TITLE: A comparison of immunoglobulin IGHV, IGHD and IGHJ genes in wild-

derived and classical inbred mouse strains

Short running title: Germline IGH genes in inbred mice

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ABSTRACT

The genomes of classical inbred mouse strains include genes derived from all three major

subspecies of the house mouse, *Mus musculus*. We recently posited that genetic diversity in the

immunoglobulin heavy chain (IGH) gene loci of C57BL/6 and BALB/c mice reflect differences in

subspecies origin. To investigate this hypothesis, we conducted high-throughput sequencing of

IGH gene rearrangements to document IGH variable (IGHV), joining (IGHJ), and diversity

(IGHD) genes in four inbred wild-derived mouse strains (CAST/EiJ, LEWES/EiJ, MSM/MsJ, and

PWD/PhJ), and a single disease model strain (NOD/ShiLtJ), collectively representing genetic

backgrounds of several major mouse subspecies. A total of 341 germline IGHV sequences were

inferred in the wild-derived strains, including 247 not curated in the International

Immunogenetics Information System. In contrast, 83/84 inferred NOD IGHV genes had

previously been observed in C57BL/6 mice. Variability among the strains examined was

observed for only a single IGHJ gene, involving a description of a novel allele. In contrast,

unexpected variation was found in the IGHD gene loci, with four previously unreported IGHD

gene sequences being documented. Very few IGHV sequences of C57BL/6 and BALB/c mice

were shared with strains representing major subspecies, suggesting that their IGH loci may be

complex mosaics of genes of disparate origins. This suggests a similar level of diversity is likely

present in the IGH loci of other classical inbred strains. This must now be documented if we are

to properly understand inter-strain variation in models of antibody-mediated disease.

INTRODUCTION

Inbred mouse strains are critical to biomedical research, and many of the most important strains such as DBA, C57BL, C3H, CBA and BALB/c have now been in use for almost a century [1]. The C57BL and BALB/c strains have been particularly important for our understanding of the biochemistry and immunogenetics of immunoglobulins (IG) [2-4]. This understanding was achieved despite a lack of detailed knowledge of the antibody genes of these and other inbred laboratory mouse strains, and until recently it was thought that the genes present in these different strains were likely to be highly similar [5].

Mouse antibody genes were first identified using cell lines derived from BALB/c mice because of the availability of mineral-oil induced plasmacytomas from this strain [4]. The cataloguing of BALB/c antibody genes effectively ceased with the emergence of the C57BL/6 strain as the workhorse of transgenic and genomic studies. The IG heavy chain region (IGH) locus of the C57BL/6 strain was therefore the first to be sequenced and annotated [6, 7]. Part of the IGH locus of the 129S1 strain was also reported [8], before comprehensive genomic investigation of mouse germline IGHV genes essentially ceased. By this time, two databases had catalogued mouse IGH genes and apparent allelic variants of these genes: the VBASE2 [9] and IMGT [10] databases. A positional nomenclature was then developed by IMGT, based upon the mouse genome reference sequence, while an alternative positional nomenclature was developed by Johnston and colleagues, based upon an alternative assembly of the C57BL/6 genome [6]. A non-positional gene sequence identifier system was also developed by VBASE2 [9].

The study of IGH gene variation in humans followed a similar trajectory to that of the

mouse. Genes and likely allelic variants were reported over a twenty-year period,

starting in the late 1970s [11]. There was a sharp decline in the reporting of new

sequences once the complete human IGH locus was published in 1998 [12], but the

advent of high-throughput sequencing of human antibody genes reawakened interest in

the documentation of allelic variants [13, 14]. A surprising level of antibody gene variation,

including structural variation of the IGH locus, has since been shown within the human

population [15-18], and such variation can have important consequences for the

development of a suitable protective antibody repertoire [19, 20]. A similar exploration of the

immunoglobulin gene variation and antibody repertoires is now beginning in the mouse.

Many recently discovered allelic variants of IGH variable (IGHV), diversity (IGHD), and

joining (IGHJ) genes have been identified from sets of VDJ gene rearrangements, using

a process of inference [21]. Rearranged VDJ sequences are often affected by somatic

hypermutations, and such mutations are distributed throughout VDJ rearrangements.

When the same mismatch to a known germline gene is repeatedly observed in data

from a single subject, however, it is more likely that the nucleotide in question is a single

nucleotide variant (SNV), rather than being a nucleotide that has arisen by somatic

hypermutation [21]. When such mismatches are repeatedly seen in a large set of VDJ

rearrangements having diverse CDR3 regions and amplified from a single individual, the

inference of a previously undiscovered gene polymorphism may be made with

confidence. The discovery of allelic variants by inference is now a feature of many

human repertoire studies, and this is facilitated by a number of recently developed

utilities [22-25]. When this approach was applied to the mouse, the outcome was quite

unexpected.

Analysis of thousands of C57BL/6 VDJ rearrangements identified 99 of the 114

germline IGHV genes that have been reported to be functional in this strain [5]. It was

concluded that the remaining 16 genes are either non-functional or are expressed at

such low frequencies that they would only be detectable in deeper sequencing studies.

It was also concluded that all IGHV genes carried by any strain of inbred mouse that are

expressed at moderate frequencies should be readily determinable by inference from

VDJ gene datasets.

An analysis of BALB/c VDJ rearrangements was then performed, and 163 BALB/c IGHV

gene sequences were identified [5], only half of which were present in the IMGT database

[10]. The expression of ten unique IGHD sequences and four IGHJ genes was confirmed,

while three other reported BALB/c IGHD genes appeared to be non-functional. Although

the identification of BALB/c IGHV genes was almost certainly incomplete, the study

successfully captured the germline gene variability that accounts for almost all of the

genetic variation in the repertoire of rearranged heavy chain genes.

These were not the first striking differences seen in the IGH loci of BALB/c and C57BL/6

mice. Historically, these strains have been known to carry different IGH constant region

gene haplotypes, Igh-1[a] and Igh-1[b] respectively, and in the past these haplotypes were

determined serologically. Sequencing studies later showed striking differences between

the two haplotypes, particular at the IGHG2 gene locus. Controversy has surrounded

the evolutionary origins of this allotypic variation, but genomic evidence led to the

suggestion that it resulted from gene duplication and gene loss in different mouse

subspecies [26].

The differences, seen by Collins and colleagues [5], between the germline BALB/c and

C57BL/6 IGHV genes were so profound that it was proposed that the IGH genes of

these strains may have had their origins in different subspecies of the house mouse.

Three major subspecies of the house mouse have been described (*Mus musculus*

musculus, *M. m. domesticus* and *M. m. castaneus*) and subsequent analysis of genomic

SNV data supported the origins of BALB/c and C57BL/6 mice from *M. m. domesticus*

and *M. m. musculus* respectively [27] (see Table 1 and Supplementary figure 1).

To test the hypothesis that BALB/c and C57BL/6 IGH genes are derived from different

subspecies of the house mouse, in this study we first document IGHV, IGHD and IGHJ

germline genes in a number of wild-derived inbred mouse strains representing each of

the three major subspecies of the house mouse (CAST/EiJ: *M. m. castaneus*;

PWD/PhJ: *M. m. musculus*; LEWES/EiJ: *M. m. domesticus*), and of a wild-derived strain

(MSM/MsJ) that originated from *M. m. molossinus* mice that are generally considered to

be hybrids of *M. m. musculus* and *M. m. castaneus* (see Table I). We then compare

these genes to those of the C57BL/6 and BALB/c strains, in order to infer the ancestry

of these classical inbred strains. The wild-derived strains used in this study were

developed in the 1970s from pairs of wild mice from known locations, with the intention

that each inbred strain would carry a genome that was derived from a single subspecies

of the house mouse. To explore the differences between strains that appear, based

upon preliminary SNV analysis, to be derived from the same subspecies of the house

mouse, we also investigated the NOD/ShiLtJ inbred strain (Table 1 and Supplementary

figure 1).

Although it was not possible in this study to document all rearrangeable genes of the

IGH loci, coverage was sufficient to allow broad conclusions to be drawn. Unexpectedly,

the NOD and C57BL/6 gene IGHV, IGHD, and IGHJ loci appear to be almost exactly

the same, while striking differences exist between each wild-derived strain and both the

C57BL/6 and BALB/c strains. The divergence that was seen between the strains

suggests that the IGH loci of inbred mouse strains are likely to harbor so much genetic

variation that if the antibody responses of these and other classical inbred mouse

strains are to be properly understood, it will be essential to fully document their germline

genes. The divergence between the strains also suggests that a single positional mouse

gene nomenclature based upon the C57BL/6 genome reference sequence may fail to

properly represent the genes of many important inbred mouse strains.

RESULTS

Defining inferred IGH germline gene sets in diverse inbred mouse strains

To ensure the highest quality input data, prior to VDJ assignment we leveraged the

PacBio circular consensus (CCS2) algorithm to generate high quality circular consensus

reads for each sample. The average read length across the libraries sequenced was

22.5 Kb (Supplementary table 1). The long read lengths paired with the target amplicon

library size of ~1200 bp, resulted in a mean of 23.9 circular consensus passes per

amplicon (Supplementary table 1). Finally, we applied a Q30 cutoff to data from each

library, resulting in a total of 36782, 43522, 43173, 28136 and 43044 pre-mapped raw

reads for CAST/EiJ, LEWES/EiJ, MSM/MsJ, PWD/PhJ, and NOD/ShiLtJ, respectively,

with mean CCS read scores of 1 (Supplementary table 1). Each of these high quality

read datasets were used for IGHV, IGHD, and IGHJ gene assignment, clonal

assignment, and germline gene inference. Read data for each strain have been

submitted to the Sequence Read Archive (SRA) under the BioProject ID PRJNA533312.

The discovery stage of our inference pipeline for each strain was modelled after that

used previously [5] (see Materials and Methods below). Clonal assignment and clustering

resulted in a total of 5261 (CAST/EiJ), 5042 (LEWES/EiJ), 4374 (MSM/MsJ), 3827

(PWD/PhJ), and 3743 (NOD/ShiLtJ) unique clones; a single representative sequence

from each of the identified clones was then randomly selected to use for germline

inference. With these sequences as input, a total of 87, 78, 84, 92, and 84 germline

IGHV sequences were inferred for CAST/EiJ, LEWES/EiJ, and MSM/MsJ, PWD/PhJ,

and NOD/ShiLtJ, respectively (Figure 1a; Supplementary table 2). Each inferred

germline sequence was represented by at least 0.1% of the total clones observed in a

given strain; the numbers of clones representing each inference are provided in

Supplementary table 2 and plotted in Supplementary figure 2.

Across the wild-derived strains, the validity of some inferred germline IGHV sequences

was supported by their presence in the IMGT mouse reference directory

(http://www.imgt.org) (Figure 1a). This included 5 sequences in CAST/EiJ, 15 in

LEWES/EiJ, 62 in MSM/MsJ, and 12 in the PWD/PhJ strain. Sequences inferred from

the wild-derived strains were, however, dominated by non-IMGT alleles (247/341, 72%;

Figure 1a). Of special note, all but one of the NOD/ShiLtJ gene sequences have

previously been reported in the IMGT reference directory, and all of these 83 sequences

are reported there as C57BL/6 sequences.

Additional supporting evidence was found in other public sequence repositories for 44

non-IMGT sequences (Supplementary table 2). Two non-IMGT sequences were found

in the MSM/MsJ strain with perfect matches to sequences reported in either VBASE2

(http://www.vbase2.org/) or the NCBI reference set. This was also true for 2, 29, and 11

non-IMGT sequences inferred from CAST/EiJ, LEWES/EiJ, and PWD/PhJ, respectively.

The sets of germline inferences were used as starting databases for analysis by

IgDiscover [22], to seek further validate the inferences. This analysis confirmed 93% of the

inferences: 82/87 (94%), 68/78 (87%), 76/84 (90%), 86/92 (93%), and 84/84 (100%) of

the inferred sequences for CAST/EiJ, LEWES/EiJ, and MSM/MsJ, PWD/PhJ, and

NOD/ShiLtJ, respectively.

Most of the inferences in the wild-derived strains that were not confirmed by IgDiscover

were present at low copy number (Supplementary table 2 and Supplementary figure 3),

though a few unconfirmed sequences were seen at relatively high copy number,

including CAST-IGHV9-2 (28 clones), LEWES-IGHV3-2 (25 clones) and MSM-IGHV2-4

(50 clones). Many of the unconfirmed sequences were supported by other secondary

evidence from public databases, or were also seen in other strains from this study

(Supplementary table 2). This included seven sequences that are present among

whole-genome shotgun sequence data generated by the Mouse Genome Project

(https://www.sanger.ac.uk/science/data/mouse-genomes-project). Just 11 of the

sequences unconfirmed by IgDiscover lacked additional evidence supporting their

validity, representing only ~2.5% of the total number of sequences identified in our

dataset. Issues of false negatives by IgDiscover, and other related inference tools, have

been reported, but have not been fully explained [24]. As a consequence, after additional

manual review of our results, the full sets of inferences were retained and are reported

here.

In some cases, novel sequences from wild-derived strains were quite divergent from

published IGHV sequences, varying from 87.02% to 99.66% sequence identity. This

was also dependent on strain in that, among the wild-derived strains, inferred germlines

from CAST/EiJ, LEWES/EiJ, and PWD/PhJ exhibited much greater sequence

divergence from IMGT alleles than sequences inferred in MSM/MsJ (Figure 1b).

The counts of genes within the different IGHV families were generally comparable

across the five strains (Figure 1c), with some exceptions. The germline repertoires of all

strains were clearly dominated by the IGHV1 family. However, the numbers of IGHV

genes in other subgroups were more variable. For example, the repertoire of CAST/EiJ

harbored fewer IGHV2 genes relative to the other strains, but greater numbers of

IGHV3, IGHV6, IGHV9, and IGHV14 genes. At least one representative germline

sequence of subfamilies IGHV1-IGHV3, IGHV5-IGHV10, and IGHV14 was inferred from

all strains; in contrast, sequences of the remaining subfamilies, which are all small

subfamilies in the C57BL/6 strain, were absent in at least one strain. IGHV13 and

IGHV15 sequences were only observed in two of the five strains. Whether this

represents a genuine lack of functional IGHV subfamily sequences in these strains (e.g.

as a result of pseudogenization or genomic deletion), or whether this is due to under

sampling of these repertoires is not clear. Deeper sequencing and ultimately

comprehensive genomic characterization in each strain would be needed to fully assess

this. Consistent with the general subfamily distributions observed, the majority of non-

IMGT sequences in CAST/EiJ (n=32), LEWES/EiJ (n=32), and PWD/PhJ (n=39) were

represented by IGHV1 genes (Figure 1d). In contrast, however, although the MSM/MsJ

repertoire was also dominated by IGHV1, the majority of non-IMGT sequences

identified in that strain were from IGHV2 (n=9) and IGHV5 (n=9) (Figure 1d).

Analysis was also performed to identify previously unreported polymorphism of IGHD

and IGHJ genes, and to define the sets of IGHD and IGHJ genes in each mouse strain.

Analysis of IGHD gene alignments led to the identification of eight or nine IGHD genes

in each of the strains, with four novel sequences being identified as likely allelic variants

of IGHD1-1 (n=2), IGHD2-3 (n=1) and IGHD2-12 (n=1) (Figure 2a and Supplementary

table 3). These polymorphisms could be determined with absolute certainty because the

critical nucleotides that distinguish them from previously reported IGHD sequences are

sufficiently distant from the IGHD gene ends. No variants were identified with

differences in the 5' or 3' terminal nucleotides of the IGHD genes, but we cannot

exclude the possibility that our analysis failed to detect such variation.

The IGHD genes of NOD/ShiLtJ were shown to be identical to those of the C57BL/6

mouse. The MSM/MsJ and PWD/PhJ strains share 6 IGHD genes with the C57BL/6

strain, and carry two and three additional unique genes respectively. The PWD/PhJ

strain expresses a variant of the 26 nucleotide IGHD2-12 gene (Figure 2a and

Supplementary table 3). The LEWES/EiJ strain shares five sequences with the BALB/c

strain, but also expresses four additional sequences, including a previously unreported

variant of the IGHD1-1 gene. This variant differs from the IGHD1-1*01 sequence at two

positions (Figure 2a and Supplementary table 3). The CAST/EiJ strain also expresses a

novel IGHD1-1 variant, distinct from that observed in LEWES/EiJ, as well as six genes

that are expressed by other strains in the study. Only CAST/EiJ expresses the IGHD2-

13*01 gene. The IGHD4-1*01 and IGHD4-1*02 are highly similar gene segments

sharing 9 of 11 and 9 of 10 nucleotides, respectively. In all strains, full length examples

of both IGHD4-1 variants are observed, but the shorter IGHD4-1*02 is difficult to confirm

with confidence as such a sequence can be derived by trimming 2 nucleotides from the

5' end of *01, followed by the non-template addition of 'c'.

All strains were found to carry four functional IGHJ genes, which were each used at

sufficient frequency to make their identification unequivocal (Figure 2b and

Supplementary table 4). Only in CAST/EiJ was there evidence of a novel allele

(IGHJ2_var). This novel allele harbored a single nucleotide difference from the closest

known allele in the IMGT reference directory (Figure 2b). The other CAST/EiJ IGHJ

genes were shared with the other strains and were identical to the genes carried by

C57BL/6 mice. No strain carried the BALB/c IGHJ1*01 allele[5].

Extensive IGHV germline diversity and limited overlap between strains

We next investigated the extent of overlap of IGHV sequences among the surveyed

strains. The sets of germline genes inferred from each inbred strain were compared to

sequences identified in all other strains to determine how many sequences were

identical between strains. Comparisons were additionally made with previously

published inferences from BALB/c mice (n=163)[5], and with the IMGT repertoire of

functional C57BL/6 sequences (n=114). Surprisingly little overlap was observed

between strains, and the majority of inferred germline sequences were unique to a

single strain (Figure 3a). Among the wild-derived strains surveyed, CAST/EiJ had the

highest number of unique germline sequences (76/87 sequences). On the other hand,

83 shared sequences were observed in NOD/ShiLtJ and C57BL/6, with 48 of these 83

sequences being additionally shared by MSM/MsJ. A single sequence was identified in

five different strains (LEWES/EiJ, NOD/ShiLtJ, CAST/EiJ, PWD/PhJ, and C57BL/6;

Supplementary table 2).

We further explored interstrain IGHV sequence relationships by estimating the average

sequence similarities of IGHV sets between strains. Consistent with sequence overlaps

presented in Figure 3a, we noted a range of mean pairwise sequence identities,

depending on the strains in question. For example, sequences in MSM/MsJ, C57BL/6,

and NOD/ShiLtJ, strains which share the most identical sequences with one another

(Figure 3a), also have high average pairwise sequence identities (>99%; Figure 3b; see

also Supplementary figure 4 for full pairwise comparisons). This is in contrast to mean

identities observed for all other pairwise strain comparisons, which ranged from 94.8%

to 97.1%. These levels of identity also generally matched the number of shared

sequences between strains. For example, LEWES/EiJ shared the most identical

sequences with BALB/c, and among all pairwise sequence comparisons between

LEWES/EiJ and other strains, the highest mean sequence identity was with the BALB/c

germline set (97.1%; Figure 3b).

No attempt was made in this study to determine whether or not any pairs of highly

similar sequences could be allelic variants of a single gene. In light of known structural

variation in the IGH loci of C57BL/6 and BALB/c mice [7], we must assume that significant

structural variation is possible between the loci of the wild-derived strains reported here.

In a locus where gene duplications and deletions, as well as pseudogenization, are

central drivers of evolution, and where many sets of highly similar genes are found in

each strain, the documentation of allelic variants of any gene will require comprehensive

genomic sequencing.

Implications of inferred germline references on repertoire alignments

The re-analysis of the VDJ datasets from each strain using the strain-specific inferred

repertoires dramatically impacted upon the repertoire-level alignment metrics (Table 2).

This was especially true for CAST/EiJ which was most poorly represented in the IMGT

reference directory. Considering the IgBLAST output for the two different repertoires,

just 3.8% of IGHVs and 49.4% of IGHJs were unmutated if the IMGT reference directory

was used for analysis. This increased to 87.8% and 88.2% for IGHV and IGHJ

respectively using the CAST/EiJ inferred germline references. LEWES/EiJ and

PWD/PhJ also experienced significant improvements for the IGHV, shifting the

frequency of unmutated reads within the IgM repertoires from 35.6 to 88.6% and 13.9 to

82.9%, respectively.

DISCUSSION

This study was undertaken to investigate the hypothesis that IGH genes of subspecies

of the house mouse are highly divergent, and to trace the subspecies origins of the IGH

loci of BALB/c and C57BL/6 inbred mice. Since the mice that were used to establish the

classical inbred strains of laboratory mice came from diverse and usually

undocumented sources, we reasoned that differences in the loci of the various

subspecies of the house mouse could explain the marked differences that were

previously reported between the sets of IGHV genes found in the BALB/c and C57BL/6

strains. To test this hypothesis, we inferred the germline IGHV, IGHD and IGHJ genes

of wild-derived strains representing each of the three major subspecies of the house

mouse (CAST/EiJ: *M. m. castaneus*; PWD/PhJ: *M. m. musculus*; LEWES/EiJ: *M. m.*

domesticus), and of a wild-derived strain (MSM/MsJ) that originated from *M. m.*

molossinus mice that are generally considered to be natural hybrids of *M. m. musculus*

and *M. m. castaneus* (see Table I). Whereas SNV-inferred haplotypes reported by

Yang and colleagues [28] supported the reported subspecies origins of CAST/EiJ,

PWD/PhJ, and LEWES/EiJ, these data suggested that the MSM/MsJ IGH locus is *M. m.*

musculus-derived, with a SNV profile that is little different to that of the C57BL/6 mouse

(see Table I and Supplementary figure 1). The IGH locus of the MSM/MsJ strain was

therefore investigated in the hope that it would shed light on genetic variation within the

loci of *M. m. musculus*-derived strains. For the same reason, the NOD/ShiLtJ strain was

also included in this study, because SNV analysis suggested that it too carries a

C57BL/6-like IGH haplotype.

In general, among the wild-derived strains surveyed in this study we observed

surprisingly little overlap between IGHV sequences. While this was expected in

comparisons of strains predicted to carry IGH loci originating from different subspecies,

intriguingly there were notable differences in IGHV sequence sets between strains

carrying loci of the same predicted subspecies. For example, PWD/PhJ mice only

shared 13 (~14%) IGHV gene sequences with the C57BL/6, NOD/ShiLtJ, and MSM/MsJ

strains, despite the fact that all of these strains were predicted to share IGH loci of *M.*

m. musculus origin. In fact, the PWD/PhJ strain shared almost the same number of

IGHV sequences with the CAST/EiJ, LEWES/EiJ, and BALB/c strains (predicted to

represent the *M. m. castaneus, M. m. domesticus* and *M. m. domesticus* subspecies

respectively). PWD/PhJ IGHV sequences were also no more similar to sequences of

other *M. m. musculus*-derived strains than to *M. m. castaneus*- or *M. m. domesticus*-

derived strains. Similarly, although SNV analysis suggested that BALB/c and

LEWES/EiJ mice both carry *M. m. domesticus*-derived IGH loci, only 13 (~16%) of the

identified LEWES/EiJ IGHV sequences are shared with the BALB/c strain. LEWES/EiJ

IGHV sequences were collectively most similar to BALB/c genes, relative to the other

strains sequenced here, but it is difficult to believe that the IGH loci of both strains are

derived in their entirety from shared *M. m. domesticus* ancestors.

The IGHV gene sequences of the MSM/MsJ strain were particularly surprising. Few of

the 84 MSM sequences were seen in any of the other three wild-derived strains. As

expected, none of these sequences were amongst the 78 IGHV genes identified in the

M. m. domesticus-derived LEWES/EiJ strain; however, there was also little identity with

sequences identified in either of the subspecies that are said to have given rise to the

hybrid *M. m. molossinus* mice. Only 10 of the 84 MSM/MsJ IGHV sequences matched

those seen in the *M. m. musculus*-derived PWD/PhJ strain, and only 4 sequences

matched those in the *M. m. castaneus*-derived CAST/EiJ strain. Instead, substantial

identity was seen between MSM/MsJ mice and inbred C57BL/6 and NOD/ShiLtJ mice,

that SNV analysis suggests are both *M. m. musculus*-derived (Supplementary figure 1).

Genomic sequencing will be required to determine whether or not this identity is a

consequence of an unreported breeding accident in the history of the MSM/MsJ colony.

Analysis of the expression of IGHJ genes showed little variation between strains,

though interestingly, no strain shared the expression of the BALB/c IGHJ1*01

sequence. Analysis of IGHD gene expression was more informative. The NOD/ShiLtJ

mice appear to carry an IGHD locus that is identical to that of the C57BL/6 strain. Not

only does this analysis support the conclusions from the IGHV gene analysis, but it

gives confidence in the inference process itself. The IGHD genes of the MSM strain

were also similar to those of the C57BL/6 strain, with seven of the nine C57BL/6 IGHD

sequences being shared. Against expectations, just five of the ten BALB/c IGHD

sequences were shared by *M. m. domesticus*-derived LEWES mice, while 8 sequences

were shared with the *M. m. musculus*-derived PWD strain. We cannot rule out the

possibility that this analysis failed to identify SNVs in either the terminal 5' or 3'

nucleotides of the IGHD sequences, though we believe this is unlikely. It has been

shown that the inference process is often unable to accurately identify terminal

nucleotides in AIRR-Seq data [29]. On the other hand, the antibody repertoire of the

mouse is strongly shaped by joining at sequences of short homology [30] and there may

be strong evolutionary pressure maintaining, for example, the identity between the 3'

ends of the IGHD2 gene family and the 5' ends of some IGHJ sequences, thereby

preventing the development of variation in the terminal IGHD gene nucleotides.

The demonstration that NOD/ShiLtJ mice carry IGHV, IGHD and IGHJ loci that are so

closely related to those of the C57BL/6 strain is intriguing and also quite unexpected,

because no direct relationship between these strains has been reported. The

NOD/ShiLtJ mouse was derived in the 1970s from cataract-prone CTS mice, which in

turn were developed in the 1960s from outbred Swiss mice [31, 32]. C57BL/6 mice, on the

other hand, were developed in the 1920s by Clarence Little from the progeny of a pair of

'fancy mice' [33, 34]. It is difficult to believe that the NOD and C57BL/6 loci could have

arisen independently by the chance selection of unrelated outbred founder pairs. The

nearly identical sets of IGHV genes in the C57BL/6 and NOD/ShiLtJ mice are more

suggestive of introgression, with a C57BL/6-like locus being introduced into the

ancestors of the modern NOD strain by outcrossing. This notion is further supported by

the observation that NOD clusters together with C57BL/6, based on mitochondrial SNV,

but is rather distant from the strain based on chromosome Y SNV [28]. This hints of a

contamination via the maternal line. Of note, this would not be the first reported

breeding accident involving the NOD lineage [35].

If the IGHV and IGHD genes of the LEWES/EiJ, PWD/PhJ and CAST/EiJ mice are

accepted as being broadly representative of the three major subspecies of the house

mouse, then neither the BALB/c strain nor the C57BL/6 strain can be unequivocally

linked with one or other of the three major subspecies of the house mouse. It may be

that the IGH loci of these and other classical inbred strains have a mosaic structure,

representing alternating blocks of genes that are potentially polymorphic within one of

the three major mouse subspecies, or divergent between them. It is also possible that

the IGH loci of these strains include haplotype blocks derived from other lineages of the

house mouse, or even from other Mus species such as *M. spretus*. Other subspecies of

M. m. musculus probably exist, and a number have been proposed, such as *M. m.*

bactrianus and *M. m. gentilulus* [36, 37].

The divergence patterns of the IGH loci of the mouse strains reported here can be

considered in the context of the allelic diversity that has been reported in humans. For

example, a comparison of the two published fully sequenced human IGHV haplotypes

revealed that, of the 68 non-redundant functional/ORF IGHV sequences identified

across the two haplotypes, only 22 were observed in both, accounting for both allelic

and structural variants [18]. In addition, although the population genetics of the human

IGH locus remains relatively uncertain [18-20], some indirect measures of diversity are

available to us. One measure of diversity is provided by consideration of heterozygous

loci in individuals who have been genotyped by the analysis of VDJ rearrangements.

When heterozygosity was explored at 50 IGHV gene loci in 98 individuals, only 5 genes

were heterozygous in more than 50% of individuals, and only 19 genes were

heterozygous in more than 20% of individuals [15]. However, it is notable that more

extreme examples of IGHV heterozygosity have been reported in some populations; for

example, a study of genomic DNA in 28 South Africans characterized >50 IGHV alleles

in all but two individuals [16]. This same study characterized 123 alleles that were not

present in IMGT. Similarly, a study of 10 individuals from Papua New Guinea identified

17 previously unreported IGHV sequences; however, in each individual, all but two or

three sequences had previously been reported from studies in Europe, America and

Australia [17]. Collectively, these data suggest that there are many alleles common across

different populations, but in some cases, it is likely that some alleles will also be more or

less frequent in, or even private to specific populations. Taken together, it seems likely

that the level of IGH diversity in inbred laboratory mice could be more extensive than

what has been observed in human studies conducted to date. This may be expected

given that our data suggest that IG genes present in many of the strains in use today

are likely to harbor variation originating from many different subspecies.

If we are to properly understand the antibody repertoires of the major laboratory strains,

their IGH loci will all need to be separately investigated. Unfortunately, existing projects

such as the Mouse Genome Project (MGP) are unlikely to provide the necessary data.

The MGP is currently sequencing the genomes of 16 inbred mouse strains, but it is

unlikely that such assemblies will lead to suitably reliable reference sequences for the

IGH locus in the short term, particularly without targeted and focused efforts that

attempt to deal with the complexity and associated technical issues of these regions.

Thus, immediate advances in our knowledge of the IGH loci of inbred strains will likely

come from the inference of genes from AIRR-seq data. The resulting lack of knowledge

of non-coding regions, and the lack of positional data, may make it difficult to decipher

relationships between some strains, but it should provide the basic information

regarding germline genes that is needed for accurate repertoire studies. Indeed, from

our reanalyses (Table 2) of data based on the novel germline sets reported here, it is

clear that strain-specific data will be needed in many cases if we are to ensure precision

in AIRR-seq studies of strains other than C57BL/6.

Deeper sequencing will also be required if a more complete documentation of the

available repertoire of germline genes in any inbred strain is to be determined.

Nevertheless, the partial documentation of the IGH loci reported here, and the strain

differences seen are sufficient to raise the possibility that the IGHV locus may contribute

to strain-related differences in mouse models of human disease. Allelic variants have

been associated with differences in disease susceptibility of rats [38] and humans [19]. IGHV

sequence variability might also contribute to the differences that have been reported in

the susceptibility of inbred mouse strains to both infectious [39, 40] and autoimmune

diseases [41].

The discovery of striking differences in the number of apparently functional IGHV genes

between the C57BL/6 and the BALB/c strains first raised the possibility that the

continued use of a positional nomenclature system for IGHV genes could be

problematic [5]. The results presented here confirm that this is the case. The C57BL/6

locus is unable to serve as a map for IGHV genes from other strains, and this appears

to be the case even for inbred strains that were shown in earlier SNV analysis to carry

M. m. musculus-derived IGH loci. A non-positional nomenclature should therefore be

developed. Attention should also be paid to the light chain loci carried by different

mouse strains. We have shown by SNV analysis that the three major subspecies of the

house mouse may all have contributed to the kappa loci of the major strains of inbred

laboratory mice [42]. If the kappa and lambda loci of laboratory mice are shown to have

the same kind of strain to strain variability as we have shown here for the IGH locus,

then a new non-positional nomenclature will be required for all the genes of the IG loci.

METHODS

Antibody gene repertoire sequencing

Whole dissected spleens, preserved in RNAlater, were obtained from female mice from

Jackson Laboratories (https://www.jax.org) for five inbred strains (CAST/EiJ [JAX stock

#000928], n=1; LEWES/EiJ [JAX stock #002798], n=1; PWD/PhJ [JAX stock #004660],

n=1; MSM/MsJ [JAX stock #003719], n=1; NOD/ShiLtJ [JAX stock #001976], n=1). An

individual mouse was studied from each strain, as the power of this kind of investigation

comes from sequencing depth rather than from the investigation of biological replicates.

Each VDJ rearrangement provides independent support for the presence of a gene

segment in the genome.

Total RNA was extracted from a section of each spleen using the RNeasy Mini kit

(Qiagen, Cat. No. 74104; Germantown, MD). For each strain, 5' RACE first-strand

cDNA synthesis was conducted using the SMARTer RACE cDNA Amplification Kit

(Takara Bio, Cat. No. 634858; Mountain View, CA), with an input amount of 1 µg of

RNA per sample. Rearranged VDJ-IgM amplicons were generated using a single IgM

oligo   positioned   in   the   CH3   region   of   the   mouse   IGHM   gene   (5'-

CAGATCCCTGTGAGTCACAGTACAC-3';   10 µM),   paired   with   a   universal   primer

(Takara Bio; 5'-AAGCAGTGGTATCAACGCAGAGT-3'; 10 µM). First-strand cDNA for

each strain was amplified using Thermo Fisher Phusion HF Buffer (Thermo Fisher, Cat.

No. F530S; Waltham, MA) for 30 PCR cycles. Amplicons were run on 2% agarose gel

for size confirmation. Final amplicons were used to generate SMRTbell template

libraries and each library was sequenced across 2 SMRTcells on a Pacific Biosciences

RSII system using P6/C4 chemistry and 240 minute movies (Pacific Biosciences; Menlo

Park, CA).

Data processing and germline gene inference

Reads from each RSII run were combined and processed using the CCS2 algorithm.

CCS2 reads of Q30 or greater were processed with pRESTO [43] v0.5.1 as follows: 1)

Reads without a universal primer were removed using a maximum primer match error

rate of 0.2 and a maximum template-switch error rate of 0.5 to de-duplicate the reads;

2) Reads without an IgM primer were removed using a maximum primer match error

rate of 0.2 and a maximum template-switch error rate of 0.5; 3) Duplicate sequences

from the FASTQ files were removed using the default value of a maximum of 20

ambiguous nucleotides. Following pRESTO processing, IGHV gene assignments were

noted after mapping reads to the IMGT germline database using IMGT/HighV-QUEST

version 1.6.0 (20 June 2018) [44]. Resulting IMGT summary output was processed using

Change-O v0.4.3 [45]. Reads representing incomplete or non-productive VDJ

rearrangements were discarded. All sequences in each sample were assigned to clones

using the distToNearest function in the SHazaM R package and the DefineClones

function in Change-O [45]. A single member of each clonal group was randomly selected

for downstream analyses.

For germline IGHV gene inference for each strain, the sequences representing the

strain's clonal groups were first clustered based on the IGHV gene assignment and

associated percent identity of the alignment to the nearest IMGT reference directory

gene sequence. Sequences shorter than the 138 base pair (bp) length of the shortest

reported functional IGHV sequence in IMGT were excluded from the analysis.

Consensus IGHV gene sequences were then determined for each cluster using CD-HIT

(cd-hit-est v4.6.8) [46] requiring that a given inference be represented by at least 0.1% of

total clonal groups identified in the strain's dataset. To be conservative, consensus

sequences for each inferred germline were trimmed to the shortest sequence

representative in the identified cluster. If the percent match identity to the closest IMGT

germline gene sequence was <95%, then the alignments were manually inspected for

evidence of chimeric PCR amplification [47].

An inferred germline IGHV sequence reference dataset was generated for each strain.

Predicted germline IGHV gene databases from Q30 datasets were assessed using one

iteration of IgDiscover v0.10 [22]. For the analysis of each strain, inferred germline IGHV

sequences generated from our clustering method were used as the IGHV gene

database for IgDiscover. Changes made to the default configuration were as follows: 1)

'race_g' set to 'true' to account for a run of G nucleotides at the beginning of the

sequence 2) 'stranded' set to 'false' because the forward primer was not always located

at the 5' end, and 3) 'ignore_j' set to 'true' to ignore whether or not a joining (J) gene

had been assigned for a newly discovered IGHV gene.

All   inferred   germline   sequences   were   compared,   using   BLAST

(https://blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/) [48], to sequences in the following databases: IMGT

(http://www.imgt.org), VBASE2 (http://www.vbase2.org/), and the NCBI non-redundant

nucleotide sequence collection. Germline sets were compared across strains using

BLAT [49]. Perfect matches between sequences of different strains required full length

alignments of the query sequence at 100% identity; sequence length variation at the 3'

end of query and subject sequences was allowed. Calculations of mean IGHV

sequence identities between strains were computed by taking the mean of the

sequence identities for the best pair-wise hits of all genes in the smaller germline set of

two strains being compared. For the comparison between IGHV sequences of

NOD/ShiLtJ and MSM/MsJ, which had an equal number of inferred germline genes, we

opted to present the mean sequence identity using the NOD/ShiLtJ germline set.

Germline IGHD genes were inferred for each strain by further analysis of the junction

sequences from each strain's clone group representatives. Junctional sequences as

defined by IMGT/HighV-QUEST from the Change-O tables were compared against the

full IMGT mouse IGHD reference directory (Release 201918-4; 9 May 2019). Reference

directory genes that share identical coding sequences were grouped to a single entry

for comparison to the VDJ junctions. For each reference IGHD gene all substrings of

length 5 or more were compared to the all junction sub-sequences of the same length.

Matches between the IGHD and junctional substrings were retained if the hamming

distance was 2 or less, with the exception of rejecting the alignment if the pattern of

mismatches fell into either of the following categories; the mismatches were in the first

or final two positions of the substrings, or the third and fourth positions were both

mismatched, or the third and fourth to last positions were both mismatched. These

heuristics were implemented to avoid patterns of mismatch that arise from mis-

alignment of non-template encoded N additions in circumstances where the IGHD has

undergone exonuclease trimming. For each VDJ junction the set of IGHD substrings

that maximised length and minimising mismatches were included in the analysis.

Multiple IGHD substring matches were permitted per VDJ junction.

Counts for observed IGHD substring matches across each strain's dataset of clone

representations were tallied for analysis. Analysis considered all IGHD substring

matches with fewer than 10 exonuclease removals and with minimum lengths of 10

nucleotides (or 9 for IGHD4-4). The presence of a reference IGHD was accepted if

abundant, full-length matches were observed within a strain's datasets (generally in

excess of 10 observations). For reference gene-derived substrings that included

mismatches, if the same mismatch was observed across 80% of the substrings for the

IGHD gene then this was taken as putative evidence of the presence of SNVs in the

germline gene. If the mismatches could be explained by mis-assignment of another

IGHD which was already confirmed by full-length, perfect matches then the putative

variant was dismissed. In the absence of such mis-assignment and with the support of

the repeated detection of the SNV(s) associated with varied patterns of exonuclease

removal, a new IGHD variant was defined. For strains with new IGHD variants, the

substring analysis was repeated using the IMGT reference directory amended to

replace the IMGT gene(s) with the novel variant(s). Final tabulations were made from

these strain adjusted references.

IGHJ genes for each strain were inferred by analysis of the subset of clone

representatives for each strain that had unmutated IGHV regions in order to reduce the

likelihood of the IGHJ containing somatic point mutations. IGHJs that were more than 2

nucleotides shorter than the closest germline reference sequence were also excluded.

For each strain's dataset, IGHJ gene sequences were then clustered using CD-HIT,

requiring exact matches. Consensus sequences from each cluster were then examined

based on the number of supporting sequences. Within each strain, the top four clusters

based on their observed frequency in the repertoire were taken to represent the IGHJ

genes of that strain. Any additional clusters that had a frequency representing >10% of

one of the top four IGHJ gene clusters were also further examined. In only one case did

this occur (in CAST/EiJ); this sequence discarded because it was was determined to be

a derivative of one of the top four clusters from this strain, and to include divergent

bases originating from 5' NP addition.

Finally, each strain's dataset was re-aligned using strain-specific IGHV, IGHD and IGHJ

references. Strain specific references included the sequences listed in Supplemental

tables 2, 3 and 4. IMGT/HighV-QUEST was unable to be utilised for this analysis as it

does not permit specification of the non-IMGT germline reference sets. Alignments were

therefore performed with stand-alone IgBLAST [50] (version 1.14.0) with a reward score of

+1 and a mismatch penalty of -3. Scoring was adjusted in this way due to length

differences (283 - 303) for the inferred IGHVs due to conservative 3` end trimming. The

default +1/-1 scoring favours longer mismatched alignments, over shorter unmutated

alignments, even when the shorter alignments are full length with respect to the inferred

gene. The IgBLAST mouse auxiliary data file was amended to include the novel IGHJ2

variant from CAST/EiJ using the same offsets as IGHJ2*01. IgBLAST with the same

parameters was also used to align that VDJ datasets against the IMGT reference

directory to distinguish the contributions of the alignment algorithm and the germline

reference.

Table 1: The intended *Mus musculus* subspecies origins of inbred strains of mice, and

the subspecies identity of the IGH loci of inbred strains, as determined by SNV analysis.

Strain	Subspecies Origin	Subspecies identity by SNV analysis
PWD/PhJ	*M. m. musculus*	*M. m. musculus*
LEWES/EiJ	*M. m. domesticus*	*M. m. domesticus*
CAST/EiJ	*M. m. castaneus*	*M. m. castaneus*
MSM/MsJ	*M. m. mollosinus*	*M. m. musculus*
C57BL/6	N/A	*M. m. musculus*
BALB/c	N/A	*M. m. domesticus*
NOD/ShiLtJ	N/A	*M. m. musculus*

Table 2: IgBLAST results using the IMGT database compared to novel strain-specific repertoires characterized in the current study.

			IGHV				IGHD				IGHJ			
			IGHV (n) *	unmutated IGHVs (n) ^	unmuted reads (%) #	mean SHM (%)	IGHD (n) *	unmutated IGHDs (n) ^	unmuted reads (%) #	mean SHM (%)	IGHJ (n) *	unmutated IGHJs (n) ^	unmuted reads (%) #	mean SHM (%)
IgBLAST	IMGT	CAST	109	30	3.8%	2.21%	16	16	87.9%	0.92%	8	4	49.4%	1.45%
		LEWES	97	27	35.6%	1.59%	16	16	90.4%	1.17%	7	7	88.8%	0.52%
		MSM	110	86	71.3%	0.52%	17	17	98.3%	0.12%	7	6	90.7%	0.39%
		NOD	98	96	82.7%	0.10%	16	15	96.4%	0.22%	6	5	93.2%	0.18%
		PWD	121	33	13.9%	1.91%	17	17	96.8%	0.16%	6	5	89.3%	0.45%
IgBLAST	inferred	CAST	87	87	87.8%	0.25%	9	9	96.2%	0.30%	4	4	88.2%	0.49%
		LEWES	78	78	88.6%	0.20%	11	11	97.8%	0.18%	4	4	88.3%	0.53%
		MSM	84	84	88.4%	0.25%	9	9	98.3%	0.12%	4	4	90.2%	0.39%
		NOD	84	84	82.9%	0.14%	9	9	97.6%	0.16%	4	4	93.1%	0.18%
		PWD	92	92	82.9%	0.32%	10	10	97.2%	0.19%	4	4	88.8%	0.45%

* number of germline genes from reference
^ number of germline genes from reference with 0 mismatches
# percent of reads assigned to unambigious germline reference with 0 mismatches

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors do not have any conflicts of interest to declare.

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FIGURE LEGENDS

Figure 1. Comparisons of inferred germline IGHV sequences from each strain

(CAST/EiJ, n=1; LEWES/EiJ, n=1; MSM/MsJ, n=1; PWD/PhJ, n=1; NOD/ShiLtJ, n=1) to

those represented in the mouse IMGT database (imgt.org). (**a**) Donut plots depicting the

proportion of inferred germline sequences from each strain that align to a known IMGT

allele with 100% match identity. (**b**) Boxplots depicting the sequence similarities of

inferred germline sequences from each strain when compared to the closest known

IMGT allele. (**c**) The count of identified germline sequences from each strain

representing known mouse IGHV gene subfamilies. (**d**) The count of non-IMGT inferred

germline sequences in each strain, partitioned by IGHV gene subfamily.

Figure 2. IGHD and IGHJ inferred germline sequences among mouse strains

(CAST/EiJ, n=1; LEWES/EiJ, n=1; MSM/MsJ, n=1; PWD/PhJ, n=1; NOD/ShiLtJ, n=1).

(**a**) Tile plot depicting the presence of IGHD genes across the different mouse strain.

Filled black cells indicate the presence of the gene. For novel variants, the sequences

are listed along with the *01 reference allele, with nucleotide differences for the variant

indicated in uppercase bold. (**b**) Tile plot depicting the presence of IGHJ genes across

the different mouse strains. Black cells indicate that a gene was confirmed as present in

a strain, white indicates that a gene wasn't confirmed for a strain and gray indicates

genes whose presence remains uncertain. For the novel variant, the sequence is listed

along with the *01 reference allele, with nucleotide differences for the variant indicated

in uppercase bold.

Figure 3. Relationships of IGHV inferred germline sequences among mouse strains

(CAST/EiJ, n=1; LEWES/EiJ, n=1; MSM/MsJ, n=1; PWD/PhJ, n=1; NOD/ShiLtJ, n=1).

(**a**) Upset plot depicting the size of the germline set from each of the analyzed strains

(left), as well as the numbers of sequences either unique to a given strain or shared

among strains (identical sequences). (**b**) Heatmap depicting the mean percent

sequence match identities among inferred IGHV germline sets for each pair-wise strain

comparison (see also Supplementary figure 4).

Supplementary figure 1. Single nucleotide variant (SNV) data from the IGHV gene

region (chr12:114700000-117270000) suggest common subspecies origins for IGHV

genomic haplotypes of inbred and wild-derived laboratory mouse strains. This figure

depicts the predicted subspecies origins (*Mus musculus domesticus*; *M. m. musculus*;

M. m. castaneous) of IGHV haplotypes in the six strains analyzed in the present study.

Here, we consider the relationships between inferred germline IGHV gene sets of these

strains in the context of these predicted subspecific origins. Data presented in this figure

were obtained from the Mouse Phylogeny Viewer [1] (https://msub.csbio.unc.edu/, based

on previously published whole-genome SNV data [2]. The bars above each haplotype

depict the locations of "diagnostic" SNVs used to make subspecies determinations.

Supplementary figure 2. Counts of identified clones representing inferred germline

sequences from each strain sequenced in this study. Additional information, including

the nucleotide sequences of each inferred germline presented in these plots, can be

found in Supplemental Table 2.

Supplementary figure 3. Boxplots depicting the numbers of clones representing each

inferred IGHV germline sequence in CAST/EiJ, LEWES/EiJ, MSM/MsJ, and PWD/PhJ,

respectively. Data for each strain are partitioned by whether the inferred sequence was

supported by IgDiscover. With only a few exceptions, the inferred IGHV sequences in

each strain lacking support by IgDiscover ("No") were represented by fewer clones in

our analysis on average than those that were supported by IgDiscover ("Yes").

Supplementary figure 4. Violin plots depicting the best percent match identities among

inferred IGHV germline sets for each pair-wise strain comparison. Individual points

within each violin plot represent the best percent identity value of an IGHV gene

segment as compared to all genes in the other strain to which it was compared.

Supplementary table 1. Per-strain AIRR-seq library summary statistics for CAST/EiJ,

LEWES/EiJ, MSM/MsJ, PWD/PhJ, and NOD/ShiLtJ.

Supplementary table 2. Complete database of inferred germline IGHV sequences from

CAST/EiJ, LEWES/EiJ, MSM/MsJ, PWD/PhJ, and NOD/ShiLtJ.

Supplementary table 3. Complete dataset of inferred germline IGHD sequences from

CAST/EiJ, LEWES/EiJ, MSM/MsJ, PWD/PhJ, and NOD/ShiLtJ.

Supplementary table 4. Complete dataset of inferred germline IGHJ sequences from

CAST/EiJ, LEWES/EiJ, MSM/MsJ, PWD/PhJ, and NOD/ShiLtJ.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

a

b