

Accurate binding of calcium to phospholipid bilayers by effective inclusion of electronic polarization

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Classical molecular dynamics simulations give detailed information about membrane structure and dynamics. However, there is still a room for improvements in current force fields – it is known from the literature, that the binding of ions, especially cations, to phospholipid membranes is overestimated in all classical models [1]. We suggest that the membrane-ion interactions can be corrected by including implicit electronic polarizability into the lipid models through the electronic continuum correction (ECC) [2], which was already applied to monovalent and divalent ions yielding models that feature correct ion pairing [3]. Using the electrometer concept [3, 4] and x-ray scattering form factors, our simulations point out that our hypothesis is correct and ECC is indeed a missing important contribution in current classical lipid models. Moreover, the solid physical principles behind ECC are found not to hamper other relevant properties of a phospholipid bilayer. The new lipid model, "ECC-lipids", shows accurate binding affinity to sodium and calcium cations and headgroup order parameter response to bound charge. We also provide for the first time a realistic stoichiometry of bound calcium cations to a POPC membrane, and their binding sites. This work will continue as an open collaboration project NMRlipids IV (<http://nmrlipids.blogspot.fi>).

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I. INTRODUCTION

motivation, significance of membranes, phospholipids and simulation.

assumptions (so that we have structure of the paper like in a mathematical proof) – MD simulation is a good tool for studying molecules. classical MD models can describe lipids accurately,

MD is ... and it serves ... it is useful for ... (describe through references)

Lipid membranes, especially phospholipid membranes; their significance for life, sciences, society, pharma ...

Current force fields – pros and cons, at a good shape in many aspects, agree on various properties. – write basic ideas from the lipid-FF whitepaper I did recently.

lipid force fields fail in description of membrane-cation interaction – could be answered by ECC? Cations were shown to generally overbind in PC lipid bilayers in NMRlipids II project. Here we propose that the cation overbinding can be corrected by implicitly inducing electronic polarizability in lipid headgroups by scaling the partial charges – i.e. MDEC/ECC [1]. **Bulid BibTex references database.** paradigm.

MDEC – or – ECC **2.choose one** We have to decide whether we will refer to the method as a correction (ECC) or as a MD simulation paradigm (MDEC) – and choose one of these labels. – Joe: use ECC as we apply MDEC rather as a correction to current state not as a new paradigm for FF development.

MD in electronic continuum as in [1] or electronic continuum correction as in [?]]

Describe ECC: good physical concept for treating part of the polarizability (electronic) in a simple mean-field way.

Successful application: Works for cations [2? , 3] **3.REF** – motivation for its application to zwitterionic lipids like POPC.

Hypothesis: ECC helps in describing even zwitterionic molecules like POPC, will be demonstrated through headgroup order parameter response to cationic molecules.

To date, there is no lipid model that can describe such a behaviour, the electrometer response and cation binding, quantitatively well [4]

Almost all lipid bilayer simulations reported in the literature are done with force fields that represent interactions between atoms with pairwise additive empirical potential and exclude the electronic polarizability [? ?]. While the issue has been considered highly relevant since the early days of lipid bilayer simulations, practical solutions have turned out to be complicated [?]. Here we propose that electronic polarizability can be effectively included in lipid bilayer simulations by using the electronic continuum correction [1].

II. METHODS

A. Electronic continuum correction for lipid bilayers

According to the electronic continuum correction (ECC) the electronic polarizability can be effectively included in MD simulations by scaling the partial charges with a constant factor $f_q = \epsilon_{el}^{-1/2}$, where ϵ_{el} is the electronic part of the dielec-

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tric constant of media [1]. Measurements of high frequency dielectric constant gives values of approximately $\epsilon_{el} \approx 2$ for almost any biomaterial [1?]. The value measured for water, $\epsilon_{el} = 1.78$, gives a scaling factor of $f_q = 0.75$ [1?], which has been successfully used to improve the performance of ion force fields [2? , 3].

Here we apply the same approach to lipid bilayers to accurately describe the lipid headgroup response to Na⁺ and Ca²⁺ concentrations [4]. We use the Lipid14 [5] force field parameters as a starting point, because they give the most realistic headgroup response with added cations and relatively realistic glycerol backbone and headgroup structures when compared with other state of the art lipid models [4, 6]. The partial atomic charges in Lipid14 were derived by fitting the electrostatic potential to its model quantum chemistry representation in vacuum. **4.I do not fully understand the end of the paragraph** If such charges are obtained in an implicit solvent, they vary the most for the polar moieties [?]. In order to represent this difference in polarity in a model with fixed charges, we shall use the average charges from both environments (IpolQ charges) [?]. By taking the charges of oxygen atoms in vacuum and implicit water solvent for POPC from [7], we represent the IpolQ charges in the electronic continuum correction of the Lipid14 model by increasing the scaling factor for charges to $f_q = 0.8$. The newly presented ECC-POPC model is based on the POPC model from

Hydrocarbon chains in Lipid14 and other lipids models are highly optimized and give generally a good description for hydrophobic part of lipid bilayers in various conditions [8], in contrast to glycerol backbone and headgroup regions which require some improvement in all available lipid models [6]. To minimize the intercalation with the highly optimized hydrocarbon parameters, we decided to apply ECC correction only to the headgroup, glycerol backbone and carbonyl in acyl chains. These regions are also most polar parts in lipids and are expected to most affect on cation binding.

The scaling of these partial charges by a factor of 0.8 reduce the area per molecule to ??, which is significantly smaller than the experimental and original Lipid 14 values. The decrease of area was speculated **5.Did you analyze the effect of this to hydration or did we only speculate?** to arise from reduced hydration of headgroup due to the lower polarity of molecules with scaled charges. The hydration can be increased by decreasing the radius of atoms by reducing σ term in Lennart-Jones potential, which allows water molecules approach closer to lipid atoms and have stonger electrostatic interactions with them. **6.This effect may have an official name. In that case we should mention it.** Indeed, the scaling of σ increased the area per molecule and the results close to experimental and original Lipid14 values were achieved with scaling factor of ?? for σ and 0.8 for partial charges.

B. Comparison to experimental data

Structures sampled by individual lipid molecules were compared to experimental data by using C-H bond order pa-

rameters [8]

$$S_{CH} = \frac{3}{2} \langle \cos^2 \theta - 1 \rangle, \quad (1)$$

where θ is the angle between C-H bond and membrane normal and average is taken over all sampled configurations. Bilayer dimensions were compared to experiments by using the scattering form factor [8] **7.Add equation.**

Ion binding was compared between experiments and simulations by using lipid headgroup order parameters and "electrometer concept" introduced by Seelig et al. [4, 9]. The concept is based on the experimental observation that the order parameters of α and β carbons in lipid headgroup (see Fig. ??) are proportional to the amount of bound charge in lipid bilayer [9]. More recent analysis included also the order parameter signs and concluded that the order parameters decrease with bound positive charge and increase with bound negative charge [4, 8]. The observations are rationalized as a change of lipid headgroup dipole tilt to more vertical orientation with bound positive charge and *vice versa* for negative [9].

8.ongoing,Actual concentration of cations in simulation has yet to be estimated. If it varies too much from the nominal concentration, I may need to tweak the scaling factors, f_q or only f_σ , to accomodate it. However, it is very unlikely, response to the surfactant DHMDMAB is OK. Big patches with loads of solvent are running at the moment to guide me on the possible finite-size errors and this conc-error. SAMULI: I thought about this a little bit. My current conclusion is that we can take the number concentration from simulations with large box having a clear bulk concentration region and calculate the bulk concentration in mol/l unit like this

$$C_{eq}[mol/l] = \frac{C_{plateau}[mM]}{0.602} \quad (2)$$

C. Simulation details

9.To be written

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Lipid bilayers without ions

The scattering form factors, NMR order parameters and area per lipids calculated from the ECC corrected lipid model for POPC are compared to experiments and original Lipid14 results in Fig. 1 and in Table I. The structural quality is comparable to the state of art lipid models available in literature [8], thus we conclude that the ECC corrected lipid model reproduces the lipid bilayer structure in liquid disordered phase with similar accuracy than other available models **10.Discussion to be finished when we have all the results in the figure.**

Headgroup order parameter response to bound charge was evaluated against experimental data measured with cationic surfactant (dihexadecyldimethylammonium bromide, $C_{12}Cl_{16}^+N_2C_1Br^-$) [16]. The exact amount of bound charge in the membrane is known these systems, because practically all cationic surfactant molecules are embedded in lipid bilayer due to their amphiphilic nature. Thus, the headgroup order

TABLE I: Area per lipid from different models for POPC without ions

model	A (\AA^2)	Temperature [K]
Lipid14 (literature)	65.6 ± 0.5	303
Lipid14ecc0.80+sigma0.875		313
GMX small patch	64.9	
GMX 4xbig patch	65.5	
oMM small patch	63.65	
oMM 4xbig patch	63.7	
experiment [?] 17.REF	62.7	293
experiment	64.3	303
experiment	67.3	323
experiment	68.1	333
experiment POPE	56.6	303

parameter changes as a function of mole fraction of cationic surfactants in Fig. 2 gives also the order parameter changes as a function of bound cations. 11.I think that we should make a separate figure for this one and ion concentrations. In the current figure it would be difficult to show this with a reasonable scale. Currently Lipid14 results are cut out, thus the scale should be increased. This would, however, make the changes with CaCl too small. The change of headgroup tilt could be incorporated in the same figure with order parameter response to cationic surfactant. The headgroup order parameter response to bound cation concentration is approximately linear up to ~ 0.3 mole fraction in experiments [16]. The linearity is also observed in simulations with original Lipid14 and with ECC correction. Quantitative comparison, however, reveals that the response is overestimated in original Lipid14 for both segments, while the ECC corrected model gives a good agreement for the change of α segment order parameter, but slightly underestimates the β segment order parameter change. The overestimation of order parameter changes with original Lipid14 model suggests that the overestimated response with CaCl₂ concentration in [4] can be partly explained by the high sensitivity of the headgroup order parameter response to bound charge.

Secondly, the S^α/S^β ratio of the response is found to be slightly larger than in experiments (VALexp vs VALsim 12.Add values of S^α/S^β response for sim and experiment SAMULI: Maybe these could be put in the same figure with the order parameter response and P-N vector angle change with surfactants.). This property is kept also by the newly derived model, ECC-lipid, and, hence, it shows a perfect agreement in the response of the headgroup order parameter S^α but underestimates slightly the response of S^β . Area per molecules extracted from MD simulations and SPD model fitted to scattering data 15.check that this the case for the used values are shown in Table I. 16.finalize figure (NMR headgr. OPs + SAXS, continue in the discussion.

B. Cation binding in POPC bilayer

Ion density profiles between different simulation models are compared in Fig. 3. Density profiles from simulations with original Lipid14 and Dang ions [20–22] show a pro-

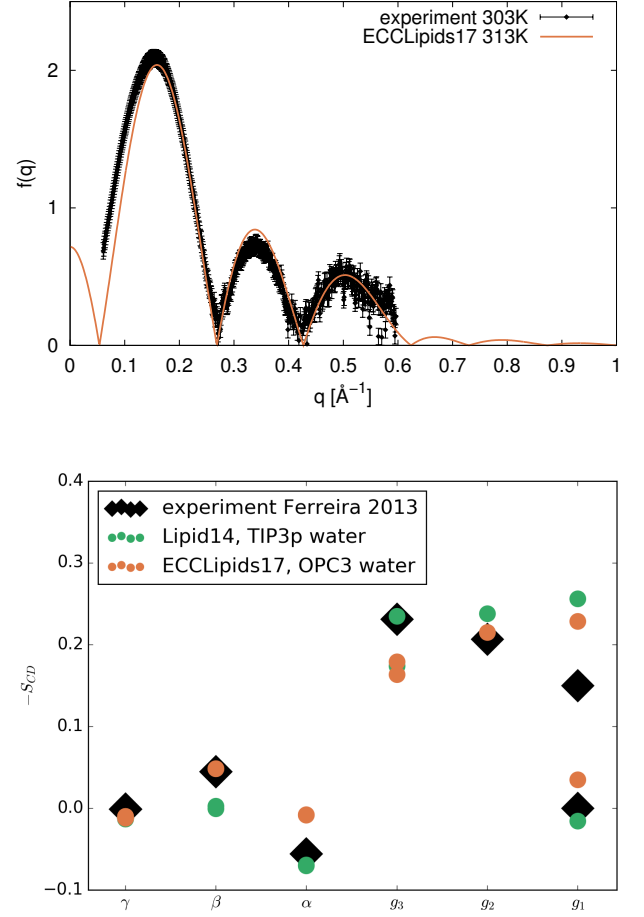


FIG. 1: X-ray scattering form factors from experiments [?] and simulations using Lipid14 and ECCLipids17 models. Headgroup and glycerol backbone order parameters from simulations with Lipid14 [5] and EECLipid17 models compared with experimental order parameters from [13].

13.Add acyl chain order parameters, POPC chemical structure 14.Should we add the results from original lipid14?

nounced peak in the position of the phosphate moieties of POPC. The use of a ECC-ion model [2, 3] along with original Lipid14 does not significantly change it. The new ECC-lipid model with scaled ions exhibits on the other hand smaller density in this region suggesting overall weaker binding of cations (Fig. 2). This demonstrates how important it is to account for electronic polarizability also in molecules with zero total charge. Altogether, the response of headgroup order parameters as a function of CaCl₂ concentration is in agreement with experiments in the new ECC-lipid model simulated with ECC model of CaCl₂. This is a significant improvement over previous models available for lipid-ion interactions studies [4] and indicates that the new model can be used for detailed studies of lipid-ion interactions.

One possible example is to address the discourse on the stoichiometry of Ca²⁺ binding to POPC [?] 19.REFs. In line with the early experimental finding [?], we find that our data

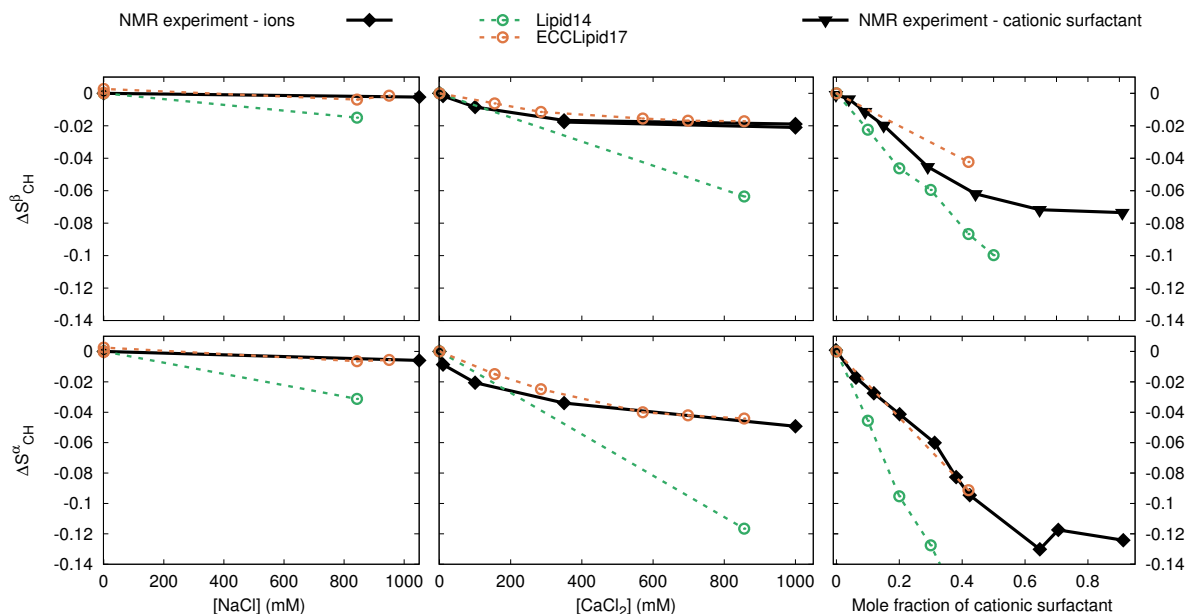


FIG. 2: Headgroup order parameter changes as a function of NaCl, CaCl_2 concentration and cationic surfactant (dihexadecyldimethylammonium bromide, $\text{C}_{12}\text{Cl}_{16}^+\text{N}_2\text{C}_1\text{Br}^-$) from simulations and experiments (DPPC [14], POPC [15], surfactant [16]). Simulations with Lipid14 and qvist ion model from [4, 17–19].

18.Add Lipid14-Aquist data.

fit well a ternary complex model, which assumes 2 POPC molecules per 1 Ca^{2+} . In contrast to this experiment, however, we possess also a complete atomistic detail of this phenomenon. Hence we can support this empirical finding with a direct observation of transient complexes of Ca^{2+} and POPC. The simulation suggests that the stoichiometry 2 POPC:1 Ca^{2+} is the most common complex. In addition, there also is a non-negligible probability of one Ca^{2+} cross-bridging three POPC molecules. This cannot be observed in experiments without atomistic detail as it makes only a small perturbation to the binding isotherm that assumes 2 POPC per 1 Ca^{2+} . 20.Analyze stoichiometry for Na^+ , Ca^{2+} , their interaction energies with the lipid membrane, etc, and finalize the discussion after these results.

not only due to overestimated binding of cations.

It is also suggested that the addition of NaCl to the solution of CaCl_2 enhances the headgroup order parameter response compared to the solution with only CaCl_2 . [?]] 21.Simulate this effect and discuss it further

22.The difference between DPPC and POPC – simulate and compare with experiment.

Discussion:

23.It might be worth acknowledging each experimental finding in [?] and observations in [?]].

other lipids: charged lipids? – ongoing research in our lab. I'm currently working on POPE with Aniket for curved (and flat) membranes.

Samuli: From the point of view of this paper, the most relevant other lipid to study would be DPPC to see if we can reproduce the difference between POPC and DPPC in experiments.

Joe: In addition, there are more experimental OP data on DPPC. However, it is not necessary and we can leave it to the community project.

Role of water model: we use OPC3 (current best), it would be worth giving an estimate how results change when we use say SPCE or even TIP3p at least in the SI (so that the reader knows what errors to expect coming from these sub-optimal models). In addition, there is protein force field Amber15-FB, which uses water close to OPC3, TIP3pFB 24.REFs. On the other hand, it might be the best if we used a model that doesn't have the dielectric constant from nuclei 78, but rather 44 – TIP4p2005 is the closest. [? ?]

questionable charge distribution from RESP – a leeway for further tweaks of the FF. It is not obvious that RESP charges provide the best description, especially due to its non-unique solution. Shall we solve RESP fitting with the constraint of full charges and then scale down, or shall we rather solve the fitting with a scaled total charge target?

achievable accuracy of the MD engines themselves (mainly Hector's worry) is another limiting factor in fine tuning parameters – solid physical ground helps.

application of the correction to other lipid models: The rule looks general, however, it depends on how accurate the original model was. From preliminary simulations with POPE, it looks that the rule works for Lipid14 FF, at least for zwitterionic headgroups.

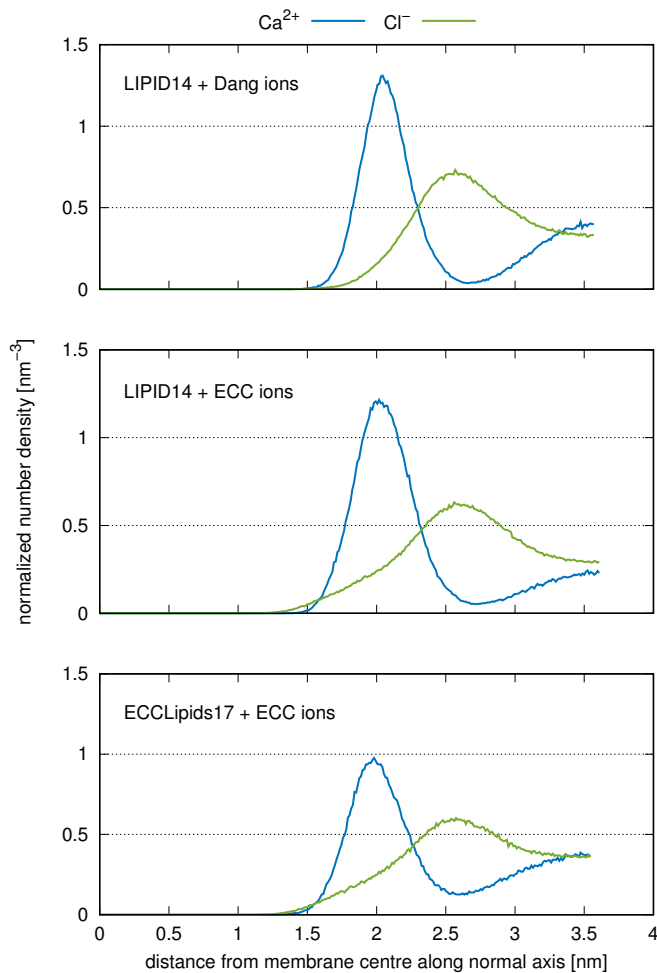


FIG. 3: Density profiles of Ca²⁺ and Cl⁻ for Lipid14 model with Aquist parameters and with ECC ions and ECCLipids17 with ECC ions.

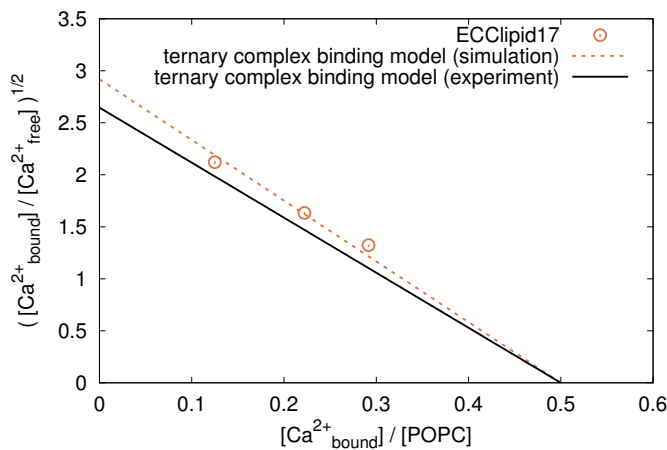


FIG. 4: Binding isotherm assuming stoichiometry of 2 POPC:1 Ca²⁺ as used in [?] fits the simulation data nicely.

IV. CONCLUSION

We present models of POPC and DPPC lipids that for the first time exhibit accurate headgroup order parameter response to cation binding. The models are derived from Lipid14 model [5] by applying the electronic continuum correction. The models were optimized to represent correct membrane structure, and they were validated with the use of electrometer concept [9, 23?]. Compared to the phenomenological observations of calcium:POPC stoichiometry in the experimental work [?], our simulations reveal the same stoichiometry of 2 POPC molecules per 1 calcium but through direct observation. This tells us on the subtle effects of calcium in phospholipid membranes possibly leading to a better understanding of their physical properties (elasticity etc.). **25.Improve this concluding-discussion with actual insights.**

This will be a foundation stone of a new open-collaboration project NPRLipid 6 in nmrlipids.blogspot.fi....

Acknowledgments

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

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ToDo

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| 12. Add values of S^α/S^β response for sim and experiment SAMULI: Maybe these could be put in the same figure with the order parameter response and P-N vector angle change with surfactants. | 3 |
| 15. check that this the case for the used values | 3 |
| 16. finalize figure (NMR headgr. OPs + SAXS, continue in the discussion. | 3 |
| 13. Add acyl chain order parameters, POPC chemical structure | 3 |
| 14. Should we add the results from original lipid14? . . | 3 |
| 19. Add references on Ca2+:POPC stoichiometry . . . | 3 |

18. Lipid14/qvist data to be added from https://github.com/NMRLipids/lipid_ionINTERACTION/blob/master/Data/POPC/CaCl/LIPID14/LIPID14caclCONSchange.dat . Joe: I'm not sure what is meant – I think Aquist data are actually plotted there. I recently changed it to L14+Dang ions (both data and plot). I think just one ion model is sufficient (and ECC-ions are based on Dang model).	4	21. Simulate this effect and discuss it further	4
20. Analyze stoichiometry for Na^+ , Ca^{2+} , their interac- tion energies with the lipid membrane, etc, and finalize the discussion after these results.	4	22. The difference between DPPC and POPC – simu- late and compare with experiment.	4
		23. It might be worth acknowledging each experimental finding in [?] and observations in [?].	4
		24. add references here	4
		25. Improve this concluding-discussion with actual in- sights.	5