

Mutations in the Zinc-Binding Motif of the Reovirus Capsid Protein $\sigma 3$ Eliminate Its Ability To Associate with Capsid Protein $\mu 1$

DEBORAH A. SHEPARD, JEFFREY G. EHNSTROM, PAMELA J. SKINNER, AND LESLIE A. SCHIFF*

Department of Microbiology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Reovirus capsid protein $\sigma 3$ binds both double-stranded RNA (dsRNA) and zinc. Previous studies have revealed that the amino-terminal zinc finger is not required for the ability of $\sigma 3$ to bind dsRNA. We expressed wild-type and mutant $\sigma 3$ molecules by *in vitro* transcription/translation to evaluate the importance of the zinc finger for other functions of $\sigma 3$. $\sigma 3$ molecules with mutations in the zinc finger did not form complexes with capsid protein $\mu 1$ but bound dsRNA more efficiently than wild-type $\sigma 3$ did. In contrast, a dsRNA-binding mutant was unimpaired in its ability to associate with $\mu 1$. Studies with $\sigma 3$ fragments support these findings and indicate that sequences critical for $\sigma 3$'s interaction with $\mu 1$ lie in the amino terminus of the molecule. Our finding that $\mu 1$ and dsRNA do not compete for identical binding sites on $\sigma 3$ has implications for its function as a translational regulator in infected cells.

The major capsid protein $\sigma 3$ is the 41-kDa product of the reovirus S4 gene (17, 20). The predicted $\sigma 3$ amino acid sequence contains an amino-terminal zinc finger motif, and atomic absorption analysis indicates that each molecule of virion-associated $\sigma 3$ contains a single zinc atom (22). A second biochemical activity associated with the $\sigma 3$ protein is the ability to bind double-stranded RNA (dsRNA) (9). A number of protein-blotting studies have shown that sequences in the carboxy-terminal half of $\sigma 3$ can bind dsRNA (18, 22) and that the carboxy terminus contains a basic motif similar to the known dsRNA-binding site of the interferon-induced, dsRNA-dependent protein kinase, PKR (18). Mutagenesis of some residues within this motif abrogates $\sigma 3$'s dsRNA-binding activity (4).

Experimental evidence suggests that, in addition to its structural role in the outer capsid, $\sigma 3$ is involved in the regulation of translation within infected cells (23). Further, expression of S4 cDNA in transfected cells stimulates the translation of nonviral mRNAs (8). These activities have been proposed to be related to the ability of $\sigma 3$ to bind dsRNA and inhibit the activation of PKR (10). The biological function of the amino-terminal zinc finger in $\sigma 3$ is less clear. Studies with proteolytic fragments and truncation mutants suggest that the zinc finger is not required for dsRNA binding (18, 22). Transfection studies with point mutants suggest that one function of the zinc finger is to influence the intracellular stability of $\sigma 3$ (15).

In the viral outer capsid and the infected cell, $\sigma 3$ exists in close association with the myristoylated polypeptide, $\mu 1$ (14, 28). Within transfected cells, this protein interaction has been shown to be required for the assembly-related, amino-terminal endoproteolytic cleavage of $\mu 1$ (14, 29, 32). Studies with temperature-sensitive mutants support the hypothesis that the $\sigma 3$ - $\mu 1$ association is a required step in the assembly of outer capsids onto progeny core-like particles (6, 19). Tillotson and Shatkin have suggested that formation of $\sigma 3$ - $\mu 1$ complexes may also interfere with the dsRNA-binding function of $\sigma 3$ because the ability of $\sigma 3$ to influence translation in transfected cells is eliminated when $\sigma 3$ and $\mu 1$ are coexpressed (29).

We are interested in defining the molecular determinants involved in the interaction of $\sigma 3$ with its functionally important ligands and in understanding the significance of those interactions for the viral life cycle. In this study, we used an *in vitro* system of protein expression to identify $\sigma 3$ sequences important for its interaction with $\mu 1$ and to investigate the contribution of the amino-terminal zinc-binding motif to the ligand-binding activities of $\sigma 3$.

Studies in which mutant S4 genes were analyzed in cotransfected COS cells suggest that specific amino-terminal residues in $\sigma 3$ may be important for interactions with $\mu 1$, but the interpretation of these studies is complicated by the fact that coexpression of $\mu 1$ with $\sigma 3$ affects the accumulation and the stability of the $\mu 1/\mu 1C$ protein (16). We first used a biochemical approach to identify the region(s) of $\sigma 3$ which determines its ability to bind $\mu 1$. Cleavage of $\sigma 3$ with staphylococcal V8 protease between residues 217 and 218 yields an amino-terminal 24-kDa fragment and a carboxy-terminal 16-kDa fragment (22) (Fig. 1A). When a nitrocellulose filter containing these $\sigma 3$ fragments was probed with ^{35}S -labeled, translated $\mu 1$, we found that $\mu 1$ recognized intact $\sigma 3$ and the amino-terminal fragment of $\sigma 3$ but not the carboxy-terminal fragment (Fig. 1B). Thus, the amino-terminal portion of $\sigma 3$ appears to be required for $\sigma 3$ - $\mu 1$ interaction. Interestingly, we found that $\mu 1$ recognized one or more of the λ proteins and the core protein $\sigma 2$. This finding is consistent with a current model of reovirus structure in which $\mu 1$ and core protein $\lambda 2$ form the icosahedral shell of the outer capsid and interact with nodules (composed of $\lambda 1$ and $\sigma 2$) that protrude from the core shell (5).

A well-characterized structural determinant within the amino terminus of $\sigma 3$ is the CCHC zinc finger motif (15, 22). To investigate the contribution of this motif to the functions of $\sigma 3$, we used the Altered Sites Mutagenesis System (Promega) to substitute serine residues for the cysteines at positions 51 (C51S) and/or 54 in the reovirus type 3 Dearing (T3D) $\sigma 3$ sequence. DNA fragments containing the mutations were subcloned into the *in vitro* transcription/translation vector pCITE2b-S4 (25). The plasmids pCITE2b-S4, pCITE2b-S4[C51S], pCITE2b-S4[C54S], and pCITE2b-S4[C51,54S] encoded wild-type (WT) $\sigma 3$, $\sigma 3$ [C51S], $\sigma 3$ [C54S], and $\sigma 3$ [C51,54S], respectively, downstream of the encephalomyocarditis virus internal ribosome entry site in pCITE2b (Novagen, Madison, Wis.). A point mutation (K293T), which ab-

* Corresponding author. Mailing address: Department of Microbiology, University of Minnesota, 420 Delaware St. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455. Phone: (612) 624-9933. Fax: (612) 626-0623. Electronic mail address: schiff@lenti.med.umn.edu.

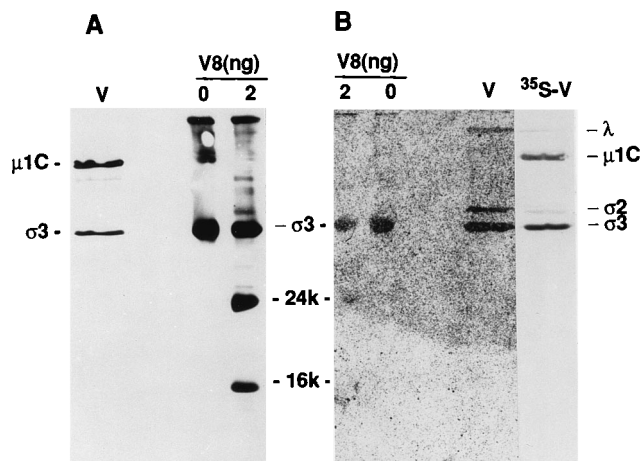


FIG. 1. Protein blot of σ_3 proteolytic fragments. Gel-purified T3D σ_3 from 2×10^{11} virions was digested in the absence or presence of 2 ng of V8 protease and transferred to nitrocellulose as described previously (22). (A) Rabbit antiserum prepared against virions was used to detect the reovirus peptides. Antibody bound to the nitrocellulose was detected by horseradish peroxidase-conjugated anti-immunoglobulin G and enhanced chemiluminescence detection reagents (Amersham International, Arlington Heights, Ill.). The positions of intact reovirus proteins (lane V) are indicated. (B) A 50- μ l μ_1 translation reaction mixture was diluted into 20 ml of Tris-buffered saline (pH 7.6)–0.05% Tween (TBST) and used to probe reovirus peptides for 1 h at room temperature. The blot was washed with TBST, coated with En^3 Hance spray (NEN, Boston, Mass.), and exposed to film. The unlabeled virus in the lane labeled V was probed with μ_1 . The [^{35}S]methionine-labeled virus in the lane labeled $^{35}\text{S-V}$ was transferred to nitrocellulose, and the positions of the viral proteins are indicated.

rogates σ_3 's dsRNA-binding activity (4), was introduced into pCITE2b-S4 by PCR-mediated mutagenesis to generate pCITE2b-S4[K293T]. We also introduced a cDNA copy of the T3D M2 gene, encoding μ_1 (17, 20), into pCITE2b. In vitro transcription was carried out according to the Ribomax method (Promega), and the resultant mRNAs were translated in vitro by using the Flexi Rabbit Reticulocyte Lysate System (Promega). In vitro transcription/translation with the pCITE2b-M2 and pCITE2b-S4 plasmids yielded appropriately sized protein products that reacted with μ_1 - and σ_3 -specific monoclonal antibodies, respectively (data not shown).

To determine whether σ_3 's amino-terminal zinc finger is an important structural determinant for the interaction of σ_3 and μ_1 , we used a coimmunoprecipitation assay. WT or mutant S4 mRNAs were cotranslated with M2 mRNA, and the resultant proteins were subjected to immunoprecipitation (30) in a buffer designed to maintain protein complexes (11). The results of our analysis are shown in Fig. 2A. Complexes between WT σ_3 and μ_1 were evident when the cotranslated proteins were immunoprecipitated with monoclonal antibody 4F2 (directed against σ_3) or 10H2 (directed against μ_1). In contrast, immunoprecipitation of cotranslated μ_1 and σ_3 [C51S], σ_3 [C54S], or σ_3 [C51,54S] with either 4F2 or 10H2 demonstrated that the zinc mutants did not form complexes with μ_1 to a significant degree. In addition to analyzing σ_3 zinc mutants, we evaluated the μ_1 -binding activity of σ_3 [K293T], a σ_3 mutant defective in dsRNA binding (4). Evidence in the literature suggests that σ_3 can bind either dsRNA or μ_1 , but not both, suggesting that their binding sites might overlap (29). Interestingly, we found that σ_3 [K293T] efficiently formed complexes with μ_1 , indicating that this amino acid substitution in the dsRNA-binding region does not affect the ability of σ_3 to form a stable complex with μ_1 (Fig. 2A).

To determine whether the failure of the σ_3 zinc mutants to

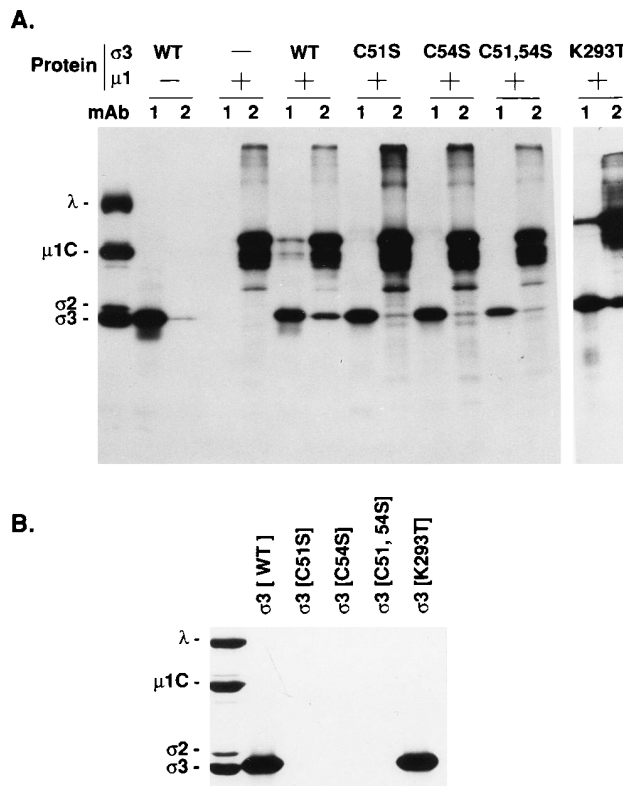


FIG. 2. Ability of σ_3 mutants to form complexes with μ_1 . (A) Cotranslation reaction mixtures containing μ_1 and WT σ_3 or mutant σ_3 (200,000 trichloroacetic acid-precipitable ^{35}S cpm) or control proteins that were translated individually (100,000 trichloroacetic acid-precipitable ^{35}S cpm) were immunoprecipitated with the σ_3 -specific monoclonal antibody 4F2 (lanes 1) or the μ_1 -specific monoclonal antibody 10H2 (lanes 2) in a buffer consisting of 0.1 M NaCl, 1 mM EDTA, 10 mM Tris [pH 7.5], and 0.05% Nonidet P-40. Samples were analyzed by sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE) and fluorography. The leftmost lane contains ^{35}S -labeled virions to identify the positions of the viral proteins. (B) ^{35}S -labeled WT and mutant σ_3 were prepared by in vitro transcription/translation and incubated with 5×10^{10} purified reovirus type 1 Lang ISVPs for 1 h at room temperature in virion storage buffer. Samples were purified by CsCl gradient centrifugation and concentrated. Untreated ^{35}S -labeled virions (far left) and unlabeled ISVPs recoated with ^{35}S -labeled, in vitro-translated WT σ_3 or mutant σ_3 were analyzed by SDS-PAGE and fluorography. The positions of viral proteins are indicated on the left.

form complexes with μ_1 was simply a consequence of the coimmunoprecipitation assay conditions, we used a subviral particle-binding assay to analyze their ability to complex with particle-bound μ_1 fragments. This assay is based on the observation that σ_3 from infected cell extracts can bind to intermediate subviral particles (ISVPs) (1). ISVPs are stable particles that can be generated by treatment of purified virions with trypsin or chymotrypsin (3, 12, 24). ISVPs differ from virions in that they have a cleaved form of μ_1 and an extended form of the cell-attachment protein σ_1 and are completely lacking σ_3 (7, 12, 24). To assess the ability of mutant σ_3 molecules to interact with ISVPs, purified ISVPs were recoated with translated WT or mutant σ_3 as described previously (25). Proteins of the ISVP were visualized by staining the gel with Coomassie brilliant blue (data not shown), and the labeled protein bound to the ISVP was visualized by fluorography (Fig. 2B). WT σ_3 and σ_3 [K293T] stably associated with ISVPs. In contrast, none of the σ_3 zinc mutant proteins bound to these particles. Together these experiments demonstrated that the σ_3 zinc mutants are defective in their ability to associate with outer capsid protein μ_1 .

The results of our studies with σ_3 fragments and site-di-

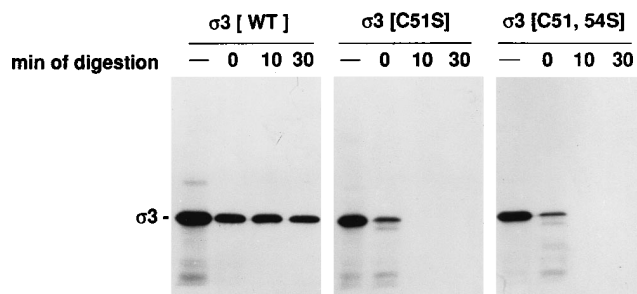


FIG. 3. Stability of $\sigma 3$ mutants in vitro. The indicated samples of in vitro-translated $\sigma 3$ (98,000 trichloroacetic acid-precipitable ^{35}S cpm each of WT $\sigma 3$, $\sigma 3[\text{C}51\text{S}]$, and $\sigma 3[\text{C}51,54\text{S}]$) were digested with 20 μg of proteinase K per ml for 30 min at 30°C in virion storage buffer. Digestion was stopped by the addition of 1 mM phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride. Samples were analyzed by SDS-PAGE and fluorography. The lane labeled - contains an untreated control removed from the sample prior to the addition of protease. Samples were removed at 0, 10, and 30 min, as indicated above the lanes.

rected point mutants strongly suggest that the ability to coordinate a zinc atom contributes to $\mu 1$ -ligand-binding activity associated with the amino terminus of $\sigma 3$. The $\mu 1$ -binding determinant could specifically involve sequences within the zinc finger, or, more likely, our findings could reflect a significant contribution of the zinc finger to the conformation of native $\sigma 3$. To test the hypothesis that the zinc mutants have an altered conformation relative to WT $\sigma 3$, we used a protease digestion assay that has been described previously (25) to analyze the protease sensitivity of translated WT and mutant $\sigma 3$. The results of this experiment (Fig. 3) illustrate that the $\sigma 3$ zinc mutants were significantly more protease sensitive than WT $\sigma 3$. WT $\sigma 3$ was relatively stable throughout the 30-min digestion period shown in this figure; between 45 and 60% of the input WT $\sigma 3$, measured by densitometry, was still detectable after 2 h under these digestion conditions (data not shown). In contrast, $\sigma 3[\text{C}51\text{S}]$ and $\sigma 3[\text{C}51,54\text{S}]$ were extremely protease sensitive, as evidenced by both the significant decrease in recovery of full-length protein immediately following proteinase K addition (time zero) and by the complete loss of labeled protein after incubation for 10 min. WT and mutant $\sigma 3$ proteins were stable in the absence of protease for the 30-min incubation period (data not shown). Similar results were obtained for the mutant $\sigma 3[\text{C}54\text{S}]$ (data not shown).

Our results suggested that the conformation of $\sigma 3$ molecules with amino acid substitutions in the zinc finger was altered so as to render them protease sensitive. Such a conformational alteration may contribute to the inability of the zinc mutants to bind $\mu 1$. The conclusion that the zinc mutants are altered in conformation was supported by the observation that six conformation-dependent, $\sigma 3$ -specific monoclonal antibodies, which recognize WT $\sigma 3$ in immunoprecipitation assays but not in immunoblotting assays (30), failed to immunoprecipitate the $\sigma 3$ zinc mutants (data not shown). The epitopes recognized by these antibodies have not been mapped, but these results suggest that they may include amino-terminal sequences. Monoclonal antibody 4F2 recognizes an epitope in the amino-terminal half of the $\sigma 3$ molecule (13). In contrast to the finding with conformation-dependent monoclonal antibodies, our analysis indicated that 4F2 immunoprecipitates WT and mutant $\sigma 3$ molecules with equal efficiency (data not shown). Monoclonal antibody 4F2 reacts with denatured $\sigma 3$ on Western blots (immunoblots) (30), suggesting that it recognizes a linear epitope that is maintained in the $\sigma 3$ zinc mutants.

Our finding that $\sigma 3[\text{K}293\text{T}]$, which is defective in dsRNA binding (4), binds $\mu 1$ as well as WT $\sigma 3$ does strongly suggests that the sites on $\sigma 3$ that mediate interaction with $\mu 1$ and

dsRNA are not identical. If the binding sites of $\mu 1$ and dsRNA on $\sigma 3$ are indeed not identical and the molecular determinants responsible for dsRNA binding lie in the carboxy terminus of the protein (4, 18, 22), then the $\sigma 3$ zinc mutants should be unimpaired in their ability to bind dsRNA. To investigate this hypothesis, samples with equal numbers of input counts from translation reaction mixtures of WT or mutant $\sigma 3$, in which all proteins were shown to be synthesized to equivalent levels (Fig. 4A), were incubated with poly(IC)-agarose beads in a batch-binding assay according to the method of Siomi et al. but modified to include 60 μl of poly(IC)-agarose per sample (27). As a negative control, we used translated $\mu 1$. The results (Fig. 4B) demonstrate that the three $\sigma 3$ zinc mutants, $\sigma 3[\text{C}51\text{S}]$, $\sigma 3[\text{C}54\text{S}]$, and $\sigma 3[\text{C}51,54\text{S}]$, have increased affinity for dsRNA relative to WT $\sigma 3$. No binding was detected by the control protein $\mu 1$. Thus, mutations in the amino-terminal zinc finger that eliminated the ability of $\sigma 3$ to bind $\mu 1$ apparently increase its ability to bind dsRNA.

In the absence of other data, these results would be consistent with an hypothesis that the amino terminus of $\sigma 3$ contains latent dsRNA-binding sites which are revealed when the molecule cannot coordinate zinc. This hypothesis is unlikely, however, given previous work indicating that carboxy-terminal cleavage fragments (22) and amino-terminal deletion mutants (18) have an increased capacity to bind dsRNA in blotting assays. Therefore, it is more likely that the conformation assumed by the amino terminus of $\sigma 3$ when it coordinates zinc is one that is critical for the interaction with $\mu 1$ and also attenuates the dsRNA-binding activity associated with the carboxy terminus of $\sigma 3$.

Our results provide evidence for an important functional property associated with the amino-terminal domain of $\sigma 3$. The ability of $\sigma 3$ to associate with $\mu 1$ appears to depend on the native conformation of the amino terminus of $\sigma 3$, which in turn is dependent on sequences in the zinc finger. Like the zinc finger motifs of the polyomavirus large T antigen and the

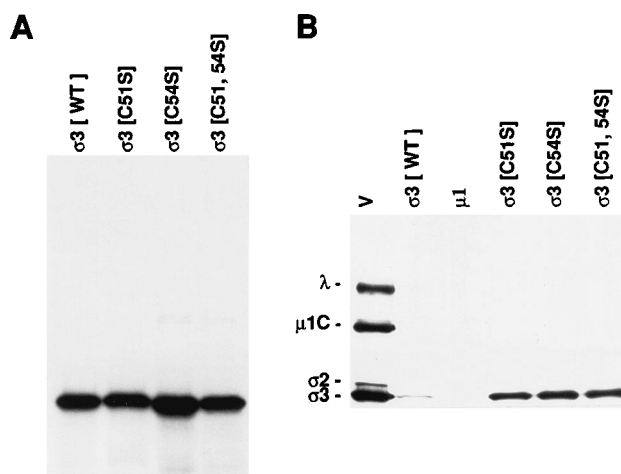


FIG. 4. dsRNA-binding activity of $\sigma 3$ mutants. (A) ^{35}S -labeled proteins were prepared by in vitro transcription/translation from the pCITE2b vector. Approximately 2% of the total volume of each translation reaction mixture of WT $\sigma 3$ and $\sigma 3$ zinc mutants was analyzed by SDS-PAGE and fluorography to confirm that the proteins were translated to equivalent levels. (B) Samples with 100,000 trichloroacetic acid-precipitable input counts were diluted into binding buffer [10 mM Tris HCl (pH 7.4), 2.5 mM MgCl_2 , 0.5% Triton X 100, 0.25 M NaCl], incubated with 60 μl poly(IC)-agarose for 1 h at 4°C, and subjected to five washes in binding buffer. Bound protein was eluted by boiling in Laemmli sample buffer, and half the sample was analyzed by SDS-PAGE and fluorography. Lane V, untreated [^{35}S]methionine-labeled virus.

adenovirus E1A protein, that of $\sigma 3$ may represent a means to facilitate important protein-protein interactions (21, 31). In addition, whereas it may not mediate nucleic acid-binding like the prototypic transcription factor IIIA-like zinc finger motif, which serves to fold that protein into a conformation that can bind nucleic acid (2), our experimental evidence indicates that the zinc finger does influence the dsRNA-binding activity of $\sigma 3$. Although the conformation of the $\sigma 3$ zinc finger mutants is altered so that they no longer bind $\mu 1$, they bind dsRNA more efficiently than does WT $\sigma 3$. This finding suggests that a native $\sigma 3$ conformation is not required for dsRNA binding and is consistent with other data from our laboratory indicating that small carboxy-terminal deletions in $\sigma 3$ do not impair dsRNA binding while they do result in enhanced protease sensitivity (26). Our findings conflict, however, with those of Denzler and Jacobs (4), who find that small amino-terminal or carboxy-terminal deletions in $\sigma 3$ eliminate dsRNA-binding activity. The reason for this inconsistency is not clear but may reflect differences in the assay conditions and/or the source of protein that influence protein conformation.

It has been suggested that the binding sites on $\sigma 3$ for $\mu 1$ and dsRNA overlap such that $\sigma 3$ - $\mu 1$ complexes cannot bind dsRNA (29). This hypothesis arose from the finding that co-expression with $\mu 1$ interferes with the ability of $\sigma 3$ to stimulate reporter gene expression (29) and the observation that $\sigma 3$ - $\mu 1$ protein complexes are never isolated from extracts of infected cells on poly(IC) columns that effectively purify free $\sigma 3$ (9). We have shown that $\sigma 3$ [K293T], the mutant which is defective in dsRNA binding (4), efficiently binds $\mu 1$ and that the $\sigma 3$ zinc mutants bind dsRNA but not $\mu 1$. Furthermore, Tillotson and Shatkin have described a $\mu 1$ mutant that binds $\sigma 3$ but does not inhibit the ability of $\sigma 3$ to stimulate reporter gene expression (29). Taken together, these results strongly suggest that the binding sites on $\sigma 3$ for $\mu 1$ and dsRNA are not identical. Two hypotheses could explain the failure of $\sigma 3$ - $\mu 1$ complexes to bind dsRNA. Binding of $\mu 1$ by $\sigma 3$ could interfere with $\sigma 3$'s dsRNA binding in a steric manner. In fact, cryoelectron microscopy data indicate that the $\sigma 3$ - $\mu 1$ interface is extensive (5). Thus, whereas our work and the work of others (16) suggest that sequences required for binding $\mu 1$ may be localized to the amino terminus of $\sigma 3$, a more extensive region of contact with $\mu 1$ may obscure $\sigma 3$'s dsRNA-binding sequences in the carboxy terminus of the protein. Alternatively, as recent data from our laboratory indicate, the $\sigma 3$ - $\mu 1$ interaction induces a conformational change in $\sigma 3$, which may in turn render $\sigma 3$ unable to bind dsRNA (25). Further experiments to test the ability of $\mu 1$ to block dsRNA binding by $\sigma 3$ are ongoing in our laboratory.

D.A.S. and J.G.E. contributed equally to this work.

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