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**Regulation of the carotenoid biosynthetic
pathway in petals of California poppy
(*Eschscholzia californica*)**

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Abstract

Carotenoids are essential plant pigments. They function in a wide range of processes including light harvesting in the photosynthetic apparatus, photoprotection against light damage, and pigmentation in flowers and fruits to attract pollinators and seed-dispersal herbivores. Carotenogenesis has been studied extensively in the last century in both photosynthetic and non-photosynthetic tissues of many plant species. Although most of the enzymes and their metabolites of the pathway have been identified, little is still known about how carotenoid production is regulated.

Previous studies have proposed that regulation of the carotenoid pathway is through metabolite feedback occurring at both transcriptional and post transcriptional levels. This thesis examines the evidence for carotenogenesis gene transcription being feedback regulated by changes in carotenoid metabolites in petals of California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), and if so, by which metabolite(s).

Virus-induced gene silencing (VIGS) was used to silence carotenoid biosynthetic genes in the petals of orange California poppy. High efficacy of silencing was achieved by first infiltrating and then drenching the California poppy seedlings with the *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* strain GV3101 containing the VIGS vectors. The VIGS vectors included portions of carotenoid gene fragments isolated from California poppy. qRT-PCR confirmed that transcript abundance of the targeted carotenogenesis genes *EcaPDS*, *EcaZDS*, *EcaLCYb*, *EcaCHYb* and *EcaZEP* was significantly reduced in the flower petals. Reduced transcript abundance of all genes apart from *EcaLCYb* altered flower colour. HPLC analyses revealed that the colour altered flower petals with knocked-down expression of each targeted gene resulted in a reduction of total carotenoid content and an altered profile of carotenoids. This manifested as an accumulation of higher amounts of intermediates including phytofluene, ζ -carotene, β -carotene and zeaxanthin, some of which are not usually seen in the flowers, and a reduction of the end products such as *retro*-carotene-triol and eschscholtzxanthin. However, these alterations in carotenoid profiles were not associated with any dramatic changes in transcript abundance of the non-TRV-targeted endogenous genes in the pathway. Therefore, little evidence was found for metabolite feedback regulation of transcriptional activity in the carotenoid biosynthetic pathway from this study. Other possible mechanisms for controlling carotenogenesis are discussed.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of contents	iii
List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	viii
Abbreviations	ix

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 General introduction to carotenoids	1
1.1.1 Discovery of carotenoids	1
1.1.2 Chemical structure of carotenoids	1
1.1.3 Biological function of carotenoids	3
1.1.4 Importance of carotenoid in industries	4
1.2 Biosynthesis and storage of carotenoids	5
1.2.1 Biosynthesis of the carotenoid precursors	5
1.2.2 Biosynthetic pathway of carotenoids	8
1.2.2.1 <i>Identification of the enzymes and genes of the carotenoid biosynthetic pathway</i>	8
1.2.2.2 <i>Reactions of the plant carotenoid biosynthetic pathway</i>	8
1.2.3 Storage of carotenoids in plastids	10
1.3 Regulation of carotenoid biosynthesis	11
1.3.1 Regulation signals of carotenoid biosynthesis	11
1.3.1.1 <i>Light</i>	11
1.3.1.2 <i>Circadian clock</i>	12
1.3.1.3 <i>Environmental stresses</i>	12
1.3.1.4 <i>Developmental signals</i>	13
1.3.1.5 <i>Plastid development</i>	13

1.3.1.6 <i>Carotenoid metabolites</i>	14
1.3.2 Role of carotenoid biosynthetic gene in the regulation of the pathway	15
1.3.2.1 <i>MEP pathway</i>	15
1.3.2.2 <i>GGPP to phytoene</i>	15
1.3.2.3 <i>Phytoene to lycopene</i>	16
1.3.2.4 <i>Lycopene to β- and α- carotenes</i>	17
1.3.2.5 <i>Carotene to xanthophyll</i>	18
1.4 Use of VIGS to study carotenoid biosynthesis	18
1.4.1 VIGS mechanism in plants	20
1.4.2 Structure and types of VIGS vectors	23
1.5 Carotenoid biosynthesis in orange <i>Eschscholzia californica</i> flowers	26
1.6 Hypothesis and Aims	27

Chapter 2: Materials and methods

2.1 Chemicals, buffers, solutions and media	28
2.2 Plant material and growth conditions	28
2.3 General microorganism growth conditions	29
2.4 Isolation of candidate sequence of carotenoid biosynthetic genes	29
2.4.1 Polymerase chain reaction (PCR)	29
2.4.2 Gel electrophoresis	32
2.4.3 Purification of PCR products	32
2.4.4 TA-cloning of PCR products into the pGEM [®] -T Easy vector	32
2.4.5 <i>E.coli</i> transformation	33
2.4.6 Screening for positive clones	33
2.4.6.1 <i>Alkaline lysis plasmid miniprep procedure</i>	34
2.4.6.2 <i>Restriction enzyme digestion</i>	34
2.4.7 Sequencing	34
2.5 Cloning of carotenoid biosynthetic genes into the TRV2 vector	35
2.5.1 Selection of region of carotenoid biosynthetic gene for insertion into TRV2	35
2.5.2 Cloning of carotenoid biosynthetic gene fragments into TRV2	38

2.5.3 GV3101 transformation	38
2.5.4 Identification of positively transformed GV3101 cells	39
2.6 Agro-inoculation of plants with VIGS vectors	39
2.6.1 Preparation of GV3101 for plant inoculation	39
2.6.2 Agro-inoculation of plants	40
2.7 Phenotype observation	40
2.8 Sample collection	40
2.9 Gene profiling	41
2.9.1 RNA isolation	41
2.9.2 Real-time PCR(qRT-PCR) primers design	41
2.9.3 qRT-PCR	44
2.10 Metabolite profiling	45
2.10.1 Carotenoid extraction, partition and saponification	45
2.10.2 Spectrophotometric determination of total carotenoid concentration	45
2.10.3 HPLC analysis of petal carotenoid profile	48
2.10.4 LC-MS analysis of petal carotenoid profile	48

Chapter 3: Results

3.1 Silencing of carotenoid biosynthetic genes in <i>E. californica</i>	50
3.1.1 Cloning of carotenoid biosynthetic genes	50
3.1.2 Silencing of the carotenoid biosynthetic gene expression in <i>E. californica</i>	51
3.1.3 Confirmation of silencing in the TRV-infected plants by qRT-PCR	53
3.1.3.1 Petal samples and RNA quality	53
3.1.3.2 Primer design and specificity of qRT-PCR	53
3.1.4 Effect of silenced carotenoid biosynthetic genes on plant development, leaf and flower colouration	59
3.2 Changes in carotenoid metabolites caused by gene silencing	63
3.2.1 Total carotenoid content of petals	63
3.2.2 Identification and quantification of the carotenoid metabolites in petal tissue	68

3.3 Gene expression profiling	72
3.3.1 Transcript abundance of the carotenoid biosynthetic genes in flower petals of control plants at anthesis	72
3.3.2 Transcript abundance of all carotenoid biosynthetic genes in the VIGS plants	75

Chapter 4: Discussion and summary

4.1 VIGS is an effective tool for studying transcriptional regulation of carotenogenesis in <i>E. californica</i> flowers	76
4.2 The carotenoid profiles change in response to single gene down-regulation in the petals of <i>E. californica</i> plants	79
4.3 Carotenoid metabolites do not appear to work as feedback regulators of carotenogenesis transcription	83
4.4 Summary	87

Appendices

Appendix 1: Recipes for buffers, media and solutions	89
Appendix 2: Carotenoid biosynthetic gene sequences and primer locations	93

References	98
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List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1.1 Representative structures of carotenoids	2
Figure 1.2 The carotenoid biosynthetic pathway, its precursors and its connection to ABA synthesis	7
Figure 1.3 Schematic illustrating VIGS of plant mRNAs	22
Figure 1.4 Schematic illustrating of TRV-based VIGS vector	25
Figure 2.1 Representative map of the TRV2 vector containing a carotenoid biosynthetic gene fragment	37
Figure 3.1 Carotenoid biosynthetic gene fragments amplified with RT-PCR for insertion into the TRV2 vector	52
Figure 3.2 Integrity of the RNA isolated from petals of TRV-infected plants as shown by ethidium bromide staining	56
Figure 3.3 Quality control for qRT-PCR data	57
Figure 3.4 Efficacy of VIGS in silencing targeted gene transcripts in petals	58
Figure 3.5 Leaf phenotypes of the TRV-infected plants	61
Figure 3.6 Flower colour phenotypes of the TRV-infected plants	62
Figure 3.7 Total carotenoid content of petals of TRV-infected plants	64
Figure 3.8 Representative HPLC chromatograms of methanolic/acetone extracts from orange flower petals of wild type or TRV empty vector infected plants	65

Figure 3.9 Representative HPLC chromatograms of saponified carotenoid extracts from flower petals of *E. californica* plants infected with TRV 66

Figure 3.10 Transcript abundance of carotenoid biosynthetic genes in petals of wild type and TRV-EV plants 73

List of Tables

	Page
Table 2.1 Degenerate primers, TM and expected product sizes for carotenoid biosynthetic gene isolation	31
Table 2.2 Primers used for amplifying sequences of the carotenoid biosynthetic genes for insertion into TRV2	36
Table 2.3 Primers used in qRT-PCR	43
Table 2.4 Elution gradients of HPLC (A) and LC-MS (B) analyses	47
Table 3.1 Concentration and purity of isolated RNA	55
Table 3.2 Summary of the spectral properties and identification of carotenoids extracted from wild type and TRV-infected plants using LC-MS	69
Table 3.3 Transcript abundance of carotenoid biosynthetic genes in petals of TRV-infected plants	74

List of abbreviations

h:	hours
sec:	seconds
min:	minutes
dpi:	days post inoculation
°C:	degrees Celsius
U:	enzyme unit
V:	voltage
g:	gram
g:	<i>g</i> -force or gravity
rpm:	revolution per minute
mL:	millilitre
M:	molar; moles per litre
mM:	millimolar; millimole per litre
μM:	micromolar; micromole per litre
mg:	milligram
ng:	nanogram
amu:	atomic mass unit
w/v:	weight-to-volume ratio
v/v:	volume-to-volume ratio
<i>m/z</i> :	mass-to-charge ratio
DW:	dry-weight
bp:	base pair
Kb:	kilo base pair
DNA:	deoxyribonucleic acid
cDNA:	complementary deoxyribonucleic acid
RNA:	ribonucleic acid
rRNA:	ribosomal RNAs
siRNA:	small interfering RNA
miRNA:	microRNA
dNTP:	deoxy-nucleotide- triphosphate

TM:	melting temperature
LB:	Luria-Bertani broth
DMSO:	dimethyl sulfoxide
EDTA:	ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid
SDS:	sodium dodecyl sulfate
MES:	2-(N-morpholino)ethanesulfonic acid
TBE:	Tris/Borate/EDTA
BHT:	butylated hydroxytoluene
PVP:	polyvinylpyrrolidone
MOPS:	3-(N-morpholino)propanesulfonic acid
CPTA	2-(4-chlorophenylthio)triethylamine hydrochloride
HPLC:	high performance liquid chromatography
LC-MS:	liquid chromatography–mass spectrometry
GMO:	genetically modified organism
PC2:	physical containment level 2
UV:	ultra violet
OD:	optical density
milliQ:	purified water using Milli-Q ultrapure system
CaMV 35S:	35S promoter, from cauliflower mosaic virus
STDEV:	standard deviation