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An ES-Like Pluripotent State in FGF-Dependent Murine iPS cells

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Abstract

Recent data demonstrates that stem cells can exist in two morphologically, molecularly and functionally distinct pluripotent states; a naive LIF-dependent pluripotent state which is represented by murine embryonic stem cells (mESCs) and an FGF-dependent primed pluripotent state represented by murine and rat epiblast stem cells (EpiSCs). We find that derivation of induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) under EpiSC culture conditions yields FGF-dependent iPSCs from hereon called FGF-iPSCs which, unexpectedly, display naive ES-like/ICM properties. FGF-iPSCs display X-chromosome activation, multi-lineage differentiation, teratoma competence and chimera contribution in vivo. Our findings suggest that in 129 and Bl6 mouse strains, iPSCs can dominantly adopt a naive pluripotent state regardless of culture growth factor conditions. Characterization of the key molecular signalling pathways revealed FGF-iPSCs to depend on the Activin/Nodal and FGF pathways, while signalling through the JAK-STAT pathway is not required for FGF-iPS cell maintenance. Our findings suggest that in 129 and Bl6 mouse strains, iPSCs can dominantly adopt a naive pluripotent state regardless of culture growth factor conditions.

Citation: Di Stefano B, Buecker C, Ungaro F, Prigione A, Chen H-H, et al. (2010) An ES-Like Pluripotent State in FGF-Dependent Murine iPS cells. PLoS ONE 5(12): e16092. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0016092

Received July 28, 2010; Accepted December 8, 2010; Published December 30, 2010

Competing Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Introduction

Pluripotent stem cells are characterized by their ability to expand indefinitely in vitro while retaining the capacity to generate derivatives of all three germ layers, both in vitro and in vivo. Sources of pluripotent stem cells include blastocyst embryos, which give rise to embryonic stem cells (ES cells), and the post-implantation epiblast which gives rise to epiblast stem cells (EpiSCs) [1,2].

ES cells and EpiSCs are both pluripotent, they are capable of generating derivatives of all three embryonic germ layers in vitro or in vivo differentiation, yet important molecular and functional differences exist between these two pluripotent states. At the molecular level, the ES cell pluripotent state is maintained by a combination of LIF/JAK/STAT3 and BMP4 signaling, while EpiSCs require a combination of bFGF and TGFβ/Activin signaling for their continued self-renewal. The different culture conditions that maintain ES cells and EpiSCs are reflected in the morphological, molecular and functional properties of these cells.

Murine ES cells form dome-shaped three dimensional colonies and are capable of generating chimeras with functional contribution to all somatic lineages as well as the germline. In contrast, EpiSCs form flattened colonies that are split by mechanical- or collagen-mediated passaging as small clusters of cells, since EpiSCs cannot be passaged as single cells by trypsin digest. EpiSCs are pluripotent and form derivatives of all three germ layers during in vitro differentiation and upon teratoma formation in vivo. Unlike ES cells, EpiSCs can even generate trophoectoderm derivatives in vitro. Yet, fail to integrate with the ICM upon morula aggregation and as a result, chimera forming potential of EpiSCs is very low or even absent. Thus, while EpiSCs are pluripotent, to-date their in vivo developmental potential is limited to teratoma formation.

Above results demonstrate that in the mouse, two functionally distinct pluripotent states exist, a naive LIF-dependent pluripotent state that is compatible with the pre-implantation ICM and a primed FGF-dependent state that is reminiscent of the post-implantation epiblast [3].
The ability to generate ES cell lines is restricted to only a few inbred mouse strains whereas other, so-called “non-permissive” mouse strains fail to yield ES cells under standard culture conditions, but instead can give rise to EpiSCs. Pluripotent stem cell lines from other species, including human and rat, share many of the defining characteristics of EpiSCs, suggesting that the EpiSC pluripotent state is common among all mammalian species. In permissive mouse strains, the ES-like culture conditions, iPS cells adopt a naive ICM/ES-like pluripotent state. In the absence of these exogenous factors, NOD iPS cells assume a stable EpiSC-like state, even when LIF is present in the culture media. Unexpectedly, upon subsequent passaging, the cells derived in the presence of bFGF displayed the characteristic murine ES-like colony morphology. The number of colonies increased with time, but lagged behind compared to the LIF control iPS cells. As expected, bisulfite sequencing demonstrated hypomethylation of the Oct4 promoter region as tested in 12 different CpG islands scattered around 350 bp of the Oct4 minimal promoter (Fig. S1A). Correct establishment of the reprogrammed cell state was confirmed by complete silencing of the exogenous reprogramming factors as revealed by qPCR (Figure S1B).

Growth factor culture conditions affect the dynamic of iPS reprogramming

To examine the effect of the growth factor conditions on the dynamic of the iPS reprogramming process, we reprogrammed from 129/BL6 F1 embryonic fibroblasts either in the presence of LIF/serum (standard murine ES/iPS conditions) or in the presence of bFGF (EpiSC conditions). For this purpose, we employed the recently reported STEMCCA inducible lentiviral vector system, which allows the expression of the four reprogramming factors (Oct4, Sox2, Klf4, cMyc) from a single lentiviral vector in a doxycyclin-inducible manner through the action of the reverse tetracycline transactivator (rtTA) at high efficiency (Figure S2A) [11]. Figure 2A schematically displays the experimental setup. Murine embryonic fibroblasts were transduced with the doxycyclin-inducible reprogramming factors and rtTA and reprogramming was induced 24 hours after infection (t = 0). At day 1, the sample was split and cells were cultured either in the presence of LIF (mES conditions) or in the presence of bFGF (EpiSC conditions). At set time intervals (between day 5 and day 15), ectopic reprogramming factors were silenced by removal of doxycycline. Colonies were visualized by Crystal Violet staining on day 18. After approximately 10–12 days, iPS colonies appeared under both conditions, and the LIF-derived iPS cells displayed a characteristic ES-like colony morphology, whereas we noted iPS cells derived in the presence of bFGF displayed the characteristic flattened colony morphology of EpiSCs (Figure S2B). However, the EpiSC-like colonies were unstable, and upon withdrawal of the ectopic reprogramming factors, most of the EpiSC-like iPS cells assumed a fibroblast-like morphology, indicating that they were partially reprogrammed and had not activated their endogenous pluripotency program. Indeed, the Oct4-GFP reporter gene present in these cells was not reactivated in the EpiSC-like iPS cells, whereas the control iPS cells did reactivate Oct4-GFP (not shown). However, in the FGF conditions, few colonies remained after silencing of ectopic reprogramming factors, which could be stably propagated in the presence of bFGF, and yet displayed the characteristic murine ES-like colony morphology. The number of stable FGF-iPS colonies increased with longer reprogramming time, but lagged behind compared to the LIF control iPS cells. As shown in figure 2B, in the presence of bFGF, stable iPS colonies emerged after 9 days of doxycycline-induced reprogramming, whereas in the presence of LIF, stable colonies were noted 4 days earlier.

Thus, it appears that while the culture growth factor conditions affect the dynamic of the iPS reprogramming process, with stable colonies emerging late under FGF growth factor conditions, the
general outcome of the reprogramming response is not affected by the culture conditions.

FGF-iPSCs display molecular and epigenetic features of the ICM/ES cell pluripotent state

The emergence of iPS cell colonies with typical murine ES-like characteristics under EpiSC culture conditions was unexpected and hence we performed genome-wide expression analysis to further characterize these cells. As shown in Figure 3A, FGF-iPSCs display a gene expression pattern characteristic of murine ES cells, including the inner cell mass markers Rex1, Nanog, Oct4, Sox2, Sall4, Gdf3 and Eras. In contrast, typical EpiSC markers, including FGF5, Eomes (also known as Tbr2), FoxA2 and Cer1 were not expressed in FGF-iPSCs (Fig. 3A). Microarray data were confirmed by qPCR expression analysis (the list of used primers is available in table S1) (Fig. 3C). Hierarchical cluster analysis of the global gene expression profiles of FGF-iPSCs cells, LIF-derived iPS cells, murine ESCs and EpiSCs revealed that FGF-iPSCs are highly similar to murine ES- and LIF-derived iPS cells, whereas EpiSCs cells form a separate cluster of unrelated cells (Fig. 3B). Starting fibroblasts are absent in this analysis as most of the investigated were not expressed in the cells prior to iPS reprogramming.

Alkaline phosphatase (AP) is a widely used marker distinguishing murine ESCs, which are expressing AP, from EpiSCs, which are negative for this marker. Interestingly, iPSCs derived in the presence of bFGF were strongly positive for the AP staining, further confirming their similarity to ESCs (Fig. 4A, B).

In addition to the above molecular and morphological characteristics, we examined the epigenetic properties of the FGF-iPSCs. The pluripotency mediator Oct4 is differentially expressed from two distinct enhancer regions; a distal enhancer

Figure 1. Generation of FGF-iPS from mouse fibroblasts by retroviral transduction. Schematic diagram illustrating a timetable of the critical steps of the reprogramming protocol utilized. Embryonic mouse fibroblasts were transduced with retroviruses carrying Oct4, Sox2 Klf4 and c-Myc and then transferred onto MEF feeder layers in DMEM medium supplemented with 10% FBS. After 4 days the medium was switched to a human ESC culture medium. Colonies activated the Oct4-GFP transgene after twelve days in culture (B–C) and are isolated for expansion after 17–18 days (D–E). After picking, single clones give rise to stable cell lines of FGF-iPSCs, which grow as round compacted colonies (F, H) expressing the Oct4-GFP transgene (G, I). Colonies expressing the Oct4-GFP (K, O, S) result positive for alkaline phosphatase activity (AP) (J), and SSEA-1 (M), Sox2 (P) and Nanog (T) immunostainings. Merged figures for Sox2/Oct4-GFP and Nanog/Oct4- immunostainings are showed in Q and U, respectively. DAPI fluorescent staining is labeling cell nuclei (blue) in L, N, R.

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0016092.g001

Generation of mouse FGF-iPS Cells
which drives Oct4 expression in murine ES cells and a proximal enhancer which mediates Oct4 expression in EpiSCs [12]. Thus, Oct4 enhancer choice is a distinctive feature between ES cells and EpiSCs. As shown in Figure S1D, Oct4 expression is driven by the ES-specific distal enhancer in FGF-derived iPSCs, as well as the ES- and LIF-derived iPSC controls. In contrast, as expected, the proximal enhancer is active in control EpiSCs.

In addition, we examined the X-inactivation state of iPSC clones from a female cell line by RNA FISH for Xist. As demonstrated in Figure 4C–D the majority of FGF-iPSCs contains two active X-chromosomes as demonstrated by the presence of only basal (pinpoint) Xist expression on both X chromosomes as also observed in the mESC control cells (Figure 4C) whereas in some cells an Xist-cloud was observed (Figure 4C, arrow). As expected, FGF-iPSCs robustly display X-inactivation upon differentiation, demonstrating that the cells are capable of X-inactivation (Figure 4C). The percentage of FGF-iPSCs containing a Xist-cloud is quantified in Figure 4D and demonstrated that approximately 90% of the undifferentiated FGF-iPSCs contain two active X-chromosomes whereas 40% of the FGF-iPSCs display X-inactivation after 4 days of differentiation. The percentage of FGF-iPSCs displaying an Xist-cloud (10%) is higher than X-inactivation observed in control mESCs (0.5%) and is perhaps reminiscent of the higher percentage of X-inactivation also observed in human ESCs. Finally, immunofluorescence-based detection of the trimethylated H3 lysine 27 (me3H3K27), a repressive histone modification, revealed the absence of a silent X chromosome in two undifferentiated female FGF-iPS cell lines (Fig. 4E). This is in stark contrast to EpiSCs which exhibit complete X-chromosome inactivation similar to their tissue of origin. Together these data demonstrate that in addition to morphological and molecular similarities, FGF-iPSCs display an epigenetic profile characteristic of mESCs as well.

Murine FGF-iPSCs are FGF-dependent

Despite the common expression of pluripotency genes between LIF or FGF derived iPSCs, important differences emerged in the expression levels of genes encoding key factors of the Nodal/Activin or Jak/Stat3 pathways between the two cell types. In fact, FGF-iPSCs exhibited high expression levels of Nodal and Inhba and, simultaneously, a low expression of genes downstream of the LIF-JAK-STAT3 signalling pathway (Stat3, Jak1, Jak2 and Pim1) in comparison to conventional ESCs and iPSCs as detected by microarray profiling and confirmed by qPCR analysis (Fig. 5A, B).

To confirm that FGF-iPS are maintained independent of JAK-STAT3 signaling, we cultured FGF-iPSCs in the presence of a JAK inhibitor (JAKi) or a LIF blocking antibody, in order to inhibit Stat3 phosphorylation (Fig. 6A). As shown in Figure 6G, addition of the JAK inhibitor efficiently eliminates STAT3 phosphorylation under these conditions both in FGF-iPS and conventional mESCs, in which STAT3 is robustly activated. FGF-iPSCs could be propagated for more than 7 passages in the presence of JAKi inhibitor while maintaining their undifferentiated state and Oct4-GFP endogenous expression (Fig. 6B, C). In contrast, we observed rapid loss of pluripotency gene expression when conventional mouse ESC and/or iPSC were cultured under the same conditions (Fig.6). Furthermore, FGF-iPSCs maintained for 5 passages in the presence of JAKi inhibitor, retained their characteristic ESC-like gene expression profile with expression of ESC-like markers Stra8, Rex1 and Stella (Dppa3) and absence of epiblast marker expression (Cer1, Dkk1 and FGF5) (Fig. 6H). Conversely, inhibition of TGFbeta/Activin signaling using a specific inhibitor of the type I Activin receptor (ALK-I) resulted in rapid FGF-iPSC differentiation, while this inhibitor did not affect mESC self-renewal (Fig. 6). Control EpiSCs and human ESCs similarly
differentiated upon ALK-1 inhibition (data not shown). In addition, FGF withdrawal or FGF receptor inhibition by the application of SU5402 in FGF-iPSCs for six days resulted in widespread cell death (Figure S3). These findings demonstrate that FGF-iPSCs are maintained independent of the activation of the JAK-Stat3 signalling pathway. Instead, FGF-iPSC self-renewal relies on the continued presence of FGF stimulation and activity of the TGFbeta/Activin signaling cascade.

Indeed, downstream mediators of FGF- and TGFbeta/Activin signaling are activated in FGF-iPSCs. We assessed Smad 2/3, Smad 1/5/8 levels in mouse ESCs, LIF-iPSCs and FGF-iPSCs by Western blot analysis. ESCs and LIF-iPSCs showed phosphorylation of Smad 1/5/8, indicating active transduction of Bmp signaling (Fig. 5C). On the contrary, two independent FGF-iPSC lines displayed a strong activation of Smad 2/3 concomitant with undetectable levels of Smad 1/5/8 active forms (Fig. 5C). qPCR analysis confirmed that specific to FGF-iPSCs, Bmp4 expression was significantly down-regulated together with the up-regulation of Gdf3 and Gremlin-1 (Grem1), two well-known Bmp4 antagonists [13,14,15] (Fig. 5B). Taken together, these findings demonstrate that self-renewing FGF-iPSCs exhibit activation of FGF and TGFbeta/Activin downstream signaling pathways and undetectable BMP4 signalling, in contrast to mESCs, in which the BMP4 signalling pathway is prominently activated and TGFbeta/Activin signalling is low (Fig. 5D).

Next, to definitively exclude the role of feeder cells in promoting FGF-iPS stem cell properties, we serially cultured FGF-iPSCs on fibronectin-coated plates in the absence of fibroblast feeder cells. At passage 6, corresponding to 5 weeks of culture in these conditions, FGF-iPS colonies revealed strong Oct4-GFP and Nanog endogenous expression as well as evident AP activity (Fig. 7A–G). In contrast, FGF-iPSCs did not show inactivation of the X-chromosome as indicated by lack of me3H3K27 staining (Fig. 7H). In line with these findings, FGF-iPSCs expressed Nanog, Rex1 and Stella (Dppa3) at similar levels to those detected when cultured on feeder conditions, and the EpiSC markers Cer1 and FGF5 were not found up-regulated.

Figure 3. The ES-like pluripotent state is dominant in the 129/BL6 genetic background. (A) Comparative gene expression analysis among conventional murine ESCs, LIF-iPSCs, FGF-iPSCs and EpiSCs for candidate genes of pluripotency. Normalized expression intensity values (scaled median ratio) were obtained from Agilent whole-genome microarrays. Two biological replicates were used for all cell types. (B) Unbiased cluster analysis of global gene expression profiles of two independent FGF-derived iPS clones, two independent LIF-derived-iPS clones, two murine ES cell lines and two EpiSC cell lines. (C) qPCR quantification of the pluripotency associated genes Nanog, Sox2, Oct4, Rex1, Fbx15, Eras, Cripto, Cer1, Daz1, Fgf5, Sox17, Dkk1 and Lefty1 in LIF-iSCs compared to FGF-iPSCs.

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0016092.g003
as tested by qPCR (Fig. 7I). Interestingly, expression of the STAT3-induced gene Socs3 was strongly reduced suggesting that this signaling is generally repressed in these culture conditions (Fig. 6I). Thus, FGF-iPSCs conserved those cardinal molecular and epigenetic features closely associated to pluripotency even when deprived of feeder layers for prolonged time.

To test the influence of the growth factor milieu on pluripotency of FGF-iPS cells, we examined the effect of LIF stimulation on
these cells. Upon culture for 10 days in a traditional mouse ESC culture medium (20% Serum, LIF), the vast majority of FGF-iPSCs were rapidly induced to differentiate causing the fragmentation of the colonies into numerous polygonal-shaped GFP-isolated cells (data not shown). However, few cells tightly adherent in small colonies maintained a strong Oct4-GFP expression. Upon trypsinization into single cells and propagation on MEFs, these cells organized into typical mouse ESCs colonies, a morphology maintained even after extensive expansion (P10, 6 weeks in culture) (Figure S4A–D). We termed these cells “LIF stimulated FGF-iPSCs” to indicate their FGF-iPSC origin. The conversion efficiency was approximately 0.01% comparable process to the recently reported conversion of EpiSCs into mESC-like cells [16]. Furthermore, when culture conditions were switched back to the original FGF culture medium, the cells re-acquired all the FGF-iPSC morphological characteristics (Figure S4E, F). These results emphasize once again that FGF-IPS cells do not depend on LIF signals for their continued self-renewal, but instead differentiate when switched to LIF culture conditions. However, similar to the recently reported conversion of EpiSCs into mESC-like cells, a small fraction of FGF-iPSCs can adapt to the LIF culture conditions and convert into a mESC-like state.

Murine FGF-iPSCs generate chimeras with germline transmission

To determine the developmental potential of FGF-iPSCs, we examined their in vitro and in vivo differentiation. We generated aggregates, termed embryoid bodies (EBs), in which pluripotent stem cells differentiate in a manner closely resembling early embryonic development, with the formation of early derivatives of the three embryonic germ layers and downregulation of pluripotency genes. Indeed, we observed rapid loss of Oct4-GFP expression in FGF-iPSC-derived EBs after 4 days of differentiation (Fig. 8A). EBs plated onto matrigel coated dishes in serum-free medium containing bFGF differentiated into Nestin expressing neuronal cells (ectoderm) (Fig. 8B). When these EBs were incubated on gelatin-coated tissue culture plates in DMEM medium supplemented with 10% FBS for 15 to 20 days, they differentiated into a wide range of cell types including Sox17 positive endoderm progenitors and Sma positive smooth-muscle cells (mesoderm) (Fig. 8C, D).

To test pluripotency in vivo, FGF-iPSCs were injected subcutaneously into nude mice. Six weeks after transplantation, teratomas were isolated and histological analysis confirmed the presence of well defined differentiated derivatives of the three embryonic germ
layers, including neural tissue, adipose tissue, epithelial structures and muscle fibers (Fig. 8E–H).

The most important functional difference between mESCs and EpiSCs is the striking inability of EpiSCs to form chimeras upon morula or blastocyst injection [1,2]. We examined the ability of FGF-iPSCs to integrate into preimplantation stage mouse embryos by aggregating mouse embryos at the 8 cells or morula stage with clumps of FGF-iPSC. GFP-positive FGF-iPSCs readily integrated with the developing inner cell mass and chimeric animals were successfully obtained at a frequency of approximately 24% (11 chimeras out of 46 animals) with a coat-color contribution ranging between 5% to 80% (Fig. 7I,L). Furthermore, germline transmission was obtained from two chimeras, derived from two independent FGF-iPSC lines (#5 and #9), as revealed by coat color and confirmed by the presence of the Oct4-GFP transgene in the offspring (Fig. 8M, N). These results demonstrate that the developmental potential of FGF-iPSCs is comparable to that normally exhibited by conventional LIF-dependent ESCs and iPSCs and FGF-iPSCs can functionally contribute to chimera formation.

We did not test the ability of FGF-iPSCs to generate entirely iPSC-derived mice by tetraploid blastocyst complementation, but analysis of the Dlk1-Dio locus revealed that in at least one FGF-iPSC clone the expression of Gtl2 was correct (Figure S5), demonstrating that similar to LIF-dependent iPSCs, the imprint status of this locus is not always preserved, but some clones can be identified that show a correct imprint status.

**Discussion**

Together, our data demonstrate that derivation of stable iPSC cells in the presence of bFGF yields two types of colonies. Colonies with morphological characteristics of EpiSCs, which are unstable and remain dependent on the constitutive expression of ectopic reprogramming factors. These are likely partially reprogrammed colonies, since they fail to reactivate endogenous pluripotency genes. In addition, stable, ectopic factor-independent colonies emerge, which display morphological, molecular, epigenetic and functional properties of murine ES cells. These murine FGF-iPSCs are maintained in an FGF-dependent fashion ([40 passages] with a normal karyotype, and display multilineage differentiation in vitro and broad developmental potential in vivo, including the generation of germline competent chimeras.

Together our results demonstrate that while the growth factor conditions influence the dynamic of the somatic cell reprogramming response, the ES-like pluripotent state is the dominant...
endpoint that is achieved independent of the culture growth factor conditions. Several lines of evidence make it highly unlikely that the ES cell pluripotent state is the result of low-level residual LIF activity emerging from the MEF feeders. First, FGF-iPS cells can be maintained under defined culture conditions in the absence of MEF feeders. Second, the FGF-derived iPSCs are dependent on bFGF signaling for their continued self-renewal, and are not affected by prolonged inhibition of JAK-STAT signaling. Finally, switching the cells to conventional mES culture conditions with addition of LIF results in FGF-iPSC differentiation, indicating that LIF is in fact incapable of maintaining FGF-iPS cells.

FGF-iPSCs and standard ESCs or iPSCs do not represent alternative metastable cell states as described for ESCs and EpiSCs, but cells with similar properties sharing an equivalent pluripotency state. Consistent with this, while EpiSCs require the stable exogenous expression of Klf4 or c-Myc for their conversion into conventional ESCs or, alternatively, the presence of small molecules that can replace these factors during reprogramming [4,17], FGF-iPSCs can be converted to conventional LIF-dependent iPSCs by simply switching growth factor culture conditions. A similar approach was shown to efficiently induce the conversion of epiblast cells from the primitive ectoderm into ES-cell-like cells (rESCs) [16]. Using an ESC-specific Oct4 distal enhancer reporter cell line, Bao and colleagues demonstrated that approx. 22–36% of epiblast cells respond to a switch in growth factors from FGF to LIF by upregulating the ESC-specific GFP reporter [16]. This efficiency in rESC derivation is much higher than the conversion rate we observed between FGF-iPSCs and LIF-dependent ESCs, indicating a relative more robust epigenetic barrier exists between these two cell types. However, when the same switch was applied to established EpiSC, the efficiency for generating rESCs was extremely more reduced and therefore more similar to what described in our experimental conditions.

Inhibition of Erk signalling, either by BMP4-induced upregulation of ID proteins or using small molecule inhibitors, is required in mESCs to maintain the ICM-like pluripotent state [18]. It is striking that FGF-dependent iPSCs maintain a naive pluripotent state in the presence of strong ERK activity. The morphological and epigenetic similarities between murine EpiSCs and human ESCs suggest that human ESCs, despite their blastocyst origin, exist in a primed pluripotent state. Our data now demonstrate that a naive pluripotent state can be achieved in FGF-dependent murine iPSCs. Revealing the molecular mechanisms that install a naive pluripotent state in FGF-iPSCs may provide important cues the identity of human ESCs.

Hanna and colleagues recently demonstrated that in the non-permissive NOD genetic background, the ES-like pluripotent state is metastable, and remains dependent on the ectopic expression of Klf4 or cMyc or the presence of small molecule inhibitors of GSK3β or the MEK-ERK signaling pathway. In this genetic background, the EpiSC pluripotent state appears dominantly stable and is achieved upon withdrawal of ectopic reprogramming factors. Our results demonstrate that the opposite is true for ‘permissive’ mouse strains such as the 129Sv, C57B/L6 and 129/BL6 F1 genetic backgrounds used in this study. The genetic elements that allow the derivation of ES-cell lines in these strains may be the same that dominantly stabilize the ES-like pluripotent state in iPSCs from these strains. The murine ES-like state offers several functional

Figure 7. Feeder-free culture of FGF-iPSCs. The FGF-iPSCs growth in the absence of feeder layer as colonies expressing Oct4-GFP (A–B). (C–D) The colonies are positive for alkaline phophatase. (E–G) FGF-iPSCs maintain the expression of Nanog in a feeder free condition. (H) Staining for H3K27 on FGF-iPS colonies show the absence of X-chromosome inactivation.
doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0016092.g007
advantages over the epiblast-stem cell state, since it allows ready manipulation of the genome combined with the ability to generate chimeras. While gene targeting is commonplace in some mouse strains, other species do not readily allow gene manipulation using similar experimental approaches, since in most species the primed pluripotent state appears to prevail. Primed pluripotent stem cells are refractive to single cell culture, which severely hampers the clonal derivation of mutant cell lines. In addition, the murine ES-state allows the generation of chimeras and may thus facilitate the generation of animal mutants to model human disease in alternative species. Indeed, the recent derivation of rat pluripotent stem cells in a murine ES-like state illustrates this point [9,10].

Materials and Methods

Ethics Statement

Animal care and experimental procedures were performed in accordance with “Decreto Legislativo n. 116 del 27 Gennaio 1992” and with the Institutional Committee for the Good Animal Experimentation of the San Raffaele Scientific Institute (IACUC 423).

This study was performed following ethical approval by the institutional review board of San Raffaele Scientific Institute.

Culture of murine ES cells, EpiSCs and iPSCs

Murine ES (Di Stefano et al., 2009) and LIF-iPS cells (Di Stefano et al., 2009) were cultured on feeder layer in ES medium composed by knock-out DMEM medium (Invitrogen) containing 15% fetal bovine serum (Invitrogen), leukemia inhibitor factor (LIF) (Chemicon), 2-mercaptoethanol, L-glutamine and non-essential amino acids (Invitrogen) as detailed in Di Stefano et al. (2009). FGF-iPS cells were cultivated on mytomicin-inactivated MEF in human ESC medium containing knock-out DMEM medium (Invitrogen) containing 20% knock-out serum replacement (Invitrogen), 4 ng/ml bFGF (Peprotech), 2-mercaptoethanol, L-glutamine and non-essential amino acids (Invitrogen). FGF-iPSCs were normally passaged in small clumps after treatment with collagenase IV (1 mg/ml) every 3 to 5 days in average. LIF-iPS, EpiSC and FGF-iPSC cells were cultured on Matrigel-coated dishes for two passages for depletion of feeder cells.
before DNA and RNA isolation. EpiSC [19] were maintained in the same conditions of FGF-iPSCs.

**Derivation of iPS cells using retroviral vectors**

Oct4-GFP embryonic or post-natal fibroblasts were obtained from the OG2 transgenic mouse line kindly provided to us by Dr. Michele Boiani (Max Planck Institute, Munster, Germany). Briefly, E15.5 transgenic embryos were isolated, washed repetitively in PBS and then the heads and all the visceral tissues dissected out. The remaining carcasses were washed, minced and dissociated after a trypsin treatment of 30' at 37°C. Single cells and small aggregates were cultured and propagated in DMEM medium (Invitrogen) with 10% FBS (Sigma). For post-natal fibroblasts, clipped tails were rinsed in PBS supplemented with antibiotics and careful minced, before digestion into trypsin for 20' at 37°C. Digested tissue was finely disaggregated with Pasteur pipettes and single cell suspension plated and propagated in DMEM medium (Invitrogen) with 10% FBS (Sigma). For induction of FGF-iPS cells, 200.000 MEFs were seeded onto gelatin-coated dishes in DMEM medium with 10% serum and transduced by pLIB-based retroviruses for mouse Oct4, Klf4, Sox2 and c-Myc. Two days after, the cells were harvested and replated on mytomycin-inactivated MEF in 100 mm dish and incubated in human ESC medium. After 15–17 days (for O-S-K-M transduced cells) or 21–25 days (for O-S-K/O-S-M), the FGF-iPS colonies were picked for expansion on MEF feeder cells in human ESC medium. A schematic diagram of the reprogramming protocol used is shown in Figure 1A. Retroviral production was performed as described before [6]. Briefly, Murine cDNAs for Oct4, Klf4, Sox2 and c-Myc were amplified by PCR from ES cells cDNA and cloned into Moloney-based retroviral vector pLIB (kindly donated by Dr. Marius Wernig, Stanford University, CA). Plat-E cells were plated at 106 cells per 100 mm dish and incubated overnight. Cells were transduced with 10 µg of vector, according to a conventional CaCl2 transfection protocol. After 30 h, medium was collected, filtered through 0.44 µm cellulose acetate filters and supplemented with 4 µg/ml Polybrene (Sigma). MEFs were then exposed to viral-polybrene containing supernatants.

**Derivation of iPS cells using STEMCCA vectors**

Fibroblasts were harvested from tails of Oct4-GFP/R26-M2rtTA transgenic newborn mice and maintained in DMEM with 10% FBS, 2 mM L-glutamine and Pen/Strep (all Invitrogen). To produce infectious viral particles, 293 T cells cultured on 10 cm dishes were transfected with the STEMCCA vectors together with the packaging plasmids VSV-G and Δ9.9 using Lipofectamine2000 (Invitrogen). The fibroblasts were transduced at ~4000 cells/cm² on 10 cm TC dishes with concentrated virus. The transgene was induced the following day by adding 2 µg/ml Doxycycline (Sigma) to the media. The cells were then incubated in blocking buffer containing 5% goat serum (Sigma) and 0.1% Triton X-100 for 30 minutes at RT. The cells were then incubated with primary antibodies diluted in the blocking buffer overnight at 4°C. On the next day, after 3 washes in PBS, the cells were exposed to secondary antibodies at RT for one hour. Primary antibodies included SSEA1 (1:100, Chemicon), Desmin (1:200, kindly donated by G. Cosso), SMA (1:200, kindly donated by L. Naldini), Nanog (1:100, Abcam), Oct4 (1:100, Abcam), Sox2 (1:100, Abcam), mH3K27 (1:100, kindly donated by G. Testa). Secondary antibodies were used donkey anti-mouse and anti-rabbit IgG and IgM antibodies conjugated with Alexa 488, Alexa 594 (1:500, Molecular Probes). Nuclear staining was performed with Hoechst 33342 (Invitrogen). Pictures were taken using a Nikon Eclipse 3000 fluorescence microscope.

For RNA FISH the Xist probe was used a 19 kb genomic fragment derived from a lambda clone which covers most of Xist gene. Probes were labeled by nick translation with Spectrum Green-dUTP and hybridized (0.1 ug of probe DNA with 10 ug of salmon sperm DNA per coverslip) in 50% formamide, 2 x SSC, 20% dextran sulfate, 1 mg/ml BSA (Biolabs), and 200 mM VRC, overnight at 37°C. After three washes in 50% formamide, 2 x SSC and three washes in 2 x SSC at 42°C, DNA was counterstained for 3 min in 0.2 mg/ml DAPI, followed by a final wash in 2 x SSC. Samples were mounted in 90% glycerol, 0.1x PBS, 0.1% p- phenylenediamine.

**Feeder-free culture of FGF-iPSCs**

FGF-iPS cells were cultivated on fibronectin (Sigma) coated dishes (5 µg/ml) in a knock-out DMEM medium (Invitrogen) containing N2 and B27 and supplemented with 100 ng/ml bFGF (Invitrogen), 50 ng/ml ActivinA (Peprotech), 2-β-mercaptoethanol, L-glutamine and non-essential amino acids (Invitrogen).

**RT-PCR analysis**

The RNeasy mini-kit (Qiagen) was used for total RNA isolation and Superscript reverse transcriptase II (Invitrogen) for cDNA synthesis starting with 2 µg of total RNA. Amplification of specific genes was carried out using primers shown in Table S1. PCR conditions were as follows: 95°C for 10 minutes; denaturation at 95°C for 30 sec, annealing for 30 sec at a temperature specific for each primer set, and extension at 72°C for 30 sec for 33 cycles and then 72°C for 10 minutes.

**Luciferase reporter assay**

Plasmids for the Oct4 enhancer assay were cloned as described [2]. 12 well plates with mES, EpiSCs and FGF-iPS cells were transfected with the 1 µg of the respective Oct4 enhancer plasmid and 0.1 µg of a renilla control plasmid using Lipofectamine2000 (Invitrogen). Luciferase activity was measured using the Dual Luciferase Reporter Assay System (Promega) following the manufacturer’s protocol. All experiments were carried out in triplicates and normalized to renilla activity to account for differences in transfection efficiencies.

**Agilent chip hybridization**

For genome-wide expression analysis, total RNA was extracted using Trizol reagent (Invitrogen) and labeled and hybridized to Agilent Whole Mouse Genome Oligo 4X4K Microarrays (one-color platform) according to the manufacturer’s protocols. The gene expression results were analyzed using GeneSifter microarray analysis software.

**Illumina bead chip hybridization**

Biotin-labelled cRNA was produced using a linear amplification kit (Ambion, Austin, TX, United States). Total RNA was
quality-checked by NanoDrop analysis (NanoDrop Technologies, Wilmington, DE, USA) and a quantity of 400 ng was used as input. Chip hybridization, washing, Cy3-streptavidin staining and scanning were performed on the Illumina BeadStation 500 platform (Illumina, San Diego, CA, United States), according to manufacturer’s instruction. cRNA samples were hybridized onto Illumina mouse-8 BeadChips. We hybridized the following samples as biological replicates: ESCs, LIF-iPSCs and FGF-iPSCs. All basic expression data analysis was carried out using the BeadStudio software 3.0. Raw data were background-subtracted and normalized using the “rank invariant” algorithm and then filtered for significant expression on the basis of negative control beads. Pathway analysis was determined according to Gene Ontology terms or mapped to Kegg pathways using DAVID 2006 (http://david.abcc.ncifcrf.gov/) by using GenBank accession numbers represented by the corresponding chip oligonucleotides as input. Analysis of the transcriptional regulatory circuit was filtered for significant expression on the basis of negative control beads.

Real-time polymerase chain reaction (qPCR)

Real-Time PCR was performed in 384 Well Optical Reaction Plates (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, United States). The PCR mix in each well included 5 μl of SYBR® Green PCR Master Mix (Applied Biosystems), 1.5 μl each of the forward and reverse primers (5 ng/μl) and 1 μl of single strand cDNA (50 ng/μl) in a final reaction volume of 10 μl. qPCR reactions were carried out on the ABI PRISM 7900HT Sequence Detection System (Applied Biosystems) using the following program: 50°C for 2 min, 95°C for 10 min, 95°C for 15 s and 60°C for 1 min, 95°C for 15 s, 60°C for 15 s and 95°C for 15 s for a total of 40 cycles. Triplicate amplifications were carried out for each target gene with three wells serving as negative controls. The output data generated by the Sequence Detection System software were transferred to Microsoft Excel for analysis. Quantification was performed through a standard curve-based method and normalized to the expression of the housekeeping gene beta-actin. Primer sequences are provided in Table S1. Primer sequences are provided in Table S1. The first round of PCR was done as follows: 94°C for 4 minutes; five cycles of 94°C for 30 seconds, 56°C for 1 minute (–1°C per cycle), 72°C for 1 minute; and 30 cycles of 94°C for 30 seconds, 51°C for 45 seconds, and 72°C for 1 minute, 20 seconds. The second round of PCR was 94°C for 4 minutes; 30 cycles of 94°C for 30 seconds, 55°C for 1 minute, and 72°C for 1 minute 20 seconds. The resulting ampLiFied products were gel-purified (Promega), subcloned into the TA vector (Invitrogen), and sequenced using the T7 and SP6 primers.

Small-molecule compounds

The following inhibitors were used at the indicated final concentrations: ALK inhibitor (A8301, Tocris Bioscience; 0.5 μM) and JAK inhibitor I (Calbiochem 420099; 0.6 μM), SU5402 (Calbiochem 572630, 10 μM). Anti-mouse LIF antibody was purchased by R&D system.

Western blotting

Protein extracts were isolated from ESCs, LIF-iPSCs and FGF-iPSCs using a modified RIPA buffer lysis buffer (150 mM NaCl, 10 mM Tris-HCl, 1 mM EDTA, 1% Triton-X100; pH 7.8) supplemented with complete protease inhibitor cocktail (Sigma) added just before use. Protein concentration was determined according to the Bradford method. Equal quantities of proteins were separated by electrophoresis in a 10% SDS-polyacrylamide gel (BioRad, Hercules, CA). Primary antibodies, purchased from Cell Signalling Technology, against SMAD 2/3, Phospho-SMAD 2/3, SMAD 1/5/8, Phospho-SMAD 1/5/8, ERK ½, phospho-Erk ½, Stat3 and phospho-Stat3 were used with the suitable HRP-conjugated secondary antibodies. Bound antibodies on nitrocellulose membrane (Amersham Biosciences) were then detected using the chemiluminescent substrate ECL (Amersham Biosciences).

Methylation analysis

Methylation analysis was performed as previously described by Belloch et al. (2006). Genomic DNA extraction was performed using the Blood & Cell Culture DNA Mini Kit (Qagen). Bisulfite treatment of DNA was achieved using the CpGenome DNA Modification Kit (Chemicon) according to the manufacturer’s instructions. The resulting modified DNA was ampliLiFied by nested polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using two forward (Met-Oct4 F1 and Met-Oct4 F2) primers and one reverse (Met-Oct4 R) primer listed in Table S1. The first round of PCR was done as follows: 94°C for 4 minutes; five cycles of 94°C for 30 seconds, 56°C for 1 minute (–1°C per cycle), 72°C for 1 minute; and 30 cycles of 94°C for 30 seconds, 51°C for 45 seconds, and 72°C for 1 minute, 20 seconds. The second round of PCR was 94°C for 4 minutes; 30 cycles of 94°C for 30 seconds, 55°C for 1 minute, and 72°C for 1 minute 20 seconds. The resulting ampLiFied products were gel-purified (Promega), subcloned into the TA vector (Invitrogen), and sequenced using the T7 and SP6 primers.

Supporting Information

Figure S1 Epigenetic, transgene silencing and chromo-some stability of FGF-iPSCs. (A) Scheme representing the methylation pattern of the Oct4 promoter in FGF-iPSCs (line 5C) and MEFs. Open circles indicate unmethylated, while filled circles depict methylated CpG dinucleotides. All the CpG dinucleotides tested were unmethylated in FGF-iPSCs. (B) Silencing of retroviral expressed transgenes was assessed by qPCR analysis. (C) A chromosome spread of FGF-iPSC cells is presented with a normal
number of chromosomes (2n = 40). (D) Luciferase reporter assay of Oct4 enhancer usage in murine ES cells, EpiSCs, LIF-derived iPS cells and FGF-derived iPS cells as indicated.

Figure S2 Reprogramming by lentiviral inducible transduction. (A) Schematic representation of the strategy used for the reprogramming of murine fibroblasts into iPS cells in the presence of LIF or bFGF. (B) Image of an EpiSC-like iPS cell colony derived in bFGF.

Figure S3 Effect of FGF withdrawal on FGF-iPSCs. In the absence of bFGF (B) or in the presence of a specific FGFR inhibitor (SU5402) (C), FGF-iPSCs differentiate extensively.

Figure S4 Facile conversion of FGF-iPSCs to LIF supplemented culture conditions. (A–D) After stimulation in a medium containing LIF, FGF-iPSCs assume a close ES-like morphology and adapt to these new conditions growing as homogeneous colonies over time (10 passages, for 3 months in culture). We termed these cells as LIF-stimulated FGF-iPSCs. When these cells were returned back to the original FGF medium and cultured for another week, they acquired the original morphological characteristic (reverted FGF-iPSCs) (E, F). A, C, E, Cell colonies in bright-field. B, D, F, GFP expression controlled by the Oct4 promoter (OG2 transgenic cells).

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