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

Citation for published version:

Million Veterans Program 2022, 'A multi-layer functional genomic analysis to understand noncoding genetic variation in lipids', *American Journal of Human Genetics*, vol. 109, no. 8, pp. 1366-1387.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajhg.2022.06.012>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1016/j.ajhg.2022.06.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajhg.2022.06.012)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

American Journal of Human Genetics

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1 **A multi-layer functional genomic analysis to understand noncoding genetic variation in**
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741

742 **Summary**

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

758

759

760 **Introduction**

761

762 Most GWAS findings have not directly led to mechanistic interpretations, largely because
763 approximately 90% of GWAS associations map to non-coding sequences^{1,2}. Mechanistic
764 interpretations in GWAS have proven challenging because the strongest signals identified in
765 GWAS typically contain many variants in strong linkage disequilibrium (LD)³ and
766 functional mechanisms including genes of action are often not clear from GWAS data alone
767 ^{4,5}.

768

769 Linking trait-associated variants to genome function has emerged as a promising model for
770 mechanistic interpretation of non-coding findings in GWAS. This 'variant-to-function' model
771 is premised on recent observations that non-coding variants often affect a trait of interest
772 through the regulation of genes and processes in trait-relevant cell types or tissues^{2,6}.

773 Implementing this functional model in GWAS has become more feasible as large-scale
774 functional genomic resources, such as epigenomic⁷ and transcriptomic⁸ catalogues, have
775 been systematically generated across a wide range of human cell types and tissues. The
776 integration of functional genomics with GWAS has identified regulatory mechanisms in
777 variants associated with some flagship disorders such as obesity⁹ and schizophrenia¹⁰,
778 yielding important functional insights into the genetic architecture of human complex traits.

779

780 The history of the human genetics of lipids mirrors the successes and challenges of GWAS.
781 Increasing sample size and genetic diversity has significantly boosted the power of discovery:
782 the first lipid GWAS in 2008 with 8,816 European-descent individuals identified 29 lipid-
783 associated loci¹¹; the latest study of 1.6 million individuals across five ancestries¹² found
784 941. Despite the dramatic increase in the number of associations, our biological

785 understanding of many of these genetic discoveries remains limited. The causal gene has
786 been confidently assigned at only a small fraction of these loci ², and the regulatory
787 mechanism connecting variant to phenotype has been conclusively characterized only for a
788 handful of genes ⁵. Furthermore, systematic mapping of lipid-associated variants to their
789 biological functions has been missing in the literature at the time of this study.

790

791 Here we conduct a genome-scale integrative analysis on the largest published GWAS to-date
792 of five lipid phenotypes (LDL, or low density lipoprotein; HDL, or high density lipoprotein;
793 TC, or total cholesterol; nonHDL, or non-high density lipoprotein; and TG, or triglycerides)
794 involving 1.65 million individuals from five ancestries ¹². Combining the lipid GWAS with a
795 wide array of functional genomic resources in diverse human tissues and cell types, we
796 identify regulatory mechanisms of noncoding genetic variation in lipids with a full suite of
797 computational approaches. Further, we develop a generalizable framework to understand how
798 tissue-specific gene regulation can explain GWAS findings, and demonstrate its real-world
799 value on lipid-associated loci.

800

801 **Material and methods**

802

803 *GWAS*

804

805 We used the recently-published GWAS data for five blood lipid traits (LDL, HDL, TC, TG,
806 and nonHDL) in 1.65 million individuals from five ancestry groups ¹² (African and African-
807 admixed, East Asian, European, Hispanic, South Asian) at 91 million variants imputed
808 primarily from the Haplotype Reference Consortium ¹³ or 1000 Genomes Phase 3 ¹⁴. GWAS

809 of individual cohorts were based on the hg19 version of the human reference genome. MR-
810 MEGA ¹⁵ was used for meta-analysis across cohorts.

811

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

818

819 For each sentinel variant, we defined credible sets of potentially causal variants within +/-
820 500kb region around the sentinel variant representing the set of variants harboring the causal
821 variant with a 95% posterior probability. Full details of the credible set construction are
822 reported in our recent GWAS publication ¹². The credible sets are freely available (Web
823 resources).

824

825 *Colocalization of GWAS associations with eQTLs*

826

827 We performed statistical colocalization of lipid GWAS with eQTLs obtained from GTEx v8
828 across 49 tissues ⁸. For each of the five lipid traits, we used the same sentinel variants defined
829 in the previous section to represent approximately independent GWAS-associated windows
830 (also removing shadow signals as described before). For each such window, we ran eQTL
831 colocalization with GTEx v8 single-tissue cis-eQTL summary statistics ⁸. For each of 49
832 GTEx tissues, we first identified all genes within 1Mb of the sentinel SNP, and then restricted
833 analysis to those genes with significant eQTLs (i.e., 'eGenes' as defined by GTEx) in that

834 tissue (FDR < 0.05). We used the R package 'coloc' (R version 3.4.3, coloc version 3.2.1) ¹⁷
835 with default parameters to run colocalization between the GWAS signal and the eQTL signal
836 for each of these cis-eGenes, using as input those SNPs in the defined window (greater than
837 500kb or 0.25cM on either side of the lead variant) that are present in both datasets. eQTL
838 summary statistics were in GRCh38, so we lifted over the GWAS summary statistics from
839 hg19 to GRCh38 using liftOver ¹⁸. As in previous studies ¹⁹, we used a colocalization
840 posterior probability of (PP3+PP4) > 0.8 to identify loci with enough colocalization power,
841 and PP4/PP3 > 0.9 to define those loci that show significant colocalization, where PP4
842 represents posterior probability of a single shared signal, and PP3 represents posterior
843 probability of two unique signals in the GWAS and eQTL datasets.

844

845 *Overlap with promoter Capture-C data*

846

847 We used four promoter-focused Capture-C (henceforth Capture-C) datasets from three human
848 cell types (Web resources) to capture physical interactions between gene promoters and their
849 regulatory elements. The four Capture-C datasets are (1) three biological replicates of HepG2
850 liver carcinoma cells (HepG2.1) ²⁰; (2) another HepG2 dataset described in Selvarajan et al
851 (HepG2.2) ²¹; (3) hepatocyte-like cells (HLC) produced by differentiating three biological
852 replicates of iPSCs (which in turn were generated from peripheral blood mononuclear cells
853 using a previously published protocol ²²); (4) an adipose dataset obtained from Pan et al ²³
854 that was produced using primary human white adipocytes. Across the four datasets, the
855 number of significant interactions on the same chromosome ranges from 67,819 (adipose) to
856 126,565 (HLC). The bait end has a median size of 2,141 (HepG2.1) to 6,567 (HepG2.2)
857 bases. The interacting end has a median size of 2,100 (HepG2.1) to 3,243 base pairs
858 (HepG2.2) for all datasets. The median distance between the bait and interacting ends for all

859 interactions on the same chromosome ranges from 71,722 (HLC) to 285,140 base pairs
860 (adipose).
861
862 The detailed protocol to prepare HepG2 or HLC cells for the Capture-C experiment is
863 described in Chesi et al²⁰. Briefly, for each dataset, 10 million cells were used for promoter
864 Capture-C library generation. Custom capture baits were designed using an Agilent
865 SureSelect library design targeting both ends of DpnII restriction fragments encompassing
866 promoters (including alternative promoters) of all human coding genes, noncoding RNA,
867 antisense RNA, snRNA, miRNA, snoRNA, and lincRNA transcripts, totalling 36,691 RNA
868 baited fragments. Each library was then sequenced on an Illumina HiSeq 4000 (HepG2) or
869 Illumina NovoSeq (HLC), generating 1.6 billion read pairs per sample (50 base pair read
870 length.) We used HiCUP v0.7.2²⁴ to process the raw FASTQ files into loop calls and
871 CHiCAGO v1.6.0²⁵ to define significant looping interactions; we defined a CHiCAGO score
872 of 5 as significant, as specified in the default parameters.
873
874 Starting with Capture-C maps processed as described above, we re-annotated the baits to
875 gene IDs from Gencode v19²⁶ to ensure uniformity of gene annotations with the rest of our
876 pipeline. For each bait, we identified any gene whose transcription start site (TSS) from any
877 transcript in Gencode v19 was within 175 base pair distance from the bait (to account for
878 differing bait designs for external datasets which may not directly overlap the canonical
879 TSS). We filtered all datasets to only include interactions in which the interacting end was
880 not another bait. Enrichment with colocalized genes was robust to our choice of distance
881 between bait and gene (enrichment with eQTL colocalized genes ranging from 2.94-2.96 for
882 bait distances from 0-350 base pairs).
883

884 To identify genetic variants associated with any of the five lipid traits that physically interact
885 with locations in the genome, we used the R package ‘Genomic Ranges’ version 1.30.3²⁷ to
886 find overlap between credible sets for each trait’s GWAS and the previously annotated
887 promoter Capture-C data. Given the bait end of a gene, we defined a GWAS locus as
888 interacting with this gene if a variant in the credible set for this GWAS locus fell inside the
889 interacting end.

890

891 *Presence of gene-variant pairs in same topologically associated domains*

892

893 To assess the frequency of colocalized gene-sentinel variant pairs in the same topologically
894 associated domain (TAD), we used a list of 2,499 publicly-available TADs from human liver
895²⁸ (Web resources). We computed as a fraction the number of colocalizations with the
896 sentinel variant and colocalized gene in the same TAD divided by all colocalizations in which
897 the sentinel variant lies in a TAD. To test if this fraction was statistically significant, we
898 generated random TAD boundaries using ‘bedtools shuffle’ 1000 times and calculated the
899 same fraction for these randomly-generated TAD boundaries.

900

901 *Pathway enrichment*

902

903 We used ClusterProfiler v3.6.0²⁹ to look for pathways over-represented in each gene list:
904 genes with eQTL colocalization and genes interacting with variants in GWAS credible sets.
905 We used the enrichKEGG function to look for enriched pathways in the latest version of the
906 KEGG database³⁰. We first re-mapped gencode IDs to gene symbols using the Gencode v24
907 annotation and then used the biomaRt R package v2.34.2³¹ to convert gene symbols to

908 Entrez IDs. We ran enrichKEGG to identify enriched pathways that were significant at a
909 Benjamini-Hochberg threshold of 0.05.

910

911 *Enrichment in known lipid-associated genes*

912

913 We calculated enrichment odds ratio of genes identified in our analysis with four known sets
914 of lipid-associated genes using the Fisher's exact test (R function 'fisher.test'). First, we
915 identified 33 Mendelian genes from ClinVar³² with lipidemia-associated ICD10 codes (E78).
916 Second, we used 35 genes with rare-coding variants associated with lipid levels³³. Third, we
917 extracted 1,115 genes associated with 'cholesterol' or 'lipidemia' phenotypes in mouse
918 knockouts from the Mouse Genome Informatics database³⁴. Fourth, we identified 4,008
919 genes from a transcriptome-wide association study (TWAS) on the same GWAS and GTEx
920 v8 summary statistics using the S-PrediXcan software³⁵ default setup. The TWAS method
921 accounts for allelic heterogeneity and thus complements the eQTL colocalization approach
922 that assumes one causal variant per locus.

923

924 *TF binding sites*

925

926 We extracted TF binding sites from ChIP-seq data of 161 TFs in 91 cell types from the
927 ENCODE project⁷ (Web resources). We included all cell types in our primary analysis
928 because TFs were not comprehensively assayed in most cell lines. We also performed a
929 secondary analysis using TF binding sites from HepG2 only. All TF binding sites were
930 aligned to the hg19 version of human reference genome
931 (https://www.encodeproject.org/chip-seq/transcription_factor/).

932

933 *Stratified LD score (S-LDSC) regression analysis*

934

935 We used LDSC version 1.0.1³⁶ to estimate the enrichment of heritability explained using
936 GWAS summary statistics in different epigenetic and transcriptomic annotations, including
937 gene expression, chromatin marks, and TF binding sites. The gene expression and chromatin
938 mark annotations across 205 datasets from more than 170 tissues and cell types and the
939 corresponding LD scores were provided as 'Multitissuegeneexpr1000Gv3' and
940 'Multitissuechromatin1000Gv3' databases in LDSC software (Web resources). The LD
941 scores for binding sites of each TF were estimated from 1000 Genomes Phase 3 European
942 samples using 'ldsc.py --l2'. We first converted the summary statistics for each phenotype to
943 LDSC-formatted summary statistics using 'munge_sumstats.py'. Second, we ran 'ldsc.py'
944 using the baseline_v1.2 baseline model on each annotation to estimate enrichment of
945 heritability. For primary analyses, we used multi-ancestry GWAS summary statistics and LD
946 scores estimated from 1000 Genomes Phase 3 European samples. For secondary analyses on
947 East Asian (EAS) GWAS alone, we obtained EAS-specific LD scores for the same functional
948 annotations³⁷.

949

950 *Genomic regulatory elements and GWAS overlap algorithm (GREGOR) analysis*

951

952 We used GREGOR³⁸ to estimate enrichment of sentinel variants for each lipid phenotype in
953 TF binding sites for 161 TFs from ENCODE compared to a null distribution of variants
954 matched for allele frequency. We ran GREGOR with default parameters, specifying 0.8 as
955 the R^2 threshold, window size of 1Mb, and 'EUR' as the population. Annotations with
956 enrichment > 2 and FDR-adjusted P-value < 0.05 were considered significant.

957

958 *Enrichment in single-cell expression data*

959

960 We overlapped our list of colocalized genes with publicly available single-cell RNA-
961 sequencing data of 8,444 cells from liver³⁹ and 38,408 cells from adipose (Web resources) in
962 humans. For both datasets, we downloaded normalized TPM data and existing tSNE cluster
963 annotations for each cell. For each cluster, we defined median expression for each gene
964 across all cells in that cluster. Then for each cluster, we quantified the overrepresentation of
965 our gene list in ranked genes for this cluster via an enrichment P-value computed by the
966 ‘fgsea’⁴⁰ R package v1.4.1 implemented in R 3.4.3.

967

968 **Results**

969

970 We systematically integrated lipid GWAS results¹² with multiple layers of functional
971 genomic data from diverse tissues and cell types to understand regulatory mechanisms at
972 lipid-associated loci (Figure 1). Specifically, we overlaid GWAS loci with eQTL and
973 chromatin-chromatin interactions to identify causal genes. We assessed polygenic
974 enrichments of tissue-specific histone marks to prioritize relevant tissues and examined
975 GWAS loci at transcription factor (TF) binding sites to detect lipid-relevant TFs. Finally, we
976 combined all these layers to prioritize functional variants at GWAS loci, providing a holistic
977 view of gene regulation at lipid loci in relevant tissue and cell types.

978

979 *Colocalization with eQTLs identifies candidate lipid-relevant genes*

980

981 First, we identified shared association signals between lipid levels and expression of nearby
982 genes, since most GWAS signals are presumed to influence complex traits through impact on

983 gene expression⁴¹. To do so, we tested for colocalization of each significant lipid GWAS
984 signal with significant cis-eQTL data across 49 human tissues from the GTEx consortium⁸.
985 The significant GWAS signals were 1,750 loci reaching genome-wide significance and
986 corrected for shadow signals in our multi-ancestry meta-analysis for at least one of five lipid
987 traits. Credible set sizes ranged from 1 to 417 variants at the 1,750 examined loci, with a
988 median size of 5 variants per credible set.

989

990 Second, we restricted our analysis to loci most likely mediated through regulatory
991 mechanisms as opposed to coding variation. Specifically, we excluded all loci with credible
992 sets containing at least one missense variant (369 of 1,750 loci, 21% of credible sets). Of the
993 remaining 1,381 GWAS loci, 696 significantly colocalized with eQTLs (the ratio of posterior
994 probability of a shared signal to the posterior probability of two signals being > 0.9 ¹⁹) in at
995 least one of 49 tissues for at least one lipid phenotype. This resulted in 1,076 colocalized
996 eGenes ranging from 1 to 16 genes per locus (Figure 2A, Table S1). Since with eQTL data
997 alone it is difficult to disentangle a single functional gene from multiple functional (and likely
998 coregulated) genes at a locus⁴² we performed all downstream analyses with all 1,076
999 colocalized genes, to further prioritize functional genes at loci with multiple eGenes.

1000

1001 Since lipid-associated genetic variants are often enriched in the liver and adipose^{43,44}, we
1002 repeated the colocalization analysis on eQTLs only from liver or adipose. Compared to the
1003 1,076 colocalized eGenes identified from all 49 tissues, the liver- and adipose-only analysis
1004 identified 119 and 225 respectively (Figure 2A). The reduced discovery of colocalized
1005 eGenes in the liver- and adipose-only analysis is likely due to the small sample sizes of liver
1006 (N=208) and adipose (N=581) in GTEx v8 (Figure S1). Leveraging the large degree of tissue
1007 sharing in eQTLs^{19,45}, our cross-tissue colocalization analysis enhanced the discovery power

1008 through the collectively large sample size across all 49 tissues (N=15,201). For example,
1009 several well-documented lipid-relevant genes such as *PPARA*⁴⁶ and *LPL*⁴⁷ were not
1010 identified in the liver- or adipose-only analysis but were identified as significant in our cross-
1011 tissue analysis.

1012

1013 To acquire additional functional insights into the 1,076 colocalized genes, we assessed their
1014 enrichments across existing biological and clinical gene sets (Figure 2B, Table S2, Table S3).
1015 Colocalized genes showed enrichments in (a) 20 KEGG pathways³⁰ at FDR 5%, including
1016 known lipid-related processes such as cholesterol metabolism, PPAR signaling, and bile
1017 secretion; (b) 33 Mendelian genes from ClinVar³² associated with lipid-related ICD10 codes
1018 (11.61-fold enrichment, P=2.08e-06, including *APOB*, *LPL*, and *APOE*), suggesting the
1019 shared genetic basis of Mendelian and complex lipid phenotypes⁴⁸; (c) 35 genes with rare-
1020 variant burden for lipid phenotypes in a recent multi-ancestry analysis³³ (30.82-fold
1021 enrichment, P=1.77e-16, including *APOB*, *LPL*, *LIPG* and *ANGPTL4*), confirming shared
1022 mechanisms of rare and common variation underlying lipid traits^{48,49}; (d) genes implicated
1023 by cholesterol or lipidemia phenotypes in mouse knockouts (3.92-fold enrichment, P=2.18e-
1024 20), suggesting the shared genetic basis of lipid traits between human and mouse⁵⁰.

1025 Colocalized genes also showed enrichment with genes implicated in TWAS (Table S4) run
1026 on the same GWAS and eQTL summary statistics (20.14-fold enrichment, P<2.22e-308).

1027 These enrichment results demonstrate the biological relevance of candidate functional genes
1028 prioritized by our approach.

1029

1030 *Chromatin-chromatin interactions shortlist eQTL-based colocalization*

1031

1032 Our eQTL-based colocalization analysis uses a linear sequence of DNA, and ignores physical
1033 interaction between non-adjacent DNA segments, another regulatory layer underlying
1034 complex human traits⁵¹. To add this layer to our analysis, we generated Capture-C data from
1035 HepG2 liver carcinoma cells (HepG2.1) and hepatocyte-like cells (HLC) derived from
1036 differentiating iPSCs²², as well as publicly-available Capture-C datasets from HepG2²¹
1037 (HepG2.2) and white adipocytes²³. Based on the Capture-C data, we defined an interaction
1038 between a GWAS locus and a gene as a significant interaction between the bait end
1039 (promoter) for this gene and the interacting end that contains a variant in the credible set for
1040 this GWAS locus. In total, 1,079 of 1,750 GWAS loci had at least one variant in the credible
1041 set with a physical interaction with a gene promoter and 3,543 of 26,621 genes with
1042 promoter-interactions had promoters physically interacting with at least one GWAS credible
1043 set variant (Figure 2A, Table S5).

1044

1045 Unlike eQTL-colocalized genes, genes interacting with GWAS credible sets were not
1046 significantly enriched in lipid-relevant KEGG pathways (Table S2) and lipid-related genes
1047 from ClinVar (Figure 2B, Table S3). These genes were significantly enriched in genes with
1048 rare-variant lipid associations (5.36-fold enrichment, $P=2.8e-05$), genes with lipid-related
1049 mouse knockouts (1.43-fold enrichment, $P=2.8e-04$), and TWAS-prioritized genes (5.05-fold
1050 enrichment, $P=2.5e-288$), but their enrichments were consistently lower than enrichments of
1051 eQTL-colocalized genes nonetheless (Figure 2B, Table S3).

1052

1053 Since genes expressed in the liver are most likely to harbour genuine lipid-relevant variant-
1054 gene interactions, we repeated the enrichment analyses above restricting both eQTL
1055 colocalization and Capture-C interactions to genes expressed in the liver (>0.1 TPM and ≥ 6
1056 reads in at least 20% of GTEx liver samples). Reassuringly, we observed higher enrichments

1057 for each combination of two methods (eQTL, Capture-C) and four databases (ClinVar, Rare
1058 Variant, Mouse Knockout, TWAS), when we restricted our analyses to genes expressed in the
1059 liver (Figure 2B, Table S3). For the same database, we observed higher enrichments in eQTL
1060 colocalized genes than Capture-C prioritized genes, consistent with the results based on all
1061 genes.

1062

1063 Genes physically interacting with GWAS loci significantly overlapped with eQTL
1064 colocalized genes despite their reduced enrichments in lipid-related gene sets. Of 1,079
1065 credible sets with promoter interactions, 224 also colocalized with eQTLs for the same gene.
1066 Across 49 eQTL tissues and four Capture-C cell lines, 233 genes were implicated in both
1067 eQTL colocalizations and Capture-C interactions (, Table S6), representing an enrichment of
1068 3-fold compared to random chance (Figure 2C, $P = 3.11e-38$). Because our Capture-C data
1069 came from liver and adipose only, we observed a stronger enrichment in overlap when
1070 restricting genes expressed in the liver or adipose (4.5-fold enrichment, $P = 2.89e-65$). We
1071 observed similar enrichment patterns when analysing liver and adipose Capture-C data
1072 separately (Figure 2C). Together, the enrichments in overlap suggest that, despite a large
1073 number of genes identified by Capture-C (Figure 2A), many of them are likely to harbour
1074 functional interactions with GWAS loci.

1075

1076 Chromatin-chromatin interactions helped shortlist functional genes from eQTL
1077 colocalization. Among 224 loci with concordant eQTL colocalizations and Capture-C
1078 interactions across all tissues, only 39% (88) mapped to a single gene using eQTL data alone,
1079 whereas adding Capture-C information increased this fraction to 80% (180). We observed the
1080 same trend in the adipose-only and liver-only analysis: 80% (12/15) and 79% (26/33) of loci
1081 mapped to a single gene using adipose and liver eQTLs alone, compared to 93% (14/15) and

1082 97% (32/33) after the integration of adipose-only and liver-only Capture-C data respectively
1083 (Figure 2D). These results showcase the potential value of combining eQTLs with physical
1084 chromatin interactions to prioritize functional genes at GWAS loci.

1085

1086 Since eQTLs are likely to reside in the same topologically associated domain (TAD) as the
1087 genes they regulate⁵², we examined TADs from an independent human liver dataset²⁸ at
1088 lipid GWAS loci with eQTL colocalizations to confirm GWAS variant-target gene
1089 colocalization within the same TAD. Of eQTL-GWAS colocalizations in which the sentinel
1090 variant resided within a TAD, 84.8% (1,040 out of 1,235) had the colocalized gene residing
1091 in the same TAD ($P < 0.001$ with 1000 permutations). When we restricted to all
1092 colocalizations concordant with Capture-C data in any cell type, 96.9% (252 out of 260) of
1093 gene-variant pairs fell in the same TAD. This fraction further increased to 100% (33 out of
1094 33) when we repeated the analysis using liver eQTLs and liver Capture-C interactions only.
1095 These results add to the existing evidence for TAD boundaries being regulatory insulators in
1096 the cell⁵³ and confirm our integration of chromatin interactions with eQTL colocalizations as
1097 an effective strategy to hone in on functional genes.

1098

1099 *Tissue-specific enrichment of GWAS signals differentiates lipid traits*

1100

1101 Regulatory variants often affect complex traits in a tissue-specific manner⁶, as shown in our
1102 eQTL colocalization analysis. Specifically, by computing the ratio of the number of
1103 colocalizations in a tissue to eQTL sample size in that tissue, we found that the liver was
1104 universally enriched for colocalized eGenes with respect to sample size across all lipid traits
1105 whereas adipose was selectively enriched in HDL and TG only (Figure S1). Motivated by

1106 these findings, we leveraged systematic approaches and additional data to identify relevant
1107 tissues and cell types for each lipid trait.
1108
1109 We implemented stratified LD score regression (S-LDSC)³⁶, a polygenic approach not
1110 restricted to genome-wide significant variants, on tissue-specific transcriptomic and
1111 epigenomic annotations across 205 datasets from more than 170 tissues and cell types, to
1112 identify relevant tissues for each lipid trait. Consistent with previous studies^{43,44} and our
1113 eQTL-based analysis, liver-related tissues (Table S7, Table S8) showed strong enrichments
1114 across all lipid traits (S-LDSC enrichment p-values ranging from .001 in TG to .0001 in TC),
1115 for both expression (Figure 3A) and chromatin annotations (Figure 3B). This result was
1116 confirmed by analysis using two other approaches: DEPICT⁵⁴ (Figure S2, Table S9) and
1117 RSS-NET⁵⁵ (Table S10). To assess the robustness of our S-LDSC results based on multi-
1118 ancestry GWAS, we applied S-LDSC to population-specific GWAS in European and East
1119 Asian ancestry participants together with population-specific LD scores and obtained similar
1120 results (Table S11, Figure S3, Figure S4).
1121
1122 The S-LDSC results also highlighted tissues selectively enriched in certain lipid traits as
1123 shown in the eQTL-based analysis. The most enriched category for HDL using chromatin
1124 annotation is ‘Adipose H3K4me3’ (P=7.6e-04); for TG, enrichment in liver-related tissues
1125 (P=1.2e-03) is similar to enrichment in adipose (P=2.7e-03). For LDL, TC, and non-HDL,
1126 enrichment P-values for the liver were much more significant than for all other tissues
1127 including adipose (Figure 3B). We observed the same pattern in S-LDSC results based on
1128 gene expression (Figure 3A). This finding is consistent with the known influence of adipose
1129 on plasma HDL levels⁵⁶, and the role of adipose as TG deposits⁵⁷. These results were
1130 corroborated by eQTL colocalizations stratified by phenotype (Figure S1) and DEPICT

1131 analysis on gene expression⁵⁴ (Figure S2, Table S9). Together, these results confirm the
1132 liver as a tissue of action for all five lipid traits, and highlight the additional role of adipose
1133 primarily in HDL and TG.

1134

1135 Given the importance of the liver and adipose in modulating lipid levels, we further identified
1136 the relevant cell types within these tissues. Using existing single-cell data from adipose and
1137 liver³⁹, we performed gene-set enrichment analysis⁵⁸ to identify cell-type clusters enriched
1138 for genes with eQTL colocalizations for any lipid trait. Out of 11 identified cell types in 20
1139 clusters in the liver, only hepatocytes were enriched at FDR-adjusted $P < 0.05$ (Figure S5,
1140 Table S12), consistent with previous results²¹. In adipose, only adipocyte clusters and
1141 macrophage-monocyte clusters showed suggestive enrichment (nominal $P < 0.05$) in
1142 colocalized genes (Figure S6, Table S12). Of note, the enrichment in adipocytes was
1143 significant when we restricted this analysis to genes that were colocalized with HDL and TG
1144 (FDR-corrected $P < 0.05$), consistent with the selective enrichments of adipose in HDL and
1145 TG (but not the other lipid traits) from our S-LDSC analysis. Evaluations at cellular
1146 resolution are required to understand the cell-type specific mechanisms underlying lipid
1147 GWAS loci, but our results could form a useful basis for future studies.

1148

1149 *Overlapping GWAS signals with binding sites highlights lipid-relevant TFs*

1150

1151 TFs have been implicated as a key mediator of linking genetic variation to complex traits⁵⁹.
1152 To understand lipid GWAS in the context of TF activity, we assessed enrichment of genome-
1153 wide significant variants at TF binding sites using GREGOR³⁸ and performed polygenic
1154 enrichment analysis of TF binding sites using S-LDSC. Because TFs were not

1155 comprehensively assayed in most cell lines (Figure S7), we used all cell types in our primary
1156 analysis presented below.

1157

1158 Using ChIP-Seq data from 161 TFs across 91 cell types from the ENCODE project ⁷, 70.7%
1159 of lipid credible sets overlapped with at least one TF binding site. Using GREGOR ³⁸, we
1160 identified 137 TFs whose binding sites were significantly enriched in GWAS lead SNPs for
1161 at least one lipid phenotype (enrichment > 2; FDR adjusted P-value < 0.05; Figure 4A, Table
1162 S13). We obtained similar results when repeating the GREGOR analysis on TF binding sites
1163 derived from HepG2 only (Table S14). To assess the impact of GWAS power on TF
1164 enrichments, we repeated the GREGOR analysis on the same TF binding sites using a
1165 previous version of lipid GWAS ¹¹, and we identified 54 enriched TFs (Table S15). Between
1166 the two versions of lipid GWAS, the total sample size and number of GWAS loci increased
1167 8.7-fold (from 188,577 to 1,650,000) and 11-fold (from 156 to 1750) respectively, but the
1168 number of enriched TFs only increased 2.5-fold (from 54 to 137), suggesting that the large
1169 number of enriched TFs is unlikely driven by the GWAS power alone.

1170

1171 Among these 137 enriched TFs, 69 of them (50%) showed significant enrichments across all
1172 five lipid phenotypes, suggesting a potential core regulatory circuit shared by all lipid traits
1173 (Figure 4A, Table S13). The TF with the strongest enrichment in all phenotypes was ESRRA
1174 (estrogen-related receptor alpha), a nuclear receptor active in metabolic tissues ⁶⁰; ESRRA
1175 has been implicated in adipogenesis and lipid metabolism, and ESRRA-null mice display an
1176 increase in fat mass and obesity ⁶⁰.

1177

1178 The GREGOR analysis also highlighted 68 TFs significantly enriched in specific subsets of
1179 (but not all five) lipid phenotypes (Figure 4A, Table S13). For example, we found 4 TFs

1180 (FOXO1, PBX3, ZKSCAN1, ZEB1) enriched in HDL and TG only, 4 TFs (EZH2, NFE2L2,
1181 NFATC1, KDM5A) enriched in HDL only and 11 TFs (FOSL1, IRF3, JUN, MEF2C,
1182 NANOG, PRDM1, RUNX3, SIRT6, SMC3, STAT3, ZNF217) enriched in TG only. Of these
1183 TFs, the central role of ZEB1 in adiposity⁶¹ and fat cell differentiation has been
1184 demonstrated⁶². These TF-centric findings corroborate the selective enrichments of adipose
1185 in HDL and TG (but not the other lipid traits) identified in our previous tissue prioritization
1186 analyses.

1187

1188 We also performed polygenic enrichment analysis of TF binding sites using S-LDSC (Figure
1189 4B, Table S16), which differed from GREGOR analysis by looking at not only the genome-
1190 wide significant associations but also the polygenic signal without GWAS P-value cutoff. On
1191 the same 161 ENCODE TFs, this polygenic analysis identified 25 TFs whose binding sites
1192 were significantly enriched in heritability explained (nominal $P < 0.05$) for at least one lipid
1193 phenotype; reassuringly, 24 of 25 TFs were also significant in the GREGOR analysis. As a
1194 sensitivity check, we repeated the analysis on TF binding sites derived from HepG2 only, and
1195 we obtained similar results (Table S17).

1196

1197 Among 24 enriched TFs identified by both GREGOR and S-LDSC identified by both
1198 GREGOR and S-LDSC, eight were significantly enriched in all five lipid traits (CEBPB,
1199 CEBPD, FOXA2, HDAC2, HNF4G, NFYA, RXRA, SP1). RXRA (retinoid X receptor
1200 alpha) is encoded by a colocalized gene (*RXRA*) near a GWAS hit (chr9:137,268,682).
1201 RXRA is a ligand-activated transcription factor that forms heterodimers with other receptors
1202 (including PPAR γ) and is involved in lipid metabolism⁶³. Moreover, 145 lipid GWAS loci
1203 overlap RXRA binding peaks, and RXRA binds to the promoters of 26 colocalized genes (18
1204 of which are protein-coding) (Figure 4C, Table S18), suggesting that the GWAS variants

1205 might affect lipids (partially) through affecting the binding activity of RXRA. While *RXRA*
1206 has been previously implicated as a GWAS locus ⁶⁴, our study demonstrates its role in lipid
1207 biology through its regulatory influence on other lipid-associated genes.

1208

1209 *Multi-layer functional integration reveals regulatory mechanisms at GWAS loci*

1210

1211 Motivated by our finding that integrating chromatin interaction shortlisted eQTL
1212 colocalizations, we further brought together multiple lines of functional evidence at each
1213 GWAS locus for mechanistic inference. We started with the list of genes with evidence for
1214 both eQTL colocalization and Capture-C interactions in the liver or adipose. We next
1215 annotated each variant in the 95% credible set with various indicators of regulatory function,
1216 including its open chromatin status in liver ²⁰ or adipose-related cell types ⁶⁵, its proximity to
1217 a promoter or an enhancer ⁶⁶, and its RegulomeDB regulation probability ⁶⁷; see Table S19
1218 for the complete list of annotations used. To account for complexities of regulatory
1219 mechanisms and limitations of functional datasets, we combined evidence across these
1220 datasets to prioritize variants at GWAS loci (Figure 5A). Specifically, we prioritized variants
1221 with at least three independent lines of functional evidence (chromatin openness, physically
1222 interaction with target genes, and promoter/enhancer status) in the liver or adipose, with at
1223 least two being in the same tissue with colocalization with the target gene, and with a
1224 RegulomeDB score > 0.5. Applying this simple procedure to lipid GWAS we prioritized 28
1225 candidate loci with the strongest multi-layer evidence, 13 of which point to a single
1226 functional variant (Table 1). We have also made the full results of variant prioritization freely
1227 available (Web resources). Below we describe two examples to highlight key features of this
1228 multi-layer integration framework.

1229

1230 *RRBP1* (ribosomal binding protein 1) could be identified from eQTL colocalization alone,
1231 but our multi-layer integration approach strengthened the conclusion via convergent evidence
1232 from various sources (Figure 5B). The *RRBP1* eQTL signals in the liver colocalize with LDL,
1233 TC, and nonHDL GWAS signals. The credible set at this locus contains a single lead variant
1234 (chr20:17,844,684). The 'T' allele of this lead variant decreases *RRBP1* expression levels and
1235 increases LDL, TC, and nonHDL levels. This lead variant is in open chromatin in HLC and
1236 adipose, and physically interacts with the *RRBP1* promoter (250kb away) in adipose. All
1237 these data consistently point to *RRBP1* as the functional gene underlying this locus. *RRBP1*
1238 specifically tethers the endoplasmic reticulum to the mitochondria in the liver (an interaction
1239 that is enriched in hepatocytes) and regulates very low density lipoprotein levels ⁶⁸. Rare
1240 variants in *RRBP1* are associated with LDL in humans ⁶⁹ and silencing *RRBP1* in liver affects
1241 lipid homeostasis in mice ⁶⁸.

1242

1243 *CREBRF* (CREB3 regulatory factor) further demonstrates the power of our multi-layer
1244 integration framework in prioritizing functional variants (Figure 5C). The eQTL signals of
1245 *CREBRF* colocalized with a GWAS locus for HDL with 30 candidate variants. In contrast,
1246 our multi-layer approach identified a single candidate variant (chr5:172,566,698) at this locus
1247 that physically interacts with the *CREBRF* promoter in adipose and is predicted to be a
1248 regulatory element (RegulomeDB score=0.91). Consistent with the index variant
1249 (chr5:172,591,337), the allele 'A' at this functional variant increased HDL levels and
1250 increased *CREBRF* expression in adipose. Missense variants in *CREBRF* have been linked to
1251 body mass index, and the gene has been linked to obesity risk in Samoans ⁷⁰.

1252

1253 Finally, to compare the power of functional fine-mapping with multi-ancestry fine-mapping,
1254 we applied our prioritization rule to credible sets derived from European-only meta-analysis.

1255 The 111 variants prioritized by our rule described above (including multiple variants in the
1256 same credible set) were all found in the multi-ancestry credible sets, representing a 3.7-fold
1257 enrichment ($P < 1e-04$ based on 10000 permutations randomly sampling variants from the
1258 European-only credible sets). This convergence of complementary approaches to the same
1259 smaller set of fine-mapped variants highlights the power of multi-ancestry datasets as an
1260 approach to narrow in on functional variants.

1261

1262 **Discussion**

1263

1264 Here we integrate the largest multi-ancestry lipid GWAS to date with a wide array of
1265 functional genomic resources to understand how noncoding genetic variation affects lipids
1266 through gene regulation. Specifically, we identify 1,076 genes whose eQTL signals
1267 colocalize with lipid GWAS signals and demonstrate how physical chromatin interaction can
1268 improve standard eQTL-based colocalization. We assess tissue-specific enrichments of lipid
1269 GWAS signals and demonstrate the selective importance of adipose in HDL and triglyceride
1270 biology. We examine binding site enrichments of 161 TFs in lipid GWAS and expand our
1271 understanding of lipid GWAS loci (e.g., *RXR α*) in the context of TF activity. Finally, we
1272 build a simple and interpretable prioritization framework that automatically combines
1273 multiple lines of evidence from orthogonal datasets, pinpointing a single functional variant at
1274 each of 13 lipid-associated loci (e.g., *RRBP1* and *CREBRF*). While there are studies that
1275 interpret lipid GWAS associations^{21,71,72}, the size of our multi-ancestry GWAS and multi-
1276 layer functional integration represent a comprehensive effort and an important step forward in
1277 this direction.

1278

1279 Our multi-layer analysis has two key strengths. First, despite a large array of functional
1280 genomic resources being embedded, our analysis produces results with high consistency. For
1281 example, the selective enrichment of adipose in HDL and TG identified by S-LDSC is
1282 confirmed by our eQTL-based colocalization and TF binding site overlap. Another example
1283 of consistency is the multi-layer prioritization of *RRBPI*, which can be identified from eQTL-
1284 based colocalization alone and it is further validated by chromatin accessibility and
1285 interaction. Such convergent evidence from various sources improves the confidence of our
1286 findings. Second, our analysis highlights that combining multiple layers of regulatory
1287 information can improve sensitivity to prioritize functional genes and variants. For example,
1288 we refined eQTL colocalized genes (1,076) to a smaller set of functional genes (233) through
1289 integration with promoter Capture-C data. Another example of sensitivity is *CREBRF*, where
1290 eQTL-based colocalization implicates 30 candidate variants and adding other regulatory
1291 layers points to a single functional variant. Moving forward, we expect these two features
1292 will serve as useful guidelines for future integrative genomic analyses of other traits.

1293

1294 Our results rely on the breadth and accuracy of functional genomic datasets used in our
1295 analyses. First, unlike our lipid GWAS, current functional datasets⁷³ are limited both in
1296 sample size and ancestral diversity, which can affect discovery and replication of regulatory
1297 mechanisms in diverse populations. Second, some functional datasets are generated at limited
1298 resolution. For example, our colocalizations are based on eQTLs from bulk tissue RNA-seq
1299^{8,74}, which may miss detailed cell types and biological processes in which lipid-associated
1300 SNPs regulate gene expression. Third, some functional datasets are not available across the
1301 full spectrum of human tissues and cell types. One example is that our chromatin-chromatin
1302 interaction analysis only examines a few cell types in two known lipid-related tissues,
1303 producing results that may be biased towards known lipid biology. Another example is that

1304 ENCODE TF ChIP-Seq data are not available in adipose-related cell lines. Fourth, our results
1305 are validated computationally but not experimentally. That said, our results provide a high-
1306 confidence list of regulatory mechanisms at lipid GWAS loci, forming a useful basis for
1307 future experiments. As more comprehensive and accurate functional genomic resources are
1308 becoming publicly available in diverse cellular contexts and ancestry groups, the resolution
1309 and power of integrative analyses like ours will be markedly increased.

1310

1311 Other limitations of this study stem from computational methods embedded in our
1312 framework. First, the colocalization approach ‘coloc’ assumes one causal variant per locus,
1313 whereas recent studies suggest extensive allelic heterogeneity⁷⁵ consistent with a model of a
1314 milieu of related transcription factors binding within a single locus. Accounting for allelic
1315 heterogeneity in summary statistics-based colocalization typically requires modelling
1316 multiple correlated SNPs through LD matrix⁷⁶, which is computationally intensive in large-
1317 scale analyses derived from many cohorts with diverse ancestries, like the multi-ancestry
1318 GWAS examined here. Second, due to restricted access to individual genotypes of 201
1319 cohorts, we cannot produce multi-ancestry LD scores within GLGC but have to use
1320 European-based LD scores in all S-LDSC analyses. This approach, though less rigorous in
1321 principle, provides robust results in practice (as confirmed by our ancestry-specific analysis),
1322 largely because 79% of cohorts in GLGC are of European descent¹². That said, we caution
1323 that the same approach might fall short in ancestrally diverse studies with few European
1324 individuals⁷⁷. Third, our multi-layer variant prioritization framework is built on a series of
1325 simple rules that are easy to implement on large datasets. This approach could possibly be
1326 formalized as statistical models (e.g., priors in Bayesian methods⁵⁵), but our approach
1327 simplifies computation and allows for scalability of the underlying framework. Despite the

1328 technical limitations, our approach here can serve as a useful benchmark for future
1329 development of methods with improved statistical rigor and computation efficiency.

1330 In summary, mapping noncoding genetic variation of complex traits to biological functions
1331 can benefit greatly from thorough integration of multiple layers of functional genomics, as
1332 demonstrated in the present study. Although tested on lipids only, our integrative framework
1333 is straightforward to implement more broadly on many other phenotypes, yielding functional
1334 insights of heritable traits and diseases in humans.

1335 **Description of supplemental data**

1336 Supplemental data include seven figures and nineteen tables, and study-specific
1337 acknowledgements.

1338 **Declaration of interests**

1339 G.C-P. is currently an employee of 23andMe Inc. M.J.C. is the Chief Scientist for Genomics
1340 England, a UK Government company. B.M.P. serves on the steering committee of the Yale
1341 Open Data Access Project funded by Johnson & Johnson. G.T., A.H., D.F.G., H.H., U.T., and
1342 K.S. are employees of deCODE/Amgen Inc. V.S. has received honoraria for consultations
1343 from Novo Nordisk and Sanofi and has an ongoing research collaboration with Bayer Ltd.
1344 M.M. has served on advisory panels for Pfizer, NovoNordisk and Zoe Global, has received
1345 honoraria from Merck, Pfizer, Novo Nordisk and Eli Lilly, and research funding from
1346 Abbvie, Astra Zeneca, Boehringer Ingelheim, Eli Lilly, Janssen, Merck, NovoNordisk,
1347 Pfizer, Roche, Sanofi Aventis, Servier, and Takeda. M.M. and A.M. are employees of
1348 Genentech and a holders of Roche stock. M.S. receives funding from Pfizer Inc. for a project
1349 unrelated to this work. M.E.K. is employed by SYNLAB MVZ Mannheim GmbH. W.M. has
1350 received grants from Siemens Healthineers, grants and personal fees from Aegerion

1351 Pharmaceuticals, grants and personal fees from AMGEN, grants from Astrazeneca, grants
1352 and personal fees from Sanofi, grants and personal fees from Alexion Pharmaceuticals, grants
1353 and personal fees from BASF, grants and personal fees from Abbott Diagnostics, grants and
1354 personal fees from Numares AG, grants and personal fees from Berlin-Chemie, grants and
1355 personal fees from Akzea Therapeutics, grants from Bayer Vital GmbH , grants from
1356 bestbion dx GmbH, grants from Boehringer Ingelheim Pharma GmbH Co KG, grants from
1357 Immundiagnostik GmbH, grants from Merck Chemicals GmbH, grants from MSD Sharp and
1358 Dohme GmbH, grants from Novartis Pharma GmbH, grants from Olink Proteomics, other
1359 from Synlab Holding Deutschland GmbH, all outside the submitted work. A.V.K. has served
1360 as a consultant to Sanofi, Medicines Company, Maze Pharmaceuticals, Navitor
1361 Pharmaceuticals, Verve Therapeutics, Amgen, and Color Genomics; received speaking fees
1362 from Illumina, the Novartis Institute for Biomedical Research; received sponsored research
1363 agreements from the Novartis Institute for Biomedical Research and IBM Research, and
1364 reports a patent related to a genetic risk predictor (20190017119). S.K. is an employee of
1365 Verve Therapeutics, and holds equity in Verve Therapeutics, Maze Therapeutics, Catabasis,
1366 and San Therapeutics. He is a member of the scientific advisory boards for Regeneron
1367 Genetics Center and Corvidia Therapeutics; he has served as a consultant for Acceleron, Eli
1368 Lilly, Novartis, Merck, Novo Nordisk, Novo Ventures, Ionis, Alnylam, Aegerion, Haug
1369 Partners, Noble Insights, Leerink Partners, Bayer Healthcare, Illumina, Color Genomics,
1370 MedGenome, Quest, and Medscape; he reports patents related to a method of identifying and
1371 treating a person having a predisposition to or afflicted with cardiometabolic disease
1372 (20180010185) and a genetics risk predictor (20190017119). D.K. accepts consulting fees
1373 from Regeneron Pharmaceuticals. D.O.M-K. is a part-time clinical research consultant for
1374 Metabolon, Inc. D.S. has received support from the British Heart Foundation, Pfizer,

1375 Regeneron, Genentech, and Eli Lilly pharmaceuticals. The spouse of C.J.W. is employed by
1376 Regeneron.

1377

1378 **Acknowledgments**

1379 XZ is supported by the Stein Fellowship from Stanford University and Institute for
1380 Computational and Data Sciences Seed Grant from The Pennsylvania State University. CDB
1381 is supported by the NIH (R01-HL133218). Funding for the Global Lipids Genetics Consortium
1382 was provided by the NIH (R01-HL127564). This research was conducted using the UK
1383 Biobank Resource under application number 24460. This research is based on data from the
1384 MVP, Office of Research and Development, Veterans Health Administration, and was
1385 supported by awards 2I01BX003362-03A1 and 1I01BX004821-01A1. This publication does
1386 not represent the views of the Department of Veteran Affairs or the United States Government.
1387 We thank Bethany Klunder for administrative support. Study-specific acknowledgements are
1388 provided in the supplemental information.

1389

1390 **Web resources**

1391 Browser of noncoding variant prioritization: [http://csg.sph.umich.edu/willer/public/glgc-](http://csg.sph.umich.edu/willer/public/glgc-lipids2021/variant_prioritization.html)
1392 [lipids2021/variant_prioritization.html](http://csg.sph.umich.edu/willer/public/glgc-lipids2021/variant_prioritization.html)

1393 GLGC GWAS summary statistics and credible sets:

1394 <http://csg.sph.umich.edu/willer/public/glgc-lipids2021/>

1395 GTEx v8 summary statistics: <https://www.gtexportal.org/home/datasets>

1396 coloc: <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/coloc>

- 1397 liftOver: <https://genome.ucsc.edu/cgi-bin/hgLiftOver>
- 1398 HepG2 Capture-C data (Chesi et al): <https://www.ebi.ac.uk/arrayexpress/experiments/E->
1399 MTAB-7144/
- 1400 HepG2 Capture-C data (Selvarajan et al):
1401 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE157306>
- 1402 Human white adipocyte Capture-C data:
1403 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE110619>
- 1404 HiCUP: <https://www.bioinformatics.babraham.ac.uk/projects/hicup/>
- 1405 CHiCAGO: <https://www.bioconductor.org/packages/release/bioc/html/Chicago.html>
- 1406 GenomicRanges: <https://bioconductor.org/packages/release/bioc/html/GenomicRanges.html>
- 1407 Human liver Hi-C data: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE58752>
- 1408 bedtools: <https://bedtools.readthedocs.io/en/latest/>
- 1409 ClusterProfiler: <https://guangchuangyu.github.io/clusterProfiler>
- 1410 biomaRt: <https://bioconductor.org/packages/release/bioc/html/biomaRt.html>
- 1411 ClinVar: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/clinvar/>
- 1412 MGI: <http://www.informatics.jax.org/downloads/reports/index.html#pheno>
- 1413 S-PrediXcan: <https://github.com/hakyimlab/MetaXcan>

- 1414 ENCODE ChIP-Seq data:
- 1415 [https://hgdownload.cse.ucsc.edu/goldenpath/hg19/encodeDCC/wgEncodeRegTfbsClustered/](https://hgdownload.cse.ucsc.edu/goldenpath/hg19/encodeDCC/wgEncodeRegTfbsClustered/wgEncodeRegTfbsClusteredWithCellsV3.bed.gz)
- 1416 [wgEncodeRegTfbsClusteredWithCellsV3.bed.gz](https://hgdownload.cse.ucsc.edu/goldenpath/hg19/encodeDCC/wgEncodeRegTfbsClustered/wgEncodeRegTfbsClusteredWithCellsV3.bed.gz)
- 1417 LDSC software: <https://github.com/bulik/ldsc>
- 1418 European LD scores and related annotations:
- 1419 <https://data.broadinstitute.org/alkesgroup/LDSCORE/>
- 1420 East Asian LD scores and related annotations: <http://jenger.riken.jp/en/data>
- 1421 DEPICT: <https://data.broadinstitute.org/mpg/depict>
- 1422 RSS-NET: <https://github.com/SUwonglab/rss-net>
- 1423 Liver single-cell data: <http://shiny.baderlab.org/HumanLiverAtlas/>
- 1424 Adipose single-cell data:
- 1425 https://singlecell.broadinstitute.org/single_cell/study/SCP133/human-adipose-svf-single-cell
- 1426 fgsea: <http://bioconductor.org/packages/release/bioc/html/fgsea.html>
- 1427 GREGOR: <https://genome.sph.umich.edu/wiki/GREGOR>
- 1428 Open chromatin data from HepG2: [https://www.omicsdi.org/dataset/arrayexpress-](https://www.omicsdi.org/dataset/arrayexpress-repository/E-MTAB-7543)
- 1429 [repository/E-MTAB-7543](https://www.omicsdi.org/dataset/arrayexpress-repository/E-MTAB-7543)
- 1430 Open chromatin data from adipose:
- 1431 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE110734>

1432 Roadmap epigenomic data (promoters and enhancer annotation):
1433 <https://egg2.wustl.edu/roadmap/data/byFileType/chromhmmSegmentations/ChmmModels/col1434 reMarks/jointModel/final/>

1435 RegulomeDB: <https://regulomedb.org/regulome-search/>

1436

1437 **Data and code availability**

1438 The HLC Capture-C data is available at

1439 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/geo/query/acc.cgi?acc=GSE189026>.

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 1520 Claude Bouchard, Anke Tönjes, Yii-Der Ida Chen, Craig E Pennell, Trevor A Mori, Wolfgang
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Figure titles and legends

Figure 1. Schematic overview of the multi-layer functional genomic analysis. We integrate GWAS summary statistics for five lipid phenotypes with eQTL and chromatin interaction data to identify potential genes mediating the GWAS loci, and use epigenomic annotations to identify regulatory mechanisms at these loci. For a GWAS locus indexed by a lead variant

‘X’, A, B, and C represent nearby eGenes across tissues, and SNPs around SNP X represent variants in the credible set for this locus.

Figure 2. Overlap between eQTL colocalized genes and Capture-C prioritized genes, and their enrichments in known lipid-associated genes. A. Numbers of genes identified by two approaches: eQTL colocalization and promoter *Capture-C* interaction. Capture-C interactions restricted to genes expressed in the tissue of interest (or in the union of adipose and liver for ‘All Tissues’) are shaded. B. Overlap between two list of prioritized genes (left: Capture-C prioritized genes; right: eQTL colocalized genes) with four external sets of genes previously associated with lipid biology (MGI knockout genes, ClinVar lipidemia-associated genes, genes implicated in rare burden of lipids, and genes from a lipid TWAS). Dashed lines represent enrichments using only genes expressed in the liver. C. Enrichment in overlap between eQTL colocalized genes and Capture-C prioritized genes against what is expected by chance, assuming both gene sets are independent. Dashed lines represent genes expressed in the tissue of interest (or in the union of adipose or liver for ‘All’). Enrichment estimates and confidence intervals shown in Panels B and C are based on the Fisher’s exact test. D. Fraction of colocalized loci that point to a single candidate gene when using eQTL data alone or using both eQTL and Capture-C data.

Figure 3. Tissue relevance of lipid-associated loci. Partitioning heritability of summary statistics on gene expression (A) and active chromatin marks (B) across tissues. Each plotted point represents a tested dataset for enrichment of heritability, with larger dots representing datasets with $P\text{-value} < 0.05$. Each color represents a tissue group (Table S6), and the y-axis represents $-\log_{10} P\text{-value}$ of enrichment of heritability.

Figure 4. TF enrichment identified by GREGOR and S-LDSC. A. Number of TFs enriched in the GREGOR analysis on GWAS loci for each of the five lipid traits. B. Number of TFs enriched in S-LDSC analysis on each of the five lipid traits. C. TF RXRA binds to the promoters of 26 colocalized genes (18 protein-coding); colors represent the subset of lipid phenotypes with colocalization. Larger node sizes represent smaller GWAS P-value of colocalized loci.

Figure 5. Multi-layer functional integration to prioritize variants at GWAS loci. A. Variant annotation and prioritization scheme at each GWAS credible set. B. Evidence for gene *RRBP1* from functional genomics data. The LDL GWAS locus at this region (first row) is an eQTL for gene *RRBP1* in the liver (second row). Variants in the credible set of this locus interact with the gene promoter in both adipose and HepG2 Capture-C data (third row). The interacting variant is also in an open chromatin peak in three liver-related cell types (fourth row). C. Multiple sources of functional genomics data support *CREBRF* as a gene contributing to HDL levels. The HDL GWAS locus at this region (first row) is an eQTL for gene *CREBRF* in adipose (second row). Variants in the credible set at this locus interact with the *CREBRF* promoter in adipose (third row). The interacting variant is also in open chromatin in liver-related cell types (fourth row).

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. The ‘Prioritized var’ column 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 tissues. The ‘RegDB’ column represents the RegulomeDB score of the prioritized variant.

Gene Name	Tissue	Sentinel	Prioritized Var	Open	CapC	Enhancer	Promoter	RegDB
<i>CEP68</i>	Adipose	2:65284231	65279414	Liver	Liver	None	Ad	0.5896
<i>TIPARP</i>	Adipose	3:156797941	156795408	Both	Both	Ad	Liver	0.705
<i>CREBRF</i>	Adipose	5:172591337	172566698	Liver	Ad	None	Both	0.9124
<i>PALM2</i>	Adipose	9:112556911	112556911	Both	Ad	Both	None	0.6091
<i>MEGF9</i>	Adipose	9:123481206	123421556	Liver	Ad	None	Liver	0.9933
<i>GBF1</i>	Liver	10:104142294	104107191	Ad	Ad	None	Both	0.705
<i>MICAL2</i>	Liver	11:12071855	12221016	Liver	Liver	None	Liver	0.6018
<i>ACP2</i>	Liver	11:47278917	47276350	Ad	Liver	Liver	Ad	0.6091
<i>PTPRJ</i>	Adipose	11:48021778	48011180	Liver	Ad	Liver	Ad	0.8797
<i>NFATC2IP</i>	Adipose	16:28899411	28883327	Liver	Liver	None	Both	0.6091
<i>HELZ</i>	Liver	17:65109591	65156919	Liver	Liver	None	Both	0.60906
<i>FAM210A</i>	Liver	18:13725674	13725674	Liver	Liver	None	Both	0.7571
<i>RRBP1</i>	Liver	20:17844684	17844684	Both	Ad	Both	None	0.6091