Structure of the T Cell Antigen Receptor (TCR): Two CD3ε Subunits in a Functional TCR/CD3 Complex

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Summary

Transgenic mice carrying and expressing the human CD3ε gene incorporate the corresponding protein product into T cell receptor (TCR)/CD3 complexes on thymocyte and T cell surfaces. The chimeric antigen receptors allow normal T cell development and selection of repertoires in vivo and are able to transduce activation signals in vitro. We have exploited the ability to distinguish mouse (m) and human (h)CD3ε chains to analyze the stoichiometry of CD3ε in transgenic mouse TCRs. Immunoprecipitation and fluorescence resonance energy transfer experiments demonstrate that such TCRs can contain both h- and mCD3ε chains, implying that more than one CD3ε subunit occurs per TCR. Antigen comodulation studies are consistent with a stochastic use of h- or mCD3ε during receptor assembly, and further suggest a structure for the TCR/CD3 complex with two CD3ε chains. The determination of CD3ε subunit stoichiometry, together with existing biochemical data, allows the generation of a minimal model for the structure of the TCR and illustrates the potential value of the transgenic approach to the analysis of complex receptors.

Material and Methods

Transgenic Mice. A preliminary description of transgenic mice strains carrying and expressing the human CD3ε gene has been published (21), and further details will be given elsewhere (Olsson, C., et al., manuscript in preparation). Briefly, five independent strains were constructed by injection of BDF2 fertilized eggs with NotI-linearized cosmid (cc-1;13) DNA. The initial backcross of founder mice was with the C57BL/6 inbred strain, and positive hemizygous offspring were subjected to brother/sister mating. Resultant homozygotes were maintained as established transgenic lines from founder mice with low transgene copy numbers (TG16, one copy; TG21, three copies; TG41, five copies). High-copy strains (TG22: ~40 copies; TG31: ~90 copies) produced homozygotes infrequently, and in most cases, these mice did not thrive. During the establishment of the TG strains, we observed that 7 of 10 of hemizygous offspring were subjected to brother/sister mating. Resultant homozygotes were maintained as established transgenic lines from founder mice with low transgene copy numbers (TG16, one copy; TG21, three copies; TG41, five copies). High-copy strains (TG22: ~40 copies; TG31: ~90 copies) produced homozygotes infrequently, and in most cases, these mice did not thrive. During the establishment of the TG strains, we observed that 7 of 10 of hemizygous mice carrying high-copy (i.e., ~40 or 90) and 1 of 16 having low-copy (i.e., one, three, or five) numbers of the transgene had a small spleen and a thymus that was barely detectable. Accordingly, thymocyte numbers were severely reduced to ~2 × 10⁶/thymus (range, 1–8 × 10⁶/thymus), while controls contained...
of fluorescence resonance energy transfer (FRET, 32-34), where the efficiency of transfer of (nonradiative) energy from donor to acceptor is determined by measuring fluorochrome acceptor emission as well as the quenching of donor fluorescence emission (radiated photons). The efficiency of transfer is directly related to the average donor-acceptor distance (33), antigens in higher abundance being preferred as acceptors (32-34).

**Results**

**Analysis of CD3ε Subunit Stoichiometry Using Transgenic Mice.** We decided to quantitate the number of CD3ε subunits in the TCR/CD3 complex by taking advantage of the unique coexpression of two distinguishable CD3ε chains on the T cell surface in hCD3ε transgenic mice (21). Five independent strains of transgenic mice were constructed using a cosmid containing the hCD3ε gene and the cis-acting elements required for its appropriate expression. The five strains contained from 1 to 90 copies of the hCD3ε gene and were all found to express hCD3ε mRNA in the correct T cell-specific fashion as defined by Northern blot assays (Ollson, et al., manuscript in preparation). T cells derived from independent transgenic strains were submitted to analyses of the subunit associations between the introduced hCD3ε and the endogenous TCR/CD3 components. In particular, we asked whether h- and mCD3ε subunits occur in the same TCR/CD3 complex by using species-specific anti-CD3ε mAb in immunoprecipitation, energy transfer, and surface modulation studies.

**Coprecipitation of h- and mCD3ε from Transgenic Mouse T Cells.** Initially, we carried out immunoprecipitation studies using surface-labeled cells and mAb specific for either hCD3ε or mCD3ε. 125I-labeled cells were first lysed using detergent conditions that dissociate TCR heterodimer and CD3 subunits. Under these conditions (Fig. 1 A), anti-hCD3ε mAb UCHT1 specifically immunoprecipitated a 20-kD protein from transgenic mouse T cells. Thus, the difference in the molecular weights of h- and mCD3ε chains allowed us readily to detect their surface coexpression in the transgenic mouse T cells.

We then analyzed the interaction between the two CD3ε subunits and the other endogenous TCR/CD3 components by using aliquots of 125I-labeled cells that were lysed under detergent conditions that preserve TCR/CD3 association. As shown in Fig. 1 B, the endogenous 23-kD mCD3ε subunit, as well as the 41-45-kD TCR dimer, were coimmunoprecipitated together with the 20-kD hCD3ε by either anti-mCD3ε or anti-hCD3ε mAb from the surface of transgenic mouse T cells. The specificity of the coprecipitation of h- and mCD3ε was confirmed using human and mouse T cell lines as controls in parallel experiments. A transgene-negative littermate gave very similar results to those of the mouse T cell line (not shown).
The coprecipitation of h- and mCD3ε in the digitonin lysates (Fig. 1 B) shows that a proportion of TCR/CD3 complexes contains at least two CD3ε subunits. The lack of such coprecipitation in the NP40 lysates (Fig. 1 A) implies that the predominant association of h- and mCD3ε is not due to strong, direct ε-ε interactions.

Fluorescence Resonance Energy Transfer between h- and mCD3ε Subunits. We examined further the physical relationship between the human and endogenous CD3ε chains by using a different experimental method: flow cytometric analysis and FRET. FRET has been used successfully to determine intramolecular and intermolecular distances at the 2- to 10-nm level in single cells (32–34). In our study, we used mAbs against mCD3ε and hCD3ε that were suitably labeled with either FITC or TRITC. FITC is excited at ~488 nm and can serve as nonradiative energy donor for a nearby (<10-nm distant) TRITC acceptor molecule. The relative spatial distribution of the binding sites for FITC-anti-mCD3ε and TRITC-anti-hCD3ε was investigated in mouse transgenic T cells. Cells labeled with both conjugated mAb were analyzed to measure the efficiency of energy transfer. The fluorescence distribution found implies energy transfer (Table 1) and indicates that anti-mCD3ε and anti-hCD3ε mAbs and their respective binding sites are in close proximity (<10 nm). The reciprocal donor-
Table 1. Fluorescence Resonance Energy Transfer between Donor-Acceptor Pairs of mAb

| T cells                  | Donor (FITC) | Acceptor (TRITC) | T°  | Efficiency (mean percent) | TG16 | TG41 | Transfer |
|-------------------------|--------------|------------------|-----|--------------------------|------|------|----------|
| CD3e transgenic mice:   |              |                  |     |                          |      |      |          |
| mCD3e                   | hCD3e        | 4°C              |     | 11.3, 10.7               | 12.3, 10.2 | Yes |
| hCD3e                   | mCD3e        | 4°C              |     | 12.9, 11.2               | 10.6, 11.0 | Yes |
| hCD3e                   | mTCRβ        | 4°C              |     | 13.7, 13.4               | ND   | Yes |
| mCD3e                   | mTCRβ        | 4°C              |     | 13.8, 14.0               | ND   | Yes |
| mCD3e                   | CD4 + CD8    | 4°C              |     | 0.4, 0.6                | 0.7, 0.3 | No |
| hCD3e                   | CD4 + CD8    | 4°C              |     | 0.3, 0.5                | 0.9, 0.2 | No |
| mCD3e                   | CD4 + CD8    | 37°C             |     | 8.4, 7.3                | 9.6, 7.5 | Yes |
| Nontransgenic littermate|              |                  |     |                          |      |      |          |
| mCD3e                   | hCD3e        | 4°C              |     | 0.3, 0.1                | 0.4, 0.2 | No |

Spleen T cells from either CD3e transgenic or control littermate mice were enriched using nylon wool columns (21). The frequency distribution of energy transfer efficiency between fluoresceinated (FITC) and rhodaminated (TRITC) mAbs specific for the indicated antigens on the surface of transgenic T cells was measured by flow cytometry. The cells were incubated with the antibodies for 60 min at the indicated temperatures (T°). Mean efficiency of transfer is displayed for T cells from two individual mice for either the TG16 or the TG41 strains, and control littermates. The interpretation of energy transfer results, where "Yes" corresponds to transfer efficiency of >2%, is indicated in the Transfer column.

acceptor combination, FITC-anti-hCD3e and TRITC-anti-mCD3e, yielded similar results. The m- and hCD3e-specific pair of mAbs used did not induce energy transfer in nontransgenic T cells.

When similar experiments were carried out using donor/acceptor antibody pairs specific for either h- or mCD3e and mTCR-β, values of efficiency of FRET were in agreement with the hCD3e/mCD3e pair results (Table 1). This indicates that both the h- and mCD3e chains and the TCR-β are in close proximity to each other.

Neither TRITC-anti-CD4 nor TRITC-anti-CD8 mAb, which bind to antigens that are about fourfold more abundant on the T cell surface, acted as acceptors in combination with a FITC-anti-CD4 mAb donor (Table 1). It is worthy to note that energy transfer between anti-CD4 and anti-CD3 fluorochrome-tagged mAb can take place at 21-37°C after microaggregation of surface molecules, but does not occur at 4°C (34; Table 1). This rules out our artificial energy transfer occurring between distant molecules under our working conditions (32-34). The FRET results show that the hCD3e-mTCR/CD3 association first detected by immunoprecipitation occurs in all transgenic T cells, and not just in a subpopulation.

Partial Comodulation Implies Random Association of h- and mCD3e. The above results imply that the TCR/CD3 complex contains at least two CD3e subunits. If hCD3e can structurally substitute for mCD3e, the existence of TCR/CD3 complexes containing only either hCD3e or mCD3e subunit pairs should be detectable. We examined this possibility by modulation of the surface expression of either hCD3e or mCD3e subunits and subsequent immunofluorescence and flow cytometry analysis of the reciprocal chain with specific mAb (Fig. 2). Although anti-mCD3e mAb removed most (~95%) of surface mCD3e, the expression of hCD3e was only reduced by ~60% as compared with modulation with anti-hCD3e mAb. Similarly, anti-hCD3e mAb removed only a portion (~50%) of mTCR/CD3 complexes in every cell after virtually complete modulation of hCD3e antigen. In contrast, >95% of both hCD3e and mCD3e comodulated with TCR-α/β (Fig. 2), indicating that both types of CD3e subunit are integral antigen receptor components. The specificity of the comodulation was confirmed using Thy-1 antigen as control.

These data are consistent with a TCR/CD3 complex that randomly assembles hCD3e and mCD3e subunits within a single receptor, the simplest interpretation being that each complex contains two CD3e chains. Given random usage of either h- or mCD3e in the transgenic mice, a ratio of 1:2:1 of the three species of TCR (comprising m/m-, h/m-, and h/hCD3e, respectively) would result. Therefore, since m is represented twice in the m/m/me TCR/CD3 species, half of the surface mCD3e would be found in he/me-type receptors, and half in me/me complexes, when expressed in molar amounts. In this case, antibodies against hCD3e would be expected to comodate half of the mCD3e chains from the cell surface, which is close to the experimental result. For hypothetical receptor complexes with three (or more) CD3e chains, HCD3e-specific antibodies should comodate 75% (or more) of the surface mCD3e, which is not observed experimentally. The antigen comodulation data, therefore, strongly suggest a stoichiometry of two CD3e subunits per TCR.

Analysis of T Cell Development in hCD3e Transgenic Mice. We were concerned to demonstrate that the chimeric antigen receptors behaved normally in the transgenic mice, and there-
Surface antigen modulated

Stained with

anti-mCD3ε

anti-hCD3ε

anti-Thy-1

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Figure 2. Surface modulation of TCR/CD3 complex. T cells from Tg16 mice were incubated overnight either in complete culture media alone (None) or supplemented with antibodies specific for the indicated antigens. To measure the modulation of TCR/CD3 subunits, cultured cells were washed and stained with antibodies specific for either mCD3ε, hCD3ε, or an unrelated surface antigen, Thy-1. In each group, the antigen submitted to modulation was analyzed by indirect immunofluorescence, whereas other antigens were studied by direct immunofluorescence. Results are displayed as histograms of fluorescence distribution in a logarithmic scale. Left histograms in each panel represent background staining using an irrelevant hCD2 mAb, whereas right histograms represent staining with the specific mAb.
Two CD3ε Subunits in the T Cell Receptor

Figure 3. Two-color immunofluorescence and FACS analysis for coordinate expression of T cell differentiation antigens in hCD3ε transgenic mouse strains. Cells were stained with antibodies specific for the indicated surface antigens. Antibodies were either directly labeled with FITC (green fluorescence axis) or biotin conjugated followed by a second step of streptavidin-PE (red fluorescence axis). Analyses were performed in a FACScan analyzer equipped with a four-decade log amplifier. 10⁶ viable cells were accumulated in each plot. Background values, obtained using irrelevant antibodies, are indicated by lines in each panel.
fore, that their function, and hence structure, reflected that found in normal mice. Along these lines, we compared by immunofluorescence and flow cytometry the thymocyte and peripheral lymphoid populations in transgenic and control mice to study the putative effects of transgene expression upon T cell development in vivo. First, we studied the effect of the transgene upon the level of CD3 expression. As shown in Fig. 3A, subpopulations (49, 35, and 16%, respectively) of transgenic thymocytes bear either no, low, or high amounts of hCD3ε chains, whereas virtually all spleen and lymph node T cells (i.e., mCD3+, Ig- ) selectively express high levels of hCD3ε (Fig. 3B). It is worth noting that, both in the thymus and peripheral lymphoid organs, the transgenic and endogenous CD3ε chains were coexpressed in similar amounts on the surface of every T cell, each in roughly half of the amount of mCD3ε found in nontransgenic littersmates (Figs. 2 and 3). Thus, the total (h + m) amount of CD3ε chains expressed in T cells from the transgenic mice approximately equals that found in normal mice.

Second, we studied the association of hCD3ε with α/β or γ/δ types of TCR. The majority of T cells in the thymus and periphery express TCR-α/β associated with hCD3ε (Fig. 2), whereas the T cells that arise first in ontogeny, occurring in low numbers at day 15 in fetal thymus (25), instead bear TCR-γ/δ associated with hCD3ε, as found after analysis of fresh thymocytes and confirmed using T cell lines and hybridomas derived from that cell population (Fig. 3C). Thus, both cell lineages express physiological levels of TCR, hCD3ε, and mCD3ε during ontogeny and in the periphery.

Third, we analyzed the distribution of CD4 and CD8, molecules implicated as TCR/CD3 coreceptors in the processes of positive and negative selection of T cells (35). The absolute number of cells found in lymphoid organs, and the proportions of cells in T cell subsets defined by the expression of CD4 and CD8 surface markers, were all within the range found in nontransgenic littersmates (Fig. 3A, B, and D).

Finally, we monitored the effect upon in vivo selection of TCR repertoires of the chimeric TCR/CD3 expressed in the transgenic mice (Table 2). Bill et al. (26) have shown that DBA/2 and [B6 × DBA/2]F1 (BDF1) mice have significantly reduced numbers of V811 cells, whereas C57BL/6 (B6) T cells, which do not express EαEβ products necessary for deletion of V811-bearing T cells, do not have deletions of T cells expressing V811 (26). The founder mice for our hCD3ε transgenic strains were BDF2, the initial backcross was with B6 mice, and the positive offspring was subsequently subjected to brother/sister mating. Therefore, the homozygous transgenic individual analyzed can either bear or lack expression of I-E gene products depending on the segregation of the MHC haplotype. We found that low frequencies of V811-bearing T cells indeed correlate with the expression of I-E in the CD3ε transgenic mice analyzed (Table 2). The frequencies of T cells bearing either V86 or V88 domains are not significantly modified in the same mice, indicating the specificity of the deletion occurring in the transgenic mice (Table 2). We conclude that association of hCD3ε with the mouse TCR heterodimer and CD3 complex does not perturb negative selection during T cell development. In summary, after the analysis of >100 individuals from five different transgenic lines from day 14 of fetal age to 1 yr old, it is clear that the surface expression of hCD3ε and the subsequent generation of h/m chimeric antigen receptors does not disrupt normal T cell development in our homozygotic transgenic mice.

hCD3ε-containing TCR/CD3 Complexes Are Functional in Assays In Vitro We also asked whether the presence of hybrid hCD3ε-mTCR/CD3 receptors in transgenic T cells affects the function of TCR/CD3 complex as measured by proliferation and cytotoxicity assays: spleen cells of the transgenic mice showed a strong proliferative response to hCD3ε-specific mAb (Table 3). The response was similar to that obtained using either mTCR-β- or mCD3ε-specific mAb in spleen cells from both transgenic and nontransgenic mice. We examined whether anti-CD3-stimulated cells expanded in IL-2 mediate TCR/CD3-dependent cytolytic activity (Table 4). Target cells coated with anti-hCD3ε, as well as mCD3ε- or βTCR-specific mAbs, were not killed by the transgenic T cells, which suggests that the transgene does not perturb the functional expression and assembly of the transgenic TCR.

**Table 2. Expression of Vβ TCR Domains in T cells**

| Strain          | Vβ6   | Vβ8   | Vβ11  | Surface I-E expression |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|------------------------|
| C57BL/6         | 8.9 ± 0.2 | 19.8 ± 0.6 | 4.8 ± 0.7 | Negative              |
| DBA/2           | 11.7 ± 0.3 | 24.1 ± 1.2 | 1.5 ± 0.2 | Positive              |
| [B6 × DBA/2]F1  | 10.9 ± 0.5 | 21.1 ± 0.7 | 1.3 ± 0.1 | Positive              |
| TG16 (I-E+)     | 10.7 ± 0.6 | 22.8 ± 0.3 | 1.4 ± 0.3 | Positive              |
| TG16 (I-E-)     | 9.8 ± 0.3 | 19.2 ± 0.4 | 4.7 ± 0.6 | Negative              |

Spleen cells were enriched for T cells using nylon wool columns (21), and 5 × 10⁶ cells in each group were incubated with the indicated biotin-conjugated Vβ-specific mAb followed by streptavidin-peroxidase and FITC-labeled anti-mCD3. The number of cells stained by Vβ-specific mAb is represented as a mean percentage ± SE of total CD3+ cells of results obtained for individual mice, with 6–10 mice in each strain analyzed. Similar results were obtained with TG41 strain. The level of expression of I-E molecules was measured in unfractionated spleen cells using FITC-conjugated 14.4.4 mAb and flow cytometry using an irrelevant CD2-specific mAb as negative control.
Table 3. Proliferation of Cells Stimulated with TCR/CD3-specific Antibodies

| Cell source            | Proliferation of cells stimulated with: | cpm           |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------|
|                        | hCD2 | HCD3ε | mCD3ε | mTCR-β |
| TG16                   | 1,583| 37,051| 43,808| 38,944 |
| Nontransgenic littermate | 1,897| 1,766 | 46,122| 39,577 |
| Human peripheral blood  | 1,193| 53,873| 1,087 | 1,154  |

10^6 cells mice spleen or human peripheral blood cells were stimulated with the indicated antibodies (0.5 µg/ml) and cultured for 4 d in 200 µl complete medium (21, 30). [3H]Methyl-thymidine was added to the wells 8 h before the harvesting. Results show the mean thymidine incorporation of triplicate wells in one experiment representative of five performed.

mAb, but not irrelevant antibodies, were efficiently killed by transgenic T cells. Both the proliferative and cytotoxic responses promoted by anti-hCD3ε mAb were specific since they were not detected using nontransgenic T cells. We conclude therefore that the hybrid hCD3ε-mTCR/CD3 receptors are functionally competent.

Discussion

Immunoprecipitation and FRET analyses in T cells from transgenic mice that carry the hCD3ε gene have shown that the hCD3ε chain is able to replace mCD3ε subunits in the assembled TCR/CD3 complex, and that transgenic TCRs can contain both h- and mCD3ε. Antigen modulation studies demonstrated that there are two CD3ε chains per antigen receptor and defined three receptor species, he/me, and me/mε, in a ratio of 1:2:1, respectively, suggesting a stochastic use of human or mouse CD3ε during TCR/CD3 assembly. The chimeric antigen receptors support normal T cell development and selection of repertoires in vivo and are able to transduce activation signals in vitro. These findings imply that hCD3ε can both structurally and functionally substitute for mCD3ε in the transgenic mouse strains studied and show that the TCR/CD3 complex contains two CD3ε subunits.

Previously, the subunit stoichiometry of the TCR/CD3 complex was considered to be either αβγδεζ or αβγδεζη (18-20). However, conclusive data supporting such a representation are lacking. The demonstration that there are two CD3ε chains in a functional antigen receptor, together with the data of other workers, allows us to present a minimal model for the TCR/CD3 complex (Fig. 4). Several biochemical studies of partial receptor complexes have demonstrated four preferential subunit pairs: α/β, γ/ε, and δ/ε (but not CD3γ/δ; 36-38), and the model is built up from these pairs. The TCR-α/β and δ/ε dimers can associate with each other in the absence of CD3 (37), suggesting that the most important structural interaction of δε is with the TCR heterodimer (Fig. 4). Chemical crosslinking experiments indicate

![Figure 4](image-url)
the proximity of CD3γ to TCR-β (38, 39) and of CD3ε to both TCR-α and -β (38). This is consistent with a CD3γ/ε heterodimer lying adjacent to the TCR β chain of the receptor, and a CD3β/ε pair flanking TCR-α (Fig. 4).

The model predicts that CD3δ contacts TCR-α and not -β, and further suggests that specificity of contact between CD3 chains and TCR-α or -β must reside in the CD3γ and -δ subunits, since CD3ε associates with both chains of the TCR heterodimer. However, such specificity must also allow association of CD3 with TCR-γ/δ chains. We have shown expression of the human CD3ε chain on γ/δ T cells from δ-transgenic mice, and, although we have not investigated the structure of the TCR-γ/δ/CD3 complex in detail, we feel it is likely that the overall organization will be similar to that of TCR-γ/β/CD3. Considering the demonstration of a functional TCR-δ/β/CD3 complex (40), the most parsimonious interpretation would be that TCR-δ and -γ substitute for TCR α and β chains, respectively, in the TCR-γ/δ/CD3 complex.

The minimal model for the TCR has a stoichiometry of αβγδεεεε. While more complex stoichiometries are conceivable, particularly since at present the minimum representation of chains other than CD3ε and -γ is not clear, certain of these structures are improbable. For example, a TCR/CD3 complex containing two copies of each CD3 subunit (γδεεεε) is unlikely for the following reasons. Since CD3γ/δ dimers are not found (36-38), a CD3γδεεεε complex would have to be grouped as trimers, either (γδεεεεε)2 or γεεεεε plus δεεεεε. CD3γ/δ/ε subcomplexes have not been documented: although anti-CD3γ sera coprecipitate CD3ε, they do not detect CD3δ. Similarly, anti-CD3δ sera do not coprecipitate CD3γ (38). Previous immunoprecipitation data suggesting a CD3γ/δ/ε trimer (37, 41) can be seen as the simultaneous precipitation of γ/ε and δ/ε species by the CD3ε-specific antibodies used. Therefore, an antigen receptor with a representation of CD3γδεεεε would involve the formation of γεεεε, and δεεεε trimers. This would require CD3ε to possess duplicated association sites for both CD3γ and -δ chains, or to bind one subunit of a γ/ε (or δ/ε) dimer. Although possible, these arrangements seem artificially complex compared with the simple γ/ε and δ/ε dimers proposed in Fig. 4, where CD3γ and -δ associate in a mutually exclusive manner with CD3ε, possibly competing for the same binding site on the CD3ε protein. This is consistent with the high degree of relatedness of CD3γ and -δ; one or both of the two conserved sequence motifs found in all CD3γ and -δ proteins from three species (42) may be involved in association with CD3ε. However, additional experiments will be required to provide direct evidence for the stoichiometry of other receptor components and, in particular, to examine the intriguing possibility that the antigen binding subunits could form a tetramer (αεββ), like IgS, rather than a dimer.

There are a number of consequences of a TCR with two CD3ε subunits. (a) The majority of CD3-specific mAbs recognize epitopes conferred by CD3ε (21, 43) and therefore have the potential to form strings of linked TCR/CD3 complexes on the cell surface. This crosslinking function may be the critical mitogenic property of CD3-specific mAbs, since antibodies monovalent for CD3 are nonstimulatory in the absence of secondary crosslinking (44). (b) CD3ε-specific mAbs may also crosslink the two CD3ε chains within a single TCR, assuming no sterical hindrance from other subunits. It is conceivable that inter-receptor and intra-receptor crosslinking might lead to qualitatively or quantitatively different intracellular signals. (c) If a TCR/CD3 complex contains a single α/β heterodimer, TCR-α/β-specific mAbs would have only a limited capacity for receptor crosslinking. This contrasts with CD3ε-specific mAbs, and might account for differences in the abilities of the two types of mAbs to stimulate T cells during T cell selection in thymus organ culture (45).

Interspecies polymorphism and complementation of TCR/CD3 subunits allowed the definition of CD3ε stoichiometry in transgenic mouse T cells. The transgenic approach to the analysis of structure/function relationships of the TCR offers several advantages over in vitro systems. It can facilitate the examination of the structure of the receptor: (a) at early developmental stages, where there is limited knowledge of TCR/CD3 subunit expression, assembly, and function; (b) during negative and positive selection processes; and (c) in the several lineages and subsets derived from T cell precursors, since the different cell populations (or lines) characterized in each strain have the same defined genetic background and do not need to be transformed. Transgenic mice may prove to be of general value as a technique for the analysis of complex receptors.

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