Glycosylation and Sialylation of Macrophage-derived Human Apolipoprotein E Analyzed by SDS-PAGE and Mass Spectrometry

EVIDENCE FOR A NOVEL SITE OF GLYCOSYLATION ON SER^290-5

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Apolipoprotein E (apoE) is a 34-kDa glycoprotein secreted from various cells including hepatocytes and macrophages and plays an important role in remnant lipoprotein clearance, immune responses, Alzheimer disease, and atherosclerosis. Cellular apoE and plasma apoE exist as multiple glycosylated and sialylated glycoforms with plasma apoE being less glycosylated/sialylated than cell-derived apoE. Some of the glycan structures on plasma apoE are characterized; however, the more complicated structures on plasma and cellular/secreted apoE remain unidentified. We investigated glycosylation and sialylation of cellular and secreted apoE from primary human macrophages by one- and two-dimensional gel electrophoresis and mass spectrometry. Our results identify eight different glycoforms with (HexNAc)_2-Hex-2-(NeuAc)_2 being the most complex glycan detected on Thr^{194} in both cellular and secreted apoE. Four additional glycans were identified on apoE(283–299), and using β-elimination/alkylation by dimethylaminopyridine, we identified Ser^290 as a novel site of glycan attachment. Comparison of plasma and cellular/secreted apoE from the same donor confirmed that cell-derived apoE is more extensively sialylated than plasma apoE. Given the importance of the C terminus of apoE in regulating apoE solubility, stability, and lipid binding, these results may have important implications for our understanding of apoE biochemistry. *Molecular & Cellular Proteomics 9: 1968–1981, 2010.*

Apollipoprotein E (apoE) is a 34-kDa glycosylated apolipoprotein of 299 amino acids. ApoE is synthesized and secreted by most cells including hepatocytes, smooth muscle cells, neuronal cells, and macrophages (1–3) and demonstrates extraordinary functional diversity. It has important roles in remnant lipoprotein clearance, the immune response, Alzheimer disease, cell proliferation, and lymphocyte activation (4, 5). More recent studies suggest that elevated plasma apoE precedes elevation of C-reactive protein and confers increased risk of cardiovascular death in the elderly (6). Proteomics-based approaches have identified elevated high density lipoprotein (HDL)-apoE as being associated with coronary disease (7). In contrast, macrophage-specific expression of apoE protects against atherosclerosis in mice (8, 9). The mechanisms by which macrophage apoE is antiatherogenic may include stimulating the removal of excess cholesterol from macrophage foam cells as well as anti-inflammatory, anti-proliferative, and immunomodulatory properties (4, 5, 10–12). An accurate understanding of the structure of apoE secreted from macrophages is important for our understanding of its properties and its role in the atherosclerotic process.

Structural studies on apoE have provided important insights into its biological properties (13). Crystallography has demonstrated that the N-terminal domain is structured in a globular four-helix bundle with the helices orientated in an antiparallel alignment (14). The structure of the C terminus has not been resolved by crystallography, but circular dichroism spectroscopy indicates it to be highly α-helical (14). Recently, NMR studies of monomeric, full-length human apoE indicated that the C-terminal domain in the intact protein adopts a more defined structure than it does as an isolated fragment (15). Lipid binding occurs at the C terminus (residues 244–272), resulting in unfolding of the molecule into a helical hairpin with the binding region for the low density lipoprotein (LDL) receptor contained within the N terminus at its apex (16).

Mucin-type O-glycosylation is a particularly common, complex, and important post-translational modification of secreted and cell surface glycoproteins (17, 18) that is difficult to

1 The abbreviations used are: apoE, apolipoprotein E; LTQ, linear ion trap quadrupole; 1-DE, one-dimensional gel electrophoresis; 2-DE, two-dimensional gel electrophoresis; IP, immunoprecipitation; MAA, M. amurensis lectin II; SNA, S. nigra bark lectin; HMDM, human monocyte-derived macrophage; E, asialylated apoE; Es, sialylated apoE; Hex, hexose; HexNAc, N-acetylhexosamine; DDA, data-dependent acquisition; XIC, extracted ion chromatogram; TIC, total ion chromatogram; Bis-Tris, 2-[bis(2-hydroxyethyl) amino]-2-(hydroxymethyl) propane-1,3-diol.
accurately characterize; however, several recent reports have facilitated analysis (19, 20). Cellular apoE and plasma apoE exist as multiple glycoforms, which vary in charge because of variable sialylation. The initial analysis of the carbohydrate content of plasma very low density lipoprotein (VLDL)-apoE by colorimetric methods and gas chromatography demonstrated that the major unmodified hexose in apoE was galactose and that N-acetylgalcosamine, N-acetylgalactosamine, and sialic acid were present (21, 22). Two-dimensional gel electrophoresis (2-DE) identified up to six sialylated apoE (Es) glycoforms in cells for any given genotype and fewer sialylated glycoforms in plasma (22). ApoE does not contain the consensus sequence (NX(T/S/C)) required for N-linked glycans, and carbohydrate residues are attached to apoE via an O-linkage to residue Thr$^{194}$ (23–25). More recent studies using 2-DE and MALDI-TOF/TOF (23) confirmed previous results and identified five glycosylated glycoforms of apoE in plasma VLDL with the most complex sugar structures containing two sialic acid residues (HexNAc-Hex-NeuAc-NeuAc). There were no other negatively charged glycoforms present on 2-DE than were distinguished by MALDI-TOF/TOF, raising the possibility that complex structures containing more than two sialic acid residues may be inherently unstable during MS analysis. Importantly, this recent study did not analyze apoE glycoforms in, or secreted from, cells.

The purpose of this study was to undertake the first detailed characterization of the glycan structures of apoE from primary human macrophages by 1-DE, 2-DE, and mass spectrometry. We found that cellular and secreted apoE in human macrophages has at least eight different glycoforms with (HexNAc)$_2$-Hex$_x$-(NeuAc)$_2$ being the most complex glycan identified. We extend previous studies by the identification of a novel site of glycan attachment on Ser$^{290}$ near the functionally important apoE C terminus in addition to glycosylation of Thr$^{194}$ and show that a major glycoform is present in each of the spots separated by 2-DE.

**EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES**

**Chemicals**

Protein A-Sepharose$^\text{TM}$ LC-4B was purchased from GE Healthcare. Goat anti-apolipoprotein E polyclonal antibodies to human apoE were obtained from Chemicon International Inc. ZOOM strips (5 × 70 mm, pH 4–7), carrier ampholyte pH 4–7, thiourea, urea, CHAPS, ultra-serum were prepared as described (23).

**Isolation and Culture of Human Monocyte-derived Macrophages (HMDMs)**

Human monocytes were isolated from white cell buffy coat concentrates from healthy donors using density gradient centrifugation and alkylated with 125 mM iodoacetamide for 15 min after which layering on Ficoll-Paque Plus (GE Healthcare). Purified monocytes were differentiated in 6-well Primaria plates (BD Biosciences) by culturing in RPMI 1640 medium containing 50 units/ml penicillin G, 50 µg/ml streptomycin, 2 mm L-glutamine, 10% heat-inactivated human serum, and 25 ng/ml macrophage colony-stimulating factor (PreproTech) for 3 days followed by culturing in the same medium without macrophage colony-stimulating factor for up to 7 days. After differentiation, the cells were washed and enriched with cholesterol by incubation in RPMI 1640 medium including 10% lipoprotein-deficient serum and 50 µg/ml acetylated LDL for 2 days. After enrichment, the cultures were washed twice with prewarmed RPMI 1640 medium and incubated in RPMI 1640 medium for between 1 and 24 h. At the indicated time points, the cells and medium samples were harvested. Cells were lysed using radioimmune precipitation assay buffer (50 mM Tris-Cl, pH 7.5, 150 mM NaCl, 0.1% SDS, 1% Triton X-100, 0.5% deoxycholate, and protease inhibitors). Whole cell lysate concentrates and human serum were supplied by the New South Wales Red Cross blood transfusion service, Sydney, Australia. Donors were genotyped for apoE by the laboratory of Prof. D. Sullivan, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, Australia, by restriction enzyme analysis (24).

**Isolation and Culture of Human Monocytes and Preparation of Human Plasma Proteins**

Blood samples in EDTA-containing tubes were obtained from a healthy volunteer with an apoE3/3 genotype. Monocytes were isolated as described above. After density gradient centrifugation, plasma supernatant was collected. Total plasma proteins were prepared as described (25). Briefly, 12 µl of plasma was mixed with 20 µl of a 10% SDS and 2.3% DTT solution boiled at 95 °C for 5 min. The sample was diluted to 500 µl with rehydration buffer (9 µm urea, 2 µm thiourea, 4% CHAPS, and trace bromophenol blue). 30 µl of the sample was separated by 2-DE, and apoE was detected by Western blot.

**Immunoprecipitation**

To isolate apoE from cholesterol-enriched HMDMs, cell lysates and medium were immunoprecipitated using a goat antibody to human apoE and protein A-Sepharose. 1.2 mg of cell lysates and medium samples was precleared for 30 min by the addition of 50 µl of protein A-Sepharose, then mixed with 5 µl of goat anti-apoE antibody, and incubated for 1 h with rotation. After 1 h, 50 µl of protein A-Sepharose was added, and the samples were incubated for another 1 h with rotation. Beads were spun down and washed five times with radioimmune precipitation assay buffer. ApoE was eluted using rehydration buffer.

**One-dimensional Electrophoresis**

To detect apoE protein bands in HMDMs, 9 mg of cell lysates and corresponding medium samples were immunoprecipitated, eluted in 150 µl of sample buffer (50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 6.8, 100 mM DTT, 2% SDS, 0.1% bromphenol blue, and 10% glycerol), and separated by Tris-glycine SDS-PAGE using 10% polyacrylamide gels. ApoE was detected by Coomassie staining.

**Two-dimensional Electrophoresis**

To detect individual apoE glycoforms, 40 µl of immunoprecipitated apoE was subjected to 2-DE. For the first dimension, isoelectric focusing was performed with a ZOOM IPGRunner system (Invitrogen) using 7-cm, pH 4–7 strips at 2000 V-h at room temperature. Samples were then reduced in 1 × NuPAGE sample reducing agent for 15 min and alkylated with 125 µm iodoacetamide for 15 min after which
second-dimension SDS-PAGE was performed using NuPAGE Novex 4–12% Bis-Tris ZOOM gels. After electrophoresis, the gels were fixed, and protein spots were visualized using a SilverQuest silver staining kit (Invitrogen) and SimplyBlue SafeStain (Invitrogen) for mass spectrometry analysis. Preliminary experiments confirmed that this separation clearly distinguished apo E 2, 3, and 4 glycoforms as described (26), consistent with calculated pI values of 5.65 (apoE3), 5.81 (apoE4), and 5.52 (apoE2) (ExPASy Compute pI/Mw tool). For all experiments described herein, apoE3/3 donor macrophages were used exclusively.

In-gel Digestion

Protein spots were excised from one- or two-dimensional gels and destained to remove Coomassie stain by incubation with 100 mM NH4HCO3 in CH3CN for 1 h. Reduction and alkylation were then performed to maximize digestion efficiency. For reduction, gel spots were incubated with 10 mM DTT in 20 mM NH4HCO3 at 37 °C for 1 h, and this was followed by incubation with 25 mM iodoacetamide in 20 mM NH4HCO3 at 37 °C for 1 h for alkylation. Gel spots were dehydrated with 100 μl of 100% CH3CN for 10 min. Sequencing grade trypsin (Promega) was added to the dehydrated gel spots at 10 ng/μl in 15 mM NH4HCO3, and samples were incubated overnight at 37 °C. Digested peptides were extracted from gel spots with 1% formic acid for 10 min followed by incubation with 100% CH3CN for another 10 min. Peptide mixtures were evaporated in a SpeedVac for 1 h and finally dissolved in 0.05% heptfluorobutyric acid and 1% formic acid.

Mass Spectrometry

Q-ToF Ultima—Digest peptides were separated by nano-LC using a CapLC and autosampler system (Waters). Samples (5 μl) were concentrated and desalted onto a micro-C18 precolumn (500 μm × 2 mm; Michrom Bioresources, Auburn, CA) with H2O:CH3CN (98:2, 0.1% formic acid) to H2O:CH3CN (65:35, 0.1% formic acid) within the linear ion trap using collisionally induced dissociation with a normalized collision energy of 25 V, activation q of 0.25, and activation time of 30 ms at a target value of 30,000 ions. m/z values selected for MS/MS were dynamically excluded for 30 s. Peak lists were generated using Mascot Daemon/extract_msn (Matrix Science, Thermo) using the default parameters and submitted to the database search program Mascot (version 2.2, Matrix Science). General search parameters were as follows: precursor tolerance was 4 ppm, product ion tolerance was ±0.4 Da, Met(O) and Cys carboxamidomethylation were specified as variable modifications, enzyme specificity was trypsin, one missed cleavage was possible, and the non-redundant protein database from NCBI or Swiss-Prot (March 2008) was searched. Additional searches with variable modifications N-acetylation, Cys-sulfenic acid, Cys-sulfonic acid, deamidation, and phosphorylation were performed. All peptides assigned by Mascot had Mouse scores >20, and spectra of glycopeptides were interpreted and validated manually. Extracted ion chromatograms (XICs) were derived from either MS or MS/MS spectra from the calculated monoisotopic mass of each ion (±m/z 0.1) using the QualBrowser in XCalibur (version 2.07), and abundances were calculated from the area of each extracted ion.

β-Elimination and Alkylation of Glycopeptides

Peptide digests were treated with NH2CH3 vapor as described (20). Briefly, a portion of the digests (~15%) was dried (SpeedVac), tubes were placed in scintillation vials together with a microcentrifuge tube containing NH2CH3 (50 μl), and the vial was flushed with N2. After capping, the vials were left at 70 °C for 60 min. Peptides were solubilized and analyzed by nano-LC MS/MS using the Q-ToF Ultima as described above.

Lectin Blot Analysis and Neuraminidase Assay

Lectin blot analysis was performed as described (28). This is based on the differing relative affinities for α-(2→6) and α-(2→3) linkages of SNA and MAA, respectively (29, 30). In short, after 2-DE and protein transfer, nitrocellulose membranes were incubated with 2% periodate-oxidized BSA buffer containing 0.1% Tween 20 in PBS (BSA-Tween buffer) at 40 °C for 1 h. Membranes were subsequently incubated in 1 h with biotinylated lectins in BSA-Tween buffer containing 0.5 μg/ml SNA or 1 μg/ml MAA. After five 5-min washes in PBS containing 0.5% Tween 20, the membranes were incubated with 1 μg/ml HRP-avidin D 1 h, washed five times with PBS containing 0.5% Tween 20, and revealed by ECL. For neuraminidase cleavage of sialic acid residues, HMDM cell lysates and medium samples were treated with α-(2→3,6,8,9)-neuraminidase or α-(2→3)-neuraminidase in 50 mM sodium phosphate, pH 5.0 at 37 °C for 3 h.

Analysis of Ser290 on Lipid-bound ApoE

A high resolution EPR structure of lipid-bound apoE was recently published, and the Protein Data Bank file was a kind gift from Prof. K. Weisgraber (31). Analysis of the glycosylation site on Ser290 was
performed using Discovery Studio 2.0 (Accelrys Software Inc.) on this structure.

RESULTS

Identification of O-Glycosylated Peptides of ApoE Using Q-TOF MS—To analyze the sugar structures of apoE glycoforms, cellular and secreted apoE was immunoprecipitated and separated by 1-DE (Fig. 1, inset). After Coomassie staining, 34-kDa apoE bands were excised, destained, and treated with trypsin, and peptides were analyzed by nano-LC data-dependent tandem MS. The inset shows Coomassie-stained cellular and 24-h secreted apoE. [M + 2H]^{2+} and [M + 3H]^{3+} precursor ions of two different glycopeptides were observed after analysis of cellular apoE. a, abundant glycan-specific ions from CID of the [M + 2H]^{2+} ion of apoE(192–206)-HexNAc-Hex-(NeuAc)_{2}. b, abundant glycan-specific ions from CID of the [M + 3H]^{3+} ion of apoE(283–299)-HexNAc-Hex-(NeuAc)_{2} were observed (for ease of interpretation, fragment ions are shown with respect to a double charged precursor in both spectra). Fragment ions and glycan oxonium ions at m/z 204.08, 292.08, and 366.13 are labeled in each spectrum. Similar spectra were obtained with secreted apoE (not shown). HNAc, HexNAc.

Cellular apoE and secreted apoE showed very similar XIC profiles, and two different potential glycosylated peptides were readily identified (not shown). An MS/MS spectrum of the [M + 2H]^{2+} precursor ion m/z 1223.07 (single charged m/z 2445.12) was obtained. This was identified as modified AATVGLAGQPLGER (apoE(192–206)) and is consistent with glycosylation of Thr^{194} (25). The delta mass between 2445.12 and 1497.80 is consistent with HexNAc-Hex-(NeuAc)_{2} glycosylation of this peptide (ExPASy GlycoMod tool). Four double charged glycan fragment ions (m/z 850.93, 932.45, 996.47, and 1077.50) were detected in the spectrum derived from this protonated peptide, and the compositions of sugar structures of these fragments are described (Fig. 1a and legend).

Unexpectedly, we detected a second putative glycopeptide from the XIC of the glycan oxonium ions. The MS/MS spectrum of precursor ion m/z 1284.57 is shown in Fig. 1b. MS/MS
FIG. 2. LTQ-FT TIC and XICs of apoE. Immunoprecipitated apoE was separated by 1-DE, Coomassie-stained bands were excised and digested with trypsin, and peptides were separated and analyzed by nano-LC data-dependent tandem MS. a, TIC of protonated apoE tryptic peptides. b, XIC obtained by adding glycan oxonium ion masses 204.08 (HexNAc), 292.09 (NeuAc), and 366.12 (HexNAC-Hex) from all MS/MS spectra. Abundant signals were observed despite the obligatory low mass cutoff of ion trap mass spectrometers. c, XIC for apoE(192–206)
analysis of \([M + 2H]^{2+}\) precursor ions showed b- and y-type ions consistent with the sequence VQAVGTSAAPVPSDNH of the C-terminal tryptic peptide of apoE, apoE(283–299). The delta mass between 2568.14 and 1620.80 is also consistent with HexNAc-Hex-(NeuAc), glycosylation. Similar to the spectrum of protonated apoE(192–206)-HexNAc-Hex-(NeuAc), two differently glycosylated double charged fragment ions (m/z 912.40, 993.94, 1058.49, and 1139.49) were detected, and the structures of these peptides were identified for apoE(192–206) by adding expected precursor ion masses (Fig. 2a) and XICs (MS2 spectra) (Fig. 2, b–d) of separated apoE protonated peptides. To identify specific glycopeptides observed from the Q-TOF experiments and other glycopeptides, the XICs were extracted for the oxonium ions m/z 204.08 + 292.09 + 366.12 (Fig. 2b), m/z 749.40 + 1497.80 ([M + 2H]^{2+} and [M + H]^+) of apoE(192–206) (Fig. 2c), and 810.90 + 1620.80 ([M + 2H]^{2+} and [M + H]^+) of apoE(283–299) (Fig. 2d). Despite recording these spectra in the linear ion trap with the concomitant loss of low mass ions and mass accuracy of approximately ±m/z 0.4, many abundant peaks characteristic of oxonium ion or apoE glycopeptides were observed, and the glycosylation patterns were characterized (Table I and Fig. 3).

Glycosylated apoE(192–206) peptides were detected between the retention times 41.65 and 42.91 min (Fig. 2c and Table I), and glycosylated apoE(283–299) peptides were detected between 35.63 and 36.52 min (Fig. 2d and Table I). Seven differently glycosylated peptide MS/MS spectra of apoE(192–206) and four different glycosylated peptide spectra of the apoE(283–299) precursor peptide were detected and manually interpreted (Table I). Many glycopeptides were present in apoE from cell lysates and from apoE secreted into medium, and both demonstrated at least one asialylated sugar residue. ApoE(192–206) peptides contained larger glycan structures than apoE(283–299) peptides, but for both, the maximum number of sialic acid residues detected per glycan was 2.

The precursor and product ion measurements in MS/MS spectra from the Q-Tof Ultima were all within ±50 ppm of the calculated values, and with a resolution of ±10,000, each product charge state was accurately determined, allowing confident assignment of glycan fragmentation patterns (Fig. 1). Fig. 3 shows MS/MS spectra of the most extensively glycosylated peptides identified from the LTQ-FT. The two glycoforms detected were triple charged ions, and these were readily resolved in the MS scan. An [M + 3H]^{3+} precursor ion, m/z 937.08 (±2 ppm, single charged, m/z 2810.28), was identified for apoE(192–206) (Fig. 3a); the delta mass between 2810.28 and 1497.80 corresponds to apoE(192–206)-HexNAc-Hex-(NeuAc),, and the glycosylation pattern was consistent with the observed fragment ions (Fig. 3a). An [M + 3H]^{3+} precursor ion, m/z 856.67 (±2 ppm, single charged, m/z 2568.14), was identified for apoE(283–299) (Fig. 3b) and was consistent with apoE(283–299)-HexNAc-Hex-(NeuAc), (Fig. 3b). Although MS/MS spectra measured within the LTQ were without isotopic resolution, many abundant glycosylated peptide fragment ions and oxonium ions were detected in both MS/MS spectra, allowing confident prediction of the glycan structure. The determined compositions of sugar structures of these fragment ions are described in Fig. 3.

The relative abundances of each ionized glycoform and unmodified peptides were determined by calculating monoisotopic XICs using the summed area of the 2+ and 3+ charge states (±m/z 0.1) of potential precursor ions from all LTQ-FT MS spectra (supplemental Fig. 1). Separation of each of the glycoforms was observed with no apparent co-elution that could be attributed to in-source fragmentation or detectable loss of sialic acid (supplemental Fig. 1). No estimates of the relative amounts of each form within the samples can be obtained by adding the expected precursor ion masses (m/z 749.40 [M + 2H]^{2+} and 1497.80 [M + H]^+) from all MS/MS spectra. The variously O-glycosylated apoE(192–206) peptides are only detected in the solid square area. d, XIC for apoE(283–299) obtained by adding expected precursor ion masses (m/z 810.90 + 1620.80 [M + 2H]^{2+} and [M + H]^+) from all MS/MS spectra. The variously O-glycosylated apoE(283–299) peptides are only present in the dotted square area. e, scatter plots depicting proportional glycan content of the indicated glycosylation/sialylation structures on apoE(192–206) and apoE(283–299) peptides in cellular (●) and secreted (●) apoE normalized to unmodified apoE(76–90) peptide. Data were obtained by automatic peak area detection from double and triple charged ion XICs (see text for details), and to bring out the large differences in normalized abundance, the y axis is in log scale.
| Glycan               | Observ. mass (0 charge) | Theoretic mass | Mass difference | Mass difference |
|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| None                 | 1496.79                 | 1496.79        | −1.710         | −0.895         |
| HexNAc               | 1699.88                 | 1699.87        | 1.182          | 1.582          |
| Hex–HexNAc           | 1861.93                 | 1861.93        | −0.091         | 0.331          |
| Hex–HexNAc–NeuAc     | 2153.03                 | 2153.02        | −0.980         | 1.770          |
| Hex–(HexNAc)₂       | 2444.12                 | 2444.12        | 0.745          | 0.355          |
| Hex–(HexNAc)₂–NeuAc | 2227.07                 | 2227.06        | −1.976         | 1.746          |
| Hex–(HexNAc)₂–(NeuAc)₂ | 2518.17               | 2518.17        | −0.036         | 1.346          |
| Hex–(HexNAc)₂–(NeuAc)₂ | 2809.26               | 2809.26        | −1.289         | 0.295          |

The LTQ-FT MS analysis of O-glycosylated apoE peptides isolated from macrophages.

TABLE I

The 34-kDa band of apoE was excised after 1-DE and subjected to LTQ-FT MS/MS. Separate analyses were undertaken for cell lysate apoE and apoE secreted into media. Peptide sequence AATVGSLAGQPLQER corresponds to apoE(192–206), and peptide sequence VQAAVGTSAAPVPSDNH corresponds to apoE(283–299). XICs are included in supplemental Fig. 1.
apoE and secreted apoE were separated by 2-DE, destained, and digested, and DDA MS analysis using the LTQ-FT was performed (Table II). As observed after MS analysis of 1-DE, the same two distinct glycosylated peptides were detected in many of the apoE spots with the same glycosylation patterns observed. In earlier studies, glycoform 1 was identified previously as asialylated and non-glycosylated (25, 36). Our analysis confirmed the absence of sialic acid residues but identified HexNAc in glycoform 1 as well as a non-glycosylated peptide, suggesting that this spot is a mixture of non-sialylated, glycosylated, and non-glycosylated apoE. Glycoform 3 had a similar molecular weight but was more highly charged than glycoform 1, suggesting either failure to detect sialic acid residues due to glycan instability or an alternative source of negative charge to explain its pI value. The Mascot search result of glycoform 3 (supplemental Fig. 2) shows a peptide containing Cys-sulfonic acid, and this peptide was absent from the search of glycoform 1, indicating that the likely cause of the pI shift of glycoform 3 was conversion of Cys to Cys-sulfonic acid (supplemental Fig. 2). Glycoforms of increasing charge (e.g. glycoforms 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7) demonstrated increasing glycan complexity but not beyond that of (HexNAc)2-Hex2-(NeuAc)2 (Table II), suggesting the presence of multiple sites of glycosylation on apoE or some unidentified post-translational modifications to explain their difference in charge. The presence of multiple glycans per spot may also be due to instability during sample preparation or LC/MS analysis (Table II). Analysis of the relative proportion, determined from XICs, of individual apoE(192–206) and apoE(283–206) MS/MS spectra of two distinct O-glycosylated peptides of apoE. Spectra of the most highly glycosylated peptides identified from each apoE glycosylation site are shown. Structures were determined from ion trap spectra even though the mass accuracy was ±m/z 0.4 and fragment ion charge states could not be accurately resolved. a, MS/MS analysis of an [M + 3H]3+ ion (m/z 937.08) present in cellular apoE. Glycan fragment ions (with respect to a double charged precursor) and losses are annotated, and the spectrum indicates glycopeptide apoE(192–206)-(HexNAc)2-Hex2-(NeuAc)2. b, ion trap MS/MS analysis of the [M + 3H]3+ ion (m/z 856.67) present in cellular apoE. The spectrum is of protonated apoE(283–299)-HexNAc-Hex-(NeuAc)2, and shows the same fragment ions observed with the spectrum acquired using the Q-Tof Ultima (Fig. 1b). The fragment ions indicated by ++ are assumed to be double charged. HexNAc, HexNAc.
forms in HMDMs. To identify the types of sialic acid linkage of apoE,

versus g was an increase in the abundance of glycoforms E and E

glycoforms did not change between 1 (media (1976)) and 299) glycopeptides in each separated 2-DE spot demon-

strated similar glycan distribution patterns in cellular and

secreted apoE for each peptide (Fig. 5). For all 2-DE glyco-

forms—

299) glycopeptides in each separated 2-DE spot demon-

strated similar glycan distribution patterns in cellular and

secreted apoE for each peptide (Fig. 5). For all 2-DE glyco-

forms of apoE, the relative proportion of glycosylated

apoE(192–206) peptides appeared greater than the proportion of
glycosylated apoE(283–299) peptides (Fig. 5), and the more

highly glycosylated/sialylated forms of apoE occurred at higher pl values.

Characterization of Sialic Acid Modification in ApoE Glyco-

forms—To identify the types of sialic acid linkage of apoE,
apoE(283–299) (Fig. 7b). Comparison of the y-ion series of product ions present in Fig. 7, a and b, showed a mass difference of m/z 13 in y-ions 13, 12, 11, and 10. The mass of the ions in both spectra (i.e. y-ions 9, 8, 7, and 6) were identical after Ser290, thereby confirming that the methyl-amine-modified residue and the major glycosylation site was Ser290 within apoE(283–299). A similar analysis of the fragmentation spectrum containing Thr194 confirmed that this was the major glycosylated amino acid in apoE(192–206) (supplemental Fig. 3).

**DISCUSSION**

We undertook the first detailed analysis of the glycosylation of apoE from primary human macrophages. Our results con-
firm previous studies identifying that apoE is extensively glycosylated and sialylated but extend these previous observations by demonstrating multiple glycosylation sites on apoE and identifying Ser290 on the apoE C terminus as a novel site of glycosylation. Given the importance of the C terminus of apoE in regulating apoE solubility, stability, and lipid binding, these results may have important implications for our understanding of apoE biochemistry.

Mucin-type O-glycosylations as occur on apoE are common, complex, and important post-translational protein modifications (17, 18) that are difficult to accurately characterize (19, 20). They are typically initiated in the Golgi with attachment of an N-acetylgalactosamine (GalNAc) residue to the side chain of an exposed Ser or Thr residue. Stepwise elongation generates up to eight core structures before further modification by processes such as sialylation. O-Linked sugars are frequently located in clusters in short regions of peptide chains containing repeating units of Ser, Thr, and Pro. Consistent with this, the peptide apoE(283–299) is rich in Ser and Thr and is the most highly predicted site for O-glycosylation in apoE (NetOGlyc 3.1 Server), supporting our identification of glycosylation on the apoE C terminus.

Our results confirm the complementary nature of MS and 2-DE approaches to identify apoE glycoforms. We identified at least seven consistently observed glycoforms of apoE in cells and in media by 2-DE, but analysis of these glycoforms by MS did not precisely distinguish between more highly charged and less charged glycoforms because multiple glycopeptides were detected in each 2D spot. Mancone et al. (25), who studied apoE associated with VLDL, also identified multiple glycoforms on 2-DE but reported no more than two sialic acid residues per glycoform. As variations in apoE charge on 2-DE were largely eliminated by treatment with neuraminidase, our data indicate that there may be up to six sialic acid residues per molecule of cell-derived apoE, and we propose that this variation relates to both the number of amino acid residues with O-linkage and variation in the number of sialic acid residues (between zero and two) on each O-linkage. Our data indicate that glycoform 3 differs from glycoform 1 as a result of conversion of Cys to Cys-sulfonic acid, which in other systems has been associated with both loss and gain of function (38). For the other spots, it is possible that there may be glycosylation sites on apoE in addition to both Thr and Ser.

Fig. 6. Contribution of sialic acid linkages to apoE glycoforms: lectin blots and effect of neuraminidase treatment. 24-h HMDM-conditioned medium (a) was separated by 10% SDS-PAGE, specific sialic acid linkages in secreted apoE were detected using SNA (left panel) and MAA (right panel) lectin blots (lanes 1–6), and apoE protein was detected by Western blot (lanes 7–9 in both panels). Fetuin was used as a standard (lanes 1–3) for both α-(2→3)- and α-(2→6)-sialic acid linkage. HMDM cellular apoE (b) was immunoprecipitated, separated by 2-DE, and stained for apoE protein by Western blot (i), MAA (ii), and SNA (iii) (lanes 1–6). c, 24-h HMDM cell lysate and medium were incubated with α-(2→3)-neuraminidase or α-(2→3,6,8,9)-neuraminidase for 3 h at 37 °C, separated by 2-DE, and detected by silver stain: i, cellular apoE control; ii, cellular apoE after α-(2→3)-neuraminidase treatment; iii, cellular apoE after α-(2→3,6,8,9)-neuraminidase; iv, macrophage-secreted apoE control; v, macrophage-secreted apoE after α-(2→3)-neuraminidase treatment; vi, macrophage-secreted apoE after α-(2→3,6,8,9)-neuraminidase treatment. Note that glycoform E’ is generated after treatment of cellular or secreted apoE with α-(2→3,6,8,9)-neuraminidase. IB, immunoblot.
ences in glycoform charge. ApoE can be phosphorylated by protein kinase CK2 in vitro on Ser\(^{296}\) (39). Mascot searches, however, did not identify other common modifications including phosphorylation of macrophage apoE in these studies.

The functional consequences of apoE sialylation are likely to be complex. ApoE was secreted normally from UDP-galactose/UDP-N-acetylgalactosamine 4-epimerase-deficient ldl\(^{-}\) CHO cells expressing a reversible defect in protein O-glycosylation (36, 40), implying that glycosylation is not essential for secretion. However, sialylated apoE was reportedly released from the plasma membrane of macrophages more efficiently than apoE that was not sialylated (41). Desialylation of apoE markedly decreased binding to HDL (42), which may be critical for facilitating HDL-mediated recycling of apoE and removal of cellular cholesterol. Protein solubility and stability can be markedly enhanced by glycosylation (43–45) with a linear dependence on the number of carbohydrate residues attached to the protein (46). In the case of apoE, we expect that C-terminal glycosylation may protect against self-association, spontaneous aggregation, and fibril formation as occurs in Alzheimer disease and atherosclerotic plaques (47, 48). Ser\(^{290}\) is situated just after the last C-terminal /H\(^{9251}\)-helix at the start of an unstructured C-terminal tail. Therefore, glycosylation of Ser\(^{290}\) is unlikely to interfere with the interhelical interactions (supplemental Fig. 4). More likely, the presence of highly negatively charged sialic acid residues on Ser\(^{290}\) could modify interactions between apoE and phospholipid head groups or affect interactions between apoE molecules.

All sialylation and glycosylation of plasma VLDL-derived apoE have been attributed to O-linkage to residue Thr\(^{194}\) (36), which resides within the peptide AATVGSLAGQPLQER (apoE(192–206)). In our studies, secreted apoE(192–206) peptides were more commonly glycosylated and contained larger glycan structures than apoE(283–299) peptides. As previous
studies found that mutagenesis of Thr^{194} precluded apoE glycosylation (36), we propose that Thr^{194} provides an initial and necessary site for apoE glycosylation and that this is followed by glycosylation of other sites on the C terminus. Such a stepwise pathway has been described for MUC1 (49).

Although it has been postulated that apoE undergoes postsecretory desialylation by plasma neuraminidases (50), VLDL-apoE reinfected in humans was not desialylated (51), and the mechanism by which apoE becomes desialylated is unknown. Our 2-DE analysis indicates that the glycoform distribution of secreted apoE changes over time with less sialylated forms (E and E') appearing in medium during longer incubations. This suggests either that macrophages desialylate apoE extracellularly or that sialic acid-poor apoE is more slowly secreted and accumulated in the medium than is sialylated apoE. Desialylation appears the more likely mechanism as the glycoform E' is generated by treatment of cellular or secreted apoE with neuraminidase. Our studies suggest the possibility that neuraminidase activity at the macrophage surface or in adjacent extracellular space acts on secreted apoE to generate lower molecular weight glycoforms after secretion. Importantly, recent studies have described endogenous sialidases Neu 1 and Neu 3 in human macrophages (52). The ability of cells other than macrophages, such as hepatocytes, to similarly generate sialic acid-poor apoE requires further investigation.

Sialylation most commonly occurs through α-(2→3) and α-(2→6) linkages to galactose. Our data based on lectin blotting indicate that macrophage-derived apoE has some terminal α-(2→3)-sialic acid linkages. However, the almost complete elimination of ES glycoforms with α-(2→3,6,8,9)-neuraminidase and weak effect of α-(2→3)-neuraminidase strongly suggest that other sialic acid linkages such as α-(2→6), α-(2→8), and α-(2→9) are likely to be present. Some α-(2→6)-sialic acid linkages may be below the limit of detection by SNA lectin blot especially if these are non-terminal sialic acid residues (29). The site specificity of O-mucins is tissue-specific as the GalNAc-transferases have tissue-specific expression patterns. It will therefore be interesting to compare the sialic acid linkages of macrophage-secreted, hepatocyte-secreted, and plasma apoE as differences may allow robust distinction between hepatocyte-derived, lipoprotein-derived, and macrophage-derived apoE in various tissues such as the arterial wall.

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