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Mechanisms of membrane deformation

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Membrane traffic requires the generation of high-curvature lipid-bound transport carriers represented by tubules and vesicles. The mechanisms through which membranes are deformed has gained much recent attention. A major advance has been the demonstration that direct interactions between cytosolic proteins and lipid bilayers are important in the acquisition of membrane curvature. Rather than being driven only by the formation of membrane-associated structural scaffolds, membrane deformation requires physical perturbation of the lipid bilayer. A variety of proteins have been identified that directly bind and deform membranes. An emerging theme in this process is the importance of amphipathic peptides that partially penetrate the lipid bilayer.

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Abbreviations

COP coatomer complex
LPAAT lysophosphatidic acid acyltransferase
MVB multivesicular body
PI(4,5)P2 phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate

Introduction

Cellular compartmentalisation requires membrane-bound structures. Traffic between membranous organelles occurs via tubular and vesicular membrane carriers that bud and fuse, effectively maintaining the compartmentalised state while allowing for dynamic flux. Over the past few years, we have garnered greater understanding of the molecular processes by which the trafficking organelles — tubules and vesicles — form and behave. Generation of these structures can be driven by a cooperation of mechanisms both extrinsic and intrinsic to the membrane. Mechanical forces applied to the membrane by the cytoskeleton can induce membrane tubule formation. Proteinaceous coats selectively associated with the surface of membrane buds are key mediators of vesicle formation in the endocytic and secretory pathways. Accessory factors to the main

constituents of coat proteins have also recently been found to be an integral part of both vesicle formation and cargo selection within the bud. Proteins that can deform the membrane into tubules have been identified and characterised. In addition, lipid components of the membrane, either directly or via interaction with proteins, have been suggested to facilitate the structural changes necessary to deform membranes.

In this review, we will primarily focus on recently described mechanisms for membrane deformation that have expanded our understanding of this process.

Extrinsic forces on the membrane

Cytoskeletal elements have long been known to play some role in membrane traffic, not only by forming the structural scaffold and network over which membrane traffic flows, but also by directly deforming membranes (Figure 1) [1–3]. A characteristic property of membrane bilayers is that the application of an external focal force results in bilayer tubule formation, rather than a broad ‘tenting’ of the membrane. Many intracellular membrane tubules are generated in this fashion [4*,5–8]. For example, microtubule motors can pull a developing membrane tubule along a preformed microtubule track *in vitro* [1,4*,5]. Microtubule-dependent mechanisms, possibly in cooperation with other cytosolic factors [9], have also been shown to play a role *in vitro* and *in vivo* for the tubular dynamics of the ER [1,2,10,11], as well as for the Golgi and endosome tubulation events following treatment with the fungal metabolite brefeldin A (BFA) [12].

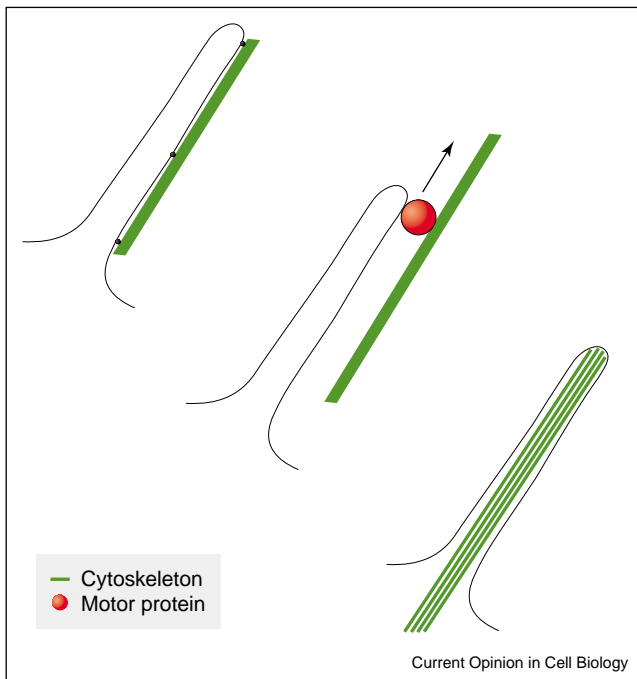
Other cytoskeletal elements, such as actin filaments and membrane-tethered myosin motors, may similarly participate in membrane deformation [13–15,16*,17]. One obvious example of actin-dependent membrane deformation is the formation of cell-surface tubular microvilli, formed by the extension of actin filaments against the plasma membrane. Thus, the cytoskeleton might affect membrane traffic by both structural and dynamic forces acting on the membrane.

Intrinsic forces on the membrane

Protein-mediated effects

Over the past few years, emerging data have implicated cytosolic proteins in bilayer deformation upon recruitment to the membrane. Oligomerisation of these proteins into a coat scaffold on the membrane has traditionally been thought to promote budding by imposing curvature on the membrane [18–20] (Figure 2a). This view, first developed for the clathrin coat, was then extended to other protein coats observed on vesicles, such as COPI

Figure 1

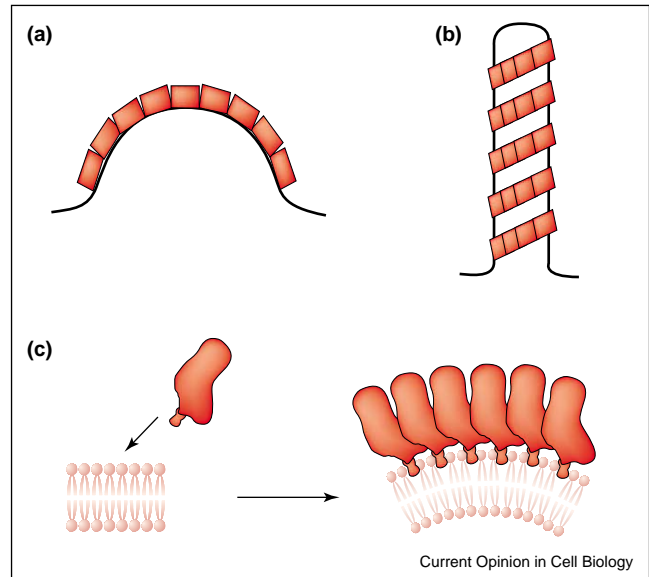


Cytoskeletal mechanisms for membrane deformation. Cytoskeletal elements may have multiple roles in membrane deformation. Above left: cytoskeleton-dependent formation and maintenance of tubular organelle structures; middle: formation of membrane tubules pulled by a cytoskeletal motor protein; below right: external cytoskeletal forces abutting the membrane and causing deformation.

[20] and COPII [21], and has since been supported by data revealing an intrinsic curvature in the structure of coat-protein scaffolds [22,23^{*}]. Importantly, the observation that coat assembly, bilayer invagination, and, in some cases, even fission could occur on protein-free liposomes demonstrated that no integral membrane proteins were required for this process [24–29].

As with the cytosolic proteins which form the coat on a developing bud, cytosolic proteins have also been found to drive bilayer tubulation following recruitment to the membrane (Figure 2b). The first evidence that cytosolic proteins play a physiological role in the generation of membrane tubules came from studies of dynamin, a GTPase critically implicated in the fission reaction of clathrin-coated vesicles and other membrane trafficking events [30–32]. Purified dynamin has the property to self-assemble into rings and spirals, both in solution and at the narrow tubular stalks of endocytic vesicles [33,34]. Both *in vitro* and *in vivo*, dynamin can deform lipid bilayers into narrow tubules coated by dynamin spirals [25,35,36]. A predominant theory emerged: coat proteins were involved in budding from the donor membrane, and dynamin rings were involved in forming the tubular neck of the clathrin-coated bud [34]. Upon GTP hydrolysis, constriction of the

Figure 2



Two modes of protein-mediated membrane deformation. (a,b) Proteins that polymerise with an intrinsic curvature (forming either spheres or spirals) could potentially drive bilayer curvature and influence membrane shape. (c) Membrane deformation according to the bilayer-couple hypothesis. By penetration of an amphipathic helix into the interfacial section of the bilayer, proteins could drive membrane deformation owing to bilayer surface-area discrepancy.

dynamin ring would mediate fission [31,36,37^{*}] (but see [38,39] for alternative interpretations).

The identification and characterisation of proteins associated with clathrin and dynamin, in conjunction with recent theoretical considerations of membrane biophysics, have since expanded and revised this view. With respect to clathrin, for example, to drive membrane curvature effectively, the rigidity of the coat protein polymer has to supercede the resistance of mechanically bending the membrane, described as the membrane-bending elastic modulus [40^{*}]. This notion has recently been challenged for clathrin, because of estimations that the rigidity of clathrin triskelia is similar to the membrane-bending elastic modulus [40^{*}]. If true, clathrin could at best serve to maintain an already curved membrane, thereby preventing its collapse back into an effectively planar form [40^{*}]. Thus, mechanisms in addition to coat-protein lattice formation that may help in deforming the bilayer are likely to come into play.

With respect to dynamin and tubulation, the identification of other endocytic proteins that bind and tubulate lipid bilayers has expanded the repertoire of proteins involved in this process. Amphiphysin and endophilin, two major interactors of dynamin, were found to robustly deform liposomes into narrow membrane tubules [41,42^{*}]. Epsin, an interactor of clathrin and of the clathrin

adaptor AP-2 [43–45], was also shown to induce membrane tubulation [46[•]]. There is currently no evidence that these proteins self-assemble into rings, like dynamin, in the absence of a lipid bilayer. The property of these proteins to deform membranes is likely to reflect a unique interaction with the membrane bilayer (see below), because not all proteins that bind lipid bilayers are able to induce deformation.

There is evidence for a role for these endocytic proteins in the early stages of clathrin-mediated budding, before the generation of a tubular neck, suggesting that the physiological role for these proteins might not be restricted to the formation of tubular membranes. For example, dynamin can be found on the dome of clathrin-coated buds, and antibody disruption of dynamin function at the lamprey synapse leads to markedly impaired clathrin-coated bud formation [47]. Furthermore, impairment of endophilin function at the lamprey synapse by antibody injection or by genetic disruption (in *Drosophila*) results in synaptic vesicle depletion and the accumulation of shallow clathrin-coated pits [48,49,50[•],51[•]].

Amphiphysin also binds clathrin and AP-2 in addition to dynamin [52,53], and clathrin-coated buds generated in the presence of amphiphysin have a more homogenous, smaller size than buds generated in the presence of clathrin-coat fractions alone (K Farsad *et al.*, unpublished data). Finally, epsin is able to recruit clathrin onto a lipid monolayer and induces ‘puckered’ clathrin-coated structures [46[•]]. Thus, via their ability to deform planar membranes, these proteins might assist clathrin in early stages of bud formation.

Although the above considerations apply to clathrin coats, it is still unknown whether similar mechanisms (i.e. cooperation of scaffold proteins and membrane-deforming proteins) might also function in coats comprising the COP proteins. In addition, caveolin polymerisation and membrane interactions are thought to play a role in caveolar budding [54–57]. As a final note, one possibility is that various properties of integral membrane proteins might also contribute to membrane deformation. For example, this has been proposed for peripherin, a trans-membrane protein concentrated at areas of high curvature in the outer segment discs of retinal photoreceptors, and which induces flattened microsomal vesicles when expressed *in vitro* [58–60].

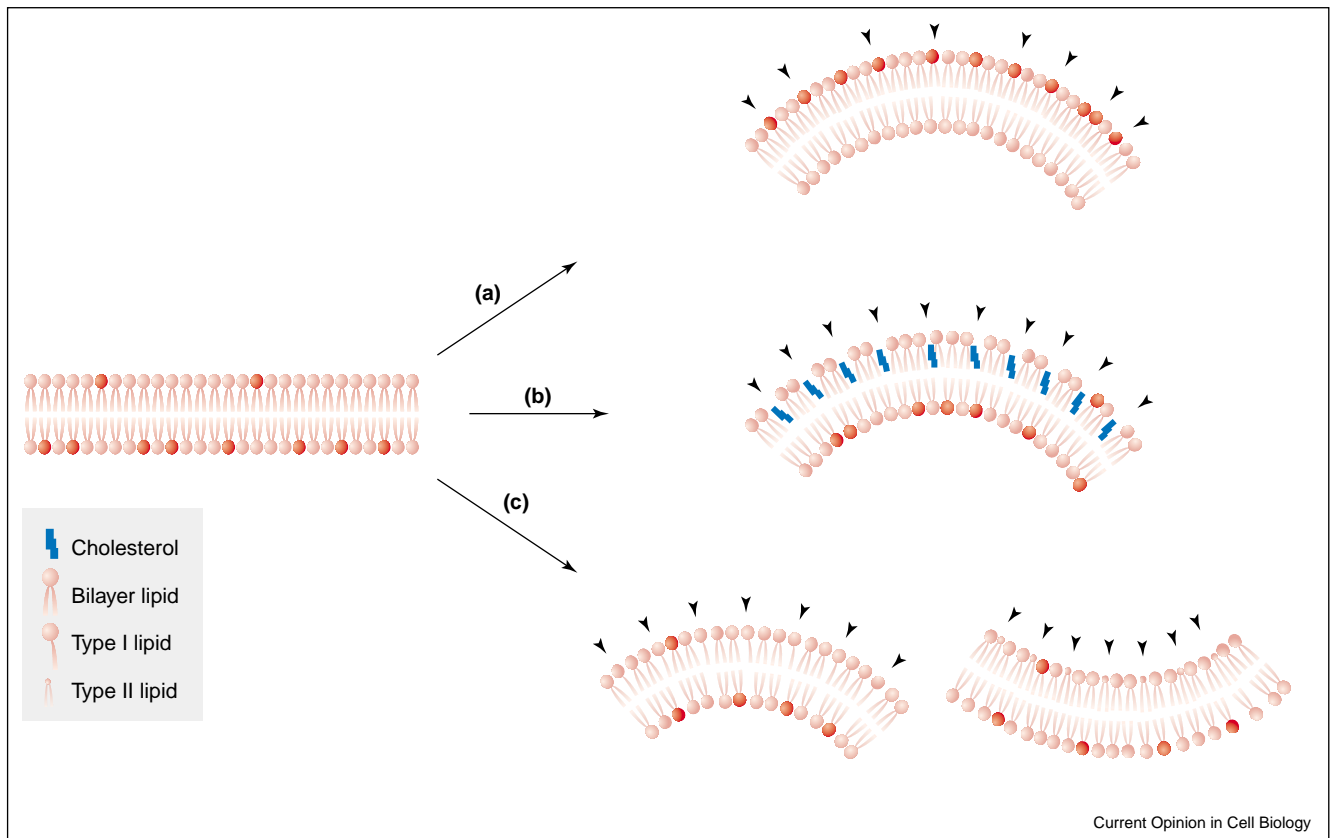
Lipid-mediated effects

The role of lipid-specific dynamics in enabling or generating membrane curvature has also been an area of provocative research [61–63]. For example, selective transfer of lipids between bilayer leaflets has been proposed as a means by which surface area asymmetries could influence budding and endocytosis (see below and Figure 3a) [62,64]. In addition, certain lipid species

are postulated to favour bilayer curvature owing to their physico-chemical properties, their relative geometries, or both [65,66]. Cholesterol, for example, is required for the generation of high-curvature clathrin-coated buds *in vivo* — cholesterol-depleting compounds prevent maturation of a bud past a shallow level of curvature [67,68]. One possible function of cholesterol is selectively to intercalate into the budding-side leaflet of the bilayer to enable bud formation without producing unfavourable hydrophobic–hydrophilic interactions as the bilayer is distorted (Figure 3b). Two proteins enriched in endocytic vesicle carriers, synaptophysin and caveolin, bind cholesterol [69,70]. These proteins could function to concentrate this lipid selectively in the budding portion of the bilayer, thus allowing more favourable phase interactions as the nascent bud forms [69,70]. In this way, the influence of cholesterol on membrane structure would encompass two non-exclusive possibilities. First, selective enrichment of cholesterol into one leaflet of the membrane might alter the relative bilayer surface areas to favour budding. Second, through differential partitioning, cholesterol might minimise the energy needed for budding by both decreasing local membrane stiffness and by preserving hydrophobic and van der Waals forces between the leaflets as the bilayer deforms [71,72,73[•]].

In addition, enzymatic alteration of lipids has been suggested to facilitate membrane deformation by generating particular lipid geometries (Figure 3c). Formation of type I lipids (i.e. those that tend to form micelles in aqueous solutions based on the geometry of their head groups and hydrocarbon tails), such as lysophosphatidylcholine, could favour positive curvature by adopting a wedge-like geometry, and formation of type II lipids (i.e. those which tend to form inverted hexagonal structures in aqueous solutions based on the geometry of their head groups and hydrocarbon tails), such as phosphatidylethanolamine, might favour negative curvature by effectively creating the reverse geometry [65,66]. For example, sphingomyelinase, an enzyme that cleaves phosphorylcholine from sphingomyelin to generate the type II lipid ceramide promotes the formation of bilayer invaginations independently from a protein-mediated effect [74]. Furthermore, phospholipase A2 activity was shown to be required for the 60–80 nm Golgi tubules formed upon treatment with BFA, as well as for the formation of tubular endosomal recycling organelles [75,76[•]]. Although the effect of phospholipase A2 on membrane deformation is not well understood mechanistically, one suggestion is that formation of type I lysolipids in the membrane might have a role. Putative roles for phospholipase C (PLC) and phospholipase D in influencing membrane structure through lipid modification have also been described [77–79]. Of note, lipid metabolism could alter bilayer structure not only directly, by affecting lipid geometries, but also indirectly, via the regulated recruitment of membrane-deforming proteins [46[•],80].

Figure 3



Lipid-driven membrane deformation. **(a)** Transfer of lipids to one leaflet could promote deformation by creating surface-area discrepancy between the leaflets. **(b)** Selective accumulation of cholesterol could decrease membrane rigidity, create bilayer surface-area discrepancy, and facilitate budding. **(c)** Type I and type II lipids, based on their relative geometries, have been postulated to play a role in membrane deformation. Black arrowheads indicate the transferred lipids in (a), cholesterol molecules in (b), and the various type I or type II lipid species in (c).

Endophilin has been reported to have lysophosphatidic acid acyltransferase (LPAAT) activity, mediating the transfer of a fatty acyl-CoA to lysophosphatidic acid, a type I lipid [81,82]. Similarly, BARS (brefeldin A ADP-ribosylated substrate), a protein involved in Golgi tubulation and fission, was also reported to have LPAAT activity [83]. It remains unclear what role LPAAT activity plays in induction of membrane curvature, especially since endophilin has been shown directly to deform lipid bilayers independently from this enzymatic activity [42*]. However, although the importance of the LPAAT activity of these proteins is currently undefined, the ability of these proteins to bind certain lipids might prove important for their biological function.

Amphipathic peptides and the bilayer-couple hypothesis

The bilayer-couple hypothesis, initially popularised by Sheetz and Singer in 1974, postulates that the two halves of a closed lipid bilayer, by virtue of asymmetries between the bilayer leaflets, could have differential responses to

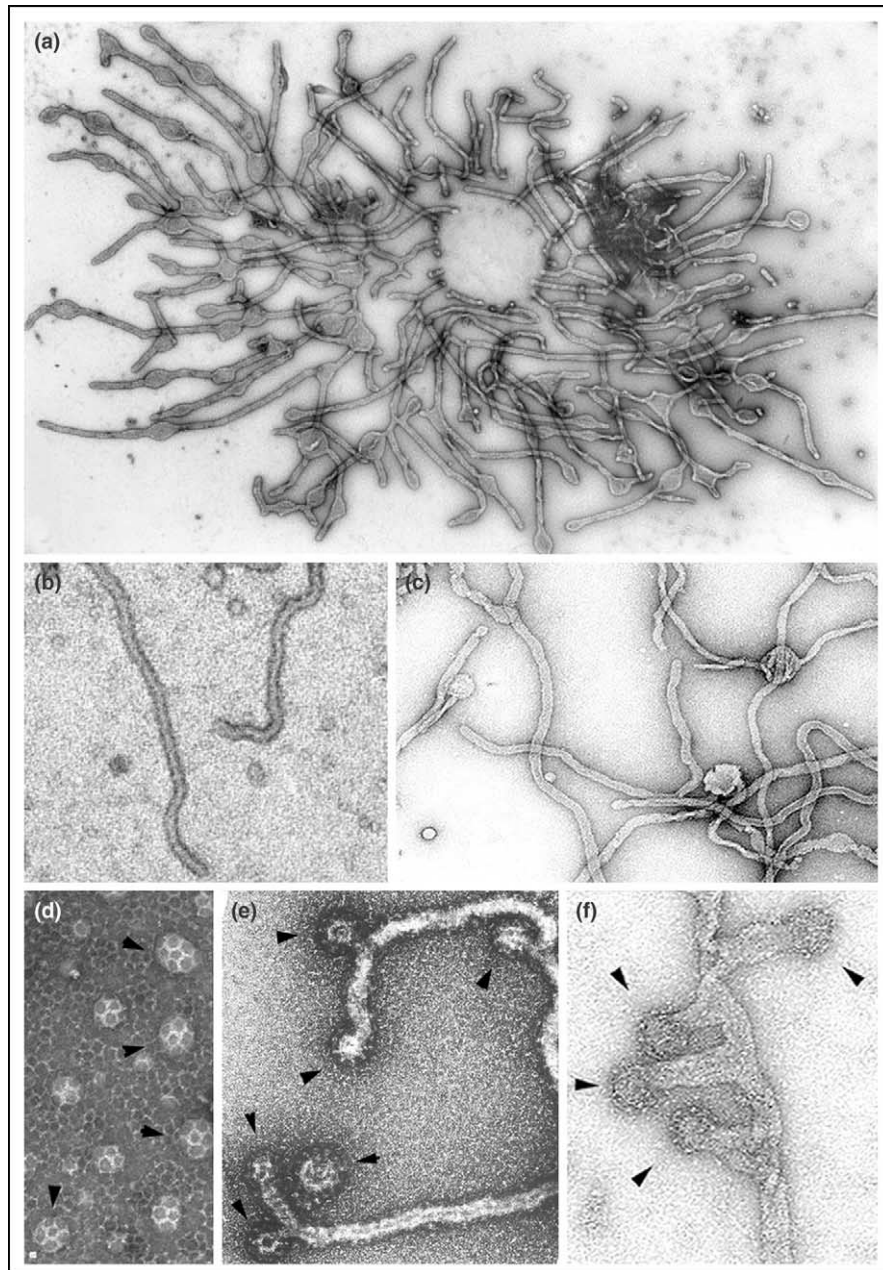
various perturbations [84,85]. Thus, a relative increase in surface area of one leaflet of a closed bilayer, as discussed above, is predicted to increase the spontaneous curvature of the bilayer. To minimise its energy state and maintain hydrophobic and van der Waals interactions between the leaflets, an unopposed bilayer will conform to its spontaneous curvature [86]. Specifically, the leaflet to which additional surface area is added will be the side to which the bilayer will deform in compensation. Sheetz and Singer observed that compounds with amphipathic qualities, presumably by intercalating into a particular leaflet of the membrane bilayer, were able to deform erythrocyte membranes according to the predictions of the bilayer-couple theory [84,85].

The bilayer-couple theory could explain the mechanism through which certain proteins affect morphological changes in planar membranes. By physically penetrating into one face of the bilayer, amphipathic peptides could cause membrane deformation (Figure 2c). The amino termini of the tubulogenic proteins endophilin and

amphiphysin contain an amino acid stretch predicted to form an amphipathic helix necessary for lipid bilayer tubulation [42^{*}]. The epsin amino-terminal homology (ENTH) domain of epsin also forms an amphipathic helix on binding phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate (PI[4,5]P₂), and this induced helix is necessary for bilayer

tubulation [46^{*}]. In addition, the ARF-family GTPases, involved in recruitment of coat proteins for vesicular trafficking along the secretory and endocytic pathways, have an amino-terminal amphipathic helix critical for membrane binding [87–90,91^{*}], which potentially could play a role in budding. An intriguing possibility is that all

Figure 4



Tubulation and clathrin-mediated budding. Tubular bilayer deformation caused by incubation of (a) amphiphysin with liposomes, (b) epsin with liposomes, and (c) endophilin with liposomes. (d) On lipid monolayers doped with PI(4,5)P₂, epsin stimulates clathrin recruitment and the formation of monolayer 'puckers', as demonstrated by clathrin pentagonal and hexagonal polymeric structures. (e) Clathrin-coated buds are seen associated with amphiphysin tubules. (f) When incubated with purified clathrin-coat proteins, endophilin-mediated membrane tubules are often capped with clathrin-coated buds, despite no biochemical binding between endophilin and clathrin-coat proteins. The image shown in (a) is courtesy of Kohji Takei; (b) and (d) are reproduced with permission from *Nature* (<http://www.nature.com/>) [46^{*}]; (e) is reproduced from the *Nature Cell Biology* [41] by copyright permission of the Rockefeller Press; and (c) and (f) are reproduced, with permission, from *The Journal of Cell Biology* [42^{*}].

of these proteins share a common mechanism for enabling membrane deformation through the interactions of an amphipathic peptide with the lipid bilayer. Identifying the mechanisms for how these protein–bilayer interactions are regulated will be paramount to understanding the dynamics of this process.

Recent biophysical studies using the prototypical amphipathic helical peptide melittin have shown that an amphipathic helix oriented parallel to a lipid bilayer surface would be ideally poised to reside at an interfacial location between the head groups and the hydrophobic core [92*,93]. The steep gradient of polarity between the head groups and the hydrocarbon tails within a lipid monolayer is estimated to be on the order of the diameter of an α helix, rendering an amphipathic helix an appropriate structural solution to a protein binding the monolayer in this fashion [94]. Thus, perhaps many of these proteins generating membrane deformation function by partially inserting an amphipathic helix into the bilayer in such a way as to create changes in membrane structure. A striking illustration of the power of an amphipathic peptide in affecting such a process was shown in the ability of a designed amphipathic 18-mer peptide to form extensive tubules 40–50 nm in diameter and up to 600 nm in length from liposomes comprising various lipid combinations [95*].

Penetration into the lipid bilayer seems necessary for this process, since proteins which bind superficially to the bilayer without penetration, such as the pleckstrin homology domain of PLC δ or the ANTH domain of AP180 (similar to the epsin ENTH domain, but without the ligand-induced amphipathic helix), do not cause deformation [42*,46*,96,97]. Another likely part of this process is clustering of these proteins such that sufficient concentrations are achieved to enable a significant membrane-deforming effect. Proteins such as endophilin and amphiphysin might cluster by polymerisation, whereas proteins such as epsin might cluster owing to the presence of localised interacting proteins. *In vitro*, and with overexpression, clustering might be a product of high protein concentrations, whereas the situation *in vivo* is probably more subtle and regulated. It remains to be seen whether different mechanisms for clustering have different effects on membrane structure.

Studies with melittin have shown that the monomeric amphipathic helix had only modest effects on bilayer structure at lower concentrations, causing only slight increases in area per lipid. By contrast, melittin monomers cysteine-linked to create dimers affected a significant change in bilayer structure and perturbation at the same monomer/lipid concentration used for monomeric melittin [92*]. Thus, the self-association of an amphipathic helix is thought to have a qualitatively different effect, compared with non-associating monomers, on the struc-

tural perturbation of a lipid bilayer [92*]. As such, it is possible that biological membrane dynamics use the effects of both monomeric and polymeric proteins to create variations on bilayer perturbation and deformation. The ability of these proteins to concentrate in the membrane, either alone or in various combinations, might affect the degree to which membrane structure is perturbed. Indeed, at high concentrations, both monomeric and dimeric melittin significantly perturb bilayer structure, and are ultimately membrane-lytic [92*].

Membrane-deforming proteins probably work in conjunction with clathrin-coat proteins to promote budding. *In vitro* data with epsin, amphiphysin and endophilin illustrate this point (Figure 4). As mentioned above, co-incubation of epsin with clathrin induced puckered clathrin polymers on a lipid monolayer [46*] (Figure 4d). Clathrin-coat proteins incubated with amphiphysin resulted in coated buds associated with amphiphysin tubules [41] (Figure 4e). Both epsin and amphiphysin interact biochemically with clathrin, and as such, it makes sense that these proteins could couple clathrin bud formation with other membrane-deforming activities. Interestingly, when incubated with coat proteins, many endophilin-generated tubules were also capped by clathrin-coated buds, despite the fact that endophilin has no known binding properties to clathrin-coat proteins [42*] (Figure 4f). This suggests that endophilin tubules might serve as structural, rather than biochemical, substrates for clathrin coats under conditions that promote budding [42*]. Thus, proteins that alone are able to drive membrane curvature might facilitate clathrin-mediated bud formation by altering bilayer structure to favour this process.

Conclusions and future directions

Our understanding of the mechanisms generating membrane deformation will no doubt increase our awareness of how this process affects various aspects of cell biology. Roles for membrane budding and tubulation have been described in both immunity and disease. For example, ‘reverse’ budding — budding away from the cytosol — is a mechanism for the formation of the multivesicular bodies (MVBs) in the late endosomal pathway [98–100]. Recent work in this field has demonstrated a role for three protein complexes, ESCRT (endosomal sorting complex required for transport) I, II and III [101*–103*], in addition to the monoubiquitin pathway [104,105] and phosphoinositide metabolism [106,107], in the generation of the luminal vesicles of the MVBs. Budding into the MVBs is an efficient way to target membrane proteins/receptors to lysosomes for degradation [100]. In addition, the luminal vesicles of MVBs are also involved in the immune response [100,108–111]. Loading of the major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class II molecules with antigen involves MVB luminal vesicles [100]. MVB luminal vesicles are also secreted as immunomodulatory organelles termed exosomes. Exosomes contain MHC class

II molecules and T cell co-stimulatory factors, and as such are potent immune stimulators and potential anti-tumour agents [100,108–111]. Furthermore, in enveloped viruses such as HIV-1, viral budding from the plasma membrane has apparently usurped the MVB machinery in an analogous process of budding away from the cytosol into the extracellular space [100,104,112,113]. How this budding process occurs is likely to represent a new mechanism in membrane deformation.

The parasite *Toxoplasma gondii* represents a new example of the role for tubulating proteins in disease. Once the parasite enters the cell into the parasitic vacuole, parasite secreted proteins play a role in the generation of a 60–90 nm tubular network emanating into the vacuole from the vacuolar membrane [114*]. The parasite secretes a protein, Gra2, which is involved in the formation of these tubules, and impaired tubule formation results in diminished parasite virulence [114*]. Gra2 contains two amphipathic α -helical regions that are critical for tubulation [114*]. Thus, *T. gondii* uses a secreted tubulogenic protein, with requisite amphipathic helices, in its infectious biology.

Membrane-deforming proteins involved in diverse cellular processes other than intracellular membrane traffic have also been described. A member of the amphiphysin protein family has been localised to the muscle T-tubule system, where its membrane-deforming properties are likely to play a role in the biology of these structures [115*]. Furthermore, dynamin and endophilin isoforms have been localised to the tubular plasma membrane invaginations often observed at podosomes, dynamic actin–membrane structures involved in motility and adhesion [116].

The number of factors known to be involved in generating membrane curvature has increased and has underscored our appreciation of the complexity of the process. Many issues remain to be resolved, and it is likely that the process is driven by a cooperation of both proteins and lipids. A major contribution to bilayer deformation is from the reversible recruitment of cytosolic proteins, which have the advantage of being recycled, to the membrane. Ultimately, more membrane-deforming factors will be identified, and we will probably find that nature has created more than one solution to the same problem.

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