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Amplification of JNK Signaling Is Necessary To Complete the Murine Gammaherpesvirus 68 Lytic Replication Cycle

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Several studies have previously defined host-derived signaling events capable of driving lytic gammaherpesvirus replication or enhancing immediate-early viral gene expression. Yet signaling pathways that regulate later stages of the productive gammaherpesvirus replication cycle are still poorly defined. In this study, we utilized a mass spectrometric approach to identify c-Jun as an abundant cellular phosphoprotein present in late stages of lytic murine gammaherpesvirus 68 (MHV68) infection. Kinetically, c-Jun phosphorylation was enhanced as infection progressed, and this correlated with enhanced phosphorylation of the c-Jun amino-terminal kinases JNK1 and JNK2 and activation of AP-1 transcription. These events were dependent on progression beyond viral immediate-early gene expression, but not dependent on viral DNA replication. Both pharmacologic and dominant-negative blockade of JNK1/2 activity inhibited viral replication, and this correlated with inhibition of viral DNA synthesis and reduced viral gene expression. These data suggest a model in which MHV68 by necessity amplifies and usurps JNK/c-Jun signaling as infection progresses in order to facilitate late stages of the MHV68 lytic infection cycle.

Gammaherpesviruses (GHVs) are DNA tumor viruses defined by their genetic similarity and the capacity to establish lifelong latent infection in lymphocytes, primarily B cells. The GHV subfamily of herpesviruses includes Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), Kaposi sarcoma-associated herpesvirus (KSHV), herpesvirus Saimiri (HVS), rhesus rhadinovirus (RRV), murine gammaherpesvirus 68 (MHV68 [also referred to as yHV68]), and two recently isolated rodent viruses, wood mouse herpesvirus and herpesvirus Peru (22, 29). Infections by the human pathogens EBV and KSHV are etiologically associated with numerous diseases, including a staggering list of cancers and tumors (10, 31).

Like all herpesviruses, GHVs exhibit two distinct phases of the infectious cycle. The lytic, or productive, replication cycle is characterized by temporally regulated viral gene expression that culminates in viral DNA replication and packaging into infectious virions. In contrast, during the latent phase of the infectious cycle, often referred to as latency, viral gene expression is exquisitely restricted, and the viral genome is maintained as a circular episome that replicates concurrent to cellular DNA replication. Latent GHVs can reactivate the lytic cycle in a process known as reactivation in response to mitogenic signals, host cell stress, or terminal differentiation of B cells to plasma cells (15, 26, 28, 40, 46, 57).

In vivo studies utilizing MHV68, a natural rodent pathogen genetically and pathogenetically related to EBV and KSHV, have indicated that lytic viral replication is necessary for dissemination from epithelial surfaces to distal latency reservoirs (33). Furthermore, ongoing productive viral replication is necessary for KSHV persistence in cultured endothelial cells (18), which correlates with clinical data that suggest that ongoing lytic replication, or at least failure of the immune system to control KSHV lytic gene expression, contributes to the pathogenesis of AIDS-associated Kaposi sarcoma (12, 31). While roles for many viral proteins in productive GHV replication have been established (13, 40, 44), much less is known about the cellular signaling events that facilitate the lytic infection process, especially those signals that are actively triggered by GHVs and then usurped for replication. This knowledge gap is in part due to the lack of robust lytic replication systems available for studying EBV and KSHV replication in culture. MHV68, on the other hand, replicates to high titers upon de novo infection of numerous cell types in culture and thus provides an important experimental system for defining biochemical pathways necessary for efficient GHV replication.

In this report, we describe experiments that identify the JNK/c-Jun signaling pathway as a critical host pathway regulating MHV68 lytic replication. JNK was activated and c-Jun phosphorylated at time points coinciding with the early-to-late transition in viral gene expression. In agreement, robust JNK and c-Jun phosphorylation and activation of an AP-1 reporter construct did not occur following infection with UV-inactivated or replication-deficient MHV68, and robust phosphorylation and activation by wild-type (WT) MHV68 did not require viral DNA synthesis. Viral gene expression and replication also were inhibited by dominant-negative JNK1 (DN-JNK1) and DN-JNK2 expression and by treatment with the pharmacologic JNK inhibitor SP600125. However, JNK inhibition did not globally repress viral gene expression as has been previously suggested in reactivation-based analyses (55), but rather blocked viral DNA replication and complete expression of viral lytic antigens. Further, while early viral gene expression was not suppressed following JNK inhibition, viral replication remained sensitive to JNK inhibition for several hours after infection of target cells. Our data support a model in which...
JNK signaling, possibly through c-Jun activation, regulates late events in the lytic replication cycle that are necessary for the production of progeny virus.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cell culture and viruses. NIH 3T12, NIH 3T3-SA (referred to as 3T3 fibroblasts throughout), and 293T cells were purchased from ATCC. C57BL/6 mouse embryonic fibroblasts (MEFs) were prepared from day 13.5 embryos as described previously (33). All cells were cultured in Dulbecco’s modified Eagle medium (DMEM) supplemented with 10% fetal calf serum (FCS), 100 units/ml penicillin, 100 µg/ml streptomycin, and 2 mM L-glutamine (cMEM). Serum starvation involved culturing of cells in medium containing 1% FCS for 18 to 24 h prior to infection or treatment. Cells were cultured at 37°C in an atmosphere containing 5% CO2 and medium containing 1% FCS for 18 to 24 h prior to infection or treatment.

1. Stahl et al.

Calf serum (FCS), 100 units/ml penicillin, 100

2. Becco’s modified Eagle medium (DMEM) supplemented with 10% fetal serum (FCS), 100 units/ml penicillin, 100

3. mM L-glutamine (cMEM). Serum starvation involved culturing of cells in medium containing 1% FCS for 18 to 24 h prior to infection or treatment. Cells were cultured at 37°C in an atmosphere containing 5% CO2 and medium containing 1% FCS for 18 to 24 h prior to infection or treatment.

4. Culture and viruses.

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A JNK/c-Jun signaling axis is induced during MHV68 lytic replication.

To better understand the signaling events that regulate lytic GHV replication, we performed phosphoproteomic analyses comparing mock-infected to MHV68-infected NIH 3T3 fibroblasts. From two independent experiments, each analyzed in triplicate, we detected c-Jun peptides phosphorylated on S63 and S73 in analytes from infected cells but not mock-infected cells (Fig. 1A). These events, depicted in the c-Jun sequence in Fig. 1C, represent known activating posttranslational modifications of the c-Jun proto-oncogene (51). Immunoblot analyses comparing mock-infected to MHV68-infected cells confirmed infection-associated c-Jun phosphorylation on S63 and S73 (Fig. 1B).

c-Jun is a classic target of the c-Jun amino-terminal kinases JNK1 and JNK2. The finding that c-Jun was phosphorylated upon MHV68 infection suggested that JNK1 and/or JNK2 would also be activated during MHV68 infection. Induction of JNK1 and JNK2 kinase activity is triggered by phosphorylation of conserved Tyr and Thr residues within the activation loop by the dual specificity mitogen-activated protein kinase kinases (MAPKKs) MKK4 and MKK7 (41). Thus, we hypothesized that JNK1/2 phosphorylation also would occur during lytic MHV68 infection. Indeed, immunoblot analyses revealed increased JNK1/2 phosphorylation following MHV68 infection compared to results with mock-infected cells (Fig. 2A). Further, we also detected enhanced JNK1/2 kinase activity against a c-Jun substrate in MHV68-infected fibroblasts compared to mock-infected cells, and JNK/c-Jun phosphorylation also occurred following infection of primary murine embryonic fibroblasts, murine endothelial cells, and 3T3 fibroblasts regardless of serum concentration (data not shown). Interestingly, while phosphorylated JNK was detectable immediately after viral adsorption (see the 1-h time point), this analysis suggested more robust JNK phosphorylation (and also c-Jun phosphorylation, particularly on S73) as infection progressed. While comparisons of diverse antigens by immunoblot analyses cannot be directly quantitated due to the potential influences of antibody affinities and Thr residues within the activation loop by the dual specificity mitogen-activated protein kinase kinases (MAPKKs) MKK4 and MKK7 (41). Thus, we hypothesized that JNK1/2 phosphorylation also would occur during lytic MHV68 infection. Indeed, immunoblot analyses revealed increased JNK1/2 phosphorylation following MHV68 infection compared to results with mock-infected cells (Fig. 2A). Further, we also detected enhanced JNK1/2 kinase activity against a c-Jun substrate in MHV68-infected fibroblasts compared to mock-infected cells, and JNK/c-Jun phosphorylation also occurred following infection of primary murine embryonic fibroblasts, murine endothelial cells, and 3T3 fibroblasts regardless of serum concentration (data not shown). Interestingly, while phosphorylated JNK was detectable immediately after viral adsorption (see the 1-h time point), this analysis suggested more robust JNK phosphorylation (and also c-Jun phosphorylation, particularly on S73) as infection progressed. While comparisons of diverse antigens by immunoblot analyses cannot be directly quantitated due to the potential influences of antibody affinities
and other variables, it is interesting that robust JNK and c-Jun phosphorylation became apparent at time points coinciding to robust expression of the viral DNA polymerase processivity factor ORF59 and viral lytic antigens detected with MHV68 antiserum. These data demonstrated JNK1/2 activation as a consequence of lytic MHV68 infection and suggested that activation of JNK/c-Jun signaling is triggered through the expression of particular viral genes.

Robust JNK/c-Jun phosphorylation and AP-1 transcriptional activation require viral gene expression, but not DNA replication. To gain better insight into the kinetics of JNK1/2 and c-Jun phosphorylation induced by MHV68 infection, especially as it relates to phase of the viral infectious cycle, we infected fibroblasts with UV-inactivated (UVI) virus, replication-defective ORF50-null (50.Stop) virus (39), and WT MHV68 in the presence or absence of phosphono-acetic acid (PAA), which blocks viral DNA replication. Again, we detected robust c-Jun and JNK1/2 phosphorylation in immunoblot analyses performed 18 h after infection with WT MHV68 (Fig. 3A). Comparatively, neither UVI nor ORF50-null MHV68 elicited robust phosphorylation of c-Jun or JNK, although a slight increase in c-Jun S73 and JNK phosphorylation was observed relative to mock-infected lysates in replicate experiments. Importantly, MHV68 antigens were not detectable following infection by either UVI or ORF50-null MHV68, which confirmed their replication incompentence and blockade to viral gene expression. Thus, these data suggest that replication-incompentence MHV68 particles in and of themselves elicit a modicum of JNK/c-Jun phosphorylation. Such activity may account for the early JNK1/2 and c-Jun phosphorylation observed in time course analyses (Fig. 1 and 2). Further, since ORF50-null MHV68 is incapable of progressing beyond immediate-early (IE) gene expression, these findings suggest that events coinciding with either RTA expression, early viral gene expression, or both are necessary for robust JNK/c-Jun-related signaling events during lytic MHV68 infection.

FIG 2 JNK phosphorylation is induced during MHV68 infection. Serum-starved 3T3 fibroblasts were mock infected (+) or infected (−) with MHV68 at an MOI of 5 PFU/cell. Cells were harvested at the indicated times postinfection, and proteins were resolved by SDS-PAGE. Resolved proteins were detected by immunoblot analyses using antibodies that recognize the indicated proteins.

FIG 3 JNK/c-Jun phosphorylation and AP-1 reporter activity are amplified as infection progresses. (A) Serum-starved 3T3 fibroblasts were either mock infected or infected at an MOI of 5 PFU/cell with WT MHV68, UVI MHV68, ORF50-null MHV68 (50.STOP), mock infected, or infected with WT MHV68 in the presence of PAA (200 μg/ml). Cells were harvested 18 h postinfection, and proteins were resolved by SDS-PAGE. Resolved proteins were detected by immunoblot analyses using antibodies that recognize the indicated proteins. (B) 3T3 fibroblasts were transiently transfected with an AP-1 reporter plasmid to evaluate JNK/c-Jun transcriptional activity. At 24 h posttransfection, cells were replated and infected as described for panel A. Cells were harvested 18 h postinfection, and luciferase activity was quantified. Results are means of triplicate samples. Error bars represent standard deviations.
SP600125 inhibition of JNK activity in cultured cells (3). It should be noted that 50 μM SP600125 did exhibit toxicity to the mono- 
layer, while lower concentrations did not. The calculated IC50 for SP600125 ranging from 0.5 to 2.5 μM concentrations for the capacity to inhibit MHV68 rep-
lication at 24 and 48 h postinfection. While concentrations of SP600125 for the capacity to inhibit MHV68 rep-
lication at 24 and 48 h postinfection. While concentrations of SP600125 concentrations greater than 5 μM potently 
held MHV68 replication, with no increase in viral titers over time occurring at 20 and 50 μM concentrations (Fig. 4A). These doses were in good agreement with previous data demonstrating 
SP600125 inhibition of JNK activity in cultured cells (3). It should be noted that 50 μM SP600125 did exhibit toxicity to the mono-
layer, while lower concentrations did not. The calculated IC50 for SP600125 against MHV68 48 h after infection was 2.24 μM (95% confidence interval, 0.96 to 5.20 μM) (Fig. 4B). These data demon-
strate that JNK can be pharmacologically targeted to inhibit MHV68 replication in culture.

As a further and complementary test of the hypothesis that JNK activation is required for MHV68 replication, we evaluated the capacity of dominant-negative JNK1 (DN-JNK1) and DN-
JNK2 expression to inhibit MHV68 replication. For this experiment, 293T cells were transfected with MHV68 BAC in combina-
tion with empty vector, DN-JNK1, DN-JNK2, or both DN-JNK1 and DN-JNK2. Cells were harvested at 48, 72, and 96 h posttrans-
fection, and immunoblot analyses were performed using polyclonal MHV68 antiserum to evaluate the expression of MHV68 lytic antigens over time. While MHV68 antiserum readily detected viral antigens in cells cotransfected with MHV68 BAC and empty vector, expression of either DN-JNK1 or DN-JNK2 resulted in reduced detection of MHV68 proteins. The reduction in MHV68 proteins detected was even more dramatic in cells transfected with both DN-JNK1 and DN-JNK2 (Fig. 5). Although reproducible, it was not immediately clear why DN-JNK2 expression was reduced when coexpressed with DN-JNK1. In agreement with the ob-
served reduction in viral antigen detectability, MHV68 titers in the supernatants of cells transfected with DN-JNK constructs were markedly reduced at each time point, especially when both DN-
JNK1 and DN-JNK2 were coexpressed, compared to empty vector transfections (Table 1). Importantly, neither of the DN-JNK con-
 structs negatively impacted transfection of the MHV68 BAC, as evidenced by detection of green fluorescent protein (GFP) ex-
pressed from the MHV68 BAC 24 h after transfection (data not shown). These findings provided an important specificity control 
for inhibition of viral replication by SP600125 and further dem-
onstrated the importance of JNK signaling to MHV68 replication. Moreover, since the effects of expressing DN-JNK1 and DN-JNK2 were additive, these findings suggest that both JNK1 and JNK2 may be utilized by MHV68 to facilitate lytic replication.

JNK signaling regulates late steps in the MHV68 lytic cycle. Data presented thus far suggest that JNK signaling is amplified and required for MHV68 replication. To begin to understand what roles JNK activity might play in MHV68 productive infection, we performed immunoblot analyses to determine what effect SP600125 treatment exerts on MHV68 gene expression (Fig. 6A). When cells were pretreated with vehicle, MHV68 infection once again elicited robust c-Jun and JNK phosphorylation in compar-
It was necessary for viral DNA replication suggest that amplification of JNK signaling occurs to regulate late steps in the viral replication cycle. To better define when in the viral replication cycle JNK signaling is critical for viral replication, we performed kinetic analyses in which infected cells were treated with vehicle or SP600125 at specific times after viral adsorption. In immunoblot analyses of samples harvested 8 h postinfection, both pretreatment and treatment with SP600125 4 h postinfection effectively reduced virus-induced c-Jun phosphorylation compared to vehicle controls. However, neither treatment appeared to inhibit expression of the early gene ORF59 or of any viral proteins detected by MHV68 antiserum (note that some were reduced) (Fig. 7A). These data indicate that JNK activity, likely through c-Jun, is not a critical requirement for immediate-early and early viral gene expression. In contrast, pretreatment and addition of SP600125 at 4 or 8 h postinfection effectively reduced c-Jun phosphorylation and reduced the relative expression levels of ORF59 and viral antigens detected with MHV68 antiserum in immunoblot analyses of samples harvested 18 h postinfection (Fig. 7B). These data demonstrated that infected cells remain sensitive to JNK inhibition up to several hours after initial infection and that JNK inhibition reduces the accumulation of viral antigens within infected cells. In related experiments testing the effects of delayed JNK inhibition on viral replication, SP600125 substantially suppressed viral replication when added at 4 and 8 h postinfection (Fig. 7C). Sensitivity to SP600125 treatment was progressively lost when added at later times postinfection. Collectively, these data are consistent with observations from immunoblot analyses demonstrating that potent JNK and c-Jun phosphorylation occurs between 8 and 12 h postinfection. These data strongly suggest that JNK controls steps in the viral replication cycle downstream of immediate-early and early viral gene expression that are necessary for viral DNA replication.

**DISCUSSION**

In this report, we validated the mass spectrometric identification of c-Jun as a cellular phosphoprotein induced during productive MHV68 infection. We extended these findings to demonstrate infection-associated activation of JNK1/2 signaling pathways, leading to c-Jun phosphorylation, and we further demonstrated that JNK1 and JNK2 are necessary for efficient MHV68 replication. By utilizing UV-inactivated virus, replication-deficient virus, and inhibitors of viral DNA replication, we found that JNK/c-Jun activation likely occurs in conjunction with early viral gene expression. These findings were supported by kinetic experiments in which pharmacologic inhibition of JNK activity most efficiently blocks viral replication when added prior to time points coinciding with robust late gene synthesis (6, 32). Finally, we demonstrated that pharmacologic JNK inhibition does not simply globally block viral gene expression but apparently suppresses late viral gene expression.

**TABLE 1** MHV68 titers from cells expressing DN-JNK1 and DN-JNK2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transfectant</th>
<th>MHV68 titer (PFU/ml) at:</th>
<th>48 h</th>
<th>72 h</th>
<th>96 h</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empty vector</td>
<td>1.8 \times 10^6</td>
<td>6.0 \times 10^6</td>
<td>1.1 \times 10^7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DN-JNK1</td>
<td>1.5 \times 10^6</td>
<td>4.9 \times 10^6</td>
<td>1.5 \times 10^6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DN-JNK2</td>
<td>1.2 \times 10^7</td>
<td>7.7 \times 10^6</td>
<td>4.8 \times 10^6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DN-JNK1 and DN-JNK2</td>
<td>4.6 \times 10^6</td>
<td>4.7 \times 10^5</td>
<td>1.9 \times 10^5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MHV68 gene expression, which correlated with altered localization of detectable viral antigens within infected cells and blockade of viral genome replication. These findings suggest a model in which JNK1/2 and possibly c-Jun activity are functionally amplified as productive viral replication proceeds, in order to facilitate DNA replication and/or viral gene expression toward completing the lytic replication cycle (Fig. 8).

Our data demonstrate that JNK/c-Jun activation occurs early after infection, presumably as a consequence of viral attachment or entry, and increases as the infection process progresses (Fig. 1, 2, and 3). The modest activation coincident with viral engagement of the host cell is consistent with data published for KSHV. These previous studies suggested that MAPK activation (p38, extracellular signal-regulated kinase, and JNK) in general facilitates or
enhances immediate-early viral gene expression (37, 43, 56). Furthermore, MAPK activation in general also regulates KSHV replication following induction with chemical stimuli (17, 55). These reports also suggested that MAPKs facilitate activation of the promoter for ORF50, which encodes the RTA protein (37, 43). As RTA expression is an absolute requirement for rhadinovirus replication (11, 39, 45), and presumably the expression of all non-IE lytic genes, it stands to reason that inhibition of factors involved in driving ORF50 transcription would block GHV reactivation. Thus, we were surprised that pretreatment with SP600125 did not globally block viral gene expression, as evidenced by the detection of MHV68 lytic antigens using MHV68 antisera in immunoblotting and immunofluorescence analyses (Fig. 6). In fact, infected cells were sensitive to JNK inhibition several hours post-infection, by which time ORF50 transcription and subsequent early gene expression are well under way (6, 24), and remained modestly sensitive to SP600125 treatment up to 12 h postinfection (Fig. 7). Our findings suggest that JNK/c-Jun pathways are not absolute requirements for GHV IE gene expression upon de novo infection but are essential to a later stage in the replication process.

Although the mechanism by which the JNK/c-Jun signaling axis is amplified as infection progresses is not immediately clear, our data support two likely hypotheses. First, it is conceivable that JNK activation and amplification are simply passive processes due to infection-associated stress on host cells. JNK and NK2 are also known as stress-associated protein kinases (SAPKs), and JNK activation is induced by numerous external and internal cellular stressors, including cytokine signaling, UV exposure, ionizing radiation, ribosome inhibition, and nutrient deprivation, to name a few (41). As a host cell response to infection by diverse pathogens, JNK activation is associated with infection-induced apoptosis (2, 8, 30) and contributes to host innate immune responses (7, 35, 42, 49). In the case of MHV68, our data imply that amplification of the JNK signal occurs concurrently with progression through the lytic gene expression cascade but prior to viral DNA replication and presumably late gene expression. The signal would then be usurped, perhaps acting as a switch that controls completion of the replication process. Second, JNK may be actively triggered (or amplified) by specific viral gene products to facilitate distinct aspects of MHV68 replication. For KSHV, both ORF36 and ORF49 are capable of stimulating JNK activation in overexpression systems (17, 20). Likewise, the EBV Na protein, the lymphocryptovirus homolog of rhadinovirus ORF49, also is linked to JNK phosphorylation (19). The expression kinetics of both ORF36 and ORF49 (6, 24), which also are MHV68 tegument proteins (4, 36), would fit with the kinetics of JNK/c-Jun phosphorylation and AP-1 reporter activity we observed. However, an ORF36 transposon mutant (44) elicited JNK/c-Jun phosphorylation comparable to WT MHV68 in our hands (J. A. Stahl and J. C. Forrest, unpublished observation). Moreover, ORF36 is not required for MHV68 replication, whereas JNK activity is. A similar analysis for ORF49 is complicated by a severe replication defect (36, 44). It would be of interest to determine if exogenous stimulation of JNK/c-Jun activity could serve as a host-cell complement to ORF49 deficiency. Suffice it to say, additional tests are necessary to define the mechanism of JNK/c-Jun induction during de novo infection by MHV68.

Whether specific cellular signaling cascades are necessary for JNK/c-Jun amplification to facilitate completion of MHV68 replication also is not clear. A recent study from the Sun laboratory found that several MAPK family members, including MAP2K3, MAP3K2, MAP3K5, MAP3K8/Tpl2/COT, and MAP3K11, were capable of enhancing MHV68 replication when overexpressed in 293T cells (27). In the context of our data, these upstream MAPKKs and MAPKKKs may serve as activators of JNK concurrent to viral entry or may function in our proposed signal amplification event that facilitates late steps in the infectious cycle. Importantly, those authors demonstrated that Tp2 enhanced activation of promoters for ORF50/RTA and ORF57, as well as promoting increased c-Fos expression immediately following MHV68 infection (27). These findings suggest that Tp2 may influence immediate-early gene expression. Further, those authors demonstrated that overexpression of dominant-negative c-Jun also inhibited ORF50 promoter activity and MHV68 replication in general (27). The promoter inhibition data seem consistent with the modest entry-associated JNK/c-Jun phosphorylation and AP-1 reporter activity described here (Fig. 3). Thus, the current data indicate that Tp2 regulates immediate-early AP-1 activity during infection, but whether Tp2 is responsible for amplification of JNK signaling as infection progresses is not yet clear.

Interestingly, varicella-zoster virus (VZV) also requires JNK activity for productive infection (58). And, for VZV, MKK4 and MKK7, which are dual-specificity upstream MAPKs that are potentially capable of activating JNK1/2 (41), are activated during productive replication. Again, MKK4/7 activation also was demonstrated for KSHV ORF36 (20), and we cannot completely rule out a similar function for the MHV68 ORF36 homolog. It will be of interest to determine if Tp2 or other MAPKKs that enhance MHV68 replication (27) function to activate MKK4 or MKK7, leading to JNK/c-Jun amplification as MHV68 infection progresses.

The mechanism by which JNK activity regulates MHV68 DNA synthesis and possibly late gene expression remains to be determined. Since treatment with SP600125 also reduced virus-related c-Jun phosphorylation, a role for JNK-mediating c-Jun activation currently seems the most likely interpretation. Searching for the AP-1 consensus binding site, TGA(G/C)TCA, within the MHV68 genome revealed 31 potential AP-1 binding elements (Table 2). Of these, 11 are situated less than 500 nucleotides upstream of an annotated open reading frame (50), which suggests a capacity to function in transcriptional activation of the adjacent viral gene. This includes elements within previously defined AP-1-responsive promoters for ORF50 and ORF57 (27) which, remarkably, are conserved in KSHV (27, 43, 52). It seems reasonable to suggest that entry-associated JNK/c-Jun activity facilitates transactivation of the ORF50 promoter, thus potentiating entry into the lytic replication cycle. Indeed, expression of dominant-negative c-Jun inhibited Tp2-related ORF50 promoter activity (27). However, mutagenesis of the ORF50 promoter AP-1 response elements within the MHV68 genome did not yield a replication-defective virus, although replication was attenuated (27). Thus, while our studies demonstrated that JNK signaling is necessary for com-
TABLE 2 Presence of AP-1 consensus sites within the MHV68 genome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genomic position (bp)</th>
<th>Gene name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7470</td>
<td>IG M3-M4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11080</td>
<td>IG ORF4-6 (ORF6 pro?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19067</td>
<td>IG ORF8-9 (ORF9 pro?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19726</td>
<td>ORF9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2971</td>
<td>ORF17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32397</td>
<td>ORF20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37831</td>
<td>ORF23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38410</td>
<td>ORF24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42009</td>
<td>ORF25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42920</td>
<td>ORF25</td>
</tr>
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<td>ORF26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46967</td>
<td>ORF29a</td>
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<td>51067</td>
<td>ORF29a</td>
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<td>52659</td>
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<td>53890</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>66569</td>
<td>ORF50 pro-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71610</td>
<td>ORF53 (ORF52 pro?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72976</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>ORF57 pro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>83200</td>
<td>ORF62 (ORF61 pro?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83298</td>
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<td>ORF68 (ORF67 pro?)</td>
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<td>M11 (ORF72 pro?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>ORF75c</td>
</tr>
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<td>11044</td>
<td>ORF75b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111140</td>
<td>ORF75b</td>
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</table>

a IG, intergenic region. The AP-1 sites sit between ORFs 4 and 6 and ORFs 8 and 9. Upstream and downstream genes are listed. Hypothetical promoters are shown in parentheses.

pletion of the lytic replication cycle, AP-1/c-Jun-driven RTA expression is not an absolute requirement for progression through the lytic cycle.

ORF57 is an interesting potential target, as the ORF57 protein product (also known as the multifunctional transcription activator [MTA]) facilitates the export of unspliced late viral transcripts from the nucleus for translation in the cytoplasm (reviewed in reference 23). ORF57 also enhances translation of viral proteins (5). Thus, inhibition of AP-1-driven ORF57 translation may result in a late blockade to viral replication. Testing such a hypothesis would require direct mutagenesis of AP-1 elements in the ORF57 promoter, as ORF57 transcription also is highly responsive to RTA (38, 54). It is also interesting to note the presence of AP-1 elements upstream of ORF9, which encodes the viral DNA polymerase. It is tempting to speculate that SP600125-mediated inhibition of viral DNA synthesis results from failed expression of the viral DNA polymerase.

Finally, it also is possible that c-Jun activity is dispensable for transcriptional events leading to viral DNA synthesis and production of progeny virions. While c-Jun is a classic target of JNK activity, JNK is capable of targeting numerous proteins within a cell. According to information on the website PhosphoSite.org (21), there are 69 JNK1 and 33 JNK2 substrates currently defined. Clearly, an attempt to determine whether all of these JNK1/2 targets regulate discrete steps in the MHV68 replication cycle is a large undertaking, but it is worth noting that our phosphoproteomic analysis identified numerous proteins—both cellular and viral—in addition to c-Jun that were phosphorylated on MAPK target motifs. Hence, potential alternative targets for JNK activity likely are present within MHV68-infected cells. Clearly, there are numerous testable hypotheses to explore in future experiments.

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9. Reference deleted.


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