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Signal Inhibitory Receptor on Leukocytes-1 Is a Novel Functional Inhibitory Immune Receptor Expressed on Human Phagocytes

Tessa A. M. Steevels,* Robert Jan Lebbink,* Geertje H. A. Westerlaken,* Paul J. Coffer,*+ and Linde Meyaard*

Myeloid cells play a crucial role in controlling infection. Activation of these cells needs to be tightly regulated, because their potent effector functions can damage host tissue. Inhibitory receptors expressed by immune cells play an important role in restricting immune cell activation. In this study, we have characterized a hitherto unidentified ITIM-bearing receptor that is highly expressed on human neutrophils and monocytes: signal inhibitory receptor on leukocytes-1 (SIRL-1). The chromosomal location of SIRL-1 is adjacent to the human leukocyte receptor complex on chromosome 19q13.34 and contains two ITIMs in its cytoplasmic tail. As a classical ITIM-bearing receptor, SIRL-1 is capable of inhibiting FcɛRI-mediated signaling and can recruit the Src homology 2 domain-containing phosphatases Src homology region 2 domain-containing phosphatases 1 and 2. To investigate the specific involvement of the individual ITIMs in this study, mutational analysis was performed, which revealed that both ITIMs are crucial for SIRL-1 inhibitory function and phosphatase recruitment. When primary cells were stimulated in vitro, SIRL-1high monocytes produce less TNF-α than SIRL-1low monocytes. Thus, SIRL-1 is a novel inhibitory immune receptor belonging to the growing family of ITIM-bearing receptors that is implied in the regulation of phagocytes. The Journal of Immunology, 2010, 184: 4741–4748.

Neutrophils and cells of the monocytic lineage are the most important effector cells of the innate immune response. Postinfection, they are immediately activated and recruited to the site of infection, where they rapidly control the replication of pathogens by phagocytosis and secretion of antimicrobial peptides (1). In addition, they secrete proinflammatory mediators to recruit additional immune cells to the site of infection and to activate the adaptive immune system (2, 3). The secretion of proinflammatory mediators is not without danger for the host, because overproduction can lead to uncontrolled influx of inflammatory cells (2), resulting in severe tissue damage or even induce lethal septic shock (4). Hence, to protect the host, the immune system has developed multiple mechanisms to regulate these potentially harmful effects of an overactive immune response.

One important mechanism to ensure a balanced immune response is the expression of inhibitory receptors by immune cells.

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Abbreviations used in this paper: CP, cytoplasmic domain; Csk, C-terminal Src kinase; cys, cysteine; EC, extracellular domain; HEK, human embryonic kidney; IgSF, Ig superfamily; IP, immunoprecipitation; LAIR-1/β, leukocyte-associated Ig-like receptor; LP, leader peptide; LRC, leukocyte receptor complex; NCBI, National Center for Biotechnology Information; PV, pervanadate; SH, Src homology; SHP, Src homology region 2 domain-containing phosphatase; SIRL-1, signal inhibitory receptor on leukocytes-1; SIRPs, signal regulatory protein α; TM, transmembrane domain; TNF, tumor necrosis factor; Tyr-phe, tyrosine-to-phenylalanine; WB, Western blotting; WCL, whole-cell lysate.

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Peripheral blood was obtained from healthy volunteers, and mononuclear cells were isolated by Ficoll-Histopaque density gradient centrifugation. From these cells, total RNA was isolated using TRIzol and converted to cDNA with oligo(dT)$_{12-18}$ primers and murine leukemia virus reverse transcriptase using the GeneAmp RNA PCR kit (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA). The cDNA mixtures were amplified by PCR using SIRL-1–specific forward (5′-TTGTGTCGCAAGAGGGAACG-3′) and reverse (5′-AGATCGAGCAATGATTCCC-3′) primers and the AmpliTaq Gold DNA Polymerase system (Applied Biosystems). Each amplification reaction underwent 40 cycles of denaturation at 96°C for 30 s, annealing for 30 s at 58°C, and elongation at 72°C for 1 min. SIRL-1 cDNA obtained from these samples was cloned into pGEM-T Easy vectors using the pGEM-T Easy vector system (Promega, Madison, WI) and subsequently sequenced. The obtained sequence was deposited in GenBank (accession number FN938145).

**cDNA constructs**

SIRL-1 cDNA was cloned into a retroviral pMX vector using SIRL-specific forward (5′-CGGGATCCACCATGACCGCAGATTCCTCTC-3′) and reverse (5′-TCTTCAAGTGTACATCTTTAGTGCCG-3′) primers. To create a N-terminal flag-tagged SIRL-1, SIRL-1 cDNA lacking a leader sequence was ligated in a pMX vector containing a CKD-leader-flag construct using the AmpliTaq Gold DNA Polymerase system (Applied Biosystems). Each amplification reaction underwent 50 cycles of denaturation at 96°C for 30 s, annealing at 58°C for 30 s, and elongation at 72°C for 1 min. SIRL-1 cDNA obtained from these samples was cloned into pGEM-T Easy vectors using the pGEM-T Easy vector system (Promega, Madison, WI) and subsequently sequenced. The obtained sequence was deposited in GenBank (accession number FN938145).

**Degranulation assays**

The degranulation assay of RBL-2H3 has been described previously (18). RBL-2H3 cells were stably transduced with SIRL-1 or SIRL-1 tyrosine-to-phenylalanine (tyr-phe) mutants. Plates were coated with 3 μg/ml 1A5 anti-SIRL-1 or an isotype control MAb for 2 h. Gel or beads were washed with PBS and blocked with 50 μl 10% BSA. Samples were immunoprecipitated for 90 min. Immune complexes were washed five times with 0.1% Triton X-100, supplemented with 1 mM PMSF and 250 μM sodium orthovanadate and boiled in non-reducing sample buffer. Proteins were resolved by SDS-PAGE and transferred to Immobilon-P membranes (Millipore, Bedford, MA). Western blots were incubated with Abs specific for phosphotyrosine, SIRL-1, flag M2, and SHP-1 (Upstate Biotechnology). Whole blood was diluted 1/5 in RPMI 1640 medium supplemented with FCS and transferred to plates coated with 1A5 anti-SIRL-1 or an isotype control MAb. Triplicate reactions were used for each condition. The spontaneous release was determined by coating BSA instead of BSA-TNP. The percentage of inhibition of degranulation by SIRL-1 was calculated by (OD$_{405}$) TNP with isotype cross-linking – OD$_{405}$ TNP with SIRL-1 cross-linking/OD$_{405}$ TNP with isotype cross-linking – OD$_{405}$ TNP (spontaneous release) × 100.

**Intracellular cytokine staining**

Whole blood was diluted 1/5 in RPMI 1640 medium supplemented with FCS and transferred to plates coated with 1A5 anti-SIRL-1 MAb or an isotype control. TNF-α production was induced by addition of 10 μg/ml Curdlan (Wako Chemicals) or 5–10 ng/ml LPS (Sigma-Aldrich). TNF-α secretion was prevented by addition of Golgiplug (BD Biosciences) to the culture. After 4 h of stimulation at 37°C, erythrocytes were lysed, and cells were stained for surface expression of SIRL-1 and CD14, after which cells were permeabilized with cytoshift/perm (BD Biosciences), stained with anti–TNF-α (BD Biosciences), and analyzed by flow cytometry.
Results

SIRL-1 is homologous to LAIR-1b and the SIRL-1 gene is located in close proximity to the human LRC region.

A cDNA encoding a putative novel ITIM-bearing receptor (NP_940883 or VSTM1) was retrieved from the human protein databases (NCBI). We named this putative receptor signal inhibitory receptor on leukocytes-1 (SIRL-1). SIRL-1 core nucleotide and protein sequences were analyzed and correspond to a putative polypeptide composed of 236 aa. The SIRL-1 polypeptide contains a 16-aa signal peptide, three putative glycosylation sites and a single hydrophobic transmembrane region spanning from aa 135 to 157 (Fig. 1A). SIRL-1 is a type Ia membrane protein that contains one extracellular IgV domain, classifying SIRL-1 as a member of the IgSF. SIRL-1 also contains two intracellular tyrosines (Y206 and Y231) that are part of an ITIM (VYYaEL) and a putative ITIM (HeYaaL), respectively. To investigate whether SIRL-1 had close family members or homologs, we searched the NCBI human blast program with a blastp algorithm for sequences homologous with SIRL-1 protein sequence. The protein with the highest amino acid homology to SIRL-1 was LAIR-1b, which is ~25% identical and 55% similar to full-length SIRL-1 (Fig. 1A). The SIRL-1 gene spans ~23.1 kb of genomic sequence and consists of nine exons (Fig. 1B). The gene is located centromeric to the human LRC region on chromosome 19q13.4 (Fig. 1C). The LRC region contains several gene families that are part of the IgSF including LAIRs, leukocyte Ig-like receptors and killer Ig-like receptors (19).

SIRL-1 is expressed by myeloid but not lymphoid cells.

To investigate the SIRL-1 expression profile, we generated SIRL-1–specific mouse mAb. The monoclonal hybridoma clone 1A5 producing Ab of the IgG1 type was purified and used for our studies (see Materials and Methods). SIRL-1–transfected but not nontransfected RBL-2H3 cells stained with 1A5 anti–SIRL-1-FITC mAb as analyzed by flow cytometry, demonstrating the specificity of the Ab (Fig. 2A). In addition, the SIRL-1–specific Ab detected a ~45-kDa and a fainter ~37-kDa protein by Western blot analysis in SIRL-1 transfected but not in the nontransfected RBL-2H3 cells (Fig. 2B). We subsequently analyzed SIRL-1 expression on human peripheral blood leukocytes by flow cytometry. As described in Materials and Methods, quadrants were set on base of isotype stainings (Fig. 3A). We found that SIRL-1 was highly expressed by both CD11b+ CD16dim neutrophils and CD11b+CD16low eosinophils (Fig. 3A, 3B). Likewise, most CD14+ monocytes highly expressed SIRL-1, although a subset of monocytes was low/intermediate for SIRL-1 expression (Fig. 3A, 3B). Expression of SIRL-1 on CD3+ CD14+CD19+ CD56+CD11c+HLA-DR+ myeloid dendritic cells differed per donor: some donors showed intermediate expression of SIRL-1, whereas other donors did not express SIRL-1 on the myeloid dendritic cells (Fig. 3A, 3B). In contrast, CD3+ CD14+CD19+ CD56+CD11c+ HLA-DR+CD123+ plasmacytoid dendritic cells did not express SIRL-1 (data not shown). Lymphocytes, including CD3+ CD56+ NK cells, CD3− CD19+ B cells, and CD3− T cells, also did not express SIRL-1 (Fig. 3A, 3B).
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After immunoprecipitation with 1A5 anti–SIRL-1 mAb, a specific band at 37 kDa was detected that was absent in isotype control immunoprecipitations (Fig 3C).

To determine whether additional cell types expressed SIRL-1, we performed flow cytometry analysis on cells obtained from human tonsils, adenoid, spleen, cord blood, bone marrow, blastocysts, and hematopoietic and mesenchymal stem cells. In the bone marrow compartment, a small subset of CD11b+CD16+SIRL-1+ neutrophils was identified (data not shown), whereas all other samples were negative for SIRL-1 expression.

We next performed flow cytometry analysis of several cell lines including: THP-1, U-937, HL-60 (monocytic cell lines); Daudi and Raji (B lymphoblastic cell lines); CEM and Jurkat (T lymphoblastic lines); YT2c2 (NK cell line); TF-1 (erythroid cell line); CHRF-288, Meg-01, and Dami (megakaryocytic cell lines); and HEK293T (HEK cells) and human foreskin fibroblasts. None of these cell lines expressed SIRL-1 on their membrane (data not shown), suggesting that SIRL-1 expression is restricted to primary myeloid cells.

SIRL-1 requires both ITIMs to recruit SHP-1 and SHP-2

The capacity of inhibitory immune receptors to inhibit cellular activation depends on effector molecules, generally recruited to the ITIMs. Because most phosphorylated ITIMs can recruit the phosphatases SHP-1, SHP-2, or SHIP, we tested whether these molecules were indeed recruited to SIRL-1. Nontransfected and RBL-2H3 cells stably transfected with SIRL-1 were treated with pervanadate to increase tyrosine phosphorylation or left unstimulated. SIRL-1 was immunoprecipitated with 1A5 anti–SIRL-1 mAb. SIRL-1 recruited SHP-1 after pervanadate treatment, but no interaction between SIRL-1 and SHP-2 was found in these cells (Fig 4A). We next assessed the contribution of the individual ITIMs in the recruitment of SHP-1. Tyr-phe mutants of SIRL-1 were generated, in which the central tyrosine of either the N-terminal ITIM (SIRL-1 FY), the C-terminal putative ITIM (SIRL-1 YF), or both ITIMs (SIRL-1 FF) was mutated to a phenylalanine. RBL-2H3 cells were stably transfected with wild-type SIRL-1 or SIRL-1 tyr-phe mutants, which were expressed at comparable levels on the cell surface (Fig 4B). SIRL-1 and tyr-phe mutants were subsequently immunoprecipitated with 1A5 anti–SIRL-1 mAb, and both tyrosine phosphorylation pattern and association of SHP-1 and SHP-2 were determined. Pervanadate treatment resulted in strong phosphorylation of wild-type SIRL-1, whereas none of the mutants attained the same degree of phosphorylation (Fig. 4C). This indicates that both tyrosines of SIRL-1 can be phosphorylated. Interestingly, in the SIRL-1 mutant with an intact N-terminal ITIM, a moderate amount of phosphorylation could still be detected but not in the mutant with an intact C-terminal ITIM (Fig. 4C). This may indicate that phosphorylation of the C-terminal ITIM is facilitated by prior phosphorylation of the N-terminal ITIM. As expected, no phosphorylation could be detected in the SIRL-1 FF mutant. Notably, the interaction between SHP-1 and SIRL-1 after pervanadate treatment was abrogated in all SIRL-1 tyr-phe mutants, indicating that both ITIMs of SIRL-1 are required for SHP-1 recruitment.

Because the lack of SHP-2 recruitment to SIRL-1 in RBL cells may be cell line dependent, we performed additional immunoprecipitations in HEK293T transiently transfected with flag-tagged SIRL-1 and tyr-phe mutants and flag-tagged FcRRIb as a control. Comparable cell surface expression of all receptors was confirmed by flow cytometry (data not shown). Flag-tagged SIRL-1, tyr-phe mutants, and FcRRIb were immunoprecipitated with anti-flag beads, and association with SHP-2 was analyzed. Notably, an

FIGURE 3. SIRL-1 is expressed on myeloid but not on lymphoid cells. A. Leukocytes were isolated from human peripheral blood by Ficoll-Histopaque density gradient centrifugation, and coexpression of SIRL-1 and lineage markers was determined by flow cytometry. Granulocytes were gated on base of forward and side scatter and CD11b expression. SIRL-1 is highly expressed by CD16high neutrophils and CD16low eosinophils (left top panel). CD14+ monocytes (middle top panel) were gated on base of forward and side scatter. HLA-DR+ myeloid dendritic cells (right top panel) were gated on base of forward and side scatter and further selected by gating CD3+ CD14+ CD19+ CD56+ and CD11c+ cells. Lymphocytes were gated on base of forward and side scatter. CD56+ NK cells and CD19+ B cells were selected by gating CD3+ cells. Neither NK cells, B cells, nor CD3+ T cells expressed SIRL-1 (bottom panels). Quadrants were set on base of isotype stainings. Data shown are representative of at least three different donors analyzed in independent experiments. B. Mean fluorescence intensity of SIRL-1 expression on different peripheral blood cell types averaged for three donors. Error bars represent SEM. C. Immunoprecipitations with 1A5 anti–SIRL-1 (1A5) or an isotype control (cIg) mAb were performed on isolated granulocytes and SIRL-1-transfected RBL-2H3 cells. Samples were analyzed by Western blots using 1A5 anti–SIRL-1 mAb, followed by HRP-linked secondary Abs to detect SIRL-1 expression. A specific ~37-kDa band was detected in granulocytes after immunoprecipitation with 1A5 anti–SIRL-1 mAb.

3B). We next performed immunoprecipitations with 1A5 anti–SIRL-1 or an isotype control mAb on isolated granulocytes and analyzed Western blots with 1A5 anti–SIRL-1 mAb to detect SIRL-1 expression. SIRL-1–transfected RBL-2H3 cells were loaded as a con-
interaction between wild-type SIRL-1 and SHP-2 was clearly detected in these cells (Fig. 4D). Immunoprecipitations using tyr-phe mutants of SIRL-1 once more suggest that two intact ITIMs are required for the interaction, because mutation of either tyrosine disrupted the recruitment. Conversely, no recruitment of SHIP was observed (data not shown). To summarize, both tyrosines of SIRL-1 can be potentially phosphorylated and are required for the interaction of SIRL-1 with SHP-1 and SHP-2.

SIRL-1 requires both ITIMs for full inhibition of FcεRI-mediated degranulation

Classically, ITIM-bearing receptors are capable of inhibiting signals mediated by receptors containing ITAMs. RBL-2H3 cells express the IgE receptor FceRI, a well-characterized ITAM-bearing receptor, and FceRI-mediated degranulation of RBL-2H3 cells is a reputable model to test the inhibitory capacity of ITIM-bearing receptors. We used this model to investigate whether SIRL-1 could inhibit cell activation signals. To stimulate the FceRI, RBL-2H3 cells were primed with anti–TNP-IgE and transferred to plates coated with TNP. The amount of β-glucuronidase released is used as a measure of the extent of degranulation, whereas an isotype control had no effect (Fig. 5A). We next used SIRL-1 tyr-phe mutants to assess the capacity of...
individual SIRL-1 ITIMs to suppress FcεRI-mediated degranulation. Interestingly, SIRL-1 receptors with mutated N- or C-terminal ITIM were both able to inhibit degranulation by ∼50% compared with the isotype control, demonstrating that both ITIMs have inhibitory potential (Fig. 5B). Mutating both tyrosines, however, resulted in a complete loss of inhibitory potential, suggesting that inhibition in this in vitro system is mediated exclusively via SIRL-1 ITIMs. In conclusion, our data indicate that SIRL-1 can inhibit FcεRI-mediated degranulation and that SIRL-1 requires both ITIMs for its full inhibitory capacity.

**SIRL-1high monocytes produce less TNF-α than SIRL-1low monocytes**

To determine whether SIRL-1 could modulate TNF-α production by primary cells, whole blood was stimulated by adding either LPS or Curdlan, a strong agonist for the pattern recognition receptor Dectin (20), to the culture. Monocyte TNF-α production was measured by intracellular staining using flow cytometry analysis. Monocytes were gated on base of forward and side scatter and on CD14 expression. TNF-α expression was quantified in human monocytes expressing either low or high SIRL-1 (Fig 6A). Notably, SIRL-1high monocytes consistently express less TNF-α than SIRL-1low monocytes (p = 0.018 for Curdlan-stimulated samples and p = 0.028 for LPS-stimulated samples) (Fig. 6B). Cross-linking of SIRL-1 by plate-bound 1A5 anti–SIRL mAb did not decrease TNF-α expression in total CD14+ monocytes (Fig 6C) or in SIRL-1high or SIRL-1low monocytes (data not shown). The lack of effect of plate-bound 1A5 anti–SIRL mAb was not due to steric hindrance by other blood cells, because similar results were obtained when we stimulated isolated PBMCs and analyzed intracellular TNF-α production in monocytes, nor did plate-bound 1A5 anti–SIRL mAb decrease TNF-α expression in either SIRL-1high or SIRL-1low monocytes (data not shown). Similarly, levels of secreted TNF-α after stimulation of MACS-isolated monocytes were not affected by plate-bound 1A5 anti–SIRL mAb as measured by ELISA (data not shown). We next investigated whether recruitment of phosphatases to SIRL-1 could be detected in monocytes. Immunoprecipitations were performed using 1A5 anti–SIRL-1 mAb in isolated monocytes. Indeed, an interaction of SIRL-1 with SHP-1 was demonstrated (Fig. 6D, top panel). Notably, in three of four donors, this interaction was demonstrated without SIRL-1 stimulation. Conversely, no interaction of SIRL-1 with SHP-2 could be demonstrated, either with or without pervanadate treatment (Fig. 6D, bottom panel). In conclusion, SIRL-1 recruits SHP-1 but not SHP-2 in monocytes, and SIRL-1high-monocytes produce less TNF-α than SIRL-1low monocytes.

**Discussion**

In this paper, we describe the identification and characterization of the novel ITIM-bearing receptor SIRL-1. This receptor has an extracellular IgV domain and is therefore a member of the IgSF. **SIRL-1** is located close to the human LRC region on chromosome 19q13.4, which contains many genes of the IgSF.

On the basis of the primary amino acid sequence, SIRL-1 is most homologous to the inhibitory receptor LAIR-1b, of which the gene is located close to **SIRL-1** in the human LRC region. LAIR-1 is expressed on almost all immune cells (8), excluding resting neutrophils (21), and is the sole inhibitory receptor described so far that ligates collagen (22). LAIR-1 has a broad modulatory role in many immune cell types, including inhibition of cytotoxic activity of NK cells and effector T cells [reviewed by Meyard (8)]. The broad expression pattern of LAIR-1 is quite dissimilar to the expression profile of SIRL-1, which is restricted to myeloid cells (Fig. 3). Furthermore,
with no more than 25% of the amino acids being identical, the homology between SIRL-1 and LAIR-1 is limited. In addition, we have not detected binding of SIRL-1 to collagen (data not shown), so a physiological ligand for SIRL-1 remains as yet unidentified.

SIRL-1 N-terminal tyrosine is centered in a canonical ITIM sequence, but the C-terminal tyrosine is part of a structurally atypical ITIM sequence (HxYxxL). As previously discussed, ITIMs are structurally defined as V/L/I/SxYxxV/L/I, but the hydrophobic residue at Y-2 is less conserved than at Y+3 (11). Setting up a prediction model for preferential binding of specific ITIMs to SH2 domain-containing phosphatases, Sweeney et al. (23) reported differential requirements of the SH2 domains of SHP-1, SHP-2, and SHIP. They demonstrate a high preference for hydrophobic residues at Y-2 position for SHP-2 recruitment, but surprisingly, they found that this preference is much weaker for SHP-1 recruitment. Indeed, the C-terminal SH2 domain of SIRP-1 has a similar affinity for histidine (present in SIRL-1 C-terminal ITIM) as for isoleucine at the Y-2 in their experiments. Besides the structural definition of ITIMs, ITIMs are functionally defined as being phosphorylated on the central tyrosine, recruiting SH2 domain-containing phosphatases, and inhibiting ITAM-dependent activation signals (5). By studying tyr-phe mutants of SIRL-1, we were able to determine whether the SIRL-1 C-terminal putative ITIM functions as a true ITIM. We show that two intact tyrosines are required for maximal receptor phosphorylation and recruitment of SHP-1 and SHP-2, suggesting that the second tyrosine participates in SHP-1 and SHP-2 binding (Fig. 4). An alternative explanation for the abrogated phosphatase recruitment in the SIRL-1 FY mutant could be that the C-terminal tyrosine is required for phosphorylation of the N-terminal tyrosine without directly binding to SHP-1 or SHP-2 itself. However, our phosphorylation studies using the SIRL-1 FY mutant demonstrate that phosphorylation can take place in the absence of a C-terminal tyrosine and thus strongly disfavor this hypothesis. Furthermore, it has been postulated that two intact ITIMs are necessary for recruitment of SHP-1, because the abrogation of SHP-1 recruitment by disrupting one of two ITIMs has been demonstrated before (18, 24), supporting the hypothesis of an active participation of the second tyrosine in SHP-1 binding. Finally, in the FceRI-mediated degranulation model, an independent inhibitory effect of the SIRL-1 FY mutant was observed, and both intact ITIMs were required for SIRL-1 full inhibitory potential (Fig. 5). The SIRL-1 FY mutant was found to partly inhibit degranulation, despite a lack of detectable tyrosine phosphorylation in this mutant. Most likely, the SIRL-1 FY mutant can be phosphorylated to some extent, but this phosphorylation was below the detection limit of the phosphotyrosine Ab. Taken together, these results ascertain that the C-terminal tyrosine of SIRL-1 is part of a bona fide ITIM, and we propose the inclusion of a histidine residue at the Y-2 position in the definition of the ITIM.

In RBL-2H3 cells an interaction between SIRL-1 and SHP-1 was demonstrated, but no interaction between SIRL-1 and SHP-2. However, in HEK293T cells, which lack SHP-1, SHP-2 recruitment by SIRL-1 was observed (Fig. 4). Because the physiological significance of the phosphatase recruitment was unclear, we examined the recruitment potential of SIRL-1 in peripheral blood monocytes. In these cells, an interaction between SIRL-1 and SHP-1, but not SHP-2, was demonstrated (Fig. 6D). Additionally, our data suggest that besides SHP-1 and SHP-2, SIRL-1 may recruit other molecules to establish its inhibitory effect, because both SIRL-1 single tyr-phe mutants can partly inhibit degranulation, whereas no SHP-1 or SHP-2 is recruited to these mutants. Similar results were obtained previously by our group, when demonstrating a SHP-independent function of the ITIM-bearing receptor LAIR-1 (7).

Remarkably, SIRL-1 is exclusively expressed by cells of myeloid origin; phagocytes especially have high SIRL-1 expression, whereas SIRL-1 is absent from lymphoid cells. The expression pattern of SIRL-1 resembles that of the inhibitory receptors signal regulatory protein α (SIRPα) (25, 26), Siglec-5 (27), and to a lesser extent CD200R (28, 29). Expression of these receptors is also mainly restricted to myeloid cells of the immune system, although recent papers demonstrate that CD200R is also expressed by human T and B cells (29, 30). Both SIRPα and CD200R have crucial functions in immune regulation and phagocytosis and in control of bacterial infections. For example, mice deficient in CD200, the ligand for CD200R, are prone to autoimmune disease and have an increased myeloid response to inflammation (31). Indeed, infecting these mice with influenza virus leads to an enhanced, fatal inflammation (32). SIRPα, in contrast, has a well-established role in the inhibition of host cell phagocytosis by macrophages (33). Furthermore, SIRPα cross-linking has shown to inhibit LPS-induced TNF-α production in macrophages (34), whereas knockdown of SIRPα in mouse macrophages results in increased production of TNF-α, IL-6, NO, and IFN-β in response to LPS. Moreover, transfer of SIRPα knockdown macrophages into wild-type mice results in an increased susceptibility to lethal LPS shock (35).

In this study, we demonstrate that SIRL-1high monocytes express less TNF-α than SIRL-1low monocytes after LPS or Curdlan stimulation (Fig. 6). This could be due to differential SIRL-1 expression on distinct subsets of monocytes. Alternatively, the lower TNF-α production by SIRL-1high monocytes may indicate that SIRL-1 is permanently signaling on these cells, leading to suppression of cell activation. This notion is supported by the finding that additional Ab-mediated cross-linking of SIRL-1 did not further affect TNF-α expression and by the finding that SIRL-1 is permanently recruited by SIRL-1 in monocytes. An explanation for the constitutive activation of SIRL-1 may be the activation of SIRL-1 by its ligand, the identity of which is presently unknown. The constitutive activation of SIRL-1 by its ligand would suggest an important role for SIRL-1 in the suppression of leukocyte activation or in increasing the activation threshold of myeloid cells. Furthermore, the fact that not only ITAM-containing Dectin signaling is affected by SIRL-1 expression but also TLR4-mediated LPS signaling implies a broad immune modulatory function for SIRL-1.

In conclusion, we have characterized a hitherto unidentified ITIM-bearing receptor, showing expression pattern, recruitment of intracellular phosphatases, inhibitory function, and the particular involvement of individual ITIMs. To further elucidate the biological role of SIRL-1 in the regulation of the innate immune response, more research is necessary. An important step toward unraveling this function would be the identification of SIRL-1 biological ligand.

Disclosures
T.A.M.S., R.J.L., and L.M. are named as inventors on a patent application on SIRL-1 function. All other authors have no conflicting financial interests.

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