Cortactin Is a Functional Target of E-cadherin-activated Src Family Kinases in MCF7 Epithelial Monolayers*

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Gang Ren†1, Falak M. Helwani‡1,2, Suzie Verma†1, Robert W. McLachlan‡, Scott A. Weed§3, and Alpha S. Yap‡4

From the †Division of Molecular Cell Biology, Institute for Molecular Bioscience, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Brisbane 4072, Australia and the ‡Department of Neuroscience and Anatomy, Program in Cancer Cell Biology, Mary Babb Randolph Cancer Center, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia 26506-9300

Src family kinases (SFKs) signal in response to E-cadherin to support cadherin adhesion and the integrity of cell-cell contacts (McLachlan, R. W., Kraemer, A., Helwani, F. M., Kovacs, E. M., and Yap, A. S. (2007) Mol. Biol. Cell 18, 3214–3223). We now identify the actin-regulatory protein, cortactin, as a target of E-cadherin-activated SFK signaling. Tyr-phosphorylated cortactin was found at cell-cell contacts in established epithelial monolayers, and cortactin became acutely tyrosine-phosphorylated when E-cadherin adhesion was engaged. In all circumstances, cortactin tyrosine phosphorylation was blocked by inhibiting SFK signaling. Importantly, Tyr-phosphorylated cortactin was necessary to preserve the integrity of cadherin contacts and the perijunctional actin cytoskeleton. Moreover, expression of a phosphomimetic cortactin mutant could prevent SFK blockade from disrupting cadherin organization, thereby placing cortactin functionally downstream of SFK signaling at cadherin adhesions. We conclude that SFK and cortactin constitute an important signaling pathway that functionally links E-cadherin adhesion and the actin cytoskeleton.

Functional cooperation between cadherin adhesion receptors and the actin cytoskeleton is commonly believed to play a key role in the morphogenesis of cell-cell interactions (1, 2). This functional interplay, and the biochemical mechanisms that underpin it, are much more complex than previously realized. Increasingly it is apparent that a range of distinct actin regulators can be recruited to cadherin adhesions depending on the biological context of cell-cell interactions (2). It is likely that the choice of actin regulator(s) recruited determines the dynamics and organization of the actin cytoskeleton at those contacts, with morphogenetic implications for the formation, modeling, and turnover of cell-cell interactions. Identifying the actin regulators that influence cell-cell interactions and how they cooperate with adhesion receptors are important open issues.

Adhesion-activated cell signaling provides a useful paradigm to analyze how classical cadherins regulate the actin cytoskeleton (2, 3). Over the past several years, a range of signal transduction pathways have been identified that are stimulated upon productive engagement of cadherins, such as E-, C-, and N-cadherin (reviewed in Ref. 3). Among these signals are Rho family GTPases, lipid kinases, and protein-tyrosine kinases. Of the latter, we recently identified Src family kinase (SFK) activity as a component of E-cadherin signaling (4). SFK was stimulated in an E-cadherin-dependent fashion when cells assembled contacts with one another. Indeed, binding to recombiant cadherin ligands was sufficient to activate SFK, implying that the cadherin itself can serve as a receptor to transduce an adhesive signal to SFK. Furthermore, inhibiting SFK signaling perturbed cadherin adhesion and the integrity of cell-cell contacts. This suggested a model where adhesive ligation of E-cadherin stimulated an SFK signaling cascade to ultimately support cell-cell interactions. An important challenge now is to identify targets of cadherin-activated SFK signaling that contribute to cadherin biology.

In this work, we tested whether the actin-binding protein, cortactin, might be just such a target. A multidomain scaffolding protein, cortactin regulates the actin cytoskeleton by interacting with a range of other actin-regulatory proteins (5, 6). It is best understood to participate in actin filament assembly (6) by promoting Arp2/3-mediated actin nucleation and also by stabilizing nascent Arp2/3-generated actin filament branches (7). Cortactin exerts many of these effects through direct interactions with actin filaments and Arp2/3 (8) as well as indirectly by associating with proteins such as N-WASP and WIP, which can themselves activate Arp2/3. Consistent with this, cortactin is often found at sites in the cortex where Arp2/3 drives membrane protrusion, such as lamellipodia and invadopodia (9).

Cortactin is also found at cadherin-based cell-cell contacts where a biochemical complex with E-cadherin or N-cadherin has been detected by co-immunoprecipitation analysis (10–12). Moreover, ligation of the cadherin with recombiant ligands could induce formation of a complex with cortactin and also recruited cortactin to the cortex at the sites of adhesion (10, 12). Cortactin is found with Arp2/3 at newly forming E-cadherin adhesive contacts, and disruption of cortactin by RNAi or dominant-negative mutants perturbs efficient assembly of cadherin complexes.

5 The abbreviations used are: SFK, Src family kinase; RNAi, RNA interference; DMSO, dimethyl sulfoxide; siRNA, small interfering RNA; GFP, green fluorescent protein; KD, knockdown.

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‡ These authors contributed equally to this work.

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‡4 Senior Research Fellow of the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia. To whom correspondence should be addressed: Institute for Molecular Bioscience, Bldg. 80, Services Rd., University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Brisbane Q4072, Australia. Tel.: 61-7-3346-2013; Fax: 61-7-3346-2101; E-mail: a.yap@uq.edu.au.
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herin-based contacts (10). At N-cadherin adhesions, cortactin promotes adhesive strengthening and its surface expression (12). Overall, these reports identified a role for cortactin in modulating cadherin biology, likely through regulation of the cadherin-based actin cytoskeleton.

Of note, cortactin was first identified as a substrate for v-Src (13) and as a target of fibroblast growth factor-stimulated SFK signaling (14). Tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin is implicated in cellular events that are accompanied by extensive remodeling of the actin cytoskeleton, such as cell migration and invasion (6, 15, 16). Building on our earlier experience in epithelial cells (4, 10), we now report that E-cadherin ligation induces the tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin through an SFK-dependent signaling pathway. Furthermore, we demonstrate that phosphorylation at the key Tyr-421, Tyr-466, and Tyr-482 residues is necessary to maintain the integrity of established cell-cell contacts and their perijunctional actin cytoskeleton.

**EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES**

*Plasmids and siRNA—Plasmids for FLAG-tagged wild-type mouse cortactin and the Y421F/Y466F/Y482F (3YF) cortactin mutant have been described (8, 10, 17). Mutations of Y421D, Y466D, and Y482D were introduced using a two-step PCR-based mutagenesis method adopted from Ref. 18. In brief, the first PCR round amplified two DNA fragments with overlapping sequences that incorporated mutations. The second PCR round used these two fragments as template to generate a full-length mutagenized DNA fragment. A dominant-negative Src construct (K295M, Y527F) tagged with enhanced GFP was a kind gift of Dr. Margaret Frame (Beatson Institute, Glasgow) (4). Cortactin RNai oligonucleotide duplexes (CTTN-HSS103233) and scrambled control RNA (106203312) were from Invitrogen. E-cadherin siRNA is as follows: sense strand, 5’-GCAUGAGUCAGAAGACAGtt-3’; and antisense strand, 5’-CUGUCUUCUGAGUCCAUGCtg-3’. SMARTpool siRNA directed against human E-cadherin were purchased from Dharmacon and used following the manufacturer’s instructions.

*Cell Culture, Transfections, and hE/Fc—MCF7 cells were cultured in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle’s medium with 10% fetal bovine serum, non-essential amino acids, 2 mM L-glutamine, 100 mg/ml streptomycin, and 100 units/ml penicillin. hE/Fc cell culture, purification, and preparation of hE/Fc-coated substrata were as described previously (19, 20). Transient transfections were performed with Lipofectamine (Invitrogen) according to the manufacturer’s instructions. To achieve effective knockdown of E-cadherin or cortactin, cells were retransfected with siRNA 48 h after the initial transfections. Clones were screened for expression by immunofluorescence and Western analysis.

*Antibodies and Fluorescent Stains—The following primary antibodies were used in this study: mouse monoclonal HEC1D against human E-cadherin (a kind gift from Dr. M. Wheelock, University of Nebraska, with the permission of Dr. M. Takeichi, RIKEN Center for Developmental Biology), rabbit polyclonal E-cadherin antibody (10), mouse monoclonal 4F11 against human cortactin (8), rabbit polyclonal against Tyr(P)-421-cortactin (Invitrogen), rabbit polyclonal against Tyr(P)-466-cortactin (17), mouse monoclonal against β-tubulin (Sigma), mouse monoclonal against the FLAG epitope (Sigma), mouse monoclonal against GFP (Invitrogen), Alexa Fluor 594-phalloidin (Invitrogen), and species-specific secondary antibodies conjugated with Alexa Fluor 488, Alexa Fluor 594, and horse-radish peroxidase (Invitrogen). Alexa Fluor 488- and 594-conjugated phalloidin (Invitrogen) was used to stain F-actin.

**Immunofluorescence Microscopy and Analysis—**Samples were prepared for immunofluorescence analysis as described previously (20). Fixed material was mounted in 1% N-propyl gallate in 50% glycerolphosphate-buffered saline for epi-illumination and spinning disc confocal microscopy; fixed material was examined either by epi-illumination using Olympus AX70 or IX81 microscopes or with a PerkinElmer spinning disc confocal microscope, and images were captured using Hamamatsu Orca 1 ER cameras driven by Metamorph software. All images were acquired within the linear range of the cameras. Figures were arranged for presentation in Adobe Photoshop CS2.

ImageJ was used to measure the average E-cadherin contact width and intensity using a “line-scanning method.” In brief, a fixed length line (65 pixels) was placed orthogonal to individual E-cadherin contacts. The ImageJ “Plot Profile” function was applied and plots of intensity (0–255) along the line distance (0–65) were obtained. Contact width was estimated by calculating +2 S.D. that covers 95% of contact pixel intensity.

ImageJ was also used to quantify the ratio of the intensity of phosphocortactin to the intensity of E-cadherin at each pixel along a defined contact. All images for a single antibody were taken at the same exposure and an identical spinning disc microscope setting. To decrease nonspecific staining, the average background fluorescence for the image was determined and subtracted from intensities for all pixels. An ImageJ built-in calculator was then used to calculate the ratio of phosphocortactin to the intensity of E-cadherin.

**Immunoprecipitations—**Cells were lysed in 1 ml of lysis buffer (1% Nonidet P-40, 150 mM NaCl, 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.4, 1 mM EDTA, 50 mM sodium fluoride, 2 mM sodium vanadate, 0.1% bovine serum albumin, and Complete protease inhibitors (Roche Applied Science)). Protein complexes were immunoprecipitated with either HEC1D E-cadherin monoclonal antibody or an antibody against the FLAG epitope bound to protein A-agarose beads. Twenty percent of each immunoprecipitation reaction was then separated by SDS-PAGE. Immune complexes were blotted for E-cadherin, cortactin, and phosphocortactin.

**Calcium Chloride Assay—**Cells were grown to 100% confluence and then incubated in 2 mM EGTA solution for 15–30 min or until cell-cell contacts were disrupted. Following washing, cells were incubated with unsupplemented culture medium containing 2 mM CaCl2 for a time course from 0 to 90 min before paraformaldehyde fixation or lysis in Laemmli sample buffer.

**Drug Inhibition of Src Family Kinase Activity—**To inhibit Src family kinase activities, 10 μM PP2 (Merck) or SU6656 (Merck) was added to MCF7 cell monolayers. The nonfunctional PP2 analog PP3 and solvent DMSO were also introduced as controls.
RESULTS

**Junctional Tyrosine-phosphorylated Cortactin in Established Epithelial Monolayers**—Cortactin is phosphorylated by SFK at Tyr-421, Tyr-466, and Tyr-482 (21, 22). Accordingly, we first used antibodies specific for either the phosphorylated Tyr-421 (Tyr(P)-421) or phosphorylated Tyr-466 (Tyr(P)-466) residue to characterize the subcellular localization of Tyr(P)-cortactin in MCF7 epithelial monolayers (Fig. 1). Confluent MCF7 monolayers formed cohesive, linear cell-cell contacts enriched in E-cadherin that co-stained for cortactin (Fig. 1A) (10). Both Tyr(P)-421- and Tyr(P)-466-cortactin clearly co-accumulated with E-cadherin, indicating that these established cadherin-based contacts were enriched in Tyr(P)-cortactin (Fig. 1A). Punctate Tyr(P)-cortactin staining was also identified in the cytoplasm, possibly decorating vesicles. Similar junctional staining for cortactin and Tyr(P)-421- and Tyr(P)-466-cortactin was also detected in confluent Madin-Darby canine kidney cells (data not shown). We found that probing for Tyr(P)-421- and Tyr(P)-466-cortactin yielded similar results throughout this study.

E-cadherin ligation activates a number of intracellular signaling pathways, including Src family tyrosine kinases (4). As a first test of whether E-cadherin might be necessary for junctional Tyr(P)-cortactin, we depleted E-cadherin in MCF7 cells using either single siRNA duplexes (Fig. 1B) or an siRNA SMART-pool (data not shown). Although E-cadherin depletion was moderate, junctional staining for Tyr(P)-421- and Tyr(P)-466-cortactin was substantially reduced (Fig. 1C). This suggested that E-cadherin might be necessary for tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin at cell-cell contacts. Junctional cortactin staining was also decreased (Fig. 1C), however, making it difficult to determine whether cadherin adhesion triggered a pathway leading to tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin or simply served to localize cortactin itself at cell-cell contacts.

**E-cadherin Adhesion Induces Tyrosine Phosphorylation of Cortactin**—To pursue this issue, we then asked whether the assembly of cell-cell contacts affects the tyrosine phosphorylation status of cortactin. We acutely disrupted MCF7 interactions by chelating extracellular calcium and then monitored contacts as they reassembled after restoration of calcium (Fig. 2A). Cells began to re-establish E-cadherin-based contacts within 15 min of adding Ca$^{2+}$. Tyr(P)-cortactin was not detectable in very early contacts, but began to accumulate with E-cadherin at ~30 min and persisted as contacts became more extensive and linear (Fig. 2A). In Western blot analysis of total cell lysates (Fig. 2B), we found that Tyr(P)-cortactin levels were relatively low after chelation of extracellular calcium and then began to rise significantly ~30 min after replenishment of Ca$^{2+}$, consistent with the appearance of junctional Tyr(P)-cortactin detected by immunofluorescence. Characteristically, the rise in total Tyr(P)-cortactin levels appeared biphasic, with an initial rise at ~30 min, followed by a second peak at ~90 min, although the precise timing of these peaks showed some inter-experiment variation, perhaps due to variations in culture density.

We then used co-immunoprecipitation analysis to test whether tyrosine phosphorylation of the cadherin-associated cortactin pool changed as cells assembled contacts with one another. As shown in Fig. 2C, a low level of Tyr(P)-cortactin was detectable in E-cadherin immune complexes after chelation of
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**Figure 2.** E-cadherin ligation induces tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin. A–C, tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin during assembly of cell-cell contacts. MCF7 cell monolayers were incubated with 2 mM EGTA until their cell-cell contacts were disrupted. EGTA was then replaced with fresh medium containing 2 mM calcium, but this rose significantly ~45 min after restoration of extracellular Ca\(^{2+}\). Interestingly, total levels of cortactin protein in the immune complexes did not change greatly during the course of these experiments. Overall, these findings implied that the assembly of cell-cell contacts triggered a signaling pathway leading to tyrosine phosphorylation of E-cadherin-associated cortactin.

Cell-cell contact can induce signaling through cadherin receptors themselves, but also by other juxtacrine signaling pathways (3). To test directly whether ligation of E-cadherin was able to induce the tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin, we allowed MCF7 cells to adhere to substrata coated with the recombinant ligand hE/Fc, which consists of the complete ectodomain of human E-cadherin expressed as an Fc fusion protein. In previous studies, we have shown that adhesion to hE/Fc stimulates cell signaling through Rac (19), Cdc42 staining seen in controls, cortactin-depleted cells showed broadened zones, where junctional E-cadherin staining was replaced by fragmented streaks and loose networks distributed extensively throughout the lateral cell-cell interfaces (Fig. 3A). To quantify the alterations in cadherin staining at contacts, we measured the width and the average pixel intensity of E-cadherin staining at cell-cell contacts. As shown in Fig. 3B, cortactin KD cells showed consistently broader cadherin staining at cell-cell contacts associated with a reduction in average pixel intensity. The perijunctional actin cytoskeleton was also greatly perturbed by cortactin KD (Fig. 3A). Whereas control cells showed an intense band of F-actin staining at the apical interface between cells, cortactin KD cells showed intermittent peri...

6 F. Helwani, unpublished data.
junctional staining, often with extensive discontinuities at the contacts.

Exogenous expression of mouse cortactin, which was resistant to the human-specific siRNA (Fig. 4A), restored both linear E-cadherin staining and the integrity of the perijunctional actin cytoskeleton (Fig. 4A), confirming that these alterations were due to cortactin depletion. Quantitation demonstrated that exogenous mouse cortactin restored both the width of cadherin staining and the fluorescence intensity (Fig. 4B).

To test the significance of tyrosine-phosphorylated cortactin, we reconstituted cortactin expression in cortactin KD cells either with a phosphorylation-incompetent cortactin mutant (3YF) in which Tyr-421, Tyr-466, and Tyr-482 were mutated to phenylalanines or with a phosphomimetic mutant (3YD) in which these tyrosine residues were replaced by aspartic acid (Fig. 4). All transgenes expressed polypeptides of the expected molecular mass (data not shown). In contrast to wild-type cortactin, reconstitution with cortactin 3YF did not restore the cortactin KD phenotype. E-cadherin staining at contacts remained dispersed (Fig. 4A) and was quantitatively indistinguishable from KD cells (Fig. 4B). Similarly, perijunctional F-actin staining remained fragmented and discontinuous (Fig. 4A). The linear integrity of both E-cadherin and perijunctional F-actin staining was restored by the 3YD mutant (Fig. 4, A and B). Overall, these findings suggest strongly that cortactin is necessary for the integrity of E-cadherin and actin cytoskeletal organization at cell-cell contacts in established epithelial monolayers. They indicate further that tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin was necessary for these effects to occur.

Interestingly, immunofluorescence staining for the tight junction marker ZO-1 was much less disrupted by cortactin depletion than that for E-cadherin. Subtle irregularity in ZO-1 staining was evident in both cortactin KD cells (Figs. 3A and 4A) and KD cells reconstituted with the 3YF mutant (Fig. 4A) compared with the more linear staining seen in control cells (Fig. 3A) and in KD cells expressing the 3YD mutant (Fig. 4A). However, the overall integrity of ZO-1 staining was not compromised, in contrast to the dramatic changes seen in E-cadherin organization. This suggested that cortactin has a greater impact on E-cadherin adhesions than on tight junctions.

Cortactin Is an Effector of E-cadherin-activated Src Signaling—Together, these observations suggested that tyrosine-phosphorylated cortactin was a functionally important downstream effector of cadherin signaling. To further characterize the relevant signaling pathways, we sought to identify protein-tyrosine
kinases critical for E-cadherin to signal to cortactin. We
focused on SFK activity, given its roles in both E-cadherin sig-
naling (4) and cortactin regulation (24, 25).

First we tested whether SFK activity was required for
homophilic cadherin ligation to increase tyrosine-phospho-
rylated cortactin (Fig. 5A). Freshly isolated MCF7 cells were
allowed to adhere to hE/Fc-coated substrata for 30 or 90 min, when
cadherin-induced cortactin tyro-
sine phosphorylation was clearly
detectable (Fig. 2A); Western blots
of cell lysates were then probed for
Tyr(P)-cortactin. Tyrosine phos-
phorylation of cortactin at both
time points was significantly
reduced when adhesion assays
were performed in the presence of
SFK inhibitors PP2 (Fig. 5A) and
SU6656 (data not shown). In con-
trast, PP3 did not affect the tyro-
sine phosphorylation of cortactin
when cells adhered to hE/Fc (Fig.
5A). These findings strongly sug-
gest that SFK activity is, directly or
indirectly, necessary for E-cad-
herin homophilic ligation to tyro-
sine phosphorylate cortactin.

We then examined whether
inhibiting SFK signaling affected
Tyr(P)-cortactin at cell-cell con-
tacts in confluent MCF7 monolay-
ers. Western analysis of cell extracts
showed that Tyr(P)-421- and
Tyr(P)-466-cortactin levels were
substantially reduced in monolayers
treated with either PP2 or SU6656
(Fig. 5B). Furthermore, the promi-
nent junctional staining of Tyr(P)-
421-cortactin and Tyr(P)-466-cor-
tactin was greatly decreased in cells
treated with either drug (Fig. 5B).
Tyr(P)-cortactin staining was lost
before E-cadherin integrity was
disrupted in these acutely treated
cultures; E-cadherin staining was
perturbed with more prolonged
treatment (data not shown) as
reported previously (4).

To confirm a role for Src signal-
ing, we transiently transfected
MCF7 cells with a dominant-nega-
tive c-Src mutant (c-Src-mf, bearing
point mutations K295M and Y527F,
which open up the Src structure but
ablate kinase activity (26)), which
we recently showed perturbs E-cad-
herin junctions (4). E-cadherin con-
tacts appeared fragmented in cells
expressing this c-Src mutant compared with controls stably
expressing GFP alone (data not shown), and Tyr(P)-cortactin
staining at the cell-cell contacts was significantly reduced (Fig.
5C). Overall, these results identify a necessary role for SFK
activity in mediating tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin by
E-cadherin adhesion.

FIGURE 4. Tyrosine-phosphorylated cortactin is necessary for integrity of E-cadherin-based cell-cell con-
tacts. A, MCF7 cell monolayers were transfected with siRNA against cortactin (cortactin KD). After 72 h, cells
were then transfected with plasmids expressing FLAG epitope-tagged wild-type mouse cortactin (mCort) and
mouse cortactin with tyrosines 421, 466, and 482 mutated to either phenylalanine (mCort 3YF) or aspartic acid
(mCort 3YD). Cells were then fixed and immunostained for cortactin, E-cadherin, F-actin (phalloidin), or ZO-1.
Reconstitution with wild-type mouse cortactin restored linear E-cadherin contact integrity as well as perjunc-
tional F-actin staining. Expression of the mouse cortactin 3YF mutant failed to rescue defects in cortactin KD
cells, although it remained localized at the cell-cell contacts. Expressing mouse cortactin bearing phosphomi-
etic mutations (mCort 3YD) restored both E-cadherin integrity and linear junctional F-actin staining. B, E-cad-
herin-based cell-cell contacts were quantitatively analyzed by measuring E-cadherin contact pixel intensity
and contact width as described under “Experimental Procedures.” The intensity and width of E-cadherin stain-
ing were restored by reconstitution with wild-type mouse cortactin and cortactin 3YD but not by mouse
cortactin 3YF. Data are mean ± S.E. (n = 30).
FIGURE 5. Src kinase signaling is required for E-cadherin to induce tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin. A, MCF7 cells were allowed to adhere to hE/Fc-coated substrata for 30 or 90 min in the presence of the Src inhibitor PP2, the non-inhibitory analog PP3, or DMSO. Cells were then lysed and immuno-blotted for phosphorylated cortactin (pY466) and cortactin. Representative immunoblots for Tyr(P)-cortactin and total cortactin are shown. The Tyr(P)-cortactin response was quantitated by measuring band intensities that were then normalized by expression as a percentage of the average band intensity in DMSO controls at 30 min. Data are mean ± S.E. (n = 3).

B, confluent MCF7 cells were treated with Src kinase inhibitors PP2 and SU6656 or controls (PP3, DMSO). Cells were then fixed and immunostained for E-cadherin and phosphorylated cortactin (pY421 and pY466). In contrast to cells treated with DMSO or PP3, PP2 and SU6656 substantially reduced Tyr(P)-421 and Tyr(P)-466 staining at E-cadherin contacts. Loss of junctional Tyr(P)-466 staining was further quantitatively analyzed as described under “Experimental Procedures.” Data are mean ± S.E. (n = 20). Cells were also lysed and immunoblotted with Tyr(P)-421, Tyr(P)-466, and cortactin to further confirm the inhibition of cortactin phosphorylation by PP2 and SU6656. C, MCF7 cells were transfected with plasmids expressing GFP or GFP-tagged dominant-negative c-Src (DN Src). Cells were fixed at confluence and immunoblotted for Tyr(P)-421. Asterisks mark transfected cells. Compared with the GFP controls, Tyr(P)-421 staining at junctional contacts was largely undetectable in cells expressing dominant-negative c-Src. Tyr(P)-421-cortactin staining in cell-cell contacts was also quantitated by counting the percentage of contacts that stained for Tyr(P)-421-cortactin. Data are mean ± S.E. (n = 20).
We then used the cortactin 3YD mutant to test whether cortactin was a functionally important effector of E-cadherin-activated SFK signaling (Fig. 6). We reasoned that if this were the case, then expression of a phosphomimetic cortactin transgene should rescue the effects of blocking SFK signaling. As previously observed (4), treatment of cells with either PP2 or SU6656 (data not shown) perturbed junctional integrity (Fig. 6A), causing E-cadherin staining at contacts to become fragmented and discontinuous compared with the linear staining seen in controls. In contrast, expression of cortactin 3YD restored the linear integrity of contacts (Fig. 6A). Quantitation revealed that 3YD reduced the number of PP2-treated cells with discontinuous contacts to levels comparable with control cells not treated with PP2 (Fig. 6B).

Tyrosine Phosphorylation and Cortactin-Cadherin Association—Finally, we used co-immunoprecipitation analysis to test whether tyrosine phosphorylation affected the biochemical interaction between E-cadherin and cortactin (Fig. 7). Cortactin co-immunoprecipitated with E-cadherin in established, confluent MCF7 monolayers (Fig. 7A), consistent with previous observations in other cellular contexts (10, 12), and Tyr(P)-cortactin was also identified in these immune complexes (Fig. 7A). Incubation of cells with PP2 substantially reduced the amount of Tyr(P)-cortactin associated with E-cadherin, but did not affect the total amount of cortactin detected in E-cadherin immunoprecipitates (B). MCF7 cells depleted of cortactin by siRNA were transfected with plasmids expressing either FLAG-tagged mouse wild-type cortactin (wt mCort) or the mouse cortactin 3YF mutant. Cortactin-binding protein complexes were immunoprecipitated using FLAG antibodies (IP: FLAG). Whole cell lysates and immunoprecipitates were Western-blotted for E-cadherin and FLAG (cortactin). Negative control for immunoprecipitation was carried out using anti-hemagglutinin monoclonal antibody. Both wild-type and 3YF cortactin were able to immunoprecipitate E-cadherin, suggesting that tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin is not necessary for its interaction with E-cadherin.

DISCUSSION

Src family kinases signal at E-cadherin-based cell-cell contacts (4, 27). Our current findings now identify cortactin as an important target for SFK signaling at these sites and demonstrate that its tyrosine phosphorylation is necessary for the integrity of both cadherin adhesive junctions and the perijunctional actin cytoskeleton. Overall, these observations lead to the
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Although Tyr(P)-cortactin was clearly required to maintain the integrity of cell-cell contacts, the tyrosine phosphorylation events that we studied did not appear to be necessary for cortactin to interact with E-cadherin. This carries two implications. First, it suggests that the impact of Tyr(P)-cortactin on cadherin biology is not simply due to regulation of the cortactin-cadherin interaction. Instead, it is likely that tyrosine phosphorylation regulates the ability of cortactin to interact with other proteins once it is incorporated into the cadherin complex. We do not yet know what these interacting proteins may be. One interesting possibility is p120-catenin, which associates directly with the cadherin cytoplasmic tail. p120-catenin can also bind directly to cortactin (30), although whether this interaction occurs when p120-catenin is associated with E-cadherin is not yet reported. Another possibility is the Arp2/3 actin nucleator. Src-phosphorylated cortactin potentiates actin nucleation in vitro by promoting the association of cortactin with Nck and N-WASP to form a trimeric complex that activates Arp2/3 (24). As Arp2/3 can interact with the E-cadherin molecular complex (20, 31), it is possible that cadherin-bound Tyr(P)-cortactin modulates Arp2/3-mediated actin assembly at cell-cell contacts.

Second, this observation implies that cortactin might be tyrosine-phosphorylated after it recruits to E-cadherin. Indeed, this is suggested by our observation that although cell contact assembly greatly increased tyrosine phosphorylation of cadherin-associated cortactin, the total amount of cortactin found in cadherin complexes did not change significantly. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Src (32) can also immunoprecipitate with E-cadherin. This suggests the possibility that the cadherin might serve to bring these two proteins together, thereby facilitating tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin. This would be consistent with increasing evidence that classical cadherins can scaffold signaling complexes at the plasma membrane.

However, it is important to emphasize that although our data indicate a key role for SFK in E-cadherin-to-cortactin signaling, they do not establish whether SFK are directly responsible for phosphorylating cadherin-bound cortactin. The Tyr-421 and Tyr-466 residues monitored in our experiments are established sites for SFK, but can also be phosphorylated by Abelson family kinases (Abl, Arg) and FER (6), which are also found in MCF7 cells.10 FER has been reported to mediate cortactin tyrosine phosphorylation in response to N-cadherin engagement (11). Moreover, both SFK and Abelson kinases are involved in tyrosine phosphorylation of cortactin in platelet-derived growth factor-stimulated fibroblasts;

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7. S. Wu and R. McLachlan, unpublished data.
8. G. Ren, unpublished data.
9. R. McLachlan, unpublished data.
10. S. Verma, unpublished data.
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Indeed, SFK may lie upstream of Abelson in this pathway (33). Nonetheless, although we cannot exclude roles for Abelson kinases or FER in E-cadherin signaling, it is clear that these kinases do not significantly compensate when Src signaling is disrupted.

SFK exert profound, but complex, effects on cadherin biology (reviewed in Ref. 27). It is well documented that expression of oncogenic, constitutively active Src mutants perturbs cadherin adhesion and disrupts the integrity of cadherin-based cell-cell contacts (34, 35). Conversely, loss-of-function studies have demonstrated a positive contribution of SFK to cadherin function. The integrity of cell-cell contacts and the ability of cadherins to support contact formation are compromised when SFK signaling is perturbed both in mammalian cells (4, 36) and in Drosophila embryos (37, 38). Overall, these observations suggest that physiological levels of SFK signaling serve to support cell-cell contacts, whereas pathological overstimulation may disrupt their integrity. Our current results imply that cortactin is a key component of physiological E-cadherin-activated SFK signaling. This extends earlier evidence that cortactin supports cadherin-based cell-cell interactions (10, 12) and complements the demonstration that cortactin is a target for Src signaling in osteoclasts that are necessary for podosome formation (15, 16). Additionally, overexpression of cortactin can promote cell migration and is often found in malignant tumors (6). Whether dysregulation of cortactin by SFK signaling may contribute to cadherin dysfunction in human disease is thus an interesting issue for future investigation.

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