Variation of ice microphysical properties with temperature and humidity at tops of convective clouds

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Abstract

A better understanding of the many interacting processes governing the evaluation of ice in natural clouds is required to improve the representation of ice clouds in global circulation models. Recent studies suggest a dominant role of vapor growth processes in determining the temperature dependence of cloud top ice sizes and shapes. Using airborne cloud remote sensing along with reanalysis data, here we show that observed cloud top ice effective radii and estimated normalized growth rates at cloud top highly correlate with an approximately linear relationship, which is consistent with a conceptual model also presented. Furthermore, significant differences in crystal shape characteristics and scattering asymmetry parameters are found between sub- and super-saturated cloud tops over ocean, although not over land. These results provide valuable observational targets for studying ice formation and evolution processes using models, while also helping interpretation of satellite observations of ice microphysical properties at cloud tops.

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6	Key Points:
7 8	• Cloud top ice effective radii are shown to highly correlate with normalized ice vapor growth rates at cloud top conditions
9 10	• Over ocean, observed cloud-top crystal properties differ significantly between sub- and supersaturated conditions
11	• A conceptual model based on basic growth theory and ice properties is consistent

with these observations

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13 Abstract

A better understanding of the many interacting processes governing the evaluation of 14 ice in natural clouds is required to improve the representation of ice clouds in global cir-15 culation models. Recent studies suggest a dominant role of vapor growth processes in 16 determining the temperature dependence of cloud top ice sizes and shapes. Using air-17 borne cloud remote sensing along with reanalysis data, here we show that observed cloud 18 top ice effective radii and estimated normalized growth rates at cloud top highly corre-19 late with an approximately linear relationship, which is consistent with a conceptual model 20 also presented. Furthermore, significant differences in crystal shape characteristics and 21 scattering asymmetry parameters are found between sub- and super-saturated cloud tops 22 over ocean, although not over land. These results provide valuable observational targets 23 for studying ice formation and evolution processes using models, while also helping in-24 terpretation of satellite observations of ice microphysical properties at cloud tops. 25

²⁶ Plain Language Summary

The sizes and shapes of ice crystals in cold clouds influence how these clouds evolve 27 and how much sunlight they reflect. Ice crystal shapes and sizes are affected by numer-28 ous interacting physical processes. A better understanding on the relative importance 29 of each of these processes is key to improve the representation of ice clouds in climate 30 models. Recent work suggests that the variation of ice crystal shapes and sizes is largely 31 32 determined by the relatively simple process of ice crystals growing directly from water vapor. Here we use data from a remote sensor mounted on a high-altitude aircraft to in-33 fer information about ice crystal sizes and shapes at the tops of convective clouds as a 34 function of top height. By combining this data with water vapor information from a model, 35 we show that the ice crystal sizes highly correlate with ice growth rates predicted by a 36 simple conceptual model based on ice growing directly from water vapor. Furthermore, 37 we find that ice crystal shapes differ significantly in tops where vapor growth is expected 38 compared to where ice is expected to sublimate. These results can help improve ice cloud 39 modeling and the interpretation of satellite observations of ice clouds. 40

41 **1** Introduction

The sizes and shapes of ice crystals in cold clouds influence the clouds' evolution 42 and radiative properties (Russotto et al., 2016; A. A. Jensen et al., 2018; Van Dieden-43 hoven & Cairns, 2020). In turn, the variation of ice crystal sizes and shapes within clouds 44 are determined by a complex interaction between ice microphysics and dynamic and ther-45 modynamic properties of the atmosphere (Bailey & Hallett, 2004). A better understand-46 ing of the many interacting processes governing the formation of complex mixtures of 47 ice of various shapes and sizes in natural ice clouds is required to improve the represen-48 tation of ice clouds in global circulation models modeling current and future climates (Waliser 49 et al., 2009; Zelinka et al., 2020; Gasparini et al., 2021). In recent work using satellite 50 retrievals over thick ice clouds globally (van Diedenhoven et al., 2020, VD2020 hereafter), 51 we found that systematic variations of ice size and shape with cloud top temperature show 52 a remarkable agreement with simplified ice crystal vapor growth theory and in situ and 53 laboratory data. This agreement suggests that the temperature dependence of the cloud top ice sizes and shapes could be dominated by the vapor growth process and that ice 55 particle distributions observed at cloud top have generally been subjected to depositional 56 growth for a uniform amount of time at average conditions similar to the observed cloud 57 top, which is somewhat surprising given the many processes involved and the large vari-58 ation in dynamical variables. 59

At low temperatures, ice growth rates generally increase with temperature, but they display a maximum at a certain temperature above which they decrease again (Pruppacher & Klett, 1997). This profile is largely determined by, on the one hand, the vapor pres-

sure over ice increasing with temperature and, on the other hand, the relative humid-63 ity with respect to ice, which generally decreases with temperature. To relate average 64 cloud top ice crystal sizes to vapor growth rates, VD2020 used the rather ad hoc assump-65 tion that the relative humidity at ice cloud tops at a given temperature is equal to the 66 relative humidity at water saturation multiplied by a scale factor $(f_{ws} < 1)$. It was shown 67 that the temperature at which the ice vapor growth rates display a maximum is deter-68 mined by this scale factor. Adjusting the scale factor so that the maximum in ice vapor 69 growth rates matches the maximum in effective radius inferred over the tropics leads to 70 a remarkable agreement between the vertical variation of retrieved average effective ra-71 dius and vapor growth rates. Moreover, the maximum retrieved effective radius over ocean 72 occurs at warmer cloud tops compared to over land, dictating a slightly larger scale fac-73 tor over ocean, consistent with moister conditions generally over oceans. 74

However, the analysis of VD2020 was limited to a qualitative comparison of the rel-75 ative vertical variation of ice crystal properties averaged over large areas and long time 76 periods and the relative vertical variation of vapor growth rates estimated as described 77 above. Here we turn to airborne remote sensing observations of subtropical convective 78 clouds with a spatial resolution of about 50-100 m, combined with reanalysis data of rel-79 ative humidity and temperature to estimate vapor growth rates at individual cloud tops. 80 Similarly to VD2020, multi-angle polarimetric and radiometric measurements are use to 81 infer ice effective radius, the aspect ratio of hexagonal components of crystals and a crys-82 tal distortion parameter are retrieved, from which the asymmetry parameter is in turn 83 derived. This dataset allows to quantitatively relate the retrieved ice effective radius and 84 other ice microphysical properties to cloud top temperature and humidity in super- and 85 sub-saturated conditions over land and ocean. In addition, a conceptual effective radius 86 growth model is constructed to interpret the observational results. 87

In section 2 we present the data, after which the conceptual model and observational results are presented in sections 3 and 4. We conclude the paper in section 5.

⁹⁰ 2 Data and methods

The remote sensing and atmospheric state data used here are obtained during the 91 Studies of Emissions and Atmospheric Composition, Clouds and Climate Coupling by 92 Regional Surveys (SEAC⁴RS) campaign in 2013 (Toon et al., 2016). SEAC⁴RS was based 93 in Houston, Texas and targeted the continental United States and the Gulf of Mexico. 94 Data are selected from flights conducted on August 21 and 30 and September 2, 4, 11, 95 13, 16, 18, and 22 by NASA's ER-2 aircraft, which operates at a nominal altitude of about 96 20 km. Flight legs in convective cloud regimes are selected based on visual inspection 97 of Cloud Physics Lidar (CPL) profiles and Geostationary Operational Environmental Satel-98 lite system (GOES) imagery. Days with substantial influence of apparent advected outqq flow of mesoscale systems over land are avoided. In this study, a total of 14826 RSP foot-100 prints that meet the selection criteria discussed below are included, of which 42% are ob-101 tained over ocean (Gulf of Mexico) and the remainder over the southern United States. 102 The data over land and ocean span the latitude ranges 29.6°N-37.7°N and 23.7°N-30.7°N, 103 respectively. 104

Cloud properties are inferred from data of the Research Scanning Polarimeter (RSP 105 Cairns et al., 1999, 2003). The RSP observes total and polarized reflectances from the 106 visible to the shortwave infrared at 152 different viewing angles along the aircraft track. 107 RSP's field of view is about 14 mrad, leading to pixel sizes of about 50–100 m for aircraft-108 cloud separations between 4 and 8 km. Interference of liquid clouds is avoided by only 109 selecting RSP pixels for which no cloudbow, originating from scattering on spherical liq-110 uid particles, could be detected. In practice, a liquid index (LI) is computed from the 111 RSP multi-directional polarization measurements as described by van Diedenhoven, Fridlind, 112 et al. (2012), and only cases with LI < 0.3 are included. 113

Cloud top heights are determined from RSP's multi-directional reflectances using a multi-angular parallax technique (Sinclair et al., 2017). Median differences between cloud top heights derived from RSP and colocated CPL measurements during SEAC⁴RS were found to be about 500 m (Sinclair et al., 2017).

Ice crystal shape characteristics and asymmetry parameters are retrieved from the 118 polarized reflectances at 0.865 μ m per the method described by van Diedenhoven, Cairns, 119 et al. (2012); van Diedenhoven et al. (2013, 2020). This method retrieves the average as-120 pect ratio and distortion level of components of complex crystals that are present at the 121 122 cloud top, as well as the corresponding scattering asymmetry parameter (van Diedenhoven, Cairns, et al., 2012; van Diedenhoven et al., 2016). The distortion parameter (Macke 123 et al., 1996) is a proxy for randomization of the crystal shape caused by a number of fac-124 tors such as large-scale crystal distortion and complexity, microscale surface roughness, 125 and impurities within the crystals (Hong & Minnis, 2015; Liu et al., 2013, 2014; Neshyba 126 et al., 2013; Panetta et al., 2016; Tang et al., 2017). Aspect ratio is defined as the prism 127 length divided by prism width for hexagonal plate-like components and the inverse of 128 that for column-like components, leading to aspect ratio values equal or below unity. Ge-129 ometrically averaged aspect ratios are reported here as recommended by (van Dieden-130 hoven et al., 2016), in addition to the percentage of results consistent with column-like 131 rather than plate-like components. 132

Ice cloud optical thicknesses and ice crystal effective radii are retrieved from a combination of RSP's near-nadir visible and shortwave infrared measurements (Nakajima & King, 1990). Ice crystal effective radius $r_{\rm e}$ is defined as (Foot, 1988)

$$r_{\rm e} = \frac{3}{4} \frac{V_t}{A_t} = \frac{3}{4} \frac{m_t}{\rho_i} \frac{m_t}{A_t} \tag{1}$$

where V_t , A_t and m_t are the total volume, projected area and mass of the ice crystal distribution and ρ_i is the bulk ice density. For this retrieval we use observations at 2.25 μ m in combination with those at 0.86 μ m over ocean. Over land, 0.67 μ m is used as the visible wavelength to avoid the vegetation albedo red edge.

As described by van Diedenhoven et al. (2014), for each instrument footprint an ice optical model is used that is consistent with the retrieved asymmetry parameter for that footprint. Only RSP pixels with an optical thickness above 5 are included in the analysis.

Profiles of relative humidity, large-scale vertical motion, temperature and pressure
are obtained from the Goddard Earth Observing System Model Forward Processing (GEOSFP) meteorological data assimilation system. These reanalysis data have a resolution
of 0.25° across latitude and 0.3125° across longitude, which is about 25 km², while the
vertical resolution is 50 and 25 hPa above and below 700 hPa, respectively. GEOS-FP
profiles are provided every 3 hours and are sub-sampled along the ER-2 ground track.

¹⁵¹ 3 Crystal growth rate model

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The growth rate of a single crystal in terms of its mass m can be estimated using the expression (Pruppacher & Klett, 1997)

$$\frac{\delta m}{\delta t} \approx 4\pi f_c D_{\max} G(S_i - 1), \qquad (2)$$

where S_i is the saturation ratio with respect to ice, D_{\max} is the particle maximum dimension, and f_c is a nondimensional capacitance shape factor (here assumed to be 0.5). The function G has units of mass per unit time per unit length and accounts for thermal and vapor diffusion growth processes depending on temperature and pressure (Pruppacher & Klett, 1997) and is approximated here as detailed by van Diedenhoven et al. (2020). Here, the term $G(S_i - 1)$ is referred to as the normalized growth rate.

Using Equation 2 in combination with an empirical mass-dimension relationship 161 allows to estimate the mass growth rate for a particle with a given mass for given nor-162 malized growth rate. Furthermore, the effective radius of a particle with a given mass 163 can be estimate per Eq. 1 using a projected area-dimension relationship and assuming 164 a monodisperse size distribution. Here we use coefficients and exponents for mass- and 165 area-dimensional power laws given by van Diedenhoven, Fridlind, et al. (2012), which 166 are applicable over a wide range of D_{\max} for cloud ice. Using this approach we model 167 the increase of particle effective radius with time. First, Eq. 2 is used to determine the 168 mass growth rate for a given normalized growth rate and initial crystal size. Subsequently, 169 the crystal is allowed to grow at this rate for a time interval $\Delta t=0.1$ s after which the growth 170 rate is updated corresponding to the resulting particle mass using Eq. 2. This process 171 is iterated for a total growth time of one hour assuming various initial ice sizes and nor-172 malized growth rates and results are shown in Fig. 1a. It is apparent that the effective 173 radius growth rate is largest for small sizes and crystals quickly grow to effective radii 174 $> 25 \ \mu m$ comparable to those observed at cloud tops. Furthermore, the sensitivity of 175 effective radius to initial crystal size decreases as growth time increases. Hence, after a 176 certain growth time, the relative variation of effective radius is mostly determined by the 177 normalized growth rate. After a full, half and quarter hour of growth, Fig. 1b shows the 178 increase of effective radius as a function of normalized growth rate. This concept model 179 is meant to qualitatively illustrate the relation between effective radius and normalized 180 growth rate, which is useful for the interpretation of our observational results. The quan-181 titative relationship may be expected to depend on the capacitance shape factor, par-182 ticle size distribution, mass- and area-dimensional relationship, among other factors. 183

¹⁸⁴ 4 Observational results

The number of RSP ice cloud observations within 500-m cloud top height bins over 185 land and ocean surfaces is shown in Fig. 2. Similarly to previous observations (van Dieden-186 hoven et al., 2020; Kubar et al., 2007) and model studies (Gasparini et al., 2021) of con-187 vective clouds, the number of observations peak at cloud top heights of around 12 km 188 or 220 K, corresponding to the estimated level of neutral buoyancy (van Diedenhoven 189 et al., 2016). Compared to over land, relatively more cloud tops occur below the homo-190 geneous freezing level over ocean, which is likely related to the weaker convection over 191 ocean. 192

The average ice microphysical properties within the 500-m cloud top height bins 193 are shown in Figs. 1b-1f along with the standard deviations. The statistics are only cal-194 culated for bins containing at least 25 observations, leading to statistically robust, con-195 tinuous profiles over land and ocean. The variation of ice crystal microphysical proper-196 ties with cloud top height are largely consistent with those observed from satellite mea-197 surements in the tropics and mid-latitude presented by van Diedenhoven et al. (2020). 198 Specifically, effective radius generally decreases with altitude for cloud top higher than 199 10 km. The rate of this decrease decreases for cloud tops higher than 12 km. A max-200 imum in effective radius occurs at below 10 km, although few clouds with tops lower than 201 10 km are observed over land. Compared to over ocean, effective radii over land are found 202 to be 3.7 μ m smaller on average, also consistent with the findings of VD2020. 203

Crystal distortion and aspect ratio generally increase with increasing cloud top height, 204 leading to asymmetry parameters decreasing with cloud top height. No substantial dif-205 ference in these variables between land and ocean is found. As shown by VD2020, the 206 minimum in aspect ratio at 7 km or 255 K corresponds to a minimum in the inherent 207 growth ratios derived from laboratory observations and used in adaptive habit micro-208 physics schemes to simulate crystal aspect ratios of vapor grown crystals (Hashino & Tripoli, 209 2011; A. A. Jensen et al., 2017). However, compared to the global results of VD2020, 210 substantially lower aspect ratios, higher percentages of column-like crystal components 211



Figure 1. Single particle effective radius as a function of time (a) and normalized growth rate (b) as calculated using the simplified growth model described in section 3. Different colors represent different initial crystal sizes as indicated. The six clusters of lines in Panel a are for normalized growth rates in the range $0.1-0.6 \ \mu g/s/m$ in equal steps. Different lines styles in Panel b represent different total growth times as indicated.

and larger asymmetry parameters are inferred during SEAC⁴RS at this level, which may be attributable to the higher spatial resolution and less averaging.

The pressure, temperature and humidity profiles from reanalysis data colocated to 214 the RSP footprints are used to calculate normalized vapor growth rate profiles as defined 215 in section 3, which are subsequently interpolated to the cloud top level. While substan-216 tial variation of humidity may be expected within the 25 km² grid cell of GEOS-FP, it 217 is assumed here that the normalized growth rate interpolated to the cloud top level is 218 a reasonable representation of the average conditions at the cloud top surroundings. Ta-219 ble 1 and Fig. 3a show that, while most of the clouds have supersaturated conditions 220 (i.e., positive normalized growth rates) at cloud top, the fraction of clouds with super-221 saturated conditions varies systematically with cloud top height and is generally smaller 222

Parameter	Land		Ocean	
	sub-saturated	supersaturated	sub-saturated	supersaturated
Number	3629	5017	1070	5110
Cloud top height [km]	11.7(1.8)	12.1(0.9)	11.8(2.4)	11.3(1.3)
$\omega_{\rm CT} [{\rm Pa/s}]$	$0.041(\ 0.059)$	-0.029(0.060)	-0.064(0.088)	-0.029(0.058)
Effective radius $[\mu m]$	30.6(10.0)	30.9(10.9)	36.5(8.3)	34.1(11.4)
Asymmetry parameter	0.750(0.034)	0.747(0.027)	0.741(0.049)	0.766(0.041)
Distortion	0.634(0.133)	0.641(0.105)	0.632(0.156)	0.578(0.146)
Aspect ratio	0.449	0.464	0.475	0.438
Column percentage	14	13	9	27

 Table 1.
 Number of observations and average values of observed parameters. Standard deviations are given in brackets. Values in bold indicate statistically significant differences between sub- and supersaturated conditions.

over land compared to over ocean. For supersaturated conditions only, Fig. 3b shows 223 the average normalized growth rates for 500-m cloud top height bins along with its stan-224 dard deviation. Consistent to the findings of VD2020, the vertical variation of average 225 normalized growth rates is similar to the vertical variation of effective radius seen in Fig. 226 2b, with normalized growth rates peaking near 8-9 km (242-253 K), decreasing with higher 227 cloud top heights before leveling off above around 12 km. Furthermore, the normalized 228 growth rates over ocean peak at a temperature that is about 2 km (7 K) higher than over 229 land, similarly to as predicted by VD2020. 230

To further investigate the relationship between the normalized growth rates at cloud 231 tops and the inferred ice microphysical properties, we calculate average ice properties 232 in normalized growth rates bins of 0.025 $\mu g/s/m$ width. A histogram of the normalized 233 growth rates at cloud tops over land and ocean in shown in Fig 4a. For supersaturated 234 conditions over land and ocean, Fig. 4b shows that the mean cloud top effective radii 235 correlate significantly (p < 0.01) with normalized growth rates with Pearson correla-236 tion coefficients of 0.92 and 0.97, respectively. The relations over land and ocean are well 237 described by linear fits with slopes of 43.4 and 43.2 and offsets of 26.7 and 25.5, respec-238 tively, if effective radius is in μm and normalized growth rates are in $\mu g/s/m$. Standard 239 deviations do not vary substantially with growth rate and are given in Table 1. These 240 relationships between effective radius and normalized growth rates resemble the mod-241 eled relationships presented in Fig. 1b. Specifically, the model suggests that crystals grow 242 to have effective radii in the observed range within about 900 s, during which cloud heights 243 would typically have increased by less than 1km (Heath et al., 2017). 244

For sub-saturated conditions, no correlation between negative growth rates and ef-245 fective radius is seen, but a jump of about 10-40% is apparent in effective radii around 246 zero growth rate. While ice mass is expected to decrease in sub-saturated conditions, sub-247 limation primarily occurs at crystal edges, leading to rounding of the crystal and hence 248 to a relatively strong decrease of the particle surface area (Nelson, 1998). As effective 249 radii is determined by the ratio of mass over projected area (see Eq. 1), crystal round-250 ing during sublimation may explain the lack of correlation between negative growth rates 251 and effective radius and the increase of effective radius for sub-saturated conditions. For 252 example, the effective radius of a spheroid is about 15% larger than that of a hexago-253 nal prism of equal length and aspect ratio. 254

For the other ice microphysical properties, no strong correlations with positive (or negative) growth rates are seen. However, above ocean observed distortion levels, column percentages and asymmetry parameters differ significantly between sub-saturated

and supersaturated cloud top conditions (see also Table 1). Specifically, larger distor-258 tion parameters are observed in sub-saturated conditions compared to supersaturated 259 tops. This is consistent with laboratory observations of increased roughness structures 260 forming on sublimating crystals (Pfalzgraff et al., 2010; Magee et al., 2014). Furthermore, 261 lowest distortion parameters are found for supersaturated conditions with the lowest growth 262 rates and a weak, but significant, increase of distortion with normalized growth rate is 263 observed, which is consistent with laboratory studies finding crystal complexity increas-264 ing with growth rates (Schnaiter et al., 2016; Voigtländer et al., 2018). No significant 265 difference in aspect ratios between sub- and supersaturated cloud tops are found, con-266 sistent with findings of (Nelson, 1998; Bailey & Hallett, 2004). However, column percent-267 ages are near zero for sub-saturated conditions, while larger and significantly increas-268 ing percentages are found for supersaturated conditions, which is consistent with the re-269 sults by Bailey and Hallett (2004) and Schnaiter et al. (2016) at conditions colder than 270 about 220 K. Furthermore, significantly lower asymmetry parameters are found for sub-271 saturated conditions, mostly associated with the larger distortion values. 272

In contrast, over land the differences in ice microphysical properties at cloud tops 273 in sub-saturated versus supersaturated are generally not significant (see Table 1). Stronger 274 variation in dynamics expected over land versus ocean may contribute to this contrast 275 as crystals may be exposed to a larger range of thermodynamical conditions. Although 276 vertical motion information at cloud scales is not available, the large scale vertical mo-277 tions at cloud top $\omega_{\rm CT}$ are derived from reanalysis profiles and indicate a clear contrast 278 between land and ocean at sub-saturated cloud tops, with mean descending conditions 279 over land and ascending tendencies at cloud tops over ocean (Table 1). Ascending con-280 ditions are found for supersaturated cloud tops over both land and ocean. 281

282 5 Conclusions

The presented dataset combining high-altitude aircraft-based remote sensing and 283 reanalysis shows an approximately linear relationship with high correlation between nor-284 malized ice crystal vapor growth rates and effective radii at cloud top, further confirm-285 ing previous conclusions by VD2020. Furthermore, the vertical variation of ice crystal 286 aspect ratio and crystal distortion is similar to those shown by VD2020 and consistent 287 with vapor growth processes. Significant differences in crystal shape characteristics and 288 scattering asymmetry parameters are found between sub- and super-saturated cloud tops 289 over ocean, although not over land. These observations further support the notion that 290 the variability of ice crystal sizes and shapes at convective cloud tops may be controlled 291 by the variability of vapor growth and sublimation processes. 292

The results suggest that ice particle distributions observed at cloud top have gen-293 erally been subjected to depositional growth for a uniform amount of time at average 294 conditions similar to the observed cloud top. Our conceptual model indicates that an 295 ice crystal population may grow to have effective radii in the observed range at timescales 296 during which cloud top heights and therewith cloud top conditions would not have changed 297 substantially. A more complete model considering realistic air motions, particles size dis-298 tributions and differential sedimentation may further inform about the relative impor-200 tance of such processes (e.g., Krämer et al., 2016). 300

We further speculate that the variability of dynamical influences is stochastic and 301 their signal in average properties largely cancels out. Greater variability of dynamics and 302 humidity over land may be a plausible cause of the lower correlation of ice effective ra-303 dius with growth rate and the lack of differences between ice properties of sub- and sat-304 urated cloud tops over land. Although no statistics of cloud scale vertical motion are avail-305 able, a dynamical difference between land and ocean clouds is indicated by our finding 306 that large scale vertical motion at cloud top levels for supersaturated conditions is as-307 cending both over land and ocean, but at sub-saturated conditions, descending motion 308

is observed on average at cloud tops over land, while ascending conditions are observedon average over ocean.

Our results are largely consistent with modeling results presented by E. J. Jensen 311 et al. (2018) and Gasparini et al. (2021) demonstrating the importance of deposition growth 312 in the evolution of the anvil cirrus. Furthermore, Muhlbauer et al. (2014) investigated 313 observations of ice clouds evolved under a broad range of meteorological conditions, which 314 indicate that variation in vertical velocity is a poor predictor for explaining the micro-315 physical variability in ice clouds and suggest that the "variability in ice supersaturation 316 317 and aerosols and their potential impacts on the availability of ice nuclei rather than variability in vertical velocity may be the primary drivers of the microphysical variability 318 of midlatitude cirrus". However, we note that our results pertain to cloud top proper-319 ties, while particle size sorting with height caused by differential fall speeds can largely 320 determine the vertical variation of ice crystal sizes and shapes within clouds (E. J. Jensen 321 et al., 2018). Additional processes, such as aggregation and riming likely lead to a even 322 wider range of properties deeper within clouds. At cloud top, however, it may be expected 323 that the primary process determining the vertical variation of effective radius and crys-324 tal shape is depositional vapor growth. 325

These results help interpretation of statistics of microphysical properties of ice crystals at cloud tops as generally observed by satellite measurements. Furthermore, the results provide valuable observational targets for studying ice formation and evolution processes using modeling studies. Cloud permitting modeling studies and other conceptual models that aim to reproduce and explain the observed vertical variation of ice microphysical properties at cloud top is advised as future work.

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Figure 2. Total numbers (a) and average ice effective radius (b), asymmetry parameter (c), crystal distortion (d), aspect ratios (e) and percentage of column-like crystal components (f) in 500-m cloud top height bins over land (green) and ocean (blue). Dashed lines in panels (b-e) indicate the standard deviations (top axes). Statistics are only shown for cloud top height bins with at least 25 sampled, indicated by the grey dashed line in panel a. The brown bars indicate the region above homogeneous droplet freezing occurs.



Figure 3. Panel a shows the fractions of supersaturated cloud tops (a) within 500-m cloud top height bins over land (green) and ocean (blue). Panel b shows the average (solid) and standard deviations (dashed) of the cloud top normalized growth rates within 500-m cloud top height bins.



Figure 4. Total numbers (a) and average ice effective radius (b), asymmetry parameter (c), crystal distortion (d), aspect ratios (e) and percentage of column-like crystal components (f) in cloud-top normalized growth rate bins of 0.025 μ g/s/m width over land (green) and ocean (blue). Linear fits to the data for supersaturated conditions are represented by dashed lines in Panel b.