annotation, E-value for best BLASTp hit during annotation, presence/absence of signal peptide or

9 transmembrane domain, and presence/absence in L. boulardi (Lb) or G. hookeri (G1) transcriptomes with

10 accession values and E-values. NA in annotation column indicates no annotation.

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- 13 **Table S2:** Lh 14 MSEV Proteins Are Not Highly Related to Viral Proteins. Lh MSEV superset proteins
- 14 were searched for similarities to LbFV proteins via BLASTp. They were also searched against the entire
- 15 PDV nr database and Viridae nr database via BLASTp. Results from an unrestricted nr BLASTp search
- 16 score better than any alignment obtained from LbFV, PDV nr, and Viridae nr.

17

ADDENDUM TO CHAPTER 1

Bioinformatic Comparison of Two *Leptopilina* **spp. Proteomes Reveals Similar Profiles**

INTRODUCTION:

The diversification of the parasitoid wasp genus, *Leptopilina*, occurred more than 30 million years ago (*1, 2*). Four *Leptopilina* species (*Leptopilina heterotoma* (*Lh*), *Leptopilina boulardi* (*Lb*), *Leptopilina clavipes*, and *Leptopilina victoriae*) are highly studied as proposed pest control agents, the *Leptopilina* genus is of great interest to those studying evolutionary biology and immunology (*3-6*). This interest is due to differences in host immune suppression strategy and the ability to utilize the well-characterized *Drosophila* as a host species (*3-6*). Studies on the origin, nature, and functions of *Leptopilina* VLPs have led to comparative studies in host range (*3*), secreted venom proteins (*6*), transcriptomes (*7, 8*) and proteomes (*9, 10*). In these latter works, no direct comparison of *Lh* MSEVs and *Lb* VLP proteomes indicating whether the two particles share a profile supporting the hypothesis of extracellular vesicles or viruses was performed. Utilizing our own *Lh 14* MSEV proteomes (*8, 10*) and the newly published *Lb* strain Gotheron (*Lb G*) VLP proteome (*9*), we directly compared the two particles not only in terms of similar proteins, but also for virus-like proteins, enrichment profile, and for putative secreted and transmembrane proteins. We hypothesized that *Lb G* VLPs should share an overall similar profile to *Lh 14* MSEVs, possess properties of extracellular vesicles, and do not contain viral proteins. An enrichment profile of the *Lb G* VLPs proteome indicates an exosomal character. The proportions of proteins amongst previously published *Lh* protein classes was also similar even though only a third of all *Lb G* proteins (115/383) were highly similar to *Lh 14* proteins. A majority of the 115 proteins are conserved cellular proteins. Three of these conserved proteins possess a signal peptide, a transmembrane domain, and annotations for proteins associated with the endomembrane system, supporting an endosome membrane system origin for the *Lh* and *Lb* particle membranes. As new wasp genome assemblies have been released on GenBank (*11*), we re-examined the portion of expected particle proteins that can be found in both *Lh* and *Lb* genomes. We report that more than 95% of proteins have coding regions within both genomes, confirming our previous results in Chapter 1.

METHODS:

Insects: Isogenized *L. heterotoma* strain 14 (*Lh 14*) and *L. boulardi* strain 17 (*Lb 17*) (*3*), were raised on the *y w* strain of *D. melanogaster* that were reared on standard cornmeal, yeast, and agar fly food at 25°C as previously described (*12*). Adult wasps were collected from parasitized hosts, 25 days after infection at 25°C. Male and female wasps were stored on fly food with 70% honey on "buzz" plugs.

Analysis of *L. boulardi* **VLP proteins:** Protein sequences were obtained from Dr. Julien Varaldi (University of Lyon) for *Lb* strain Gotheron (*Lb G*) VLPs (*9*) as these sequences were not available publicly. Proteins that had an equivalent transcript in the *Lb 17* whole body transcriptome (*Lb* Ground, GITC00000000, *Lb* Space, GISX00000000) and the female abdominal transcriptome (GAJA00000000) were identified and this corresponding accession number is noted in Table 1. Equivalence is defined as %ID, E-value, and query coverage being within cutoff threshold of BLAST search (%ID >70%, E-value < 1E-50, and query coverage > 70%). E-value indicates the estimated probability of finding a better match after repeated searches within the database. Query coverage (Quer Cov) indicates percentage of query covered by subject sequence.

Annotation: Proteins were annotated using the OmicsBox annotation pipeline (downloaded April 2020), E-value threshold of 1E-7 (*13, 14*). Results were organized and classified based on Gene Ontology (GO) terms from UniProt and InterPro using scripts to sort annotation results, followed by manual curation (*15- 18*). Proteins that failed annotation by OmicsBox but obtained GO terms from UniProt/InterProScan searches and were still classified. Proteins were considered "virulence-related" based on GO terms indicating involvement with infection, inflammation, and immune response through the manual curation step. The above protocol applies to all proteins in both the *Lb* and *Lh* proteomes (and in all tables where a Class is specified in this Addendum). The results may contain minor discrepancies when compared to classification in Heavner et al.

Enrichment: Enrichment analysis (Fig 1C) of *Lb G* VLP and *Lh 14* MSEV proteins was as performed (*8, 10*) using FunRich and the Vesiclepedia database as of November 2020. Simultaneous analysis was done in order to ensure that both proteomes were analyzed with the same available version of the database (*19-21*). Briefly, *Lb G* VLP and *Lh 14* MSEV proteins could be included in the enrichment

analyses only if a human ortholog was present. The gene identifiers for human orthologs were obtained from the MSEV/VLP KO and the UniProt mapping utility (*17, 22*).

Secreted/membrane proteins: Presence of signal peptide and/or transmembrane domain in *Lb G* and the full set of *Lh 14* was examined utilizing SignalP, TMHMM, and Phobius (*23-28*) as in (*10*). Assignments for each parameter was made only if a specific sequence met the criteria of both programs (i.e., SignalP and Phobius for signal peptide, and TMHMM and Phobius for transmembrane domain). Full listing of *Lb G* proteins analyzed for signal peptide and/or transmembrane domain in Table 1. Full listing of *Lh 14* proteins analyzed for signal peptide and/or transmembrane domain in Table 2.

BLAST search using *Lb G* **proteins**: To determine correspondence of proteins within each proteome, the NCBI BLAST+ (v 2.7.1) (*29-31*) tool was used to query 383 *Lb* VLP proteins (*9*) against (a) NCBI nonredundant (nr) database restricted to Polydnaviridae (Taxid: 10482), Viridae (Taxid: 10239), and unrestricted (nr) as described previously in (*10*) (see Tables 7 and 8); and (b) also against the 407 *Lh 14* MSEV proteins (see Table 5, Figure 1A) (*8, 10*). Proteins were considered similar if E-value was within 1E-5 and query coverage >50-70% in both searches. Percent identity was not used as a threshold in comparing *Lh 14* to *Lb G* but was provided in the table.

BLAST search of new wasp genomes: New genome assemblies for *Lh 14* and *Lb* strain *G486* (*Lb G486*) were released on GenBank by Huang et al. under the accession numbers JABAIE010000000 and JABAIF010000000 respectively and downloaded in December 2020 and published in (*11*). Protein sequences for *Lh 14* MSEVs and *Lb G* VLPs were used as queries for TBLASTN search of genomes using NCBI BLAST+ (v2.7.1) (*29-31*). Cut-off for positive results was query coverage > 50%, %ID > 40% and E-value of 1E-7.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Similarities between *Lb* **VLPs and** *Lh* **MSEVs**

To test the extracellular vesicle hypothesis, we first annotated and sorted all 383 *Lb G* proteins into the same classes we have previously used for *Lh*: Class 1 – Conserved Eukaryotic, Class 2 – Infection and Immunity, and Class 3 – Unannotated Novel (*8, 10*). The full list of proteins with annotations, class, presence/absence of signal peptide and transmembrane domain, and equivalent accession numbers is in Table 1. A repeat of this analysis with a full listing of *Lh 14* proteins can be found in Table 2. A number of similarities became apparent from these analyses which are discussed below.

Comparison of classes

When comparing the 383 proteins found in *Lb G* VLPs to the set of 407 *Lh 14* MSEV proteins (previously described as the "superset" published in (*10*)), we found that only 115 proteins were highly similar between the two species at a stringent threshold of E-value 1E-5 and >70% query coverage (Fig 1A, Table 3). Of these 115 proteins, the vast majority (96/115, 83.5%) were classified as conserved eukaryotic (Class 1) proteins, which is to be expected as they are important for cellular functions in eukaryotes. The remaining 19 proteins were split into infection and immunity related (Class 2 - 10/115, 8.69%) and novel proteins (Class 3 - 9/115, 7.82%) (Fig 1A, Table 3, all proteins that were unique to *Lh 14* and *Lb* are listed in Tables 4 and 5 respectively).

Although only an approximate third of the *Lb G* VLP proteins were found to be highly similar to the *Lh 14* MSEV proteins, we examined if the overall proportions of these proteins in the three classes would also be the same. Compared to *Lh 14* (Class 1: 63.8%, Class 2: 11.1%, Class 3: 24.6% (*10*)), *Lb* VLP proteins are similarly distributed (Class 1: 249/383 - 65%, Class 2: 34/383 - 9%, Class 3: 100/383 - 26%) (Fig 1B). Classes 1 and 2 contain many expected proteins, such as cytoskeletal proteins (actin and tubulin), myosin, and ribosomal proteins (all Class 1), and venom allergen protein, and several diedel-like proteins (Class 2) (Table 1). Class 3 does appear to contain several protein annotations which will require additional analysis and manual curation which will shift proportions. We have also found two Class 3 proteins that are annotated as a QWxxN domain, a predicted protein found in *Enterococcus* bacteria according to RefSeq (accession number WP_016625331.1), with an e-value between 1E-12 to 1E-22.

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Future modeling of these proteins may indicate how similar the *Lb G* protein is to the bacterial. If highly similar, this result may be an indication of prokaryotic-like proteins being used as part of the wasp strategy. This would also match the presence of prokaryotic-like proteins in the *Lh* proteome, further describing particles of *Leptopilina* wasps as having a "mixed-strategy" (*8*).

Enrichment analysis and predicted secreted/membrane proteins

An enrichment analysis to see if *Lb G* VLPs share a similar profile to *Lh 14* revealed that just as *Lh 14* MSEVs have a profile enriched in exosome proteins (*8, 10*), *Lb G* VLPs are similarly significantly enriched (Fig 1C). In fact, *Lb G* VLPs have a greater enrichment than *Lh 14* MSEVs (56.8% compared to 48.8%). This interpretation is consistent with the report of Di Giovanni et al., that also used the same ontogeny terms for annotating the *Lh* and *Lb* proteins and found similar results (*9*).

The signal peptide and transmembrane domain searches revealed that more than 80% of the *Lb G* proteins may not contain these sequences (89.3% and 84.3% respectively), and a small portion of proteins may be secreted or inserted on to the VLP membrane. Interestingly, only 11/383 (2.9%) proteins were predicted to have both these protein trafficking signals (Table 1). Thus, only a small number of proteins represent candidates for mediating interaction with the hosts' (hemocyte) cell membrane.

Class 1 proteins

We also noted that *Lh 14* had 12 proteins and *Lb G* particles had 11 proteins with signal peptides and transmembrane domains, indicating these proteins may be components of the particles responsible for interacting with host cells. Comparing these proteins via BLAST indicated three were highly similar (Evalues < 1E-140, %ID and query cov. > 80%) and their annotations were for malectin, transloconassociated protein subunit beta, and transmembrane emp24 domain-containing protein bai (Table 6), and all three were within Class 1. Malectin is a protein found in the endoplasmic reticulum and participates in quality control of glycoproteins (*32-34*). Translocon-associated protein subunit beta is associated with transport of proteins into the endoplasmic reticulum (*35, 36*). Transmembrane emp24 domain-containing protein bai is a cargo receptor and also aids in vesicle formation (*37*). All three of these proteins are highly associated with cellular endoplasmic reticulum and endomembrane system.

Another 2/11 scored poorly, with e-values near 1E-4, %ID < 50%, and query coverage $\leq 10\%$, These two proteins were also found to be mostly Class 1 proteins, but annotations did not match between the proteins (Table 6). The remaining 6 proteins either did not have significant similarities or were already matched to a protein which had a much higher scoring subject. The presence of such proteins, highly associated with endomembrane system and endoplasmic reticulum support the hypothesis of an extracellular vesicle nature as these organelles are involved in the production of extracellular vesicles in the form of exosomes released via multivesicular bodies (*38-40*).

Class 2 proteins

Examining the 10 Class 2 proteins that were found to be highly similar between *Lb G* and *Lh 14* (Fig 1A, Table 4) revealed three proteins to be annotated as ras-related rab GTPases (3/10, 30%, Table 4). Rab GTPases are involved in not only moving effector proteins onto membrane, but also vesicle formation and fusion (*41*). Also found in the common 115 proteins were metalloproteinases and venom allergen 3-like proteins, which were previously described as components of the *Lh* proteome and transcriptome (Table 4) (*8, 42*). Venom allergen 3 is a known acid phosphatase, which triggers allergic responses after hymenopteran stings and is found in many hymenopteran venoms (*7, 42-48*). As an acid phosphatase, it may also work in conjunction with metalloproteinases to digest host tissue to release nutrients for the growing wasp larva. A single enhancing factor and diedel-like protein were also found in common (Table 5). Both are proteins involved in modulating host immune response, especially diedel which is also found to be co-opted by insect viruses, parasitoid venoms, and as an immune modulatory cytokine in *Drosophila* (*8, 42, 49*).

We previously identified a family of prokaryotic-like GTPases in *Lh* MSEVs that is absent in *Lb 17* transcripts (*8*) . The equivalent GTPase are absent within the *Lb G* proteome. Similarly, p40 was not identified in the *Lb G* proteome. In contrast, LbGAP (a known *Lb* virulence protein (*50-52*), g27718.t1), has counterparts in *Lh 14*. This result supports our previous results that *Lh* and *Lb* may have similar RhoGAP proteins in their proteomes (*8*). At least 6 RhoGAPs were reported in *Lh* MSEVs (*8*), however, only one high scoring candidate (GAJC01024661.1_16) met our strict thresholds.

Comparison of PDV/viral profiles

It is intriguing that the proportions of proteins in both *Lh 14* and *Lb G* proteomes with viral hits (PDV and Viridae) is quite similar. While the *Lh 14* proteome contains 6/407 (1.47%) PDV hits and 84/407 (20.63%) Viridae hits, the *Lb G* proteome has 7/383 PDV (1.8%) and 101/383 Viridae (26.3%) hits. These latter results for *Lh 14* are discussed in Chapter 1. Results from the *Lb G* proteome are presented next.

When searching the PDV protein database, 7/383 (1.8%) *Lb G* proteins returned hits. However, all 7 proteins received better hits against eukaryotic proteins in the nr database (Table 7). When this search was repeated using Viridae protein database, 101/383 (26.3%) proteins had hits. All but one protein (Lb_LbFV_ORF85), had better matches against eukaryotic proteins (Table 8). Interestingly, the Lb_LbFV_ORF85 did not match a LbFV protein sequence, but instead matched a *Drosophila* filamentous virus protein, annotated as Ac81-like (Table 8). The same Ac81-like annotation was also given to Lb_LbFV_ORF85 by Di Giovanni et al. (*9*). Ac81 is involved in nucleocapsid envelopment of *Autographa californica nuclear polyhedrosis virus,* a highly pathogenic baculovirus that targets insects (*53*). The evidence for the Lb_LbFV_ORF85 counterpart's included in the *Lh 14* proteome is not convincing (*9, 10*)

A similar result was obtained in both restricted and unrestricted nr databases with virus-like diedels in the *Lh* proteome (*8, 10*). While diedel homologs are present in viruses and eukaryotic hosts (*49*), this Ac81-like protein in the *Lb G* proteome remains firmly viral and essential for virus envelopment alongside several other core genes (*53*). Together, these results support our method of evaluating viral versus non-viral sequences and also the work of Di Giovanni et al. from Dr. Varaldi's group.

Genomic locations of both Lh MSEV and Lb VLP proteins

New genome assemblies for *Lh 14* and *Lb* strain G486 (*Lb G486*) were released by Huang et al. (*11*). We previously found 375/407 (92%) of MSEV proteins to be encoded the *Lh 14* genome (Chapter 1, (*10*)). When these sequences were searched against a new *Lh 14* assembly, 386/407 (94.8%) genes could be mapped to genomic scaffolds. The bulk (18/21) of the remaining 21 proteins fall within Class 3. The remaining three proteins are Class 1 proteins, two of which have annotations for troponin and Y-box factor. The third Class 1 protein is unannotated. We mapped all but four of the 383 (98.9%) *Lb G* VLP genes against the *Lb G486* genome. Two of the unmapped sequences were in Class 1 and annotated as a 60S acidic ribosomal protein and a mesencephalic astrocyte-derived neurotrophic factor homolog. The

other two unmapped genes were in Class 3. The discrepancies in total proteins to mapped genes in both *Lh* and *Lb* could be due to strain differences, issues with gene prediction (unusual or non-canonical gene structures); locations in heterchromatic genomic regions affecting assembly, close identity with other gene families members or inaccurate alternative splicing predictions.

Concluding remarks

Here we have presented a set of proteins common between both VLPs and MSEVs. A closer examination of this group of proteins should be useful in understanding how these particles are produced by venom gland cells, what proteins influence particle structure, and the mechanism of particle entry/fusion with host immune cells. Our results suggest that like *Lh* MSEVs the *Lb* VLPs should be considered extracellular vesicles. Furthermore, both proteomes have similar profiles and lack Viridae sequences. We believe this analysis provides a basis for further comparative studies between *Leptopilina* species and supports the hypothesis that venom particles found within the *Leptopilina* genus possess extracellular vesicle-like nature. Future studies with the rapidly increasing amount of data available on GenBank and in publications will allow for these comparative studies to include other *Leptopilina* species of interest like *L. clavipes* and *L. victoriae*. These will, in turn, aid in addressing virus integration hypotheses and also drawing a distinction between origin of sequences required to synthesize particles versus the current nature of the particle itself.

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FIGURES

Figure 1: Comparison of *Lb G* VLPs to *Lh 14* MSEVs and profiling *Lb G* VLP proteome. A) *Lb G* VLP proteins were compared to *Lh 14* MSEV proteins. Homologous proteins, indicated by class, are within the overlap of the Venn diagram. B) Distribution of *Lb G* VLP proteins and *Lh 14* MSEV proteins by class. C) Enrichment analysis of *Lb G* VLP proteins and *Lh 14* MSEV proteins as percentage of genes analyzed by FunRich. P-value provided as scatterplot points.

TABLES

Table 1: Full listing of *L. boulardi* VLP proteins analyzed in this work. Lb VLP Protein column indicates protein sequences of the *Lb* Gotheron strain provided by Varaldi et al (*13*). Class indicates assignment of a protein as "conserved eukaryotic" (Class 1), "infection and immunity-related" (Class 2), or "novel" (Class 3). Annotations were determined by OmicsBox (see Methods). The "Equivalent Accession" column provides accession numbers for transcripts from three Lb transcriptomes. (The translated sequence shows a high match to the analyzed VLP protein.) Signal peptide (SP: Y/N) and transmembrane domain (TM: Y/N) presence/absence are indicated in respective columns. N/A indicates no annotation from OmicsBox. NF refers to absence of equivalent accession number within available transcriptomes. Proteins that failed annotation by OmicsBox but obtained GO terms from UniProt/InterProScan searches and were still classified.

Table 2: Full listing of Lh 14 MSEV proteins with class, annotation, and presence/absence of signal peptide and transmembrane domain. Signal peptide (SP: Y/N) and transmembrane domain (TM: Y/N) presence/absence are indicated in respective columns. N/A indicates no annotation from OmicsBox. Proteins that failed annotation by OmicsBox but obtained GO terms from UniProt/InterProScan searches and were still classified.

Table 3: Comparison of *Lh 14* MSEV and *Lb* VLP proteins. All 407 *Lh 14* MSEV proteins and 383 *Lb G* VLP proteins were compared using NCBI BLAST+. The 115 common proteins are listed here with their class and annotation. The last three columns show the percent identity, e-value, and query coverage for the alignment are also provided. Percent identity (%ID) indicates the percentage of amino acid residues that are exactly the same in the query (*Lb G*) protein to the subject (*Lh 14*) protein. Protein IDs in columns 1 and 4, are in-house identifiers only, whereas identifiers in columns 1 are related to accession numbers in NCBI. N/A indicates that no annotation was found by OmicsBox. Some proteins failed annotation by OmicsBox but obtained GO terms from the UniProt/InterProScan searches and were still classified.

Table 4: Table of the *Lh 14* MSEV proteins that either had no homology or had limited homology to the Lb VLP proteins based on the cut-offs (see Methods). Class indicates assignment of protein as Conserved Eukaryotic (Class 1), Infection and Immunity Related (Class 2), or Novel (Class 3). Annotation is protein annotation as provided by OmicsBox. N/A refers to no annotation.

Table 5: Table of the *Lb G* VLP proteins that either had no homology or had limited homology to *Lh 14* MSEV proteins, as defined in the Methods. Equivalent Accession column provides accession numbers for the available *Lb 17* transcripts which, when translated, match to analyzed protein sequence according to the criteria specified in the Methods. NF refers to absence of equivalent accession number within available transcriptomes.

Table 6: Listing of proteins with both a signal peptide and one or more transmembrane domain found in the *Lh 14* MSEV and *Lb G* VLP sequences. Reciprocal BLASTP results with accession number, Class, E value, %ID, % query coverage and annotation are shown. Criteria for score cutoff detailed in Methods.

Table 7: Results of BLASTP searches using the *Lb* VLP proteins as query (column 1) against polydnavirus protein database (nr: PDV), or the unrestricted non-redundant (nr) database. Column 2 indicates whether the search was performed against nr: PDV or against the unrestricted nr database. Subject indicates the subject accession numbers obtained. Description indicates annotation of subject sequence associated with the BLAST result. The %ID, E-value and Quer. Cov. columns indicate the corresponding results from these searches. The nr searches were done at the same time as the PDV searches.

Table 8: Results of BLASTP searches using *Lb* VLP proteins as query (column 1) against the Viridae protein database (nr: Viridae) or the unrestricted non-redundant (nr) database. Database in column 2 indicates whether the search was performed against the nr: Viridae or the unrestricted nr database. Subject indicates subject accession numbers obtained. Description indicates annotation of the subject sequences associated with the BLAST result. The %ID, E-value and Quer Cov columns indicate the corresponding results from these searches. The nr searches were done at the same time as the Viridae searches.

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CHAPTER 2

Transgenic and RNA Interference studies of a generalist Drosophila parasitic wasp protein p40 reveals key virulence function

ABSTRACT:

Parasitic wasps *Leptopilina heterotoma* produce spiked particles, called Mixed Strategy Extracellular Vesicles (MSEVs), that are 300 nm in diameter and produced in a venom gland. Previous molecular profiling suggested a complex vesicular nature with more than 400 proteins and an absence of nucleic acid in these particles. However, these particles are full of proteins of unknown function. One such protein is a spike/surface protein called "p40". Previous work showed that although p40 is encoded in a typical eukaryotic gene in the wasp genome, it is predicted to be a transmembrane MSEV protein. Modeling studies predicted that p40 folds similarly to the Type III secretion system protein IpaD of the Gram-negative bacteria *Shigella*. Previous studies also showed that pre-treating MSEVs with anti-p40 antibodies prevents the venom's action on host lamellocytes, suggesting that p40 plays a role in *L. heterotoma*'s strategy to lyse host lamellocytes. Here we show that transgenic expression of a full length p40-RFP fusion protein localized to plasma membranes of the larval host's fat body, plasmatocytes, and lamellocytes. Furthermore, a p40 mRFP-fusion construct with the putative transmembrane domain deleted caused loss of membrane localization; secretion of this protein is evidenced by sequestering of the mRFP signal within the larval pericardial cells. Expression of the secreted p40 transgenic construct in hosts prevented encapsulation of the less successful *L. victoriae* wasps. p40 transcripts and protein are expressed in the venom gland prior to wasp eclosion. Knockdown of p40 in developing female wasps did not affect normal wasp development but increased parasite death rate through encapsulation when compared to untreated or GFP knockdown controls. These results confirm that p40 can act on host hemocytes independently of other MSEV proteins and underscore the importance of p40's significant role in *L. heterotoma*'s unique method of active immune suppression in their fly hosts.

INTRODUCTION:

During their work on *Leptoplilina heterotoma (Lh)*, Rizki and Rizki first examined the action of *Lh* venom *on D. melanogaster* larval hemocytes (*1*). They hypothesized that a factor called lamellolysin was responsible for causing lamellocytes, normally large and flat cells, to turn into a long, thin, and spindly morphology called 'bipolar' but they never identified the protein in *Lh* venom that possessed the lamellolysin activity (*2*). This same activity, present in *Lh*, was also found in the venom of its sister species *L. victoriae* (*Lv*) but not in the related species *L. boulardi* (*Lb*) (*3, 4*). Like Lh, the Lv venom gland also produces spiked VLPs (*4*). The *Lh* and *Lv* venom extracts also promote apoptosis of plasmatocytes (*5*).

The lamellolysin activity was localized to particles within *Lh* venom that the Rizkis called virus-like particles (VLPs) (*6*). Proteomic analysis of VLPs in our lab revealed an abundance of proteins involved in cellular processes and immune suppression with an enrichment profile similar to extracellular vesicles (*7, 8*). This analysis did not reveal the presence of any known viral coat proteins (*7, 8*). Based on these analyses, we proposed renaming *Lh* VLPs to mixed-strategy extracellular vesicles (MSEVs) (see Chapter 1 for more details).

Associated with *Lh* MSEVs is p40, a highly abundant protein (*9*). Originally identified in extracts of *Lh* and *Lv* venom gland, p40 was found to be secreted from the secretory cells of the long gland portion of the venom gland (*4, 9, 10*). However, transcription and translation of p40 in pre-eclosion wasp stages has not been studied to date.

In *ex vivo* assays using lamellocytes from mutant animals, venom gland extracts from both *Lh* and *Lv* promote lamellocyte lysis and bipolar morphology (*2, 5*) although the effects of the *Lv* venom are weaker (*4*). In the same *ex vivo* bipolar assays, pre-treating venom extracts with anti-p40 antibodies protects lamellocytes from the lytic effects of *Lh* and *Lv* MSEVs (*9*). Inmmuno-electron microscopy studies with *Lh* and *Lv* MSEVs showed that p40 is associated with the MSEV membrane and spike tips (*9*). Based on its localization to spike surfaces and tips and MSEV spike interaction with lamellocyte surfaces, it was proposed that MSEV-associated p40 mediates MSEV interactions with lamellocytes and is hence may be important to *Lh* and *Lv* virulence (*9*). Significantly, p40 is absent in the genomes and abdominal transcriptomes of *Lb* (*7, 11*), suggesting that it contributes to *Lh*'s unique lamellocyte lysis activity.

p40's domain analysis and homology modeling suggested it to be bound to the MSEV membrane as its predicted sequence structure contains (a) a signal sequence, (b) a central domain important for p40 function, and (c) a transmembrane domain (*7*). Homology modeling the protein's central domain (without its N-terminal signal sequence and C-terminal trans-membrane domain) revealed that at the 3D level, p40 is structurally folded in a way that is similar to IpaD/SipD proteins, even though no significant similarity is found in their primary sequences (*7*). Modeling results also showed that like SipD/IpaD, p40 shares structural similarities to the actin binding proteins, spectrin and plectin (*7*). With these structural similarities, we hypothesized that p40 may function similarly to bacterial IpaD. IpaD can cause apoptosis of macrophages and B-lymphocytes in humans (*12, 13*). IpaD also interacts with macrophage and epithelial cell membranes(*14, 15*). Mutations in key residues in IpaD prevent its interaction with host cells, secretion of effector proteins, or bacterial entry into host cells (*14*). Here we test the hypotheses that (a) transgenic expression of p40 in wild type flies might alter host hemocyte behavior and inhibit encapsulation induced by less virulent wasps; and; (b) knockdown of p40 in wasps would negatively affect the success rate of parasitism.

Utilizing the UAS-GAL4 system in *D. melanogaster*, we found that a full length p40 construct localizes to cell membranes similarly to a membrane-targeted myristoylated mRFP protein and a membrane-associated mCD8-GFP, whereas a p40 construct without its transmembrane domain appears to be secreted into hemolymph and sequestered in cells responsible for filtering hemolymph. Fly larvae expressing transgenic *Lh* p40 showed reduced encapsulation of the related wasp, *Lv*. Unlike its host, *Lh* does not offer forward genetic tools for in vivo studies. However, reverse genetic approaches such as RNA interference (RNAi) have been shown successful for "loss-of-gene function" studies. Experiments with other wasps have shown that dsRNA administration through microinjection or feeding is effective in this regard (*16-25*). We show that knockdown of p40 increased encapsulation of parasite eggs significantly compared to GFP dsRNA and uninjected controls confirming its important role in *Lh* virulence. These studies illustrate how a novel immune suppression factor can greatly change the success of a parasite, thus broadening its niche and success compared to its evolutionary cousins.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Insects: Isogenized *Lh* 14 wasps (*26*) and *Lv (4)*, were raised on the *y w* strain of *D. melanogaster* that were reared on standard cornmeal, yeast, and agar fly food at 25°C as described (*27*). Adult wasps were collected from parasitized hosts, 25 days after infection. Male and female wasps were stored on fly food with 70% honey on "buzz" plugs. Drosophila crosses were performed at 27 °C to express transgene at high levels.

Transgenic fly lines: Constructs for full-length p40 containing predicted p40 domains and variations with domain deletions were cloned into the pENTR Gateway Vector (Invitrogen). Clones were then used for transferring constructs into destination vectors from the Drosophila Gateway Destination Vector collection (Cornell, https://emb.carnegiescience.edu/drosophila-gateway-vector-collection (*28-31*)) to express constructs using the UAS-GAL4 system and to tag the C-terminal with mRFP. Primers used to develop each construct are listed in Table 1. Recombination between entry and destination vector was performed using the LR-Clonase II kit (Invitrogen) following included protocols. Recombination products were transformed into TOP10B competent *E. coli* cells (Invitrogen) using heat shock at 42 °C for 30 seconds, recovery at 37 °C for 1 hour, and then plated on Luria-Bertani Agar with 100 μg/mL ampicillin overnight at 37 °C. Colonies were screened with polymerase chain reaction and restriction digest using PstI to verify successful insertion of construct in destination vector. Inserts in selected plasmids were sequenced using primers in Table 1 (GENEWIZ) to confirm the proper reading frame. Plasmids were prepared for injection using Qiagen Midi Prep kit (Qiagen). Injection of vectors with P-element helper plasmid into strain *y w D. melanogaster* embryos was performed by Rainbow Gene Transgenic Flies. Transgenic insertions were mapped to fly chromosomes and a balanced or homozygous strain was produced using standard crosses. Recombinant lines containing the *Cg-GAL4* P-element transgenic insert (*32*) and all four *UASp40* constructs or *UAS-myr-mRFP* were made using standard genetic crosses (Table 2).

Verification of transgenic p40 expression: Transcription: *Cg-Gal4* and the *UAS-p40* construct larvae were washed twice in deionized water prior to processing. Total RNA was extracted using 100 µL of Trizol (Invitrogen) following manufacturer's protocols. RNA was resuspended in 0.1% DEPC treated water and treated with DNase I to remove contaminating DNA (Thermo Fisher Scientific). The RNA concentration

was determined by NanoDrop (Thermo Fisher). cDNA was synthesized using Proto-Script First Strand cDNA Synthesis Kit (New England Biolabs).

PCRs were performed with Taq polymerase (gift of C. Li lab, CCNY), the cDNA templates, PCR buffer (300 mM Tris HCl pH 9.5, 75 mM (NH₄)₂SO₄, 10 mM MgCl₂) and deoxyribonucleotides (0.2 mM; Thermo Fisher Scientific). The PCR products were resolved on a 1% agarose gel in Tris acetic acid EDTA buffer (40 mM Tris HCl pH 7.6, 20 mM acetic acid, 1mM EDTA pH 8.0). Ethidium bromide (Sigma Aldrich)-stained gels were visualized on an ultraviolet Trans-Illuminator (UVP) and gel images were taken using the DigiDocIt Imaging System (UVP). Gel images were processed in Adobe Photoshop for clarity only. Primers are listed in Table 2.

Translation: Protein extracts were made from third instar larval progeny of *da-GAL4* (*33*) flies crossed to *UAS-p40* construct flies. Larvae were washed in water and 70% ethanol before crushing in insect lysis buffer (1x PBS pH 7.4, 1% Triton-X 100, 25 mM Tris-HCl pH 7.4, 1x mammalian proteinase inhibitor (VWR)). Samples were centrifuged for 15 min at 13,000 X revolutions per minute (RPM), 4°C. The supernatant was pipetted into clean microfuge tubes and used for analysis. Samples were stored at - 80°C until use.

SDS page gels were run using 6% stacking gel and 12% resolving gel. For Western blot, proteins were transferred onto a nitrocellulose membrane with Tris-Glycine buffer for 1 hr at 70V. Membrane was blocked with 3% (w/v) bovine serum albumin (BSA) with 0.1% Tween 20 in PBS for 1 hr. Anti-p40 (*9*) or anti-RFP (Rockland Immuno) antibodies were diluted 1:1000 in block and incubated with membrane for 1 hr with shaking. Membrane was washed before incubation with alkaline phosphatase conjugated antimouse or anti-rabbit secondary antibody diluted 1:200 in block for 1 hr. Color development and band detection was performed with 125 μg/mL 5-bromo-4-chloro-3-indolyl phosphate (BCIP) with 250 μg/mL nitro blue tetrazolium chloride (NBT) in NTM 9.5 (1μM NaCl, 1μM TRIS pH 9.5, 5nM MgCl₂). Color development was stopped by washing membrane in deionized water.

Subcellular localization of p40-RFP and in vivo effects: Tissues were dissected from animals with the following genotypes: *w; Cg-GAL4* (called *Cg-*GAL4), *w; Cg-GAL4, UAS-p40FL* (Cg>p40FL), *w; Cg-GAL4, UAS-p40noTM* (Cg>p40noTM), *w; Cg-GAL4, UAS-p40CD* (Cg>p40CD), *w; Cg-GAL4, UAS-p40noSP/CyO-GFP* (Cg>p40noSP). These genotypes and designations are listed in Table 2.

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Larvae were washed twice in deionized water and kept in phosphate buffered saline (PBS) prior to dissection. Lymph gland and hemolymph smears were allowed to dry for 1 hr at 25°C before fixation with 4% paraformaldehyde for 15 min. Tissues were rinsed three times using PBS before staining actin with Alexa Fluor 488 for 30 min and Hoechst for 15 min. Tissues were rinsed three times with PBS before application of VectaShield mounting media. Fat body tissue samples were dissected into PBS and kept hydrated while following the same fixation, staining, and mounting procedures listed for other tissues. Confocal microscopy was performed on LSM 710 confocal microscope (Zeiss). Images were processed using Zen Blue.

Transgenic p40 encapsulation and cell aggregate assay: *Lv* wasps were provided Cg>p40^{noTM}, Cg>p40FL , and Cg>myr-mRFP larvae as hosts and allowed to parasitize at 27°C. Three days later, larvae were dissected to determine presence/absence of wasp embryos/larvae, encapsulation of wasp embryos/larvae, and to count number of melanized cell aggregates (i.e., hemocytes which were not surrounding a wasp embryo/larva). Percentage encapsulation was calculated as the total number of infected larvae that had at least one encapsulated wasp embryo/larva divided by the total number of infected larvae. Percentage presence of cell aggregates was calculated as the total number of infected larvae that had at least one melanized cell aggregate divided by the total number of infected larvae. Welch's one-tailed t-test assuming unequal variances was performed to determine statistical significance between conditions.

In situ **hybridization:** Sense and anti-sense digoxigenin (DIG)-labeled RNA probes were made using the DIG RNA labeling kit from ROCHE and SP6 RNA polymerase from Thermo Fisher following provided protocols.

Protocol for hybridization of probe was modified from protocols specified in (*34*). To prepare tissue for hybridization, *L. heterotoma* venom glands were dissected in 1X Phosphate Buffered Saline pH 7.4 (PBS) and then fixed in 4% paraformaldehyde. Samples were then permeabilized for 20 min using 0.3% Triton-X in PBS (PBT). Samples were washed in 0.1% PBT before incubation at 42°C for 1 hr in hybridization buffer (50% Formamide, 5X SSC, 1 mg/mL ARN torula, 50 μg/mL Heparine, 2% Roche Blocking Reagent, 5 μM EDTA, 0.1% CHAPS, 0.1% Tween20, DEPC treated H2O). Samples were incubated with DIG-labeled RNA probes at 65°C overnight. Samples were then washed in hybridization

buffer and 0.1% PBT to the following ratios: 3:1, 1:1, 1:3. Samples were then blocked in 10 mg/mL BSA with 0.1% Tween in PBS (PTW) for 1 hr. Anti-DIG antibody from DIG-labeling kit (ROCHE) was diluted 1:2000 in block and incubated with samples for 2 hrs. Samples were washed in 0.1% PBT and PBS before color development with 125 μg/mL BCIP with 250 μg/mL NBT in NTM 9.5 (1μM NaCl, 1μM TRIS pH 9.5, 5nM MgCl₂). Color development was stopped by washing samples in 1X PBS. Samples were then mounted in 50% (v/v) glycerol in PBS and imaged at 20x magnification on an Axioskop 2 Plus (Zeiss).

Microinjection of dsRNA: Constructs for double-stranded RNA for *cinnabar* and *p40* were prepared using primers in Table 1 and cloned into pCRII TOPO (Invitrogen) prior to cloning into L4440 expression vector (Caenorhabditis Genetics Center). L4440:GFP was used for expression of GFP dsRNA as negative control (gift from C. Li, CCNY). Constructs were cloned into *E. coli* strain HT115(DE3) (Caenorhabditis Genetics Center) for expression.

Overnight bacterial cultures were diluted 1:100 in 50 mL of 2x Yeast Tryptone media and grown to OD 0.4 at 37°C with shaking. Cultures were then induced with 0.4mM isopropyl β-D-1 thiogalactopyranoside for 4 hrs. Cultures were pelleted at 6000 RPM for 5 min at 4°C. Extraction and purification of dsRNA was performed as described in (*16*) and then resuspended in 0.1% diethyl pyrocarbonate treated water. dsRNA concentration was determined via NanoDrop (ThermoFisher). dsRNA aliquots were stored at -80°C until use.

For microinjection, wasp larvae were dissected out of host pupal cases at 10 days-post infection (dpi) and placed on 2% agar plates made with 1x PBS and supplemented with 1% Methyl 4 hydroxybenzoate (Sigma). Injections were performed using a Pico-Injector (Harvard Apparatus). All injections were approximately 1 nL. Knockdown of *cn* was done with injections of 700 ng/μL *cinnabar* dsRNA. Negative control was 700 ng/μL *GFP* dsRNA. Knockdown of *p40* was done using injections of 350, 700, or 1000 ng/μL *p40* dsRNA. Negative dsRNA control was 350, 700, or 1000 ng/μL of *GFP* dsRNA. dsRNA was denatured at 95°C for 5 min before reannealing at room temperature before use in injections. Wasps that were dissected from pupal case but not injected with any dsRNA (uninjected) were used as wounding/stress negative control. 1% blue food coloring (final concentration in solution, McCormick brand) was added to dsRNA and used to trace injection. Injected wasps were incubated at

25°C until adulthood. Knockdown of *cinnabar* was scored via microscope observation on a Leica MKFLIII (Leica). Survival statistics for injection of *p40* dsRNA, *GFP* dsRNA, and uninjected control are listed in Table 3.

Encapsulation assay: dsRNA injected and uninjected wasps were used to infect *y w D. melanogaster* larvae. The number of female wasps used in each infection repeat was recorded in order to calculate encapsulations per female. An average of three females were used per egglay. Each egglay used for a set of "knockdown" (KD) females was counted as a repeat. Infection repeats were incubated at 25°C. All emerging flies and wasps from each repeat were counted approximately ten day's post injection/dissection. Adult flies were scored for presence/absence of capsules. Representative images of affected larvae and flies were taken on a Leica MKFLIII (Leica). Encapsulations were normalized to number of encapsulations per female. F-test for variances was performed to confirm if variance between conditions was unequal prior to statistical significance testing. Welch's one-tailed t-test assuming unequal variances was performed to determine statistical significance between conditions. If variance is equal, Welch's t-test performs as if Student's t-test.

RESULTS:

Transgenic expression of p40 in flies

In previous experiments, the central domain of p40 (p40 CD) was expressed in bacteria to test if exposure to target hemocyte cells ex vivo might alter their shape and viability (*35*). The rationale was that as IpaD interacts with macrophage and epithelial cell membranes to allow the Type III Secretion System needle to inject proteins (*12, 14, 15*), a similar 3D structure, even in solution, may help lyse target host cell membranes, when presented from the outside (*35*). This bacterially expressed p40 CD was able to induce significant lamellocyte shape change (*35*).

To verify these results from bacterially derived p40 in an *ex vivo* system, we turned to transgenic flies whose cells would add post-translational modifications to p40, and also allow testing its predicted membrane localization. For this, we designed four monomeric RFP-tagged (mRFP-tagged) p40 constructs for expression in Drosophila under the UAS-GAL4 system: full length p40 (p40FL), p40 without transmembrane domain ($p40^{n\sigma TM}$), p40 central domain ($p40^{CD}$), and p40 without signal peptide ($p40^{n\sigma SP}$) (Fig 1A). Transgenic fly lines were checked for expression of constructs. While all constructs expressed transcripts detectable with construct specific primers (Fig 1B), only two transgenes ($p40^{FL}$ and $p40^{n \circ TM}$) expressed detectable protein level in Western blot analysis (Fig 1C).

Fusion constructs were first expressed in the larval fat body (Fig 1E-G) using *Collagen* (*Cg)*- *GAL4* as the fat body is large and made up of a single layer of endopolyploid cells, where it is easy to observe intracellular protein localization. (The fat body is not a known target of wasp venom or p40 and we did not expect specific biological effects of p40 expression in it.) Fat bodies from *Cg*-*GAL4* animals without the UAS-transgene were used as negative control (Fig 1D). Expression of myristoylated mRFP (myr-mRFP) was used to label membrane with mRFP as another control (Fig 1E) (*36*). We observed that $p40^{FL}$ clearly localized to the plasma membrane, as indicated by the mRFP signal outlining the cell boundary. Punctate staining in the fat body cell cytoplasm is likely to be vesicular. Colocalization of p40FL mRFP signal with mCD8-GFP (which is known to insert into membranes due to mCD8's transmembrane domain (*37, 38*)) also occurred in lymph glands when expressed with *Hemese (He)-GAL4*, which further supports p40's membrane association (Fig 2B, Fig 3E).

Finally, fat body cells and plasmatocytes expressing $p40^{FL}$ appear to have denser F-actin signal (Fig 1F, Fig 3C-C'') compared to controls (Fig 1D and E, Fig 3B-B''). F-actin and the associated modeling protein spectrin are associated with cell membranes and involved in several cellular processes including motility and signaling (*39-43*). While we do hypothesize that p40 CD may fold similarly to spectrin, we cannot confirm the orientation of membrane associated $p40^{FL}$ and if the p40 CD is within the cytoplasm to interfere with actin modeling (Fig 3A). However, the density of the actin staining may indicate that a cytoplasmic region of p40 is able to interact with actin.

As expected from the Western blot results (Fig 1C), we failed to detect an mRFP signal in the fat bodies of Cg>p40^{CD} and Cg>p40^{noSP} animals, possibly due to their rapid degradation (not shown). In Cg >p40^{noTM} fat body cells the mRFP signal was also not detected (Fig 1G), however, pericardial cells (PCs) in these animals showed a clear, but punctate, mRFP signal which was not detected in the Cg>myr-mRFP control PCs (p40^{noTM} total n = 31/33 larvae, myr-mRFP n = 0/25 across three rounds of dissections, Fig 1E''' and 1G'''). This result is consistent with the model that p40 lacking the transmembrane domain is secreted and taken up by PCs, as PCs are pinocytotic (*Cg-GAL4* is not expressed within PCs ;Fig 1E^{'''} (44-47)). Thus, sequestration of p40^{no™} within these cells is possible if it is secreted.

We were surprised to find that as in the Cg> $p40^{n \circ T M}$ larval pericardial cells, the Cg> $p40^{FL}$ animals also showed uptake of the RFP signal into their PCs (Fig 1F'''). However, unlike the fat body cells, the Cg>p40^{FL} p40 signal is not localized to the pericardial cell membrane, but instead it is punctate, just like the p40^{no™} signal. This uptake in Cg>p40^{FL} was observed multiple times in three separate dissections $(p40^{FL}$ total n = 23/28 across three dissections).

To observe if there were any differences in localization in hemocytes (plasmatocytes and lamellocytes) compared to fat body localization, we expressed p40 constructs in lamellocytes using *misshapen (msn)-GAL4* and in plasmatocytes via *Cg*-*GAL4* (Fig 2B-E, expression of p40noTM not shown). As seen in fat body cells, $p40^{FL}$ continued to localize to cell membranes of both plasmatocytes and lamellocytes. The $p40^{n \circ TM}$ proteins were not detected from the cytoplasm and membrane of expressing cells (data not shown). Given the expected expression patterns and subcellular localization of the p40FL and $p40^{n \circ \text{TM}}$ proteins in transgenic fat bodies and hemocytes, we performed functional assays.

Transgenic p40 proteins appear to be active

We hypothesized that p40 may interact with hemocytes differently depending on presentation (Fig 2A). Effects may occur when $p40^{FL}$ is internalized during endocytosis when presented on the cell membrane. Secreted p40noTM may also be taken up by the very same plasmatocytes that produce the construct and cause a biological effect. Other effects may arise from interaction of individual cells (plasmatocyte-plasmatocyte, lamellocyte-lamellocyte, plasmatocyte-lamellocyte, Fig 3A). To observe effects of p40 expression on lamellocytes, we expressed constructs using *msn*-GAL4 and via *Cg*-GAL4 (Fig 3B-E, expression of $p40^{n \circ TM}$ not shown). We also utilized an over-proliferative hemocyte background (*hopTum-l*) in order to ensure that both plamatocytes and lamellocytes were present. The *hopTum-*^l background causes melanized aggregates of hemocytes which are referred to as tumors. The production of these tumors during larval stages decreases viability of the adult fly. We hypothesized that if transgenic p40 was active against hemocytes, it should reduce tumor burden and/or increase viability. A significant effect on tumors and viability was seen when p40 was expressed in plasmatocytes or lamellocytes with decreased tumor burden and increased viability (Sevilla, Vashist, and Govind, unpublished work). These effects of p40 expression appear to be cell-specific as no deleterious effects were observed when p40 was expressed in the eye using *eyeless*-GAL4 and *GMR*-GAL4 (data not shown).

Expression of transgenic p40 reduces encapsulation of *L. victoriae*

Given the potential effects on tumors and viability in an over-proliferative hemocyte background, we hypothesized that transgenic p40 expression would reduce the encapsulation of the *Leptopilina* spp. *L. victoriae*, which is known to have p40, but is less successful leading to higher incidence of encapsulation in comparison to *Lh (4)*. After allowing *L. victoriae* to parasitize hosts expressing either myr-mRFP, p40^{FL}, or p40^{no™} under the control of *Cg*-GAL4, we found hosts expressing p40^{no™} had no encapsulations of *L. victoriae* embryos or larvae, a stark contrast to myr-mRFP control and p40FL which still had an average of encapsulation occurrence of 36% and 61% respectively (Fig 4A). Expression of myr-mRFP or $p40^F$ created no significant difference in percentage of larvae with encapsulations despite the difference in averages (Fig 4A).

Despite a striking difference between p40^{no™} and myr-mRFP controls, expression of p40^{no™} did not prevent activation of the host immune response. Instead, it significantly reduced the percentage of

hosts with melanized cell aggregates compared to myr-mRFP control (p-value = 2.57E-5, Fig 4B). No significant difference was observed between p40^{FL} and myr-mRFP controls.

Knockdown of p40 increases parasite encapsulation

Colinet et al. (*23*) have shown that RNA interference (RNAi) is possible within the *L. boulardi* system using microinjection of double strand RNA (dsRNA). Using this as an example, we performed knockdown of the eye color gene *cinnabar* (*cn*) as a proof of concept.

Timing for injection of *cn* dsRNA was performed on wasps aged 10 days post infection (dpi) as performed in Colinet et al. as at this stage, eyes have not yet developed nor has any pigmentation developed (*23*). However, timing for p40 expression had not yet been determined. To find the optimal time point for injection of p40 dsRNA for knockdown, we performed *in situ* hybridization in venom glands to time expression of p40 mRNA. In venom glands from wasps (13-14 days post infection (dpi)) until up to 2 weeks dpi) we found p40 mRNA transcribed and translated even at the earliest time point (Fig 5 and 6). We were also concerned about the duration of knockdown and wondered if knockdown of p40 would persist long enough for wasps to reach adulthood and parasitize hosts. Colinet et al. reported that in their experiments, as detected by Southern blots of *L. boulardi* Rho-GAP (also known as LbGAP), knockdown lasts well into adulthood of female wasps (*23*). We thus expected that inducing knockdown of p40 early would lead to lasting effects into adulthood to see effects in attempts to suppress fly response to parasitism.

Injection of *cn* dsRNA caused a dark red eye color compared to the black/gray GFP dsRNA (Fig 7A and B) and thus we moved forward with p40 dsRNA injections. Despite attempts to minimize lethality, dissection from pupal case and injection of dsRNA caused wasp lethality or diapause (a stop in development) due to injury. Dissection from pupal case without injection (uninjected) had survival rates of 51% to 71% across all experiments (Table 3; total attempts n = 409 wasps). However, injection of p40 dsRNA or GFP dsRNA reduced survival rates ranging from 23% to 57% across all three dsRNA dosages (total p40 dsRNA attempts $n = 534$, total GFP dsRNA attempts $n = 500$, Table 3) and there was larger variability in survival. These numbers are similar to injection survival observed by Colinet et al. with for

Luciferase dsRNA control (65-68.7% survival, total n = 140) and for LbGAP dsRNA (58.7-60% survival, total n = 140) (*23*).

To examine the effects of p40 KD, we injected p40 dsRNA at 10 dpi, at three different concentrations (350 ng/μL, 700 ng/μL, and 1 μg/μL) prior to development of a venom gland in order to prevent early expression and studied encapsulation rates in hosts infected with "KD" wasps (Fig 7C-F). The rate of encapsulation per surviving female was determined as the total number of encapsulations in a vial per the number of females used in each vial. GFP dsRNA control did not affect encapsulation compared to uninjected control which was expected. When comparing injection of p40 dsRNA to uninjected wasps or GFP dsRNA injected wasps, we found significantly more encapsulations per female in all three concentrations of dsRNA for injection.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

The history and previous work on *Lh*'s methods of host immune suppression are focused around understanding the mechanism of host hemocyte death and prevention of initiating the immune response (*1, 3, 4, 6-9, 26, 48*). In fact, the fat body immune response requires Spätzle secreted from hemocytes (*49*) and so destruction of host hemocytes may serve two functions: prevention of immune response and prevention of encapsulation. So far, no single protein in the *Lh* venom has been indicated to possess this "lamellolysin" activity proposed by the Rizkis (*1, 2, 6*). Here, we investigated the highly abundant protein p40 and establish its importance to the parasite strategy in hopes of determining if p40 is important or related to lamellolysin activity. Consistent with antibody inhibition assays with p40 (*9*), p40 knockdown in wasps protects lamellocytes from lysis.

In both hemocytes and fat body cells, we found our $p40^F$ -mRFP signal localized to cell membranes, supporting a membrane association. This signal overlapped with our membrane-associated actin stain as well as mCD8-GFP (Fig 1F-F'' and Fig 2A-A'') and is the same as the membrane localization of myr-mRFP (Fig 1G-G'' and Fig 2B-B''). The overlap between actin staining, mCD8-GFP, and $p40^{FL}$ may also be because the mRFP tag is on the cytoplasmic side while $p40$ CD may be presented to the outside of the cell. Contrary to this, we also found that expression of $p40^{FL}$ appears to cause denser actin staining around the cell membrane. While this does not directly support the modeling of p40 CD as similar to spectrin/plectin, it does potentially indicate that a domain of p40 that is within the cytoplasm is influencing actin localization. Although immune-gold EM of MSEVs for p40 supports external presentation of p40 on the outside of MSEVs (*9*), we do not have any evidence to support that the orientation of the transgenic construct will match that of MSEVs.

Domain architecture analysis of $p40$ is further supported by the presence of $p40^{n \circ TM}$ in pericardial cells (Fig 1G'''). Pericardial cells are also known to act as the filtration system of the larval hemolymph (*45-47, 50*) and Cg-GAL4 does not cause expression of UAS constructs within pericardial cells (Fig 1E''' and (32)). Thus, without the transmembrane domain, the tagged $p40^{n \circ T M}$ construct is unable to remain associated with membrane and appears to be secreted into the hemolymph only to be filtered out by the pericardial cells. However, we were particularly surprised to find p40FL within pericardial cells (Fig 1F'''),

especially considering the membrane association. Interestingly, pericardial cells have been shown to take up macromolecules and colloids via pinocytosis (*46*). This may indicate that p40FL may be shed with membrane or cellular debris by cells. Follow up experiments will check for presence of additional membrane markers, such as mCD8-GFP, from hemocytes and fat body cells in combination and separately through use of different GAL4 drivers specific to those tissues. We hypothesize that if p40^{FL} is being shed with membrane due to cell death, blebbing, or other reasons, pericardial cells should show signal for both p40 and membrane marker.

p40-expressing hemocytes decreased tumor burden and increased viability of *hopTum-l* flies (Sevilla, Vashist, and Govind, unpublished work). These data support the idea that the $p40^{F\perp}$ and $p40^{n\circ TM}$ constructs, encoding the central domain, possess a biochemical activity, which when presented to target hemocytes' membranes, alter their function. The strongest effects were however observed when secreted p40 expressing hosts were infected with *Lv* (36-61% with myr-mRFP and p40FL compared to 0% with $p40^{n \circ \text{TM}}$ (Fig 4A). The effectiveness of the secreted p40 on hemocytes could be due to the presence of other immune-suppressive factors in the *Lv* venom and VLPs that also worked in conjunction with Lv's p40 variant (*9*). Additionally, it was possible to clearly visualize the neutralizing effects of the transgenederived secreted p40 in the context of a natural encapsulation reaction which retains the homeostatic resolution mechanisms intact (*51, 52*), whereas the *hopTum-l* mutants exhibit constitutive cellular immunity and is unable to resolve hemocyte proliferation and differentiation due to loss of homeostasis (*53*).

Knockdown of p40 increases encapsulation (0.89-1.5 encapsulations per p40 dsRNA injected female on average compared to 0.2-0.5 encapsulations per GFP dsRNA injected or uninjected female) (Fig 7F). However, encapsulation results were quite variable. This variability may be due to technical and biological reasons arising from differences in volume of dsRNA administered, the precise site of delivery affecting the degree of knockdown, and inherent variation in wasps' infectivity in different biological replicates. Even though MSEVs contain a multitude of other proteins including infection and immunity proteins (*7, 8*), strong effects are seen with just p40 knockdown. This observation suggests that these other effector proteins might suppress other aspects of cellular or humoral immunity. The combined use of protein modeling, transgenic expression assays coupled with RNA interference adopted for p40 can also be used to study select candidate effector proteins. The absence of p40-like protein in the *Lb* venom correlates with its inability to lyse host lamellocytes. This result suggests that the p40's activity on hemocytes might facilitate or hasten the effects of other factors to rapidly suppress host immunity. Like bacterial IpaD/SipD proteins, it may be able to interact directly with host membranes, mediating its own efficient entry and also of other effector proteins, although this remains to be shown. Like IpaD, *Lh* p40 may be able to promote hemocyte death, a result that is supported in preliminary results with bacterially expressed p40 in our lab. These results need to be confirmed in larvae expressing the secreted p40. If p40 alone is able to induce cell shape change and lysis of lamellocytes, it would be a candidate for the lamellolysin activity hypothesized by the Rizkis. Additional experiments with transgene derived proteins in *Drosophila* would confirm this function.

Our results suggest that p40 is an important arsenal in the *Lh*/*Lv* immune suppressive armament. Its presence and high activity in *Lh* may help explain *Lh*'s ability to succeed on a wide range of species. BLAST searches of *L. claivpes* genomic and transcriptomic sequences did not reveal the existence of a p40-like protein in *L. clavipes*, and like *Lb* its host range is limited, if not preferential (*54*), Characterization of the p40 variants in different *Lv* strains will expand our understanding of the evolution of this important protein in the *Leptopilina* clade.

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FIGURES

Figure 1: Expression of p40 constructs follows domain architecture predictions. (A) Illustration of p40 domains within each designed construct. (B) cDNA of p40 fusion constructs expressed in transgenic fly larvae (*Cg-GAL4*) amplified by PCR and compared to controls amplified from corresponding plasmid templates. Lanes are as follows 0- Molecular weight ladder, $1 - p40^{FL}$ plasmid control, $2 - p40^{FL}$ cDNA, 3 $-$ p40^{noTM} plasmid control, 4 – p40^{noTM} cDNA, 5 – p40^{CD} plasmid control, 6 – p40^{CD} cDNA, 7 – p40^{noSP} plasmid control, 8 – p40^{noSP} cDNA. (C) Western blot to detect mRFP-tagged p40 in fly larvae extracts. (D-G) Confocal microscopy of fly larval fat body showing localization of p40 mRFP signal with myristoylated mRFP as positive control and *Cg-GAL4* only as negative control. Scale bars for panels indicate 50 μm. Panel C: Courtesy Carlo Sevilla

Figure 2: Expression of p40FL. In lymph gland hemocytes with *He-GAL4*. (A-A'') Control *He-GAL4*>mCD8-GFP lymph gland showing mCD8-GFP expression. (B-B'') Full length p40-mRFP fusion protein shows similar localization with membrane-associated mCD8-GFP. Dashed line indicates selected zoom and split channel regions. Scale bar in indicates 50 μm (A and B) and 20 μm (A', A'', B', B'').

Figure 3: Presentation of p40 with and to hemocyte types. (A) p40 was expressed either in plasmatocytes (*Cg-GAL4*) or lamellocytes (*msn-GAL4*). This expression may cause autonomous (steps 1a-1c), or non-autonomous (steps 2-4) effects in hemocytes (that are not themselves producing the p40). In this experimental design, p40 is also expressed in the fat body via *Cg-GAL4*. (B-E) Localization of p40^{FL} in plasmatocytes (C) and lamellocytes (E) shows cytoplasmic and membrane association of the protein. Scale bars indicate 20 μm.

Figure 4: Transgenic expression of secreted p40 reduces encapsulation of *Lv* but does not prevent differentiation of lamellocytes. (A) Expression of p40noTM significantly reduced encapsulation of *Lv* embryos/larvae compared to myr-mRFP control, p-value = 0.004. (B) Expression of $p40^{noTM}$ significantly reduced presence of melanized cell aggregates in *Lv* parasitized hosts compared to myr-mRFP control, p-value = 2.57E-5.

Figure 5: *Lh* venom gland *in situ* with DIG-labeled probes to detect *p40* transcription. Venom glands are from wasps 3 days before eclosion (A-A''), newly eclosed wasps (B-B''), 1-week post eclosion (C-C''), or 2 weeks post eclosion (D-D''). Presence of transcript is detected as purple color from alkaline phosphatase staining reaction. Scale bar indicates 100 µm.

Figure 6: Immunohistochemistry detection of p40 protein in wasp venom glands. Wasps at four developmental time points (A) uneclosed (3 days before eclosion), (B) newly eclosed, (C) 1 week old, (D) 2 weeks old. Images were taken at 40x magnification. Scale bar indicates 50 μm.

Figure 7: RNA interference in *Lh* indicates importance of p40 in suppressing encapsulation. (A and B) knockdown of eye color gene *cinnabar* as proof of concept. GFPRNAi does not change the normal black eye color (A) but cnRNAi causes a deep red eye color (B). (C-E) Knockdown of p40 causes increased encapsulation. Uninjected wasps were also used as a control. Panel C shows a host without encapsulation after infection by a wasp injected with 700 ng/µL GFPRNAi. Panels D and E show larval hosts with capsules and an adult fly with capsule caused by $p40^{RNAi}$ (700 ng/ μ L) wasps. (F) Comparison of encapsulation (per female wasp-see Methods) induced by wasps injected with different p40RNAi concentrations relative to uninjected wasps or GFPRNAi wasps. Number of encapsulation assays (biological replicates) for each treatment is indicated as n above each bar. The number of wasps in each biological replicate ranged from 1 to 4. Error bars indicate standard error of mean. p values indicate statistical significance using Welch's one-tailed t-test. p40 dsRNA vs uninjected: 350 ng/μL p = 0.004, 700 ng/μL p = 0.015, 1 μg/μL p = 0.038. p40 dsRNA vs GFP dsRNA: 350 ng/μL p = 0.003, 700 ng/μL p = 0.018, 1 μg/μL p = 0.043. Uninjected control vs GFP dsRNA control: 350 ng/μL p = 0.94, 700 ng/μL p = 0.38, 1 μ g/ μ L p = 0.42).

TABLES

Table 1: Primer sequences used in cloning of *L. heterotoma* p40 and *cinnabar* constructs.

Table 2: Fly lines used in this work. References for original strains are provided where applicable.

Table 3: Survival statistics for double strand RNA injection. Wasps were considered to have survived if they were fully developed and motile 12 days post injection. Cultured indicates total number of wasps dissected for a given treatment (uninjected, GFP dsRNA injected (GFP), or p40 dsRNA injected (p40). The term "survived" refers to the total number of male and female wasps that survived treatment. The number of surviving females is also noted.

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