

VEX1 controls the allelic exclusion required for antigenic variation in  
trypanosomes

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**Supporting Information Appendix**

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## Materials and Methods

### *T. brucei* growth and manipulation

Bloodstream-form *T. brucei*, Lister 427 and 2T1 cells (1) were grown in HMI-11 medium and genetically manipulated using electroporation as described (2); cytomix was used for all transfections other than for RNAi library generation. The subtelomeric *NPT*-reporter cassette within 2-kbp of a *de-novo* telomere was derived from pTMF (3). Assembly of the bloodstream-form *T. brucei* RNAi library was carried out as described (2) and the library incorporating the *NPT*-reporter was grown under RNAi-inducing conditions (tetracycline, Tet at 1  $\mu\text{g}\cdot\text{ml}^{-1}$ ) 24 h prior to G418-selection at 50  $\mu\text{g}\cdot\text{ml}^{-1}$  for 12 days. Puromycin, phleomycin, hygromycin and blasticidin were used at 2, 2, 2 and 10  $\mu\text{g}\cdot\text{ml}^{-1}$  for selection of recombinant clones; and at 1, 1, 1 and 2  $\mu\text{g}\cdot\text{ml}^{-1}$ , respectively, for maintaining those clones. Exceptions were G418 used at 1  $\mu\text{g}\cdot\text{ml}^{-1}$  to select for integration of the *GFP:NPT* bicistron with common UTRs and at 250  $\mu\text{g}\cdot\text{ml}^{-1}$  over 10 days to select for *VSG-5/NPT* co-activation, starting with  $1.5 \times 10^6$  cells. In the latter case, cells that were >99% VSG-5 negative, as determined by immunofluorescence microscopy, were sub-cloned prior to selection. Cumulative growth curves were generated from cultures seeded at  $10^5$  cells. $\text{ml}^{-1}$ , counted on a haemocytometer and diluted back to below  $10^5$  cells. $\text{ml}^{-1}$  as necessary. Established procyclic-form *T. brucei*, Lister 427 cells were grown in SDM-79 at 27°C and genetically manipulated by electroporation using 10  $\mu\text{g}$  linearized DNA in a 4-mm gap cuvette and a Gene Pulser (Bio-Rad) set at 1.4-kV, 400- $\Omega$  and 25- $\mu\text{F}$ . Electroporated cells were selected in 96-well plates after 24 h; hygromycin and blasticidin were used at 25 and 50  $\mu\text{g}\cdot\text{ml}^{-1}$ , respectively.

### Plasmids

Specific RNAi target fragments of 574 bp (Tb927.11.16920) or 418 bp (Tb927.6.4330) were amplified using PCR primers designed using RNAit (4) and cloned into pRPa<sup>ISL</sup> (5). For epitope-tagging at native loci, fragments of 915 bp (Tb927.11.16920) or 1069 bp

(Tb927.6.4330) were amplified and cloned in pNAT<sup>xTAG</sup> (5) to add a 12 x c-myc C-terminal epitope tag. An 1146 bp fragment of TRF2 (Tb927.10.12850) was amplified and cloned in pNAT<sup>TAGx</sup> to add an N-terminal GFP-tag. For overexpression, the 2754 bp open reading-frame of Tb927.11.16920 was amplified and cloned in the pRPa<sup>ix6mycx</sup> vector with or without fusion to a C-terminal myc-tag. RNAi-knockdown constructs under the control of tetracycline-inducible promoters were targeted to a single genomic locus validated for robust expression, and GFP or c-myc based vectors were used to add fluorescent or epitope-tags to native gene loci (5). Reporter strains were generated using telomere-mediated chromosome-fragmentation with derivatives of pTMF (3). The VSG-5 reporter, p5<sup>N</sup>TMF, was constructed by replacing the VSG-2 associated sequence with an *rDNA* promoter and a VSG-5 ORF with a *procyclin* 5'-sequence and VSG-2 3'-sequence. The latter sequence incorporates 77 bp up to the polyadenylation site and 819 bp beyond this site. The bicistronic reporter with common UTRs, pGFP<sup>NAA</sup>TMF, was constructed by replacing the VSG-2 associated sequence with an *rDNA* promoter and *GFP* ORF with a *procyclin* 5'-sequence and *aldolase* 3'-sequence. The latter sequence incorporates 651 bp up to the polyadenylation site and 70 bp beyond this site. The bicistronic reporter with distinct UTRs, pGFP<sup>NTA</sup>TMF, was constructed by replacing the *GFP*-associated *aldolase* 3'-sequence with a *tubulin* 3'-sequence. Oligonucleotide sequences are available on request.

### **Nucleic acid analysis**

RIT-seq was carried out on a MiSeq platform (Illumina) at BGI (The Beijing Genome Institute) and reads were mapped to the *T. brucei* 927 reference genome (v6, [tritrypdb.org](http://tritrypdb.org)) with Bowtie 2 (6) using the parameters --very-sensitive-local --phred33. Alignment files were manipulated with SAMtools (7) and a custom-script (2) and data were further assessed using the Artemis genome browser (8); 518,000 mapped reads. For RNA-seq, we used pairs of wild-type clones and pairs of strains, either uninduced or induced for VEX1 overexpression or knockdown for 72 h; population density was reduced by 74% and 24%, respectively,

following induction for 72 h. Briefly, polyadenylated transcripts were enriched using poly-dT beads and reverse-transcribed before sequencing on a HiSeq platform (Illumina) at the University of Dundee or at BGI. Reads were mapped to a hybrid genome assembly consisting of the *T. brucei* 927 reference genome plus the bloodstream VSG-ESs (9) and metacyclic VSG-ESs (10, 11) from the Lister 427 strain used in this study. Bowtie 2-mapping was with the parameters --very-sensitive --no-discordant --phred33. Alignment files were manipulated with SAMtools (7). Per-gene read counts were derived using the Artemis genome browser (8); MapQ, 0. Read counts were normalised using edgeR and differential expression was determined with classic edgeR. RPKM values were derived from normalised read counts in edgeR (12). Southern blotting and Northern blotting were carried out according to standard protocols.

### **Western blotting**

Western blotting was carried out according to standard protocols. Rabbit  $\alpha$ -VSG-2, rabbit  $\alpha$ -VSG-5 and rabbit  $\alpha$ -VSG-6 were all used at 1:20,000, while mouse  $\alpha$ -myc (Source Bioscience) was used at 1:2,000. Blots were developed using an enhanced chemiluminescence kit (Amersham) according to the manufacturer's instructions.

### **Microscopy**

Immunofluorescence microscopy was carried out according to standard protocols, typically using wild-type cells and cells induced for VEX1 knockdown or overexpression for 72 h. We used 'antigen-retrieval' for quantitative analysis of pol-I and VEX1 and for 3D-SIM. In these cases, prior to permeabilization, fixed cells were rehydrated in PBS for 5 min at RT, held at 95°C for 60 s in antigen retrieval buffer (100 mM Tris, 5% urea, pH 9.5) and then washed 3 x 5 min in PBS at RT. Primary antisera were rat  $\alpha$ -VSG-2 (1:10,000), rabbit  $\alpha$ -VSG-5 (1:10,000), rabbit  $\alpha$ -VSG-6 (1:10,000), rabbit  $\alpha$ -GFP (1:500, Invitrogen), mouse  $\alpha$ -myc (1:400, Source Bioscience) and rabbit  $\alpha$ -NOG1 (1:500, Tb927.11.3120) (13).  $\alpha$ -pol-1

antisera (1:200) were raised in rabbits against two peptides (DTAILRDVLERNF and DTGGPQRRRRGSVESGRGD - Tb927.8.5090; Perbio). Cells were mounted in Vectashield (Vector Laboratories) containing DAPI (4',6-diamidino-2-phenylindole). For standard immunofluorescence microscopy, secondary antibodies (Pierce) were FITC conjugated  $\alpha$ -rabbit (1:2000), FITC-conjugated  $\alpha$ -mouse (1:2000) and rhodamine conjugated  $\alpha$ -rat (1:2000). In *T. brucei*, DAPI-stained nuclear and mitochondria DNA can be used as cytological markers for cell-cycle stage; one nucleus and one kinetoplast (1N:1K) indicates G<sub>1</sub>, one nucleus and an elongated kinetoplast (1N:eK) indicates S-phase, one nucleus and two kinetoplasts (1N:2K) indicates G<sub>2</sub>/M and two nuclei and two kinetoplasts (2N:2K) indicates post-mitosis. We used an Eclipse E600 epifluorescence (Nikon) or a Zeiss Axiovert 200M microscope. Images were captured using a Coolsnap FX (Photometrics) CCD, or a AxioCam MRm camera, respectively. Images were processed using Metamorph and analyzed using ImageJ. Actinomycin D was applied at 10  $\mu\text{g}.\text{ml}^{-1}$  and eliminated focal VEX1 signals, detectable in >60% of control cell nuclei. For 3D-SIM, secondary Alexa Fluor conjugated goat antibodies (ThermoFisher) were  $\alpha$ -rabbit 488,  $\alpha$ -rat 647 and  $\alpha$ -mouse 568, all used at 1  $\mu\text{g}.\text{ml}^{-1}$ . These cells were mounted on precision cover glass (Marienfeld; thickness N<sup>o</sup>. 1.5H, tol. +/- 5  $\mu\text{m}$ ) and analyzed using a super-resolution OMX Blaze system (GE Healthcare).

### **Flow cytometry**

Fluorescence activated cell sorting was carried out according to standard protocols. Briefly, VSGs were detected using rat  $\alpha$ -VSG-2 (1:10,000) and rabbit  $\alpha$ -VSG-6 (1:10,000) primary antibodies. Secondary antibodies were goat  $\alpha$ -rat Alexa Fluor 647 and goat  $\alpha$ -rabbit Alexa Fluor 488 both at 1  $\mu\text{g}.\text{ml}^{-1}$ . DNA was stained with propidium iodide at 5  $\mu\text{g}.\text{ml}^{-1}$ . Samples were analyzed on a FACS Canto (Becton Dickinson) and data were visualized using FlowJo software.

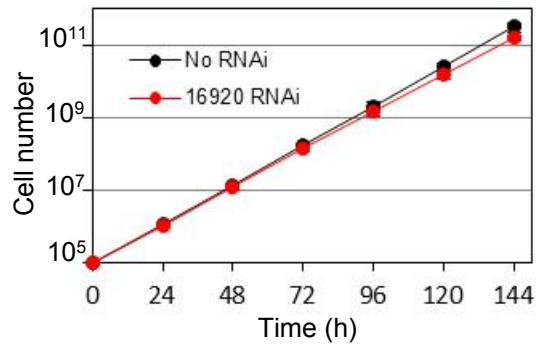
### **Quantitative mass spectrometry**

GPI-specific phospholipase C (GPI-PLC) cleaved soluble VSG (sVSG) was prepared as described (14), except the eluate was concentrated on an Amicon Ultra 0.5 ml centrifugal filter (Millipore), and recovered in 100  $\mu$ l of water. We used wild-type cells and cells induced for VEX1 knockdown or overexpression for 72 h. sVSG samples at 0.5  $\mu$ g. $\mu$ l<sup>-1</sup> in 50 mM ammonium bicarbonate and 0.5% RapiGest SF (Waters Corp., USA) were reduced in 10 mM DTT (Calbiochem, Clelands Reagent, ULTROL Grade) at 56°C for 1 h and alkylated with 50 mM iodoacetamide for 30 min at 20°C. Trypsin-digestion (Pierce, 0.25  $\mu$ g MS-Grade Trypsin) was in a ThermoMixer (Eppendorf) for 16 h at 30°C and 900 rpm. Samples were then adjusted to 1% formic acid and incubated for 45 m at 37°C and 900 rpm. Samples were spun for 10 min at 14,500 rpm and injected (10  $\mu$ l) into an Ultimate 3000 RSLCnano system (Thermo Scientific) coupled to a Linear Trap Quadropole OrbiTrap Velos Pro (Thermo Scientific). Peptides were trapped on an Acclaim PepMap 100 (C18, 100  $\mu$ M x 2 cm) and then separated on an Easy-Spray PepMap RSLC C18 column (75  $\mu$ M x 50 cm; Thermo Scientific). Data files were searched against ES-associated VSGs using the Mascot Search Engine (Mascot Daemon Version 2.3.2). emPAI scores are proportional to protein content in a protein mixture (15).

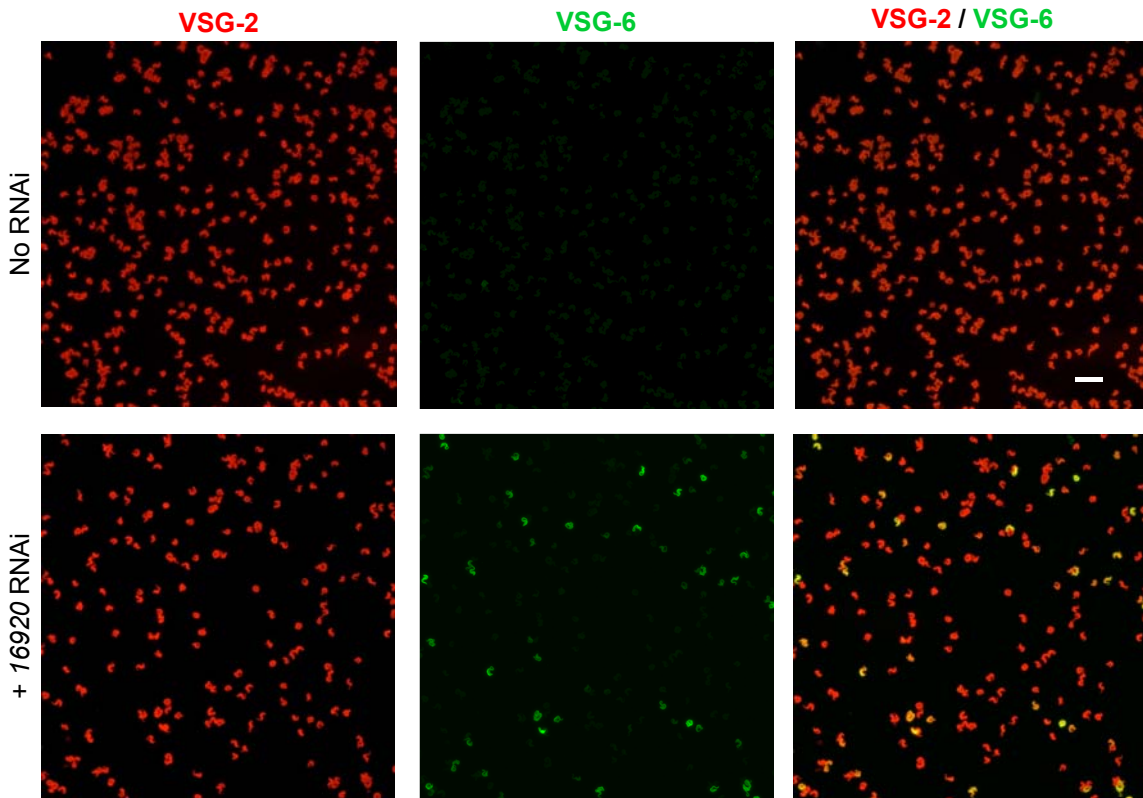
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**A.**

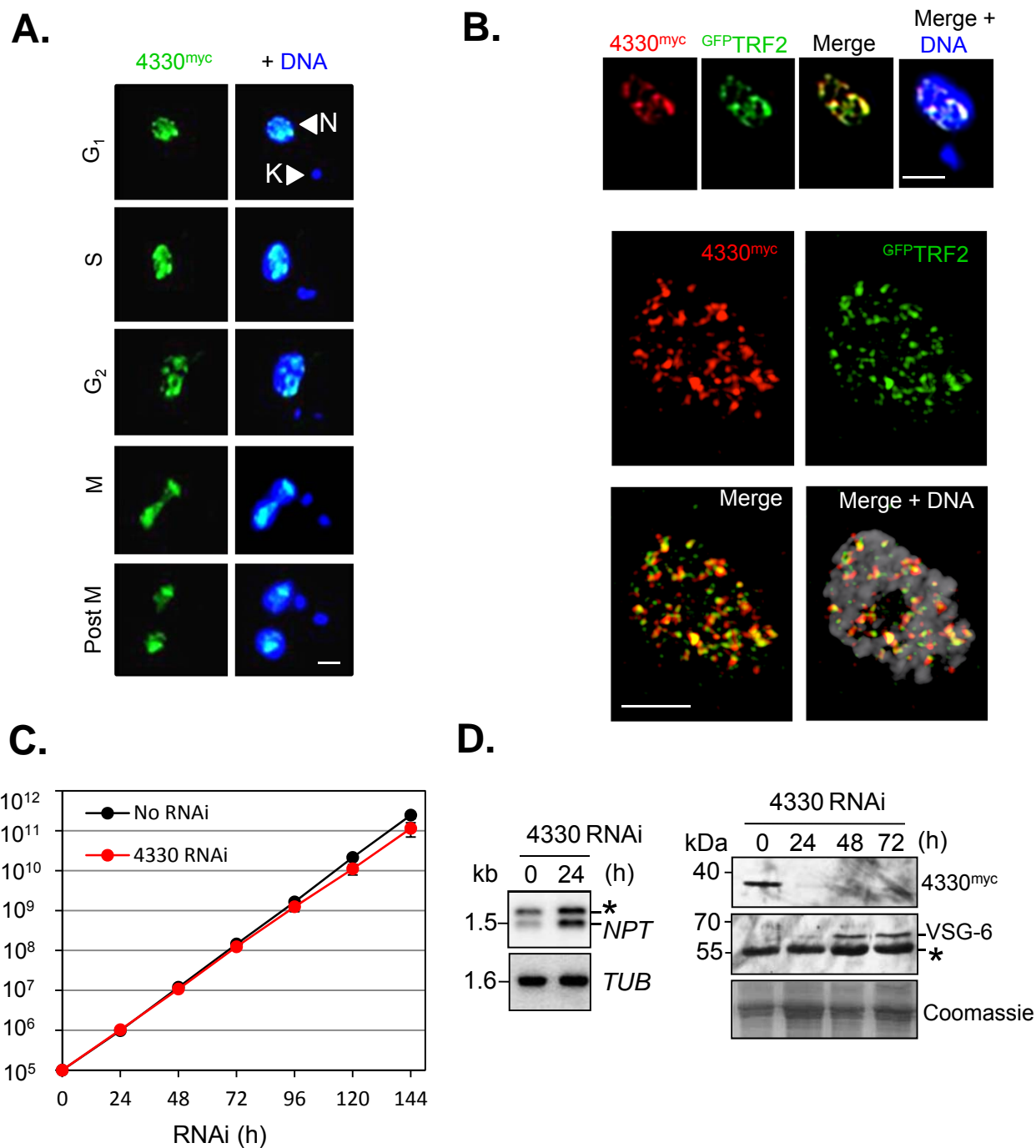


**B.**

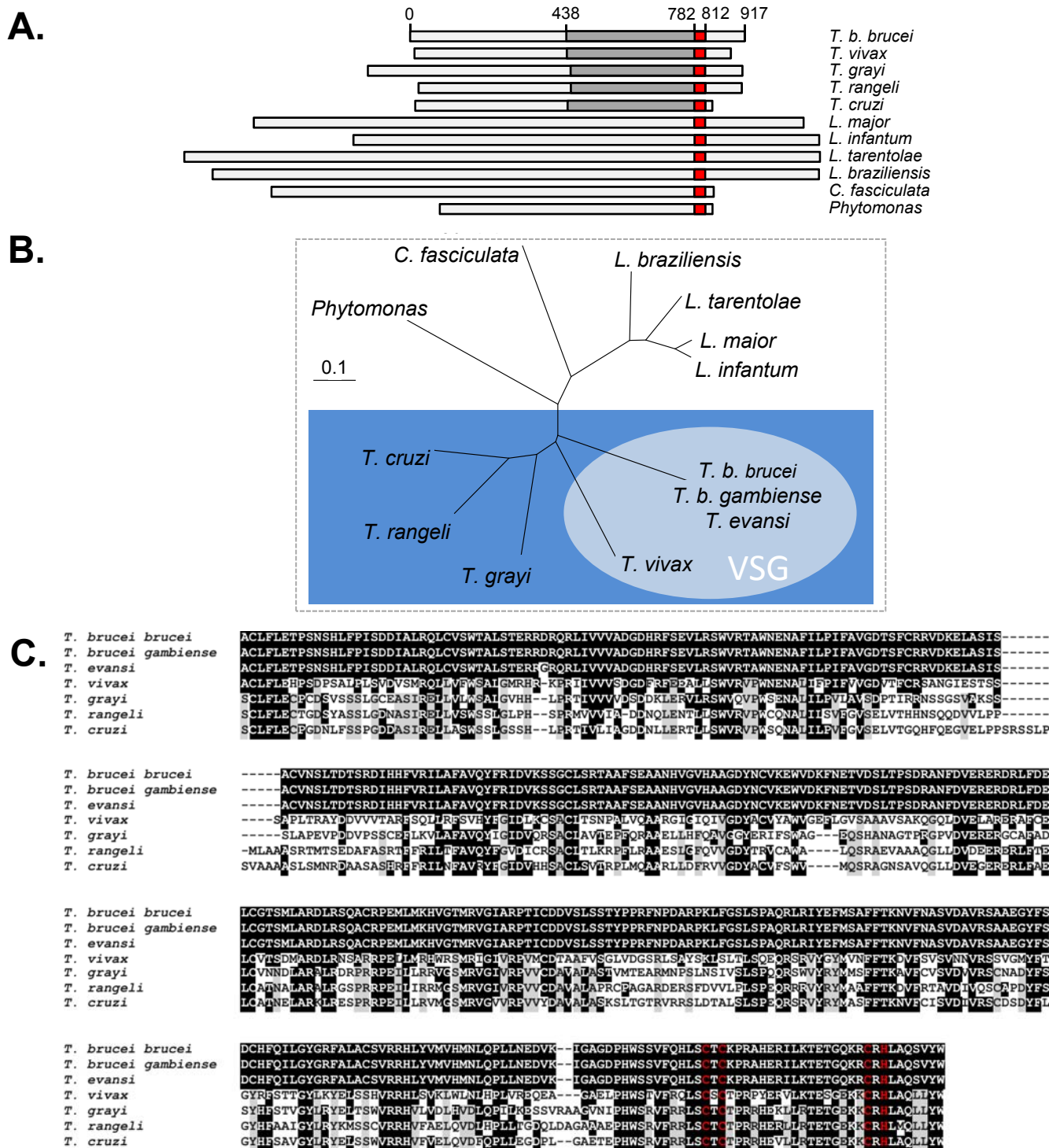


**Figure S1. Tb927.11.16920 controls VSG exclusion.** (A) The growth-curve indicates relative cell-number following Tb927.11.16920 knockdown; data derived from two independent strains. Error bars, SD. (B) Immunofluorescence microscopy analysis of VSG-expression after Tb927.11.16920 RNAi (72 h). Cells were stained with both  $\alpha$ -VSG-2 and  $\alpha$ -VSG-6. Scale bar, 100  $\mu$ m.

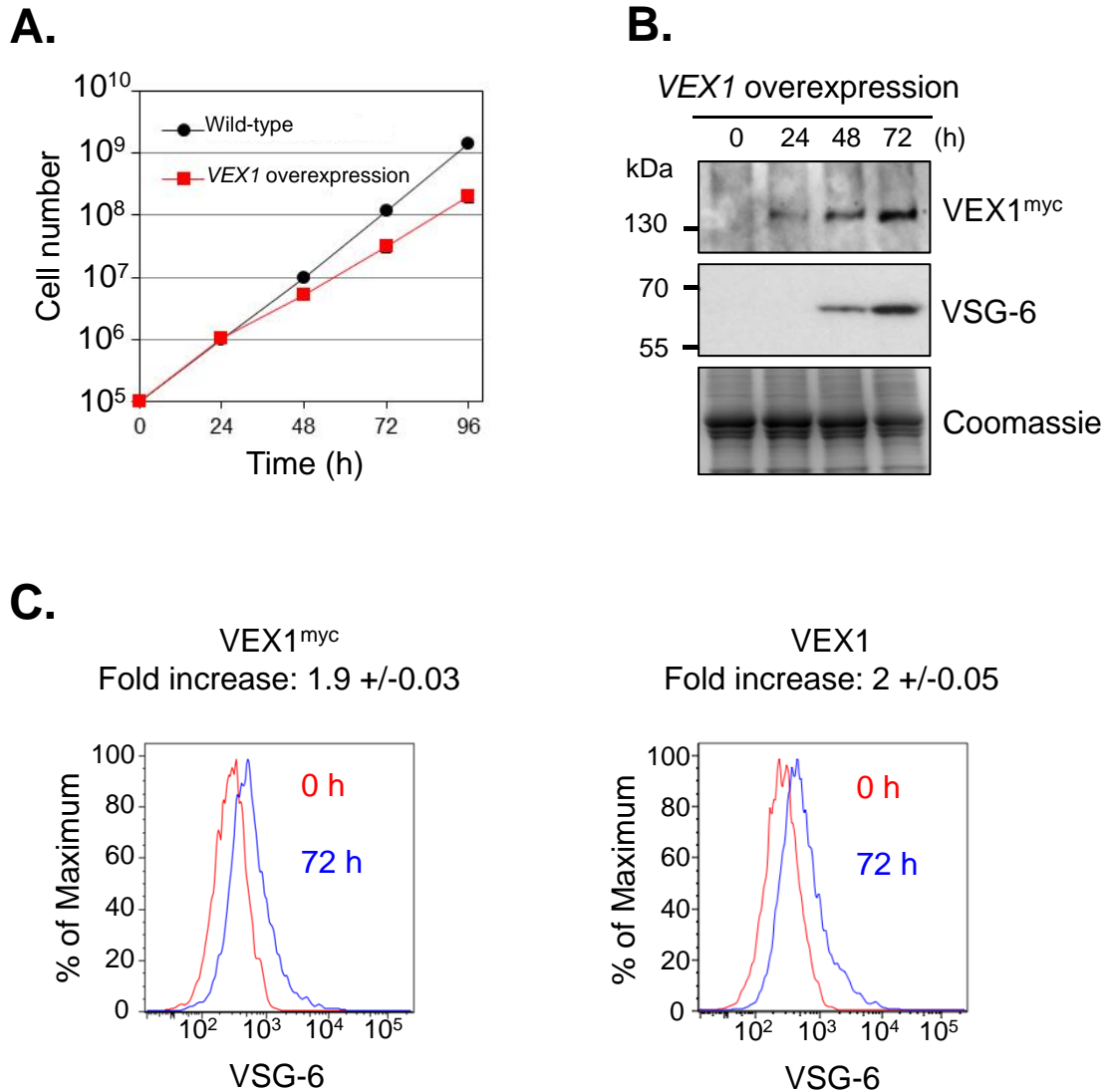




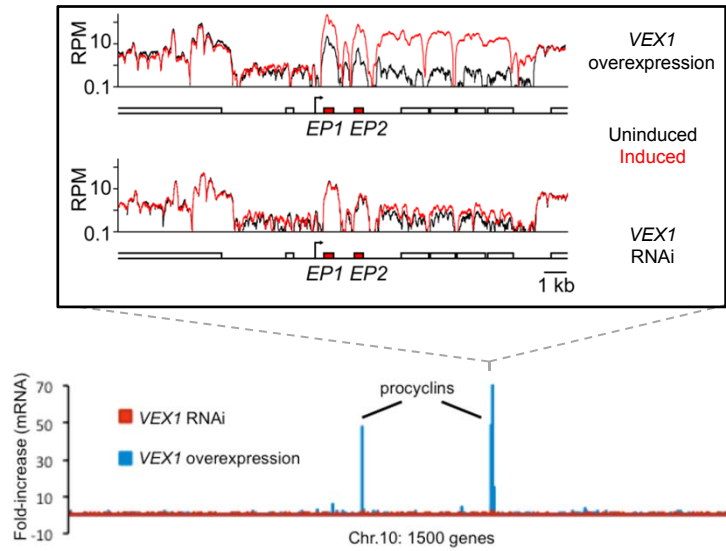
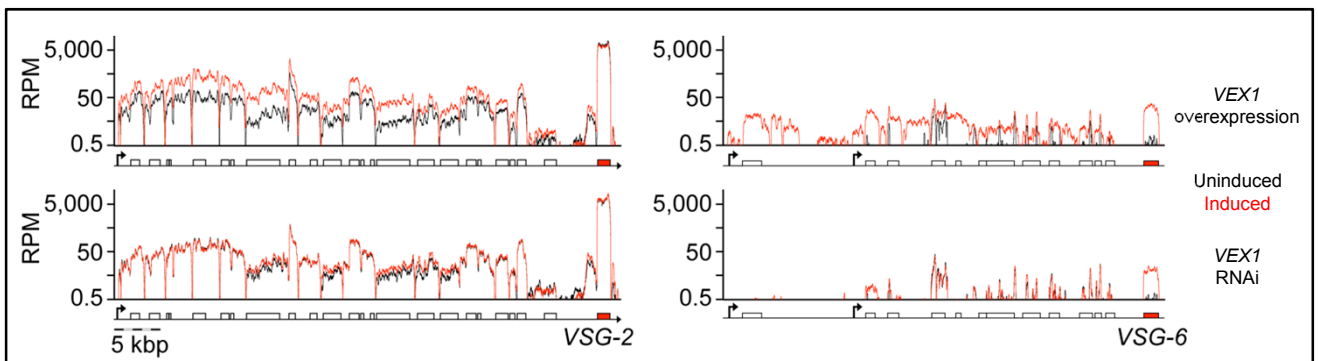
**Figure S2. Tb927.6.4330 encodes a telomere-associated protein.** (A) Immunofluorescence microscopy of Tb927.6.4330<sup>myc</sup> in bloodstream form *T. brucei*; cell-cycle phases are indicated. DNA was counter-stained with DAPI. N, nucleus; K, kinetoplast (mitochondrial genome). (B) Immunofluorescence microscopy of Tb927.6.4330<sup>myc</sup> and GFPTRF2. Lower panels, 3D structured illumination projections. Scale bar 2  $\mu$ m. (C) Growth was assessed in two independent Tb927.6.4330 RNAi-knockdown strains. Error bars, SD. (D) Subtelomeric *NPT* (left-hand side) and *VSG* derepression (right-hand side) were assessed by RNA and protein blotting, with *TUB* and Coomassie panels as loading controls, respectively. Knockdown was also confirmed by monitoring Tb927.6.4330<sup>myc</sup> (right-hand side). \* indicates a cross-reacting band in each case.



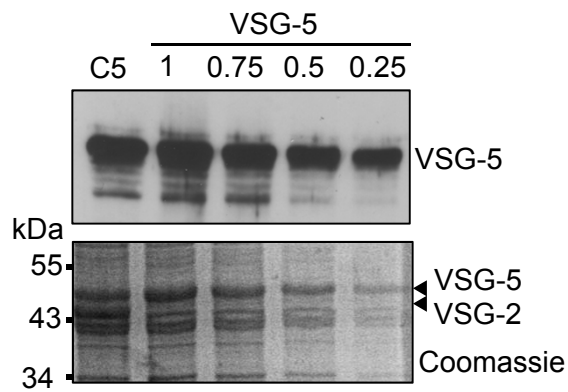
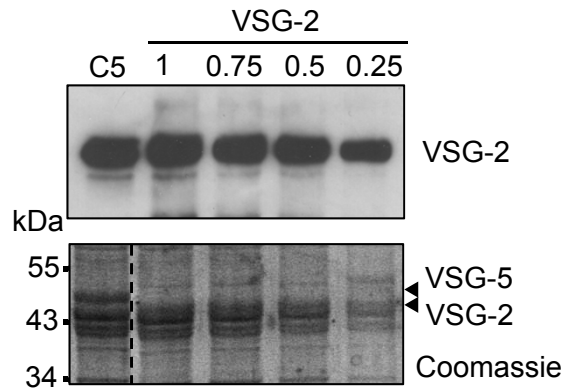
**Figure S3. VEX1 Sequence Analysis.** (A) The schematic shows the predicted VEX1 protein and orthologues encoded by syntenic genes in other trypanosomatids, including parasites of humans and other mammals, crocodiles, plants and insects. The location of the conserved SWIM-type Zn-finger is indicated (red). The grey shaded regions are aligned in C. (B) Phylogenetic analysis. The unrooted neighbour-joining tree was generated using clustal 1.8X and TreeView. The blue box indicates sequences aligned in C and the light-blue oval indicates trypanosomes that undergo VSG-based antigenic variation. (C) Alignment of a conserved VEX1-region. Residues identical to the *T. b. brucei* sequence are on a black background and other residues shared among >2 other sequences are on a grey background. Key residues of the SWIM-type zinc finger are highlighted (red). The *T. b. brucei* gene (Tb927.11.16920) and the other syntenic gene sequences can be accessed via [tritrypdb.org](http://tritrypdb.org).



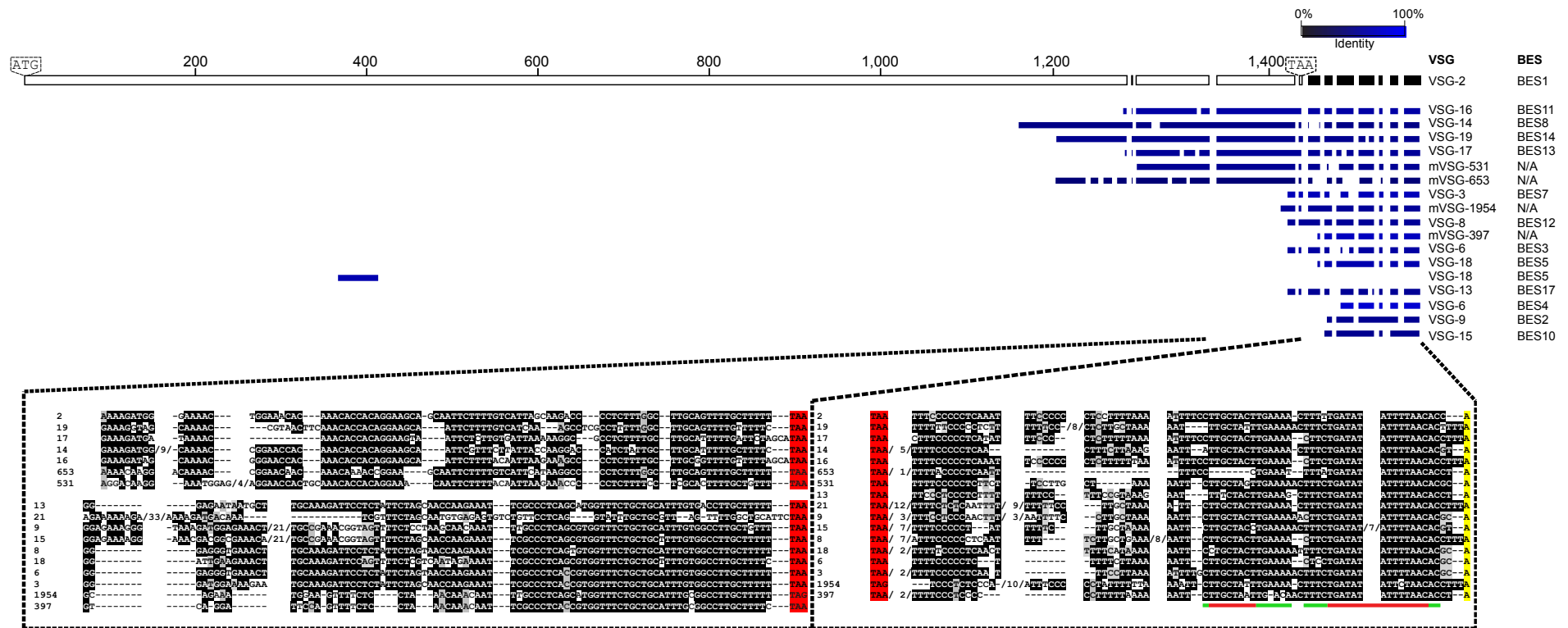
**Figure S4. VEX1 overexpression derepresses VSGs.** (A) The growth-curve indicates relative cell-number following VEX1 overexpression; data derived from two independent strains. Error bars, SD. (B) Overexpression of VEX1<sup>myc</sup> was associated with VSG-6 derepression as assessed by protein blotting. The Coomassie-stained panel serves as a loading control. (C) Flow-cytometry analysis of VSG-6 expression before (red) and after (blue) VEX1 overexpression. Data for myc-tagged VEX1 and native VEX1 are shown. Mean increase in VSG-6 fluorescence intensity is shown +/- SD.

**A.****B.**

**Figure S5. RNA-seq analysis reveals positive and negative control of pol-I loci by VEX1. (A)** Specific derepression of *procyclin* loci on chr. 10 following *VEX1* overexpression. The upper box shows normalized, single base resolution RNA-seq plots of the *EP1/EP2 procyclin* locus. RPM, reads per million; boxes, protein-coding genes; arrowheads, *procyclin* promoters. **(B)** Specific derepression of *ESAGs* (white boxes) at both active and 'silent' VSG-ESs following *VEX1* overexpression. Normalized, single base resolution RNA-seq plots of the active VSG-ES (*VSG-2*) and a 'silent' VSG-ES (*VSG-6*). Arrowhead above the line, VSG-ES promoters.



**Figure S6.** Simultaneous expression of VSG-2 and VSG-5. Western blots probed with a-VSG sera and equivalent Coomassie-stained gels are shown. The top panel shows clone 5 compared to a dilution-series from a wild-type clone expressing VSG-2. The lower panel shows clone 5 compared to a dilution-series from a wild-type clone expressing VSG-5.



**Figure S7.** Analysis of VSG-associated nucleotide sequences. We analyzed the annotated VSG-ES sequences and metacyclic VSG-ES sequences from the Lister 427 strain used in this study. Identity ranged from 71-96% over 77 nucleotides in the 3'-UTR and similarity also extended to the C-terminal, VSG-encoding sequence. The top panel indicates the VSG-2 query sequence and 'hits' (blue) from BLAST-analysis against a custom database containing the ORF and predicted 3'-UTRs of bloodstream and metacyclic ES-associated VSGs. The lower panels show alignments for the regions comprising the majority of hits. The most common bases are on a black background while additional bases shared among >2 additional sequences are on a grey background. Red bars below the alignment indicate a previously identified conserved '8/14mer' while green extended lines indicate that this can be considered a '15/20mer' in the current ES-associated VSG cohort.

Gene ID	Protein	Function	Subcellular localisation	Perturbation	Loss of fitness	VSG expression control	VSG switching control	Promoter-adjacent control only	Citation	PMID
Tb927.11.16920	<a href="#">VFX1</a>	Allelic exclusion	Adjacent to ESB	RNAi	Moderate	Y			Current study	Current study
Tb927.6.4330			Telomeres	Overexpression	Moderate	Y			Current study	Current study
Tb927.10.7420	<a href="#">BDF2</a>	Ac-Lys binding	Nucleus	Knockout	Moderate	Y			<a href="#">Schulz et al., 2015</a>	26646171
Tb927.11.10070	<a href="#">BDF3</a>	Ac-Lys binding	Nucleus	RNAi	Severe	Y				
Tb927.1.1570	<a href="#">DOT1B</a>	Histone methyltransferase	Nucleus	Knockout	Moderate	Y			<a href="#">Janzen et al., 2006</a>	16916638
									<a href="#">Figueiredo et al., 2008</a>	18597556
									<a href="#">Batram et al., 2014</a>	24844706
Tb927.3.5620	<a href="#">FACT (Spt6)</a>	Histone chaperone	<i>Not determined</i>	RNAi	Severe	Y			<a href="#">Denninger et al., 2010</a>	20879999
									<a href="#">Denninger &amp; Rudenko, 2014</a>	25266856
Tb927.10.15350	<a href="#">H3var (+J-base)</a>	Histone variant (+DNA modification)	Nucleus	Knockout	None	Y			<a href="#">Reynolds et al., 2016</a>	26796527
Tb927.10.15350	<a href="#">H3var (+J-base)</a>	Histone variant (+DNA modification)	Nucleus	Knockout	None	Y			<a href="#">Schulz et al., 2016</a>	26796638
Tb927.2.1810	<a href="#">ISWI</a>	Chromatin remodelling	Nucleus	RNAi	Severe	Y			<a href="#">Hughes et al., 2007</a>	17431399
									<a href="#">Stanne et al., 2011</a>	21571922
Tb927.7.1770	<a href="#">MCM-BP</a>	Regulator of DNA replication	Nucleus	RNAi	Severe	Y			<a href="#">Kim et al., 2013</a>	23451133
Tb927.10.5450	<a href="#">NLP</a>	ISWI interacting partner	Nucleus	RNAi	Severe	Y			<a href="#">Narayanan et al., 2011</a>	21076155
Tb927.2.4230	<a href="#">NUP1</a>	Nuclear lamin	Nuclear lamina	RNAi	Severe	Y			<a href="#">DuBois et al., 2012</a>	22479148
Tb927.11.7215	<a href="#">ORC</a>	DNA replication	Nucleus	RNAi	Severe	Y			<a href="#">Benmerzouga et al., 2012</a>	23216794
Tb927.4.1620	<a href="#">PIP5K</a>	Inositol Phosphate pathway	Inner plasma membrane	RNAi	Severe	Y			<a href="#">Cestari &amp; Stuart, 2015</a>	25964327
Tb927.11.6270	<a href="#">PIP5Pase</a>		Nucleus/telomeres	RNAi	Severe	Y				
Tb927.11.5970	<a href="#">PLC</a>		Inner plasma membrane	Overexpression	None	Y				
Tb927.11.370	<a href="#">RAP1</a>	Telomeric protein	Telomeres	RNAi	Severe	Y			<a href="#">Yang et al., 2009</a>	19345190
									<a href="#">Pandya et al., 2013</a>	23804762
Tb927.9.11070	<a href="#">Siz1/PIAS1</a>	SUMO E3 ligase	Nucleus	RNAi	Moderate	Y			<a href="#">Lopez-Farfan et al., 2014</a>	25474309
Tb927.5.3210	<a href="#">SUMO</a>	SUMOylation	Primarily nucleus / ESB	RNAi	Severe	Y				
Tb927.3.3940	<a href="#">TDP1</a>	Chromatin structure	Nucleolus + ESB	RNAi	Severe	Y			<a href="#">Narayanan et al., 2013</a>	23361461
									<a href="#">Aresta-Branco et al., 2015</a>	26673706
Tb927.7.6900	<a href="#">SCC1</a>	Sister chromatid cohesion	Nucleus	RNAi	Severe		Y		<a href="#">Landeria et al., 2009</a>	19635842
Tb927.3.1560	<a href="#">TIF2</a>	Telomeric protein	Telomeres	RNAi	Severe		Y		<a href="#">Jehi et al., 2014</a>	24810301
Tb927.10.12850	<a href="#">TRF2</a>	Telomeric protein	Telomeres	RNAi	Severe		Y		<a href="#">Jehi et al., 2014</a>	25313155
Tb927.1.630	<a href="#">ASF1</a>	Histone chaperone	Nucleus	RNAi	Severe			Y	<a href="#">Alsford &amp; Horn, 2012</a>	22941664
Tb927.10.7050	<a href="#">CAF1</a>	Histone chaperone	Nucleus	RNAi	Severe			Y		
Tb927.10.1680	<a href="#">DAC1</a>	Histone Deacetylase	Nucleus	RNAi	Severe			Y	<a href="#">Wang et al., 2010</a>	20624217
Tb927.2.2190	<a href="#">DAC3</a>	Histone Deacetylase	Nucleus	RNAi	Severe			Y		
Tb927.7.1060	<a href="#">FYRP</a>	ISWI interacting partner	<i>Not determined</i>	RNAi	Moderate			Y	<a href="#">Stanne et al., 2015</a>	26378228
Tb927.11.1880	<a href="#">Histone H1</a>	Histone	Nucleus	RNAi	Moderate			Y	<a href="#">Povelones et al., 2012</a>	23133390
									<a href="#">Pena et al., 2014</a>	24946224
Tb927.1.2430	<a href="#">Histone H3</a>	Histone	Nucleus	RNAi	Severe			Y	<a href="#">Alsford &amp; Horn, 2012</a>	22941664
Tb927.11.10330	<a href="#">RCCP</a>	ISWI interacting partner	<i>Not determined</i>	RNAi	Moderate			Y	<a href="#">Stanne et al., 2015</a>	26378228

**Table S1.** Genes Linked to VSG-ES Transcription Control in Bloodstream-Form *T. brucei*.

VSG	Wild-type				VEX1 overexpression				VEX1 knockdown			
	Score	Significant matches	Significant sequences	emPAI	Score	Significant matches	Significant sequences	emPAI	Score	Significant matches	Significant sequences	emPAI
2	10473	351	38	29.94	7117	249	40	40.6	9457	336	40	48.68
6	64	2	1	0.05	804	28	11	0.88	1050	31	13	0.98
8	0	0	0	0	388	15	10	0.82	817	30	16	1.77
11	0	0	0	0	525	12	5	0.46	276	6	3	0.24
531	167	4	1	0.06	542	9	6	0.42	346	6	4	0.26
18	0	0	0	0	478	11	4	0.38	300	5	3	0.24
397	0	0	0	0	233	9	4	0.25	69	4	3	0.18
15	0	0	0	0	70	3	3	0.17	96	4	3	0.17
653	0	0	0	0	97	5	2	0.13	56	2	2	0.13
1954	0	0	0	0	238	4	1	0.12	139	3	2	0.18
3	0	0	0	0	121	3	1	0.06	23	1	1	0.06
13	0	0	0	0	93	2	1	0.06	81	2	1	0.06
21	0	0	0	0	74	2	1	0.06	0	0	0	0

**Table S2.** VSG Quantitative Mass-Spectrometry Data. emPAI, exponentially modified Protein Abundance Index.