1 A multi-layer functional genomic analysis to understand noncoding genetic variation in

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- 740 Abstract

741	A major challenge of genome-wide association studies (GWAS) is to translate phenotypic
742	associations into biological insights. Here, we integrate a large GWAS on blood lipids
743	involving 1.6 million individuals from five ancestries with a wide array of functional
744	genomic datasets to discover regulatory mechanisms underlying lipid associations. We first
745	prioritize lipid-associated genes with expression quantitative trait locus (eQTL)
746	colocalizations, and then add chromatin interaction data to narrow the search for functional
747	genes. Polygenic enrichment analysis across 697 annotations from a host of tissues and cell
748	types confirms the central role of the liver in lipid levels, and highlights the selective
749	enrichment of adipose-specific chromatin marks in high-density lipoprotein cholesterol and
750	triglycerides. Overlapping transcription factor (TF) binding sites with lipid-associated loci
751	identifies TFs relevant in lipid biology. In addition, we present an integrative framework to
752	prioritize causal variants at GWAS loci, producing a comprehensive list of candidate causal
753	genes and variants with multiple layers of functional evidence. Two prioritized genes,
754	CREBRF and RRBP1, show convergent evidence across functional datasets supporting their
755	roles in lipid biology.
756	

758 Introduction

759

760	Most GWAS findings have not directly led to mechanistic interpretations, largely because
761	90% of GWAS associations map to non-coding sequences ^{1,2} . Mechanistic interpretations in
762	GWAS have proven challenging because the strongest signals identified in GWAS typically
763	contain many variants in strong linkage disequilibrium (LD) ³ and functional mechanisms
764	including genes of action are often not clear from GWAS data alone ^{4,5} .
765	



recent observations that non-coding variants often affect a trait of interest

through the regulation of genes and processes in trait-relevant cell types or tissues 2,6 .

770 Implementing this functional model in GWAS has become more feasible as large-scale

functional genomic resources, such as epigenomic ⁷ and transcriptomic ⁸ catalogues, have

been systematically generated across a wide range of human cell types and tissues. The

773 integration of functional genomics with GWAS has identified regulatory mechanisms in

variants associated with some flagship disorders such as obesity 9 and schizophrenia 10 ,

yielding important functional insights into the genetic architecture of human complex traits.

776

777 The history of the human genetics of lipids mirrors the successes and challenges of GWAS.

778 Increasing sample size and genetic diversity has significantly boosted the power of discovery:

the first lipid GWAS in 2008 with 8,816 European-descent individuals identified 29 lipid-

780 associated loci¹¹; the latest study of 1.6 million individuals across five ancestries ¹² found

781 941. Despite the dramatic increase in the number of associations, our biological

vunderstanding of many of these genetic discoveries remains limited. The causal gene has

been confidently assigned at only a small fraction of these loci 2 , and the regulatory 783 784 mechanism connecting variant to phenotype has been conclusively characterized only for a 785 handful of genes⁵. Furthermore, systematic mapping of lipid-associated variants to their 786 biological functions has been missing in the literature at the time of this study. 787 788 Here we conduct a genome-scale integrative analysis on the largest GWAS to-date of five 789 lipid phenotypes (LDL, or low density lipoprotein; HDL, or high density lipoprotein; TC, or 790 total cholesterol; nonHDL, or non-high density lipoprotein; and TG, or triglycerides) involving 1.65 million individuals from five ancestries ¹². Combining the lipid GWAS with a 791 792 wide array of functional genomic resources in diverse human tissues and cell types, we 793 identify regulatory mechanisms of noncoding genetic variation in lipids with a full suite of 794 computational approaches. Further, we develop a generalizable framework to understand how 795 tissue-specific gene regulation can explain GWAS findings, and demonstrate its real-world 796 value on lipid-associated loci. 797

798 Material and Methods

799 *GWAS*

800

801 We performed GWAS for five blood lipid traits (LDL, HDL, TC, TG, and nonHDL) in 1.65

802 million individuals from five ancestry groups ¹²(African and African-admixed, East Asian,

803 European, Hispanic, South Asian) at 91 million variants imputed primarily from the

804 Haplotype Reference Consortium ¹³ or 1000 Genomes Phase 3 ¹⁴. The individual GWAS and

805 meta-analyses were performed using the hg19 version of the human reference genome. We

806 used MR-MEGA¹⁵ for meta-analysis across cohorts.

808	We defined 'sentinel variants' as lead variants representing independent trait-associated loci in
809	the genome. These windows are the greater of 500kb or 0.25cM around the sentinel variant;
810	genetic distances were defined using reference maps from HapMap 3 ¹⁶ . We performed a
811	second round of conditional analysis, conditioning on the sentinel variants to identify and
812	remove any significant windows that are shadow signals (or dependent on) of a neighboring
813	locus to enforce independence of associated loci.
814	
815	Colocalization with eQTLs
816	

817 We performed statistical colocalization of lipid GWAS with eQTLs obtained from GTEx v8

across 49 tissues ⁸. For each of the five lipid traits, we used the same sentinel variants defined
in the previous section to represent approximately independent GWAS-associated windows
(also removing shadow signals as described before).

821

822 For each such window, we ran eQTL colocalization with GTEx v8 single-tissue cis-eQTL

823 summary statistics ⁸. For each of 49 GTEx tissues, we first identified all genes within 1Mb of

the sentinel SNP, and then restricted analysis to those genes with significant eQTLs (i.e.,

'eGenes' as defined by GTEx) in that tissue (FDR < 0.05). We used the R package 'coloc' (run

826 on R version 3.4.3, coloc version 3.2.1)¹⁷ with default parameters to run colocalization

between the GWAS signal and the eQTL signal for each of these cis-eGenes, using as input

those SNPs in the defined window (greater than 500kb or 0.25cM on either side of the lead

variant), i.e. all SNPs present in both datasets. eQTL summary statistics were in GRCh38, so

830 we first lifted over the GWAS summary statistics (in hg19) to GRCh38 using liftOver 18 . As

in previous studies ¹⁹, we used a colocalization posterior probability of (PP3+PP4) > 0.8 to

identify loci with enough colocalization power, and PP4/PP3 > 0.9 to define those loci that

show significant colocalization, where PP4 represents posterior probability of a single shared

signal, and PP3 represents posterior probability of two unique signals in the GWAS and

eQTL datasets.

836

837 *Overlap with promoter Capture-C data*

838

839 We used four promoter-focused Capture-C (henceforth Capture-C) datasets from three human 840 cell/tissue types to capture physical interactions between gene promoters and their regulatory elements. We used three biological replicates of HepG2 liver carcinoma cells²⁰, another 841 HepG2 dataset described in Selvarajan et al²¹, hepatocyte-like cells (HLC) produced by 842 843 differentiating three biological replicates of iPSCs (which in turn were generated from peripheral blood mononuclear cells using a previously published protocol²²), and an adipose 844 dataset obtained from Pan et al²³ that was produced using primary human white adipocytes. 845 846 847 The detailed protocol to prepare HepG2 or HLC cells for the Capture-C experiment is described in Chesi et al²⁰. Briefly, for each dataset, 10 million cells were used for promoter 848 849 Capture-C library generation. Custom capture baits were designed using an Agilent 850 SureSelect library design targeting both ends of DpnII restriction fragments encompassing 851 promoters (including alternative promoters) of all human coding genes, noncoding RNA, 852 antisense RNA, snRNA, miRNA, snoRNA, and lincRNA transcripts, totaling 36,691 RNA 853 baited fragments. Each library was then sequenced on an Illumina HiSeq 4000 (HepG2) or 854 Illumina NovoSeq (HLC), generating 1.6 billion read pairs per sample (50 base pair read length.) We used HiCUP v0.7.2²⁴ to process the raw FastO files into loop calls and 855 856 CHiCAGO v1.6.0^{24,25} to define significant looping interactions; we defined a CHiCAGO 857 score of 5 as significant, as specified in the default parameters.

859	Starting with Capture-C maps processed as described above, we re-annotated the baits to
860	gene IDs from Gencode v19 26 to ensure uniformity of gene annotations with the rest of our
861	pipeline. For each bait, we identified any gene whose transcription start site (TSS) from any
862	transcript in Gencode v19 was within 175 base pair distance from the bait (to account for
863	differing bait designs for external datasets which may not directly overlap the canonical
864	TSS). We filtered all datasets to only include interactions in which the interacting end was
865	not another bait. Enrichment with colocalized genes was robust to our choice of distance
866	between bait and gene (enrichment with eQTL colocalized genes ranging from 2.94-2.96 for
867	bait distances from 0-350 base pairs).
868	
869	To identify genetic variants associated with any of the five lipid traits that physically interact
870	with locations in the genome, we used the R package 'Genomic Ranges' version 1.30.3 27 to
871	find overlap between credible sets for each trait's GWAS and the previously annotated
872	promoter Capture-C data; we refer to these as Capture-C/GWAS interactions. Each credible
873	set was defined as the set of variants with a 95% posterior probability of being the causal
874	variant. For all individual variants within all GWAS-associated loci for the five lipid traits,
875	we identified which variants overlapped any interacting end of the four previously annotated
876	promoter Capture-C data.
877	
878	Presence of gene-variant pairs in same topologically associated domains
879	
880	To estimate the frequency of colocalized gene-sentinel pairs in the same topologically
881	associated domain (TAD), we used publicly-available TADs from human liver ²⁸ . We
882	compared the number of colocalizations with the sentinel variant and colocalized gene in the

883	same TAD divided by all colocalizations in which the sentinel variant lies in a TAD. To test
884	if this ratio was statistically significant, we generated random TAD boundaries using
885	'bedtools shuffle' 1000 times, and calculated the same ratio for these randomly-generated
886	TAD boundaries.
887	
888	Pathway enrichment
889	
890	We used ClusterProfiler v3.6.0 29 to look for pathways over-represented in each gene list:
891	genes with eQTL colocalization and genes interacting with variants in GWAS credible sets.
892	We used the enrichKEGG function to look for pathway enrichment in KEGG pathways
893	(using the latest version of the KEGG database ³⁰). We first re-mapped gencode IDs to gene
894	symbols using the Gencode v24 annotation and then used the biomaRt R package v2.34.2 31
895	to convert gene symbols to Entrez IDs. We ran enrichKEGG to identify enriched pathways
896	significant at a Benjamini-Hochberg threshold of 0.05.
897	
898	Enrichment in known lipid-associated genes
899	
900	We calculated enrichment odds ratio of genes identified in our analysis with three known sets
901	of lipid-associated genes using the Fisher's exact test (R function 'fisher.test'). First, we
902	identified a list of 33 Mendelian genes from ClinVar ³² with lipidemia-associated ICD10
903	codes (E78). Second, we used the set of genes identified from a transcriptome-wide
904	association study (TWAS) on the same GWAS and GTEx v8 summary statistics using the S-
905	PrediXcan software ³³ default setup. Third, we used 35 genes with rare-coding variants
906	associated with lipid levels ³⁴ .
907	

908 Stratified LD score regression

910	We used LDSC version 1.0.1 35 to estimate the enrichment of heritability using GWAS
911	summary statistics in different epigenetic and transcriptomic annotations, including gene
912	expression, chromatin marks and TF binding sites. The gene expression and chromatin mark
913	annotations and the corresponding LD scores were provided as
914	'Multitissuegeneexpr1000Gv3' and 'Multitissuechromatin1000Gv3' databases in LDSC
915	software. The TF binding site annotations were extracted from ChIP-seq data of 161 TFs
916	from ENCODE, and their LD scores were estimated from 1000 Genomes Phase 3 European
917	samples using 'ldsc.pyl2'. We first converted the summary statistics for each phenotype to
918	LDSC-formatted summary statistics using 'munge_sumstats.py'. Second, we ran 'ldsc.py'
919	using the baseline_v1.2 baseline model on each annotation to estimate enrichment of
920	heritability. For primary analyses, we used multi-population GWAS summary statistics and
921	LD scores estimated from 1000 Genomes Phase 3 European samples. For secondary analyses
922	on East Asian GWAS alone, we obtained EAS-specific LD scores for the same epigenomic
923	annotations ³⁶ .
924	

GREGOR analysis

927We used GREGOR 37 to estimate enrichment of sentinel variants for each lipid phenotype in928TF binding sites for 161 TFs from ENCODE compared to a null distribution of variants929matched for allele frequency. We ran GREGOR with default parameters, specifying 0.8 as930the R² threshold, window size of 1Mb, and 'EUR' as the population. Annotations with FDR-931adjusted P-value < 0.05 were considered significant.</td>

933 Enrichment in single-cell expression data

935	We overlapped our list of colocalized genes with publicly available single-cell RNA-
936	sequencing data of 8,444 cells from liver ³⁸ and 38,408 cells from adipose (Web resources) in
937	humans. For both datasets, we downloaded normalized TPM data and existing tSNE cluster
938	annotations for each cell. For each cluster, we defined median expression for each gene
939	across all cells in that cluster. Then for each cluster, we calculated the enrichment P-value for
940	our list of colocalized genes using the 'fgsea' R package v1.4.1, which looks for
941	overrepresentation of our gene list in ranked genes for each cluster ³⁹ , implemented in R
942	3.4.3.
943	
944	Results
945	
946	We systematically integrated lipid GWAS results ¹² with multiple layers of functional
947	genomic data from diverse tissues and cell types to understand regulatory mechanisms at
948	lipid-associated loci (Figure 1). Specifically, we overlaid GWAS loci with eQTL and
949	chromatin-chromatin interactions to identify causal genes. We assessed polygenic
950	enrichments of tissue-specific histone marks to prioritize relevant tissues and examined
951	GWAS loci at transcription factor (TF) binding sites to detect lipid-relevant TFs. Finally, we
952	combined all these layers to prioritize functional variants at GWAS loci, providing a holistic
953	view of gene regulation at lipid loci in relevant tissue and cell types.
954	
955	Figure 1: Schematic overview of the multi-layer functional genomic analysis. We first
956	integrate GWAS summary statistics for five lipid phenotypes with eQTL and chromatin
957	interaction data to identify potential genes mediating the GWAS association, and then

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- 958 incorporate epigenomic annotations to identify regulatory mechanisms at these loci. For any
- 959 lead variant 'X', A, B, and C represent nearby eGenes, and SNPs around SNP X represent
- 960 *variants in the credible set.*

961



962

963 Colocalization with eQTLs identifies candidate lipid-relevant genes

964



974 mechanisms as opposed to coding variation. In particular, we excluded all loci with credible

975	sets containing at least one missense variant (369 of 1,750 loci, 21% of credible sets). Of the
976	remaining 1,381 GWAS loci, 696 significantly colocalized with eQTLs (the ratio of posterior
977	probability of a shared signal to the posterior probability of two signals being $> 0.9^{-19}$;
978	Methods) in at least one of 49 tissues for at least one lipid phenotype. This resulted in 1,076
979	colocalized eGenes ranging from 1 to 16 genes per locus (Figure 2A; Table S1). Since with
980	eQTL data alone it is difficult to disentangle a single functional gene from multiple functional
981	(and likely coregulated) genes at a locus ⁴¹ we performed all downstream analyses with all
982	1,076 colocalized genes, to further prioritize functional genes at loci with multiple eGenes.
983	
984	To acquire additional functional insights into the 1,076 colocalized genes, we assessed their
985	enrichments across existing biological and clinical gene sets. Colocalized genes showed
986	enrichments in (a) 20 KEGG pathways ³⁰ at FDR 5% (Table S2), including known lipid-
987	related processes such as cholesterol metabolism, PPAR signaling, and bile secretion; (b) 33
988	Mendelian genes from ClinVar ³² associated with lipid-related ICD10 codes, (11 fold
989	enrichment at P=2.08e-06, including APOB, LPL, and APOE; Figure 2B), suggesting the
990	shared genetic basis of Mendelian and complex lipid phenotypes ⁴² ; (c) 35 genes with rare-
991	variant burden for lipid phenotypes in a recent multi-ancestry analysis ³⁴ (30-fold enrichment,
992	P = 1.77e-16, including APOB, LPL, LIPG and ANGPTL4), confirming shared mechanisms
993	of rare and common variation underlying lipid traits ^{42,43} . Colocalized genes also showed
994	enrichment with genes implicated in TWAS run on the same GWAS and eQTL summary
995	statistics (20-fold enrichment, P<2.22e-308). These enrichment results demonstrate the
996	biological relevance of candidate functional genes prioritized by our approach.
997	
998	Figure 2: Overlap between eQTL colocalized genes and capture-C prioritized genes, and

999 their enrichment in known lipid-associated genes. A. Numbers of genes identified by two

- 1000 approaches: eQTL colocalization (upper half) and promoter capture-c interactions (lower
- 1001 *half*) B. Overlap between our list of prioritized genes (left: capture-C prioritized genes; right:
- 1002 *eQTL colocalized genes) with three sets of genes previously associated with lipid biology*
- 1003 (ClinVar lipidemia-associated genes, genes implicated in rare burden of lipids, and genes
- 1004 from a lipid TWAS). C. Enrichment in overlap between eQTL colocalized genes and capture-
- 1005 *C prioritized genes against what is expected by chance, assuming both gene sets are*
- 1006 independent. Enrichment estimates and confidence intervals shown in Panels B and C were



1007 *obtained using Fisher's exact test.*

1008

1009

1010 Chromatin-chromatin interactions improve eQTL-based colocalization

1011

1012 Our eQTL-based colocalization analysis uses a linear sequence of DNA, and ignores physical 1013 interaction between non-adjacent DNA segments, another regulatory layer underlying complex human traits ⁴⁴. To add this layer to our analysis, we generated Capture-C data from 1014 1015 HepG2 liver carcinoma cells (denoted as HepG2.1) and hepatocyte-like cells (HLC) derived from differentiating iPSCs (the latter is described in ²²), as well as publicly-available Capture-1016 C datasets from HepG2 21,43 (denoted as HepG2.2) and adipose tissue 23 . We defined a 1017 1018 GWAS-relevant interaction as any Capture-C interaction between any gene and a variant in the 95% credible set for a GWAS locus⁴⁵. Credible set sizes ranged from 1 to 417 variants at 1019

1020	the 1,750 examined loci, with a median size of 5 variants per credible set. In total, 1,079
1021	GWAS loci had at least one variant in the credible set with a physical interaction with a gene
1022	promoter and 3,543 of 26,621 genes with promoter-interactions had promoters physically
1023	interacting with at least one GWAS credible set variant (Figure 2A; Table S3). Unlike eQTL-
1024	colocalized genes, these genes interacting with their credible sets showed limited enrichment
1025	in relevant KEGG pathways (Table S2) and lipid-related genes from ClinVar (Figure 2B),
1026	though we see 5-fold enrichment (compared to greater than 10-fold enrichment for eQTL-
1027	colocalized genes) in genes with rare-variant lipid associations (P = $2.8e-05$) and TWAS
1028	genes (P=2.5e-288).
1029	
1030	Genes physically interacting with GWAS loci helped shortlist functional genes from eQTL
1031	colocalization despite their reduced enrichments in known gene sets. Of 1,079 credible sets
1032	with promoter interactions, 224 also colocalized with eQTLs for the same gene. At the gene
1033	level, 233 genes were implicated in both eQTL colocalization and Capture-C interactions
1034	(Figure 2C), representing an enrichment of 3-fold compared to random chance ($P = 3.11e-38$).
1035	Among these loci with concordant eQTL colocalizations and Capture-C interactions, only
1036	39% of them mapped to a single gene using eQTL data alone, whereas adding Capture-C
1037	information increased this fraction to 80%. These results showcase the potential value of
1038	combining eQTLs with physical chromatin interactions to prioritize functional genes at
1039	GWAS loci.
1040	
1041	Since eQTLs are likely to reside in the same topologically associated domain (TADs) as the
1042	genes they regulate ⁴⁶ , we examined TAD structure from independent datasets at lipid GWAS

- 1043 loci with eQTL colocalizations. Of eQTL-GWAS colocalizations in which the sentinel
- 1044 variant resided within a liver TAD 28 , the colocalized gene resided in the same liver TAD

1045	84.8% of the time (P $<$ 0.001 with 1000 permutations; Methods). When we restricted
1046	colocalizations to those supported by Capture-C data in any cell type, 91.2% fall in the same
1047	TAD. These results add to the existing evidence for TAD boundaries being regulatory
1048	insulators in the cell ⁴⁷ and confirm our integration of chromatin interactions with eQTL
1049	colocalizations as an effective strategy to hone in on functional genes.
1050	
1051	Tissue-specific enrichment of GWAS signals differentiates lipid traits
1052	
1053	Regulatory variants often affect complex traits in a tissue-specific manner ⁶ , as shown in our
1054	eQTL colocalization analysis. Specifically, by computing the ratio of the number of
1055	colocalizations in a tissue to eQTL sample size in that tissue, we found that the liver was
1056	universally enriched for colocalized eGenes with respect to sample size across all lipid traits
1057	whereas adipose was selectively enriched in HDL and TG only (Figure S1). Motivated by
1058	these findings, we leveraged systematic approaches and additional data to identify relevant
1059	tissues and cell types for each lipid trait.
1060	
1061	We implemented stratified LD score regression (S-LDSC), a polygenic approach not
1062	restricted to genome-wide significant variants, on tissue-specific transcriptomic and
1063	epigenomic annotations across 204 datasets from more than 170 tissues and cell types, to
1064	identify relevant tissues for each lipid trait (Methods). Consistent with previous studies and
1065	our eQTL-based analysis, liver-related tissues (Table S4) showed strong enrichments across
1066	all lipid traits (S-LDSC enrichment p-values ranging from .001 in TG to .0001 in TC), for
1067	both expression (Figure 3A) and chromatin annotations (Figure 3B). This result was
1068	confirmed by analysis using two other approaches: DEPICT 48 (Figure S2) and RSS-NET 49
1069	(Table S5). To assess the robustness of our S-LDSC results based on multi-population

- 1070 GWAS, we applied S-LDSC to population-specific GWAS in European and East Asian
- 1071 ancestry participants together with population-specific LD scores (Methods) and obtained
- 1072 similar results (Table S6).
- 1073
- 1074 Figure 3: Tissue relevance based on lipid GWAS and functional annotations. Partitioning
- 1075 heritability of GWAS summary statistics for five lipid traits on gene expression (A) and
- 1076 chromatin mark (B) annotations across tissues. Each plotted point represents a tested dataset
- 1077 for enrichment of heritability, with larger dots representing datasets with P-value < 0.05;
- 1078 multiple annotation datasets are tested for the same tissue group. Each color represents a
- 1079 tissue group, and the y-axis represents -log10 P-value of enrichment of heritability.



- 1081
- 1082

1083 The S-LDSC results also highlighted tissues selectively enriched in certain lipid traits as 1084 shown in the eQTL-based analysis. The most enriched category for HDL using chromatin 1085 annotation is 'Adipose H3K4me3' (P-value 7.6e-04); for TG, enrichment in liver-related

1086	tissues (P-value 1.2e-03) is similar to enrichment in adipose (P-value 2.7e-03). For LDL, TC,
1087	and non-HDL, enrichment P-values for the liver were much more significant than for all
1088	other tissues including adipose (Figure 3B). We observed the same pattern in S-LDSC results
1089	based on gene expression (Figure 3A). This finding is consistent with the known influence of
1090	adipose on plasma HDL levels ⁵⁰ , and the role of adipose as TG deposits ⁵¹ . These results
1091	were corroborated by eQTL colocalizations stratified by phenotype (Figure S1) and DEPICT
1092	analysis on gene expression 48 (Figure S2). Together, these results confirm the liver as the
1093	tissue of action for all five lipid traits, and highlight the additional role of adipose in HDL and
1094	TG only.

1096 Given the importance of the liver and adipose in modulating lipid levels, we further identified 1097 the relevant cell types within these tissues. Using existing single-cell data from adipose and liver, we performed gene-set enrichment analysis ⁵² to identify cell-type clusters enriched for 1098 1099 genes colocalized with any lipid trait. Out of 11 identified cell types in 20 clusters in the 1100 liver, only hepatocytes were enriched at FDR-adjusted P < 0.05 (Figure S3), consistent with previous results²¹. In adipose, only adipocyte clusters and macrophage-monocyte clusters 1101 1102 showed suggestive enrichment (nominal P < 0.05) in colocalized genes (Figure S4). Of note, 1103 the enrichment in adjocytes was significant when we restricted this analysis to genes that 1104 were colocalized only with HDL and TG (FDR-corrected P < 0.05), consistent with the 1105 selective enrichments of adipose in HDL and TG (but not the other lipid traits) from our S-1106 LDSC analysis. Evaluations at cellular resolution are required to understand the cell-type 1107 specific mechanisms underlying lipid GWAS loci, but our results could form a useful basis 1108 for future studies.

1109

1110 Overlapping GWAS signals with binding sites highlights lipid-relevant TFs

1112	TFs have been implicated as a key mediator of linking genetic variation to complex traits ⁵³ .
1113	To understand lipid GWAS in the context of TF activity, we assessed enrichment of genome-
1114	wide significant variants at TF binding sites using GREGOR ³⁷ and performed polygenic
1115	enrichment analysis of TF binding sites using S-LDSC.
1116	
1117	Using ChIP-Seq data from 161 TFs across 91 cell types from the ENCODE project ⁷ , 70.7%
1118	of lipid credible sets overlapped with at least one TF binding site. Using GREGOR ³⁷ , we
1119	identified 137 TFs whose binding sites were significantly enriched in GWAS lead SNPs for
1120	at least one lipid phenotype (enrichment > 2; FDR adjusted P-value < 0.05; Figure S5; Table
1121	S7). Among these 137 enriched TFs, 69 of them (50%) showed significant enrichments
1122	across all five lipid phenotypes, suggesting a potential core regulatory circuit shared by all
1123	lipid traits (Figure S5). The TF with the strongest enrichment in all phenotypes was ESRRA
1124	(estrogen-related receptor alpha), a nuclear receptor active in metabolic tissues ⁵⁴ ; ESRRA
1125	has been implicated in adipogenesis and lipid metabolism, and ESRRA-null mice display an
1126	increase in fat mass and obesity ⁵⁴ .
1127	
1128	The GREGOR analysis also highlighted 68 TFs significantly enriched in specific subsets of
1129	(but not all five) lipid phenotypes (Figure S8). For example, we found 4 TFs (FOXM1,
1130	PBX3, ZKSCAN1, ZEB1) enriched in HDL and TG only, 4 TFs (EZH2, NFE2, NFATC1,
1131	KDM5A) enriched in HDL only and 11 TFs (FOSL1, IRF3, JUN, MEF2C, NANOG,
1132	PRDM1, RUNX3, SIRT6, SMC3, STAT3, ZNF217) enriched in TG only. Of these TFs, the
1133	central role of ZEB1 in adiposity ⁵⁵ and fat cell differentiation has been demonstrated ⁵⁶ .
1134	Taken together, these TF-centric findings corroborate the selective enrichments of adipose in

1135 HDL and TG (but not the other lipid traits) identified in our previous tissue prioritization

analyses.

1137

1138	Similar to tissue prioritization, we also performed polygenic enrichment analysis of TF
1139	binding sites using S-LDSC (Table S8), which differed from GREGOR analysis by looking at
1140	not only the genome-wide significant associations but also the polygenic signal irrespective
1141	of GWAS P-values. On the same 161 ENCODE TFs, this polygenic analysis identified 25
1142	TFs whose binding sites were significantly enriched in heritability (nominal P < 0.05) for at
1143	least one lipid phenotype (Figure S6); reassuringly, 24 of 25 TFs were also significant in
1144	GREGOR analysis. Among these enriched TFs, eight (34%) were significantly enriched in all
1145	five lipid traits (CEBPB, CEBPD, FOXA2, HDAC2, HNF4G, NFYA, RXRA, SP1; P <
1146	0.05). Of those TFs significant in both analyses, RXRA (retinoid X receptor alpha) is also
1147	encoded by a colocalized gene (RXRA) near a GWAS hit (chr9:137,268,682). RXRA is a
1148	ligand-activated transcription factor that forms heterodimers with other receptors (including
1149	PPARG) and is involved in lipid metabolism ⁵⁷ and homeostasis. Moreover, 145 GWAS loci
1150	(Table S9) overlap RXRA binding peaks, suggesting that the GWAS variants might affect
1151	lipids (partially) through affecting the binding activity of RXRA. While the RXRA-associated
1152	variant has been previously implicated as a GWAS locus ⁵⁸ , our study demonstrates its role in
1153	lipid biology through its regulatory influence on other lipid-associated genes.
1154	
1155	Multi-layer functional integration reveals regulatory mechanisms at GWAS loci
1156	
1157	Motivated by our finding that integrating chromatin interaction improved eQTL

1158 colocalizations, we further brought together multiple lines of functional evidence at each

1159 GWAS locus for mechanistic inference. We started with the list of genes with evidence for

1160	both eQTL colocalization in the liver or adipose and credible set physical interactions. We
1161	next annotated each variant in the 95% credible set with various indicators of regulatory
1162	function, including its open chromatin status in liver or adipose-related cell types, its
1163	proximity to a promoter or an enhancer, and its RegulomeDB regulation probability ⁵⁹ (see
1164	Table S10 for the complete list of annotations used). To account for complexities of
1165	regulatory mechanisms and limitations of functional datasets, we combined evidence across
1166	these datasets to prioritize variants at GWAS loci (Figure 4A). Specifically, we prioritized
1167	variants with at least three independent lines of functional evidence (chromatin openness,
1168	physically interaction with target genes, and promoter/enhancer status in liver or adipose),
1169	with at least two being in the same tissue with colocalization with the target gene, and with a
1170	RegulomeDB score > 0.5 . Applying this simple procedure to lipid GWAS we identified 13
1171	candidate loci, each with the strongest multi-layer evidence pointing to a single functional
1172	variant (Table 1). Below we describe two examples to highlight key features of this multi-
1173	layer integration framework.
1174	
1175	RRBP1 (ribosomal binding protein 1) could be identified from eQTL colocalization alone,
1176	but our multi-layer integration approach strengthened the conclusion via convergent evidence
1177	from various sources (Figure 4B). The RRBP1 eQTL signals in the liver colocalize with LDL,
1178	TC, and nonHDL GWAS signals. The 'T' allele of the lead variant (chr20:17,844,684, hg19)

1179 decreases *RRBP1* expression levels and increases LDL, TC, and nonHDL levels. This lead

1180 variant is in open chromatin in HLC, and physically interacts with the *RRBP1* promoter

1181 (250kb away) in adipose and HepG2. All these data consistently point to *RRBP1* as the

- 1182 functional gene underlying this locus. RRBP1 specifically tethers the endoplasmic reticulum
- 1183 to the mitochondria in the liver--an interaction that is enriched in hepatocytes--and regulates

1184 very low density lipoprotein (vLDL) levels ⁶⁰. Rare variants in *RRBP1* are associated with

- 1185 LDL in humans 61 and silencing *RRBP1* in liver affects lipid homeostasis in mice 60 .
- 1186
- 1187 Figure 4. An easy-to-implement multi-layer framework to prioritize functional variants at
- 1188 *GWAS loci. A. Variant annotation and prioritization scheme at each credible set. B. Evidence*
- 1189 for gene RRBP1 from functional genomics data. The LDL GWAS locus at this region is an
- 1190 *eQTL for gene RRBP1 in the liver (second row). Variants in the credible set of this locus*
- 1191 *interact with the gene promoter in both adipose and HepG2 Capture-C data. The interacting*
- 1192 variant is also in an open chromatin peak in three liver-related cell types. C. Multiple
- 1193 sources of functional genomics data support CREBRF as a gene contributing to HDL levels.
- 1194 The HDL GWAS locus at this region is an eQTL for gene CREBRF in adipose (second row).
- 1195 Variants in the credible set at this locus interact with the CREBRF promoter in adipose. The
- 1196 *interacting variant is also in open chromatin in liver-related cell types.*



1199	CREBRF (CREB3 regulatory factor) demonstrates the power of our multi-layer integration
1200	framework in prioritizing functional variants (Figure 4C). The eQTL signals of CREBRF
1201	colocalized with a GWAS locus for HDL with 30 candidate variants. In contrast, our multi-
1202	layer approach identified a single candidate variant (chr5:172,566,698) at this locus that
1203	physically interacts with the CREBRF promoter in adipose, was predicted to be a regulatory
1204	element (RegulomeDB score=0.91). Consistent with the index variant (chr5:172,591,337),
1205	the allele 'A' at this functional variant increased HDL levels and increased CREBRF
1206	expression in adipose. Missense variants in CREBRF have been linked to body mass index,
1207	and the gene has been linked to obesity risk in Samoans ⁶² .
1208	
1209	Finally, to compare the power of functional fine-mapping with trans-ancestry fine-mapping,
1210	we applied our prioritization rule to credible sets derived from European-only meta-analysis.
1211	The 111 variants prioritized by our rule described above (including multiple variants in the
1212	same credible set) were all found in the multi-ancestry credible sets, representing a 3.7 fold
1213	enrichment (P < 1e-04 derived from 10000 permutations randomly sampling variants from
1214	the European-only credible sets). This convergence of complementary approaches to the
1215	same smaller set of variants highlights the power of multi-ancestry datasets as an approach to
1216	narrow in on functional variants.
1217	
1218	Discussion
1219	
1220	Here we integrate the largest multi-population lipid GWAS to date with a wide array of
1221	functional genomic resources to understand how noncoding genetic variation affects lipids
1222	through gene regulation. Specifically, we identify 1,076 genes whose eQTL signals

1223	colocalize with lipid GWAS signals and demonstrate how physical chromatin interaction can
1224	improve standard eQTL-based colocalization. We assess tissue-specific enrichments of lipid
1225	GWAS signals and demonstrate the selective importance of adipose in HDL and triglyceride
1226	biology. We examine binding site enrichments of 161 TFs in lipid GWAS and expand our
1227	understanding of lipid GWAS loci (e.g., RXRA) in the context of TF activity. Finally, we
1228	build a simple and interpretable prioritization framework that automatically combines
1229	multiple lines of evidence from orthogonal datasets, pinpointing a single functional variant at
1230	each of 13 lipid-associated loci (e.g., RRBP1 and CREBRF). While there are studies that
1231	interpret lipid GWAS associations ^{21,63,64} , the size of our multi-population GWAS and multi-
1232	layer functional integration represent a comprehensive effort and an important step forward in
1233	this direction.
1234	
1235	Our multi-layer analysis has two key strengths. First, despite a large array of functional
1236	genomic resources being embedded, our analysis produces results with high consistency. For
1237	example, the selective enrichment of adipose in HDL and TG identified by S-LDSC is
1238	confirmed by our eQTL-based colocalization and TF binding site overlap. Another example
1239	of consistency is the multi-layer prioritization of RRBP1, which can be identified from eQTL-
	based colocalization along and it is further validated by abromatin anonness and interaction
1240	based colocalization alone and it is further variated by chromatin openness and interaction.
1240 1241	Such convergent evidence from various sources improves the confidence of our findings.

1243 improve sensitivity to prioritize functional genes and variants. For example, we refined eQTL

1244 colocalized genes (1,076) to a smaller set of functional genes (233) through integration with

- 1245 promoter Capture-C data. Another example of sensitivity is *CREBRF*, where eQTL-based
- 1246 colocalization implicates 30 candidate variants and adding other regulatory layers points to a

1247 single functional variant. Moving forward, we expect these two features will serve as useful

1248 guidelines for future integrative genomic analyses of other traits.

1249

1250	Our results rely on the breadth and accuracy of functional genomic datasets used in our
1251	analyses. First, unlike our lipid GWAS, current functional datasets ⁶⁵ are limited both in
1252	sample size and ancestral diversity, which can affect discovery and replication of regulatory
1253	mechanisms in diverse populations. Second, some functional datasets are generated at limited
1254	resolution. For example, our colocalizations are based on eQTLs from bulk tissue RNA-seq ⁸ ,
1255	which may miss detailed cell types and biological processes in which lipid-associated SNPs
1256	regulate gene expression ⁶⁶ . Third, some functional datasets are not available across the full
1257	spectrum of human tissues and cell types. For example, our chromatin-chromatin interaction
1258	analysis only examines a few cell types in two known lipid-related tissues, producing results
1259	that may be biased towards known lipid biology. As more comprehensive and accurate
1260	functional genomic resources are becoming publicly available in diverse cellular contexts and
1261	ancestry groups, the resolution and power of integrative analyses like ours will be markedly
1262	increased.

1263

1264 Other limitations of this study stem from computational methods embedded in our

1265 framework. First, the colocalization approach 'coloc' assumes one causal variant per locus,

1266 whereas recent studies suggest extensive allelic heterogeneity ⁶⁷ consistent with a model of a

1267 milieu of related transcription factors binding within a single locus. Accounting for allelic

- 1268 heterogeneity in summary statistics-based colocalization typically requires modelling
- 1269 multiple correlated SNPs through LD matrix ⁶⁸, which is computationally intensive in large-

1270 scale analyses derived from many cohorts with diverse ancestries, like the multi-population

1271 GWAS examined here. Second, due to restricted access to individual genotypes of 201

1272 cohorts, we cannot produce multi-population LD scores within GLGC but have to use

- 1273 European-based LD scores in all S-LDSC analyses. This approach, though less rigorous in
- 1274 principle, provides robust results in practice (as confirmed by our ancestry-specific analysis),
- 1275 largely because 79% of cohorts in GLGC are of European descent ¹². That said, we caution
- 1276 that the same approach might fall short in ancestrally diverse studies with few European
- 1277 individuals ⁶⁹. Third, our multi-layer variant prioritization framework is built on a series of
- 1278 simple rules that are easy to implement on large datasets. This approach could possibly be
- 1279 formalized as statistical models (e.g., priors in Bayesian methods ⁴⁹), but certainly simplify
- 1280 computation and improve scalability of our framework. Despite the technical limitations, our
- 1281 approach here can serve as a useful benchmark for future development of methods with
- 1282 improved statistical rigor and computation efficiency.
- 1283 In summary, mapping noncoding genetic variation of complex traits to biological functions
- 1284 can benefit greatly from thorough integration of multiple layers of functional genomics, as
- 1285 demonstrated in the present study. Although tested on lipids only, our integrative framework
- 1286 is straightforward to implement more broadly on many other phenotypes, yielding functional
- 1287 insights of heritable traits and diseases in humans.
- 1288 Description of Supplemental Data
- 1289 Supplemental data include seven figures and ten tables, and study-specific
- acknowledgements.
- 1291 Declaration of Interests
- 1292 G.C-P. is currently an employee of 23andMe Inc. M.J.C. is the Chief Scientist for Genomics
- 1293 England, a UK Government company. B.M.P. serves on the steering committee of the Yale
- 1294 Open Data Access Project funded by Johnson & Johnson. G.T., A.H., D.F.G., H.H., U.T., and

1295	K.S. are employees of deCODE/Amgen Inc. V.S. has received honoraria for consultations
1296	from Novo Nordisk and Sanofi and has an ongoing research collaboration with Bayer Ltd.
1297	M.M. has served on advisory panels for Pfizer, NovoNordisk and Zoe Global, has received
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1299	Abbvie, Astra Zeneca, Boehringer Ingelheim, Eli Lilly, Janssen, Merck, NovoNordisk,
1300	Pfizer, Roche, Sanofi Aventis, Servier, and Takeda. M.M. and A.M. are employees of
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1305	and personal fees from Sanofi, grants and personal fees from Alexion Pharmaceuticals, grants
1306	and personal fees from BASF, grants and personal fees from Abbott Diagnostics, grants and
1307	personal fees from Numares AG, grants and personal fees from Berlin-Chemie, grants and
1308	personal fees from Akzea Therapeutics, grants from Bayer Vital GmbH, grants from
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1313	as a consultant to Sanofi, Medicines Company, Maze Pharmaceuticals, Navitor
1314	Pharmaceuticals, Verve Therapeutics, Amgen, and Color Genomics; received speaking fees
1315	from Illumina, the Novartis Institute for Biomedical Research; received sponsored research
1316	agreements from the Novartis Institute for Biomedical Research and IBM Research, and
1317	reports a patent related to a genetic risk predictor (20190017119). S.K. is an employee of
1318	Verve Therapeutics, and holds equity in Verve Therapeutics, Maze Therapeutics, Catabasis,
1319	and San Therapeutics. He is a member of the scientific advisory boards for Regeneron

1320	Genetics Center and Corvidia Therapeutics; he has served as a consultant for Acceleron, Eli
1321	Lilly, Novartis, Merck, Novo Nordisk, Novo Ventures, Ionis, Alnylam, Aegerion, Haug
1322	Partners, Noble Insights, Leerink Partners, Bayer Healthcare, Illumina, Color Genomics,
1323	MedGenome, Quest, and Medscape; he reports patents related to a method of identifying and
1324	treating a person having a predisposition to or afflicted with cardiometabolic disease
1325	(20180010185) and a genetics risk predictor (20190017119). D.K. accepts consulting fees
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1367 Web Resources

- 1368 GLGC 2021 summary statistics: http://csg.sph.umich.edu/willer/public/glgc-lipids2021/
- 1369 GTEx v8 summary statistics: https://www.gtexportal.org/home/datasets
- 1370 coloc: https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/coloc
- 1371 liftOver: https://genome.ucsc.edu/cgi-bin/hgLiftOver
- 1372 HiCUP: https://www.bioinformatics.babraham.ac.uk/projects/hicup/
- 1373 CHiCAGO: https://www.bioconductor.org/packages/release/bioc/html/Chicago.html
- 1374 GenomicRanges: <u>https://bioconductor.org/packages/release/bioc/html/GenomicRanges.html</u>
- 1375 bedtools: https://bedtools.readthedocs.io/en/latest/
- 1376 ClusterProfiler: https://guangchuangyu.github.io/clusterProfiler
- 1377 biomaRt: https://bioconductor.org/packages/release/bioc/html/biomaRt.html
- 1378 ClinVar: <u>https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/clinvar/</u>
- 1379 S-PrediXcan: https://github.com/hakyimlab/MetaXcan
- 1380 LDSC software: https://github.com/bulik/ldsc
- 1381 LD scores and related annotations: <u>https://data.broadinstitute.org/alkesgroup/LDSCORE/</u>
- 1382 DEPICT: <u>https://data.broadinstitute.org/mpg/depict</u>
- 1383 RSS-NET: https://github.com/SUwonglab/rss-net

- 1384 Adipose single cell data:
- 1385 https://singlecell.broadinstitute.org/single_cell/study/SCP133/human-adipose-svf-single-cell
- 1386 fgsea: http://bioconductor.org/packages/release/bioc/html/fgsea.html
- 1387 GREGOR: https://genome.sph.umich.edu/wiki/GREGOR
- 1388 RegulomeDB: https://regulomedb.org/regulome-search/

- 1390 Data and Code Availability
- 1391 HLC Capture-C data is available at
- 1392 <u>https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE189026</u>

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Tables

Table 1. Thirteen prioritized loci with highest confidence of a single functional variant in the credible set. The 'sentinel' column represents the lead variant at the locus. 'Prioritized var' represents the prioritized variant in the credible set. Columns 5-8 represent overlap of the functional variant with open chromatin ('Open'), capture-C ('CapC') interactions with the candidate gene, enhancer and promoter marks from Roadmap in liver ('Liver'), adipose ('Ad'), both or none of these datasets. The 'RegDB' column represents the RegulomeDB score of the prioritized variant.

Gene Name	Tissue	Sentinel	Prioritized Var	Open	CapC	Enhance r	Promote r	RegDB
CEP68	Adipose	2:65284231	65279414	Liver	Liver	None	Ad	0.5896
TIPARP	Adipose	3:156797941	156795408	Both	Both	Ad	Liver	0.705
CREBRF	Adipose	5:172591337	172566698	Liver	Ad	None	Both	0.9124
PALM2	Adipose	9:112556911	112556911	Both	Ad	Both	None	0.6091
MEGF9	Adipose	9:123481206	123421556	Liver	Ad	None	Liver	0.9933
GBF1	Liver	10:104142294	104107191	Ad	Ad	Both	Ad	0.705
MICAL2	Liver	11:12071855	12221016	Liver	Liver	Liver	Ad	0.6018
ACP2	Liver	11:47278917	47276350	Ad	Liver	Liver	Ad	0.6091
PTPRJ	Adipose	11:48021778	48011180	Liver	Ad	Liver	Ad	0.8797
NFATC2I P	Adipose	16:28899411	28883327	Liver	Liver	None	Both	0.6091
HELZ	Liver	17:65109591	65156919	Liver	Liver	Both	Ad	0.6090 6
FAM210A	Liver	18:13725674	13725674	Liver	Liver	Both	Ad	0.7571
RRBP1	Liver	20:17844684	17844684	Both	Ad	Both	Ad	0.6091