

## ASSOCIATION STUDIES ARTICLE

# Evidence for several independent genetic variants affecting lipoprotein (a) cholesterol levels

Wensheng Lu<sup>1,2</sup>, Yu-Ching Cheng<sup>1,3</sup>, Keping Chen<sup>1</sup>, Hong Wang<sup>1</sup>, Glenn S. Gerhard<sup>4,5</sup>, Christopher D. Still<sup>4</sup>, Xin Chu<sup>4</sup>, Rongze Yang<sup>1</sup>, Ankita Parihar<sup>1</sup>, Jeffrey R. O'Connell<sup>1</sup>, Toni I. Pollin<sup>1</sup>, Eduardo Angles-Cano<sup>6,7</sup>, Michael J. Quon<sup>1</sup>, Braxton D. Mitchell<sup>1</sup>, Alan R. Shuldiner<sup>1,3</sup> and Mao Fu<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Division of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Nutrition, University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD 21201, USA, <sup>2</sup>Department of Endocrinology, People's Hospital of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Nanning, Guangxi 530021, China, <sup>3</sup>Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System, Baltimore, MD 21201, USA, <sup>4</sup>Geisinger Obesity Institute, Geisinger Clinic, Danville, PA 17822, USA, <sup>5</sup>Penn State Institute for Personalized Medicine, Penn State College of Medicine, Hershey, PA 17033, USA, <sup>6</sup>Inserm U1140, Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale, Paris, France and <sup>7</sup>Faculty of Pharmaceutical and Biological Sciences, University Paris Descartes, Paris F-75006, France

\*To whom correspondence should be addressed at: University of Maryland School of Medicine, 660 West Redwood Street, HH492, Baltimore, MD 21201, USA. Tel: +1 4107061065; Fax: +1 4107061622; Email: mfu@medicine.umaryland.edu

## Abstract

Lipoprotein (a) [Lp(a)] is an independent risk factor for atherosclerosis-related events that is under strong genetic control (heritability = 0.68–0.98). However, causal mutations and functional validation of biological pathways modulating Lp(a) metabolism are lacking. We performed a genome-wide association scan to identify genetic variants associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels in the Old Order Amish. We confirmed a previously known locus on chromosome 6q25-26 and found Lp(a) levels also to be significantly associated with a SNP near the APOA5–APOA4–APOC3–APOA1 gene cluster on chromosome 11q23 linked in the Amish to the APOC3 R19X null mutation. On 6q locus, we detected associations of Lp(a)-cholesterol with 118 common variants ( $P = 5 \times 10^{-8}$  to  $3.91 \times 10^{-19}$ ) spanning a ~5.3 Mb region that included the LPA gene. To further elucidate variation within LPA, we sequenced LPA and identified two variants most strongly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol, rs3798220 ( $P = 1.07 \times 10^{-14}$ ) and rs10455872 ( $P = 1.85 \times 10^{-12}$ ). We also measured copy numbers of kringle IV-2 (KIV-2) in LPA using qPCR. KIV-2 numbers were significantly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol ( $P = 2.28 \times 10^{-9}$ ). Conditional analyses revealed that rs3798220 and rs10455872 were associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels independent of each other and KIV-2 copy number. Furthermore, we determined for the first time that levels of LPA mRNA were higher in the carriers than non-carriers of rs10455872 ( $P = 0.0001$ ) and were not different between carriers and non-carriers of rs3798220. Protein levels of apo(a) were higher in the carriers than non-carriers of both rs10455872 and rs3798220. In summary, we identified multiple independent genetic determinants for Lp(a)-cholesterol. These findings provide new insights into Lp(a) regulation.

## Introduction

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a leading cause of human morbidity and mortality throughout the world. Dyslipidemia is an important independent risk factor for CVD (1). Recently, Lp(a) has been identified as a causal role in atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (2–4). Lp(a), which consists of a cholesterol-laden LDL particle and a plasminogen-like glycoprotein [apo(a), encoded by the *LPA* gene], may contribute to the processes of both atherosclerosis (5–8) and thrombosis (9–11). Lp(a) concentrations are under strict genetic control that are minimally influenced by age, weight and diet (4). The heritability of Lp(a) is estimated to range from 0.68 to 0.98 (12–14). The pattern of inheritance indicates that a major gene, as well as polygenic factors likely, contribute to plasma Lp(a) concentrations (15–17). Candidate gene studies indicate that the copy number of kringle IV-2 repeats and single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) in the *LPA* gene may be determinants of Lp(a) levels (2,14,18,19). Recently, Lim et al. (20) identified two splice variants (loss of function) in the *LPA* gene that were associated with lower plasma Lp(a) levels and protection from cardiovascular disease. Genome-wide linkage analyses strongly suggests that the *LPA* locus on chromosome 6q25–27 is a major determinant of Lp(a) levels (LOD score from 9 to 108) and also suggests other new genetic determinants on chromosomes 1, 2, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 19 (21,22). Ober et al. (23) performed a genome-wide association study (GWAS) of plasma Lp(a) levels in 386 Hutterite subjects and identified SNPs in at least six genes on chromosome 6q in addition to *LPA* that are significantly associated with Lp(a) levels independent of each other and of the number of KIV-2 repeats. However, causal mutations and functional validation of biological pathways modulating Lp(a) metabolism are lacking. A greater understanding of Lp(a) regulation and metabolism may lead to novel targets for pharmacologic lowering of Lp(a) levels for treatment and/or prevention of CVD.

To better define the genetic architecture of Lp(a), we performed a GWAS for Lp(a)-cholesterol in the Old Order Amish (OOA), a population relatively homogenous in genetic ancestry and lifestyle characteristics. We then sequenced the 40 exons, all intron–exon boundaries and 2 kb of the promoter region of the *LPA* gene in 24 Amish subjects. To further cover the *LPA* gene region, we also genotyped five tag SNPs from sequencing results and investigated the previously described KIV-2 repeat polymorphism in *LPA*. Finally, we investigated whether genetic variants significantly associated with variation in Lp(a)-cholesterol levels were also associated with Lp(a) mRNA and protein levels in human liver.

## Results

### Clinical characteristics of OOA subjects

OOA subjects who were phenotyped for Lp(a)-cholesterol and related traits were recruited in this study. The study population of 1376 OOA represented a group of relatively healthy adults. The mean age was 49.8 years with women slightly older than men ( $P = 0.025$ ) (Table 1). The mean level of Lp(a)-cholesterol in this sample was 7.13 mg/dl, similar to the white population in the US. The heritability for Lp(a)-cholesterol in the OOA was 0.68 ( $P < 0.0001$ ). Mean levels of BMI, triglycerides (TG), high density lipoprotein- (HDL) and Lp(a)-cholesterol were significantly higher in women than in men (age adjusted  $P < 0.01$ ).

### Genome-wide association analysis for Lp(a)-cholesterol

We completed a GWAS of Lp(a)-cholesterol in the OOA using the Affymetrix 500 K SNP array after imputing all autosomal SNPs on

**Table 1.** Clinical characteristics of the OOA subjects

	Female	Male
Number	676	700
Age (years)	50.9 ± 16.6	48.8 ± 17.4
BMI (kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	27.8 ± 5.5	26.1 ± 3.6
TG (mg/dl)	83.6 ± 58.5	73.8 ± 45.5
HDL (mg/dl)	59.6 ± 15.4	51.8 ± 13.0
LDL (mg/dl)	143.1 ± 47.6	138.5 ± 40.6
Lp(a) (mg/dl)	7.7 ± 4.0	6.6 ± 3.5

HapMap by MACH (Supplementary Material, Table S1). We identified two loci significantly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol on chromosome 6q25–q26 and 11q23 ( $P < 5 \times 10^{-8}$ ) (Fig. 1, Supplementary Material, Fig. S1). The SNPs most strongly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol are shown in Supplementary Material, Table S2. An imputed SNP rs2305695 on chromosome 16 also reached GWAS significance [ $P = 2.11 \times 10^{-9}$ , minor allele frequency (MAF) = 0.005]; however, when genotyped, this SNP was found not to be polymorphic in Amish samples, suggesting an imputation error that may be due to low MAF. Previous observations have shown that imputation error rate increases as the MAF decreases (24,25).

We identified an imputed SNP near the *APOA5*–*APOA4*–*APOC3*–*APOA1* gene cluster on chromosome 11 to be significantly associated with increased Lp(a)-cholesterol levels ( $P = 8 \times 10^{-8}$ ) (Fig. 2). This SNP, rs12787909, is located in intron 3 of *DSCAML1* and has a MAF of 0.045 in the Amish and a MAF of 0.07 in HapMap-CEU population, but is not polymorphic in HapMap-HCB, JPT or YRI samples. SNP rs12787909 was also associated with decreased TG ( $P = 2 \times 10^{-7}$ ), increased HDL-C ( $P = 4 \times 10^{-9}$ ) and decreased LDL-C ( $P = 0.0001$ ) in the OOA. Since the OOA, due to a founder effect, exhibit a high frequency of the rare null R19X mutation in nearby *APOC3* (rs76353203,  $r^2$  in Amish with rs12787909 = 0.75) that is also associated with increased Lp(a), decreased TG, increased HDL-C and decreased LDL-C, a conditional analysis was performed. The association of *APOC3* rs76353203 not only explained the signal at rs12787909, but was also more significant (Table 2) thus, indicating rs12787909 is a within-Amish association (i.e. linkage) rather than a population association.

We identified 118 common variants significantly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels ( $P = 5 \times 10^{-8}$  to  $3.91 \times 10^{-19}$ ) that spanned ~5.3 Mb on chromosome 6q25–26 in a region encompassing 26 genes, including *LPA*. Common variants within six genes (*SNX9*, *SERAC3*, *TAGAP*, *FNDC1*, *PLG* and *AGPAD4*) were significantly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels (Fig. 3A).

### Rare variants in *LPA* are associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels

Variants in *LPA* have previously been associated with Lp(a) levels (14). The common variants located in *LPA* gene in our GWAS were only modestly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels with the lowest  $P$ -value =  $9.70 \times 10^{-5}$  (for imputed SNP rs7770685). To further evaluate DNA variation within *LPA*, we sequenced the 40 exons, all intron–exon boundaries and 2 kb of the *LPA* promoter region in 24 Amish subjects who were in the extreme high or low tail of the Lp(a)-cholesterol distribution, or who had different genotypes than the most significant association SNP with Lp(a)-cholesterol in GWAS. We identified 23 variants, including 6 missense variants falling within 5 exons: exon 26 (rs7765803 L1358V,

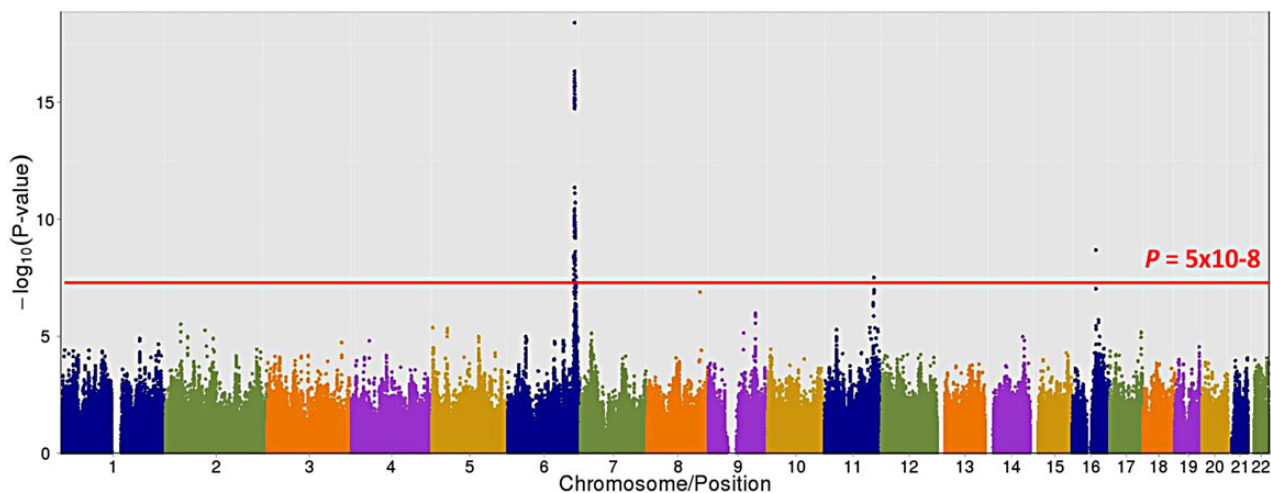


Figure 1. Association results of Lp(a)-cholesterol across all autosomal chromosomes. SNPs are plotted on the x-axis according to their position on each chromosome against association with Lp(a)-cholesterol on the t-axis (shown as  $-\log_{10}$  P-value).

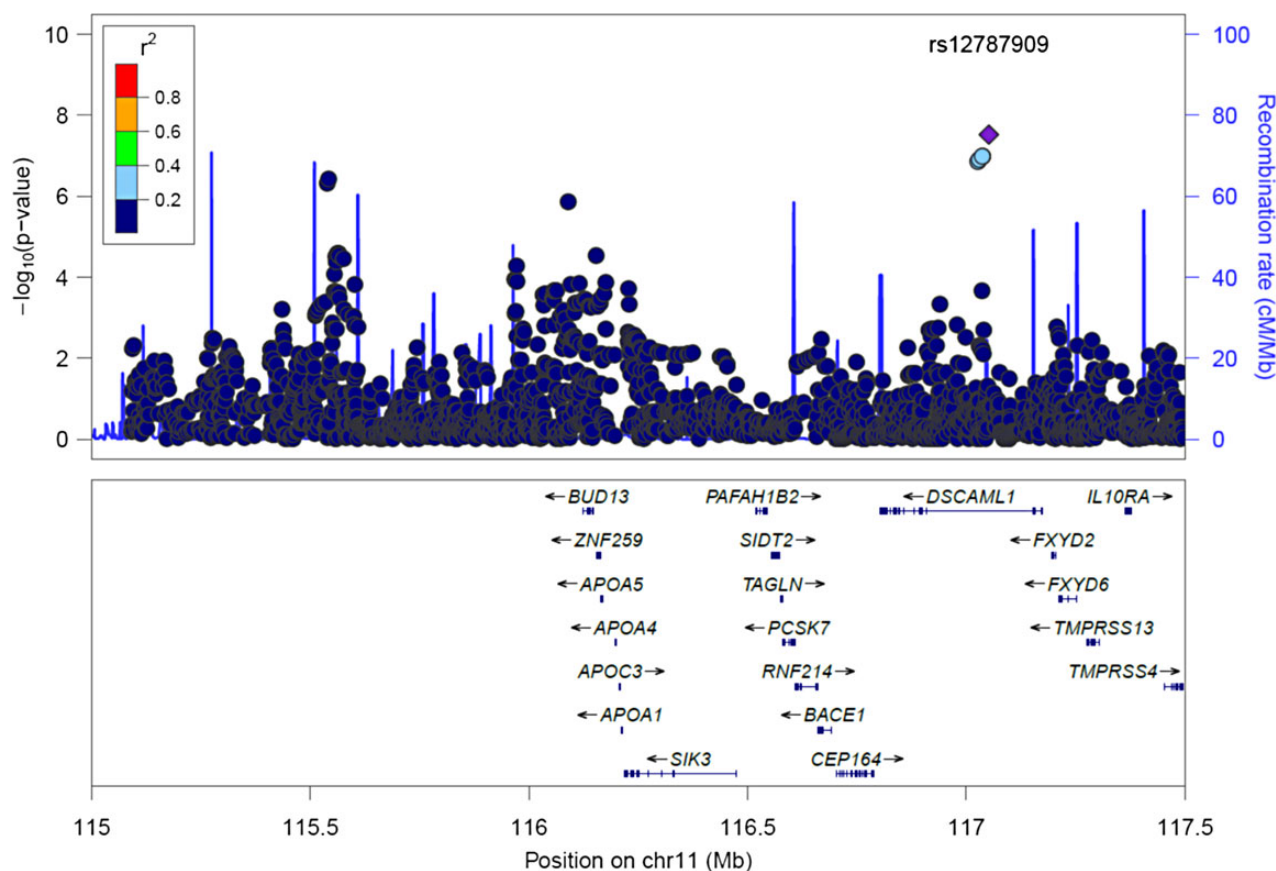


Figure 2. Association of SNPs on chromosome 11 with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels. SNPs are plotted by position on chromosome 11q23 against association with Lp(a)-cholesterol ( $-\log_{10}$  P-value). The SNP name shown on the plot was the most significant SNP. Estimated recombination rates (from HapMap) are plotted in cyan to reflect the local LD structure. The SNPs surrounding the most significant SNP are color-coded to reflect their LD with this SNP (taken from pairwise  $r^2$  values from the HapMap-CEU database, [www.hapmap.org](http://www.hapmap.org)). Genes, position of exons, and direction of transcription from UCSC genome browser (<http://genome.ucsc.edu>) are noted. Regional plots were generated using LocusZoom (<http://csg.sph.umich.edu/locuszoom>).

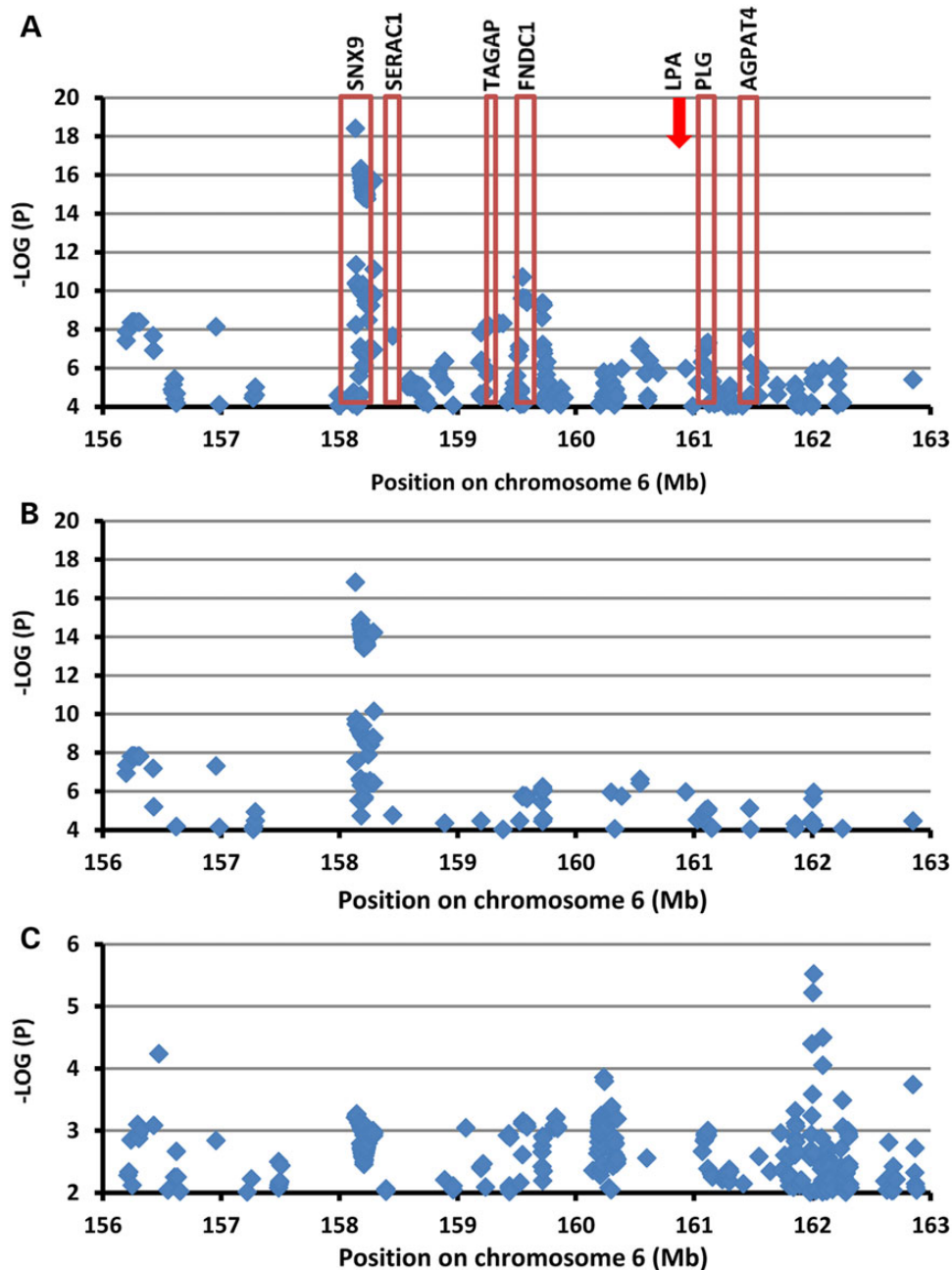
rs7765781 L1372V), exon 32 (rs1801693 M1679T), exon 37(rs379 8220 I1891M), exon 39 (rs41267809 L1961P) and exon 40 (rs312 4784 R2016C) (Supplementary Material, Fig. S2 and Table S3). Selected based on the LD structure, we genotyped five SNPs in

the LPA gene region that had not been well covered by our GWAS. Two of these variants (rs3798220 I1891M in exon 37 and rs10455872 A>G in intron 25) were significantly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels ( $P$  values:  $1.07 \times 10^{-14}$  and  $1.85 \times 10^{-12}$ ,

**Table 2.** Associations of the *DSCAML1* SNPs and *APOC3* null variant with Lp(a) and Lipid Traits

Trait	N	<i>APOC3</i> R19X		<i>DSCAML1</i> irs12787909 (imputation quality = 0.38)		<i>DSCAML1</i> irs12787909 adjusted for <i>APOC3</i> R19X	<i>DSCAML1</i> irs12787909 adjusted for lnTG
		Beta	P-value	Beta	P-value	P-value	P-value
LnLp(a)	1098 <sup>a</sup>	0.419	$3 \times 10^{-8}$	0.459	$8 \times 10^{-8}$	0.28	0.014
Ln[Lp(a)+1]	1113	0.396	$4 \times 10^{-8}$	0.430	$2 \times 10^{-7}$	0.32	0.037
TG	1113	-43.340	$3 \times 10^{-10}$	-40.681	$2 \times 10^{-7}$	0.62	
lnTG	1113	-0.637	$4 \times 10^{-18}$	-0.645	$1 \times 10^{-14}$	0.66	
HDL-C	1113	13.545	$6 \times 10^{-10}$	14.607	$4 \times 10^{-9}$	0.29	
LDL-C	1113	-22.391	0.0004	-27.571	0.0001	0.13	

<sup>a</sup>Fifteen subjects had Lp(a)=0.



**Figure 3.** Association of SNPs on chromosome 6 with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels. SNPs are plotted by position on chromosome 6q25-26 against association with Lp(a)-cholesterol ( $-\log_{10}$  P-value). (A) Highlights the most significant SNP in association analysis adjusted age, age2 and sex; (B) The most significant SNP after conditional analysis where included age, age<sup>2</sup> sex and KIV-2 numbers as a covariate; (C) The most significant SNP after conditional analysis where included age, age<sup>2</sup> sex, KIV-2 numbers, rs3798220 and rs10455872 as a covariate. (Arrow marked LPA location.)

**Table 3.** The association of top variants with lipid traits

Variants	CHR <sup>a</sup>	Gene	Location	MAF	LnLP(a)		TG		HDL-C		LDL-C	
					Beta	P-value	Beta	P-value	Beta	P-value	Beta	P-value
rs76353203	11	APOC3	Exon2	0.045	0.419	3.00E-08	-43.340	3.00E-10	13.545	6.00E-10	-22.391	4.00E-03
rs3798220	6	LPA	Exon 37	0.009	0.843	1.07E-14	-10.194	2.94E-01	-2.233	4.60E-01	9.887	2.64E-01
rs10455872	6	LPA	intron25	0.022	0.556	1.85E-12	-7.630	2.69E-01	2.501	2.47E-01	-4.600	4.71E-01
KIV-2	6	LPA	Exons	NA <sup>a</sup>	-0.168	2.28E-09	-1.378	5.75E-01	-0.575	4.54E-01	-2.553	2.45E-01

<sup>a</sup>CHR, chromosome; NA, no data available.

**Table 4.** Conditional analyses adjusted by age, age<sup>2</sup>, sex and variants

Variants	Chromosome	Gene	Location	Beta	SE	P-value
rs3798220 <sup>a</sup>	6	LPA	Exon37	8.59E-01	1.07E-01	2.02E-15
rs10455872 <sup>a</sup>	6	LPA	intron25	5.77E-01	7.65E-02	9.67E-14
rs3798220 <sup>b</sup>	6	LPA	Exon37	8.23E-01	1.07E-01	3.62E-14
rs10455872 <sup>b</sup>	6	LPA	intron25	5.10E-01	7.85E-02	1.19E-10
KIV-2 <sup>b</sup>	6	LPA	Exons	-1.35E-01	2.78E-02	1.31E-06

<sup>a</sup>The effect of rs3798220 is adjusted for the effect of rs10455872; the effect of rs10455872 is adjusted for the effect of rs3798220.

<sup>b</sup>The effect of rs3798220 is adjusted for KIV-2 and rs10455872; the effect of rs10455872 is adjusted for rs3798220 and KIV-2; the effect of KIV-2 is adjusted for the effect of rs3798220 and rs10455872.

respectively) (Table 3). Neither of these SNPs was significantly associated with LDL-C, HDL-C or triglycerides (Table 3).

#### Determination of kringle IV-2 number in the LPA gene

KIV-2 copy number variation in LPA is strongly associated with plasma Lp(a) levels and risk of CVD (26,27). Therefore, we measured KIV-2 copy number using quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction (qPCR) (28). Real-time PCR signals of the two probe sets used for qPCR targeting exons four and five, respectively, were strongly correlated ( $r^2 = 0.76$ ,  $P = 2.98 \times 10^{-259}$ , Supplementary Material, Fig. S3). Numbers of KIV-2 were inversely correlated with plasma Lp(a)-cholesterol levels ( $r^2 = 0.06$ ,  $P = 9.44 \times 10^{-17}$ , Supplementary Material, Fig. S4). The KIV-2 copy numbers were significantly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels ( $P = 2.28 \times 10^{-9}$ ), although not with LDL-C, HDL-C or triglycerides (Table 2). The rare alleles of both the rs10455872 and rs3798220 SNPs were each correlated with lower KIV-2 copy numbers (Supplementary Material, Fig. S5).

#### Conditional analysis

We performed linkage disequilibrium (LD) analysis for chromosome 6q25-26 SNPs associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol using Haploview. The significantly associated SNPs fell into different blocks suggesting that multiple variants/genes in this region may regulate Lp(a)-cholesterol levels (Supplementary Material, Fig. S6). To further assess the number of independent associations on chromosome 6q25-26, we performed conditional association analysis using the most significantly associated SNPs as covariates. We first estimated independence between rs3798220 and rs10455872 in the LPA gene. We performed association analysis of one SNP with Lp(a)-cholesterol including the other SNP as a covariate. In this analysis, the effect sizes (i.e. betas) and statistical evidence for association (i.e. P-values) for each SNP were only minimally changed, suggesting that these two SNPs influenced variation in Lp(a)-cholesterol levels independently from each other (Table 4). Next, we assessed independence of KIV-2

numbers and these two SNPs (rs3798220, rs10455872). We tested the association of one variant with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels while adjusting for the other two variants simultaneously. These results indicated that both SNPs remained significantly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels independently of KIV-2 numbers. KIV-2 numbers also remained significantly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels independently of both SNPs, although the magnitude of the association was reduced due to partial correlation of KIV-2 numbers with the two SNPs (Table 4). We also reciprocally examined the association of SNPs on chromosome 6q25-q26 by adjusting for KIV-2 numbers. These SNPs remained highly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels with only a modest reduction in strength of association (the best P value from  $3.91 \times 10^{-19}$  to  $1.49 \times 10^{-17}$ ) (Fig. 3B). Finally, we performed conditional analysis of SNPs on chromosome 6q25-26 adjusted for all three LPA variants (KIV-2 CNV, rs3798220 and rs10455872). The magnitude of the association of SNPs on 6q25-q26 with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels was largely reduced (the best  $P = 3.01 \times 10^{-6}$ ) (Fig. 3C). These three variants in LPA gene explained 12.0% of the variation in Lp(a)-cholesterol levels in the Old Order Amish.

#### Regulation of LPA gene expression

To gain more insights into the associations between LPA SNPs rs3798220 (I1891M) or rs10455872 (A>G in intron 25) and Lp(a)-cholesterol levels, we tested whether these were also associated with LPA gene expression. Since apo(a) is synthesized predominantly in the liver, we obtained liver samples from 78 white subjects undergoing bariatric weight loss procedures for extreme obesity or related comorbid medical conditions (29,30). We selected samples according to patient's genotype at rs3798220 ( $N = 20$  subjects each with the CT and TT genotypes) and rs10455872 ( $N = 3$ , 20 and 20 subjects with the GG, AG and AA genotypes, respectively), matching patients across genotypes by age and gender. We measured LPA gene expression by quantitative PCR (qPCR) and found that LPA mRNA levels were significantly higher in carriers (GG and AG genotypes) than non-carriers

(AA genotype) of rs10455872 ( $P = 0.0001$ , Fig. 4A). In contrast, there was no difference in *LPA* mRNA levels when rs3798220 carriers and non-carriers were compared ( $P > 0.05$ , Fig. 4B). We measure protein levels of Apo(a) in these liver samples (rs3798220,  $N = 18$  subjects each for the CT and TT genotypes; rs10455872,  $N = 12$  subjects each for the AG and AA genotypes). Apo(a) protein levels are higher in carriers than non-carriers of either rs10455872 and rs3798220 ( $P = 0.004$ , Fig. 5A and  $P = 0.048$ , Fig. 5B respectively). These findings suggest that rs10455872 within *LPA* may play a key role in influencing *LPA* transcription levels or mRNA stability, while rs3798220 may influence Lp(a) levels through other mechanisms including effects on translation or post-translation.

## Discussion

Recent evidence has convincingly shown a causal role for Lp(a) in atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (2–4). Lp(a) levels in human plasma are under primarily genetic rather than environmental control. Here we present a systematic search for genetic variants with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels and find two significant association signals located on chromosome 6q25-q26 and chromosome 11q23. We further identify two SNPs (rs3798220, rs10455872) and KIV-2 in the *LPA* gene that are strongly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels. Conditional analyses indicate that these variants act largely independently of one another to influence Lp(a)-cholesterol levels, although the mechanisms by

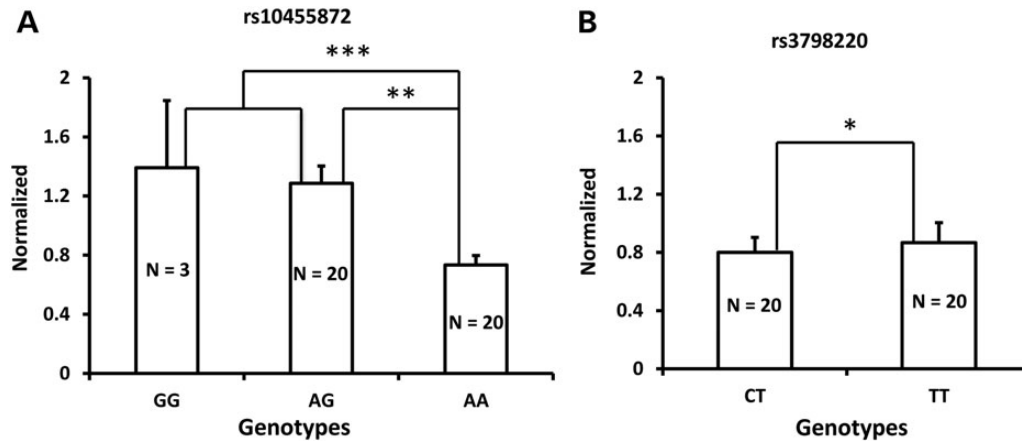


Figure 4. mRNA levels for *LPA* were assessed by qPCR in liver samples with different genotypes. (A) *LPA* expression was increased in the A>G variant of rs10455872; (B) The T>C variant of rs3798220 did not affect *LPA* mRNA expression. \* $P = 0.70054$ ; \*\* $P = 0.000182$ ; \*\*\* $P = 0.000111$ .

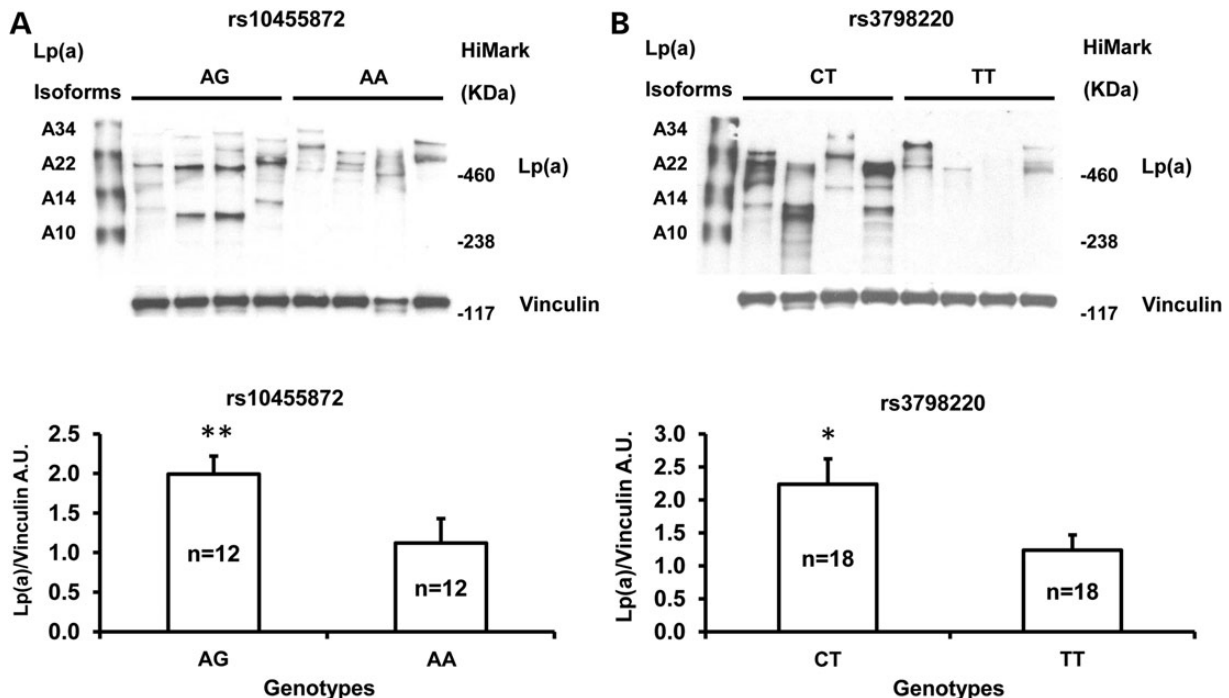


Figure 5. Western blot analysis of Lp(a) expression in liver samples with different genotypes. Representative western blots were shown for Lp(a) expression in rs10455872 (A;  $N = 12$  for AG; AA genotypes) and in rs3798220 (B;  $N = 18$  for CT; TT genotypes). Densitometric analysis of Lp(a) versus vinculin was performed for each genotype. A mixture of recombinant human Lp(a) isoforms (A10, A14, A22 and A34; provided by Dr Eduardo Angles-Cano) and HiMark™ Pre-stained Protein Standard (Life Technologies, Grand Island, NY) were applied in western blot. Data are presented as means  $\pm$  SEM. A.U., arbitrary units. \* $P = 0.048$ ; \*\* $P = 0.004$ .

which they do so are different, e.g. intronic variant rs10455872 is associated with reduced *LPA* mRNA levels while exonic SNP rs3798220 acts through other mechanisms.

We conducted a GWAS in the OOA, a culturally and genetically homogenous population originating from a small founder population. We identified a SNP on chromosome 11q23 that was significantly associated with increased Lp(a)-cholesterol and also with decreased TG, increased HDL-C and decreased LDL-C levels in the OOA. This association is mostly likely attributable to the *APOC3* R19X variant, which exists at high frequency in the Amish due to a founder effect and is linked in the Amish to (but not in LD in the outbred population with) rs12787909. The *APOC3* R19X is a null allele that reduces apoC-III production in heterozygotes by 50% and is associated with reduced triglycerides and increased HDL-C, LDL-C and cardioprotection as measured by less coronary calcification (31) and a lower rate of myocardial infarction (32,33). While it may seem counterintuitive at first glance that an otherwise cardioprotective variant would be associated with increased Lp(a) levels, a strong inverse correlation between Lp(a) levels and TG levels has been observed by us ( $r = -0.38$ ,  $P = 6 \times 10^{-27}$ ) and others ( $r = -0.22$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ) (34). Since the *APOC3* variant is associated with TG and Lp(a) levels but the *LPA* variants are associated with Lp(a) but not TG levels, this finding provides strong evidence that the Lp(a)/TG correlation is driven by a causal effect of TG on Lp(a). That Lp(a) can be both a risk factor for CVD at very high levels and correlated with cardioprotective factors speaks to the limited understanding of the underlying biology of Lp(a) that our research is designed to address.

We confirmed a strong association of Lp(a)-cholesterol levels with the *LPA* locus on chromosome 6q25-26. Previous genome-wide linkage analyses have identified linkage of this region with Lp(a) levels with robust LOD scores ranging from 9 to 108 (21,22). The significant variants span ~5.3 Mb region on chromosome 6q25-26 region that are within or flanking 26 genes including *LPA*. The *LPA* gene is an obvious and important candidate gene for influencing Lp(a) levels (26). Although the initial GWAS identified variants within *LPA* that were modestly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels, sequence analysis identified two rare SNPs (rs3798220, rs10455872) in *LPA* that were strongly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels. These SNPs (rs3798220, rs10455872) have been associated with Lp(a) levels and with cardiovascular diseases in previous studies used the HumanCVD BeadChip or direct genotyping (3,35,36). These rare SNPs were not tagged well by SNPs on the GWAS panel nor were they tagged by imputed SNPs. Systematically capturing the underlying causal variants within GWAS signals is an important approach for moving beyond GWAS.

The copy number variation of kringle IV-2 in *LPA* is highly polymorphic and a predictor of Lp(a) levels (26). We measured KIV-2 copy numbers using qPCR and found that the KIV-2 numbers were significantly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels. As reported by others (37), smaller copy numbers of KIV-2 were associated with higher plasma Lp(a)-cholesterol levels. The number of KIV-2 repeats is variable ranging from 2 to >50 in each allele. Most individuals have two alleles that contain different numbers of KIV-2 repeats (38). The qPCR assay we employed measures the average number from both alleles. Our KIV-2 number represents the sum of KIV-2 number from both alleles that may be potentially limiting. This is because studies have demonstrated variable expressions of different KIV-2 numbers (39). Despite this limitation, we detected strong association between the sum of KIV-2 repeats from both alleles and Lp(a)-cholesterol levels consistent with earlier observations (3).

Our studies confirmed that multiple genetic variants on chromosome 6q25-26 are associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels. We found SNP rs3798220 was not in linkage disequilibrium with SNP rs10455872 ( $r^2 = 0$ ). Conditional analysis also revealed that these two SNPs influenced variation in Lp(a)-cholesterol levels independently from each other. We measured KIV-2 copy numbers with qPCR. A weakness of this approach is that we cannot assess LD between genotyped SNPs with KIV-2 copy numbers. We found that the carriers of both rs10455872 and rs3798220 had a lower KIV-2 copy numbers than non-carriers. A previous study has shown similar results in that rare alleles of both rs10455872 and rs3798220 are each correlated with a smaller apolipoprotein(a) isoform (as assessed by immunoblotting) and a lower copy number (as assessed by quantitative PCR assay) (3). However, conditional analysis revealed that the most significant SNPs on chromosome 6q25-26 remained strongly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels after adjusting for KIV-2 numbers, suggesting these SNPs were significantly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels independently of KIV-2 copy numbers. Previous studies indicated that KIV-2 copy numbers are not in strong LD with any biallelic markers in *LPA* (23,40). Therefore, two variants (rs3798220, rs10455872) were independently associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels. Our conditional analysis revealed that KIV-2 copy numbers were significantly associated with levels independently of both SNPs, although the magnitude of the association was reduced. We also found some SNPs were significantly associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels adjusted for KIV-2 numbers, rs3798220 and rs10455872. Additional rare variants in the *LPA* non-coding region or other gene region remain to be identified.

We further investigated the effect of rs3798220 and rs10455872 on *LPA* gene expression. To our knowledge, the higher transcription level of *LPA* in carriers of rs10455872 has not been previously reported. We also found that a few carriers of rs10455872 have lower *LPA* gene expression and a few non-carriers have higher *LPA* gene expression (Supplementary Material, Fig. S7). The SNP rs10455872 may thus be a surrogate for, or 'tags,' the underlying causal variant within a linkage block to influence gene expression. Deep sequencing will be necessary to discover functional variants in this region. There are no differences in *LPA* transcription levels between carriers and non-carriers of rs3798220. However, the protein levels of Apo(a) in liver samples are higher in carrier than non-carrier of either rs10455872 or rs3798220. The substitution from isoleucine to methionine in rs3798220 may affect apo(a) and Lp(a) catabolism to increase Lp(a) levels (41). We used SIFT (42) and PolyPhen-2\_HDIV (43) to predict whether this substitution may alter the function of apo(a). The substitution of isoleucine with methionine is predicted to be a functionally deleterious substitution (SIFT: 0.01 and PolyPhen-2\_HDIV: 0.998).

In summary, we performed a systematic analysis of genetic variants with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels and identified multiple genetic determinants. We confirmed at least three sequence variants on chromosome 6q25-26 that were associated with Lp(a)-cholesterol levels and appear to act largely independent from one another. We also found the *APOC3* R19X null mutation on chromosome 11q23 to be associated with increased Lp(a)-cholesterol levels. Our results suggest rs10455872 within *LPA* may influence mRNA levels of *LPA* (transcription or stability), while rs3798220 may influence Lp(a) levels through effects on translation or protein stability. Future work will be required to precisely elucidate the complex genetic architecture and regulation of Lp(a) and the contribution of genetic variation to risk factors for cardiovascular diseases.

## Materials and Methods

### Subjects

The OOA subjects of Lancaster Pennsylvania are relatively homogeneous in terms of both genetic ancestry and lifestyle characteristics (44). Subjects ( $n = 1376$ ) included in this study were relatively healthy adults aged 20 years or older, who participated in the Heredity and Phenotype Intervention (HAPI) Heart Study (45) and the Amish Family Longevity Study (AFLS) (46). Details of the study design, recruitment, and phenotyping have been described previously (45,46). For Lp(a)-cholesterol specifically, quantitative measurements were made with Vertical Auto Profile-II (VAP-II) method (Atherotech, Birmingham, AL, USA) (47). The VAP method measures cholesterol concentration of Lp(a) particles instead of apo(a) or Lp(a) particle concentration that will be a advantage of VAP. Measuring cholesterol concentration enables VAP testing of Lp(a) without influence of apo(a) size, which is a major problem influencing the accuracy of almost all immunoassay-based methods (47,48). The VAP method provides the continuous enzymatic analysis of cholesterol using a continuous flow VAP analyzer in lipoprotein classes separated by single vertical spin density-gradient ultracentrifugations that may be the potential for misclassification between different categories of LDL-particles. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and the study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

### Genotyping and sequence

GWAS samples were genotyped using the Affymetrix GeneChip® Human Mapping 500 K array set including a total of 500 568 SNPs (Santa Clara, California). The GeneChip Genotyping Analysis Software (GTYPE 4.0) was used for automated genotype calling as part of the GeneChip Operating Software (GCOS) platform. The GTYPE-generated chip files were re-analyzed using the BRLMM genotype calling algorithm which provided improved call accuracy compared with the DM algorithm (<http://www.affymetrix.com/support/technical>). A confidence threshold, a measure of the call quality, of 0.33 was used for this analysis. As an initial quality control (QC) measure, BRLMM-generated chip files with call rates <90% for both enzymes were excluded from further analysis. Following quality control, Mendel and HWE checks, 382 935 informative SNPs were included in our analyses. We then used the 382 935 genotyped SNPs to impute all autosomal SNPs on HapMap (~2.5 million SNPs) by MACH (version 1.0.15), using the publicly available phased haplotypes from HapMap (release 22, build 36, CEU population) as a reference panel (49). Follow-up genotyping was performed using TaqMan Allelic Discrimination Assay (Applied Biosystems).

Direct sequencing (50) was used to screen the 40 exons, exon-intron boundaries, and 2 kb of the promoter region of *LPA* for genetic variation in 24 Amish participants. We selected subjects according to their genotype at rs3805766 (top SNP from GWAS) or their Lp(a)-cholesterol levels. Both strands were sequenced on an ABI 3730xl DNA sequencer (Applied Biosystems) and analyzed using Sequencher software (GeneCodes).

### KIV-2 copy number genotyping

*LPA* KIV-2 copy number was determined by quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction (qPCR) as previously described (37). Briefly, a multiplexed qPCR was carried out using TaqMan probes for *LPA* KIV-2 and an endogenous single-copy control gene in the Applied Biosystems 7900HT Fast Real-Time PCR

system. Experiments were performed using probes targeted to exons 4 and 5 of *LPA*, each of which is found once within every KIV-2 repeat at the genomic level (37). TaqMan® TERT control reagent was used as single-copy reference gene (part number 44 01 633). Reaction volumes contained: 5  $\mu$ l of Applied Biosystems Taqman Genotyping Master Mix (part number 43 71 357), 0.5  $\mu$ l of 20 $\times$  TaqMan®: primer/probe mix for *LPA*, 0.5  $\mu$ l of 20 $\times$  TaqMan®: primer/probe mix for TERT, 2  $\mu$ l of water and 2  $\mu$ l of genomic DNA at a concentration of 3–5 ng/ $\mu$ l. The average of  $\Delta$ CT4 and  $\Delta$ CT5 was then used for further analysis as the relative kringle repeat number.

### LPA gene expression analyses

#### Liver samples

Seventy-eight wedge biopsy liver samples based on the carrier and non-carrier status for rs3798220 ( $N = 20$ : 20 for CT: TT genotypes) and rs10455872 ( $N = 3$ : 20: 20 for GG: AG: AA genotypes) matched by age, sex and BMI were obtained from white patients undergoing open or laparoscopic Roux-en-Y gastric bypass operations or laparoscopic adjustable gastric banding procedures for extreme obesity or its comorbid medical problems at Geisinger Medical Center, Danville, Pennsylvania (29,30).

#### RT-qPCR

Liver total RNA was extracted by TRIzol® reagent (Invitrogen) according to the manufacturer's instruction. The resulting RNAs were subjected to DNase digestion using RNase-free DNase Set (Qiagen) and purification using RNeasy® MinElute® Cleanup Kit (Qiagen). The RNA quantity and quality were determined using a nanodrop spectrophotometer. cDNA was produced using Transcriptor First Strand cDNA Synthesis Kit (Roche). Real-time PCR was performed using TaqMan gene expression assay primers and probes [assay ID: Hs00916691-m1 for human *LPA*, Hs99999903\_m1 for human Beta Actin (*ACTB*) as the endogenous control] and LightCycler 480 Probes Master (Roche) on LightCycler 480 Real-Time PCR system (Roche) using standard conditions and cycle times/temperatures. Relative expression of mRNAs was determined after normalization with reference gene levels using LightCycler 480 software 1.5. We normalized expression of mRNAs to a sample that had been tested in both SNPs.

#### Immunoblotting

Liver samples were homogenized in radioimmunoprecipitation buffer (Teknova, Hollister, CA) containing 150 mM sodium chloride, 1% Triton X-100, 1% deoxycholic acid-sodium salt, 0.1% sodium dodecyl sulfate, 50 mM Tris-HCl (pH 7.5), 2 mM EDTA, 50 mM NaF, 100  $\mu$ M Na<sub>3</sub>VO<sub>4</sub>, and a pill of complete inhibitor (Roche Diagnostics, Indianapolis, Indiana). Liver tissue lysates were centrifuged at 16 000g for 30 min at 4°C and the supernatant was saved for subsequent immunoblotting. Protein concentrations were measured with the Pierce BCA kit (Thermo Scientific, Rockford, IL). Of note, 66  $\mu$ g of liver protein was subjected to electrophoresis on NuPage 3–8% Tris-Acetate Gel (Life Technologies, Grand Island, NY), samples were transferred to nitrocellulose membrane, and then immunoblotted with Lp(a) sheep polyclonal antibody (provided by Dr Eduardo Angles-Cano, Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale, France) at a dilution of 1:20 000 for 2 h at room temperature (51). Then the blots were incubated with a donkey anti-sheep IgG secondary antibody conjugated with peroxidase (Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Dallas, Texas) at a dilution of 1:20 000 for 1 h at room temperature. The blots were subsequently incubated with monoclonal



anti-vinculin mouse antibody (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO) used as an internal control. The immunoblot signals were visualized with the Pierce ECL Western Blotting Substrate (Thermo Scientific, Rockford, IL). Image quantitative analysis was performed using ImageJ Software (52).

### Statistical analysis

The natural log of plasma Lp(a)-cholesterol was used for association analyses. Association analyses were performed using a variance component model that includes a polygenic component to account for phenotypic correlation due to relatedness. The polygenic component was modeled using the relationship matrix derived from the complete 14-generation Amish pedigree structure (53,54). A one-degree of freedom likelihood ratio test was used to assess significance of the measured genotype under an additive model. We included age, age<sup>2</sup> and sex as covariates in the association models. Pairwise linkage-disequilibrium (LD) statistics ( $D'$  and  $r^2$ ) were calculated with Haploview version 4.2 (<http://www.broadinstitute.org/haploview/>).

LPA gene expression data were normalized to the quantity of beta-actin mRNA present in each sample. This allowed us to account for any variability in the initial template concentration as well as the conversion efficiency of the reverse transcription reaction. Student's *t* test was used to compare expression levels between carriers and non-carriers.

### Supplementary Material

Supplementary Material is available at HMG online.

### Acknowledgements

We thank the Amish Research Clinic Staff for their energetic efforts in study subject recruitment and characterization as well as all the volunteers for their participation in these studies. This study would not have been possible without the outstanding cooperation of the Amish community. We thank Alexis Gorden for helping to get clinic information from Geisinger Clinic bariatric surgery patients.

Conflict of Interest statement. None declared.

### Funding

This work was supported in part by American Heart Association grant (10SDG2690004 to M.F.); American Diabetes Association grant (7-12-CT-26 to M.F.); National Institutes of Health (U01 HL072515), (U01 HL84756), (R01 AG18728), (R01 DK088231) the Mid-Atlantic Nutrition Obesity Research Center (grant P30 DK72488); the VA BLR&D Career Development award (Y.-C.C.).

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