

1 **Innexin function dictates the spatial relationship between distal somatic cells in the**  
2 ***Caenorhabditis elegans* gonad without impacting the germline stem cell pool**

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20 # co-corresponding

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22

23 **Abstract**

24

25 Gap-junctional signaling mediates myriad cellular interactions in metazoans. Yet, how gap  
26 junctions control the positioning of cells in organs is not well understood. Innexins compose gap  
27 junctions in invertebrates and affect organ architecture. Here, we investigate the roles of gap-  
28 junctions in controlling distal somatic gonad architecture and its relationship to underlying  
29 germline stem cells in the nematode *Caenorhabditis elegans*. We show that a reduction of  
30 soma-germline gap-junctional signaling causes displacement of distal sheath cells (Sh1) towards  
31 the distal end of the gonad. We show that a somatically expressed innexin fusion protein, which  
32 was used as marker in a prior study asserting that the wild type lacked a bare region between  
33 the distal tip cell (DTC) and Sh1, encodes a poisonous gap junction subunit. We determine that,  
34 contrary to the model put forth in the prior study based on this marker, Sh1 mispositioning  
35 does not markedly alter the position of the borders of the stem cell pool or of the progenitor  
36 cell pool. Together, these results demonstrate that gap junctions can control the position of  
37 Sh1, but that Sh1 position is neither relevant for GLP-1/Notch signaling nor for the exit of germ  
38 cells from the stem cell pool.

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42 **Introduction**

43

44 The relative positions of certain cells within larger organ structures are often important for  
45 organ function. Yet the mechanisms by which cells reach and maintain their precise relative  
46 positions within organs are poorly defined. Gap junctions act as conduits for small molecules  
47 passed between cells and/or as rivets to ensure adhesion between cells (reviewed by (Skerrett  
48 and Williams, 2017)). They have also been implicated in cell morphology within organs  
49 (reviewed by (Phelan, 2005)), however this latter role is less well characterized. Here we take  
50 advantage of well-characterized and stereotypical morphology, interactions and relationships

51 among cells in *Caenorhabditis elegans* to investigate the role gap junctions play in somatic  
52 gonad architecture and its consequences for the underlying germ line stem cells.

53

54 The *C. elegans* hermaphrodite gonad provides a premier system for studying organogenesis and  
55 stem cell behavior (reviewed by (Hubbard and Greenstein, 2000; Hubbard and Schedl, 2019)).  
56 Two gonad arms, anterior or posterior of a central uterus and vulva, are each capped by a single  
57 somatic cell, the distal tip cell (DTC) that establishes a stem cell niche (Figure 1). Germline stem  
58 cells and their proliferative progeny, which together are referred to as progenitors, are  
59 maintained by GLP-1/Notch mediated signaling in the germ line in response to DSL family ligands  
60 LAG-2 and APX-1 produced by the DTC (Austin and Kimble, 1987; Berry et al., 1997; Henderson  
61 et al., 1994; Nadarajan et al., 2009; Yochem and Greenwald, 1989). Proximal to the DTC, five pairs  
62 of sheath cells (named as pairs Sh1 to Sh5, distal to proximal) provide additional support (DTC  
63 and Sh1 shown in Fig. 1). In particular, Sh1 is implicated in promoting germline progenitor cell  
64 proliferation (Killian and Hubbard, 2005; McCarter et al., 1997). Although the molecular and  
65 cellular mechanisms by which Sh1 promotes germline proliferation remain to be fully elucidated,  
66 it is clear that one mechanism for the function of these cells involves the formation of gap  
67 junctions with germ cells (Starich et al., 2014).

68

69 Invertebrate gap junctions are formed from octameric hemichannels of innexin proteins  
70 (Oshima et al., 2016). In *C. elegans*, INX-8 and INX-9 associate to form hemichannels in the  
71 hermaphrodite somatic gonad which couple to germline innexin hemichannels (INX-14 with  
72 INX-21 or INX-22) to promote germline proliferation and inhibit meiotic maturation,  
73 respectively (Figure 1A-B; (Starich et al., 2014)). Phenotypic analysis of reduction-of-function  
74 mutants in *inx-8* recently led to the discovery of malonyl-CoA as a key cargo that traverses the  
75 soma-germline junction to ensure timely gametogenesis and proper embryogenesis (Starich et  
76 al., 2020) .

77

78 In the distal gonad, the somatic gonadal hemichannel components *inx-8* and *inx-9* are required  
79 redundantly for germ cell proliferation and differentiation. Loss of both components renders

80 the germline devoid of all but a handful of germ cells, which fail to undergo gametogenesis.

81 Restoration of *inx-8* either to the DTC or to Sh1 rescues the severe germline proliferation defect

82 of the *inx-8(0) inx-9(0)* double mutant, while a reduction of *inx-8* and *inx-9* via hypomorphic

83 alleles or by RNAi limits expansion of the pool of proliferative germ cells (Dalfo et al., 2020;

84 Starich and Greenstein, 2020; Starich et al., 2014).

85

86 Several observations point to a role for innexins in overall somatic gonad architecture. In young

87 adult hermaphrodites, the DTC forms long extending processes reaching proximally towards Sh1,

88 while the distal border of Sh1 is more regular, with filopodia extending distally towards the DTC.

89 Extensive ultrastructural and both fixed and live image analysis demonstrated the existence of a

90 “bare region” in the adult hermaphrodite gonad in which germ cells are covered only by a basal

91 lamina in the region between the proximal extending DTC processes and the distal extending

92 filopodia of Sh1 ((Hall et al., 1999); Figure 1). Interestingly, the hypomorphic allele *inx-14(ag17)*

93 (Miyata et al., 2008) causes Sh1 to reach almost to the distal end of the gonad (Starich et al.,

94 2014), obliterating the bare region between the DTC and Sh1. Similarly, a loss of the bare region

95 was observed in *inx-8(0) inx-9(0)* double mutants in which germline proliferation was largely

96 restored through expression of an *inx-8::gfp* transgene in the DTC only (Starich et al., 2014). This

97 latter result suggested that if Sh1 cannot form gap junctions with germ cells, it extends distally.

98 However, the consequences of this mis-positioning and the accompanying loss of the bare region

99 for germline stem cells has not been previously explored.

100

101 This spatial relationship between the DTC, Sh1 and the germ line was recently challenged, and

102 an hypothesis put forth that Sh1 might guide an oriented and asymmetric division of stem cells,

103 such that a daughter cell in contact with Sh1 enters the differentiation pathway while the other,

104 in contact with the DTC, remains a stem cell (Gordon et al., 2020). However, given that much of

105 the analysis was performed using an INX-8 fusion protein marker that could conceivably alter the

106 position of Sh1, and given that the precise relationship between the position of Sh1 vis-à-vis the

107 border of the stem cell pool was not directly investigated, we wished to determine how

108 hypomorphic innexin alleles alter the position of Sh1 in live worms and whether the position of  
109 Sh1 influences the germline stem or progenitor pools.

110

111 In short, our results confirmed the presence of a bare region in the wild type and showed that  
112 reducing soma-germline gap junction coupling causes Sh1 to be mispositioned distally. Further,  
113 we determined that absence of the bare region by Sh1 distal mispositioning does not markedly  
114 alter the position of the borders of the stem or progenitor cell pools. In addition, we show that  
115 the marker used in the previous study (Gordon et al., 2020) encodes a poisonous allele of *inx-8*  
116 that also causes distal mispositioning of Sh1. Together, these results demonstrate that the  
117 position of the distal border of Sh1 is not relevant for GLP-1/Notch signaling nor for germ cells  
118 to exit the stem cell pool.

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## 121 **Results**

122

### 123 **Distal somatic gonad architecture is dictated by both somatic- and germline-expressed** 124 **innexins**

125

126 Previously, in fixed preparations, we observed that the distal edge of Sh1 was shifted almost all  
127 the way to the distal end of the gonad in worms bearing a hypomorphic mutation in the  
128 germline innexin *inx-14(ag17)* (Starich et al., 2014). We further investigated the position of the  
129 DTC relative to Sh1 in *inx-14(ag17)* using live imaging of intact young adult hermaphrodites  
130 bearing contrasting markers for Sh1 and the DTC (see Materials and Methods for details on  
131 markers used). We found that, in contrast with *inx-14(+)*, the distal edge of Sh1 in *inx-14(ag17)*  
132 extends to the distal end of the gonad, well distal to the average position of the DTC processes  
133 (Figure 1C-E). We note that this allele only moderately impairs fertility; *inx-14(ag17)*  
134 hermaphrodites display a slightly reduced average brood size of 230 progeny without  
135 appreciable embryonic lethality (Table 1).

136

137 Table 1 Brood sizes and embryonic lethality measurements for selected strains

138

Genotype	Brood Size <sup>a</sup>	Embryonic Lethality (%)
WT	292.1 ± 34.4 (n=49)	0.2 ± 0.3 (n=5843)
<i>inx-8(qy78)</i> <sup>b</sup>	108.2 ± 56.3 (n=126)	49.7 ± 17.7 (n=13,883) <sup>c</sup>
<i>inx-8(qy78tn2031)</i> <sup>d</sup>	270.7 ± 31.4 (n=59)	0.1 ± 0.2 (n=7748)
<i>inx-8(tn2034)</i> <sup>e</sup>	289.7 ± 43.8 (n=60)	0.1 ± 0.2 (n=7751)
<i>inx-9(ok1502)</i> <sup>f</sup>	268.8 ± 40.2 (n=72)	0.1 ± 0.2 (n=7088)
<i>inx-8(qy102)inx-9(ok1502)</i> <sup>g</sup>	144.4 ± 58.5 (n=58)	10.1 ± 8.9 (n=9303)
<i>inx-14(ag17)</i> <sup>h</sup>	230.1 ± 41.5 (n=48)	0.6 ± 0.6 (n=5192)
<i>inx-14(ag17); inx-8(qy78)</i> <sup>i</sup>	95.3 ± 33.5 (n=39)	20.3 ± 13.2 (n=4640)
<i>bcls39; nals37</i> <sup>j</sup>	235.8 ± 43.2 (n=56)	0.7 ± 1.2 (n=9330)

139 <sup>a</sup>Viable brood size, measured as the average number of embryos that hatch from single parent  
140 at 20°C.

141 <sup>b</sup>DG5063 (n=95) and DG5261 (n=31). DG5063 was derived from the strain NK2571 *inx-8(qy78);*  
142 *cpIs122(lag-2p::mNeonGreen::plcdeltaPH)* (Gordon et al., 2020) by outcrossing with wild-type  
143 males. DG5261 was generated from DG5063 by outcrossing with wild-type males. We  
144 examined NK2571 and observed an average brood size of 155 ± 24.4 (n=19) with 58.2 ± 14.9%  
145 embryonic lethality (n=4056).

146 <sup>c</sup>The percentage of embryonic lethality (Emb) is increased early and late in the brood, with the  
147 following breakdown: Day 1, 87.7% Emb (n=922); Day 2, 65.0% Emb (n=4743); Day 3, 29.6%  
148 Emb (n=6047); Day 4, 32.2% Emb (n=1835); Day 5, 61.1% Emb (n=337).

149 <sup>d</sup>DG5250 was derived from *inx-8(qy78)* by deleting the mKate2 moiety and additional *inx-8*  
150 sequences to generate an *inx-8* null allele.

151 <sup>e</sup>DG5251. This strain has the same DNA sequence at the *inx-8* locus as does the *inx-*  
152 *8(qy78tn2031)* null allele, but it was generated in an otherwise *inx-8(+)* background, not in *qy78*.  
153 <sup>f</sup>DG5059, an *inx-9* null allele.

154 <sup>g</sup>DG5064. *inx-8(qy102)* is the mKate2:INX-8 fusion generated in the *inx-9(ok1502)* genetic  
155 background (Gordon et al., 2020). DG5064 was derived from NK2576 *inx-9(ok1502) inx-*  
156 *8(qy102[mKate2::inx-8]); cpls122(lag-2p::mNeonGreen::plcdeltaPH)* by out-crossing with wild-  
157 type males. We examined NK2576 and observed an average brood size of  $168.6 \pm 83.9$  (n=20)  
158 with  $11.2 \pm 6.3\%$  embryonic lethality (n=3595).

159 <sup>h</sup>DG5270. INX-14R326H (Miyata et al., 2008; Starich et al., 2014).

160 <sup>i</sup>DG5070

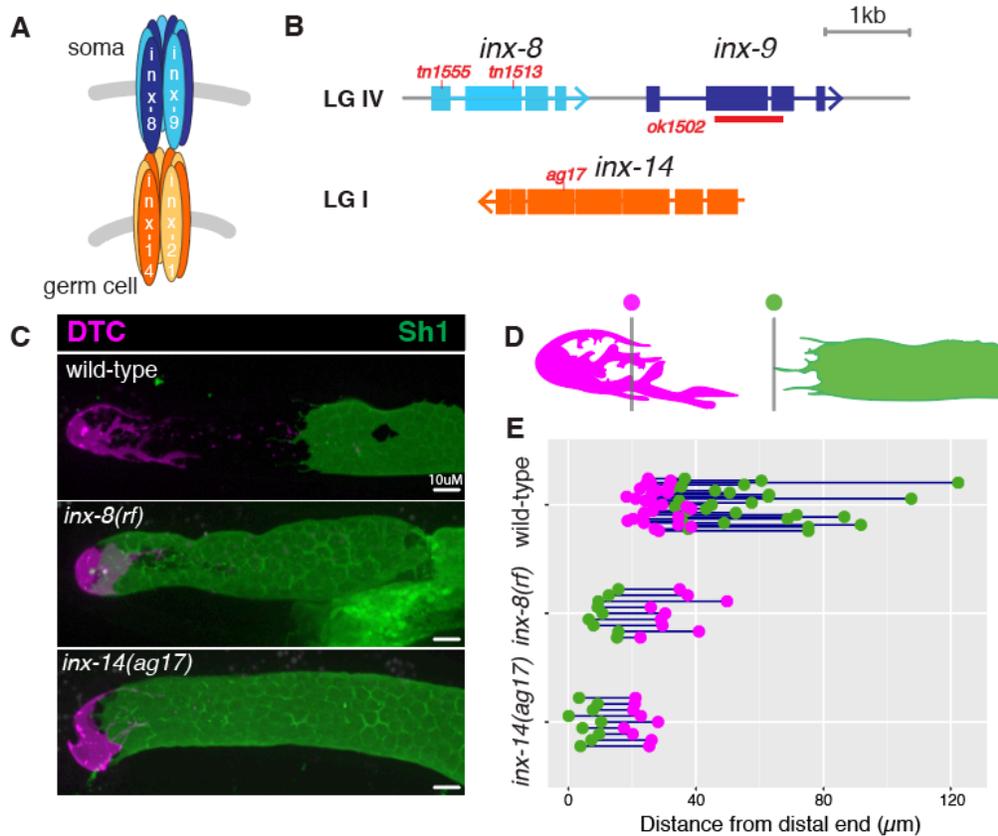
161 <sup>j</sup>DG5020 Strain with sheath and DTC markers but otherwise wild-type.

162

163

164 To determine whether the position of Sh1 is also shifted distally upon reduction of the somatic  
165 innexins, we investigated the position of Sh1 relative to the distal end of the gonad in a well-  
166 characterized compound *inx-8* mutant ((Starich et al., 2020); Figure 1B-E). We found that Sh1 in  
167 worms bearing one partially functional somatic gonad innexin encoded by *inx-8(tn1513tn1555)*  
168 in an otherwise null *inx-9(ok1502)* background (hereafter referred to as “*inx-8(rf)*”; (Starich et  
169 al., 2020)), is also distally positioned, similar to *inx-14(ag17)* (Figure 1C-E). The existence of the  
170 bare region in wild-type worms, as well as the distally altered Sh1 position in the *inx-14* and *inx-*  
171 *8* mutants were consistent in live images of worms bearing different DTC and sheath markers  
172 (Figure 1—figure supplement 1).

173

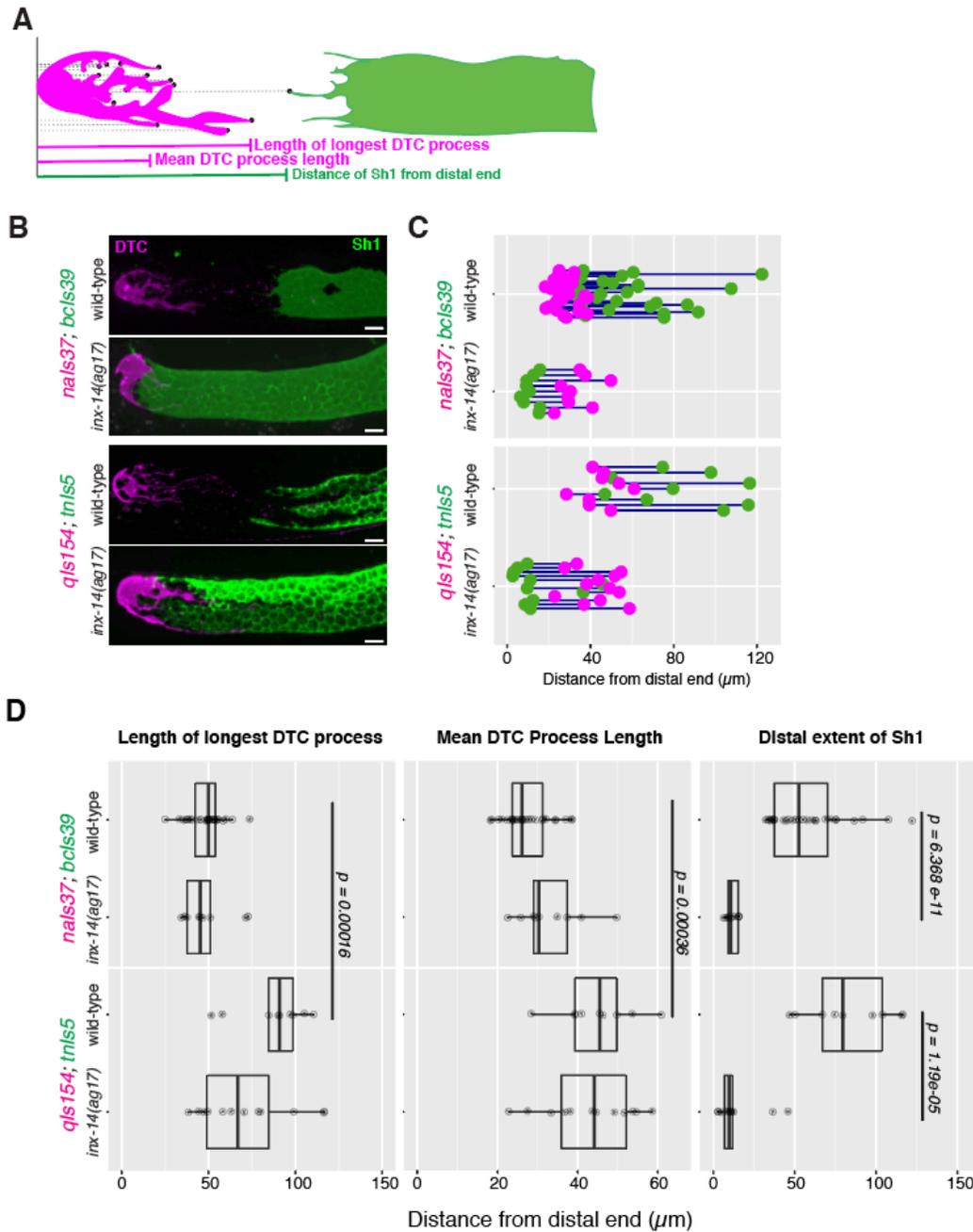


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175

176 **Figure 1.** Germline and somatic gonad innexins are required for proper somatic gonad architecture. A. Schematic  
 177 of paired somatic and germline octameric hemichannels. B. Schematic diagram of the *inx-8 inx-9* locus and the *inx-*  
 178 *14* locus, with relevant mutations indicated in red. C. Fluorescent confocal maximum projection images of distal  
 179 gonads in live worms. Distal tip cell (DTC) marked in magenta (*nals37[lag-2p::mCherry-PH]*) and sheath pair 1 (Sh1)  
 180 marked in green (*bcls39[lim-7p::CED-1::GFP]*). Top: strain bearing markers only, denoted “wild type”. Middle: *inx-*  
 181 *8(tn1513tn1555) inx-9(ok1502)*, denoted “*inx-8(rf)*” after Starich et al. (2020). Bottom: *inx-14(ag17)*. D. Diagram of  
 182 DTC-Sh1 relationship in distal end of a typical wild-type gonad (DTC magenta, Sh1 green). Although these cells have  
 183 variable morphology, certain parameters can be measured for each specimen, as indicated in Figure 1– figure  
 184 supplement 1. A vertical line topped with a magenta dot shows the average length of contiguous DTC processes for  
 185 that gonad and a vertical line with a green dot shows the most distal extent of the sheath cell. A detailed diagram  
 186 of all measurements taken for live fluorescent images is shown in Figure 1–figure supplement 1. E. Plot showing  
 187 the distance between the average DTC process length (magenta dots) and the most distal extent of the sheath cell  
 188 (green dots); each pair of dots joined by a blue line represents the data for a single gonad. The presence of a bare  
 189 region is indicated when the green dot is to the right of the magenta dot; absence of a bare region is indicated  
 190 when the green dot is to the left of the magenta dot.

191



192

193

194 **Figure 1—figure supplement 1.** Consistent trends in Sh1 and DTC positions are observed with multiple markers.

195 A. Schematic diagram of DTC and sheath parameters measured in this study. Each black dot represents a point in a

196 maximum projection Z-stack for which the distance from the distal end was measured in microns. B. Fluorescent

197 micrographs of gonads in live worms bearing *nals37*[*lag-2p::mCherry-PH*] and *bcls39*[*lim-7p::CED-1::GFP*] (top pair,

198 same images as in Fig. 1, included here for comparison) or *qls154*[*lag-2p::myr-tdTomato*] and *tnls5*[*lim-7p::GFP*]

199 (bottom pair), in wild-type and *inx-14(ag17)* mutant backgrounds, as indicated. C. Quantitative plot with magenta  
200 dots representing the average length of DTC process paired to green dots representing the distal extent of Sh1.  
201 Each pair of dots connected by a line represents data for a single gonad. The presence of a bare region is indicated  
202 when the green dot is to the right of the magenta dot; absence of a bare region is indicated when the green dot is  
203 to the left of the red dot. D. Plots showing quantitative measurement of parameters diagrammed in (A). Although  
204 the behavior of the DTCs marked by different markers is variable, and DTCs marked with *qls154* show significantly  
205 longer DTC processes, the behavior of Sh1 in the presence of either marker shows significantly consistent changes  
206 across mutant genotypes. All p-values result from Student's t-test. Scale bar is 10 $\mu$ m.

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208

### 209 **An mKate2::INX-8 fusion encodes a poisonous INX-8 protein**

210

211 We extended our analysis to *inx-8(qy78[mKate2::INX-8])*, an allele that encodes a fusion protein  
212 of mKate2 and INX-8 that was used to mark Sh1 in a prior study (Gordon et al., 2020). We found  
213 that, like *inx-14(ag17)* and *inx-8(rf)*, *inx-8(qy78)* caused a distal shift in Sh1 (Figure 2). In  
214 addition, this allele causes a severe reduction in brood size and highly penetrant embryonic  
215 lethality (Table 1). We also observed that this same deletion in the background of the *inx-9* null  
216 mutant (*inx-8(qy102)*, see Materials and Methods) shifts Sh1 even more distally, whereas loss  
217 of *inx-9* alone does not significantly affect Sh1 position (Figure 2—figure supplement 1).

218

219 To ensure that the apparent distal shift of Sh1 in the *inx-8(qy78[mKate2::INX-8])* background  
220 did not reflect a disparity between the expression patterns of mKate2::INX-8 and either of the  
221 *lim-7p*-driven Sh1 markers, we examined the overlap between the mKate2::INX-8 and *lim-7p*-  
222 driven markers in strains expressing both *inx-8(qy78[mKate2::INX-8])* and GFP markers encoded  
223 by *tnIs6 [lim-7p::GFP]* or *bcls39 [lim-7p::CED-1::GFP]* (Figure 2—figure supplement 2). In short,  
224 in over 85% of gonad arms examined, the overlap was complete. In short, in over 85% of gonad  
225 arms examined, the overlap was complete. In both cases, the remaining gonads displayed  
226 reduced Sh1 expression, which may be the result of stochastic transgene downregulation.

227

228 Based on our observations that *inx-8(qy78[mKate2::INX-8])* displays embryonic lethality and a  
229 distal shift in the border of Sh1, we hypothesized that *inx-8(qy78)* might encode a poisonous

230 INX-8 protein. If so, we would predict that the distal shift of Sh1, the reduced brood size, and  
231 embryonic lethality seen with this allele would be dependent on the presence of the INX-8  
232 coding region. To test this hypothesis, we used CRISPR-Cas9 genome editing to generate *inx-8*  
233 null alleles in both the *inx-8(qy78[mKate2::inx-8])* and wild-type genetic backgrounds. We  
234 generated deletions with identical breakpoints in the *inx-8* locus in both genetic backgrounds  
235 [e.g., *inx-8(qy78tn2031)* and *inx-8(tn2034)*] starting 136 bp upstream of the wild-type *inx-8* ATG  
236 start codon and extending 221 bp into *inx-8* exon 3 (Figure 2 and Figure 2—figure supplement  
237 1). In the *inx-8(qy78[mKate2::inx-8])* context, this deletion also removes the mKate2 moiety.  
238 These deletions are expected to constitute *inx-8* null alleles because, in addition to removing  
239 the start codon, they delete amino acids 1–349 (out of 382 amino acids), including virtually all  
240 residues essential for spanning the plasma membrane and forming a channel (Starich and  
241 Greenstein, 2020). These deletions must not appreciably perturb the function of *inx-9* because  
242 they exhibit nearly normal brood sizes (Table 1). Unlike the original *inx-8(qy78)* allele, the  
243 compound mutant *inx-8(qy78tn2031)* almost completely restores the DTC-Sh1 positional  
244 relationship with a substantial return of the bare region (Figure 2). Further, *inx-8(qy78 tn2031)*  
245 exhibits a nearly normal brood size and suppresses the embryonic lethality observed in the *inx-*  
246 *8(qy78)* starting strain (Table 1). Likewise, the identical deletion generated in the wild-type  
247 genetic background [e.g., *inx-8(tn2034)*] also exhibits a substantial bare region (Figure 2—figure  
248 supplement 1) with a normal brood size and negligible embryonic lethality (Table 1). Thus, we  
249 conclude that *inx-8(qy78)* encodes a poisonous mKate2::INX-8 product that interferes with the  
250 normal channel and/or rivet functions of soma-germline gap junctions.

251

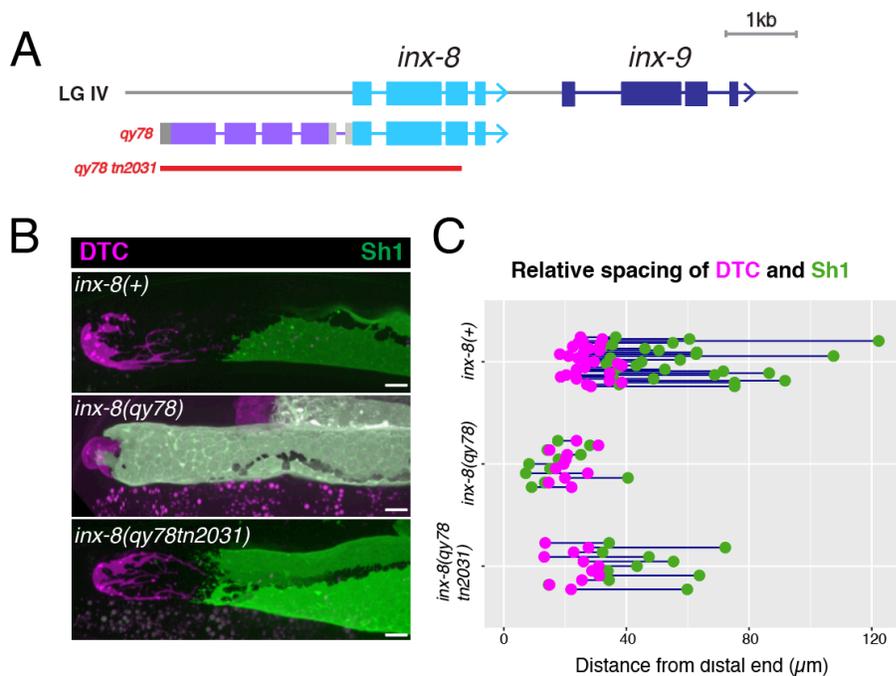
252 A surprising observation was that both the *inx-14(ag17)* mutation and the *inx-9(ok1502)* null  
253 mutation could individually suppress the embryonic lethality caused by an mKate2::INX-8 fusion  
254 protein (Table 1). Because it has been shown that gap junctions in the proximal gonad are  
255 required for embryonic development by virtue of their function to deliver malonyl-CoA to  
256 developing oocytes (Starich et al., 2020), one possibility is that mKate2::INX-8-containing  
257 channels are constitutively or too-widely open such that embryos receive inappropriately large  
258 amounts of transiting biomolecules, and that this can be compensated by reducing channel

259 function. Alternatively, possible delays in gametogenesis that may occur in the double mutants  
260 might effectively increase oocyte quality by providing additional time for levels of needed  
261 biomolecules to build up in the germ line. Perhaps favoring this second possibility is an unusual  
262 behavior of *inx-8(qy78)* itself: the first embryos produced in the brood display heightened  
263 embryonic lethality, suggesting that if key limiting substances fail to accumulate early, a time-  
264 dependent or later mechanism may compensate.

265

266 In any case, the genetic behavior of *inx-8(qy78)* suggests that this mutant allele confers both  
267 loss-of-function and antimorphic properties to soma-germline gap junctions. We infer loss-of-  
268 function behavior since other loss-of-function mutations affecting soma-germline gap junctions,  
269 such as *inx-14(ag17)*, also cause a loss of the bare region, though *inx-14(ag17)* does so without  
270 reducing brood size or embryonic viability (Table 1). We infer antimorphic behavior of *inx-  
271 8(qy78)* since removing the entire protein suppresses all defects, including loss of the bare  
272 region, brood size and embryonic viability.

273

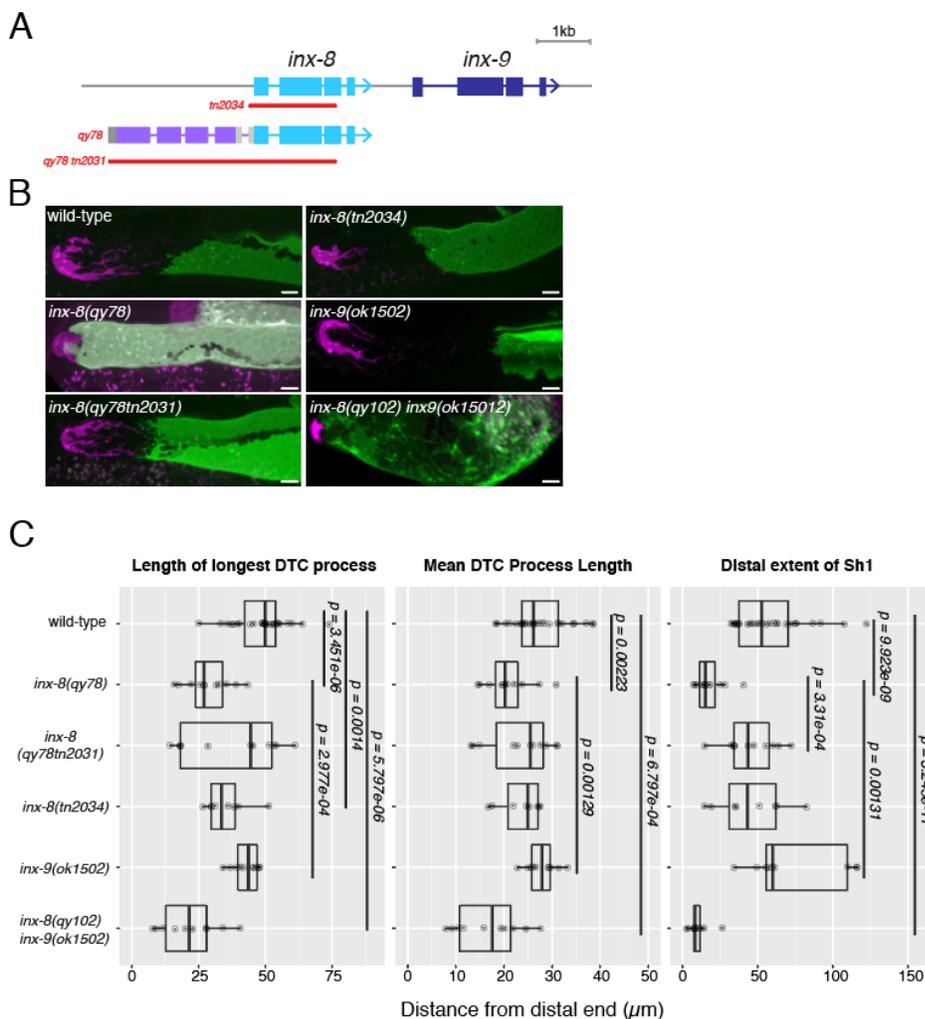


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276

277 **Figure 2.** N-terminal fusion of mKate2 to INX-8 generates a poisonous INX-8 protein that alters somatic gonad  
 278 morphology. A. Schematic diagram showing the genetic manipulations used in this section. *inx-8(qy78)* was  
 279 created by placing mKate2 in-frame with the N-terminus of INX-8 (Gordon et al., 2020). *inx-8(qy78tn2031)* was  
 280 created by deleting the *inx-8* coding region and mKate2 moiety in the *inx-8(qy78)* background. B. Fluorescent  
 281 micrographs of live animals with the DTC marked by *nals37[lag-2p::mCherry-PH]* and Sh1 marked by *bcls39[lim-*  
 282 *7p::CED-1::GFP]*. Top: wild-type with markers only. Middle: *inx-8(qy78)*. Bottom: *inx-8(qy78tn2031)*. C. Quantitative  
 283 dot-plot with magenta dots showing average length of DTC processes and green dots showing distal extent of Sh1.  
 284 Data for wild-type (marker only) strain in C is the same as in Figure 1. Each pair of dots connected by a line  
 285 represents data for a single gonad. Scale bar 10 $\mu$ m.  
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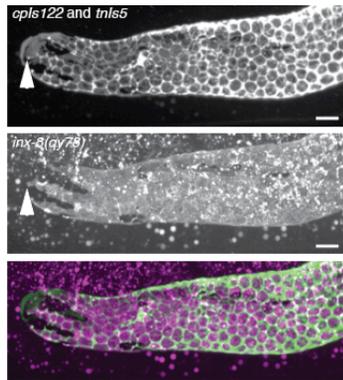
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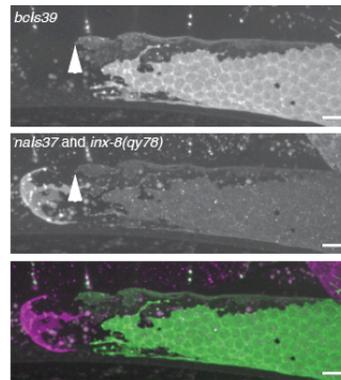
290 Figure 2—figure supplement 1. Additional evidence that the *qy78 mKate2::inx-8* fusion generates a poisonous INX-8  
291 protein. A. Schematic diagram showing additional alleles at the *inx-8 inx-9* loci that affect somatic gonad  
292 architecture. B. Representative fluorescent micrographs of live worms carrying each relevant allele (images for *inx-8*  
293 *8(+)*, *inx-8(qy78)* and *inx-8(qy102tn2031)* are the same as in Fig. 2B, included here for comparison). C. Quantitative  
294 plots showing changes to DTC morphology and Sh1 position. All p-values result from Student's t-test. Scale bar  
295 10µm.  
296

### A Complete overlap > 85%

*cpls122[lag-2p::GFP]; inx-8(qy78);  
tnIs5[lim-7p::GFP]*

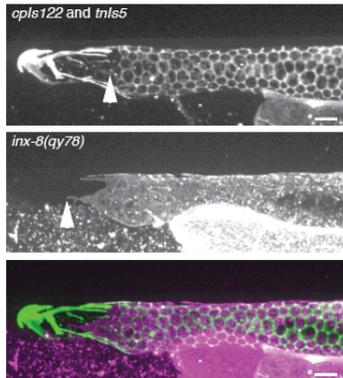


*nals37[lag-2p::mCherry]; inx-8(qy78);  
bcls39[lim-7p::CED-1::GFP]*

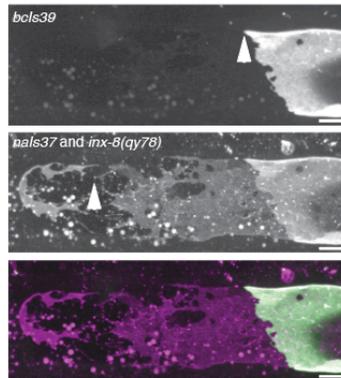


### B Incomplete overlap < 15%

*cpls122[lag-2p::GFP]; inx-8(qy78);  
tnIs5[lim-7p::GFP]*



*nals37[lag-2p::mCherry]; inx-8(qy78);  
bcls39[lim-7p::CED-1::GFP]*



297  
298

299 **Figure 2—figure supplement 2.** The low-penetrance loss of marker expression in Sh1 does not reflect altered  
300 sheath cell placement. A. Individual gonads carrying different Sh1 markers in addition to *inx-8(qy78[mKate2::INX-*  
301 *8])* Left column: Individual channels and merged image (bottom panel) of a single worm co-expressing the DTC  
302 marker *cpls122[lag-2p::GFP]*, *inx-8(qy78[mKate2::INX-8])* and the sheath cell marker *tnIs5[lim-7p::GFP]*. Of 33  
303 gonads examined, 30 showed perfect overlap as shown in these images. Right column: Individual channels and  
304 merged image (bottom panel) of a single worm co-expressing the DTC marker *nals37[lag-2p::mCherry-PH]*, *inx-*

305 *8(qy78[mKate2::INX-8])* and the sheath cell marker *bcls39[lim-7p::CED-1::GFP]*. Of 13 gonads examined, eleven  
306 showed complete overlap. B. Two individual gonads of the same genotypes as in (A), showing incomplete overlap  
307 between *mKate2::INX-8* and the respective GFP sheath cell markers. White arrowheads mark the most distal  
308 extent of each marker in the single-channel panels. Scale bars are 10 $\mu$ m.

309  
310

### 311 **The distal position of Sh1 does not influence the position of the stem cell pool border**

312

313 A recent model proposed that the position of the Sh1 border influences the stem/non-stem  
314 decision in underlying germ cells (Gordon et al., 2020). However, because the previous study  
315 did not examine the position of stem or progenitor cells, and because the model was based on  
316 results using the poisonous *inx-8(qy78)* allele, we investigated this relationship.

317

318 In its simplest form, the model predicts that when the distal edge of Sh1 is positioned distally,  
319 the stem/non-stem border should similarly shift distally. The SYGL-1 protein serves as a stem  
320 cell marker as *sygl-1* is a direct transcriptional target of GLP-1/Notch in the germ line (Brenner  
321 and Schedl, 2016; Chen et al., 2020; Kershner et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2016; Shin  
322 et al., 2017). We analyzed the proximal extent of the pool of SYGL-1-positive cells bearing a  
323 well-characterized OLLAS epitope tag on SYGL-1 and compared that boundary relative to the  
324 distal Sh1 border (Figure 3 and Materials and Methods). In the case of *inx-14(ag17)*, though the  
325 distal border of Sh1 was shifted drastically and significantly, there was no significant change in  
326 the size of the SYGL-1-positive stem cell pool. In the case of the *inx-8(qy78[mKate2::inx-8])*  
327 allele, the border of the SYGL-1-positive pool was marginally shifted distally relative to the wild  
328 type, though not commensurate with the extent to which Sh1 shifted distally in this  
329 background. Furthermore, the shifted border of the stem cell pool was suppressed when *inx-8*  
330 was deleted, either in *inx-8(qy78tn2031)* or in *inx-8(tn2034)*, suggesting that such a defect was  
331 due to the altered function of *mKate2::INX-8*, rather than due to the position of Sh1 (Figure 3A-  
332 C). To detect any subtle correlation between the proximal end of the SYGL-1 pool and the distal  
333 extent of Sh1, we plotted these against each other and computed an R value (Figure 3D). By

334 Pearson correlation, there is no significant relationship in any genotype examined between the  
335 position of the sheath cell, and the extent of the SYGL-1(+) stem cell pool.

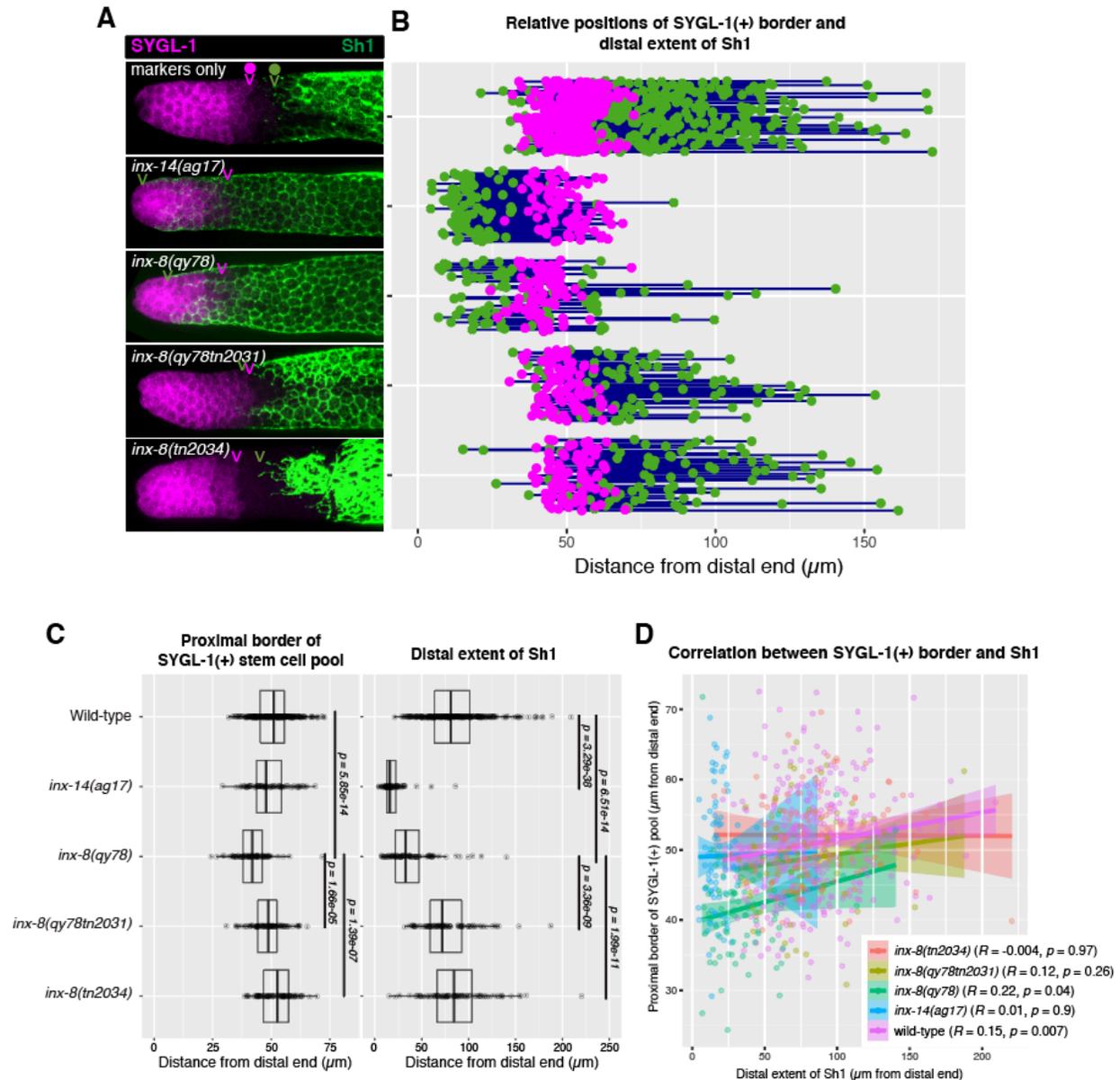
336

337 The recent model also proposed that Sh1 controls spindle orientation at the stem/progenitor  
338 border. However, we found that in the wild type (marker-only) strain, the distal position of Sh1  
339 was proximal to the proximal SYGL-1-positive border in 86% of the gonads (276/320), with the  
340 distance 5 cell diameters or greater in 67% of gonads (215/320) (Figure 3 and Figure 3—figure  
341 supplement 1). This 5 cell-diameter distance is not consistent with the hypothesis that Sh1 is  
342 controlling spindle orientation at the border as such control would be expected to occur over a  
343 distance of 1-2 cell diameters.

344

345 We conclude that there is no correlation between the position of the distal border of Sh1 and  
346 the proximal border of the SYGL-1-positive stem cell pool and that if spindle-oriented divisions  
347 occur at the Sh1 border, they are not influencing cell fate.

348



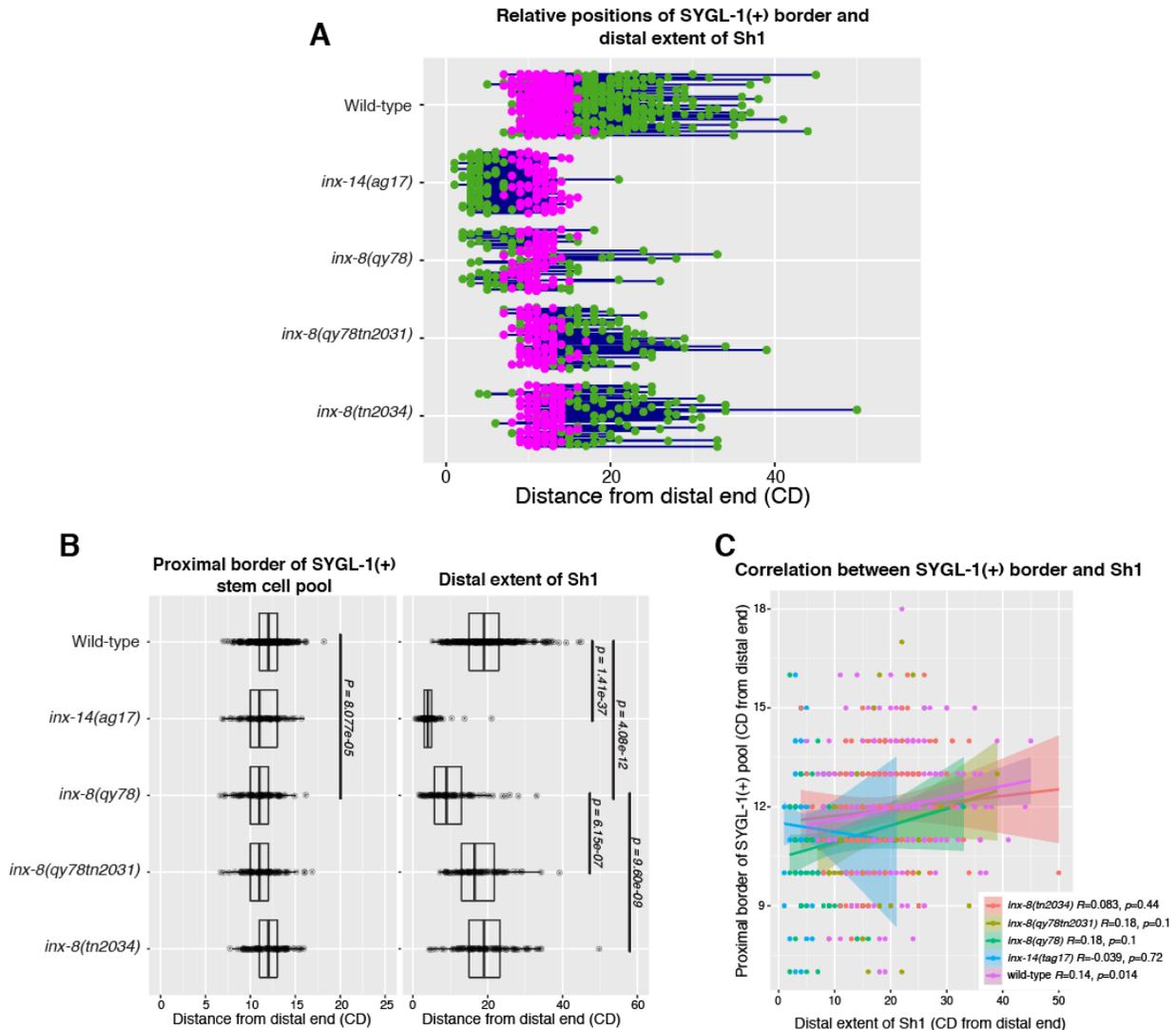
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351

352 **Figure 3.** The position of the proximal border of the SYGL-1-positive stem cell pool does not correlate with the  
 353 position of Sh1. A. Fluorescent confocal maximum projection images of fixed, dissected gonads showing the SYGL-  
 354 1(+) stem cell pool marked in magenta and the sheath cell marked in green. Magenta caret represents the location  
 355 of the proximal border of the SYGL-1(+) stem cell pool. Green caret represents the distal edge of Sh1. B.  
 356 Quantitative graph with magenta dots representing the proximal border of SYGL-1::OLLAS expression and green  
 357 dots representing the distal reach of Sh1. Each pair of dots connected by a line represents the data for a single

358 gonad. C. Dot plot with overlaid box plots showing the size and quantiles of the SYGL-1(+) stem cell pool and distal  
 359 extent of Sh1 for each genotype. Each dot represents a single specimen of that genotype. P-values were calculated  
 360 using Student's t-test. D. Scatterplot showing lack of correlation between the proximal extent of SYGL-1 expression  
 361 and the distal reach of Sh1.  
 362  
 363  
 364



365  
 366  
 367 **Figure 3—figure supplement 1.** The position of the proximal border of the SYGL-1-positive stem cell pool does not  
 368 correlate with the position of Sh1 when data are shown in cell diameters. A. Quantitative graph with magenta dots  
 369 representing the proximal extent of SYGL-1::OLLAS expression and green dots representing the distal reach of Sh1.  
 370 Each pair of magenta and green dots connected by a line represents the data for a single gonad. B. Dot plot with

371 overlaid box plots showing the size and quantiles of the SYGL-1(+) stem cell pool and distal extent of Sh1 for each  
372 genotype, in cell diameters from the distal end. Each dot represents a single specimen of that genotype. P-values  
373 were calculated using Student's t-test. C. Scatterplot showing lack of correlation between the proximal extent of  
374 SYGL-1 expression and the distal reach of Sh1. CD: cell diameters.

375

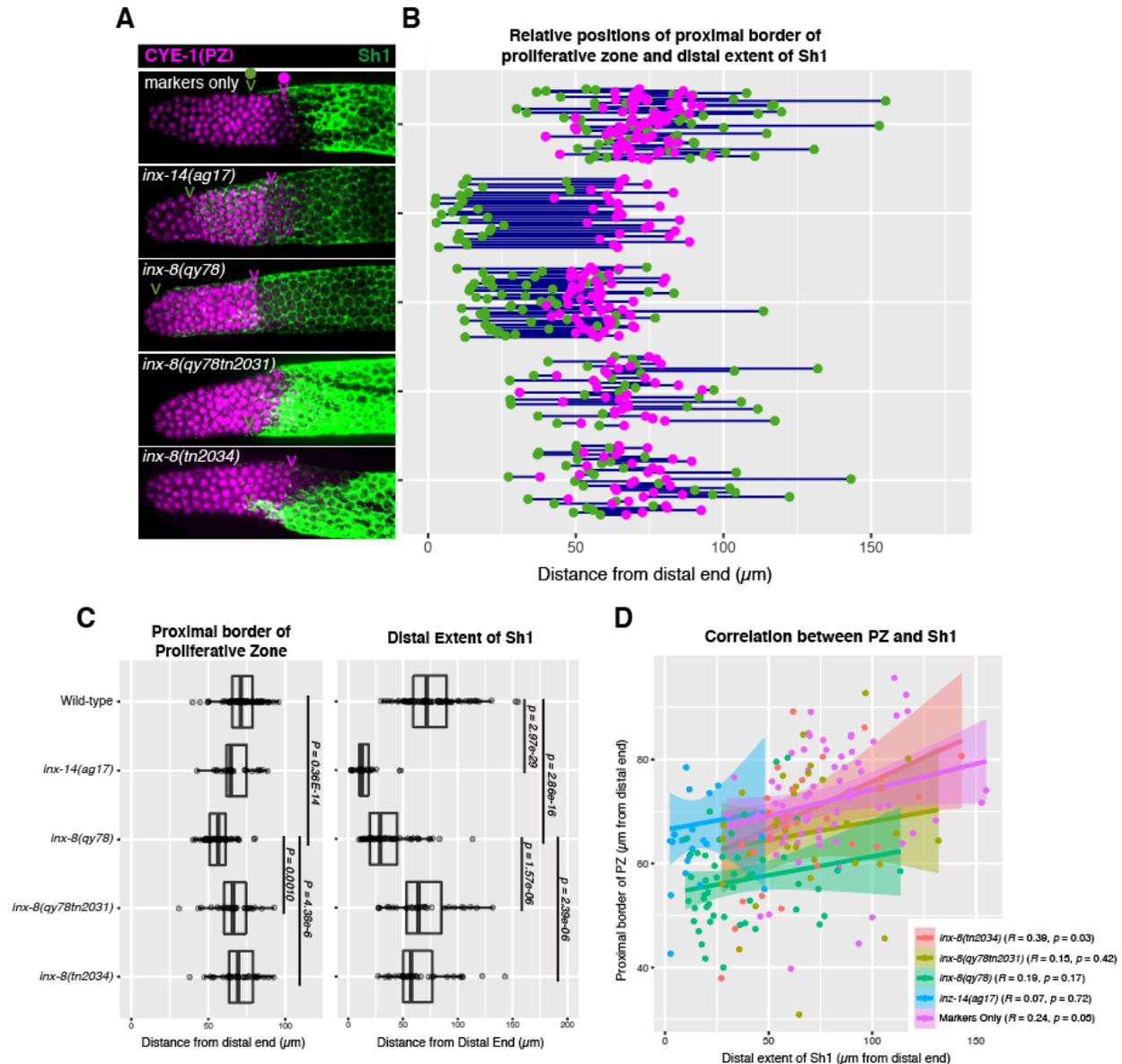
376

### 377 **The Distal position of Sh1 does not influence the position of the progenitor pool border**

378

379 Although we found no correlation between the stem cell pool border and Sh1 position, we  
380 wondered whether altered Sh1 position might nevertheless influence the position of the border  
381 between the progenitor zone (PZ) and the transition zone that marks overt meiotic entry. In  
382 wild type, we found that the distal position of Sh1 can be either distal or proximal of the PZ  
383 border, using the length of the CYE-1-positive region to define the PZ border, following CYE-1  
384 and pSUN-1(S8) co-staining (Figure 4 and Materials and Methods; Mohammad et al., 2018). We  
385 found that although there is a subtle shift in the PZ border in *inx-8(qy78)* and *inx-14(ag17)*, it  
386 does not correlate with the dramatic shift in Sh1 position seen in these mutants (Figure 4).

387



388

389

390 **Figure 4.** The position of the proximal border of the progenitor zone does not correlate with the position of Sh1. A.

391 Fluorescent confocal maximum projection images of fixed, dissected gonads showing the progenitor pool marked

392 in magenta and the sheath cell marked in green. Magenta caret represents the location of the proximal border of

393 the CYE-1(+),pSUN-1(-) progenitor pool. Green caret represents the distal edge of Sh1. B. Quantitative graph with

394 magenta dots representing the proximal extent of the CYE-1 staining and green dots representing the distal reach

395 of Sh1. Each pair of magenta and green dots connected by a line represents the data for a single gonad. C. Dot plot

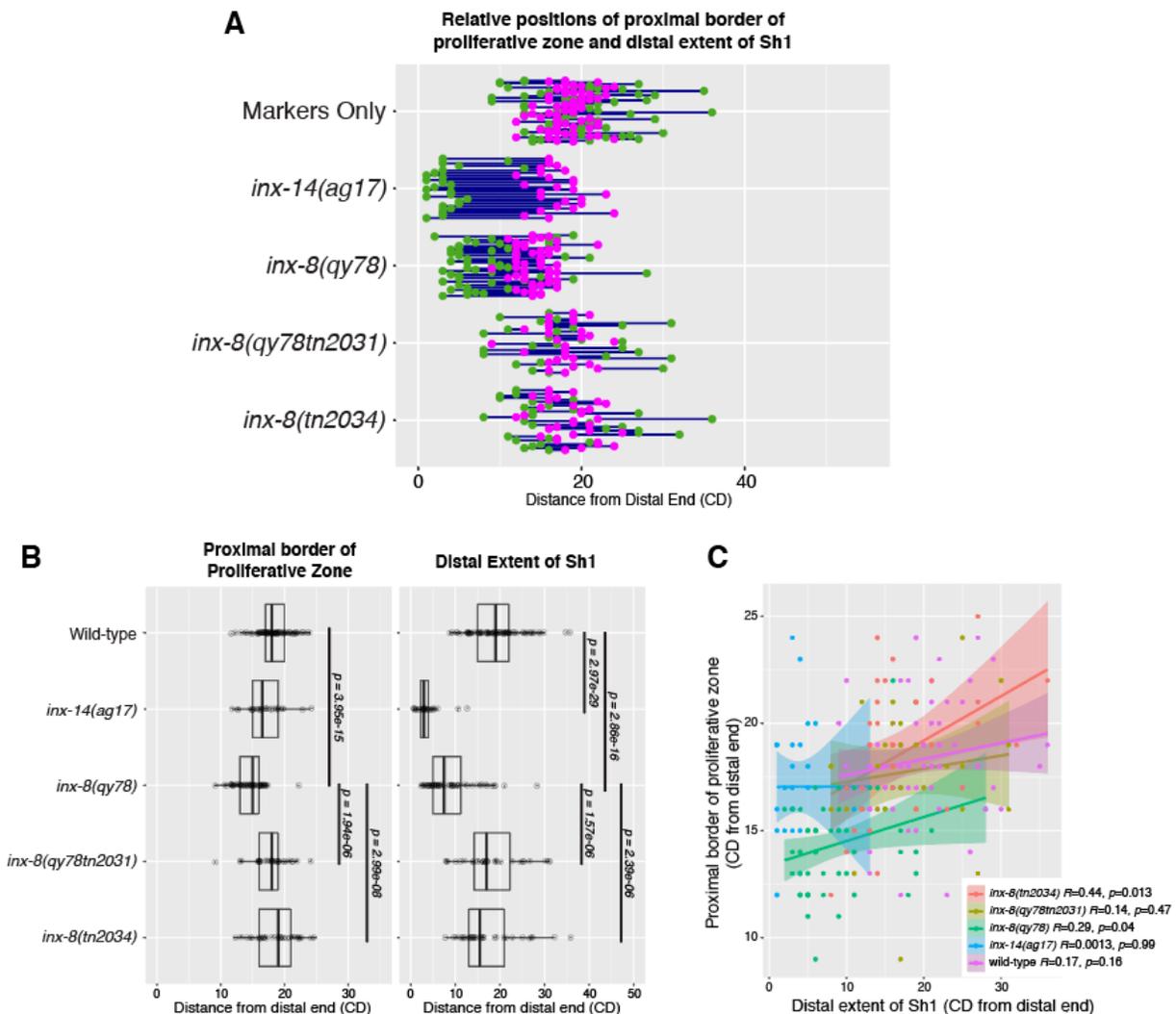
396 with overlaid box plots showing the size and quantiles of the progenitor pool and distal extent of Sh1 for each

397 genotype. Each dot represents a single specimen of that genotype. P-values were calculated using Student's t-test.

398 D. Scatterplot showing that lack of correlation between the proximal PZ border and Sh1 position.

399

400



401

402

403 **Figure 4–figure supplement 1.** The extent of the proliferative zone does not correlate with the position of Sh1

404 when data are shown in cell diameters. A. Quantitative graph with magenta dots representing the location of the

405 proximal border of the CYE-1(+), pSUN-1(-) progenitor pool and green dots representing the proximal extent of and

406 green dots representing the distal reach of Sh1. Each pair of magenta and green dots connected by a line

407 represents the data for a single gonad. B. Dot plot with overlaid box plots showing the size and quantiles of the

408 CYE-1(+), pSUN-1(-) progenitor pool and distal extent of Sh1 for each genotype, in cell diameters from the distal end. Each dot

409 represents a single specimen of that genotype. P-values were calculated using Student's t-test. C. Scatterplot

410 showing lack of correlation between the proximal extent of proliferative zone and the distal reach of Sh1. CD: cell

411 diameters.

412

413

## 414 **Discussion**

415

416 These studies show that impaired innexin function distally displaces sheath cells, but that this  
417 displacement does not similarly shift the proximal border of the stem cell pool (Figure 5). We  
418 show that a gap normally exists between the DTC and Sh1, but that this gap can be closed with  
419 reduced innexin activity either in the soma or the germ line. These results contradict a previous  
420 observation that relied on a marker that was itself interfering with innexin function. The  
421 cautionary tale is that fusion proteins used as markers, even when they are generated by  
422 CRISPR/Cas9 genome editing in the context of the endogenous locus and therefore are not  
423 likely mis-expressed or overexpressed, may nevertheless generate poisonous proteins. Here,  
424 the mKate2::INX-8 fusion protein caused a distal shift in the Sh1 position due to its apparent  
425 antimorphic effect on gap junctions. Because of the redundant function of INX-9, we were able  
426 to remove the offending mKate2::INX-8 protein entirely and restore the bare region. Our  
427 finding that the germline response to signaling from the DTC, as measured by expression of the  
428 GLP-1/Notch target, SYGL-1, is independent of interactions with distal sheath cells also meshes  
429 with the finding that males, which lack distal sheath cells altogether, exhibit similarly sized stem  
430 cell pools (Crittenden et al., 2019). In addition, the distal border of Sh1 relative to the proximal  
431 stem cell border in the wild type is  $\geq 5$  cell diameters in the majority of gonads examined. Thus,  
432 the previous model that Sh1 acts to orient divisions of stem cells to thereby direct their fate is  
433 also called into question by our results. Finally, using alleles that dramatically alter the position  
434 of Sh1, we found no evidence supporting the prediction that the stem/non-stem border is  
435 coincident with the Sh1 border. Together, these results indicate that Sh1 is not involved in the  
436 germline stem-progenitor fate decision.

437

438 Our studies also provide evidence that innexin gap junctions not only serve as communication  
439 and adhesion junctions, but that in the context of an organ system they contribute to the  
440 positioning of cells relative to each other. How might gap junctions influence the relative

441 position of the DTC and Sh1 in the distal gonad arm? The DTC also forms gap junctions with  
442 germ cells, which must be disassembled as germ cells enter the bare region, only to be  
443 reassembled again when in contact with Sh1 (and then again with the more proximal sheath  
444 cells). A detailed TEM analysis of the gonad (Hall et al., 1999) led to the consideration that a  
445 constant interplay of association and dissociation likely also occurs between Sh1 and the  
446 underlying germ cells that migrate proximally along the arm: as germ cell flux continually moves  
447 germ cells towards the proximal end of the gonad, the Sh1 cells presumably extend their  
448 filopodia distally and form new gap junction connections with incoming germ cells. Otherwise,  
449 the bare region would increase in size. The relative steady-state positions of the DTC and Sh1  
450 may therefore be determined by the rate of germ cell proliferation as well as by the strength of  
451 interaction between Sh1 and germ cells, and gap junctions could contribute to both.

452

453 To complement the role of gap junctions in promoting robust proliferation, the kinetics of gap  
454 junction coupling between the somatic gonad and germ cells may play a role in determining the  
455 strength of the interactions between the two cell types. Unlike sheath-oocyte junctions, which  
456 form large plaques containing many functional gap junctions, the gap junctions formed in the  
457 distal arm appear to represent looser associations of a few gap-junction channels (Starich et al.,  
458 2014). Nonetheless, these associations may be sufficient to maintain adhesion with the  
459 underlying germline, functioning like regularly spaced rivets, albeit dynamic and removeable  
460 ones.

461

462 Disentangling the adhesive and channel functions of gap junctions is a complex issue. The  
463 mutants used in this study are competent to form gap junctions. However, they may do so less  
464 efficiently than their wild-type counterparts. For example, the pattern of localization of gap  
465 junction puncta in *inx-8(rf)* and *inx-14(ag17)* appears more diffuse than in the wild type (Starich  
466 et al., 2014);(Starich et al., 2020). Alternatively or additionally, the mutants in this study may  
467 assemble into hemichannels as readily as the wild-type, but the pairing or opening of gap  
468 junction channels may be compromised. Studies of connexin gap-junction channels in paired  
469 *Xenopus* oocytes strongly suggest that opening of hemichannels facilitates their assembly into

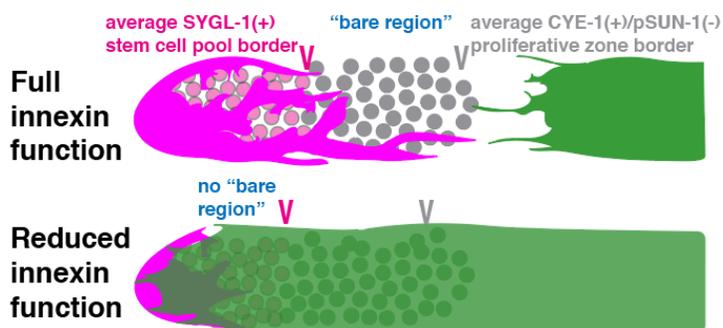
470 gap junctions. That study proposed hemichannel opening collapses the intermembrane space  
471 between juxtaposed cells to allow the extracellular loops of connexins to dock into gap  
472 junctions (Beahm and Hall, 2004). If a similar model applies to innexin-containing gap junctions,  
473 then rivet and channel function would be coupled.

474

475 How could impaired innexin function cause Sh1 to creep more distally? One hypothesis is that  
476 when fewer junctions are made, reduced adhesion or reduced recognition occurs. This scenario  
477 would also be consistent with Sh1 extending to the distal end when no gap junctions can form  
478 between sheath cells and germ cells (Starich et al., 2014). At the same time, it is not possible to  
479 exclude the formal possibility that the DTC and Sh1 engage in an active repellent or passive  
480 space-excluding interaction that somehow involves gap junction function. Another possibility is  
481 that a deficit in gap-junctions might be sensed by Sh1, which then responds by extending its  
482 coverage of the germ line to increase the surface area over which junctions may form to supply  
483 more of the active biomolecules that transit through these junctions. Nevertheless, our studies  
484 show that the position of germline stem cells is independent of the position of Sh1.

485

486



487

488

489 **Figure 5.** Reduced innexin function eliminates the bare region between the DTC and Sh1, but  
490 this shift does not alter the border of the stem cell pool.

491

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493 We thank Gabriela Huelgas-Morales for discussions and constructive suggestions during the  
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495 thank WormBase. The CGC, which is funded by NIH Office of Research Infrastructure Programs  
496 (P40 OD010440), provided some starting strains.

497

498

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637

638

## 639 **Materials and Methods**

640

### 641 *Live imaging and image analysis of live samples*

642

643 Live specimens were grown at 20°C, and staged by picking mid-L4 larvae, then allowing them to  
644 grow at 20°C until imaging them 24 hours later. Animals were immobilized using 10mM  
645 Levamisole (Sigma T1512) in M9 buffer. Imaging was carried out on a Nikon W1 spinning disk  
646 confocal microscope.

647

648 Image analysis was carried out on 2-dimensional maximum-projection Z-stack images of 3D  
649 confocal data. The distance from the distal end of the gonad to the end of each DTC process  
650 was measured along a line drawn from the end of each process parallel to the distal-proximal  
651 axis to a line drawn tangent to the distal end, orthogonal to the distal-proximal axis line (Figure  
652 1—figure supplement 1). The distance between the distal end of the gonad and the most distal  
653 extent of Sh1 was measured in the same way. All data points were recorded for each sample  
654 and used to calculate the mean values presented in Figures 1 and 2.

655

656 Sh1 visualization in live worms: *bcls39* [*lim-7p*::CED-1::GFP] (Zhou et al., 2001) encodes a  
657 functional membrane-localized fusion to CED-1. *tnls5* and *tnls6* encode an identical non-  
658 functional fusion to the first 61 amino acids of LIM-7 (*tnls5* or *tnls6*) denoted here as "*lim-*  
659 *7p*::GFP" that includes 2.23kb upstream, the first two exons, and the first intron of *lim-7* fused  
660 to GFP (Hall et al., 1999).

661

662 DTC visualization in live worms: *nals37* [*lag-2p::mCherry-PH*] encodes mCherry fused to the PH  
663 domain of rat phospholipase C delta (Pekar et al., 2017) and *qls154* [*lag-2p::MYR-tdTomato*]  
664 encodes a src kinase myristoylation sequence fused to tdTomato (Byrd et al., 2014).

665

666

667 *Strains*

668

669 *C. elegans* strains (Table S1) were grown on standard NGM media [containing 6.25 mg/ml  
670 Nystatin (added after autoclaving) and 200 mg/ml streptomycin sulphate (added before  
671 autoclaving)] with *E. coli* strain OP50-1 as food source. Similar results were obtained on NGM  
672 medium with OP50 as food source and without inclusion of streptomycin sulphate in the media.  
673 Strains were grown at 20°C. In addition to the wild-type strain N2, the following alleles,

674 described in WormBase ([www.wormbase.org](http://www.wormbase.org)) or in the cited references, were used:

675 Chr. I—*inx-14(ag17)* (Miyata et al., 2008; Starich et al., 2014), *sygl-1(q983[3xOLLAS::sygl-1])*  
676 (Shin et al., 2017) .

677 Chr. IV—*inx-8(qy78[mKate2::inx-8])* (Gordon et al., 2020) , *inx-8(qy78 tn2031)* (this work), *inx-*  
678 *8(tn2034)* (this work), *inx-9(ok1502)*, *inx-8(qy102[mKate2::inx-8]) inx-9(ok1502)* (Gordon et al.,  
679 2020), *inx-8(tn1513tn1553) inx-9(ok1502)* (Starich and Greenstein, 2020), *inx-8(tn1513tn1555)*  
680 *inx-9(ok1502)* (Starich et al., 2020).

681 Balancer chromosomes (Dejima et al., 2018) used included: *tmC18 [dpy-5(tmIs1236)]* I,  
682 *tmC27[tmIs1239]* I, *tmC5[tmIs1220]* IV.

683 Integrated transgenes included: *mIs11[myo-2p::gfp + pes-10p::gfp + gut promoter::gfp]* IV,  
684 *bcls39[lim-7p::ced-1::gfp + lin-15(+)]* V (Zhou et al., 2001), *qls154[lag-2p::MYR::tdTomato + ttx-*  
685 *3p::gfp]* V (Byrd et al., 2014) , *tnIs5[lim-7p::gfp + rol-6(su1006)]* X, *tnIs6[lim-7p::gfp + rol-*  
686 *6(su1006)]* X (Hall et al., 1999) , *cpls122[lag-2p::mNeonGreen::plcdeltaPH]* (Gordon et al., 2020),  
687 *nals37[lag-2p::mCherry:: plcdeltaPH + unc-119(+)]* (Pekar et al., 2017).

688 Extrachromosomal arrays used included: *tnEx42[acy-4::gfp + rol-6(su1006)]* (Govindan et al.,  
689 2009).

690

691 **Table S1. Strains used in this study**

692	<b>Strain</b>	<b>Genotype</b>	<b>Reference</b>
693	<b>DG4959</b>	<i>qls154 V; tnls5 X</i>	(this work)
694	<b>DG4977</b>	<i>inx-14(ag17) I; qls154 V; tnls5 X</i>	(this work)
695	<b>DG5020</b>	<i>bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
696	<b>DG5026</b>	<i>inx-14(ag17) I; bcls39 V nals37</i>	(this work)
697	<b>DG5027</b>	<i>inx-9(ok1502) IV; bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
698	<b>DG5029</b>	<i>inx-8(tn1513 tn1555) inx-9(ok1502) IV; bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
699	<b>DG5059</b>	<i>inx-9(ok1502) IV</i>	(this work)
700	<b>DG5063</b>	<i>inx-8(qy78) IV</i>	(this work)
701	<b>DG5064</b>	<i>inx-8(qy102) inx-9(ok1502) IV</i>	(this work)
702	<b>DG5070</b>	<i>inx-14(ag17) I; inx-8(qy78) IV</i>	(this work)
703	<b>DG5131</b>	<i>inx-8(qy78) IV; bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
704	<b>DG5133</b>	<i>inx-8(qy102) inx-9(ok1502) IV; bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
705	<b>DG5136</b>	<i>sygl-1(q983) I; bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
706	<b>DG5150</b>	<i>inx-14(ag17) sygl-1(q983) I; bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
707	<b>DG5181</b>	<i>sygl-1(q983) I; inx-8(qy78) IV; bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
708	<b>DG5229</b>	<i>inx-8(qy78 tn2031) IV; bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
709	<b>DG5232</b>	<i>inx-8(tn2034) IV; bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
710	<b>DG5248</b>	<i>sygl-1(q983) I; inx-8(qy78 tn2031) IV; bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
711	<b>DG5249</b>	<i>sygl-1(q983) I; inx-8(tn2034) IV; bcls39 V; nals37</i>	(this work)
712	<b>DG5250</b>	<i>inx-8(qy78 tn2031) IV</i>	(this work)
713	<b>DG5251</b>	<i>inx-8(tn2034) IV</i>	(this work)
714	<b>DG5270</b>	<i>inx-14(ag17) I</i>	(this work)
715	<b>KL006</b>	<i>inx-8(qy78) IV; tnls6 X; cpls122</i>	(Gordon et al., 2020)
716			
717			
718			
719		<i>Strain constructions</i>	

720  
721 Multiply mutant strains were constructed in a straightforward manner (Huang and Sternberg,  
722 1995). *tmC18* was used as a balancer chromosome for *inx-14(ag17)*. *tmC27* was used as a  
723 balancer chromosome for *sygl-1(q983)*. *tmC5* or *mIs11* were used as balancer chromosomes for  
724 *inx-8* and *inx-9* mutant alleles. The presence of *inx-14(ag17)* in strains was verified by PCR and  
725 DNA sequencing. The *ag17* allele was originally described as an Arg to His change in the second  
726 extracellular loop of INX-14, but the exact residue position was not specified (Miyata et al.,  
727 2008). A 1.2-kb PCR fragment covering this region was amplified with primers *inx-14delF* and  
728 *inx-14delR* (see Table S1 for the sequence of oligonucleotides used in this study). The PCR  
729 fragment was sequenced with the *inx-14delR* primer. No sequence changes were found in Arg  
730 residues predicted to occupy the second extracellular loop. However, a CGT to CAT (R326H)  
731 change was identified at a residue position predicted to lie near the cytoplasmic end of the  
732 fourth transmembrane domain, and we surmise that this change represents the original *ag17*  
733 mutation. The presence of the *sygl-1(q983[3xOLLAS::sygl-1])* mutation in strains was verified by  
734 PCR with primers *sygl1-F* and *sygl1-R*, which produce a 216 bp product in the wild type and a  
735 348 bp product in *sygl-1(q983)* and by anti-OLLAS staining. The presence of *inx-8(qy78 tn2031)*  
736 and *inx-8(tn2034)* in strains was verified by PCR with oligonucleotide primers *inx8\_delta.F* and  
737 *inx8\_delta.R*.

738

#### 739 *Brood counts and Embryonic lethality measurements*

740

741 L4-stage hermaphrodites were cultured individually and transferred approximately every 24  
742 hours until they stopped producing embryos (4–6 days). Worms that crawled off the media and  
743 died were redacted (varied from 0–10% depending on the experiment). Embryos that failed to  
744 hatch after 24–36 hours were counted and scored as dead. In the majority of cases, these  
745 embryos exhibited morphological abnormalities. Control experiments demonstrated that these  
746 embryos were not simply delayed and never hatched. Embryos that hatched were counted and  
747 scored as viable. This includes embryos in *inx-8(qy78)* that died shortly after hatching, arrested  
748 as larvae, and/or exhibited morphological abnormalities.

749

750 *Genome editing*

751

752 CRISPR-Cas9 genome editing was used to generate *inx-8* null alleles in both the *inx-*  
753 *8(qy78[mKate2::*inx-8*])* and wild-type genetic backgrounds. The approach taken generated  
754 identical 1524 bp deletions within the *inx-8* locus in both genetic backgrounds starting 136 bp  
755 upstream of the wild-type *inx-8* ATG start codon and extending 221 bp into *inx-8* exon 3. In the  
756 *inx-8(qy78[mKate2::*inx-8*])* context, this edit removes both the mKate2 moiety and *inx-8*. The  
757 deletions are expected to constitute *inx-8* null alleles because, in addition to removing the start  
758 codon, they delete amino acids 1–349 (out of 382 amino acids), including virtually all residues  
759 essential for spanning the plasma membrane and forming a channel (Starich and Greenstein,  
760 2020). The approach used pRB1017 to express two single guide RNAs (sgRNAs) under control of  
761 the *C. elegans* U6 promoter (Arribere et al., 2014). Oligonucleotides *inx8\_us\_sgRNA1.F* and  
762 *inx8\_us\_sgRNA1.R* were annealed and used to generate the plasmid *inx8\_us\_sgRNA1* to direct  
763 Cas9 cleavage 136 bp upstream of the ATG initiator codon (Table S1 lists the sequences of all  
764 oligonucleotides used in this study). Oligonucleotides *inx8\_sgRNA1.F* and *inx8\_sgRNA1.R* were  
765 annealed and used to generate the plasmid *inx8\_sgRNA1* to direct Cas9 cleavage in exon 3. To  
766 generate sgRNA clones, annealed oligonucleotides were ligated to BsaI-digested pRB1017  
767 plasmid vector, and the resulting plasmids were verified by Sanger sequencing. pDD162 served  
768 as the source of Cas9 expressed under control of the *eef-1A.1/eft-3* promoter (Dickinson et al.,  
769 2013). The repair template oligonucleotide used was *inx8\_rpr*. Genome editing employed the  
770 *dpy-10* co-conversion method (Arribere et al., 2014). The injection mix contained pJA58 (7.5  
771 ng/μl), AF-ZF-827 (500 nM), *inx8\_us\_sgRNA1* (25 ng/μl), *inx8\_sgRNA1* (25 ng/μl), *inx8\_rpr* (500  
772 nM), and pDD162 (50 ng/μl) and was injected into adult hermaphrodites from strains DG5131  
773 *inx-8(qy78[mKate2::*inx-8*]) IV; bcls39[lim-7p::*ced-1::gfp + lin-15(+)] V; nals37[lag-*  
774 *2p::*mCherry::PH + unc-119(+)]* and DG5020 *bcls39[lim-7p::*ced-1::gfp + lin-15(+)]V; nals37[plag-*  
775 *2::*mCherryPH + unc-119(+)]*. Correct targeting was verified by conducting PCR with primer pairs  
776 *inx8\_delta.F* and *inx8\_delta.R* followed by DNA sequencing. Three deletion alleles were  
777 recovered from the injections into DG5131 (*qy78tn2031*, *qy78tn2032*, and *qy78tn2033*), and****

778 two deletion alleles were recovered from the injections into DG5020 (*tn2034* and *tn2035*). The  
779 deletion alleles were outcrossed to *tmC5(tmIs1220[pmyo-2::Venus])/+ IV; bcls39[lim-7p::ced-*  
780 *1::gfp + lin-15(+)/+V; nals37[plag-2::mCherryPH + unc-119(+)]/+* males. Homozygous strains  
781 were analyzed by confocal microscopy.

782

783 **Table S2. Oligonucleotides used in this study**

784 <b>Oligo name</b>	<b>Sequence</b>
785 inx8_us_sgRNA1.F	TCTTGTGGAAAACAGAGGAATGGG
786 inx8_us_sgRNA1.R	AAACCCCATTCCTCTGTTTTCCAC
787 inx8_sgRNA1.F	TCTTGAGTGACTTGGTAGCATCGG
788 inx8_sgRNA1.R	AAACCCGATGCTACCAAGTCACTC
789 inx8_RPR	GGTGGCCAATAAAAATGCTTTTCTTTTGGCTTTT
790	CTCTATCTACTTCCGTTCCGCCCGGAGGTTGCC
791	GTGGAGATGTACAGCGACTTTTATAGTAAGTCTTT
792	TCAAC
793 inx8_delta.F	CCTTCGACCTGATTTCCCTTCTTCTAATG
794 inx8_delta.R	CTATTGCTTTCCGTTCTTCAAGATGTTGTTG

795

796

797 *Immunostaining and image analysis of fixed samples*

798

799 Immunostaining was carried out as described (Mohammad et al., 2018). Briefly, synchronized  
800 adult hermaphrodites, 24-hr past mid-L4, were dissected in PBST (PBS with 0.1% Tween 20),  
801 with 0.2 mM levamisole to extrude the gonads. The gonads were fixed in 3% paraformaldehyde  
802 solution for 10 min and then post-fixed in -20° chilled methanol for 10 min. After 3x 10-min  
803 washes with PBST, they were blocked in 30% goat serum for 30 min at RT. The gonads were  
804 then incubated with the desired primary antibodies diluted (see below) in 30% goat serum at 4°  
805 overnight. The next day, after 3x 10-min PBST washes, the gonads were further incubated with  
806 appropriate secondary antibodies, diluted in 30% goat serum, at 4° overnight. The gonads were  
807 washed 3 times with PBST, then incubated with 0.1 g/ml DAPI in PBST for 30 min. After removal

808 of excess liquid, the gonads were mixed with anti-fading agent (Vectashield) and transferred to  
809 an agarose pad on a slide. Hyperstack images were captured using a spinning disk confocal  
810 microscope (PerkinElmer-Cetus, Norwalk, CT). Two overlapping hyperstack images were  
811 captured for each gonad arm to obtain coverage of >50 cell diameters from the distal end of  
812 the gonad. Images were further processed in Fiji, and DAPI stained nuclei were used to mark  
813 the number of cell diameters from the distal end. Employing pixel to micron ratio, specific to  
814 the images captured, cell diameters were converted into microns where required.

815

816 SYGL-1 zone length assessment: OLLAS staining was used to assess 3xOLLAS::SYGL-1  
817 accumulation (Shin et al., 2017). In wild-type young adults, SYGL-1 accumulates at the distal end  
818 of the germline and is downregulated around 10 cell diameters from the distal tip (Kocsisova et  
819 al., 2019; Shin et al., 2017). Cell diameters were counted from the distal end of the germline up  
820 to the row where SYGL-1 is no longer visible by eye. OLLAS staining in the wild type worms  
821 without OLLAS tag was used to differentiate staining from the background. To confirm the  
822 accuracy of our visual assessment, we quantified the intensity of SYGL-1 accumulation in the  
823 distal germline, employing methods similar to Chen et al., 2020 in the same set of germlines  
824 where the SYGL-1 zone was visually evaluated. We found that the cell diameter position called  
825 as the end of the SYGL-1 zone consistently corresponded to 6 – 9% of peak SYGL-1 intensity, for  
826 each genotype. These results indicate that the SYGL-1 zone length visual assessment was  
827 reproducible and consistent.

828

829 Progenitor zone length assessment: The gonads were stained with a progenitor zone marker,  
830 CYE-1, and an early meiotic prophase marker, pSUN-1, (anti-SUN-1 S8-Pi) (Mohammad et al.,  
831 2018). For assessing the progenitor zone length, cell diameters (rows) were counted from the  
832 distal end of the germline, where all cells are CYE-1 positive, till the point after which the  
833 majority of the cells in a row have switched from staining for CYE-1 to pSUN-1. Note that pSUN-  
834 1 staining is not shown in the figures though it was used to assess the PZ border.

835

836 Assessment of distal position of Sh1: anti-GFP antibody staining was used to visualize the  
837 sheath, where cell diameters were counted from distal end to the point where GFP staining  
838 became prominent.

839

840 Primary antibodies used: mouse anti-CYE-1 (1:100; (Brodigan et al., 2003)); guinea pig anti-SUN-  
841 1 S8-Pi (1:1000; (Penkner et al., 2009)); rat anti-OLLAS (1:2000; Novus Biological); rabbit anti-  
842 GFP (1:200; from Swathi Arur, MD Anderson Cancer Center).

843

844 Secondary antibodies used: Alexa Fluor 647 goat anti-mouse (Life Technologies), Alexa Fluor  
845 594 goat anti-guinea pig (Invitrogen), Alexa Fluor 594 donkey anti-rat (Invitrogen), Alexa Fluor  
846 488 goat anti-rabbit (Invitrogen).

847

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853

#### 854 **Contributions**

855 TT, EJAH, wrote the manuscript with contributions from all authors.

856 TT, AM, DG, T Starich performed analyzed and interpreted experiments.

857 EJAH, T Schedl, DG oversaw experiments and analysis

858

#### 859 **Competing interests**

860 E.J.A.H. holds US patent 6,087,153.

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