Identification and Physical Mapping of 
A Polymorphic Human T Cell Receptor VB Gene 
with a Frequent Null Allele

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Summary
Germline variation in genes that encode the human T cell receptors (TCRs) may have an important 
fluence in shaping the immune T cell repertoire. In this report we describe a frequent null allele of the human VB18 gene, resulting from a nucleotide substitution that creates a stop codon (CGA~ Approximately 11% of the population tested was homozygous for this null allele, indicating that this is a frequent "hole in the repertoire." We confirmed that there is a greatly reduced (undetectable) level of VB18 mRNA in peripheral blood lymphocytes from an individual homozygous for this null allele. In addition, all heterozygous individuals expressed detectable levels of only the functional VB18 allele in their peripheral blood lymphocytes. Two other DNA polymorphisms were identified in VB18, one of which would result in an amino acid substitution in an expressed VB18 gene. Genotypes for all three of these VB18 DNA polymorphisms were determined in a group of unrelated individuals. Statistical analyses of the associations between alleles of the VB18 polymorphisms and those of other DNA polymorphisms in the TCR β locus suggested a close physical proximity between the VB18 gene and the 3' end of the Cβ2 region. This localization of human VB18 had been previously predicted by the sequence homology between human VB18 and mouse VB14, a V gene segment previously mapped to 3' of the mouse Cβ genes. We confirmed this localization of the human VB18 gene by isolating a cosmid clone that contains both the VB18 and Cβ2 gene segments. Mapping by restriction enzyme digestion and by the polymerase chain reaction indicated that the VB18 gene segment is approximately 9 kb 3' of the Cβ2 gene, making this the only known human VB gene 3' of the Cβ region.

A diverse repertoire of TCRs is generated by a variety of 
somatic mechanisms, including the random rearrangement of gene segments, N region diversification, and junctional diversity. In addition to these somatic effects, allelic variations arising from DNA polymorphisms in the TCR genes also contribute to germline diversity in the population (1). In the past, RFLPs detected with probes from TCR V genes were used as indirect measures of DNA polymorphism within the V genes (2–6). More recently, however, direct sequence analysis has demonstrated the presence of germline DNA polymorphisms in the TCR that result in amino acid substitutions. Specifically, Robinson (7) has reported a polymorphism in the VB1 gene segment that results in a change from glutamine to histidine, while Li et al. (8) reported two polymorphisms in the VB6.7 gene that result in a serine to arginine and also a glycine to glutamic acid substitution. Although the ultimate impact of these or other allelic variations on the TCR repertoire remains to be determined, the analysis of TCR polymorphisms may provide a greater understanding of the potential relationship between DNA polymorphisms in the TCR and susceptibilities to certain autoimmune diseases (reviewed in references 1 and 9).

To further assess the extent of TCR germline polymorphism, we have compared the sequence of TCR V gene segments from multiple individuals. In this study, we report a striking example of a DNA polymorphism in the VB18 gene that results in the introduction of a termination codon (the VB18 gene has also been referred to as the VB20 gene in another nomenclature by Kimura et al. [9a]). 11% of the individuals analyzed were homozygous for this null allele, and therefore could not express a functional VB18 protein product. Analysis of VB18 expression using RNA from PBL confirmed this relationship between VB18 RNA message and the stop codon. Additionally, we have also obtained the entire genomic sequence of the VB18 gene, and have determined its physical location to be at the 3' end of the Cβ region genes.
This localization is opposite of other known human \( \beta \) genes, but is syntenic with the location of a homologous TCR \( \beta \) gene segment (\( \beta14 \)) previously mapped in the mouse.

**Materials and Methods**

**Human DNA and RNA.** A panel of DNAs isolated from the lymphoblastoid cell lines of six unrelated Caucasians was used for polymorphism screening, and was kindly provided by R. A. Gatti. The DNA of 76 Caucasian parents and certain families from Centre d'Etude du Polymorphisme Humaine (CEPH) (10), pedigrees were used for polymorphism typing. For the \( \beta18 \) expression analysis, RNA was isolated from PHA-stimulated PBL from several small families (kindly provided by R. Spielman, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA) using the acid guanidinium thiocyanate-phenol-chloroform extraction method (11).

**Oligonucleotides.** Amplification primers and ligation probes were synthesized using a DNA synthesizer (384 or 391; Applied Biosystems, Inc., Foster City, CA). The sequences of amplification primers and ligation probes used in polymorphism typing of the \( \beta18 \) gene segment are shown in Table 1. The 5' allele-specific ligation probes were biotinylated as previously described (12), and the adjoining 3' reporter probes were phosphorylated using "5'-phosphate-on" according to the manufacturer's instructions (Clontech, Palo Alto, CA). Ligation probes were purified by reverse-phase HPLC, and the phosphorylated 3' reporter probes were enzymatically labeled with digoxigenin as previously described (13).

**DNA Amplification.** DNA samples were amplified by the PCR. For determining the \( \beta18 \) genotypes by restriction enzyme digestion, PCR was performed using a DNA thermal cycler (Perkin-Elmer Cetus, Emeryville, CA) in a reaction mix containing reaction buffer (Amersham Corp., Arlington Heights, IL), nucleotides (final concentration, 20 \( \mu \)M each), DNA polymerase (Hot Tub; Amersham Corp.) (final concentration, 10 \( \mu \)U/ml), 0.3 \( \mu \)M each of primer \( \beta18-3 \) and \( \beta18-4 \) (Table 1), and 10-100 ng of genomic DNA. The amplification profile was 35-40 cycles of 1 min at 94\(^\circ\)C, 1 min at 60\(^\circ\)C, and 2 min at 72\(^\circ\)C.

For determining the \( \beta18 \) genotypes by OLA, DNA samples were amplified in a 96-well microtiter plate thermal cycler (MJ Research, Watertown, MA). Genomic DNA (10 ng) was mixed with a standard PCR buffer (30 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.3, 50 mM KCl, 1.5 mM MgCl\(_2\), and 0.001% gelatin) containing 40 \( \mu \)M of each of the four deoxynucleotide triphosphates, 0.5 \( \mu \)M of each primer, and 10 \( \mu \)U/ml of Taq polymerase (Perkin-Elmer Cetus) (14). The amplification profile was 40 cycles of 20 s at 93\(^\circ\)C, 40 s at 55\(^\circ\)C, and 90 s at 72\(^\circ\)C.

For PCR-based mapping of the H29 cosmids, 50 ng of cosmids DNA was mixed with the same mixture of PCR buffer, nucleotides, and enzyme as described directly above for amplifying DNA in a 96-well format. The primer pair used for amplification was 5'-CGTGGAGAGATTGACG-3' (3' end of H29) and 5'-GCTGCTGGGATCCTGTGAA-3' (3' end of \( \beta18 \)). This mix was then subjected to 40 cycles of 1 min at 93\(^\circ\)C, 1 min at 55\(^\circ\)C, and 2 min at 72\(^\circ\)C in a DNA thermal cycler (Perkin-Elmer Cetus). The amount of time at 72\(^\circ\)C was extended by 5 s after each cycle and is essential to amplifying larger DNA products.

**DNA Sequencing.** For purposes of DNA sequencing, a large-scale PCR (200 \( \mu \)l) was performed according to the conditions described above. To eliminate an additional manipulation, mineral oil was not used during the amplification so that ethanol precipitation was done in the same tube as used for amplification. The concentrated PCR products were purified by electrophoresis through 1% low-melting point agarose (Bethesda Research Laboratories, Gaithersburg, MD), and the amplified products excised from the gel. 10 \( \mu \)l of the PCR product in the gel slice was used directly as the template for sequencing in 96-well assay plates using the Sequenase sequencing kit (U.S. Biochemical Corp., Cleveland, OH) (15). The sequencing primers used were the same as those used for the original amplification. Sequence from the \( \beta18 \) gene region was obtained using the H29 cosmid. Sequence-specific oligonucleotide primers were used to sequence across both strands of the cosmid template (<2 \( \mu \)g of cosmid DNA template per labeling reaction). Sequencing was done using the Sequenase sequencing kit, and the annealing and radiolabeling steps were performed at 37\(^\circ\)C (15).

**Restriction Digest Analysis.** Restriction digestion of the PCR products was performed without further purification of the DNA. 10 \( \mu \)l of the amplified DNA was digested with 10 U of either KpnI or Sau3A (Bethesda Research Laboratories). Only the addition of BSA (final concentration, 100 \( \mu \)g/ml) was necessary for complete digestion with KpnI, whereas addition of the manufacturer's 10 \( \times \) digestion buffer was required for digestion with Sau3A. Restriction enzyme-digested PCR products were subjected to electrophoresis in a 3% agarose gel (including 2% NuSieve agarose; FMC Bioproducts, Rockland, ME) containing ethidium bromide, and visualized by UV illumination.

**Oligonucleotide Ligation Assay (OLA).** Analyses of amplified DNA samples using primers \( \beta18-1 \) and -2 for each of the \( \beta18 \) polymorphisms were performed using an OLA detection system previously described in detail (13, 14). In this assay, each sample was analyzed by a ligation reaction for each allele. Each reaction contained one of the 5' biotinylated probes specific for that allelic form of the polymorphism, the common 3' reporter probe labeled with digoxigenin, an aliquot of the amplified DNA target, and T4 DNA ligase. If the probes were hybridized to a perfectly matched target, the biotinylated allele specific and reporter probes were joined by the ligase. To determine whether the ligation reaction had been successful, the reaction was transferred to a streptavidin plate to capture the biotinylated probe. The plate was washed and then assayed for the presence of the covalently attached reporter molecule using an enzyme-linked immunosassay system (13).

**Cosmid Identification and Restriction Digest Mapping.** A human cosmid library constructed in a modified pWE85 vector (16) and containing 15 genome equivalents was screened for \( \beta18 \). The cosmids H29 was identified by hybridization (final stringency was 0.5 \( \times \) SSC at 65\(^\circ\)C) to a PCR-amplified \( \beta18 \) gene segment that had been cloned into the M13 phage. The H29 cosmids was mapped with EcoRI, HindIII, BamHI, and XbaI using a standard protocol of partial digestion, and then sequential hybridization with vector-specific oligonucleotides (final stringency wash of 6 \( \times \) SSC at 65\(^\circ\)C), and to TCR C\( \beta \) and \( \beta18 \) probes.

**\( \beta18 \) RNA Expression.** For PCR analysis of RNA, cDNA was synthesized from 1-2 \( \mu \)g of total RNA by random hexamer priming using a cDNA synthesis kit (Amersham Corp.). Approximately 25 ng of the cDNA was PCR amplified with 25 cycles using a 5' \( \beta18 \) and 3' \( \beta \) together with a 5' and 3' C\( \alpha \) primer pair, as listed in Fig. 6, b and c, legends. The products were subjected to electrophoresis at 150 V through 2% agarose and vacuum blotted with 0.4 N NaOH onto Genetran nylon membrane (Plasco, Marlboro, MA). The membrane was hybridized overnight to a C\( \beta \) and C\( \alpha \) DNA probe that were \( \alpha \)P radiolabeled separately by random priming. These probes had been combined as a 50:50 mixture based on the amount of incorporated \( \alpha \)P. The hybridized blot was then

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1. **Abbreviation used in this paper:** OLA, oligonucleotide ligation assay.
washed several times up to a final stringency of 0.1× SSC at 65°C. The PCR products were detected by autoradiography.

Linkage Disequilibrium Analysis. Statistical analysis of linkage disequilibrium between loci was tested using the Q statistic (17). This statistic measures the total linkage disequilibrium between the alleles at two loci by summing the differences between the observed frequencies of the allele combinations and those frequencies expected if one assumed random association of alleles at the two loci. Linkage disequilibrium was also assessed using a normalized measure for disequilibrium, D' (18), which describes the extent of disequilibrium in terms of the fraction of maximum (±1.0) linkage disequilibrium possible for that locus pair. Since genetic phase was not established, individuals who were heterozygous at both loci in a pair-wise comparison were not included in the linkage disequilibrium calculation.

Results

Genomic Sequence of the Vß18 Region. To obtain the genomic sequence of the human Vß18 region, a cosmid (H29) was isolated by hybridization to a Vß18 probe. Using a series of primer-directed sequencing walks along both strands of the cosmid DNA, the entire Vß18 coding sequence was obtained as listed in Fig. 1. This sequence extends from the leader region, through the first intron and the Vß18 gene segment, and ends within the 3' noncoding sequence. The 3' noncoding sequence also includes the recombination signal (heptamer-nonamer sequences) for somatic DNA rearrangement. One of the interesting features of the human Vß18 gene sequence is its similarity to mouse Vß14 (19). This similarity across species is 77% in the coding regions, and 63% overall.

Identification of Sequence Polymorphisms in the Human Vß18 Gene. Direct sequencing of the amplified germline Vß18 gene segment from multiple persons revealed three DNA polymorphisms in the Vß18 gene segment. The positions of the DNA polymorphisms in the Vß18 gene segment are shown in Fig. 1. All three polymorphisms were single nucleotide substitutions involving C to T base transitions. From the amino acid translations, two polymorphisms, one at nucleotide 524 and the other at nucleotide 620, would have significance with regard to the Vß18 protein product. Most importantly, the polymorphism at position 524 leads to the introduction of a stop codon in the Vß18 protein sequence. The nucleotide substitution at position 620 would result in a proline to serine amino acid substitution in the gene product.

Genotyping of the Vß18 Polymorphisms. Genotypes for the

![Figure 1. Complete genomic DNA and amino acid sequence of the human Vß18 gene segment.](image-url)
Figure 2. Mendelian segregation of the KpnI and Sau3A Vβ18 DNA polymorphisms. The Vβ18 gene was amplified using primers Vβ18-3 and -4 from the individuals in a three-generation pedigree (F, father; M, mother; c, child; g, grandparent). The PCR products were digested with either the KpnI or Sau3A restriction enzyme and genotypes were determined based on the polymorphic DNA fragments observed. The pointers on the left indicate the allelic restriction fragments, with the joined pointers (after KpnI digestion) indicating a single allele (though the lower fragment is noticeably faint in the heterozygotes). Sau3A digestion also resulted in a monomorphic DNA fragment present in all individuals. On the far right, sm indicates the 123-bp ladder used as a size marker.

Vβ18 polymorphisms were determined for a larger group of individuals. First, according to the DNA sequences surrounding the polymorphisms at nucleotide positions 524 and 620 (Fig. 1), these polymorphisms would result in altering restriction enzyme recognition sites. The base change at position 524 alters a KpnI restriction site, and the DNA polymorphism at position 620 changes a Sau3A restriction site, as demonstrated in Fig. 2. Genotypes for all three Vβ18 polymorphisms were obtained using the semi-automated OLA typing system. Analysis of the inheritance patterns for these three DNA polymorphisms revealed proper Mendelian segregation, as shown in Fig. 3. The segregation of the Vβ18 genotypes was completely compatible with cosegregation (i.e., no recombinants) with haplotypes of the TCR β chain previously determined in these individuals (6).

Within our tested population (152 chromosomes), the nucleotide changes at positions 524 and 620 had identical allele frequencies of 68% for the C substitution and 32% for the T substitution. 11% of the individuals tested were homozygous for the T substitution at nucleotide 524, and therefore, based on the presence of the stop codon, these 11% of the individuals would not produce a functional Vβ18 protein product. The allele frequency for the silent base substitution at nucleotide 661 was slightly different from those found for the other two polymorphisms (524 and 620), i.e., at position 661 the allele frequency for the C substitution was 53% and the T substitution was 47%. Even though one of the substitutions, 524, leads to a stop codon, the genotype distributions for all three polymorphisms were consistent with Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium.

Linkage Disequilibrium Analysis. We statistically examined the extent of association between alleles of the Vβ18 polymorphism(s) and alleles of other previously reported TCR β DNA polymorphisms (Table 2). Because of complete linkage disequilibrium among the three point mutations within the Vβ18 gene (D' = 1.00), only three DNA haplotypes were observed (as shown in Fig. 1). The extent of linkage disequilibrium was also measured between the Vβ18 polymorphisms and other biallelic polymorphisms previously studied in this same population of CEPH parents (6, 14). Although the alleles of the Vβ18 polymorphisms did not show statistical association with other Vβ gene polymorphisms (Table 2), polymorphisms at the 3' end of the TCR β gene complex (Cβ2 region) were significantly nonrandomly associated with the 524 and 620 Vβ18 polymorphism(s) (p <0.0001).

Figure 3. A composite figure assembled from photographs of microtiter plates containing OLA genotypes that show Mendelian segregation of the three Vβ18 sequence polymorphisms. Microtiter wells containing the reporter group digoxigenin form a colored product (dark wells) and indicate a perfect nucleotide match between the ligating probes and the amplified DNA target.
Table 1. DNA Sequences for the Amplification Primers and Ligation Probes Used in Typing the Vβ18 DNA Polymorphisms

| Amplification primers | Sequences                          |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Vβ18-1                | GAGTGCACTGTGGAGGGAA                |
| Vβ18-2                | TCACATTGGCCACGTCAG                 |
| Vβ18-3                | ATTCATCAATGGCCACGGCAG              |
| Vβ18-4                | GGAGCTTCTTAGAACTCAG                |
| Ligation probes*      |                                    |
| Vβ18-524              | B-CCCCAACCTATACTGGTACC             |
|                       | pGACAGGCTGCAGGCAGGG-D              |
| Vβ18-620              | B-GAATCTCTCAGCCTCCAGAC             |
|                       | pCCCAGGACCAGCAGTTCTCAT-D           |
| Vβ18-661              | B-CTAGTTCTAAGAAGCTCCTC            |
|                       | pCTCAGTGACTCTGGCTCTTCTAT-D         |
|                       | * B, biotin; p, phosphorylated; D, digoxigenin. |

Table 2. Analysis of Linkage Disequilibrium between Vβ18 Polymorphisms and Other Polymorphisms in the TCR β Gene Complex

| Vβ18-524/620* and: | Haplotypes | D* | Q (χ²) | Vβ18-661 and: | Haplotypes | D* | Q (χ²) |
|--------------------|------------|----|--------|---------------|------------|----|--------|
| Vβ1                | 140        | 0.04| 0.1    | Vβ1           | 130        | 0.07| 0.1    |
| Vβ8                | 116        | 0.18| 1.3    | Vβ8           | 92         | 0.20| 2.9    |
| Vβ11               | 114        | -0.23| 1.9    | Vβ11          | 94         | -0.20| 2.5    |
| Cβ2-1              | 118        | -0.28| 2.2 | Cβ2-1         | 102        | -0.30| 4.5    |
| Cβ2-5              | 102        | -1.0 | 31.4  | Cβ2-5         | 94         | -0.35| 8.7    |
| Cβ2-6              | 108        | 0.69 | 24.8  | Cβ2-6         | 98         | 0.27 | 6.4    |
| Cβ2-7              | 98         | -1.0 | 27.2  | Cβ2-7         | 92         | -0.37| 9.0    |
| Vβ18-661           | 84         | 1.0  | 31.2  | Vβ18-524/620* | 84         | 1.0  | 31.2   |

The order of the polymorphisms compared in this table (top to bottom) is the same as the physical order of the polymorphisms along the chromosome (centromere to telomere) (6, 14).

* The Vβ18 position 524 and 620 polymorphisms are synonymous for this analysis since there was a singular correspondence between alleles at these loci (haplotypes, 86; D*, 1.0; Q, 86.0).
* For D*, a value of 1.00 (or -1.00) indicates maximum linkage disequilibrium; a value of 0.0 would indicate complete random association between the loci.
* For the Q statistic (χ² distribution, 1-degree freedom), Q >15 corresponds to p <0.0001, which rejects the null hypothesis of random association between the alleles at that pair of loci.

Figure 4. Restriction map of the cosmid insert containing Vβ18 and Cβ2 genes. Cosmid H29 was shown by hybridization to contain both the Vβ18 and Cβ gene segments. A restriction map of the cosmid was constructed by partial digestion and hybridization with either the gene segments or vector sequences. Restriction sites for EcoRI, BamHI, HindIII, and XbaI are shown as vertical lines below the cosmid.
Physical Mapping of the Vβ18 Cosmid. Based on the linkage disequilibrium results (Table 2), we sought to confirm the suggested 3' location of the Vβ18 gene relative to Cβ2. The H29 cosmid that contained Vβ18 was tested for hybridization to 22 other Vβ families and Cβ. Only hybridization to a Cβ probe was detected. PCR was used to confirm that this cosmid contained both the Vβ18 and Cβ genes. Physical mapping of the H29 cosmid with four restriction enzymes and hybridization with Vβ18 and Cβ probes indicated that the Vβ18 gene was located within 15 kb of the Cβ2 gene (Fig. 4). Previous studies have shown that the mouse Vβ14 gene (gene counterpart of human Vβ18) has an opposite transcriptional orientation to that of other Vβ genes as well as the D, J, and C gene segments (20). By using PCR with the H29 cosmid, we have determined the transcriptional orientation of human Vβ18 relative to the Cβ2 gene segment. DNA amplification with a primer located just 3' of the end of the Cβ2 gene, in combination with a primer located just downstream of the Vβ18 gene, indicated that the Vβ18 gene segment is located ~9 kb 3' of the Cβ2 gene (Fig. 5). Since these PCR primers must face each other to amplify the intervening DNA sequence, these data also indicate that the transcriptional orientation for human Vβ18 is opposite to that of the Cβ2 gene, and therefore similar to the orientation of the mouse Vβ14 and Cβ2.

It is worth noting that several different pairs of amplification primers from the 3' end of the Cβ2 gene and the 3' end of the Vβ18 gene could be used to obtain a similarly sized PCR product from cosmid DNA (data not shown). In addition, we were also able to sequence the ends of the 9.5-kb PCR product (Fig. 5) in low-melt agarose (see Materials and Methods), which verified the origins of this PCR product, i.e. Cβ2 at the 5' end and Vβ18 at the 3' end (data not shown).

Vβ18 RNA Expression in Peripheral Blood. As a result of the null allele for Vβ18 in the population, we sought to confirm the importance of this polymorphism in the expression level of Vβ18 in individuals homozygous for the Vβ18 stop codon. Several members from three families were tested by KpnI restriction enzyme analysis of genomic DNA for the Vβ18 null allele (KpnI-). Representatives of each of the three genotypes were identified (Fig. 6 A) and PCR was used to amplify the Vβ18 RNA (cDNA) from all these individuals. Based on the intensity of the Vβ18 PCR product, and the control Cα product in each lane, Vβ18-Cβ message was detected in the peripheral blood of all individuals, except the person homozygous for the stop codon (Fig. 6 B). As even stronger evidence of the relationship between the stop codon and Vβ18 expression, the amplified Vβ18-Cβ message was digested with KpnI (Fig. 6 C). The results show that in the eight individuals studied who possessed the null allele (either heterozygous or homozygous individuals), only the Vβ18 KpnI+ allele was expressed at detectable levels in the peripheral blood.

Discussion

Allic variation in the germline DNA of the TCR genes has been suspected to influence the expressed TCR repertoire by altering amino acids that change the TCR’s ability to recognize antigen and/or MHC. DNA polymorphisms in TCR genes could change the expressed T cell repertoire either qualitatively or quantitatively through the process of clonal selection and expansion in the thymus or periphery. It is also possible that DNA polymorphisms could influence the quan-
tivity of an expressed TCR protein by altering regulatory ele-
ments, or through translational changes such as creating a
stop codon. The potential for functional relevance of TCR
polymorphisms has been the basis for many disease associa-
tion studies that have compared the frequency of various TCR
DNA polymorphisms in autoimmune and control popula-
tions (reviewed in references 1 and 9).

In this study, we describe an extreme example of a func-
tionally relevant DNA polymorphism that results in the pres-
ence of a stop codon in the Vβ18 gene segment. This poly-
morphism was present in 54% of the population that we
studied. Importantly, 11% of the individuals tested were
homozygous for this null allele, indicating a lack of cell sur-
face expression of the Vβ18 TCR protein. Coincidentally,
there were two other DNA polymorphisms in the Vβ18 gene,
one of which would have resulted in an amino acid change
from proline to serine, in the absence of the stop codon.

The observation of complete allelic association between
the Vβ18 polymorphisms could have implications in terms
of the origins of these polymorphisms. Since the Vβ18 al-
leles at positions 524 and 620 were correlated completely,
this could be due to the simultaneous “creation” of the poly-
morphisms in a single ancestral genetic event. A more specula-
tive but immunological explanation for the complete allelic
correlation is evolutionary selection at the protein level since
the alleles of both polymorphisms would affect expression
and possibly structure. At present time, whenever the serine
residue is coded for at the second polymorphic site, the ter-
nation codon is encoded at the first polymorphic site. The serine/proline substitution site would occur within the fourth
hypervariable region in the TCK/β chain (21) and might be
involved in antigen/MHC contact. Based on the location of
this amino acid substitution, and the radical nature of the
substitution (22), generous speculation might suggest that
the Vβ18 haplotype with the stop codon and serine residue
has been selected to prevent protein expression of the Vβ18
with a serine residue at this position.

The strong disequilibrium between the Cβ-KpnI site
(Cβ2-5; Table 2) and the Vβ18 polymorphisms has relevance
to disease association studies since previous studies that have
used the Cβ-KpnI RFLP have therefore indirectly measured
the Vβ18 polymorphism association with systemic lupus ery-
thematosus, multiple sclerosis, and myasthenia gravis (23, 24).
Also, the lack of any detectable disequilibrium between the
Vβ18 polymorphisms and the Cβ-BglII RFLP (Cβ2-1), as
well as the other more distant 5' Vβ RFLPs (Table 2), im-
ples that the many positive disease associations found with
these RFLPs (1, 9) cannot be directly explained by the Vβ18
stop codon. Vice versa, studies reporting no disease associ-
tion with the previously reported Vβ and Cβ-BglII RFLPs
in Table 2 (except Cβ-KpnI) cannot conclude that the Vβ18
polymorphisms are not involved in the disease susceptibility.

Physical mapping of the human and mouse TCR β gene
complexes has shown a remarkable conservation in the orga-
nization of homologous Vβ genes between these two spe-
cies (19, 25). The human Vβ18 gene is most similar to the
mouse Vβ14 gene based on the high nucleic acid homology
between these gene segments (77%). Therefore, since the
mouse Vβ14 has been shown to be the only V gene located
3' of the TCR β C region (26), it was predicted that the human
Vβ18 gene would be located 3' of the C region (19).

This was suggested by linkage disequilibrium (Table 2) and
confirmed by isolating a cosmid that contained both the human
Vβ18 and C region Cβ2 gene. Restriction enzyme and PCR
mapping of this cosmid showed Vβ18 to be ~9 kb 3' of the
Cβ2 gene segment. This 9-kb distance in humans is similar to
the 10-kb distance between Cβ2 and Vβ14 in mice (26).

Multiple PCR analyses also showed that the human Vβ18
has an opposite transcriptional polarity relative to the TCR β
D, J, and C region genes and other Vβ genes, as shown for
counts and transcribe the nonfunctional Vβ18 gene segment could
not be positively selected because they would be unable to
assemble a TCR α/β protein heterodimer. Thus, these Vβ18-
rearranged cells could not be expected to populate the pe-
ripheral blood and immune system to an appreciable level.
In an individual homozygous for the Vβ18 null allele, a very
low level of rearranged Vβ18 message in PBL could be ac-
counted for by the frequent additional rearrangement that
can occur on the other chromosome 7 homologue in T cells
that express some other Vβ gene on their cell surface. The
failure to detect Vβ18-Cβ RNA message from the null allele
is also consistent with what has been previously seen in mice
with a similar Vβ stop codon (30, and see below [BALB/c
Vβ19]).

While other polymorphic stop codons have not yet been
reported in human TCR genes, there are two examples of
polymeric stop codons in mouse TCR Vβ genes. Mouse
Vβ19 is expressed in the SJL strain, but the BALB/c strain
has deleted a single base in the leader exon that results in a
frameshift mutation (30). A second example of a polymorphic
stop codon in a mouse TCR β gene is mouse Vβ17. Certain
strains of mice possess a TCR \( \beta \) haplotype that encodes a V\( \beta \)17 gene with a single mutation in the coding region that results in a stop codon (31). Other strains of mice with a functional V\( \beta \)17 gene have their V\( \beta \)17-bearing T cells clonally eliminated in those mice that express a certain self-superantigen and the MHC class II molecule IE (32). Wade et al. (31) speculated that although self-tolerance mechanisms would seem diminished in those mice that express a certain sdf-superantigen, functional V\( \beta \)17 gene have their V\( \beta \)17-bearing T cells clonally eliminated in those mice that express a certain self-superantigen and the MHC class II molecule IE (32). Wade et al. (31) speculated that although self-tolerance mechanisms would seem to be able to control such autoimmune cells reactive to the self-superantigen, perhaps evolutionary pressures have acted to provide an additional means of eliminating such autoreactive T cells from a portion of the population, via a stop codon. It is therefore interesting to note that the T cells bearing human V\( \beta \)18 appear to be stimulated by the Staphylococcus aureus enterotoxin superantigens (27). This parallel between these mouse and human V\( \beta \) genes allows similar speculation on whether past selective pressures on humans could have had an importance in the prevalence of the polymorphic stop codon in the human V\( \beta \)18 gene.

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Note added in proof: Malhotra et al. (33) have recently reported the detection, by a different approach and technology, of the mutation at nucleotide position 524 in the V\( \beta \)18 gene (the V\( \beta \)20 gene according to their nomenclature).

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