**PA28ab Reduces Size and Increases Hydrophilicity of 20S Immunoproteasome Peptide Products**

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CHEMISTRY & BIOLOGY (2014)

# PA28αβ Reduces Size and Increases Hydrophilicity of 20S Immunoproteasome Peptide Products

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**SUMMARY**

The specific roles that immunoproteasome variants play in MHC class I antigen presentation are presently unknown. To investigate the biochemical properties of different immunoproteasome forms and unveil the molecular mechanisms of PA28 activity, we performed *in vitro* degradation of full-length proteins by 20S, 26S and PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes and analyzed the spectrum of peptides released. Notably, PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes hydrolyze proteins at the same low rates as 20S alone, in line with PA28 neither stimulating nor preventing entry of unfolded polypeptides into the core particle. Most importantly, binding of PA28αβ to 20S greatly reduces the size of proteasomal products, while favoring the release of specific, more hydrophilic, and longer peptides. Hence, PA28αβ may either allosterically modify proteasome active sites or act as a selective 'smart' sieve that controls the efflux of products from the 20S proteolytic chamber.

## INTRODUCTION

The continual presentation of intracellular protein fragments on MHC class I molecules is a process that allows cytotoxic $CD8^+$ T lymphocytes (CTLs) to eliminate cells that synthesize foreign or abnormal proteins (Pamer and Cresswell, 1998). The vast majority of MHC class I-presented peptides are generated during the degradation of mature proteins or defective ribosomal products (DRiPs) by the ubiquitin-proteasome system (UPS) (Rock and Goldberg, 1999; Yewdell, 2001). The active form of proteasome, which appears to degrade most cellular proteins, is the 26S proteasome, a large proteolytic complex formed by the association of the 19S regulatory particle with the 20S proteasome (Voges et al., 1999). In most cells, the proteolytic activity of the 20S proteasome is mediated by three subunits of the core particle: β5, β2 and β1. However, lymphoid cells and cells exposed to cytokines such as IFN-γ express three alternative, homologous subunits (β5i/LMP7, β2i/MECL-1, β1i/LMP2), which replace the constitutive active β-subunits in newly-assembled immunoproteasome particles (Kloetzel, 2001). The pivotal role of immunoproteasomes in the generation of MHC class I ligands was recently demonstrated in transgenic mice lacking all three proteasomal catalytic β-immune subunits (Kincaid et al., 2012).

Another INF-γ-inducible UPS component that affects MHC class I antigen presentation is PA28, a ring-shaped heteroheptameric complex (3α4β) (Sugiyama et al., 2013) that can bind to the 20S proteasome and dramatically enhance its ability to degrade short peptide substrates, but not ubiquitin-conjugated proteins (Dubiel et al., 1992; Ma et al., 1992). In addition, PA28 can also form an asymmetric 26S hybrid complex (19S-20S-PA28) (Cascio et al., 2002; Hendil et al., 1998). The effects of PA28 on antigen processing and $CD8^+$ responses are still unclear and controversial (Rechsteiner et al., 2000). Expression of PA28α or PA28αβ has been reported to enhance MHC class I-presentation of some, but not all, antigens (Sijts et al., 2002). Furthermore, cells lacking this complex have a reduced ability to generate certain antigens (Murata et al., 2001). Recent studies have identified PA28 as the second most important UPS component for the production of MHC class I ligands (de Graaf et al., 2011), although its effects seem to be restricted to specific MHC

class I alleles (Yamano et al., 2008). Additionally, several studies have indicated that oxidized proteins are preferentially degraded without ubiquitination by 20S immunoproteasomes (Orlowski and Wilk, 2003) in a process that may be stimulated by PA28αβ (Li et al., 2011; Pickering et al., 2010). A variety of biochemical actions have been proposed for PA28 (Rechsteiner et al., 2000; Stadtmueller and Hill, 2011), and the crystal structure of PA26 (PA28 homologue in trypanosomes) in association with 20S yeast proteasomes has been solved (Whitby et al., 2000). The binding of PA26 was found to dilate the gated channel in the proteasome α-ring through which substrates enter (Groll et al., 2000) and products exit (Kohler et al., 2001). Therefore, PA28 was predicted to lead to attenuation of proteasomal processivity and consequent release of peptide products with a greater mean length (Whitby et al., 2000), as occurs upon deletion of the α-gate (Kohler et al., 2001). A full understanding of the molecular mechanism of PA28 activity would undoubtedly represent an important achievement, especially in the light of the observation that mammalian cells contain significant amounts of PA28αβ-20S immunocomplexes (Ahn et al., 1996; Hendil et al., 1998), whose abundance further increases upon INF-γ stimulation (Murata et al., 2001; Tanahashi et al., 1997).

## RESULTS

### Different immunoproteasome species exhibit distinct rates of peptide bond cleavage and turnover of protein substrates.

In an attempt to further characterize the biochemical properties of different forms of IFN-γ-induced proteasomes, casein was incubated for several hours with 26S, 20S and 20S-PA28αβ immunoproteasomes in a buffer containing ATP and $Mg^{++}$, and the hydrolysis of the substrate was measured by fluorescamine assay (Cascio et al., 2001; Kisselev et al., 1999). Under these experimental conditions, proteasome species are completely stable and maintain their structural integrity and biochemical properties for several hours (Fig. S1A and Cascio et al., 2001; Kisselev et al., 1999). As shown in Figures 1A and 1B, the rates of generation of new amino groups were linear for up to 6 hours, albeit widely different, for the three immunoproteasome species analyzed. Specifically, 26S immunoproteasomes were found to generate around 10-fold more amino groups than 20S immunoproteasomes (Fig. 1A). Surprisingly, 20S-PA28αβ complexes consistently generated 3-fold more amino groups at each time point than 20S particles alone (Fig. 1B). This was unexpected, since PA28 has been described as an activator of hydrolysis by the 20S particle of small tri- and tetrapeptides (but not full-length proteins) (Ma et al., 1992). In principle, the higher generation rate of primary amino groups by PA28αβ associated 20S immunoproteasomes might result from either accelerated protein breakdown induced by the activator or from a modification in the pattern of peptide products released (i.e. even if the overall rate of substrate consumption was not increased). To discriminate between these two mechanisms, we initially followed the disappearance of undigested casein incubated for several hours in the presence of 20S immunoproteasomes alone or conjugated with PA28. This experiment clearly demonstrated that the presence of PA28αβ does not modify the kinetics of substrate disappearance (Fig. 1C and D). The lack of increased substrate consumption upon binding of PA28αβ to the 20S core particle was subsequently confirmed by assessing degradation of fluorescein isothiocyanate (FITC)-labeled casein (Fig. 1E). In this assay, the fluorescence signal generated is directly proportional to the rate

of turnover of the substrate, independently of the characteristics of the peptides produced. As shown in Figure 1E, the rates of appearance of TCA-soluble fluorescence were identical when FITC-casein was degraded by either 20S or 20S-PA28αβ particles, and nearly 6-fold lower compared to rates observed with 26S immunoproteasomes. We thus concluded that the association of PA28 with 20S immunoproteasomes does not alter the rate of casein and FITC-casein hydrolysis. Accordingly, we tested whether PA28αβ might modify the pattern of peptides generated from these substrates, presumably by increasing the frequency of cleavage within the 20S core. Towards this end, degradation products were separated by reverse-phase HPLC and the chromatographic profiles were compared. Remarkably, the peptides patterns were dramatically different depending on whether FITC-casein (Fig. 1F) was degraded by 20S, 20S bound to PA28 or 26S immunoproteasomes. In particular, while some peptides were produced by both 20S and 20S-PA28 particles, albeit in different amounts, several others were detected only when one of these two immunoproteasome forms was used (Fig. 1F).

To confirm these findings, we performed similar degradation experiments with the 8 kDa protein insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1), another well characterized proteasomal model substrate. Similar to what has been observed for casein, the rates of appearance of primary amino groups were ~8 and ~2-fold higher, compared to 20S particles, for 26S and for 20S-PA28αβ immunoproteasomes, respectively (Fig. 2A and B). Importantly, even for IGF-1, enhanced levels of peptide bond cleavage, induced by PA28, did not correspond to increased rates of substrate turnover, but rather to a higher frequency of cleavage events (Fig. 2C and D).

**20S-PA28αβ complexes generate shorter peptide products than 20S and 26S immunoproteasomes.**

Because the association of PA28αβ with 20S particles did not alter the rate of protein hydrolysis, but rather modified the pattern of the peptides produced, we investigated its effect on the size distribution of proteasomal products. In fact, since the observed increase in the rate of peptide bond

cleavages does not result in enhanced substrate turnover, it must be correlated with a reduction in the average size of peptide products. To test this hypothesis, casein and IGF-1 were incubated with 20S, 20S-PA28αβ and 26S immunoproteasomes under conditions that ensure a linear rate of peptide generation and that do not favor a second cycle of cleavage following release from proteasomes (Cascio et al., 2001; Kisselev et al., 1999). To assure such conditions, substrates were present in large excess, and no more than 10% of the initial substrate was consumed (Fig. S2A and B). After 6 hours, the peptides produced were separated from the undigested substrate by ultrafiltration through a 5 kDa membrane, derivatized with fluorescamine and fractionated by HP size exclusion chromatography (HP-SEC) with on-line fluorescence detection. This method provides a quantitative measure of different products, as the intensity of the fluorescence signal emitted by any peptide is the same and independent of its length (Berko et al., 2012; Kohler et al., 2001). When analyzed by this method, peptides generated from casein by 20S and 26S immunoproteasomes were found to fall into a continuum of size distribution ranging from 1 to 26 residues (Fig. 3A) that appeared to fit a log-normal distribution, in agreement with previous analyses of different substrates and proteasome species (Cascio et al., 2001; Cascio et al., 2002; Kisselev et al., 1999; Kohler et al., 2001). Specifically, the chromatographic profile of 20S particle products was characterized by four broad peaks (Fig. 3A left panel), corresponding to lengths of 1-2, 3-5, 11-13 and 17-20 residues. The generation of detectable amounts of products with a molecular weight around 200 Da was unexpected since proteasomes have not been found to generate such small fragments. It is possible that the analytical approaches used previously either excluded or imposed a strong bias against individual amino acids and dipeptides, while the method used herein can accurately separate and quantitate peptides between 1 and 30 residues long (Fig. S2C). A similar size distribution was also obtained for the products of 26S immunoproteasomes, although in this case the peak of the longer fragments was significantly reduced and a matching increase was detected in the peaks corresponding to the shorter peptides (Fig. 3A right panel). Consequently, both the mean and median length of peptide products were about 2 residues shorter

for the 26S than for 20S immunoproteasomes (Table 1). However, the size distribution of products generated by 20S-PA28αβ immunoproteasomes differed drastically from that of both 20S and 26S particles (Fig. 3A). Specifically, the peak corresponding to the longer products disappeared, the peak of 11-13 residues long peptides was significantly reduced and the two peaks of shorter fragments increased in size. Consequently, the binding of PA28αβ to 20S proteasomes reduced the mean and median sizes of peptide products by about 50% (Table 1).

Similar results were subsequently obtained for the size distributions of IGF-1 degradation products (Fig. 3B). With this shorter substrate, 20S immunoproteasomes were found to generate the same four broad peaks of products as already observed for casein, although in this case the two central peaks were higher than the peaks of longer and smaller fragments (Fig. 3B left panel). Furthermore, with 26S particles the peak of 11-13 amino acids was also strongly reduced (Fig. 3B right panel), while with 20S-PA28αβ immunoproteasomes a major peak (corresponding to 3-5 residues) was detected, and the peak of amino acids and dipeptides slightly increased in size compared to 20S and 26S (Fig. 3B). Accordingly, the mean and median length of products calculated from these size distributions were higher for the 20S than for 26S immunoproteasomes, while 20S-PA28αβ products were characterized by lower mean and median values (Table 1).

To further analyze the relative distributions of peptides of different sizes, we also plotted these data as cumulative frequency curves (Fig. 3C) (Kisselev et al., 1999). The resulting size distribution plots clearly showed that for both protein substrates no more than 10% of peptide generated by the three forms of immunoproteasomes were 8 to 10 residues long, which is the appropriate length to bind MHC class I heterodimers (Fig. 3C and Table 2). Importantly, the association of PA28αβ with the 20S particles does not increase this fraction, but slightly reduces it (Table 2). Moreover, casein products that might serve in MHC class I antigen presentation after appropriate trimming by aminopeptidases in the cytosol or the ER represent 38%, 24% and 8% of the total when the protein is degraded by 20S, 26S and 20S-PA28αβ immunoproteasomes,

respectively (Fig. 3C and Table 2). Similar results were also obtained for IGF-1, although with this smaller substrate higher production of peptides shorter than 8 residues were detected for all three immunoproteasome species (Fig. 3C and Table 2).

**Mass spectrometry of immunoproteasomal products.**

To further define changes in the patterns of products that resulted from binding of PA28αβ to 20S particles, and specifically to investigate in detail the nature of the differences observed between 20S, 20S-PA28αβ and 26S immunoproteasomes, the individual peptides generated from IGF-1 and casein were analyzed by tandem mass spectrometry (MS/MS). The MS analysis excluded peptides with a length of up to 7 amino acids in order to minimize signals originating from small chemical compounds. Although tandem MS does not provide quantitative information about the absolute abundance of the peptides detected, their relative amounts can be assessed by comparing the corresponding ion intensities measured in sequential MS analyses (Bantscheff et al., 2007; Old et al., 2005). Therefore, we used ion intensities to quantify the relative amount of single fragments generated from IGF-1 and casein by more than one immunoproteasome species. By this approach, 90 different peptides from IGF-1 and 103 from casein were unambiguously identified and quantified (Fig. 4). These ranged in length from 8 to 25 residues, and were derived from the entire length of the proteins. Notably, the generation of some of the peptides required the removal of one or two residues from the substrate, further demonstrating that proteasomes can release products as short as single amino acids and dipeptides. Most importantly, this analysis demonstrated that while some peptides are generated exclusively by 20S, 20S-PA28αβ or 26S immunoproteasomes, several others are produced in common by different immunoproteasome forms, but in very different amounts. In fact, even if some products are released at about the same level by two or even all three proteasome species, many others are characterized by striking quantitative differences spanning over 3 log values. Notably, the MS data reveal that, regardless of the clear differences in the overall sizes distributions of products unveiled by SEC, each of the three immunoproteasome forms can

preferentially enhance the generation of individual peptides that are 8 to 25 residues in length (Fig 4 and Table S1). These results were also further confirmed by the analysis of peptides generated by the asymmetric 26S hybrid complex, namely proteasomes capped at one side by 19S regulatory particle and by PA28 at the other (Cascio et al., 2002; Hendil et al., 1998). In this case, MS analysis revealed that hybrid particles generate some of the peptides produced in common by 26S and PA28αβ-20S from IGF-1, and also several of those released specifically only by one of the two immunoproteasome forms (Table S2).

To check whether the differences in the sequence of products revealed by MS analysis might be, at least in part, predicted on the basis of the modifications of the three main proteasomal peptidase activities induced by PA28, we assessed its stimulatory effect on cleavage specificities of 20S particles. In this way, we found that the caspase-like, although lower in absolute terms, is the immunoproteasome peptidase activity that is enhanced to a higher extent by PA28, while stimulation of chymotryptic and tryptic activities appears lower and more dependent on the specific sequence of the peptide used (Fig 5A). Of interest, this higher activation of the caspase-like activity may help to explain the enhanced generation of peptides with an acidic residue at their C terminus that we observed when IGF-1 and, to a lower extent, casein are degraded by 20S-PA28αβ particles (Fig. 4 and Table S1). Furthermore, in an attempt to define the physiochemical parameters that control the generation of longer products in the presence of PA28, we calculated the hydropathy of peptides exclusively (or preferentially) released by 20S and PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes (Table S3). As expected for products derived from two extremely hydrophilic proteins such as IGF-1 and casein, both pools of peptides were characterized by high average hydrophilicity. However, hydrophilicity was significantly higher for peptides generated by PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes (Fig. 5B), suggesting that PA28 might allow preferential release of longer products that are polar/charged from the proteolytic proteasomal chamber.

## DISCUSSION

The present study focused on immunoproteasomal degradation of loosely folded, non-ubiquitinated proteins as ubiquitinated proteins are not hydrolyzed by 20S and PA28-20S complexes (Dubiel et al., 1992; Ma et al., 1992), most likely since these particles lack the enzymatic activities necessary to remove and/or to unfold polyubiquitin chains that otherwise would sterically block translocation of substrates into the proteolytic chamber (Shabek and Ciechanover, 2010; Yao and Cohen, 2002). As a result, we found that unstructured polypeptides are hydrolyzed at rates that are nearly 10-fold higher by 26S compared to 20S immunoproteasomes. This finding is consistent with the notion that the free 20S particle is a relatively inactive protease, presumably since the N-terminal tails of its α subunits obstruct the two opposite axial pores through which substrates access the internal catalytic lumen (Groll et al., 2000). This autoinhibited state is relieved when the 20S core particle binds to activators such as 19S or PA28 that displace the N-terminal tails, thereby opening an axial channel in the α ring (Kohler et al., 2001; Whitby et al., 2000). However, the latency of unliganded 20S proteasome is not absolute since, even in the absence of artificial treatments that are known to activate it (Coux et al., 1996), the 20S core particle degrades proteins at detectable and reproducible rates, probably involving transient and/or only partial channel opening (Kohler et al., 2001). Accordingly, atomic force microscopy (AFM) studies have shown that the α-rings of the 20S proteasome repeatedly switch between an open and a closed gate conformation and, importantly, the relative abundance of the two conformers depends on the nature of their interaction with ligands. In fact, the closed conformation predominates in control or inhibited 20S proteasomes, while the open form prevails in the presence of peptide or protein substrates (Osmulski and Gaczynska, 2000, 2002; Osmulski et al., 2009). Interestingly, despite the fact that the open-channel conformation of the gating residues induced by ATP-dependent (i.e. 19S) and independent (i.e. PA28) activators appears to be identical (Rabl et al., 2008), our data show that PA28αβ-20S immunocomplexes hydrolyze proteins at the same rates than 20S immunoproteasomes, and much less efficiently than 26S immunoproteasomes. While on one hand this result confirms the initial

reports on the biochemical properties of PA28 (Ma et al., 1992), it appears difficult to reconcile with the known role of the proteasomal gate in controlling accessibility of substrates into the lumen of the 20S particle. In fact, opening of the axial channel by deletion of the N-terminal tails of eukaryotic (Kohler et al., 2001) or archaeal (Benaroudj et al., 2003) proteasomal α subunits results in strong enhancement of the degradation rates of unfolded proteins, therefore suggesting that unstructured substrates can freely access the internal proteolytic chamber of the 20S particle simply by passive diffusion thorough a fully open gate. In light of these data, the inability of PA28 to enhance hydrolysis rates of loosely folded proteins is surprising. In fact, the crystal structure of PA28α shows that the aqueous channel through the heptamer has a diameter of 20 Å at its minimum, which is at least in principle wide enough for passage of unfolded proteins (Knowlton et al., 1997). However, the homolog-specific inserts present between helices 1 and 2, which are not resolved in the crystal structure, most likely form a ring-like collar on the upper, non-proteasome binding surface of the PA28 heptamer. Although several studies have shown that these loops do not restrict passage of tri- or tetra- peptide fluorogenic substrates (Song et al., 1997; Zhang et al., 1998), recent investigations have demonstrated that they can hinder the transit of longer peptides, and conceivably of proteins as well, through the PA28 channel (Sugiyama et al., 2013).

Although PA28αβ does not enhance the rates of protein degradation by proteasomes, its association with the 20S particle leads to profound changes in the patterns of peptides generated, which greatly differ from those produced by 20S and 26S immunoproteasomes. In fact, from both protein substrates analyzed, 20S and 26S immunoproteasomes were found to release a continuum of peptides with a size ranging from 1 to 26 residues, although some classes of length clearly predominate. Surprisingly, PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes display a reduced ability to generate longer products that, in principle, might depend upon different mechanisms. Conceivably, PA28 might stimulate additional rounds of hydrolysis of previously-digested longer precursors. However, reentry into the proteasome and further hydrolysis of already-released fragments seem statistically less likely, since our degradation assays were performed under conditions that have previously been

shown to allow generation of individual peptides at linear rates for several hours (Cascio et al., 2001; Kisselev et al., 1999). To this end, substrate was always present in large excess and no more than 10% of the protein was consumed at the end of the incubation period, which ensures that peptides analyzed are generated directly from the substrate, and do not reenter the proteasome and undergo cleavage in later rounds of proteolysis. Likewise, it has been shown that *in vitro* peptides released by proteasomes are further cleaved by these proteolytic particles at extremely low rates (Saric et al., 2004), and they are therefore unlikely to efficiently compete for degradation with proteins, which are much more preferred as substrates (Dolenc et al., 1998). Furthermore, if re-uptake and further hydrolysis by 20S-PA28αβ immunoproteasomes of intermediate fragments did occur, this would be expected to increase over time as longer peptides are generated and their concentration increases. Consequently, the kinetics of new amino group generation would be most likely exponential, rather than linear, since intermediate fragments would be metabolized again according to a double cut modality, which implies release of three free amino groups each time that a long precursor is further hydrolyzed (Dick et al., 1996). Finally, if intermediate products were indeed generated, over time they should start to compete with the protein substrates for hydrolysis at proteasomal active sites, which in turn would cause a progressive decrease in the rates of protein consumption, a phenomenon that was not observed even after prolonged incubation. As alternative possibilities, PA28 might enhance generation of shorter products by inducing conformational changes in proteasomal active sites or by imposing a constraint on the exit port that would have a greater effect on longer fragments. These would be retained inside the proteasomal proteolytic cavity longer and therefore have an increased probability to be further cleaved. At the present, neither of these two hypotheses can be controverted. In fact, although crystallographic studies show that association with PA26 does not induce structural modification of proteasomal catalytic β subunits (Whitby et al., 2000), biochemical data indicates that proteasome proteolytic sites are allosterically regulated (Harris et al., 2001; Li et al., 2000, 2001) and that their modification leads to gate opening (Osmulski and Gaczynska, 2000, 2002; Osmulski et al., 2009). Furthermore, an

allosteric pathway linking the PA26 binding sites with the active sites in the *T. acidophilum* 20S proteasome has been recently described (Ruschak and Kay, 2012). A model entailing PA28αβ in which it acts by imposing a constraint on diffusion of longer products out of the hydrolytic chamber, thus facilitating their further hydrolysis, is also consistent with our data. In this scenario, PA28 would primarily act as a sieve that retains longer protein fragments inside the 20S proteolytic chamber until they are cleaved to pieces small enough to diffuse outside. Such a molecular mechanism would be consistent with both detailed kinetic analysis showing that PA28 exerts its activating influence by enhancing bi-directional passage of short (3-4 residues) peptides (Stohwasser et al., 2000) and with a previous *in vitro/in silico* study that identified one of the major factors involved in the enhancement of double cut efficiency induced by PA28 in a reduced efflux of longer peptides out of the 20S particle (Mishto et al., 2008). Furthermore, it was recently shown that a PA28αβ complex lacking the unstructured and highly mobile PA28α loops surrounding the central pore of the heptameric ring cleaves substrates longer than a nonapeptide more efficiently than wild type PA28. On these bases, it was hypothesized that the flexible loops of PA28 might act as gatekeepers that block the exit of longer peptides from the proteolytic chamber (Sugiyama et al., 2013). Selectivity based exclusively on peptide size, however, cannot account for the global effects of PA28 on the patterns of proteasome products observed in our study. In fact, quantitation of products demonstrated that several individual peptides with a length of 8 to 23 residues are released in much higher amounts by PA28αβ-20S than by 20S or 26S immunoproteasomes (Table S1). At present, the properties that might allow specific longer peptides to evade the constraint imposed by PA28 towards their efflux are not completely clear. However, the finding that products longer than 7 residues whose generation is strongly enhanced in presence of PA28 are, on average, more hydrophilic than those preferentially released by 20S alone, suggesting that the passage of polar/charged long peptides thorough PA28 might be favored. In this model, PA28 would act as a selective “smart” sieve that strictly controls the exit from proteasomes of products on the basis of size and, presumably, sequence. As a result, PA28αβ would promote preferential efflux from the

20S proteolytic cavity of only a reduced number of individual peptides longer than 6-7 amino acids, while the great majority of the other proteasomal products are retained inside where they are further cleaved to smaller pieces before they diffuse outside. In accordance with this model, the central channel of PA28α ring is almost completely lined by charged or polar residues (Knowlton et al., 1997), and is thus well suited for permitting the passage of water soluble peptides. Importantly, this molecular model would also be consistent with our findings on 19S-20S-PA28 immunoproteasomes. In this case, the absence of a clear difference in size distribution (Cascio et al., 2002) argues that in hybrid proteasomes (as in 26S canonical particles) the main route of exit of peptides from the inner proteolytic chamber is regulated by the 19S cap, while PA28 would exert its major effect by allowing preferential sorting, through its central channel, of selected products. Accordingly, hybrid particles were found to generate some of the peptides produced in common by 26S and PA28αβ-20S from IGF-1, in addition to also several of those released specifically by only one of the two immunoproteasome forms.

**Implications for MHC class I antigen presentation.**

The reasons why mammalian cells are equipped with different immunoproteasome species and whether these immunoproteasomal variants play specific roles in the MHC-I antigen processing pathway are presently unknown. Yet the *in vivo* observation that their cellular levels greatly increase following INF-γ stimulation (Murata et al., 2001; Tanahashi et al., 1997) strongly supports their involvement in class I presentation. In this regard, the major findings of our study can be summarized as follows.

1- For both protein substrates analyzed, only ~10% of peptides generated by 20S and 26S immunoproteasomes are 8-10 residues long, the appropriate length to bind MHC class I heterodimers. Most importantly, association of PA28αβ with the ends of 20S immunoproteasomes does not increase the fraction of 8-10 residue peptides generated, but reduces it to 6% of the total for both substrates.

2- The fraction of peptides longer than 10 amino acids, which might serve in MHC class I antigen presentation only after appropriate trimming by aminopeptidases in the cytosol or ER, is larger for 20S than for 26S immunoproteasomes; binding of PA28αβ to the 20S particle dramatically reduces the overall efficiency of generation of these longer products. We conclude, therefore, that PA28 does not act simply by expending the fraction of proteasomal products that can be accommodated in the groove of MHC class I molecules directly or after trimming.

From an immunological point of view, however, the sequence and not only the length of proteasomal products is a crucial parameter. Herein, the relative amounts of individual peptides produced by more than one immunoproteasomal species from IGF-1 and casein were quantified on the basis of their ion intensity signal following sequencing using tandem mass spectrometry. This analysis revealed striking quantitative differences, which in several cases exceeded three orders of magnitude, thus demonstrating that each immunoproteasomal form possesses the capacity to preferentially release individual peptides in the range of 8 to 25 residues. The outcome of this selection process on MHC class I presentation is further amplified by the fact that overall the absolute generation of longer peptides was reduced upon association with PA28, as shown by SEC analysis.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

Our study demonstrates that in spite of their different general efficiency in generating products with a size distribution appropriate to serve in MHC class I presentation, 20S, 26S and PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes possess the capacity to produce exclusively, or at least in a preferential manner, a subset of specific peptides. In this regard, the finding that PA28αβ induces generation of a certain number of peptides with an acidic C-terminus is counterintuitive, since these products cannot bind efficiently to MHC-I molecules (Kloetzel, 2001; Pamer and Cresswell, 1998; Rock and Goldberg, 1999). However, several of the remaining peptides do present the correct hydrophobic or basic C-terminal anchor residue required for association with the MHC-I groove. It seems plausible,

therefore, that a substantial fraction of peptides specifically released by PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes might be critical in eliciting an effective CTL response under different pathophysiological conditions, especially if favoring a non-canonical, ubiquitin-independent, proteolytic pathway (Orlowski and Wilk, 2003; Qian et al., 2006; Yuksek et al., 2009). In principle, it is also possible that by promoting release of a certain number of peptides that cannot serve in class I antigen presentation, PA28 might exert a regulatory function aimed at blunting excessive cytotoxic responses against antigens of self origin, thus preventing the risk of potentially harmful autoimmune reactions.

## EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

### Protein purification, substrate degradations and peptide analysis

Purification of immunoproteasomes and PA28αβ, casein and IGF-1 degradation and HPLC analysis of peptide products were performed as previously described (Berko et al., 2012; Cascio et al., 2001, 2002; Song et al., 1997). More details are provided in Supplemental Experimental Procedures. Heterodimeric PA28 (Fig S1C) was reconstituted from purified recombinant α and β subunits as described (Song, et al., 1997) with minor modifications. Briefly, equal volumes of proteins at a final concentration of 0.1 mg/ml were preincubated in 20 mM HEPES, pH 7.6, 20 mM NaCl, 1 mM EDTA, 5 mM β-mercaptoethanol and 5% glycerol for 16 h at 4°C. Reconstituted PA28αβ complexes were then purified by gel filtration on a HiPrep Sephacryl-S200 HR column (GE Healtcare, Piscataway, NJ, USA) (Fig. S1D) and are free of any exo- or endoproteolytic activity. PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes were reconstituted by pre-incubating 20S particles with 8-fold molar excess of PA28αβ at 37°C for 30 min in 20 mM HEPES, pH 7.6, 2 mM NaCl and were used immediately for degradation experiments. Native PAGE showed almost complete conversion of 20S particles into doubly capped (PA28αβ-20S-PA28αβ) 20S immunoproteasomes that are stable throughout the entire degradation period (Fig. S1A). For analysis of peptide products, casein (470 μM) and denatured IGF-1 (900 μM) were incubated with 20S (20 nM for IGF-1 and 50 nM for casein), PA28αβ-20S (20 nM for IGF-1 and 50 nM for casein) and 26S immunoproteasomes (35 nM for both substrates) for 6 h at 37°C in 20 mM HEPES, pH 7.6, 1.5 mM ATP, 3 mM $MgCl_2$ and 2 mM NaCl. To assay peptides generated during protein degradation, we measured the appearance of new amino groups using fluorescamine. At the end of the incubation, peptide products were separated from undegraded protein by ultrafiltration through a membrane with a 5 kDa cutoff, and these samples were used for size exclusion chromatography and mass spectrometry. Consumption of substrates at the end of the incubation never exceeded 10% (Fig. S2). FITC-casein (10 μM) was degraded by 20S, PA28αβ-20S and 26S immunoproteasomes (40 nM) for 6 h at 37°C in 20 mM HEPES, pH 7.6, 1.5 mM ATP, 3 mM $MgCl_2$ and 2 mM NaCl. At the end of the incubation,

undigested FITC-casein was precipitated with 2% perchloric acid, and fluorescence in the supernatant was measured (excitation, 490 nm; emission, 525 nm). RP-HPLC analysis of peptides generated by different immunoproteasome species were performed using methods described elsewhere (Cascio, et al., 2002). For size exclusion chromatography, equal amounts of peptides generated during degradation of casein and IGF-1 were lyophilized, resuspended in 0.1 M HEPES pH 6.8 and separated on a polyhydroxy-ethyl aspartamide column (0.46 x 20 cm, Poly LC, Columbia, MD, USA). The mobile phase was 0.2 M $Na_2SO_4$, 25% acetonitrile pH 3.0 at a flow rate of 0.125 ml/min. For each analysis, 20 µl of peptide solution was added to 10 µl of fluorescamine (0.3 mg/ml in acetone). The reaction was terminated after 30 sec with 30 µl of $H_2O$, and the sample was immediately injected on the HPLC column. The fluorescence of eluted material was monitored continuously and a blank run (corresponding to time 0) was always subtracted. To determine the apparent molecular mass of peptides eluted, the column was calibrated with 18 standard amino acids and peptides in the 200-3500 Da range that had been derivatized with fluorescamine in the same manner as proteasomal degradation products. Prior control studies showed that retention times of these fluorescamine-derivatized products are highly reproducible and linearly dependent on the logarithm of their molecular weights (Fig. S2), and that recovery of amino acids and peptides of different lengths is quantitative. Note that amino acids and peptides eluting from the column are bound to fluorescamine, whose molecular weight must be subtracted to calculate the actual mass of proteasomal products. Mean and median sizes of peptides generated by immunoproteasomes were calculated from the distributions of products obtained by SEC, assuming an average molecular weight of 110 Da for each residue. Proteasome peptidase activities were measured using specific fluorogenic substrates in 20 mM Tris–HCl pH 7.5, 1 mM ATP, 2 mM $MgCl_2$, and 0.2% (w/v) BSA. The fluorescence of released amc (excitation, 380 nm; emission, 460 nm) was monitored continuously at 37°C. Assays were calibrated using standard solutions of the free fluorophore, and the reaction velocities were calculated from the slopes of the initial linear portions of the curves.

**Mass spectrometry of proteasomal products**

Peptides generated by degradation of similar amounts of IGF-1 by immunoproteasomes and casein in two independent experiments were analyzed by LC-MS/MS tandem mass spectrometry. Peptides were captured on a C18 stage tip. The cleaned peptides were separated on a nano HPLC system (Proxeon, easy nLC) using a 5% to 40% linear gradient of acetonitrile on a 15 cm micro column (prepared in house, 75 µm inner diameter, filled with 3 µm C18 reverse phase beads, Reprosil, Dr. Maisch) and directly sprayed into the mass spectrometer (LTQ-Orbitrap or Q-Exactive, Thermo scientific) using a proxeon ion source. Data was analyzed using version 1.3.0.5 of the MaxQuant software package (Cox and Mann, 2008). Briefly, the software uses MS/MS spectra for the identification of peptides, while quantification of peptides is derived from MS-spectra. The software integrates the intensities over the entire range of elution, thus allowing highly accurate quantification of peptides. The false discovery rate (FDR) was set to 1% of peptide levels.

**Statistical analyses**

To compare average measures of amino group generation, protein degradation and peptide hydrophilicity, we adopted a Mann-Whitney test. Error bars represent standard error of the mean (SEM).

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**AKNOWLEDGMENTS:** We thank Marion Schmidt and Ernst Jarosch for critical reading of the manuscript, and are grateful to Patrick Moore for assistance in preparation of this manuscript. This research was supported by the Italian Ministry of Instruction, University and Research, MIUR (Prin 2008 to P.C.).

**FIGURE LEGENDS**

**Figure 1. Casein degradation by 20S, 26S and PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes.** Primary $NH_2$ generated by equimolar amounts of 20S and 26S **(A)** or 20S and PA28αβ-20S **(B)** immunoproteasomes were quantified by fluorescamine and expressed as fold change relative to the amount released in 2 hours by 20S. The average of 4 to 6 independent experiments (± SEM) is shown. $NH_2$ generation does not occur when the substrate was incubated alone, with only PA28αβ or in the presence of β-lactone. * $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$. See also Figure S1. **(C)** Casein was incubated as indicated in the figure, and the undegraded protein was separated by SDS-PAGE. **(D)** Densitometric quantification of the residual protein. Data are the average of 3 independent experiments ± SEM. NS, not significant. * $P < 0.05$. **(E)** FITC-casein was incubated with immunoproteasomes and generation of soluble fluorescence assessed. **(F)** FITC-casein was degraded by immunoproteasomes and peptides analyzed by RP-HPLC. See also Supplemental Experimental Procedures.

**Figure 2. IGF-1 degradation by 20S, 26S and PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes.** Degradation of IGF-1 by 20S and 26S **(A)** or 20S and PA28αβ-20S **(B)** immunoproteasomes was performed as described in Figure 1. The average of 3 independent experiments (± SEM) is shown. * $P < 0.05$**. (C)** IGF-1 was incubated as indicated, and the undegraded protein was separated by SDS-PAGE. **(D)** Densitometric quantification of the residual protein. Data are the average of 3 independent experiments ± SEM. NS, not significant. * $P < 0.05$.

**Figure 3. Size distribution of peptides generated from casein and IGF-1 by 20S, 26S and PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes.** Equal amounts of peptides generated during degradation of casein **(A)** and IGF-1 **(B)** by 20S, 26S and PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes were reacted with fluorescamine and immediately fractionated by HP-SEC. Similar data were obtained in at least 4 independent experiments. **(C)** The cumulative frequency curves of peptides generated from casein

and IGF-1 were obtained by transformation of data from panels A and B. For each point, the fraction of peptides with this and lower molecular mass was calculated, and each curve was obtained by averaging the data from 4 independent experiments. See also Figure S2 and Supplemental Experimental Procedures.

**Figure 4. MS analysis of peptides generated from IGF-1 and casein degradation by 20S, 26S and PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes.**

Peptides were identified by tandem mass spectrometry (MS/MS), and those produced by more than one immunoproteasome species were quantified on the basis of their ion intensity signal as described in the Materials and Methods. Values are indicated as percentage of the highest ion intensity signal for each single peptide set as 100%. Underscored peptides whose generation requires removal of only 1 or 2 residues at the N- or C-terminus of the substrate. See also Tables S1 and S2.

**Figure 5. Modifications in cleavage specificities of 20S immunoproteasomes induced by PA28αβ. (A)** Chymotryptic, tryptic and caspase activities of PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasome were measured with different fluorogenic peptides and indicated as fold change relative to the corresponding activities of 20S particle alone. Data are the average of 3 independent experiments ± SEM. Below the graph the values (± SEM) of specific activity for the hydrolysis of each fluorogenic substrate by PA28αβ-20S are reported. See also Supplemental Experimental Procedures. **(B)** The grand average of hydropathy (GRAVY) values for peptides preferentially released from IGF-1 and casein by 20S and PA28αβ-20S immunoproteasomes were calculated as described in Table S3.

Table 1. Mean Sizes of Peptides Generated by 20S, 20S-PA28αβ and 26S immunoproteasomes from IGF-1 and casein

| | Substrate | Mean | Median |
|---|---|---|---|
| 20S | IGF-1 | 7.3 ± 0.10 | 5.9 ± 0.07 |
| | Casein | 9.4 ± 0.14 | 7.3 ± 0.27 |
| 20S-PA28αβ | IGF-1 | 4.9 ± 0.07 | 4.6 ± 0.04 |
| | Casein | 4.8 ± 0.05 | 3.9 ± 0.07 |
| 26S | IGF-1 | 6.0 ± 0.05 | 5.3 ± 0.06 |
| | Casein | 7.3 ± 0.04 | 5.7 ± 0.10 |

Mean sizes and median were calculated from the distributions of products obtained by size exclusion chromatography, assuming an average molecular weight of 110 Da for each residue and the values are averages from five experiments ± SEM.

Table 2. Size classes of peptides generated from IGF-1 and casein by different forms of immunoproteasomes.

| | | *Fractions of peptides (%)* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Substrate | <8 a.a. | 8-10 a.a. | >10 a.a. |
| 20S | IGF-1 | 67 | 9 | 24 |
| | Casein | 54 | 8 | 38 |
| 20S-PA28αβ | IGF-1 | 89 | 6 | 5 |
| | Casein | 86 | 6 | 8 |
| 26S | IGF-1 | 78 | 9 | 13 |
| | Casein | 66 | 10 | 24 |

Peptide lengths were calculated from the distributions of products obtained by size exclusion chromatography and grouped in three size classes: longer (>10 a.a.), shorter (<8 a.a.) and of the correct size (8-10 a.a.) to fit into the groove of MHC class-I molecules.

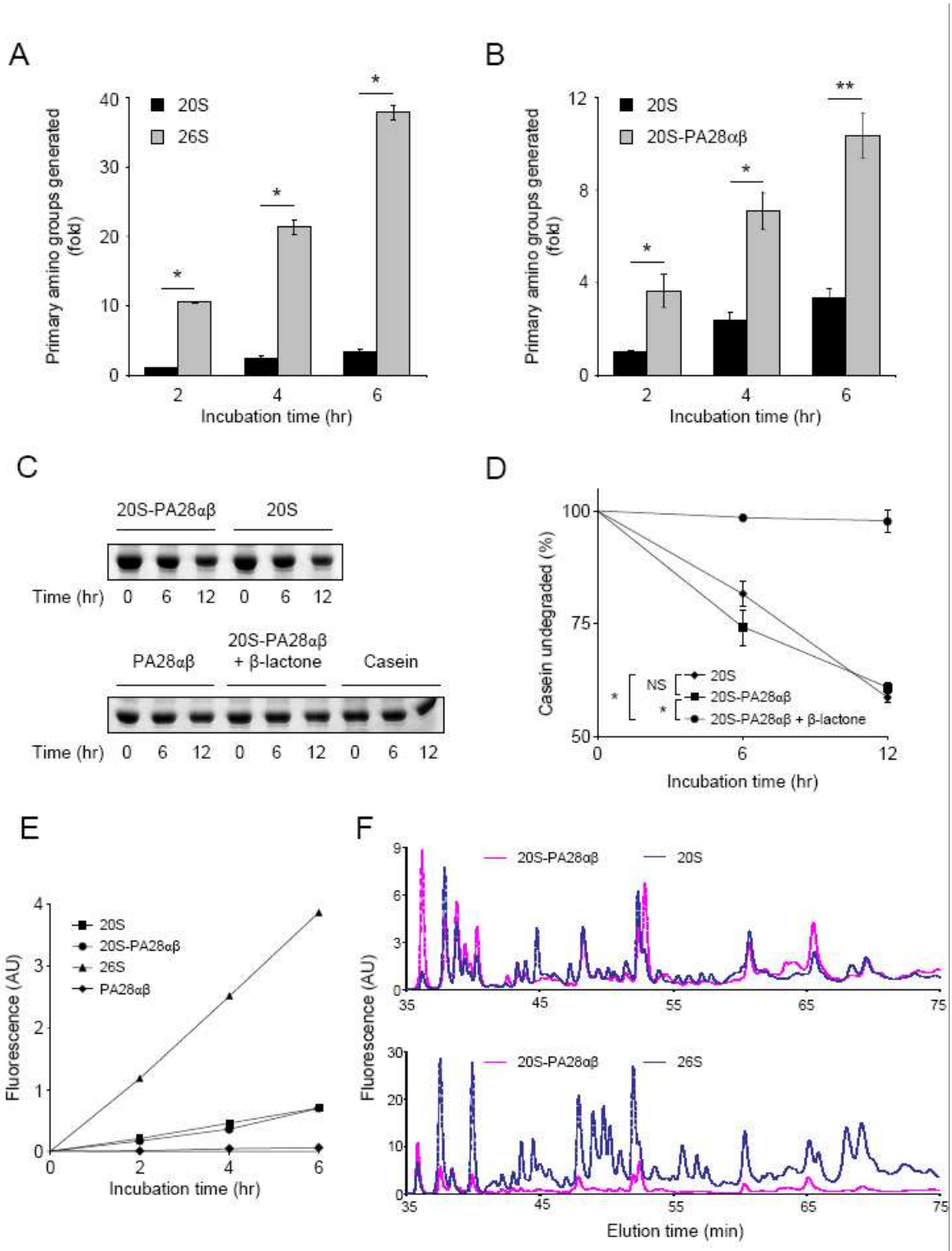

A
Primary amino groups generated (fold)
20S
26S
Incubation time (hr)
B
Primary amino groups generated (fold)
20S
20S-PA28αβ
Incubation time (hr)
C
20S-PA28αβ
20S
Time (hr) 0 6 12 0 6 12
PA28αβ
20S-PA28αβ + β-lactone
Casein
Time (hr) 0 6 12 0 6 12 0 6 12
D
Casein undegraded (%)
NS
20S
20S-PA28αβ
20S-PA28αβ + β-lactone
Incubation time (hr)
E
Fluorescence (AU)
20S
20S-PA28αβ
26S
PA28αβ
Incubation time (hr)
F
Fluorescence (AU)
20S-PA28αβ
20S
20S-PA28αβ
26S
Elution time (min)

Figure 1

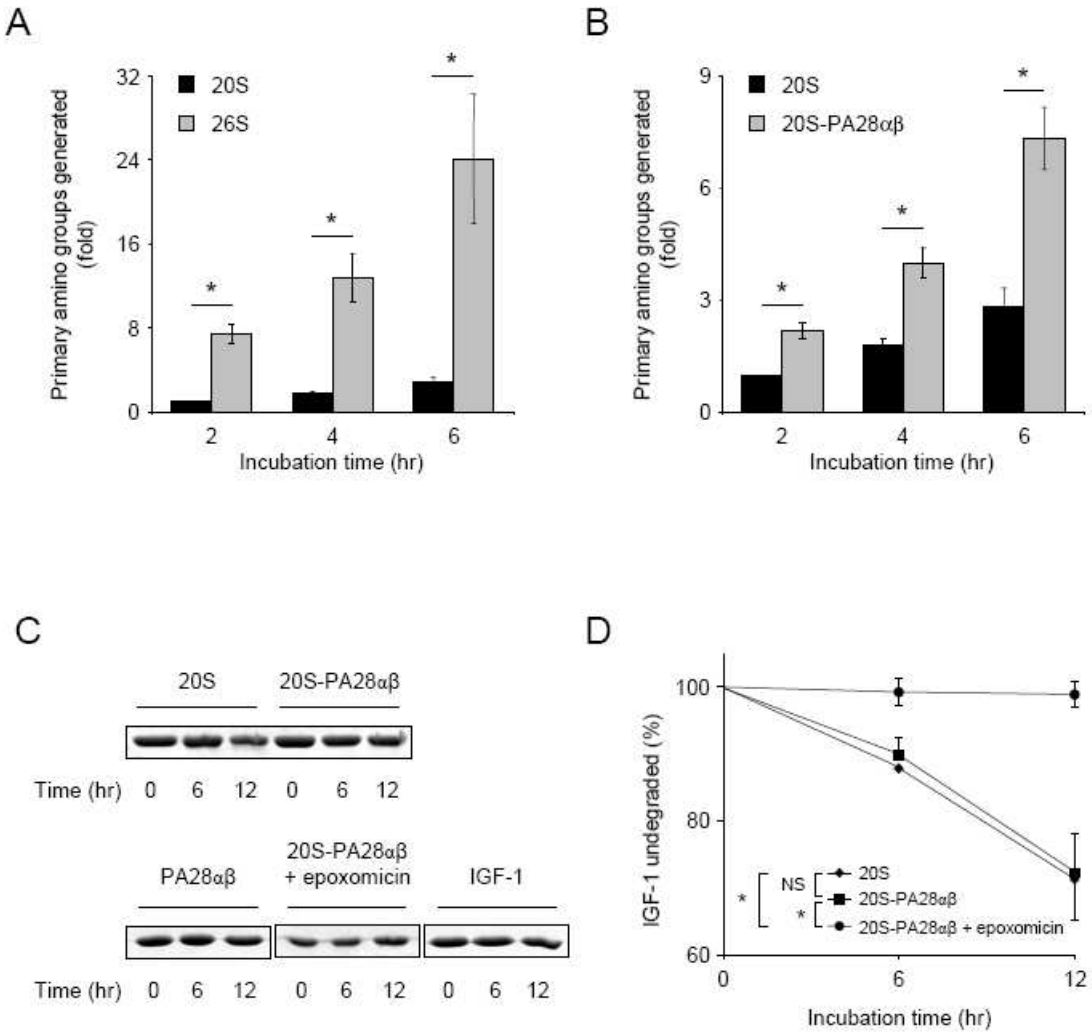

A
B
C
D
20S
26S
20S-PA28αβ
Primary amino groups generated (fold)
Incubation time (hr)
Time (hr)
PA28αβ
20S-PA28αβ + epoxomicin
IGF-1
IGF-1 undegraded (%)
NS
*

Figure 2

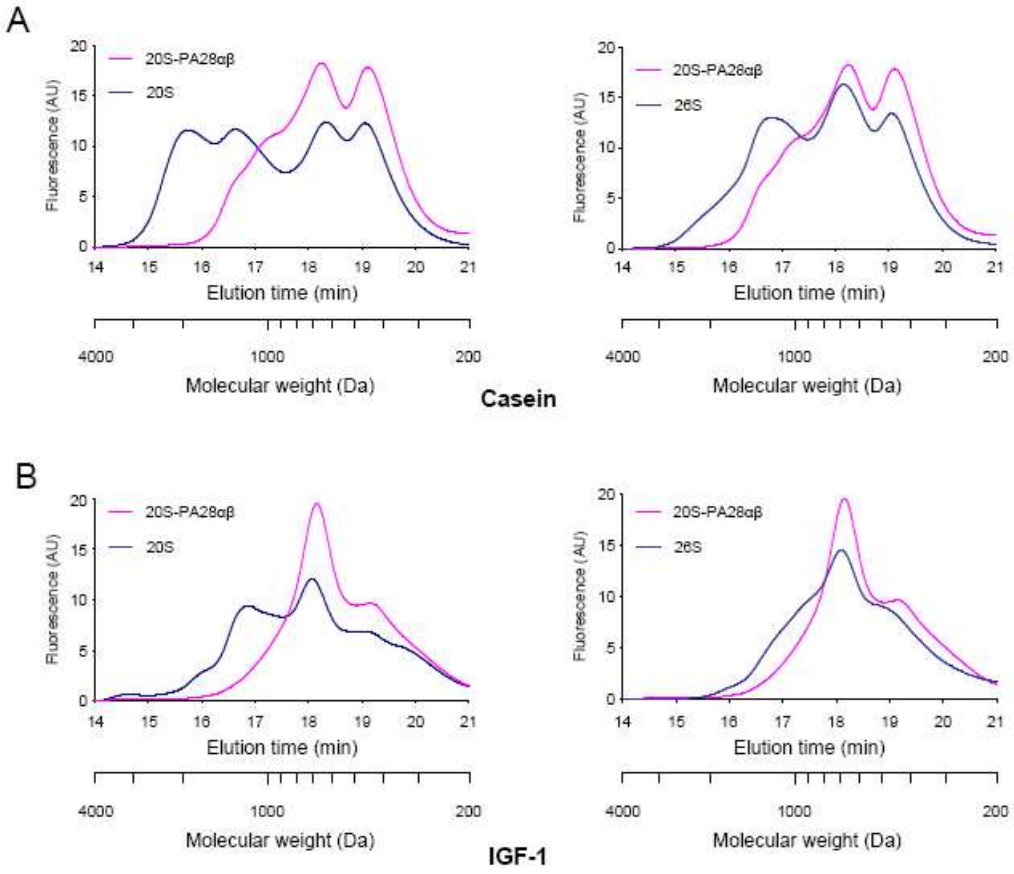

A
20S-PA28αβ
20S
26S
Fluorescence (AU)
Elution time (min)
Molecular weight (Da)
Casein
B
IGF-1
C
Size of MHC class I-ligands
Cumulative frequency (%)
Molecular weight (Da)

Figure 3

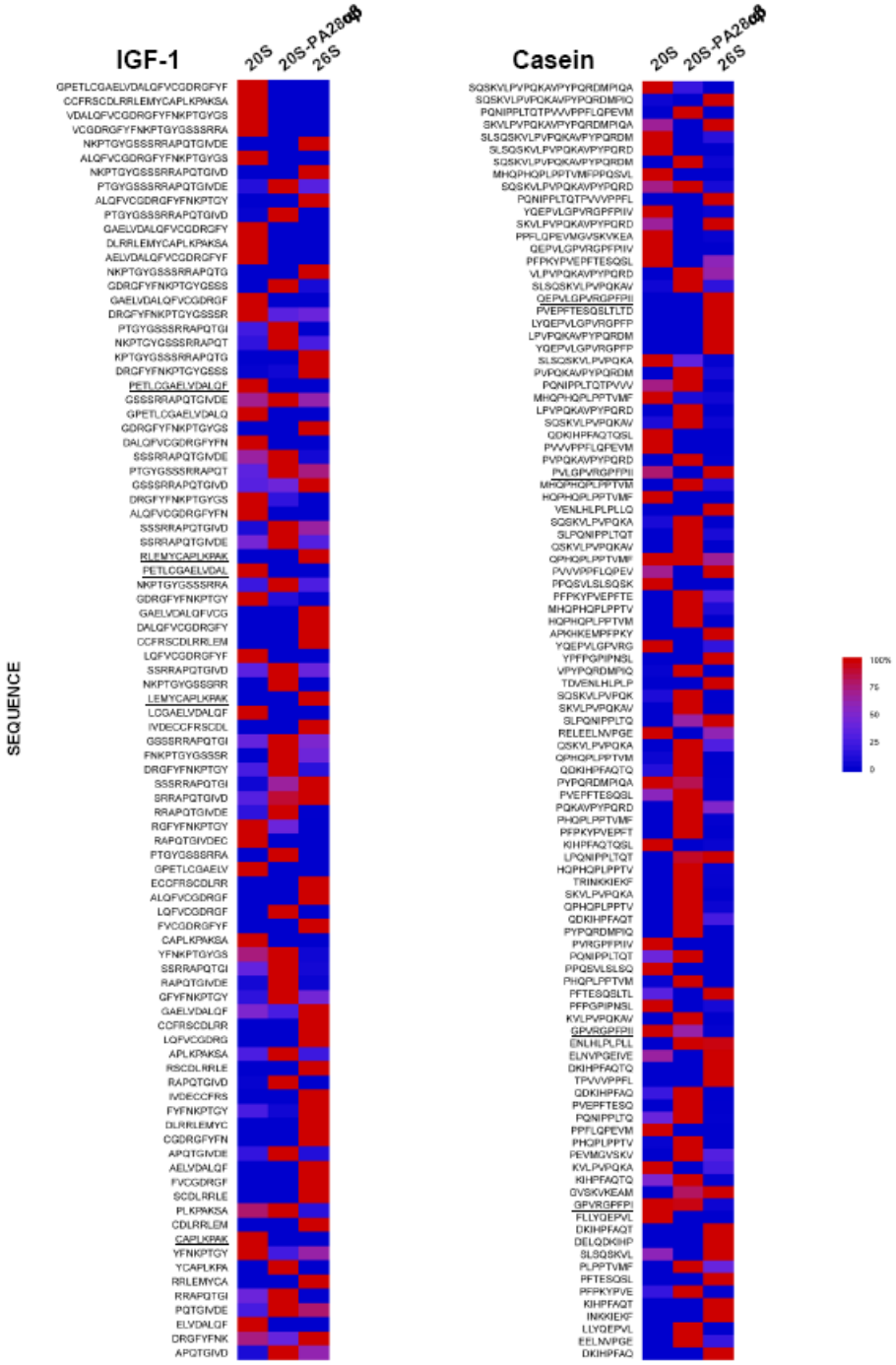
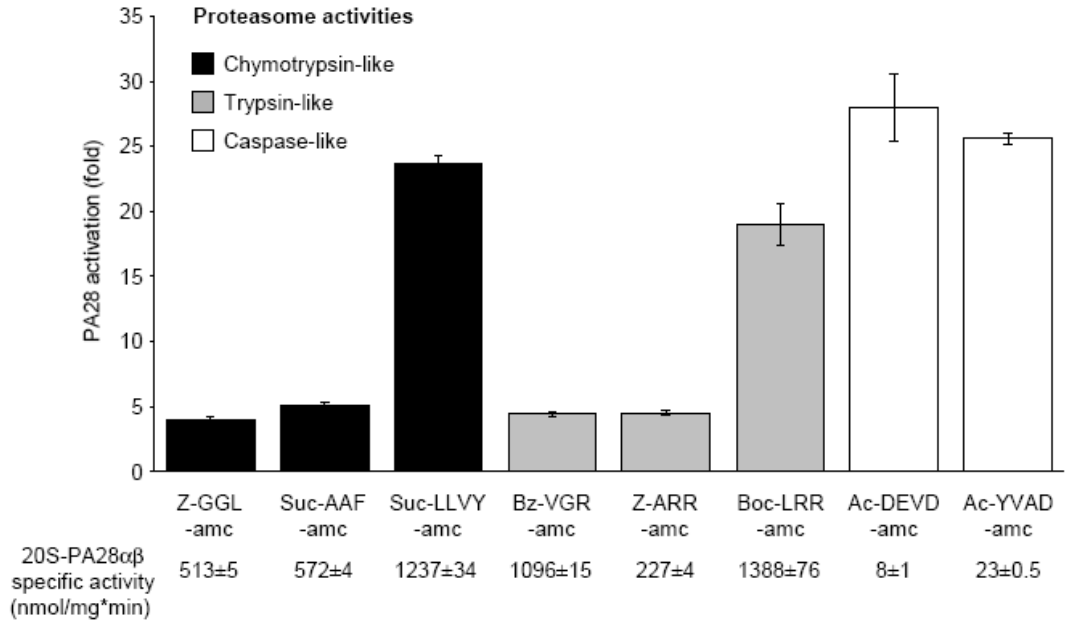

IGF-1
20S
20S-PA28αβ
26S
Casein
20S
20S-PA28αβ
26S
SEQUENCE
100%
75
50
25
0

Figure 4

A


Proteasome activities
Chymotrypsin-like
Trypsin-like
Caspase-like
PA28 activation (fold)
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Z-GGL -amc
Suc-AAF -amc
Suc-LLVY -amc
Bz-VGR -amc
Z-ARR -amc
Boc-LRR -amc
Ac-DEVD -amc
Ac-YVAD -amc
20S-PA28αβ specific activity (nmol/mg*min)
513±5
572±4
1237±34
1096±15
227±4
1388±76
8±1
23±0.5

B

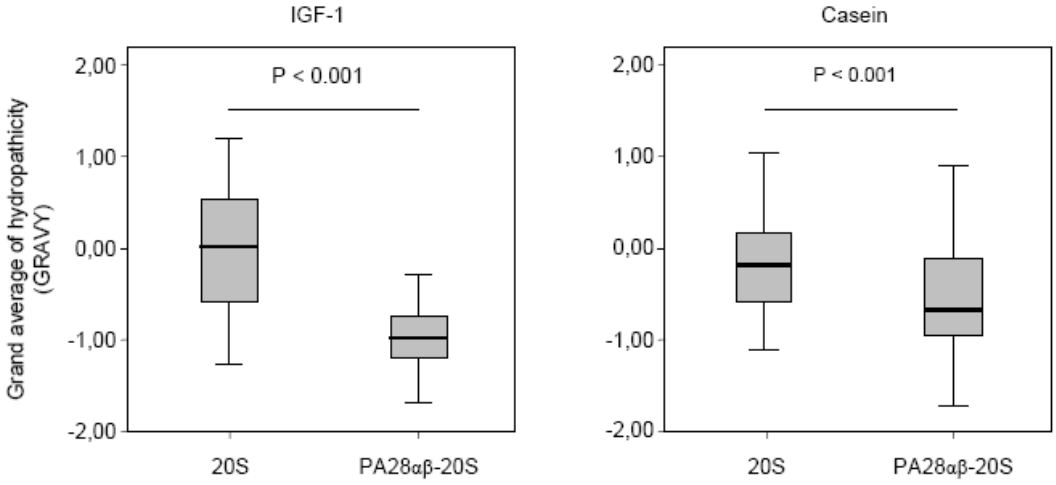

IGF-1
Casein
P < 0.001
P < 0.001
Grand average of hydropathicity (GRAVY)
2,00
1,00
0,00
-1,00
-2,00
20S
PA28αβ-20S

Figure 5