Fluorescent Gangliosides As Probes for the Retention and Organization of Fibronectin by Ganglioside-deficient Mouse Cells

SARAH SPIEGEL,* KENNETH M. YAMADA,† BETTY E. HOM,‡ JOEL MOSS,§ and PETER H. FISHMAN*
*Membrane Biochemistry Section, Developmental and Metabolic Neurology Branch, National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke, *Membrane Biochemistry Section, Laboratory of Molecular Biology, National Cancer Institute, and §Molecular Mechanisms Section, Laboratory of Cellular Metabolism, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, The National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland 20205

ABSTRACT Ganglioside-deficient transformed mouse fibroblasts (NCTC 2071A cells), which grow in serum-free medium, synthesize fibronectin but do not retain it on the cell surface. When fluorescent derivatives of gangliosides, containing either rhodamine or Lucifer yellow CH attached to the sialic acid residues, were added to the culture medium, the cells incorporated the derivatives and their surfaces became highly fluorescent. When the cells were stained with anti-fibronectin antibodies and a fluorescent second antibody, fibrillar strands of fibronectin were observed to be attached to the cell surface, with partial coincidence of the patterns of direct ganglioside fluorescence and indirect fibronectin immunofluorescence at the cell surface. When the cells were exposed to bacterial neuraminidase during the time of ganglioside insertion, similar patterns of fluorescence were observed. Because the fluorescent gangliosides are resistant to the enzyme, these results suggest that neuraminidase-sensitive endogenous glycoconjugates were not involved in the ganglioside-mediated retention and organization of endogenous fibronectin. After cells were exposed to exogenous chicken fibronectin, most of the fibronectin was attached to the substratum and only a few fibrils were attached to the cells. When exogenous gangliosides were included in the incubation, there was a striking increase in cell-associated exogenous fibronectin, which was highly organized into a fibrillar network. Conversely, cells incubated for 18 h with exogenous unmodified gangliosides exhibited a highly organized network of endogenously derived fibronectin. Upon further incubation of the cells for 2 h with fluorescent gangliosides, there was considerable co-distribution of the fluorescent gangliosides with the fibronectin network as revealed by immunofluorescence. Our results support the concept that gangliosides can mediate the attachment of fibronectin to the cell surface and its organization into a fibrillar network.

Fibronectin is a high molecular weight glycoprotein associated with the surface and extracellular matrix of a variety of cells and tissues. It is believed to be involved in various cellular processes, including attachment to and spreading on various substrates (1–3). In addition to the cellular form of fibronectin, there is also a soluble plasma form which, although chemically different, can bind to cells and induce attachment and spreading (4, 5). Recently, the cell attachment domain of fibronectin was isolated and sequenced (6, 7). The molecular basis for the interaction of fibronectin with cells, however, remains unclear, and the nature of the cell surface receptor for fibronectin has not yet been elucidated.

Different reports are consistent with the proposal that the cellular receptor(s) for fibronectin may be glycoproteins (8–14), glycosaminoglycans (15), gangliosides (16–21), or phospholipids (22). In a recent study (20), it was demonstrated...
that exogenous gangliosides could mediate the retention and reorganization of endogenous fibronectin by NCTC 2071A cells, a line of transformed mouse L cells adapted to grow in serum-free medium. These cells are deficient in gangliosides (23, 24) and cannot retain endogenously synthesized fibronectin at the cell surface (20). Cells treated with exogenous gangliosides restored a more normal fibrillar arrangement of fibronectin rather than simply alter the patterns of secretion and retention of endogenous fibronectin. With the recent availability of fluorescent derivatives of gangliosides (25, 26) and species-specific anti–fibronectin antibodies, we have addressed these questions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials: Vibrio cholerae neuraminidase (EC 3.2.1.18) was obtained from Calbiochem-Behring Corp. (La Jolla, CA). Fluorescein-labeled rabbit anti-goat IgG was from Miles Laboratories (Elkhart, IN) and rhodamine-labeled rabbit anti–goat IgG was from Cappel Laboratories (Cochraneville, PA). Affinity-purified goat anti-chicken cellular fibronectin antibodies were prepared as described previously (27). Antibodies crossreacting with mouse fibronectin were removed by passage of the affinity-purified antibodies through a second affinity column containing mouse plasma fibronectin covalently linked to agarose. Removal of the crossreactive antibodies was verified by immunofluorescence staining of NCTC 2071A cells secreting endogenous mouse fibronectin. Cellular fibronectin was purified from chick embryo fibroblasts as described by Yamada (28). Rhodamine- and Lucifer yellow CH-labeled gangliosides were prepared as described by Spiegel et al. (25, 26). Bovine brain gangliosides were obtained from ICN Nutritional Biochemicals (Cleveland, OH).

Cell Culture: NCTC 2071A cells were cultured in serum-free NCTC 135 medium on glass coverslips as described previously (20). Cells were cultured 2-3 d before an experiment and were not fed. The cell density was ~50,000 cells/cm². The growth medium was then changed and unmodified, and fluorescence was dissolved in sterile water, were added to the coverslip cultures at a final concentration of 20-50 µg/ml of NCTC 135 medium. The cells were incubated without further medium change for 2 or 18 h in a humidified incubator (20). Cells were treated with exogenous chicken cellular fibronectin (20 or 50 µg/ml) after being washed with NCTC 135 medium.

Immunofluorescence: After the various treatments, the cells were rinsed three times with Dulbecco’s phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) and fixed for 1 h with a solution containing 3.7% formaldehyde and 5% sucrose in PBS. After extensive rinsing, the cells were incubated with 20 µg/ml of affinity-purified goat anti–fibronectin for 1 h at room temperature. Indirect immunofluorescence was performed using rabbit anti–goat IgG labeled with fluorescein (diluted 1:20) or with rhodamine (50 µg/ml) as described previously (20). After extensive washing, the cultures were examined with Zeiss microscopes equipped for epifluorescence microscopy. Photographs were taken with either a Pentax camera or a Photomicroscope III optics using interference filters (models 487110 and 487711; Carl Zeiss, Inc., Thornwood, NY) specific for rhodamine or fluorescein fluorescence. With this filter combination, no crossover was observed; cells labeled with Lucifer yellow CH-gangliosides were not detected in the rhodamine channel, and cells labeled with rhodaminyl gangliosides were not detected in the fluorescein channel. The filters were changed without altering the focus to compare direct ganglioside fluorescence with fibronectin immunofluorescence on the same cells. Routine controls included incubating the cells with equal amounts of preimmune IgG, omitting the first antibody, or omitting the ganglioside incorporation step.

Other Methods: Lucifer yellow CH-labeled gangliosides (50 µg) were incubated in 0.1 ml of neuraminidase solution (0.1 U) at 25°C for 18 h; then 0.4 ml of PBS was added, and the sample was dialyzed against distilled water and lyophilized. The gangliosides were separated by thin-layer chromatography on silica gel 60-coated glass plates using the solvent system chloroform/methanol/0.25% aqueous CaCl₂ (60:35:8, vol/vol).

RESULTS

Effect of Fluorescent Gangliosides on Endogenous Fibronectin of NCTC 2071 Cells

NCTC 2071A cells were incubated 18 h in medium supplemented with either Lucifer yellow CH- (Fig. 1, a and b) or rhodamine-labeled gangliosides (Fig. 1, c and d), washed extensively, fixed, and then stained indirectly for cellular fibronectin using anti–fibronectin antibody and either rhodamine- (Fig. 1, a and b) or fluorescein- (Fig. 1, c and d) labeled second antibody. When we examined the cells for direct fluorescence, we observed that both of the ganglioside derivatives had become associated with the surfaces of the cells; in addition, there was some internal fluorescence, indicating that the gangliosides became internalized within time (Fig. 1, a and c). As had been observed with unmodified gangliosides (20), the fluorescent derivatives also promoted the reorganization of fibronectin into fibrillar strands bound to the cell surface (Fig. 1, b and d).

The specificity of the fibronectin staining was confirmed by appropriate controls. When cells enriched with fluorescent gangliosides were stained with preimmune IgG from the same goat followed by the appropriate fluorescent second antibody, no fluorescence was detected on the surfaces of the cells. The effect of the fluorescent gangliosides was also specific because control cells indirectly stained for fibronectin exhibited no surface fibronectin as reported previously (20).

A comparison of direct ganglioside fluorescence with indirect fibronectin immunofluorescence indicated considerable coincidence of the two patterns at the cell surface and sometimes on the fibers (Fig. 1, a vs. b, c vs. d; see also Figs. 3, 5, and 7). The effect of ganglioside treatment on fibronectin reorganization was not confined to only a few cells (Fig. 2A). Both unmodified and fluorescent gangliosides caused a similar
increase in the proportion of cells containing fibrillar strands of fibronectin.

Fluorescent Gangliosides Affect the Organization of Exogenous Fibronectin

To explore further the phenomenon of ganglioside-stimulated attachment of fibronectin to the cell surface, we added exogenous fibronectin from another species to the culture medium. The addition of purified chicken cellular fibronectin to NCTC 2071A cells for 18 h had minimal effects on the localization of fibronectin (Fig. 2 B). Most of the fibronectin was confined to the substratum and only a few fibrils extending from the cell surface were observed (Fig. 3 a; Fig. 4, a and f). When the cells were incubated at the same time with either fluorescent (Fig. 3, b and d) or unmodified (Fig. 4, b, c, and h) gangliosides, there was a striking increase in the intensity of fibrillar staining for fibronectin. Most of it was localized in fibrillar structures with increasing numbers of fibrils extending from the cell surface (Fig. 2 B; Fig. 3, b and d; Fig. 4, b, c, and h). In addition, some of the fluorescent gangliosides were found localized on the strands of fibronectin (Fig. 3, c and e). Results with crossreacting (Fig. 3) and species-specific (Fig. 4) antibody yielded similar results.

Fluorescent Gangliosides Co-distribute with the Fibrillar Network of Fibronectin

The above studies indicated some association of fluorescent gangliosides with the fibrillar network of fibronectin. Because a similar, tight association had been observed recently with dense cultures of human fibroblasts (21), it appears that gangliosides may have a higher affinity for fibrillar fibronectin than for soluble fibronectin because of some type of cooperative interaction. To test this possibility, NCTC 2071A cells were cultured for 18 h with unlabeled gangliosides. Then the cells were washed and incubated for 2 h more with Lucifer yellow CH-labeled gangliosides (Fig. 5 a). The fluorescent gangliosides were not only distributed diffusely on the plasma membrane but also corresponded identically to the fibrillar network of fibronectin as revealed by rhodamine-labeled immunofluorescence (Fig. 5 b). The more intense co-distribution of fluorescent gangliosides under these conditions, compared with those used in Fig. 1, appears to be the result of two effects. First, the fluorescent gangliosides became internalized by the cells with time (Fig. 1) and thus were not available to interact with the fibronectin as it was slowly organized at the cell surface. Second, during the long incubation period required to optimize the fibrillar network of fibronectin, most of the exogenous fluorescent gangliosides became adsorbed to the plastic dishes in which the glass coverslips were maintained. The ability of gangliosides to be adsorbed to plastic is well established and has been used to develop solid phase assays (19, 29).

Effect of Neuraminidase on Reorganization of Endogenous Fibronectin

We observed that Lucifer yellow CH-labeled gangliosides
Figure 4  Interspecies reorganization of exogenous fibronectin by ganglioside-treated NCTC 2071A cells. Cells were incubated for 18 h with high concentrations (50 μg/ml) of purified chicken cellular fibronectin in the presence or absence of unmodified gangliosides (20 μg/ml). Control and treated cells were fixed and stained specifically for chicken fibronectin using affinity-purified anti-chicken fibronectin antibodies from which all antibodies recognizing endogenous mouse fibronectin had been removed by affinity chromatography. Fluorescein-labeled rabbit anti-goat was used as the second antibody. (a) Substrate-adsorbed fibronectin in control culture receiving exogenous fibronectin but no exogenous gangliosides; (b and c) fibrils of reorganized exogenous fibronectin around individual cells treated with gangliosides; (d) absence of immunofluorescence in a culture receiving exogenous gangliosides but no exogenous fibronectin, showing lack of staining of endogenous mouse fibronectin; (e and f) control culture receiving exogenous fibronectin but no exogenous gangliosides; and (g and h) cultures treated with both exogenous fibronectin and gangliosides. (e and g) Phase contrast micrographs and (f and h) the corresponding immunofluorescence images.

Figure 5 Interaction of fluorescent gangliosides with fibrillar network of fibronectin on NCTC 2071A cells. Cells were cultured for 18 h in serum-free medium supplemented with 20 μg/ml unmodified gangliosides. The cells then were washed and incubated in fresh medium for 2 h with Lucifer yellow CH-labeled gangliosides. The cells were washed, fixed, stained with anti-fibronectin and rhodamine-conjugated second antibody, and examined for ganglioside (a) and fibronectin (b) fluorescence. Arrows indicate coincidence between ganglioside and fibronectin fluorescence.

Figure 6 were resistant to neuraminidase (Fig. 6). The NCTC 2071A cells were incubated with both the enzyme and the Lucifer yellow CH-tagged gangliosides. Neuraminidase treatment did not have any noticeable effect on ganglioside insertion and distribution (Fig. 7a) or on the reorganization of fibronectin on the cell surface (Fig. 7b). When NCTC 2071A cells were incubated with several different proteolytic enzymes, they became severely damaged, and no useful information was obtained.

DISCUSSION

Our present results indicate that fluorescent derivatives of gangliosides are taken up by ganglioside-deficient NCTC 2071A cells and initially are associated with the plasma membrane. There, the fluorescent gangliosides promoted the retention of endogenous fibronectin and its organization into fibrils in a manner analogous to that reported previously for un-
modified gangliosides (20). The use of fluorescent gangliosides also allowed us to determine whether there was any association between fibronectin and gangliosides at the cell surface. Under appropriate conditions, we observed a coincident distribution of the gangliosides by direct fluorescence and the fibrillar network of fibronectin as revealed by indirect immunofluorescence. In many cases with cells at low density, the fibrillar patterns of fibronectin could have represented binding to cell processes or extensions without matrix formation. In other cases, e.g., in Fig. 4 of this paper and in a previous publication (20), the fibronectin appeared to become organized into an extensive pericellular fibrillar network. It also appears that the organization of fibronectin requires a ganglioside-dependent function of the cells rather than some nonspecific self-polymerization event.

In addition, we were able to demonstrate that gangliosides promoted the retention and organization of exogenously added chick fibronectin. Finally, we observed that bacterial neuraminidase did not prevent the retention and organization of fibronectin in cells exposed to the fluorescent gangliosides. As the latter were resistant to the enzyme presumably because of their modified sialyl groups, only endogenous sialoglyco-conjugates would be susceptible to the enzyme.

Our observations confirm and extend previous studies that implicate gangliosides as cell surface receptors for fibronectin.

Abbreviations used in this paper: CHO, Chinese hamster ovary; BHK, baby hamster kidney.
for fibronectin is still controversial. Aplin et al. showed that a 48-kD cell-surface glycoprotein is cross-linked to fibronectin in adherent cells (9). The same glycoprotein, however, was detected when cells were allowed to spread on photoactive derivatives of concanavalin A and ricin. Tarone et al. reported a 48-kD cell-surface glycoprotein is cross-linked to fibronectin on ganglioside-deficient cells and its organization into a fibrillar network. Other plasma membrane components may also weakly with potential receptor components (19, 35-37; Akiyama, K., and K. M. Yamada, manuscript submitted for publication). It appears, however, that the fibrillar form of fibronectin is recognized by the cell surface with a higher affinity than the soluble form. In this regard, our ability to demonstrate a direct binding of fluorescent gangliosides to the fibronectin matrix of NCTC 2071A cells as well as confluent human fibroblasts (21) may be highly relevant and provide a potential assay for identifying the fibronectin receptor.

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