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Hsc70 chaperone activity underlies Trio GEF function in axon growth and guidance induced by netrin-1

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During development, netrin-1 is both an attractive and repulsive axon guidance cue and mediates its attractive function through the receptor Deleted in Colorectal Cancer (DCC). The activation of Rho guanosine triphosphatases within the extending growth cone facilitates the dynamic reorganization of the cytoskeleton required to drive axon extension. The Rac1 guanine nucleotide exchange factor (GEF) Trio is essential for netrin-1–induced axon outgrowth and guidance. Here, we identify the molecular chaperone heat shock cognate protein 70 (Hsc70) as a novel Trio regulator. Hsc70 dynamically associated with the N-terminal region and Rac1 GEF domain of Trio. Whereas Hsc70 expression supported Trio-dependent Rac1 activation, adenosine triphosphatase–deficient Hsc70 (D10N) abrogated Trio Rac1 GEF activity and netrin-1–induced Rac1 activation. Hsc70 was required for netrin-1–mediated axon growth and attraction in vitro, whereas Hsc70 activity supported callosal projections and radial neuronal migration in the embryonic neocortex. These findings demonstrate that Hsc70 chaperone activity is required for Rac1 activation by Trio and this function underlies netrin-1/DCC-dependent axon outgrowth and guidance.

Introduction

The proper wiring of the central nervous system (CNS) is imperative for normal physiological function and survival. During development, the extension and pathfinding of neurons of the CNS is governed in part by environmental guidance cues (Tessier-Lavigne and Goodman, 1996; Guan and Rao, 2003; Huber et al., 2003). Molecular signals initiated by these cues are transduced intracellularly by means of conserved receptors expressed at the distal axon growth cone, ultimately resulting in modulation of the actin cytoskeleton (Lowery and Van Vactor, 2009). Netrins constitute a family of axon guidance cues that are required for proper neural specification (Kennedy et al., 1994; Serafini et al., 1996; Bashaw and Klein, 2010). To date, netrin-1 was found to signal through at least four distinct families of transmembrane receptors: the Deleted in Colorectal Cancer (DCC) family (DCC and neogenin), Down syndrome cell adhesion molecule, the UNC-5 family, and amyloid precursor protein (Keino-Masu et al., 1996; Ackerman et al., 1997; Leonardo et al., 1997; Ly et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2009; Rama et al., 2012). During development of the spinal cord and cerebral cortex of vertebrates, netrin-1 exerts its attractive functions through the receptor DCC (Kennedy et al., 1994; Keino-Masu et al., 1996; Richards et al., 1997). In humans, mutations of the DCC gene have been associated with congenital mirror movements (Stour et al., 2010), and small nucleotide polymorphisms within the genes encoding DCC and netrin-1 have been associated with schizophrenia (Grant et al., 2012), Parkinson’s disease, and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lesnick et al., 2008; Lin et al., 2009). Upon netrin-1 stimulation, DCC becomes highly phosphorylated on serine, threonine, and tyrosine residues (Meriane et al., 2004). In particular, phosphorylation of rat DCC at Tyr1418 by Src family kinases is required for netrin-1–mediated axon outgrowth and guidance in vertebrates (Li et al., 2004; Liu et al., 2004; Meriane et al., 2004).

Rho family GTPases are molecular switches that have been well characterized as modulators of cytoskeletal dynamics and cellular motility by cycling between an inactive GDP-bound and active GTP-bound state (Jaffe and Hall, 2005). In the context of axon growth and pathfinding, the recruitment and localized activation of the Rho GTPases Rac1, Cdc42, and RhoA are imperative for translating guidance cues into cytoskeletal rearrangements within
peaks (DeGeer et al., 2013). We also observed that Trio promotes DCC in cortical growth cones occurring when Rac1 activation was activated (Li et al., 2002; Shekarabi and Kennedy, 2002; Briançon-Marjollet et al., 2008; Moore et al., 2008). Oversight of Rho GTPase nucleotide cycling is performed by regulatory proteins: guanine nucleotide exchange factors (GEFs) enhance the GTP-bound state (Cook et al., 2014; Laurin and Côté, 2014), whereas GTP hydrolysis is catalyzed by GTPase-activating proteins (Tcherkezian and Lamarche-Vane, 2007). Additionally, guanine nucleotide dissociation inhibitors bind to Rho GTPases and restrict them in an inactive state in the cytoplasm, preventing them from associating with their downstream effectors (Olofsson, 1999). In recent years, the GEFs DOCK180 and Trio have been shown to mediate Rac1 activation downstream of netrin and DCC in mammalian systems (Briançon-Marjollet et al., 2008; Li et al., 2008). Trio contains two Dbh homology/Pleckstrin homology GEF domains (GEFDs) and a serine/threonine kinase domain for which a substrate has yet to be identified (Debant et al., 1996). Trio has activity toward both Rhog and Rac1 via its first GEFD (GEFD1), whereas the second GEFD activates RhoA in vitro (Debant et al., 1996; Bellanger et al., 1998; Blangy et al., 2000). Trio is highly enriched in the mammalian brain where five Trio isoforms containing the GEFD1 are generated by alternative splicing (Portales-Casamar et al., 2006). Trio-null mice die between embryonic day 15.5 (E15.5) and birth and display a general impairment of netrin-1– and DCC-dependent neuronal projections in the spinal cord and brain (O’Brien et al., 2000; Briançon-Marjollet et al., 2008). Specifically, in the brain Trio-null embryos lack anterior commissures, and notably DCC-positive projections in the corpus callosum and internal capsule are misguided (Briançon-Marjollet et al., 2008). We have recently shown that netrin-1 promotes the Src kinase-dependent phosphorylation of Trio2822 and a concomitant coassociation with DCC in cortical growth cones occurring when Rac1 activation peaks (DeGeer et al., 2013). We also observed that Trio promotes the enrichment of surface DCC at cortical neuronal growth cones in a Trio2822-dependent manner (DeGeer et al., 2013). These findings demonstrated the importance of Trio2822 phosphorylation in the regulation of netrin-1– and DCC-mediated cortical axon outgrowth. Despite these observations, the mechanisms governing Trio localization and activation downstream of netrin-1/DCC are unknown. In this work we provide evidence that the chaperone activity of Hsc70 permits Rac1 activation by Trio in the developing cerebral cortex. In addition, we show that Hsc70 function is required for proper Trio and DCC localization in cortical growth cones treated with netrin-1. We correlate the chaperone-mediated activation of Rac1 by Trio with the regulation of DCC plasma membrane insertion within the growth cones of cortical neurons and demonstrate Hsc70’s requirement for axon outgrowth and guidance induced by netrin-1. In this way we link cytoskeletal proteins with the regulation of an axon guidance receptor and describe a novel function for the chaperone Hsc70 during development.

Results

The molecular chaperone Hsc70 associates with Trio in the developing cerebral cortex To characterize the molecular mechanisms governing Trio regulation during netrin-1/DCC signaling, we used a proteomic approach and identified Hsc70 as a novel Trio-associated protein in extracts of netrin-1–treated rat E17.5 cerebral cortices. To validate the mass spectrometry result, Trio was immunoprecipitated (IP) from cortical tissue extracts and coassociated proteins were analyzed by Western blot. We found that Hsc70 interacted with Trio, whereas the highly homologous chaperone Hsp70 failed to do so (Fig. 1 A). To determine whether the association between Trio and Hsc70 was netrin dependent, rat cortices were treated with netrin-1 for 5 to 30 min before harvesting. Trio and Hsc70 coassociation in cell extracts peaked 5 min after netrin-1 stimulation and decreased after 15 and 30 min (Fig. 1, B and C). FAK was activated (pFAK) after 5 min of netrin-1 treatment and activation was sustained for at least 30 min, as reported previously (Fig. 1 B; DeGeer et al., 2013).

We next investigated the degree of endogenous coassociation of Trio and Hsc70 in dissociated cortical neurons by indirect immunofluorescence. Neurons were treated with netrin-1, and then fixed and stained with antibodies against Trio and Hsc70 (Fig. 1 D). Confocal microscopy was performed and the mean Pearson’s correlation coefficient between Trio and Hsc70 was generated at both cortical growth cones and axon shafts to assess the degree of coassociation. By this means, we observed a basal colocalization between Trio and Hsc70 in the cortical growth cones (r = 0.50 ± 0.02; Fig. 1, D and E). Netrin-1 treatment significantly increased the colocalization of Trio and Hsc70 within growth cones after 5 min (r = 0.62 ± 0.02, P < 0.0007), whereas the colocalization returned to basal levels after 15 min of netrin-1 treatment (r = 0.47 ± 0.02, P < 0.0001; Fig. 1, D and E). The basal colocalization of Hsc70 and Trio in axon shafts was similar to the growth cones (r = 0.51 ± 0.02); however, netrin-1 application for either 5 or 15 min resulted in no significant modulation of the association (r = 0.48 ± 0.03 and r = 0.42 ± 0.02, P > 0.05; Fig. 1, F and G). In summary, we identified Hsc70 as a novel Trio-associated protein in embryonic cortical tissues and demonstrate that the netrin-1–induced coassociation occurs preferentially in cortical growth cones versus axons.

Hsc70 facilitates Trio-dependent Rac1 activation and cortical axon outgrowth in a chaperone-dependent manner

To delineate the regions of Trio permitting the association with Hsc70, GFP-Trio deletion mutants were expressed in HEK293 cells and the interaction with Hsc70 was assessed by coimmunoprecipitation (IP) from cortical tissue extracts and coassociated proteins were analyzed by Western blot. We found that Hsc70 interacted with Trio, whereas the highly homologous chaperone Hsp70 failed to do so (Fig. 1 A). To determine whether the association between Trio and Hsc70 was netrin dependent, rat cortices were treated with netrin-1 for 5 to 30 min before harvesting. Trio and Hsc70 coassociation in cell extracts peaked 5 min after netrin-1 stimulation and decreased after 15 and 30 min (Fig. 1, B and C). FAK was activated (pFAK) after 5 min of netrin-1 treatment and activation was sustained for at least 30 min, as reported previously (Fig. 1 B; DeGeer et al., 2013).

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Hsc70 facilitates Trio-dependent Rac1 activation and cortical axon outgrowth in a chaperone-dependent manner

To delineate the regions of Trio permitting the association with Hsc70, GFP-Trio deletion mutants were expressed in HEK293 cells and the interaction with Hsc70 was assessed by coimmunoprecipitation (Fig. 2, A and B). In this assay, full-length GFP-Trio basally associated with endogenous Hsc70, and the C-terminal truncation of Trio, lacking the RhoA GEF and kinase domains resulting in the Trio 1–1813 fragment, did not reduce the association with Hsc70 relative to immunoprecipitation (IP) from cortical tissue extracts and coassociated proteins were analyzed by Western blot. We found that Hsc70 interacted with Trio, whereas the highly homologous chaperone Hsp70 failed to do so (Fig. 1 A). To determine whether the association between Trio and Hsc70 was netrin dependent, rat cortices were treated with netrin-1 for 5 to 30 min before harvesting. Trio and Hsc70 coassociation in cell extracts peaked 5 min after netrin-1 stimulation and decreased after 15 and 30 min (Fig. 1, B and C). FAK was activated (pFAK) after 5 min of netrin-1 treatment and activation was sustained for at least 30 min, as reported previously (Fig. 1 B; DeGeer et al., 2013).

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ulates the Rac1 GEF activity of Trio. We performed pull-down assays with the Cdc42/Rac interactive binding (CRIB) domain of PKA fused to GST to assess the level of active GTP-Rac1 in HEK293 cell extracts (Briançon-Marjollet et al., 2008; Picard et al., 2009). As expected, Trio overexpression resulted in a significant increase in Rac1-GTP levels (P = 0.0003), whereas the expression of Hsc70 had no significant effect on Rac-GTP levels alone (P = 0.28; Fig. 2, D and E). Increasing levels of GFP-Hsc70 coexpression with GFP-Trio resulted in enhanced Trio-dependent Rac-GTP induction with low levels of Hsc70 (P < 0.03), whereas higher levels of Hsc70 expression did not significantly augment Trio-induced Rac1 activation (P = 0.44; Fig. 2, D and E). To examine whether Hsc70 chaperone activity is required to modulate the activation of Rac1 by Trio, the dominant-negative
and chaperone-dead (ATPase-deficient) Hsc70<sup>D10N</sup> was introduced and Rac1-GTP pull-downs were performed. Although GFP-Hsc70<sup>D10N</sup> expression alone had no effect on basal Rac1-GTP levels, the coexpression of GFP-Hsc70<sup>D10N</sup> with Trio abolished Trio-dependent Rac1 activation (Fig. 2, D and E). These results demonstrate that Trio Rac1 GEF activity is regulated by Hsc70 in a chaperone activity-dependent manner.

We have previously reported that exogenous Trio expression in dissociated cortical neurons increases axon length in a Rac1 GEF-dependent manner.

Figure 2. Hsc70 facilitates Trio-dependent Rac1 activation and cortical axon outgrowth in a chaperone-dependent manner. (A) Schematic of Trio domain structure. (B) Trio constructs were transfected into HEK293 cells as indicated. GFP-Trio proteins were IP from cell lysates and Hsc70 coIP with Trio was detected by immunoblotting. TCL, total cell lysates. (C) Densitometric analysis of Hsc70 coIP with GFP-Trio from B. Error bars indicate the SEM (n = 3; NS, P > 0.05; **, P < 0.001; ***, P < 0.0001; one-way ANOVA, Bonferroni’s multiple comparisons test). (D) HEK293 cells were transfected with the indicated constructs and with increasing amounts of GFP-Hsc70 plasmid. GTP-loaded Rac1 was pulled down from protein lysates by GST-CRIB. GTP-bound Rac1, total Rac1, and the indicated proteins were detected by immunoblotting. (E) Densitometric ratio of GTP-bound Rac1/total Rac1 normalized to the vector control. Error bars indicate the SEM (n = 4; NS, P > 0.05; *, P < 0.05; ***, P < 0.0001; one-way ANOVA, Bonferroni’s multiple comparisons test). (F) Dissociated E17.5 rat cortical neurons were electroporated with the indicated constructs and a GFP reporter. Bar, 50 µm. (G) The mean axon lengths of GFP<sup>+</sup> neurons were calculated manually with Metamorph software (>54 axons per condition from three independent experiments). Error bars indicate the SEM (NS, P > 0.05; **, P < 0.001; ***, P < 0.0001; one-way ANOVA, Bonferroni’s multiple comparisons test). (H) Representative protein expression of electroporated constructs in E17.5 cortical neurons from F and G. WT, wildtype Hsc70; D10N, Hsc70<sup>D10N</sup>.
Trio function (DeGeer et al., 2013). We applied this model to assess whether Hsc70 functionally regulates Trio-dependent axon outgrowth. Dissociated cortical neurons were electroporated with constructs encoding GFP and either GFP-Hsc70 or GFP-Hsc70D10N alone or with GFP-Trio. After 2 d in culture the neurons were fixed and imaged and the mean axon length of GFP-positive (GFP+) cells was determined (Fig. 2, F and G). Although expression of GFP-Hsc70 or Trio alone resulted in a significant increase in axon length relative to control cells (P < 0.0001), coexpression of Hsc70 and Trio did not further enhance the mean axon length relative to Trio-expressing neurons (P = 0.97; Fig. 2, F and G). Axon lengths of GFP-Hsc70D10N–expressing neurons were not significantly different from GFP-expressing neurons, whereas coexpression of GFP-Hsc70D10N with Trio abrogated Trio-dependent enhanced axon extension (P < 0.0001; Fig. 2, F and G). To rule out possible down-regulation or degradation of proteins, the expression of GFP-tagged proteins was verified by immunoblotting (Fig. 2 H). Altogether, these data demonstrate that Rac-GTP induction by Trio is modulated by Hsc70 chaperone activity, which is required for Trio-stimulated axon extension in cortical neurons.

**Hsc70 is required for the netrin-1–induced enrichment of Trio at the growth cone periphery**

Because Hsc70 is a molecular chaperone, we assessed whether it may function to regulate Trio localization within cortical growth cones. To first establish Trio localization, cortical neurons were treated with netrin-1 for 5 min, and then fixed and stained (Fig. 3 A). Trio and F-actin growth cone localizations were assessed and the intensity of each signal was measured along a 10-μm segment of the distal growth cone (Fig. 3 A, right). Upon netrin-1 treatment, the intensity of Trio shifted to the growth cone periphery compared with untreated growth cones, similar to F-actin (Fig. 3 A and B).

We next down-regulated endogenous Hsc70 in neurons by electroporation of synthetic siRNA targeting the 5’-UTR of rat Hsc70 along with GFP cDNA as a transfection marker. Neurons were fixed and immunostained for endogenous Hsc70, and the level of Hsc70 present in GFP+ neurons versus GFP-negative neurons was assessed by indirect immunofluorescence (Fig. 3, C and D). In this manner, we observed a 60% reduction in the total level of Hsc70 in GFP+ neurons relative to nontransfected neurons (Fig. 3 D). Subsequently, Trio localization was assessed within the growth cones of dissociated neurons electroporated with either control or Hsc70 siRNA and stimulated with netrin-1 for 5 min. In the absence of netrin-1, Trio localization was dispersed throughout the growth cones of control neurons with reduced incidence of compartmentalization in the growth cone periphery (15.17 ± 4.30%; Fig. 3, E–G). Similarly, in Hsc70-depleted neurons Trio was largely dispersed throughout the growth cones and a lower proportion displayed a peripheral Trio localization (Periphery: 6.16 ± 0.32%; Fig. 3, E–G). Netrin-1 application for 5 min resulted in an increase in the proportion of growth cones with peripheral Trio localization (59.25 ± 5.46%, P < 0.001; Fig. 3, E–G). In contrast, Hsc70-depleted neurons displayed no significant change in Trio localization (8.33 ± 2.08%, P = 0.23; Fig. 3, E–G). Together with the previous finding that Hsc70 is required for Trio-dependent axon outgrowth, this data supports a hypothesis whereby Hsc70 regulates Trio function in the extending growth cone by regulating Trio localization.
Hsc70 is required for netrin-1–mediated cortical axon outgrowth and Rac1 activation

We next explored the role of Hsc70 in netrin-1–induced axon outgrowth of dissociated cortical neurons. Cortical neurons were electroporated with control or Hsc70 siRNA together with GFP cDNA and stimulated with either netrin-1 or glutamate for 24 h before fixation (Fig. 5, A and B). Although depletion of endogenous Hsc70 did not affect basal cortical axon lengths, netrin-1 treatment was insufficient to stimulate axon extension in these neurons (Fig. 5, A and B). In contrast, Hsc70-depleted neurons remained responsive to glutamate (P...
< 0.03), confirming that Hsc70 depletion does not impair all mechanisms of induced axon outgrowth (Fig. 5, A and B). To verify the function of Hsc70 in netrin-1-mediated axon outgrowth, siRNA-resistant GFP-Hsc70 or GFP-Hsc70D10N were expressed in Hsc70-depleted cortical neurons and stimulated with netrin-1 (Fig. 5, A and C). Reexpression of Hsc70 was sufficient to restore netrin-1-induced cortical axon extension (P < 0.05), whereas expression of the chaperone-dead Hsc70D10N did not rescue netrin-1 sensitivity relative to untreated neurons (P = 0.45; Fig. 5, A and C).

To determine whether Hsc70 functions upstream or downstream of Trio during netrin-1–induced axon outgrowth, cortical neurons were depleted of endogenous Hsc70 or Trio (DeGeer et al., 2013) and expression was rescued with siRNA-resistant GFP-Trio or GFP-Hsc70 cDNAs (Fig. 5 D). In this context, GFP-Hsc70 overexpression was not sufficient to restore netrin-1–induced axon extension in Trio-depleted neurons (P = 0.75; Fig. 5, D and E). Conversely, when neurons were depleted of endogenous Hsc70, the overexpression of GFP-Trio restored the sensitivity of these neurons to netrin-1
Hsc70 is required for netrin-1-dependent attraction of embryonic cortical neurons

We have previously reported that Trio-null embryos have defective neural projections within the CNS, notably the netrin-1-dependent ventral projections of spinal commissural axons and DCC-positive projections of the corpus callosum and internal capsule (Briançon-Marjollet et al., 2008). In each case, a deficit in axon guidance was observed as the projected fibers were dispersed over a larger area compared with wild-type embryos (Briançon-Marjollet et al., 2008). Because Trio contributes to axon guidance in vivo (Briançon-Marjollet et al., 2008), we next evaluated the contribution of Hsc70 to netrin-1–induced chemoaatraction of cortical neurons. To assess this proposed function, we used an in vitro axon guidance assay based on the Dunn chamber (Yam et al., 2009). E17.5 rat cortical neurons electroporated with control or Hsc70 siRNA with GFP cDNA were exposed to either a vehicle (PBS) or netrin-1 gradient in the Dunn chamber for at least 90 min at 2 d in vitro (DIV2; Fig. 6, A and B). Notably, a minimum of 10-μm displacement threshold was enforced for the calculated trajectory of the growth cone to be considered a “turn.” As an internal control, naïve cortical neurons (non-electroporated) were also assessed. Although the mean turning angles of each PBS-treated condition did not vary significantly (P > 0.2), netrin-1 induced a robust attractive turning response for either the naïve or control siRNA-electroporated neurons, resulting in turning angles of 11.9° ± 4.74° (P < 0.005) and 10.67° ± 4.29° (P < 0.02), respectively (Fig. 6, B and C). Hsc70-depleted cortical neurons, however, were not attracted to the netrin-1 gradient in the chamber relative to the PBS controls, as the turning angle was reduced to 6.25° ± 3.03° (P > 0.07; Fig. 6, B and C). Importantly, exposure of neurons to the netrin-1 gradient did not significantly affect the displacement of the turning growth cones during the imaging period. However, the displacement of the Hsc70-depleted neurons was markedly reduced compared with the control siRNA or naïve control neurons (Fig. 6 D). In fact, the mean displacement of all growth cones (including those excluded from turn calculations) of Hsc70-depleted neurons was fourfold reduced compared with control growth cones (Fig. 6, E and F). Furthermore, the proportion of growth cones
Figure 5. **Hsc70 is required for netrin-1–mediated cortical axon outgrowth and Rac1 activation.** (A) Dissociated E17.5 rat cortical neurons were electroporated with control siRNA or Hsc70 siRNA with a GFP reporter construct or the indicated GFP constructs. At DIV1, neurons were stimulated with netrin-1 or glutamate for 24 h. Bar, 50 µm. (B and C) The mean axon lengths of GFP+ neurons from A were calculated manually using Metamorph software (>50 neurons assessed per condition, from at least three independent experiments). Error bars indicate the SEM (****, P < 0.0001; one-way ANOVA, Fisher’s least significant difference post-test). (D) E17.5 rat cortical neurons were depleted of endogenous Trio and Hsc70 by siRNA and reexpressed both with siRNA-resistant Hsc70 and Trio. (E and F) The mean axon lengths of GFP+ neurons were calculated as in B (>70 neurons assessed per condition, from at least three independent experiments). Error bars indicate the SEM (*, P < 0.05; unpaired t test). (G) HEK293 cells were transfected with pRK5-DCC with empty vector (EV), GFP-Hsc70, or GFP-Hsc70(D10N) and stimulated with netrin-1 for 5 min. GTP-loaded Rac1 was pulled down from protein lysates by GST-CRIB. GTP-bound Rac1 (top), total Rac1, and the indicated proteins were detected by immunoblotting. TCL, total cell lysates. (H) Densitometric ratio of GTP-bound Rac1 to total Rac1 normalized to DCC. Error bars indicate the SEM (n = 6; *, P < 0.05; one-way ANOVA, Bonferroni’s multiple comparisons test).
pressed in neurons whereas Hsp70 is enriched in glial cells in the unstressed mouse embryo (Loones et al., 2000). Hsc70 is an ATP-dependent chaperone that carries out various housekeeping chaperone functions; it assists in protein folding, translocation, chaperone-mediated autophagy, and prevention of protein aggregation (Daugaard et al., 2007).

Our study is the first to describe Hsc70-mediated regulation of a Rac1 GEF in neurons to date. In earlier studies, Hsc70 was reported to associate with other Rho GEFs including the protooncogenes Dbl and Plekhg4 (Kauppinen et al., 2005; Gupta et al., 2013). Similar to our findings for Trio, Kauppinen et al. (2005) demonstrated that the association of proto-Dbl with Hsc70 was mediated by the N terminus and Pleckstrin homology domain of the GEFD of proto-Dbl (Kauppinen et al., 2005). In direct contrast to our results, however, Hsc70 was identified as a negative regulator of proto-Dbl–induced RhoA GEF activity (Kauppinen et al., 2005). Although future studies are required to determine the precise mechanism of Hsc70-mediated regulation of Rho GEFs, our work highlights the exciting possibility that Hsc70 may serve as a universal regulator of Rho GEFs in specific cellular contexts. Elevated Hsc70 expression occurs in various tissues in which Rac1 is known to function, including in the neural tube during embryogenesis and in various types of cancer (Loones et al., 2000; Rohde et al., 2005; Duquette and Lamarche-Vane, 2014). Although Rac1 expression is elevated in primary tumors and Rac1 activation is required for cancer cell migration and metastasis (Bid et al., 2013), the dysregulation of Rac1 and Hsc70 has not yet been linked in any biological system. Currently, pharmacological inhibitors of Hsc70/Hsp70 are being tested as anti-cancer agents.

Figure 6. Hsc70 is required for netrin-1–dependent attraction of embryonic cortical neurons. Control (siCTL) or Hsc70 siRNA (siHsc70) was electroporated with a GFP reporter plasmid in E17.5 cortical neurons. At DIV2, neurons were exposed to vehicle PBS or a 200-ng/ml netrin-1 V1-V (net) gradient in Dunn chamber turning assays. (A) Video time-lapse imaging of control neurons exposed to a gradient for 90 min. Bar, 20 µm. (B) Rose histograms represent the distribution of turning angles of the cortical neurons. Green or pink indicate positive or negative turning angles, respectively. (C) Mean turning angles for each condition (>50 axons per condition, from at least three independent experiments). Error bars indicate the SEM (NS, P > 0.05; *, P < 0.05; **, P < 0.01; one-way ANOVA, Newman-Keuls multiple comparisons test). (D) The mean displacement of turning cortical growth cones over the 90-min imaging period. Error bars indicate the SEM (n > 50 axons per condition; NS, P > 0.05; ***, P < 0.001; one-way ANOVA, Newman-Keuls multiple comparisons test). (E) The mean displacement of all cortical growth cones over the 90-min imaging period (>70 axons per condition, from at least three independent experiments). Error bars indicate the SEM (***, P < 0.001; unpaired student’s t test). (F) The distribution of growth cone displacements from E. (G) The proportion of growth cones from E with at least one retraction event. (H) The proportion of neurons from E with collapsed growth cones.

Figure 6 A-H.
and correlate with a function of Hsc70 in regulating Rac1-dependent processes such as cell proliferation and migration (Kaiser et al., 2011; Balaburski et al., 2013).

Furthermore, Rac1 signaling is required for neuronal polarization and migration during neocortex development (Azzarelli et al., 2015). Whereas wild-type Rac1 enhances neuronal migration, expression of dominant-negative or constitutively active Rac1 results in accumulation of neurons in the intermediate zone and failure to extend leading processes (Konno et al., 2005; Yang et al., 2012). Because Hsc70 is required for Trio-dependent Rac1 activation, the impaired polarization and radial migration of dominant-negative Hsc70D10N-expressing neurons may be in part caused by dysregulation of Rac1. Normally, immature neurons go through a multipolar stage before becoming radially polarized during migration to the upper cortical layers (Nadarajah et al., 2001), thus the reduced polarization of Hsc70D10N-expressing neurons is not a result of delayed neuronal differentiation. Further study should focus on whether this is because of Hsc70’s function in regulating Rac1-dependent cytoskeletal dynamics or by a complementary component of cell migration. Indeed the endocytic machinery components clathrin and dynamin are also important for cortical neuron radial migration in vivo by supporting cell soma translocation (Shieh et al., 2011). Because Hsc70 is required for endocytosis and clathrin uncoating via dynamin regulation (Chang et al., 2002) it is likely that Hsc70 supports neuronal migration via both cytoskeletal and endosomal mechanisms.

Because the netrin-1–induced association of Hsc70 with DCC is prolonged in comparison to that with Trio alone, it suggests that Hsc70 may have an additional or downstream function in the DCC signaling complex independent of its regulation of Trio Rac1 GEF activity. The preferential association of Hsc70 with surface DCC further implies that Hsc70 in part regulates surface DCC localization or stability. Indeed we show

Figure 7. **Hsc70 chaperone activity supports radial neuronal migration and callosal projections in the embryonic neocortex.** [A] In utero electroporation of E14.5 mouse embryos with pCIG2 control vector or pCIG2 constructs encoding Hsc70 or Hsc70D10N. Representative brightfield images of E17.5 coronal brain sections, stained with anti-GFP (green) and the nuclear marker DAPI (blue). Asterisk denotes impaired callosal projections. CP, cortical plate; IZ, intermediate zone; VZ/SVZ, ventricular zone/subventricular zone. Bar, 200 µm. [B] Quantification of the distribution of GFP+ neurons in the cortex [pCIG2: 372 neurons from six embryos; Hsc70: 500 neurons from five embryos; Hsc70D10N: 850 neurons from 11 embryos]. Error bars indicate the SEM (*, P < 0.05; ***, P < 0.001; unpaired student’s t test). (C) Morphological comparison of Hsc70D10N-expressing neurons in the intermediate zone relative to vector control neurons. Bar, 50 µm. (D) High magnification 3D rendering of representative GFP+ neurons in the intermediate zone from C revealing impaired neuronal polarization with Hsc70D10N expression. Left, front view; right: side view. Arrows indicate direction of radial migration. Arrowheads indicate leading processes of migrating GFP+ neurons. (E) Quantification of the proportion of GFP+ neurons in the intermediate zone with polarized morphology [pCIG2: 288 neurons from seven embryos; Hsc70D10N: 416 neurons from seven embryos]. Error bars indicate the SEM (***, P < 0.001; unpaired student’s t test).
that Hsc70 chaperone activity is required for the sustained enrichment of surface DCC in cortical growth cones downstream of netrin-1. Recruitment of DCC to the plasma membrane is important for netrin-1–induced axon guidance in cortical neurons. To date, a few mechanisms have been demonstrated that support netrin-1–induced DCC surface targeting from intracellular pools, including depolarization, activation of protein kinase A, and RhoA inhibition (Bouchard et al., 2004; Moore et al., 2008). We have previously reported that Trio supports the growth cone enrichment of surface DCC downstream of netrin-1 in cortical neurons (DeGeer et al., 2013). The Hsc70 ATPase activity is required for the stabilized enrichment of surface DCC at cortical growth cones treated with netrin-1. Therefore, we postulate that Hsc70 and Trio function by supporting the enrichment of surface DCC or permitting the mobilization of DCC from intracellular pools to the plasma membrane to allow a proper chemotactic response of growth cones to netrin-1 (Fig. 8). Although further studies are required to delineate how Trio and Hsc70 contribute to surface DCC localization, one interesting possibility is local exocytosis of DCC-embedded vesicles. Previous studies report that netrin-1–induced axon outgrowth is dependent on exocytosis-driven plasma membrane insertion at the leading edge of the extending growth cone (Cotrufo et al., 2011; Winkle et al., 2014). Exocytosis and membrane fusion are mediated by the SNARE complex comprising a v-SNARE such as Syntaxin-1, and in this way it induces the local exocytosis of vesicle-associated membrane protein 2 and plasma membrane t-SNAREs, SNAP25 and syntaxin-1 (Südhof and Rothman, 2009). DCC forms a complex with syntaxin-1 downstream of netrin-1, and in this way it induces the local exocytosis of vesicle-associated membrane protein 2–expressing vesicles during axon outgrowth (Cotrufo et al., 2011). Furthermore, the E3 ubiquitin ligase TRIM9 associates directly with both SNAP-25 and DCC and promotes netrin-1–dependent axon branching in cortical neurons (Winkle et al., 2014). Interestingly, Hsc70 is closely linked to the exocytotic machinery at synapses by associating with vesicular cysteine-string protein α and SNAP25, enabling a SNARE complex formation at the plasma membrane (Sharma et al., 2011). In addition, another TRIM protein, TRIM22, has been recently connected to the Hsc70 partner C terminus of Hsc70-interacting protein (Gao et al., 2013), suggesting that Hsc70 may contribute in part to DCC-driven exocytosis through a TRIM9/SNAP25-dependent mechanism.

Although some evidence supports the ability for neurons to regenerate and form functional contacts after CNS injury, our knowledge of the cellular mechanisms underlying these processes and treatments for these conditions remains incomplete (Mar et al., 2014). Dysfunction of Hsc70 has been implicated in various neurodegenerative disorders including Huntington’s, Parkinson’s, and Alzheimer’s diseases (Shimura et al., 2004; Koga et al., 2011; Turturici et al., 2011; Pemberton and Melki, 2012). To our knowledge this is the first study to implicate Hsc70 in the regulation of Rac1-dependent cellular processes, raising the possibility that Rac1 dysregulation in neurons contributes to the pathophysiology of neurodegenerative diseases (DeGeer and Lamarche-Vane, 2013). Indeed, Hsc70 expression is induced in response to cerebral ischemia, thus supporting a role for Hsc70 in axon regeneration and repair (Muranyi et al., 2005; Chen et al., 2007). It will be of great interest to investigate whether selectively augmenting Hsc70 chaperone activity will promote nerve regrowth in the context of neurodegeneration.

**Materials and methods**

**DNA constructs, antibodies, and reagents**

- pEGFP-Trio and deletion mutants, pEGFP-Hsc70, pEGFP-Hsc70(D10N), pPKS-DCC, and pCIG2 constructs have been described previously (Estrach et al., 2002; Li et al., 2002; Hand et al., 2005; Briançon-Marjollet et al., 2008; Bański et al., 2010). Hsc70 and Hsc70(D10N) cDNA were subcloned into the pCIG2 vector by PCR amplification using the forward primer (5′-CAGCCGTCTGAGCAACCATGTCTA-AGGACC-3′) and reverse primer (5′-CTTGAAATCTTAATC-CACCTCTTCAATGG-3′) using standard cloning procedures. The rabbit polyclonal anti-TrioMTP antibody was generated by J. Boudou (Centre de Recherche de Biochimie Macromoléculaire, Montpellier, France) as previously described using an antigen encompassing residues 1581–1849 of Trio C isoform (DeGeer et al., 2013). Additional antibodies used were as follows: mouse anti-DCC(N) (clone G97-449; BD), mouse anti-DCC(EXT) (clone AF5; EMD Millipore), rabbit anti-pERK1/2 (pThr202/pThr204) and anti-ERK1/2 (Cell Signaling Technology), rabbit anti-pFAK (pY861) and anti-FAK (Invitrogen), rabbit anti-GFP (Invitrogen), mouse anti-Hsc70 (clone B-6; Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Inc.), rabbit anti-Hsp70 (Enzo Life Sciences), mouse anti-Rac1 (BD), mouse anti-tubulin (EMD Millipore), and goat anti–α–anti-Alexa Fluor 488 and goat anti–mouse Cy3 (Molecular Probes). Reconstituted chick netrin-1 was secreted by 293-EBNA cells stably expressing chick netrin-1 (Serafini et al., 1994) tagged at its C terminus with the myc epitope and was purified by heparin affinity chromatography (GE Healthcare).

**Cell culture and transfection**

HEK293 cells were cultured at 37°C in DMEM (Wisent Bioproducts) supplemented with 10% FBS (Wisent Bioproducts), 2 mM l-glutamine, penicillin, and streptomycin (Invitrogen) under humidified conditions with 5% CO₂. Cells were transfected with the indicated constructs using linear polyethylenimine (PolySciences) at a 1:10 ratio (cDNA/polyethylenimine) as described previously (DeGeer et al., 2013).
Cortical neurons from E17.5 rat embryos were dissociated mechanically and electroporated with cDNA constructs or siRNAs as indicated using the Amaxa Rat Neuron Nucleofector kit (Lonza). After electroporation, neurons were plated on either poly-d-lysine (0.1 mg/ml; Sigma-Aldrich)–coated dishes or poly-l-lysine (0.1 mg/ml, Sigma-Aldrich)–treated coverslips in 24-well plates at a density of 200,000 cells/well. Neurons were cultured in attachment medium (DMEM, 10% FBS, supplemented with 2 mM L-glutamine, penicillin, and streptomycin [Invitrogen]) under humidified conditions with 5% CO2. After 1.5 h, the medium was replaced with maintenance medium (Neurobasal-A medium [Invitrogen], supplemented with 2% B27 [Invitrogen], 1% L-glutamine, penicillin, and streptomycin [Invitrogen]). After DIV1 or 2, the neurons were treated for the indicated times with recombinant netrin-1 (500 ng/ml). Down-regulation of endogenous Hsc70 was achieved by electroporating dissociated E17.5 rat cortical neurons with 150 nM synthetic Hsc70 siRNAs designed to target the 5′-UTR of the rat Hsc70 mRNA (5′-UCUGUGGGUCUCGUCACUUU-3′; Thermo Fisher Scientific) versus control siRNA (Silencer #1; Ambion) together with 4 µg of pmaxGFP vector (Lonza) used as a reporter. Only GFP-expressing neurons were assessed. The siRNA-resistant GFP-Hsc70 or GFP-Hsc70D10N plasmids were coelectroporated with the appropriate antibodies, and visualized by ECL (PerkinElmer). For surface and intracellular DCC immunoblotting with the appropriate antibodies, and visualized by ECL (PerkinElmer). For surface and intracellular DCC immunoprecipitations, cortical neurons were treated with or without 500 ng/ml of netrin-1 for 5 min and transferred to ice. Cells were then washed with ice-cold PBS containing 1 mM magnesium chloride and 0.1 mM calcium chloride and then blocked in ice-cold 1% BSA/PBS for 20 min. After blocking, the cells were incubated with either mouse IgGs or mouse anti-DCC<sub>EXT</sub> (AF-5) antibodies at 1 µg/ml in ice-cold PBS for 40 min on ice, followed by three, 5-min washes with cold PBS. Proteins were extracted with RIPA buffer (150 mM NaCl, 50 mM HEPES, pH 7.5, 1% NP-40, 10 mM EDTA, pH 8.0, 0.5% sodium deoxycholate, 0.1% SDS, 20 mM sodium fluoride, 1 mM sodium orthovanadate, 1 mM PMSF, and 1 µg/ml aprotinin and leupeptin [BioShop]), and protein lysates were centrifuged at 10,000 g for 5 min at 4°C. Surface DCC was isolated by incubation with protein G–Sepharose beads for 1 h at 4°C. The supernatant corresponding to the intracellular DCC pool was collected for each sample, and immunoprecipitations were subsequently performed with either IgGs or anti-DCC.

**Rac1 activation assay**
Transfected HEK293 cells were serum starved overnight and then lysed in buffer containing 25 mM HEPES, pH 7.5, 1% NP-40, 10 mM MgCl2, 100 mM NaCl, 5% glycerol, 1 mM PMSF, and 1 µg/ml aprotinin and leupeptin (BioShop). Protein lysates were centrifuged at 10,000 g for 2 min at 4°C to remove insoluble materials. Endogenous GTP–Rac1 was pulled down by incubating the protein lysates for 30 min at 4°C with the CRIB domain of mouse Pak3 (amino acids 73–146) fused to GST and coupled to glutathione-Sepharose beads. The beads were washed twice with 25 mM HEPES, pH 7.5, 1% NP-40, 30 mM MgCl2, 40 mM NaCl, and 1 mM DTT and resuspended in SDS sample buffer. Protein samples were resolved by SDS-PAGE and transferred onto nitrocellulose membranes for immunoblotting with the anti-Rac1 antibody. The levels of GTP-bound Rac1 were assessed by densitometry using Quantity One software (Bio-Rad Laboratories) and normalized to the total amount of GTPases detected in the total cell lysates.

**Immunofluorescence, microscopy, and Pearson's correlation coefficient**
Cortical neurons (DIV1 or 2) were fixed with 3.7% formaldehyde (Sigma-Aldrich) in 20% sucrose/PBS for 30 min at 37°C and permeabilized as described previously (DeGeer et al., 2013). Immunostaining was performed with the indicated primary antibodies and the respective Cy3- or Alexa Fluor 488–conjugated secondary antibodies and all coverslips were mounted with ProLong Gold Antifade reagent (Invitrogen). To assess protein colocalization, coimmunostained cortical neurons were imaged on a laser-scanning confocal microscope (LSM510; Carl Zeiss) with a Plan Apochromat 63×/1.4 oil immersion objective lens and analyzed with Zen2009 software (Carl Zeiss). Quantification of colocalization using Pearson's correlation coefficient was performed using MetaMorph software (Molecular Devices), analyzing >15 neurons per condition in at least three independent experiments. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed, and the data were presented as a mean ± SEM. For axon outgrowth assays, neurons were visualized with a motorized inverted microscope (IX81; Olympus) using a 40x U Plan Fluorite oil immersion objective lens. Images were recorded with a CoolSnap 4K camera (Photometrics) and analyzed with Meta morph software. For surface DCC detection, cortical neurons remained unpermeabilized, were blocked in 1% BSA/PBS, and were incubated with anti-DCC<sub>EXT</sub> in 1% BSA/PBS at 4°C overnight. Cy3-conjugated secondary antibodies were used to label surface DCC. Images were acquired as for the axon outgrowth experiments, and the mean pixel intensity of DCC fluorescence on growth cones and axonal surfaces was measured from acquired images using Metamorph software, using exclusive thresholding to eliminate background fluorescence.
Axon outgrowth analysis and Dunn chamber assays

To analyze axon outgrowth of primary cortical neurons (DIV2), electroporated (GFP+) cells were analyzed for each condition from at least three independent experiments. Axon lengths were measured manually from acquired images with MetaMorph software. One-way ANOVA with Fisher’s least significant difference post-test was used for statistical analysis, and the data were presented as the mean cortical neuron axon length ± SEM. For turning assays, dissociated cortical neurons (DIV2) were plated on coverslips used for Dunn chamber assembly as previously described (Yam et al., 2009). Gradients were generated with purified netrin-1 VI-V (200 ng/ml) or buffer containing PBS in the outer well. Cell images were acquired every 3–4 min for at least 90 min at 37°C on a temperature controlled stage. Neurites of at least 10-µm length were tracked in GFP-expressing neurons. The final position of the growth cone was used to determine the angle turned over 90° relative to the gradient position. Measurements are presented in rose histograms in bins of 10° with the length of each segment represented relative to the gradient position. Measurements are presented in rose histograms in bins of 10° with the length of each segment representing the frequency of measurements in percent. Mean turning angle and mean displacement are also represented.

In utero electroporation

CD1 mouse embryos were staged using the morning of the vaginal plug as E0.5. To drive GFP reporter expression in layer II/III neurons, E14.5 embryos were electroporated with pCIg2 expression vectors containing an IRES-EGFP cassette under the control of the CAG promoter (Hand et al., 2005). In utero electroporation was performed essentially as described previously (Langevin et al., 2007). In brief, 3 µg/ml of plasmid was injected into the telencephalon and electroporated using 6× 50-V/50-ms square wave pulses with 1-s intervals.

Histology

Immunohistochemistry was performed as previously described (Langevin et al., 2007). In brief, dissected E17.5 brains were fixed overnight at 4°C in 4% paraformaldehyde/PBS. Brains were cryoprotected in 20% sucrose/PBS at 4°C overnight and frozen in OCT on liquid nitrogen. Cryosections (16 µm) were collected on Superfrost Plus slides and stored at −20°C. Sections were incubated in 10% normal goat serum/PBS for 1 h at room temperature, followed by incubation overnight at 4°C in the primary antibodies. The following primary antibodies were used: chicken anti-DCC (1:1000), mouse anti-Trio (1:1000), rabbit anti-netrin-1 (1:1000), and rabbit anti-βIII-tubulin (1:2000). Sections were washed 3× in 1× PBS/0.05% Tween 20, incubated in secondary antibodies for 1 h at room temperature, washed 3× in 1× PBS, and mounted in Vectorshield containing DAPI. Sections were visualized using an Imager M2 upright microscope (Carl Zeiss) with an Axioplan fluorescence objective lenses. Images were processed with Zen software and Photoshop CS5 (Adobe). Cortical layers were subdivided based on cell density, and neuronal migration was scored from confocal images (>350 GFP+ neurons from at least five brains, per condition). Neuronal polarization of GFP+ cells in the intermediate zone were scored by assessing maximal projections of confocal Z-stacks taken at 0.5-µm increments to visualize processes out of plane (>250 GFP+ neurons from at least six brains, per condition). Non-polarized neurons were considered round cells without any processes.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed with GraphPad Prism 6 (GraphPad Software). The data are presented as the mean ± the SEM.

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