

Orientation and swimming mechanics by the scyphomedusa *Aurelia* sp. in shear flow

Kelly C. Rakow¹ and William M. Graham

Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Dauphin Island, Alabama 36528; Department of Marine Sciences, University of South Alabama, Mobile, Alabama 36888

Abstract

Individual *Aurelia* sp. medusae were distributed around regions of current shear associated with vertical density discontinuities during three vertically towed camera profiles in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Along shear regions, medusae oriented nonrandomly and swam horizontally, forming distinct layers. To identify the mechanisms by which *Aurelia* maintain horizontal orientation in velocity shear, jellyfish swimming mechanics were studied in laboratory kreisel tanks at three shear rates (0.10, 0.21, and 0.34 s⁻¹) and a no-flow control. Medusae counteracted the rotational effect of velocity shear by pulsing asymmetrically. Specifically, medusae held a position against shear flow by maintaining a higher bell margin angle on the side of the medusa in higher flow velocity. Swimming asymmetry increased with shear and, as a result, the ratio between bell angles on opposing flow sides was significantly different from the control at all shear rates. Contractions were initiated on the lower flow side of the bell in all cases, and at the highest shear rate, the low-flow side of the bell contracted 0.2 s before the high flow side. Laboratory observations confirm that patches of jellyfish at vertical discontinuities could be the result of an active behavioral response to vertical velocity shear. Layers of jellyfish formed via an active behavioral response to shear might improve prey encounter or fertilization success.

Aggregations of scyphomedusae result from the interplay between sensory physiology and behavior of medusae and their physical, chemical, and biogeochemical surroundings (reviewed by Graham et al. 2001). Prior investigations have suggested that medusae are passively accumulated by buoyancy, along density gradients (Nielson et al. 1997), or by currents (Sparks et al. 2001). Although physics undoubtedly plays a role in passively aggregating medusae, active behavioral responses are usually required to provide a mechanism for accumulation (reviewed by Graham et al. 2001). Previous in situ studies have documented that medusae orient to flow features such as pycnoclines (Graham et al. 2003b), tidal currents (Costello et al. 1998), wind-driven currents (Shanks and Graham 1987), fronts (Graham 1994), and Langmuir convergences (Hamner and Schneider 1986), but with the exception of Graham et al. (2003b), these studies did not include velocity measurements along with orientation data. Whereas fluid motion occurs over a range of spatial scales, medusae interact with fluid features from the diameter of the medusa (tens of centimeters) to the medusa's realm (hundreds of meters). Mobile organisms can aggregate any time they swim fast enough to overcome advection out of an area (Mackas et al. 1985) or when swimming counteracts the rotational force created by a velocity gradient (Tiselius et al. 1994).

Cnidarians have a simple, diploblastic body plan and lack

a central nervous system; yet, on the basis of their phylogenetic position, there is no reason to assume that cnidarians are unsophisticated organisms (Mackie 1999). Radial symmetry allows for multiple sensory structures situated in rhopalia around the bell margin (Fig. 1). The statocyst and touch plate, a group of sensory cells, located in the rhopalium are the structures responsible for sensing gravity (Hüngden and Biela 1982). Although individual statocysts are incapable of detecting the direction of a stimulus, this limitation might be overcome by the presence of multiple sensory organs around the bell margin (Fig. 1B; Budelmann 1988).

With the use of these balancing organs, scyphomedusae are capable of maintaining an orientation and can compensate when they are steered off course (Shanks and Graham 1987). Turning, like orientation, is a response to an environmental stimulus. Scyphozoans are able to turn by pulsing asymmetrically (Gladfelter 1972). First one side contracts, tilting the animal sideways. After a delay, the second side (i.e., the outboard side) contracts, but the magnitude of contraction is enhanced compared with the leading side, and a turn is effected.

It is critical to understand relationships between swimming mechanics and jellyfish aggregation because directional swimming often plays a role in swarm formation. Ultimately, aggregations of medusae can have profound ecological and socioeconomic effects. Recent evidence of distributional and seasonal range expansions, numerical increases, and anthropogenic introductions of gelatinous zooplankton (Graham 2001; Sullivan et al. 2001; Graham et al. 2003a) has underscored the key ecological role of these predators in a wide range of ecosystems. In addition, gelatinous predators are capable of feeding on fish eggs and larvae, leading to decreases in commercial fisheries stocks (Cowan and Houde 1993; Purcell and Arai 2001).

Jellyfish aggregations are often associated with physical features in marine environments; yet, there is no direct evidence that scyphomedusae respond to fluid flow, and the

¹ To whom correspondence should be addressed. Present address: Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Woods Hole, Massachusetts 02543 (krakow@whoi.edu).

Acknowledgments

We thank the crew of the RV *Pelican* for field assistance. We are grateful to H. Fletcher, J. Higgins, D. Martin, and J. Martin for technical support and thoughtful discussions. Input from K. Park and J. Costello substantially improved the quality of this work. The research was supported by the National Science Foundation (OCE 9733441).

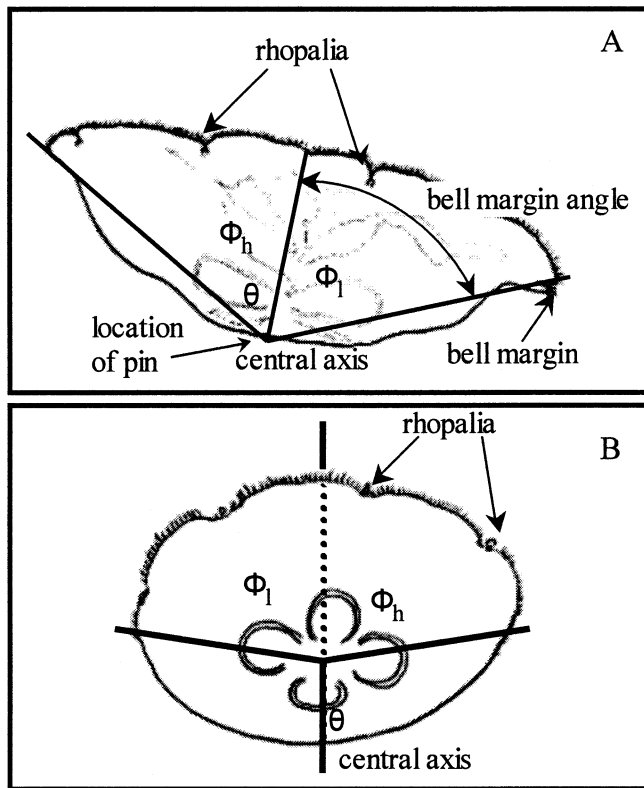


Fig. 1. *Aurelia* sp. morphology and landmarks used for swimming measurements. Margin angles in high flow (Φ_h) and low flow (Φ_l) are expressed in degrees relative to the heading of the medusa (θ). (A) Side view. (B) Aboral view.

behavioral mechanism by which a medusa maintains a position into a current has never been investigated. In this study, we explored the orientation and swimming mechanics of the jellyfish *Aurelia* sp. The following questions were addressed: (1) Do scyphomedusae orient to velocity shear and, if so, (2) What is the behavioral mechanism for orienting to shear?

Materials and methods

Field observations—Three JellyCam video profiles of *Aurelia* sp. patches were collected in the northern Gulf of Mexico on 13, 18, and 20 August 2000 from the 32-m RV *Pelican*. The JellyCam is a towed video system used for in situ quantification and observation of large medusae in conjunction with real-time conductivity–temperature–depth and digital Global Positioning System data (Graham et al. 2003b). The camera was lowered vertically in 2-m increments and towed horizontally at a speed of 1 m s^{-1} for 1 min at each depth. For all data analyses, the water column was divided into 2-m depth bins, and the number of medusae per cubic meter of water was calculated. Medusae were assigned a heading angle in 45° increments between 0° (aboral side up) and 180° (aboral side down). For depths at which more than five medusae were observed, Rayleigh's test was used to

determine whether *Aurelia* sp. were randomly or directionally oriented (Batchelet 1981).

Current velocity measurements were taken with a vessel-mounted, narrowband 600 kHz ADCP (RD Instruments) during or immediately after the JellyCam tow. Mean current velocity and standard error were calculated in 2-m depth bins by averaging velocity measurements taken over a 1-min interval with 1-m resolution.

Laboratory observations—Behavioral observations of *Aurelia* sp. were made at three velocity shear rates and a no-flow control on the basis of the range of shear experienced by medusae in situ as measured above, below, and at the halocline from the northern Gulf of Mexico during July and August 2002 (Higgins 2005). Experimental observations were made in modified kreisel tanks ($100 \times 75 \times 40 \text{ cm}$) characterized by circular flow, which keeps gelatinous plankton suspended and free of the intake and tank walls (Hamner 1990; Raskoff et al. 2003).

Aurelia sp. medusae between 15 and 25 cm in diameter were collected with dip nets from the northern Gulf of Mexico during August and September 2003. Medusae were maintained in pseudokreisel tanks, and observations were made within 1 week of collection. Medusae were fed *Artemia* nauplii or thawed Cyclop-eeze copepods one to two times daily. Tank temperature ranged from 23°C to 26°C , and salinity ranged from 25 to 35, closely matching the environmental conditions at the time of collection.

Current velocity in the kreisel tank was characterized by acoustic Doppler velocimeter (ADV) measurements (SonTek, emission frequency = 10 MHz; sampling rate = 210 Hz) at 5-cm intervals. *Artemia* cysts were used as ambient particles to reflect acoustic beams back to the receiver. Three replicate velocity measurements taken for 30-s periods at each grid node were processed with WinADV32 (developed by T. L. Wahl, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation). The mean velocity at each grid node was used to establish the shear rate in the pseudokreisel and was visually represented with vector plots in Surfer 8 (Golden Software, Inc.). Shear rate (D) is described by Eq. 1,

$$D = \frac{\partial w}{\partial x} \quad (1)$$

where w is the water velocity in the vertical direction and x is distance in the horizontal direction.

Behavior was recorded in two dimensions with a digital video camera (Sony MiniDV). At each treatment level, 10 individual medusae were videotaped for 20 min. A black background with 5-cm^2 white gridlines placed behind the tank provided scale for video analysis. The video camera remained stationary on an observational window on one side of the tank. Before each observation, a pin was inserted at the top of the bell to serve as a landmark for swimming measurements (Fig. 1A). Preliminary observations conducted with and without a pin indicated that insertion of a pin in the bell did not influence swimming behavior.

The swimming movements of medusae were quantified by comparing the range of the bell margin angle on either side of the medusa. This bell margin angle was approximated by drawing a central oral–aboral axis, with the pin inserted at

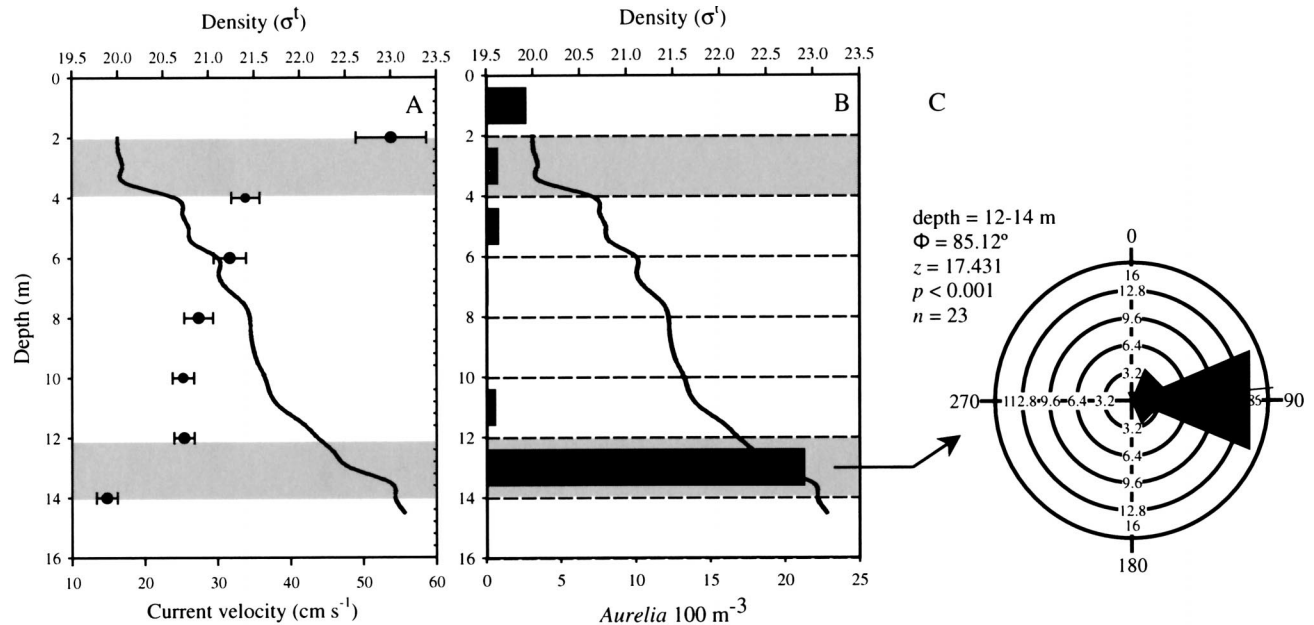


Fig. 2. Vertical profiles of *Aurelia* sp. distribution and physical structure on 13 August 2000. Gray shading highlights regions of shear. (A) Vertical profiles of density and current velocity (mean \pm SE over 1 min). (B) Vertical distribution of *Aurelia* sp. with density profile. (C) Circular frequency histograms of *Aurelia* sp. swimming orientation. Concentric circles correspond to number of individuals observed, Φ is the mean swimming direction, z is Rayleigh's test statistic, p is the significance level, and n is the number jellyfish observed.

the top of the bell as a landmark, and drawing a second line from the top of the bell to the edge of the bell to create a measurable angle (Fig. 1A). The margin angles on each side of the bell were measured over a pulse sequence to indicate whether the animal was pulsing nonuniformly. For each 20-min jellyfish observation, three swimming sequences (three to five pulse cycles) were analyzed at 0.1-s intervals. Bell margin angles were reported as “high flow” and “low flow” in all treatments including the control.

To test the hypothesis that bell pulsation is symmetrical, the mean bell angle was compared between the two sides of the medusae with two-sample t -tests performed in Minitab 13.1. The ratio of the mean bell angle corresponding to the lower flow side (Φ_l) to the mean bell angle corresponding to the higher flow side (Φ_h) was calculated and compared with a 1 : 1 ratio to detect a departure from symmetry. These ratios were then analyzed for treatment effects with a one-way analysis of variance and a post hoc Tukey test for multiple comparisons (Minitab 13.1). The use of ratios provides a way to standardize and compare swimming across treatments, but ratio data pose limitations for statistical analysis because the relationship between the numerator and denominator is masked, so conclusions should be interpreted somewhat cautiously (Liermann et al. 2004).

Results

In situ vertical distribution—The water column was stratified on 13 August with pronounced velocity shear between 2 and 4 m and again between 12 and 14 m (Fig. 2A). Most medusae were distributed in the region of velocity shear near the sea floor (Fig. 2B). At this depth, the medusae were

swimming horizontally at a mean angle of 85.12° (Fig. 2C) and were nonrandomly distributed (Rayleigh's z , $p < 0.001$).

On 18 August, a marked surface layer to 8-m depth was characterized by a weak density gradient. A pronounced pycnocline was located between 15 and 17 m; however, the region of highest velocity shear was above the pycnocline between 12 and 14 m (Fig. 3A). Velocity shear was also present in the upper layer of the water column, below the pycnocline, and above the benthic boundary layer. *Aurelia* sp. were mostly concentrated (72%) between 14 and 18 m below the pycnocline with a single maximum between 16 and 18 m (Fig. 3B). Medusae were nonrandomly oriented in the horizontal direction (Rayleigh's z , $p < 0.001$; Fig. 3C).

The JellyCam profile conducted on 20 August was in 144 m of water off the continental shelf, although the camera was only lowered to a depth of 54 m (Fig. 4). The water column was highly structured (Fig. 4A), and a velocity gradient was pronounced from the surface to 16 m depth. A single pycnocline was located between 14 and 20 m (Fig. 4A). Highest numbers of *Aurelia* sp. were located above 10 m, where velocity shear was most pronounced (Fig. 4B). Medusae within this region were primarily swimming in the horizontal direction between 45° and 135° (Fig. 4C). In the upper 6 m of the water column, where shearing was greatest, the swimming mode was at 90° or angled slightly up. A second strong region of shear was located at 10 m. Between 6 and 10 m, medusae were swimming downward.

Laboratory swimming mechanics—The rotational motion of water in the kreisel created flow velocity gradients across the tank. Flow velocities and shear rates were most pronounced at the kreisel boundary and lowest toward the cen-

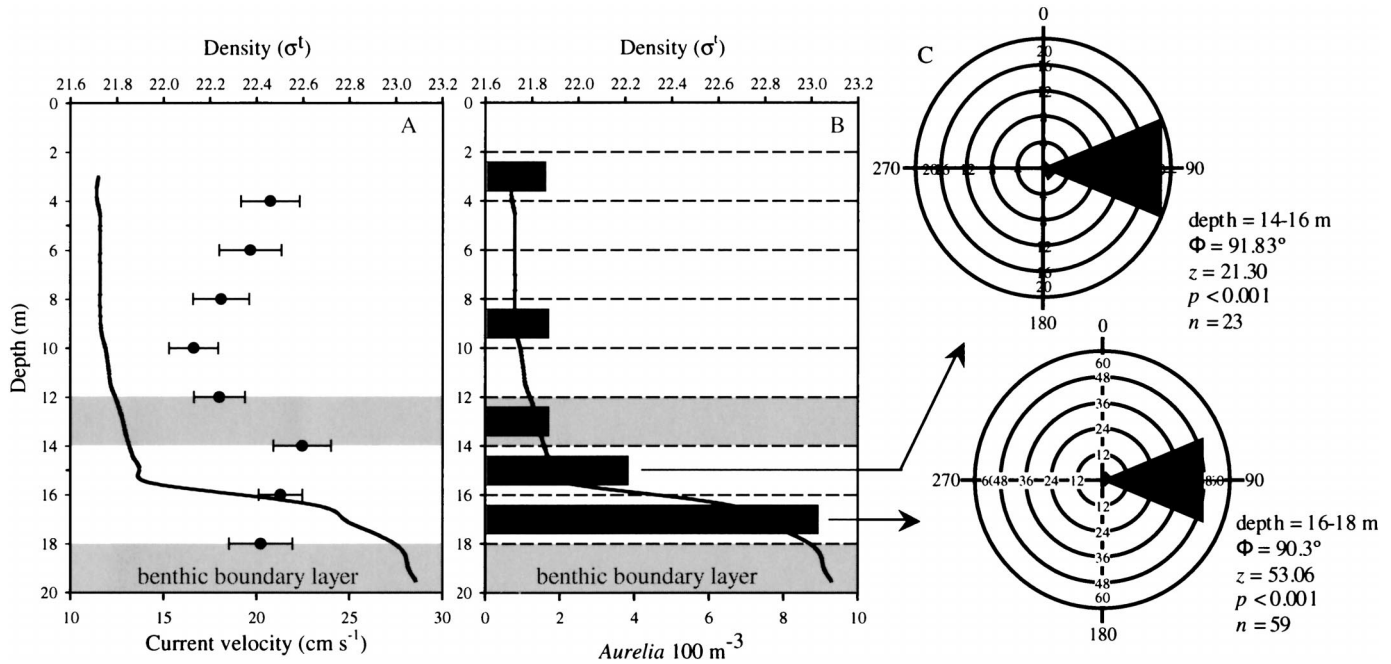


Fig. 3. *Aurelia* sp. swimming orientation during cast taken 18 August 2000. Gray shading highlights regions of shear. Shearing in the benthic boundary layer is not based on measured velocity values. Panels as in Fig. 2.

ter of the tank (Fig. 5). Horizontal profiles of velocity and shear were used to describe the flow field (Table 1; Fig. 6). Maximum velocity ranged from $3.02 (\pm 0.28) \text{ cm s}^{-1}$ in the low-flow treatment to $10.21 (\pm 0.05) \text{ cm s}^{-1}$ in the high-flow treatment. The three flow treatments produced shear rates of 0.10, 0.21, and 0.34 s^{-1} , respectively.

Medusa bell contraction was symmetrical in the no-flow treatment and increasingly asymmetrical as velocity shear increased. Figure 7 depicts a sequence of images of an in-

dividual *Aurelia* sp. medusa swimming in shear flow, showing the difference in bell angle on the two sides of the medusa. The relative magnitude of bell contraction between the two sides of the bell increased in the presence of highest shear (0.34 s^{-1}) compared with the control (Fig. 8A,B). At the highest shear velocity (0.34 s^{-1}), the mean bell margin angle was higher on the high-velocity side of the experimental tank than on the low-flow side (two-sample *t*-test, $p = 0.05$; Table 2). However, in the low (0.10 s^{-1}) and medium

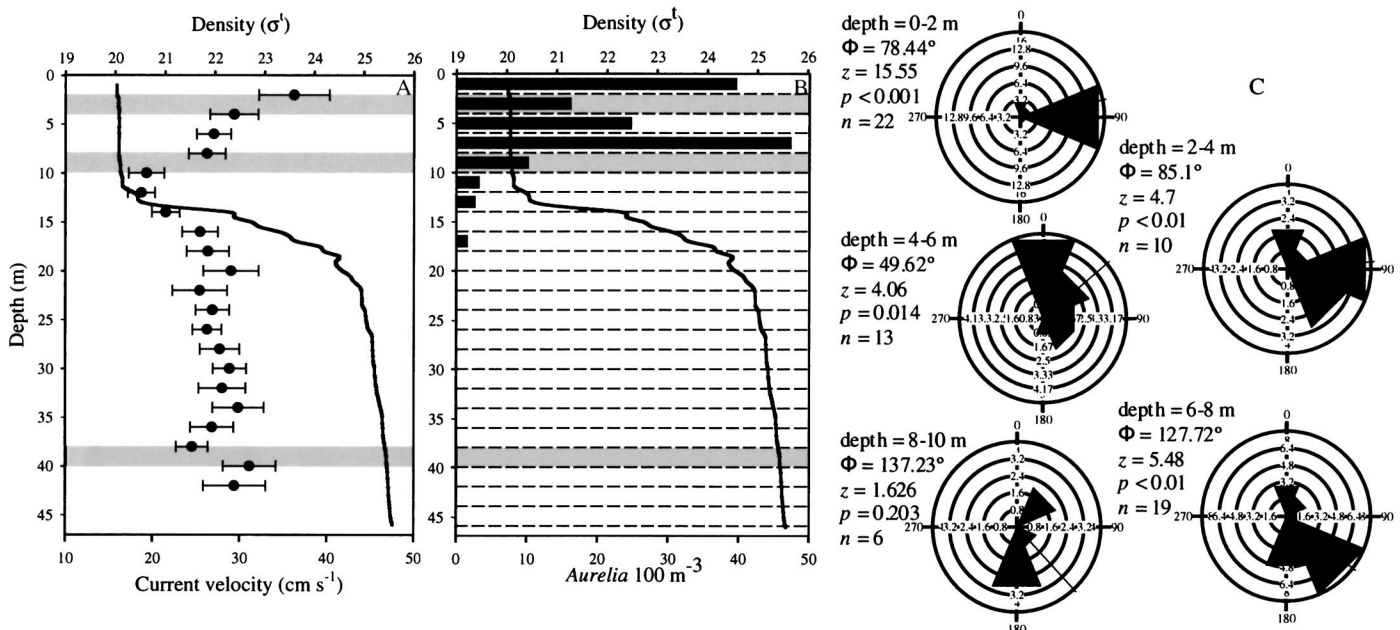


Fig. 4. *Aurelia* sp. swimming orientation during cast taken 29 August 2000. Panels as in Fig. 2.

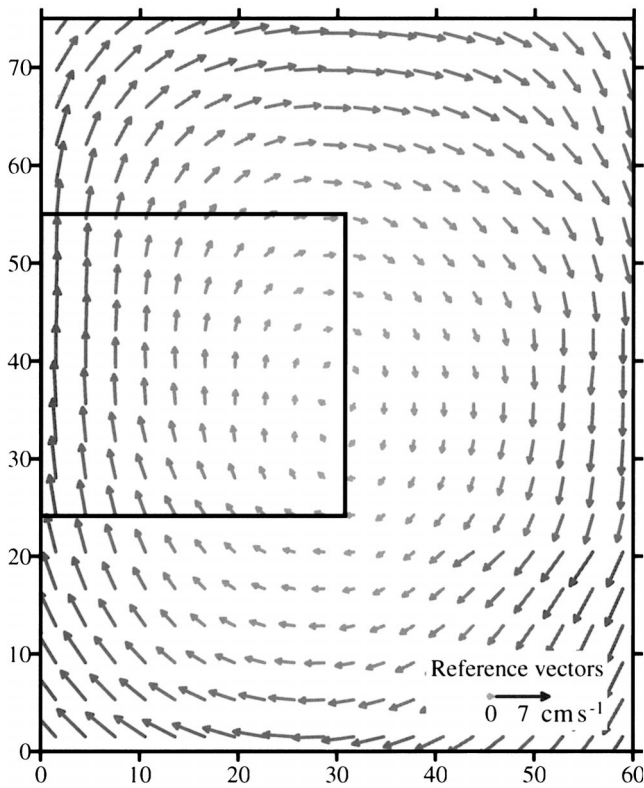


Fig. 5. Flow vector field in a pseudokreisel tank at a shear rate of 0.21 s^{-1} . Black square indicates the area in which behavioral observations were made. Vector legend is shown in bottom right corner.

(0.21 s^{-1}) shear treatments, low- and high-flow bell margin angles were not significantly different from the control bell margin angles (two-sample t -test, $p > 0.05$; Table 2).

The ratio of bell margin angles in the no-flow treatment was significantly different from the ratios in the other three flow treatments (ANOVA, Tukey test, $p < 0.05$; Table 4; Fig. 9). The ratio in the no-flow treatment was >1 , whereas the ratios in shear treatments were all <1 .

Data fitting—Additional information about the kinematics of jellyfish swimming was produced by fitting raw data for

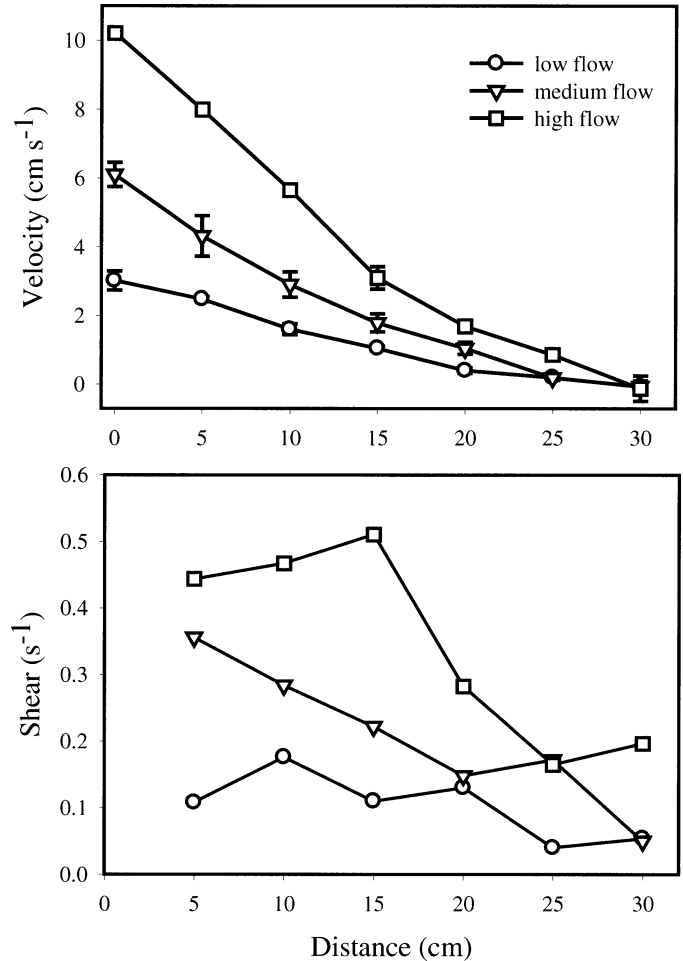


Fig. 6. Distribution of vertical velocity (bars are standard error of the mean) and shear taken along a horizontal transect in a pseudokreisel tank. Positive velocities are upward.

each swimming sequence with the following four-parameter sine equation in SigmaPlot 8.0 (SPSS, Inc.),

$$y = y_0 + a \sin \frac{2\pi}{b}(t + c) \quad (2)$$

where y_0 is the height of the baseline or average angle (rad),

Table 1. Vertical velocity (mean \pm standard error of the mean) and shear values from horizontal transects at each flow treatment in pseudokreisel tanks. Positive velocities are upward.

Horizontal distance (cm)	Velocity (cm s^{-1})	Shear (s^{-1})	Velocity (cm s^{-1})	Shear (s^{-1})	Velocity (cm s^{-1})	Shear (s^{-1})
0	3.02 ± 0.28		6.10 ± 0.35		10.21 ± 0.05	
5	2.48 ± 0.77	0.11	4.32 ± 0.59	0.36	7.99 ± 0.08	0.44
10	1.60 ± 0.16	0.18	2.90 ± 0.36	0.28	5.65 ± 0.05	0.47
15	1.05 ± 0.06	0.11	1.79 ± 0.26	0.22	3.10 ± 0.33	0.51
20	0.40 ± 0.09	0.13	1.05 ± 0.18	0.15	1.69 ± 0.1	0.28
25	0.20 ± 0.07	0.04	0.19 ± 0.07	0.17	0.86 ± 0.1	0.16
30	-0.07 ± 0.1	0.05	-0.06 ± 0.16	0.05	-0.12 ± 0.37	0.20
Mean	1.24	0.10	2.33	0.21	4.20	0.34

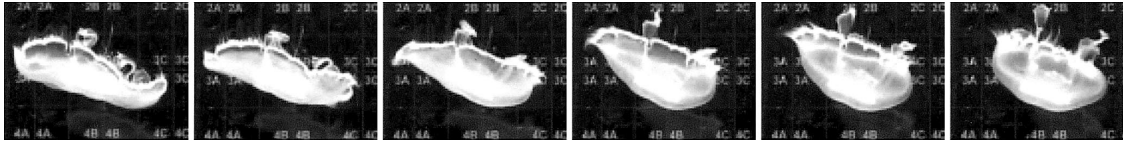


Fig. 7. Video frame sequence of *Aurelia* sp. swimming in a shear velocity of 0.34 s^{-1} . The pulse is initiated on the lower flow side of the bell (right side) and a higher bell margin angle is maintained on the low-flow side of the bell.

a is the amplitude (rad), t is time (s), b is period (s), and c is phase shift or temporal offset (s).

For each fitted curve, parameter coefficients of y_0 , a , b , and c ; standard errors; and R^2 with associated p values were generated (Fig. 10). Parameter coefficients, y_0 , and a (rad) for the two sides of the bell were then compared within treatments by a paired Watson–Williams test. Parameter coefficients b and c (s) for the two sides of the bell were compared within treatments with t -tests.

The four-parameter sine curve approximated the raw data successfully ($R^2 = 0.25\text{--}0.94$, mean 0.70 ; ANOVA, $p < 0.01$). There were no significant differences between contraction period, phase shift, and bell margin amplitude across the two sides of medusae in any of the flow treatments (two-sample t -test, $p > 0.05$). However, the mean bell margin angle was different at the highest shear rate treatment of 0.34 s^{-1} (two-sample t -test, $p < 0.05$; Table 3). Phase shift had a

pattern of increasing difference with increasing shear (Table 4). At all shear rates, the larger phase shift was associated with the low-flow side of the bell, indicating that contractions were initiated on the low-flow side of the bell. At the highest shear rate, the low-flow side of the bell contracted 0.2 s before the high-flow side.

A typical equation solution for the two sides of the bell was generated for each flow treatment by averaging the equation parameters a , b , c , and y_0 (Table 3). Equation solutions for the shear treatments show a 1:1 relationship in the no-flow control and an increasing divergence in mean angle, y_0 , with increasing shear flow (Fig. 11A–D). Consequently, the ratio of y_0 on the low-flow side of the bell to y_0 on the high-flow side of the bell deviated from a 1:1 ratio with increasing shear velocity (Fig. 11E–H). The average angle ratio oscillated as the medusa swam, with the lowest ratio values (i.e., largest asymmetry between the two sides of the medusa) occurring just before the time of maximum contraction on the low-flow side of the bell. The contraction period and amplitude, however, were the same on the two sides of the bell at all shear treatments (two-sample t -test, $p > 0.05$).

Discussion

Field observations indicate that local populations of *Aurelia* sp. in the northern Gulf of Mexico orient horizontally in regions associated with vertical velocity shear (Figs. 2–4). The proximate cue for orientation is not completely clear because medusae were most concentrated either above (Figs. 3B, 4B) or within (Fig. 2B) regions of pronounced shearing but also occurred below regions of shearing (Figs. 3B, 4B). In general, medusae associated with shear features maintained a 90° heading (Figs. 2C, 3C, 4C). Medusae located between two regions of shearing on 20 August might have oriented to the closest shear feature. *Aurelia* sp. located below a region of pronounced shearing at 4 m were swimming upward at 50° , and medusae above a region of pronounced shearing at 10 m were swimming downward at 128° (Fig.

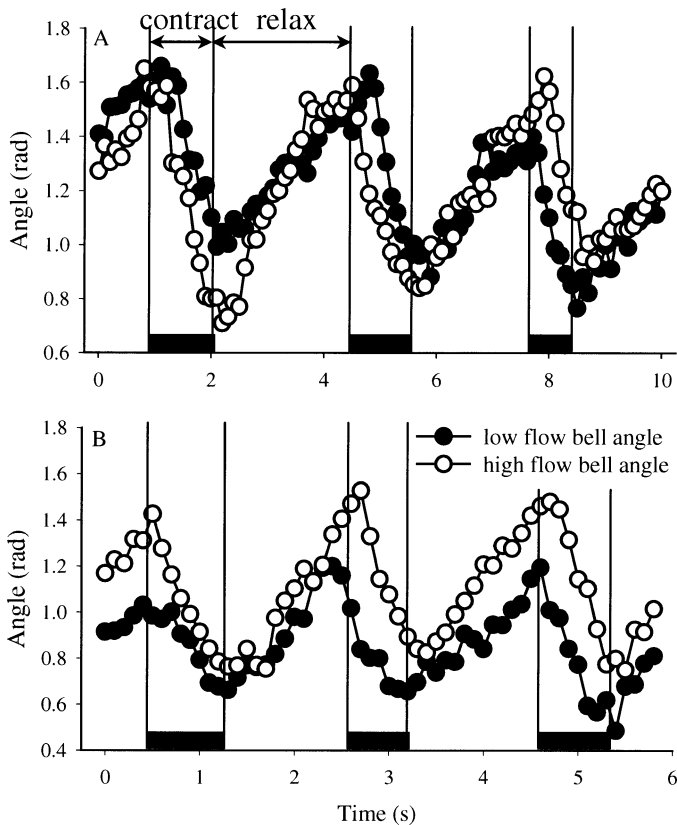


Fig. 8. Representative plots of jellyfish swimming in varying flow fields: (A) no flow and (B) a shear velocity of 0.34 s^{-1} . Peaks correspond to maximum relaxation, and troughs correspond to full-est contraction.

Table 2. Low- compared with high-flow sides of bell margin angle means (two-sample t -test).

Treatment (s^{-1})	n	High angle (rad)	Low angle (rad)	p value
No flow	8	0.97	0.99	0.77
0.1	10	0.99	0.94	0.35
0.21	9	0.94	0.89	0.25
0.34	10	1.02	0.94	0.05

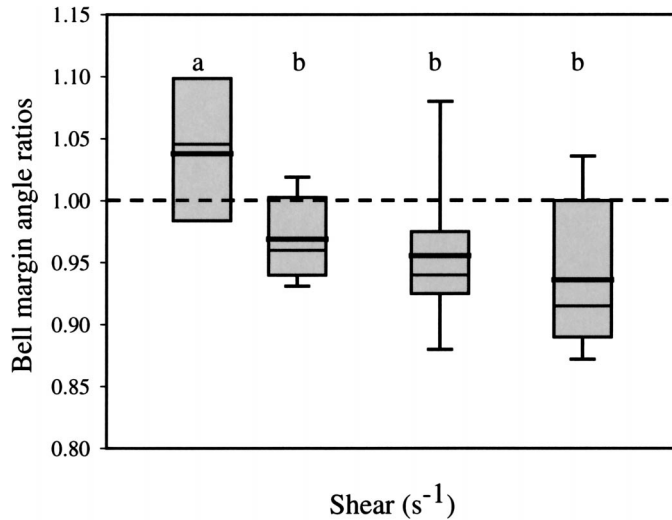


Fig. 9. *Aurelia* sp. bell angle ratios for four shear treatments. Means with same letters are not significantly different at $p < 0.05$. Theoretical balanced swimming is indicated by dashed line (1 : 1). Box boundaries are the 25th and 75th percentiles, and error bars are the 90th and 10th percentiles. Thin line is the median and thicker line is the mean.

4C). Precise behavioral inferences are not possible because density and velocity profiles varied in the field (Figs. 2A, 3A, 4A).

Laboratory observations confirmed that *Aurelia* sp. orient directionally against shear and showed that they accomplish oriented swimming by pulsing asymmetrically. Medusae maintain a higher bell margin angle on the side of the bell in higher flow velocity throughout a pulse cycle (Tables 2, 3; Figs. 7, 8, 11). A pulse is initiated on the lower flow side of the bell and the second side contracts after a delay. (Table 4; Figs. 7, 11). These swimming movements result in an increasing asymmetry between the two sides of the bell in increasing levels of shear (Fig. 9).

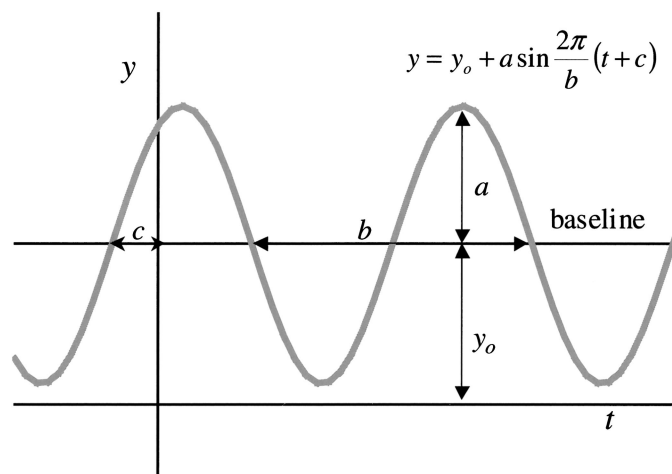


Fig. 10. General four-parameter sine curve. y_0 is the height of the baseline or average angle, a is the amplitude or half of the angular range, b is the period, and c is the phase shift or temporal offset.

Table 3. Model parameter coefficient means for low- compared with high-flow sides of bell in no-flow and 0.34 s^{-1} shear treatments.

Parameter		High flow	Low flow	p value
No flow, $n = 8$				
Amplitude (rad)	a	0.19	0.19	0.97
Period (s)	b	2.62	2.63	0.97
Phase shift (s)	c	2.80	2.78	0.98
Vertical offset (rad)	y_0	0.97	0.98	0.88
Shear rate = 0.34 s^{-1} , $n = 10$				
Amplitude (rad)	a	0.22	0.22	0.80
Period (s)	b	2.36	2.38	0.92
Phase shift (s)	c	2.00	2.20	0.70
Vertical offset (rad)	y_0	1.02	0.95	0.05*

The distribution of plankton with respect to hydrographic features is well studied, but until recently, very few investigations have included hydrodynamic features such as turbulence and shear. At large spatial scales (tens to hundreds of kilometers), the horizontal distribution of plankton is dictated by large-scale physical features. However, at smaller scales (1 mm to hundreds of meters), active swimming behavior by plankton can dominate local physical features, thereby regulating patterns of distribution (Genin et al. 2005). Our finding that *Aurelia* sp. accumulate in regions of highest vertical velocity shear suggests a behavioral response of medusae to velocity shear.

Velocity shear can develop at the air–sea interface, the benthic boundary layer, or an interface between two dissimilar water masses. Although medusae in the northern Gulf of Mexico typically experience shear that is driven by a salinity gradient (Schroeder and Wiseman 1999), the physical properties and density structure of fronts in the Gulf of Mexico are comparable to physical gradients in other areas. Boundaries between water masses are characterized by sharp gradients in salinity, temperature, and velocity, and these physical interfaces often coincide with biological discontinuities, including chlorophyll maxima and plankton patches (e.g., McManus et al. 2003). Zooplankters with sufficiently high swimming speeds are capable of overcoming local flow (Yamazaki and Squires 1996) and forming layers at shear interfaces (Gallager et al. 2004). During this study, groups of medusae were abundant in areas with relatively high shear velocity, often associated with the pycnocline (Figs. 2–4).

Although the precise sensory mechanism behind orienting to shear remains unresolved, laboratory investigations pro-

Table 4. Differences in phase shift, c , between low-flow and high-flow bell margin angles for each treatment.

Flow treatment	Phase shift (s)		
	High flow	Low flow	Difference
No flow	2.80	2.78	−0.02
Low	2.93	3.01	0.08
Medium	1.75	1.86	0.11
High	2.00	2.20	0.20

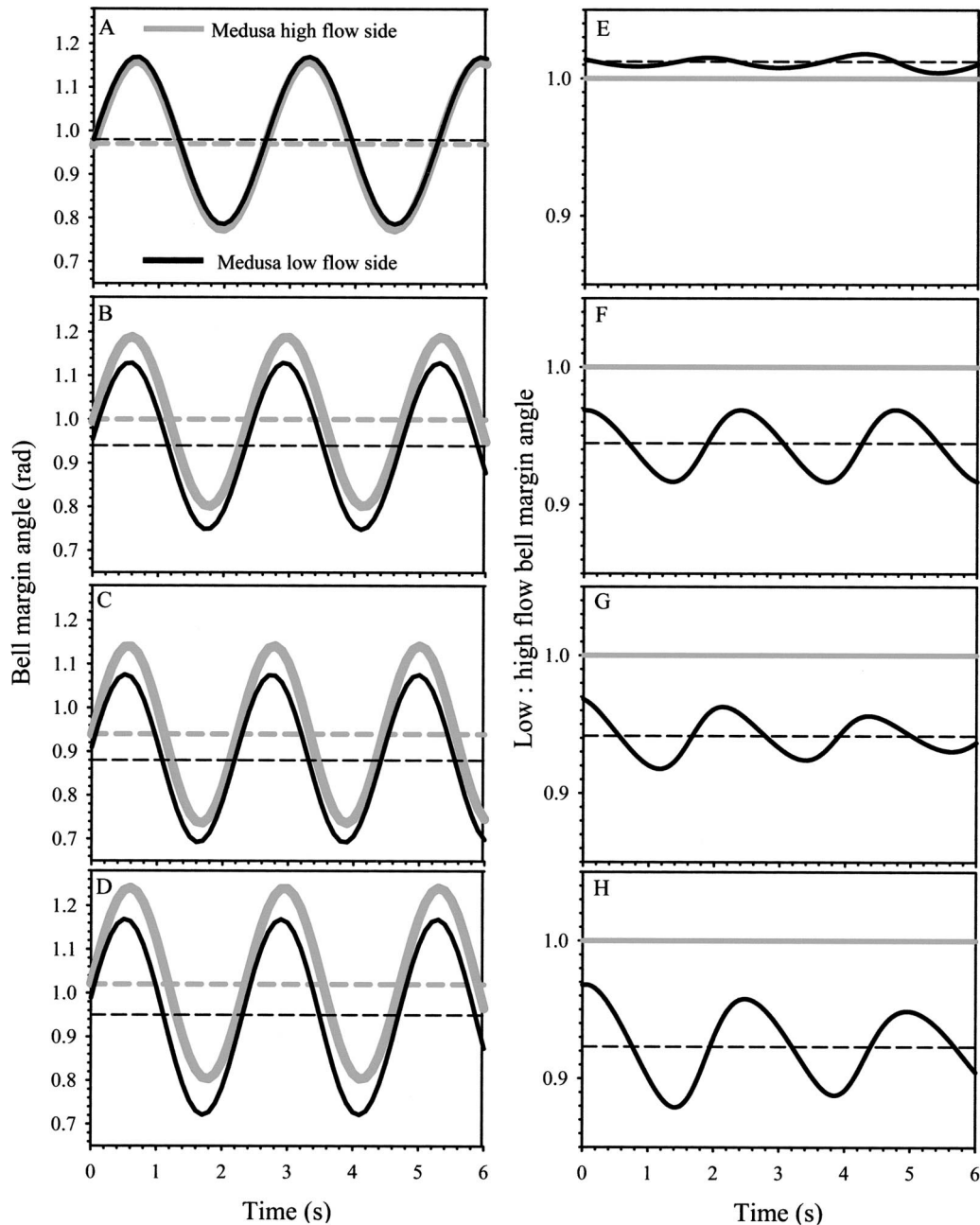


Fig. 11. Typical waveforms of *Aurelia* sp. swimming as derived from mean equation parameters. (A–D) Plotted equations for the low- and high-flow sides of the bell margin angle correspond to shear treatments of no flow, 0.1, 0.21, and 0.34 s^{-1} , respectively. (E–H) Corresponding ratios of low-flow to high-flow bell margin angles. Dashed lines represent time-averaged means.

vide evidence that a medusa can maintain a position into a velocity gradient by maintaining a higher overall bell margin angle on the side of the bell in the higher flow velocity (Table 2; Fig. 11). This behavior bears a resemblance to the turning mechanics of scyphomedusae described by Gladfelter (1972, 1973). During turning in scyphomedusae, Gladfelter described unilateral swimming in which a contraction was initiated on one side (i.e., the inboard side) of the bell and after a delay, the lagging side (outboard side) contracted at a greater rate. The angle of contraction was always higher

on the initiating side, but this was only because of its initial lead.

The difference in phase shift between the two sides of the bell (Table 3; Fig. 11), confirmed that medusae swimming in shear initiated contractions on the lower flow side of the bell. The low-flow side of the bell contracted more strongly, whereas the higher flow side of the bell maintained a higher angle throughout a pulse cycle (Fig. 11). At any given time, the more contracted side was on the low-flow side (inboard), so when the outboard side contracted, a thrust was produced

that shifted the umbrellar axis and counteracted the rotational force produced by the velocity gradient.

Despite the difference in angle between the two sides of the bell, the amplitude was the same, indicating that the overall magnitude of contraction did not differ between sides (Table 3). Additionally, the contraction period was the same between sides of the bell, which could be predicted on the basis of the neural circuitry of cnidarians (Table 3). Conduction of impulses is all or none, and once a pulse is initiated, it spreads to the entire bell. So, although it is possible for contraction to be delayed on one side of the bell, it is unlikely that one side could pulse at a different frequency than the other. On the whole, the behavior that a medusa employs to counteract the rotational force imposed by a velocity gradient is the same behavior exhibited by turning medusae.

The observation that groups of medusae orient to flow implies a selective advantage to this behavior. Orienting to currents or shear regimes could serve a variety of adaptive purposes—increased prey encounter rates (Rothschild and Osborn 1988), increased fertilization success (Higgins 2005), refuge from damaging levels of shear and turbulence—that could differ between taxa and even between populations of the same species, depending on local ecological conditions (Hamner 1995; Dawson and Hamner 2003). By orienting to a current, scyphomedusae might increase prey contact rates by spending more time in regions in which fluid velocity, prey abundance, and prey diversity are optimal.

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Received: 7 February 2005

Accepted: 5 October 2005

Amended: 27 October 2005