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**Identification and functional
characterisation of a novel surface protein
complex of *Lactobacillus rhamnosus***

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Microbiology and Genetics
at Massey University, Manawatu Campus, New Zealand

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2016

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people for the encouragement and support they have given me during my PhD study.

First of all, special thanks should be given to my supervisor A/Prof Jasna Rakonjac for her patience, encouragement and support of all aspects. Her expertise and enthusiasm had tremendous impact on the completion of my PhD project and motivated me to solve hard scientific problems. I also would like to thank my cosupervisors, Dr Michael Collett and Dr Dragana Gagic, for their time, technical help, critical comments and professional advice for my PhD study.

Thanks to all my former and current labmates in Helipad (Hot Zone) lab of the Institute of Fundamental Sciences (formerly the Institute of Molecular BioSciences), in particular Sofia Khanum and Julian Spagnuolo, for comments, discussions and technical help. I have really enjoyed the time working with them in our lab in the past 7 years. Furthermore, I really appreciate the help from the institute staff, especially Prof Barry Scott, A/Prof Kathryn Stowell, Ms Ann Truter, Ms Cynthia Cresswell and Mr Paul Hocquard. Their support made my PhD study realistic and relaxing.

I also would like to thank Dr Rachel Anderson of AgResearch for her time, knowledge and advice on the cell culture work in my thesis and Ms Kelly Armstrong and Ms Eva Maier for their training for working with the human cell lines and all essential equipment.

Finally, big thanks given to my wife, Jacqueline, for her support, patience and encouragement. Without her support, I would not have been able to concentrate on my PhD study. A special thanks also goes to my dad and brother who always encouraged me during my study.

Table of Content

Acknowledgments.....	2
Table of Content	3
List of Figures	6
List of Tables	7
Abbreviations.....	7
Abstract.....	10
<i>Chapter Ia: Lactobacilli as probiotics.....</i>	<i>11</i>
1.1 Human health and probiotic bacteria	12
1.1.1 Anatomy and functions of the human intestinal epithelium	12
1.1.2 Human intestinal microbiota.....	12
1.1.3 Implications of the GIT microbiota on human health.....	14
1.1.4 Probiotic microorganisms and their health-promoting effects.....	15
1.1.5 Characteristics of lactic acid bacteria.....	17
1.2 Lactobacilli used as probiotics.....	18
1.2.1 General characteristics of lactobacilli	18
1.2.2 Genomic features of <i>Lactobacillus</i>	19
1.2.3 General features of the cell surface of lactobacilli.....	22
1.2.4 Adaptive and probiotic functions of lactobacilli cell surface structures in the human intestinal tract.....	25
1.3 Colonisation the human intestinal tract by lactobacilli	26
1.3.1. Adhesion	26
1.3.2. Aggregation.....	31
1.3.3. Biofilm formation	33
1.4 Molecular interactions between lactobacilli and the human intestinal epithelium	36
1.4.1 Crosstalk between probiotic bacteria and the human host.....	36
1.4.2 Enhancement of the epithelial barrier function.....	39
1.4.3 Immunomodulation.....	40
1.5 Secretion and surface display of the extracellular proteins of lactobacilli.....	42
1.5.1 Protein secretion.....	42
1.5.2 Protein attachment to bacterial surface	47
1.5.3 Glycosylation of bacterial surface proteins.....	50
1.6 Probiotic properties of <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i>	51
1.6.1 Clinical implications of <i>L. rhamnosus</i>	52

1.6.2 Molecular basis of the <i>L. rhamnosus</i> -mediated probiotic effects	53
1.6.3 <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> HN001	54
<i>Chapter Ib: Phage display as an efficient approach to study protein-protein interactions</i>	56
1.7 An overview of Ff bacteriophage	58
1.8 Ff bacteriophage life cycle	59
1.9 Ff phage display technology	61
1.10 SpcA, a <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> HN001-binding protein	62
Aims	63
<i>Chapter II: Materials and Methods</i>	65
2.1 Materials and Culture Conditions	66
2.1.1 Bacterial strains, growth conditions and helper phage	66
2.1.2 Plasmids, phagemids and phage	67
2.1.3 Oligonucleotides	68
2.1.4 Solutions and buffers	69
2.1.5 Chemicals, reagents, and enzymes	69
2.2 Methods	70
2.2.1 General molecular biology methods	70
2.2.2 General DNA techniques	70
2.2.3 Preparation and transformation of <i>Escherichia coli</i> TG1 chemically competent cells	72
2.2.4 Preparation and transformation of <i>Lactococcus lactis</i> MG1363 electro-competent cells	73
2.2.5 Preparation and transformation of <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> electro-competent cells	73
2.2.6 Basic phage and phagemid particle related protocols	74
2.2.7 Phagemid particle-lactobacilli binding assay and enzymatic treatment of <i>L. rhamnosus</i> HN001	76
2.2.8 Electron microscopy	78
2.2.9 Expression and purification of MBP-SpcA fusion	78
2.2.10 Screening of <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> HN001 phage display genomic library using MBP-SpcA as bait	79
2.2.11 Phagemid particle-based western blot	80
2.2.12 Construction of <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> knock-out mutants	80
2.2.13 Autoaggregation assay	81
2.2.14 <i>In vitro</i> biofilm assay	82
2.2.15 Hydrophobicity assay	82
2.2.16 Mammalian cell culture	83

2.2.17 Bacterial adhesion assay	83
2.2.18 Transepithelial electric resistance (TEER) assay	84
<i>Chapter III: Discovery of SpcA-binding ligand</i>	85
3.1 SpcA binds to a cell-wall associated protein, specific to the tested <i>L. rhamnosus</i> strains	86
3.2 SpcB, the largest surface protein in <i>L. rhamnosus</i> , is the SpcA-docking protein.....	90
3.3 Features of SpcB protein sequence and domain organisation resemble those of a group of large Ser-rich Gram-positive bacterial adhesins	93
3.4 Comparative analysis of <i>spcA</i> -downstream region in <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> genomes	96
Summary	98
<i>Chapter IV: Analysis of the SpcB and SpcA roles in L. rhamnosus HN001 and GG</i>	99
4.1 Construction of <i>L. rhamnosus spcA</i> and <i>spcB</i> knock-out mutants.....	100
4.2 SpcA binding to <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> is SpcB-dependent	105
4.3 SpcB may affect autoaggregation of <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> GG	106
4.4 SpcA and SpcB may negatively regulate biofilm formation in <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> GG.....	108
4.5 SpcA and SpcB do not affect the overall hydrophobicity of <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> HN001 and GG	110
4.6 SpcA and SpcB do not affect <i>in vitro</i> adhesion of <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> HN001 and GG to Caco-2 cells.....	112
4.7 SpcB of <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i> GG may improve the barrier function of the TNF α -treated polarised Caco-2 cell layer.....	113
Summary	116
<i>Chapter V: Discussion</i>	117
5.1 SpcA and SpcB of <i>L. rhamnosus</i> strains form a novel type of interacting surface protein complex.....	118
5.2 Roles of SpcA and SpcB in surface properties of <i>Lactobacillus rhamnosus</i>	122
5.3 Roles of SpcA and SpcB in bacteria-host interactions.....	125
<i>Chapter VI: Conclusions and further directions</i>	129
6.1 Conclusions.....	130
6.2 Further directions.....	131
References.....	134
Appendix I.....	162
Appendix II.....	165

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Anatomy of the intestinal immune system.....	13
Figure 1.2	Phylogenetic tree of lactic acid bacteria.....	17
Figure 1.3	Cell envelope of lactobacilli with a schematic representation of cell-wall- and membrane-associated proteins.....	21
Figure 1.4	Interaction of probiotic bacteria with IECs and DCs from the GALT	38
Figure 1.5	Models of Sec export.....	45
Figure 1.6	Schematic representation of Ff bacteriophage.....	58
Figure 1.7	Schematic presentation of the life cycle of Ff bacteriophage.....	60
Figure 3.1	PPs-lactobacilli binding assays with various <i>Lactobacillus</i> species or strains.....	87
Figure 3.2	PPs-lactobacilli binding assays with <i>L. rhamnosus</i> HN001 mutants	88
Figure 3.3	PPs-lactobacilli binding assays with enzymatically treated <i>L. rhamnosus</i> HN001.....	89
Figure 3.4	The plasmid profiles over four rounds of affinity-screening (biopanning) of the HN001 phage display library using purified MBP-SpcA ^{A1} fusion protein as bait.....	91
Figure 3.5	Confirmation of the physical interaction between SpcA and SpcB by phagemid particles (PPs) western blot.....	92
Figure 3.6	Schematic representation of SpcB protein organisation and mapping of the SpcA-binding region.....	94
Figure 3.7	Amino acid composition of SpcB.....	95
Figure 3.8	Schematic representation <i>spcBCDA</i> gene cluster organisation in <i>L. rhamnosus</i> strains, Lc705, GG and HN001.....	96
Figure 4.1	Construction of <i>L. rhamnosus</i> knockout mutants.....	102
Figure 4.2	Confirmation of the putative HN001 Δ <i>spcA</i> mutant by Southern blot	103
Figure 4.3	Confirmation of the constructed <i>L. rhamnosus</i> knockout mutants, HN001 Δ <i>spcB</i> , GG Δ <i>spcA</i> and GG Δ <i>spcB</i> mutants, by Southern blot...	104
Figure 4.4	PPs binding assay to <i>L. rhamnosus</i> knockout mutants.....	105
Figure 4.5	Comparison of the autoaggregation properties between the wild-type strains and knockout mutants of <i>L. rhamnosus</i>	107

Figure 4.6	Comparison of the <i>in vitro</i> biofilm-formation capacities of the <i>L. rhamnosus</i> GG knockout mutants with their parent strains.....	109
Figure 4.7	Comparison of the surface hydrophobicity between the <i>L. rhamnosus</i> wild-type strains and their mutants.....	111
Figure 4.8	Comparison of the adhesion to the Caco-2 cells between the wild-type strains and knockout mutants of <i>L. rhamnosus</i>	112
Figure 4.9	Impact of the <i>L. rhamnosus</i> GG and HN001 wild-type strains and knockout mutants on the integrity of Caco-2 cell monolayers.....	115
Figure 5.1	Model of the SpcB-SpcA complex and position of SpcC and SpcD	119

List of Tables

Table 1.1	Examples of adhesins identified in lactobacilli.....	30
Table 1.2	Examples of aggregation-promoting factors identified in lactobacilli	32
Table 1.3	Examples of <i>Lactobacillus</i> factors involved in biofilm formation.....	34
Table 2.1	Bacterial strains used in this study.....	66
Table 2.2	Phage, phagemids and plasmids.....	67
Table 2.3	Oligonucleotides.....	68

Abbreviations

Amp	Ampicillin
APF	Aggregation-promoting factor
Big-3	Bacterial immunoglobulin-like domain type-3
cfu	colony-forming unit
Cm	Chloramphenicol
COG	Cluster of orthologous genes
CWBD	Cell wall-binding domain
DC	Dendritic cell

DC-SIGN	Dendritic Cell-Specific Intercellular adhesion molecule-3-Grabbing Non-integrin
DMSO	Dimethyl sulfoxide
EDTA	Ethylenediaminetetraacetic Acid
EGF	Epithelial growth factor
EGFR	Epithelial growth factor receptor
Em	Erythromycin
FRDC	Fonterra Research and Development Centre
GALT	Gut-associated lymphoid tissue
GIT	Gastrointestinal tract
GlcNAc	<i>N</i> -acetylglucosamine
h	hour(s)
HRP	Horse radish peroxidase
IEC	Intestinal epithelial cell
kbp	kilobase pair
LAB	Lactic acid bacteria
LTA	Lipoteichoic acid
MAMP	Microorganism-associated molecular pattern
MAPK	Mitogen-activated protein kinase
MBP	Maltose-binding protein
min	minute(s)
MRS	Man-Rogosa-Sharpe
MurNAc	<i>N</i> -acetylmuramic acid
NF- κ B	Nuclear factor κ B
NLR	Nucleotide-binding oligomerisation domain-like receptor
PBS	Phosphate-buffered saline
PCR	Polymerase chain reaction
PEG	Polyethylene glycol
pfu	plaque-forming unit
PG	Peptidoglycan
PPs	Phagemid particles
PR-1	Pathogenesis response domain 1
PRR	Pattern recognition receptor

PS	Polysaccharides
sec	seconds
Str	Streptomycin
TA	Teichoic acid
TBS	Tris-buffered saline
TBST	TBS-Tween
Tet	Tetracycline
TJ	Tight junction
TLR	Toll-like receptor
TNF α	Tumor necrosis factor alpha
v/v	volume/volume
w/v	weight/volume
WPS	Wall polysaccharide

Abstract

Proteins are the most diverse structures on bacterial surfaces; hence they are candidates for species- and strain-specific interactions of bacteria with the host, environment and other microorganisms. In probiotic bacteria, some surface and secreted proteins mediate interactions with the host and may consequently contribute to the health-promoting effects. However, a limited fraction of surface-associated proteins from probiotic bacteria have been functionally characterised to date. A secreted protein of *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* HN001, SpcA, containing two bacterial immunoglobulin-like domains type 3 (Big-3) and a domain distantly related to plant pathogen response domain 1 (PR-1-like), was previously shown to bind to HN001 cells, however the nature of its ligand on the surface of the cells was unknown. In this study, a series of binding assays first demonstrated that SpcA binds to a cell wall anchored protein of HN001. Next, the SpcA-“docking” protein, named SpcB, was identified using phage display. SpcB is a 3275-residue cell-surface protein that has all the features of large glycosylated serine-rich adhesins/fibrils from Gram-positive bacteria, including the hallmark glycoprotein signal sequence motif KxYKxGKxW and the cell wall anchor motif LPxTG. The *spcA* and *spcB* genes are located in a gene cluster, *spcBCDA*, which is present in 94 out of 100 strains of *L. rhamnosus* species and some strains of *L. casei* and *L. paracasei* whose genome sequences have been determined, but was absent from other *Lactobacillus* clades. To confirm the role of SpcB as the SpcA anchor and investigate the roles of these two proteins in surface properties of probiotic *L. rhamnosus* strains HN001 and GG, stable double-crossover mutations of these two genes were constructed. Binding assays to *L. rhamnosus* mutant cells confirmed dependence on SpcB in both GG and HN001 strains. Comparison of the wild-type and mutant surface properties suggested that SpcB in GG interferes with biofilm formation and aggregation, while it might contribute to the protective effect against TNF α -mediated disruption of the polarised Caco-2 cell monolayer integrity. Deletion of HN001 *spcB* or *spcA* had no effect on functions other than the SpcA binding. Our findings indicate that the roles of a surface protein can vary considerably among the strains of a species, requiring functional data to validate the bioinformatics-based hypotheses.