Neuroscience

Activity-Dependent Changes in Ion Channel Voltage-Dependence Influence the Activity Patterns Targeted by Neurons

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This **important** computational study investigates homeostatic plasticity mechanisms that neurons may employ to achieve and maintain stable target activity patterns. The work extends previous analyses of calcium-dependent homeostatic mechanisms based on ion channel density by considering activity-dependent shifts in channel activation and inactivation properties that operate on faster and potentially variable timescales. The model simulations demonstrate the potential functional importance of these mechanisms, but the evidence is **incomplete** and would be strengthened by more in-depth analyses and explicit exposition.

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Abstract

Neurons can maintain stable activity profiles over their lifetimes despite ion channel turnover over minutes to days. Neurons also exhibit flexibility in electrical activity by regulating the voltage-dependence of ion channels. This flexibility, combined with channel turnover can, in principle, work together to maintain a stable activity profile. We augment a classical model of activity-dependent ion channel density regulation with a mechanism that adjusts channel voltage-dependence based on activity. Our findings reveal that the timescale of these adjustments shapes the range of electrical patterns that meet an activity target. This work highlights a potentially distinct role for activity-dependent regulation of channel voltage-dependence in maintaining stable neuronal activity profiles.

Introduction

Many neurons maintain stable patterns of activity over years, despite the fact that the ion channels that give rise to this activity are replaced thousands of times in their membranes, as they turn over on time scales from minutes to weeks. Indeed, a number of computational (Abbott &

LeMasson 1993, Alonso et al 2023, Golowasch et al 1999b, LeMasson et al 1993, Liu et al 1998, O'Leary et al 2014) and experimental (Desai et al 1999, Haedo & Golowasch 2006, Mizrahi et al 2001, Santin & Schulz 2019, Thoby-Brisson & Simmers 2002, Turrigiano et al 1994, Turrigiano et al 1995, Viteri & Schulz 2023) studies have argued that neurons accomplish this stability in activity by prespecifying an activity target and achieving it through activity-dependent regulation of ion channel densities.

On the other hand, the gating properties of these ion channels are known to be regulated by second messenger pathways, enabling multiple discharge patterns to arise from the same channel repertoire. The neuron implements these changes by altering the channel's voltage-dependent properties, viz. their activation curves, inactivation curves, and time constants, through conformational changes induced by post-translational modifications such as phosphorylation or S-nitrosylation (Broillet 1999, Hille 2001, Levitan 1988). These modifications are usually thought to take place on time scales that range over seconds to minutes but can include more long-lasting effects (Levitan 1988). The second messenger modulation of ion channels can have profound effects on excitability and can radically transform the patterns of electrical discharge of single neurons (Levitan 1987).

There is evidence that the neuron can also alter the gating properties of ion channels to achieve a stable activity profile (Gasselin et al 2015, Haedo & Golowasch 2006, Thoby-Brisson & Simmers 2002). This suggests that the second messenger pathways responsible for modifying gating properties may play a role in stabilizing neuronal activity. However, the contribution of changes in channel gating to achieving activity stability remains underexplored, largely due to the challenges associated with measuring such changes. Inter-neuronal variability in activation and inactivation curves can obscure clear patterns of activity-mediated modifications, especially when analyzed at the population level (Turrigiano et al 1995).

To evaluate how regulation of channel voltage-dependence affects a neuron's ability to achieve a stable activity profile amidst the insertion and deletion of ion channels, we developed a computational model. The model was built around a simulated neuron with seven intrinsic currents and a specified target activity profile. The model tracked fluctuations in intracellular Ca^{2+} concentration resulting from the neuron's activity, with the target profile defined by specific Ca^{2+} concentration targets. The model then evaluated whether the Ca^{2+} fluctuations resulting from the neuron's discharge pattern met these predefined targets. If they did not, the model iteratively adjusted the density (via alterations in maximal conductance) and voltage-dependence (via alterations in half-(in)activations) of all seven intrinsic currents until the target was achieved.

This approach is justified for two reasons. First, intracellular Ca^{2+} levels reflect neuronal activity (Grienberger & Konnerth 2012). Second, elevated Ca^{2+} concentration levels are known to be associated with the activation of many second messenger pathways that putatively regulate channel density (Northcutt & Schulz 2020) or regulate channel voltage-dependence (Kennedy 1989). However, a limitation of this approach is the assumption that the same Ca^{2+} target deviations driving changes in channel density also drive changes in channel voltage-dependence. We know, also, that not all changes to intrinsic excitability are mediated by activity induced Ca^{2+} concentration fluctuations (Khorkova & Golowasch 2007, MacLean et al 2005, Maclean et al 2003, Zhang et al 2009).

Still, this model has two important features that make it particularly useful. First, it allows independent control over the timescales at which channel voltage-dependence and channel density respond to deviations from the target activity profile. This enabled us to explore the specific role of voltage-dependence regulation in achieving neuronal stability amidst ongoing ion channel turnover by altering the relative timescale of their responses to target deviations. Second, this type of model is known to have a particular biologically realistic feature: it can achieve a given an activity target using different configurations of intrinsic currents. Indeed, experiments

show that neurons with putative activity targets, such as constitutive bursters, exhibit varying channel densities while exhibiting similar electrical behaviors (Alonso et al 2023, Golowasch 2014, Golowasch et al 1999a, Liu et al 1998, Marder & Goaillard 2006, O'Leary et al 2014, Schulz et al 2006).

These two aspects of the model converge to highlight the central finding of this paper. The *speed* (or timescale) of these adjustments can guide the neuron toward *subsets* of intrinsic current configurations, all consistent with the predefined activity target. This suggests a potential role for second messenger-mediated regulation of channel voltage-dependence in shaping the electrical patterns that emerge as stability is achieved.

Results

To explore how modifications in channel voltage-dependence influence a neuron's capacity to achieve an activity profile as changes in ion channel density occur, we created a computational model. This model was built around a single compartment, Hodgkin-Huxley type conductance-based neuron with seven intrinsic currents (see Turrigiano et al (1995) or Box 1, Supplement 1). The neuron model consisted of a fast Na^+ current, two Ca^{2+} currents, three K^+ currents, a hypolarization-activated inward current (I_h), and a leak current. Each current was described by its maximal conductance (number of ion channels) and activation curves. Some currents also possessed inactivation curves as well. The (in)activation curves described the effects of voltage on the opening and closing of the membrane channels.

The activity-dependent regulation of channel number and (in)activation curves employed a strategy that uses intracellular Ca^{2+} concentrations as a proxy for the neuron's activity (Abbott & LeMasson 1993, Alonso et al 2023, Golowasch et al 1999b, Gorur-Shandilya et al 2020, LeMasson et al 1993, O'Leary et al 2014, Siegel et al 1994, Srikanth & Narayanan 2015). Specifically, we followed the approach used in Liu et al (1998) and Alonso et al (2023), for altering channel density to guide our approach to altering (in)activation curves. In those models, the intracellular Ca^{2+} concentration and three filters (also called sensors) of the Ca^{2+} concentration were computed. The three sensors were employed to better differentiate between the activity of tonic spiking and bursting neurons (Alonso et al 2023, Liu et al 1998). A target activity profile was chosen by prespecifying the average value of these filters. When deviations from these Ca^{2+} sensor target were detected, channel densities were altered to up or down regulate the number of channels in the membrane (Alonso et al 2023, Liu et al 1998).

We expanded on these models by incorporating a mechanism that shifts the (in)activation curves in response to deviations from the Ca^{2+} sensor targets. This was accomplished by changing the half-(in)activation voltages of the (in)activation curves, mirroring strategies employed in Liu et al (1998) and Alonso et al (2023). The details of the Model, with their equations are described in the Methods section and in Box 1.

Importantly, the response times of the mechanisms responsible for ion channel insertion and deletion, as well as those for shifts in (in)activation curves, could be independently controlled. In the model, these response times were initially set two orders of magnitude apart. This reflected the slower processes of protein synthesis and degradation associated with channel insertion and deletion. This contrasted with faster time scale of post-translational modifications such as channel phosphorylation. Specifically, the timescale for changes in maximal conductance was set at τ_g = 600 s, and the timescale for half-(in)activation shifts at τ_{half} = 6 s. Later, we adjusted the response times of the (in)activation curve shifts. We note that in prior computational studies of activity-dependent regulation, τ_g is set to be less than 10 seconds, substantially faster than the timescales

used in our model (Alonso et al 2023, Liu et al 1998). In contrast, our study lengthens this timescale explores the impact of varying the relative timescales of maximal conductance changes (τ_g) and half-(in)activation shifts (τ_{half}).

Bursters Assembled by Activity-Dependent Alterations in Ion Channel Density and Channel Voltage-Dependence

Figure 1 shows that the full model, with the two regulation mechanisms in operation. From a set of starting randomly chosen parameters (maximal conductances and half-(in)activations), referred to as Starting Parameters 1 (SP1), the activity-dependent regulation mechanism altered the ion channel density and voltage-dependences to assemble an electrical activity pattern that satisfied the Ca^{2+} targets. The targets were chosen so that a burster self-assembled (see Methods). The final ion channel density and voltage-dependences are shown in the bar graph (**Figure 1A**). The first two rows in **Figure 1A** show the electrical activity of the neuron as model seeks to satisfy the Ca^{2+} target. As it does, the model assembled a burster. The second row shows the activity over the entire trace and the first row shows blows up at: the start (a), about 100 minutes (b) and at the end of the simulation (c). At the time shown in (b), the neuron was bursting, but the Ca^{2+} targets had not been achieved. There were two indications that this burster did not satisfy the specified Ca^{2+} targets: (1) the model still continued to adjust the properties of the ion channel repertoire here and (2) α was not yet zero (see Methods).

The third and fourth traces in **Figure 1A** show how the model altered half-activation and half-inactivation values to meet the Ca^{2+} target. Very early on there were large changes in the activation curves, which then slowly moved to a steady-state value. The fifth trace shows the evolution of maximal conductances. These started to change early on but did so slowly. As the maximal conductances slowly changed, the half-activation curves followed suit, adapting to the new repertoire of ion channels to close the distance to Ca^{2+} target. **Figure 1** Supplement shows the assembly of a burster from a different set of Starting Parameters (maximal conductances and half-(in) activations (SP4)), with qualitatively similar results to those obtained with SP1 but quantitatively different final parameters.

In general, when the model was initialized with different Starting Parameters, it produced bursters with different final intrinsic properties. Twenty degenerate bursters (SP1-SP20), conforming to standards specified in Methods, were selected from over 100 bursters produced with different Starting Parameters. Five sets of Starting Parameters (SPs 1-5) were selected based on their periods being within 2%, with an average period of 416 ms. This group was then expanded to include an additional 15 model instances (SP6-SP20), whose periods are within 20% of the mean.

Figure 1B shows that without the activity-dependent regulation of the maximal conductances, the model failed to assemble SP1 into a burster. This was seen in the other 19 Starting Parameters (SP2-SP20), as well. We note, however, that for specific, suitably organized sets of maximal conductances, the half-activation regulation mechanism was able to assemble a burster. For instance, when we took the randomly initialized starting half-(in)activations and the finally assembled maximal conductances for SP1 the resulting activity pattern did not satisfy the activity target (**Figure 1C**, Blow-Up 1). However, by only altering the half-(in)activations, the model assembled a burster from the previous activity pattern (**Figure 1C**, Blow-Up 3).

Statistics of the Population

The burst characteristics of these 20 bursters were measured (**Figure 2A**). The blue circles represent the wider Group of 20 while the black dots denote the Group of 5. The stringency of period selection is seen in how the black dots are more concentrated within the more dispersed blue circles in the plot of Period in **Figure 2A**. In contrast, the black dots are more dispersed amongst the blue dots in plots of the Burst Duration, Spike Height, Maximum Hyperpolarization

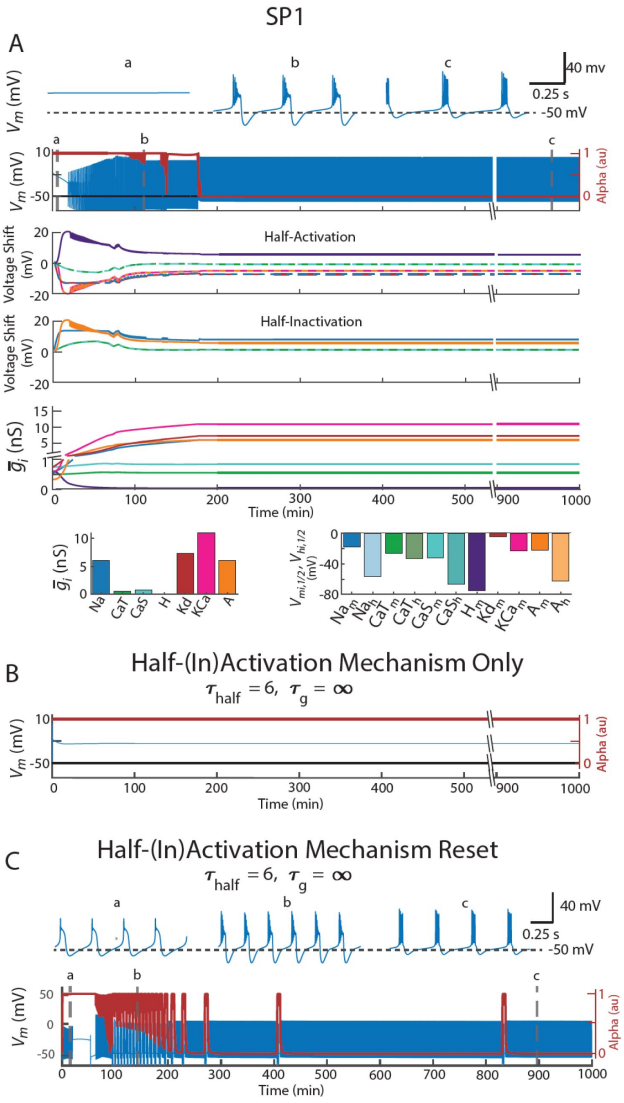

Figure 1

Activity-Dependent Regulation Mechanism (τ_{half} = 6 s and τ_g = 600 s) was used to assemble a burster that meets the Ca^{2+} targets from 'random' starting parameters (i.e. SP). This set of starting parameters is called SP1. A – Row 1: blow-ups of specific points a, b, and c in the voltage trace in Row 2. Row 2: Plots the neuron's electrical activity as its channel density and (in)activations curves were being adjusted. Alpha was a measure of how close the model is to satisfying Ca^{2+} targets (see Methods). It took values between 0 and 1, with 0 meaning the targets were satisfied. Row 3: Plots the adjustments made to the half-activations as the model attempted to satisfy the calcium targets. They were color-coded to match the intrinsic currents shown in the left plot of Row 5. Row 4: Same as Row 3, except for (in)activation curves. Note that not all currents in this model had inactivation curves. Row 5: Same as Row 3, except for maximal conductances (i.e. channel density). Row 6: The final levels of maximal conductances are shown in the left plot. The final half-(in)activations are plotted on the right. The final half-activation of an intrinsic current, $V_{m_{i,1/2}}$, was the sum of the initially posited level of the that current's half-activation $V_{m^0_{i,1/2}}$ and the shifts the model made to the activation curve, $V_{s_i^m}$ (shown in Row 3). The final half-inactivation of an intrinsic current, $V_{h_{i,1/2}}$, was the sum of the initially posited level of the that current's half-inactivation $V_{h^0_{i,1/2}}$ and the shifts the model made to the inactivation curve, $V_{s_i^h}$ (shown in Row 4). The process is illustrated in **Figure 1** (supplement) for a different set of starting parameters (i.e. initial half-(in)activation shifts and maximal conductance levels). B – This displays the neuron's electrical activity if the model was restricted to varying only half-(in)activations (τ_{half} = 6 s), with maximal conductances fixed (τ_g = ∞ s). The same starting parameters as in Panel A were used for this simulation. C – This also displays the neuron's electrical activity if the model was restricted to varying only half-(in)activations (τ_{half} = 6 s), with maximal conductances fixed (τ_g = ∞ s). However, different starting parameters were used. The initial half-(in)activation values were identical to those used in Panels A and B. But, the initial maximal conductances were set to a specific configuration: the values obtained at the end of the simulation in Panel A (Row 6, left table).

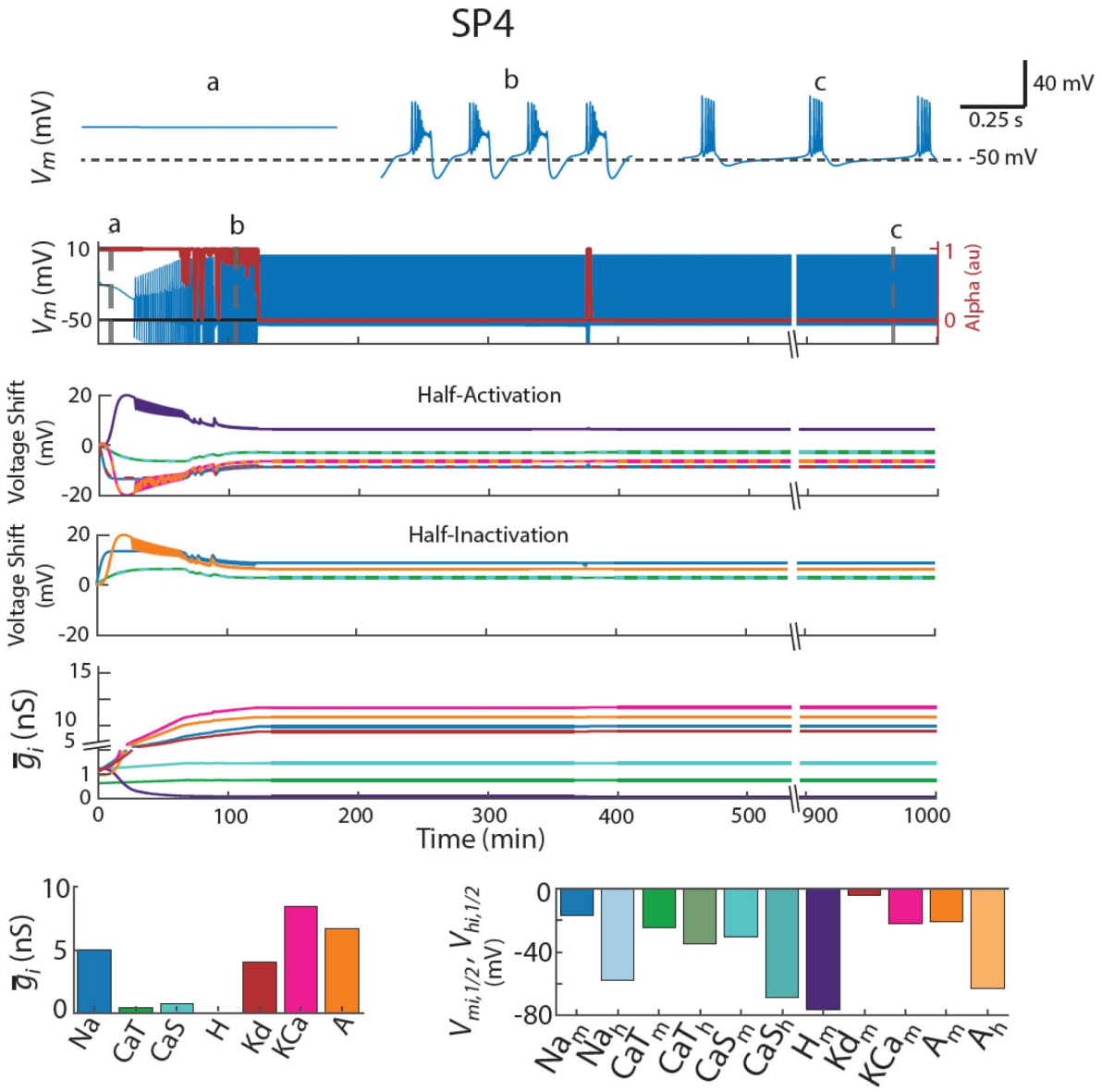

Figure 1 (Supplement)

This model attempts to satisfy the same Ca^{2+} targets as in **Figure 1**, Panel A, but was started from a different set of 'random' initial parameters. The rows correspond to those in **Figure 1**, Panel A. Note that the maximal conductances of the two potassium currents, I_{Kd} and I_A, differ from SP1.

and Slow Wave Amplitude. This suggests that the narrow constraints on period did not constrain other characteristics of the burster. Indeed, bootstrap statistical analysis revealed that the relative standard deviation measurements between the Group of 5 and Group of 20 were not significant for any of the burst characteristics (see **Figure 2** legend and Methods).

Figure 2B assesses how the stringency of period selection affected intrinsic currents. The left panel shows the range of conductances, and the right panel illustrates the variation in half-(in)activation curves. The asterisks represent, within 0.5 mV, where all the half-(in)activations were initialized (for more see Methods). It initially appeared that the impact of period stringency on parameter variability might reveal itself in some of these properties. In all intrinsic current properties, the black dots had a smaller relative standard deviation than the circles (**Figure 2** legend). For example, g_{Na} for Group of 5 and Group of 20 had a relative standard deviation of 11.4% and 129.2% (**Figure 2-B1**), and the relative standard deviation of the half-activations for the sodium current were 2.5% vs 10.0%, respectively (**Figure 2-B2**). However, bootstrap analysis revealed that these differences were statistically insignificant. Evidently, the constraints on the Group of 5's period were not reflected in the intrinsic current's properties. Together, with the findings on burst characteristics, this suggested that the Group of 5 is quite diverse despite the strict period selection.

Half-(in)activation Mechanism Timescale Impacts Activity Pattern

In previous the section, we studied the types of bursters that arose from slowly changing the density of the channel repertoire and quickly altering the half-(in)activations of the resulting repertoire. We next changed the timescale over which we altered half-(in)activations and assessed how the burst characteristics of the population changed (the timescale of channel density alterations remains the same). To start, we present an example of what occurred when SP1 was assembled under various timescales of half-(in)activation alterations: fast, with the same time scale of ion channel density alterations, and infinitely slow (i.e. off). Evidently, the timescale of half-(in)activation alterations did not impact *whether* a burster assembled. Rather, it impacted the burster characteristics of the assembled electrical pattern. This can be seen by comparing the blow-ups of the SP1 activity profiles in the three conditions in **Figure 3**. Notably, burst characteristics such as maximum hyperpolarization and period varied between the different homeostatic mechanisms originating from SP1. In fact, these differences were observed the entire SP1-SP20 population. **Figure 4A** shows that alterations in the timescale of half-(in)activation alterations significantly impacted the period, interburst interval, spike height, and maximum hyperpolarization of the entire bursting population.

The timescale of half-(in)activation alterations also impacted some intrinsic properties of the population. **Figure 4B** plots the burster assembled with the timescale of half-(in)activation alterations at two extremes: fast and infinitely slow (i.e. off). This visualization is known as a currentscape (Alonso & Marder 2019). In both cases, the resulting burster appeared to terminate using the same mechanism: hyperpolarization via the calcium-activated potassium current. This is seen by the relative contribution the calcium-activated potassium current makes at the point of maximum hyperpolarization (see at the dotted line in **Figure 4B**). However, the manner in which this current came to dominate the burster termination differs. Note that the burster constructed without half-(in)activation alterations possessed higher maximal conductance for I_{KCa} than the burster constructed with half-(in)activation alterations (**Figure 4C**, Mauve dot). Moreover, the latter burster had more depolarized half-activations (**Figure 4C**, Mauve dot). In fact, this observation held true for SP2-SP20 as well (**Figure 4C**).

Half-(in)activation Alterations Contribute Activity Homeostasis

This model can also simulate the homeostatic recovery of activity in the assembled bursters following perturbations. In **Figure 5A**, SP1 received a depolarizing perturbation of extracellular potassium concentration increase for 100 minutes (in olive green) after which the model neuron

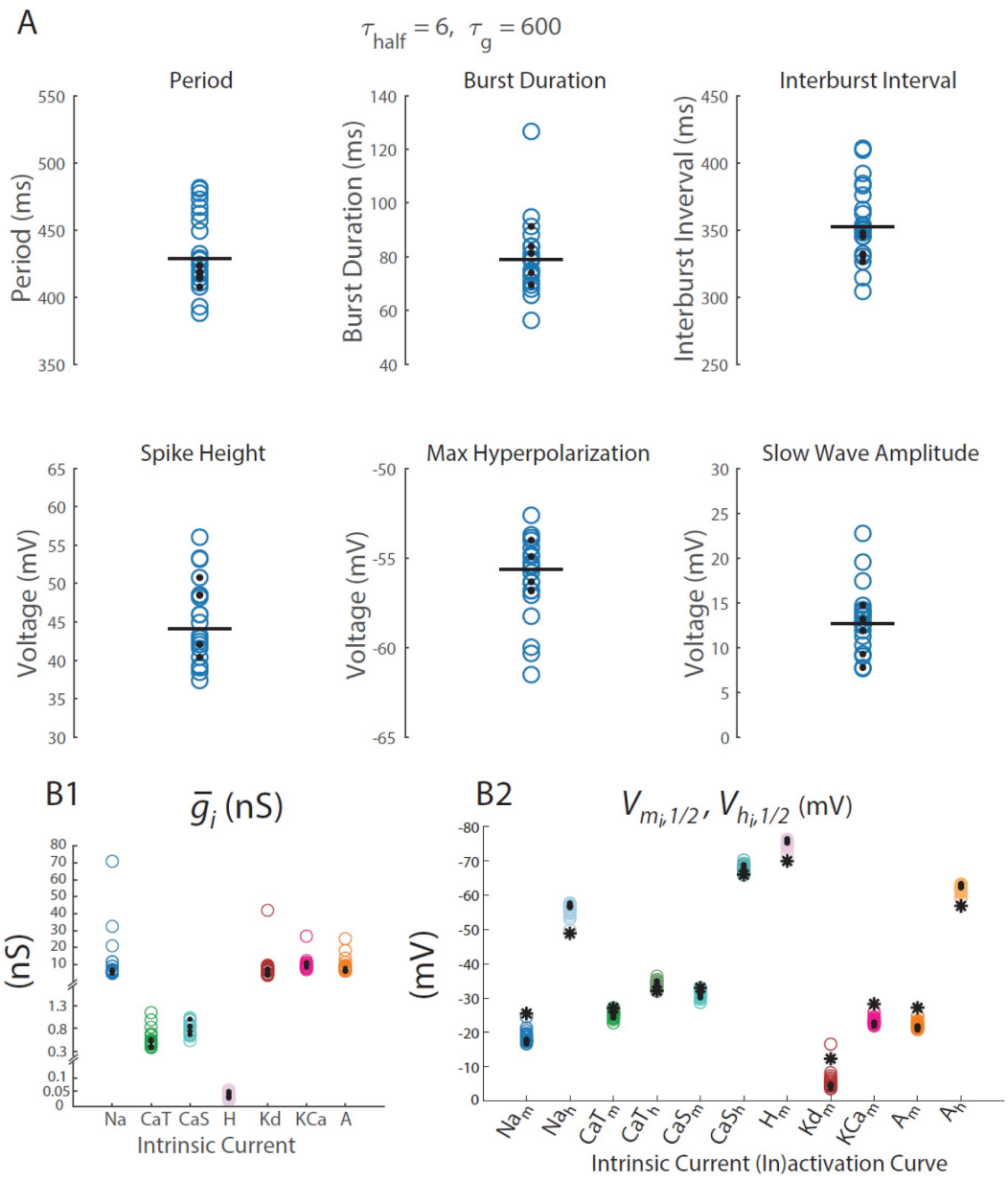

Figure 2

All 20 SP's were analyzed including those illustrated in **Figure 1**. Five SP's (SP1 – SP5) were selected based on their periods being within 2% of each other, with an average period of 416.3 ms. This group was expanded to include an additional 15 model instances (SP6 - SP20) whose periods are within 20% of the mean. A) The top left panel displays the periods for all SP's, with black dots indicating the center of the circles for SP1 – SP5 within the larger group. Burst Duration, Interburst Interval, Spike Hight, Maximum Hyperpolarization, and Slow Wave Amplitude measurements for these SP's are provided in subsequent plots. The relative standard deviation of SP1-SP5 vs SP1-SP20 for Period, Burst Duration, Interburst Interval, Spike Hight, Maximum Hyperpolarization, and Slow Wave Amplitude were, respectively: 1.4% vs 6.8%, 10.7% vs 17.9%, 2.8% to 8.1%, 9.9% to 12.0%, 2.3% vs 4.2%, and 25.9% to 28.5%. B) The left panel shows maximal conductances, and the right panel displays half-(in)activation voltages for each of the 20 SP's. Black dots indicate the center of the circles for SP1 – SP5 within the larger group. An asterisk on the right indicates the initially specified level of half-(in)activation. The relative standard deviation of SP1-SP5 vs SP1-SP20 for the maximal conductances of I_{Na}, I_{CaT}, I_{CaS}, I_H, I_{Kd}, I_{KCa}, and I_A were, respectively: 11.4% vs 129.2%, 17.6% vs 35.9%, 15.6% vs 17.6%, 23.2% vs 30.2%, 32.8% vs 96.9%, 10.6% vs 40.4%, and 10.0% vs 51.6%. The relative standard deviation of SP1-SP5 vs SP1-SP20 for the half-activations of I_{Na}, I_{CaT}, I_{CaS}, I_H, I_{Kd}, I_{KCa}, and I_A were, respectively: 2.5% vs 10.0%, 2.8% vs 4.1%, 2.3% vs 3.3%, 0.5% vs 1.4%, 10.6% vs 48.9%, 1.8% vs 4.6%, and 1.8% vs 4.8%. The relative standard deviation of the Group of 5 vs the Group of 20 for the half-inactivations of I_{Na}, I_{CaT}, I_{CaS}, and I_A were, respectively: 0.8% vs 3.3%, 2.1% vs 3.1%, 1% vs 1.5%, and 0.6% vs 1.7%.

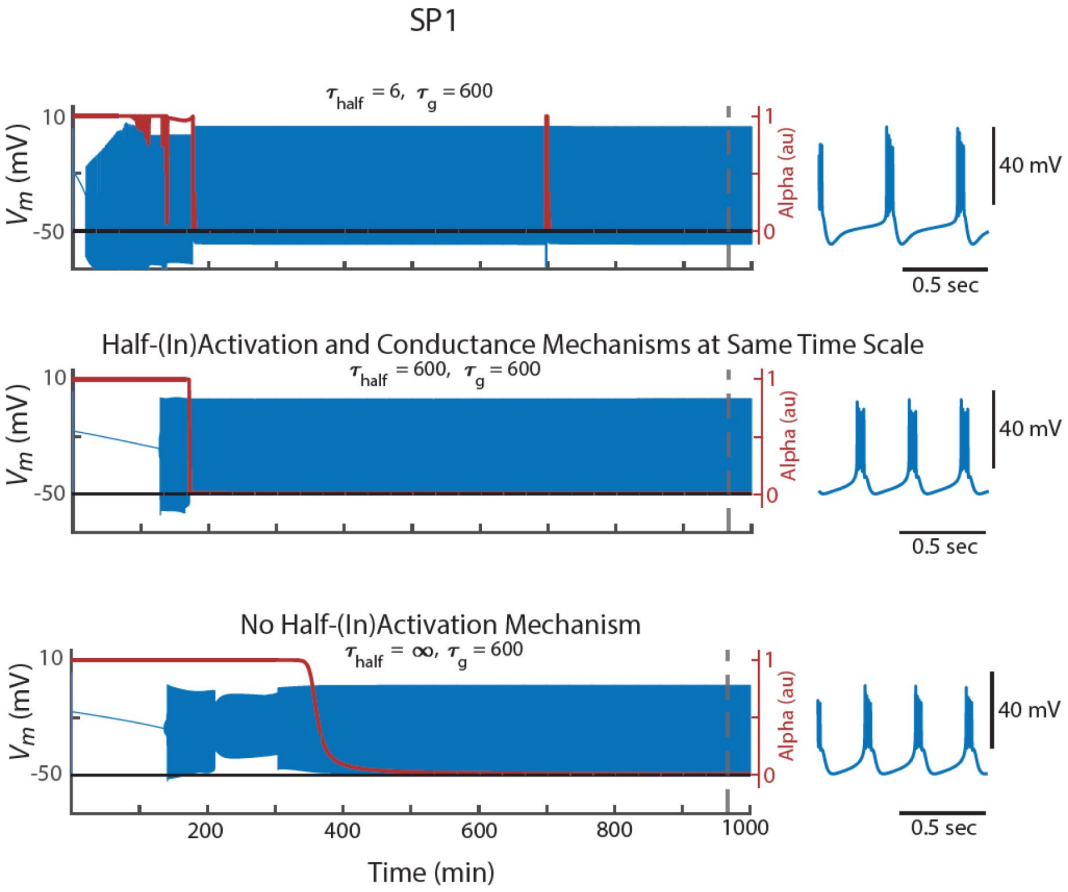

Figure 3

The model did not need to alter half-(in)activations to assemble a burster. In each row, the electrical activity of SP1 is shown as the model attempted to meet the Ca^{2+} targets. In each row, the speed at which the model changed (in)activation curves in response to deviations from Ca^{2+} target, was altered. From top row to bottom the speeds are: τ_{half} = 6 s, τ_{half} = 600 s, and τ_{half} = ∞ s (i.e. half-(in)activations do not change). The speed at which the model changed channel density is fixed in all rows: τ_g = 600 s. Superimposed on these traces is the α (alpha) parameter, which indicates whether the activity patterns were meeting the Ca^{2+} targets. Blow-ups of the activity pattern when the calcium sensors were satisfied are displayed to the right.

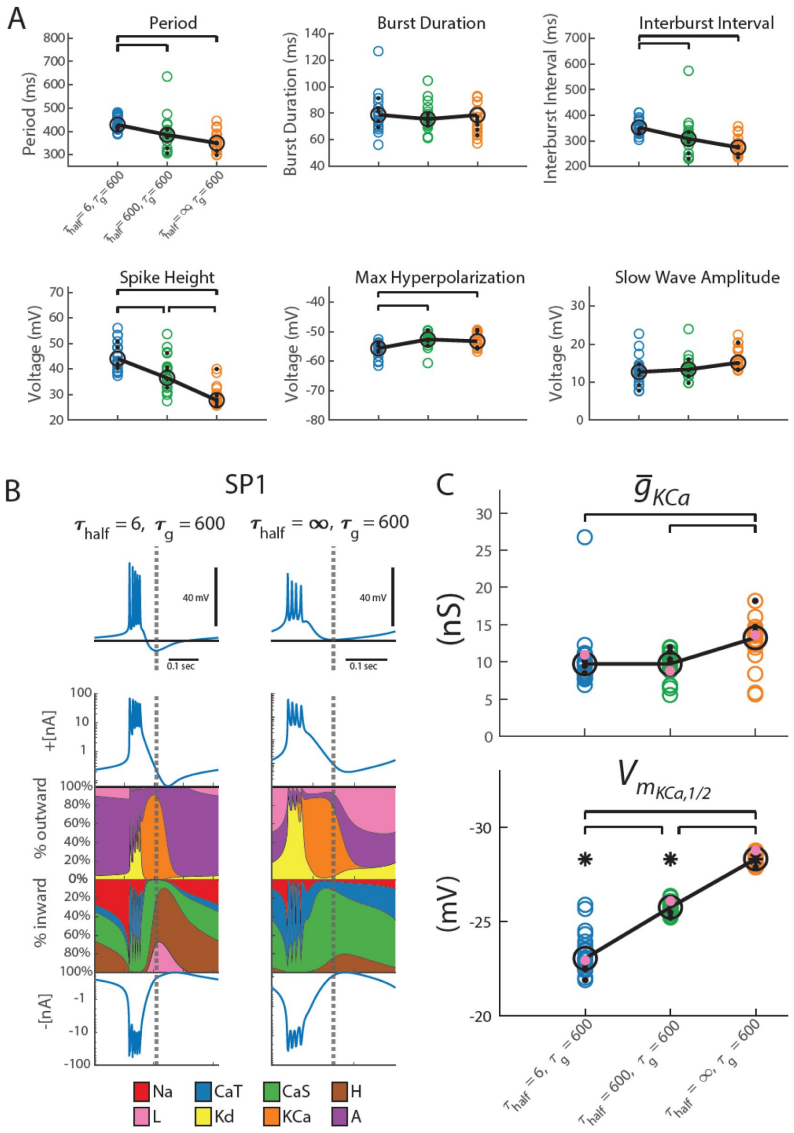

Figure 4

The speed at which the model changed (in)activation curves in response to deviations from Ca^{2+} target impacted the type of bursters the model assembled. In all simulation for this figure, $\tau_g = 600$. A) These plots extend the measurements from **Figure 2** to the same 20 SP's, now with (in)activation curves regulated at a different speed. In blue, $\tau_{half} = 6$ s; recapitulating results in **Figure 2**. In green and orange, the SP's were reassessed with slower half-(in)activation adjustments, $\tau_{half} = 600$ s, and $\tau_{half} = \infty$ s (i.e. halted), respectively. Brackets indicate significant differences in medians ($p < .05$). These pairwise differences were assessed using a Kruskal-Wallis test (to assess whether any differences in medians existed between all groups) and post-hoc Dunn tests with Bonferroni corrections to assess which pairs of groups differed significantly in their medians. B) The model was used to stabilize SP1 to the same Ca^{2+} target but using different timescales of half-(in)activation alterations. $\tau_{half} = 6$ s is shown on the left and $\tau_{half} = \infty$ s (representing the slowest possible response) on the right. Rows 1-4 below each voltage trace show: the total outward current, percentage contribution of each outward intrinsic current to the total outward current, percentage contribution of each inward intrinsic current to the total inward current, and the total inward current. A dashed line across all rows marks the point of maximum hyperpolarization in each activity pattern to guide focused comparison. C) When the model stabilized around a burster, the speed at which the model changed (in)activation curves impacted maximal conductance and half-activation location of the calcium-activated potassium current. Shown here in blue, green, and orange are $\tau_{half} = 6$ s, $\tau_{half} = 600$ s, and $\tau_{half} = \infty$ s (i.e. halted), respectively. SP1 – SP20 are in the colored circles. Black dots mark the center of the colored circles for SP1 – SP5. Trends are illustrated with a black line, with large circles marking median positions. The mauve dot highlights the level of maximal conductance and half-(in)activation SP1 evolved to. The asterisks mark the original position of the KCa half-activation $(V_{m^0_{6,1/2}})$. A Kruskal-Wallis test followed by post-hoc Dunn tests (with Bonferroni corrections) were conducted to assess significant pairwise differences in medians ($p < .05$).

was returned to normal conditions. The initially bursting neuron (**Figure 5A**, Blow-Up 1) received a perturbation that results in the cessation of activity (**Figure 5A**, Blow-Up 2). However, during the perturbation, the neuron altered its channel density and voltage-dependences to reattain bursting activity pattern (**Figure 5A**, Blow-Up 3). This bursting pattern, in fact, satisfied the calcium target (alpha is near zero in **Figure 5A**, Blue Arrow). Following the perturbation, the neuron briefly ceased activity (**Figure 5A**, Blow-Up 4), but returned to a bursting pattern that satisfied the calcium target (**Figure 5A**, Blow-Ups 5 and 6).

The model might offer some perspectives on the role that alterations in channel voltage-dependence have during homeostasis. First, these alterations may play a unique role in the recovery of activity following a perturbation. While the channel densities were substantially altered during the perturbation, after the perturbation they did not change much (**Figure 5B**, Black Arrow). In contrast, channel voltage-dependences appeared to change greatly post-perturbation (**Figure 5C** and **5D**, Black Arrow). The channel densities appeared to have been altered in a way so that only changes in channel voltage-dependences were necessary to recover bursting following the perturbation. Second, the changes resulting from shifting activation and inactivation curves may, perhaps, be reconceptualized as alterations in window currents. To see this, observe the relative positions of the activation curves and inactivation curves for I_{CaT}, I_{CaS}, I_A, and I_{Na} (the other currents in the model do not possess both curves). At the time the neuron recovered bursting during the perturbation (**Figure 5A**, Blow-Up 3), the model shifted the activation curves to more hyperpolarized potentials and inactivation curves to more depolarized potentials (**Figure 5C** and **5D**, Blue Arrow). In effect, the excitability of the neuron increased following the perturbation due to changes in window currents.

Discussion

Timescale of Channel Voltage-Dependence Alterations

Post-translational modifications alter the voltage-dependent gating mechanisms of ion channels, affecting their open probability and thereby influencing neuronal excitability (Hille 2001, Levitan 1988). Increases in intracellular calcium are associated with signaling pathways that trigger these modifications (Kandel et al 2000, Levitan 1988). Intracellular calcium is also thought to play a crucial role in maintaining neuronal activity set points (LeMasson et al 1993, Turrigiano et al 1994). Together, these observations suggest that calcium-mediated post-translational modifications impact a neuron's ability to maintain a target activity profile. Indeed, experimental evidence supports the idea that neurons can modify their channel voltage-dependence properties to achieve activity targets (Gasselin et al 2015, Haedo & Golowasch 2006, Thoby-Brisson & Simmers 2002). While alterations in channel voltage-dependence are known to plastically modulate a neuron's excitability (Levitan 1988), their role in stabilizing a neuron around an activity target has not been extensively explored. As such, we designed a study to explore how modifications to channel gating properties can influence the attainment of an activity target.

We demonstrated that altering the *timescale* of these modifications is important in determining the neuron's electrical activity pattern and underlying intrinsic properties. A way to understand this work is outlined in **Figure 6**. The space of activity characteristic (**Figure 6A**) or underlying intrinsic parameters (**Figure 6B**) contains a region representing all electrical patterns consistent with the neuron's activity target. When channel gating properties are altered quickly in response to deviations from the target activity, the resulting electrical patterns are shown in **Figure 6** as the orange bubble labeled "τ_{half} = 6 s". As the timescale of alterations slow, the activity characteristics and model parameters of the electrical patterns shift, as illustrated by the other orange subregions in **Figure 6**. This conceptually highlights how changing the

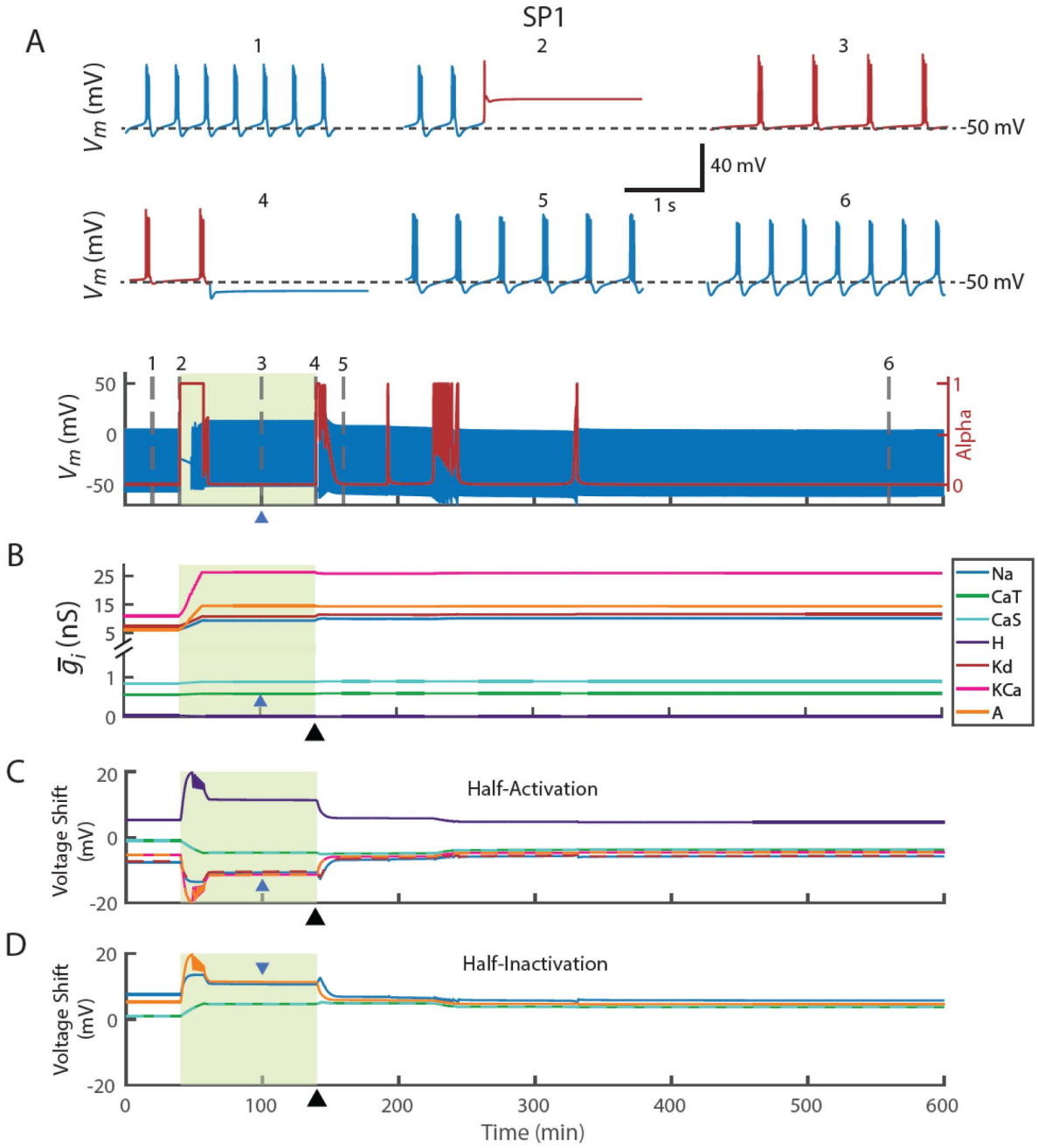

Figure 5

The model simulated the homeostatic recovery of neuronal activity. A burster (SP1) was perturbed by increasing the extracellular potassium concentration to 2.5 times its baseline level (shown in olive green) for 120 minutes. The model adjusted the neuron's maximal conductance and half-(in)activations to satisfy the Ca^{2+} targets (τ_{half} = 6, τ_g = 600). The blue arrow indicates the position of inset 3 on the time evolution of the maximal conductances and half-(in)activations. By this point, the model had assembled a burster that satisfied the Ca^{2+} targets during the extracellular potassium perturbation. The black arrow marks the end of the perturbation.

timescale of alterations to channel voltage-dependence can move the neuron through different regions within the space of activity characteristics or intrinsic parameters while still maintaining its activity target.

Figure 6 tacitly suggests the existence of a continuous region within the space of activity measurements or model parameters that aligns with the calcium target. If this continuity is indeed present, neurons could, in response to perturbations, seamlessly transition to new patterns that meet the activity target. Such adaptability may be important in scenarios like temperature perturbations, where it is postulated that neurons continuously adjust their intrinsic currents to manage temperature changes (Alonso & Marder 2020). In certain rhythmic neuronal networks, the relative phase of neuronal firing is preserved even as the overall network frequency increases (Hooper 1997, Tang et al 2010). To target intrinsic properties that may be amenable to maintaining phase in higher temperatures, a neuron may control how quickly it adjusts its (in)activation curve in responses to deviations from its target activity as temperature changes.

Our simulations show that altering the timescale of channels' voltage-dependent gating properties impact the targeted activity characteristics. However, what biological processes can implement these alterations? Fast timescale post-translational alterations can be implemented by second messengers that are anchored next to ion channels, for instance Protein Kinase A (Fraser & Scott 1999) or cAMP dependent protein kinase (Johnson et al 1994). Over slightly longer timescales, these modifications may proceed more slowly as second messengers diffuse across the cytosol and potentially degrade (Agarwal et al 2016, Zaccolo et al 2006). Phosphorylation by kinases is a commonly studied post-translational modification, however there are other modifications that also occur on these time scales, such as S-nitrosylation. In fact, all the channels used in this study are known change their voltage gating properties in response to phosphorylation or S-nitrosylation: I_{Na} (Ashpole et al 2012, Bielefeldt et al 1999), I_{Kd} (Bai et al 2004, Dilly et al 2004, Thompson et al 2017), I_H (Difrancesco & Tortora 1991, Ingram & Williams 1996), I_{CaS} (Bai et al 2004, Peterson et al 1999), I_{KCa} (Lang et al 2000, Weiger et al 2002), I_A (Hoffman & Johnston 1998, Varga et al 2004), and I_{CasT} (Welsby et al 2003).

On intermediate timescales, the channel's voltage-dependence properties can be modulated by either the association of calcium activated subunits, for example via Potassium Channel-Interacting Proteins (Wu et al 2023), or cleavage of subunits by calcium mediated proteins, such as calpain (Friedrich et al 2004, Sandoval et al 2006). On even slower timescales, the neuron can modulate the transcription and translation of these auxiliary subunits based on intracellular calcium levels. For instance, Potassium Channel-Interacting Proteins are known to be controlled by CREB (Wu et al 2023). Additionally, the composition of the lipid rafts that house these ion channels may impact their gating properties (Dart 2010, Levitan et al 2010). Documented cross talk between the pathways that modify the lipid composition of these rafts and calcium signaling pathways may further influence a channel's gating properties during slow changes in intracellular calcium levels (Pulli et al 2018).

Model Assumptions

This model of channel voltage-dependence alterations is based on certain assumptions. The concept outlined in **Figure 6** is not expected to depend on these choices. However, examining these assumptions reveal additional insights.

The notion of ion channel gating alteration speed is simplified in two ways in this model. First, the model assumes a single, uniform time constant for modifying all intrinsic currents. In reality, each intrinsic current is likely influenced by a combination of mechanisms. For example, the relative contributions of anchored second messengers and freely diffusing kinases in phosphorylating key residues in L-Type calcium channels are not well understood and may well involve both processes (Weiss et al 2013). Consequently, the timescale of modulation for I_{CaS}—the current to which L-Type calcium channels putatively contributes—likely represents a weighted average of these

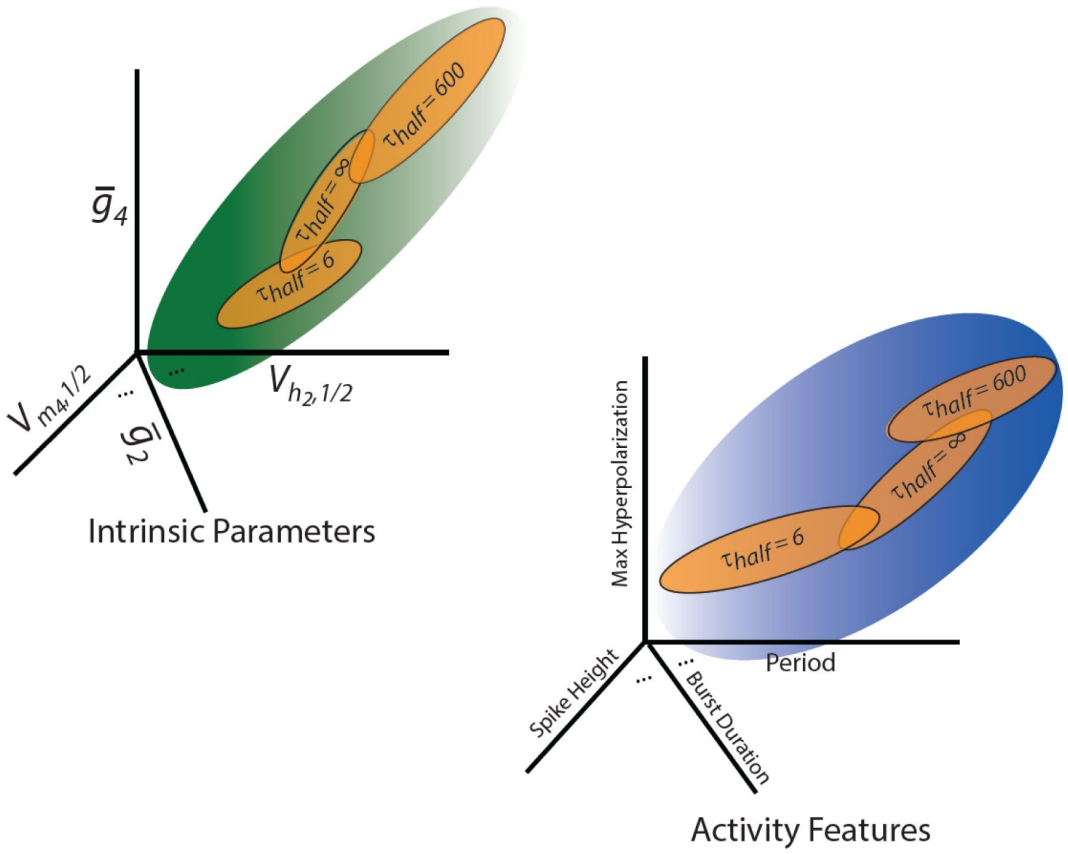

Figure 6

The impact of adjusting the timescale of ion channel (in)activation curve alterations can be illustrated conceptually using the space of activity characteristics (right) and underlying intrinsic parameters (left). The regions in green and blue are the activity patterns that are consistent with the Ca^{2+} targets in the space of activity characteristics and underlying intrinsic parameters, respectively. As the speed of ion channel (in)activation curve adjustments changes in response to deviations from Ca^{2+} targets, the regions targeted by the model also shift (shown in orange). Regardless of the timescale, all targeted regions reside within a larger region encompassing all activity profile measurements and intrinsic parameters consistent with the Ca^{2+} targets.

mechanisms. Similarly, I_{Kr}, is modulated by PIP2 (a metabolite of calcium-mediated second messenger pathways) and a beta subunit (Li et al 2011). While the presence or absence of PIP2 can change on a fast timescale, the synthesis of the beta subunit occurs over much slower timescales, resulting in mixed temporal dynamics. These examples illustrate that the balance between fast and slow regulatory mechanisms likely varies among intrinsic currents, complicating the assumption of a single time constant. Second, our framework assumes post-translational modifications are added as quickly (or slowly) as they are removed. This simplification fails to account for processes where rapid calcium increases lead to prolonged downstream effects. For instance, the calcium-mediated second messenger CaMKII undergoes autophosphorylation, enabling a brief calcium signal to induce long-lasting changes in protein activity (Hudmon & Schulman 2002, Kennedy 1989). This autophosphorylation is known to influence intrinsic excitability neurons (Sametsky et al 2009) and may modulate the voltage-dependence of Ca_V2 channels (Jiang et al 2008), which putatively contribute to I_{CaS}. Accounting for these processes would require a more complex model capable of capturing asymmetries in modification rates.

Another assumption we make is that there are limits on the extent to which (in)activation curves can shift. This limitation is implemented through the cubic term in Equations 16 and 17. These constraints reflect the fact that shifts in activation curves are not unlimited. For example, while cAMP can shift the half-activation of I_h, this effect saturates at high cAMP concentrations (Difrancesco & Tortora 1991). In our study, however, a uniform constraint is applied across all intrinsic currents. In reality, different intrinsic currents likely have unique limits on how much they can shift, requiring distinct functional forms to model their unique restrictions.

Furthermore, we assumed that activity-dependent alterations in channel voltage-dependence are implemented by changing half-(in)activations. We have not, however, considered the (in)activation curve's slope or the gating variable's time constant. In this study, the gating variable's voltage-dependent time constant shift by the same amount as the half-(in)activation. This preserves how quickly the gating variable respond to changes in voltage – regardless of where the activation curve is centered. However, this coupling between the time constant and the activation curve is not necessarily required. For instance, activity-dependent shifts in voltage-dependent time constants have been observed without concomitant shifts in activation curves (Thoby-Brisson & Simmers 2002). The voltage dependence of the time constant can, in principle, change in other ways as well. Also, we presume that the slopes of the (in)activation curves do not respond to changes in activity. The slope of (in)activation curves defines the steepness of the voltage dependence for ion channel gating, thereby influencing the voltage sensitivity of the transition between states (e.g., from closed to open or from inactivated to deinactivated). In our model, the slopes of these curves are held constant. Consequently, the voltage ranges remain fixed regardless of shifts in the centering of the activation or inactivation curves. However, this assumption may not be true. For example, with certain calcium-activated potassium currents, the center and slope of the activation curve depends on calcium concentration (Wang & Brenner 2006). To the extent that calcium entry during activity initiates downstream signaling processes that alter ion channel function, this observation supports the idea that activity could influence the slope of the I_{KCa} activation curve.

In the model, the same activity targets are used to drive changes in both channel density and voltage dependence. This assumes extensive crosstalk between the calcium pathways posited to be responsible for ion channel insertion, deletion, and post-translational modifications. However, the extent to which this crosstalk occurs is not known. However, it is known that cells can detect the temporal patterns and specific pathways of calcium entry, leading to specific activity-dependent changes (Bito et al 1997, Fields et al 1997, Gallin & Greenberg 1995). Therefore, it is likely that activity-induced calcium influxes trigger changes along distinct pathways – with some impacting only channel gating properties, some impacting channel density, and some impacting both.

It is not necessarily true that all activity-dependent changes in the properties of intrinsic currents are directly controlled by calcium influx. For example, neurons coregulate I_A and I_H expression, so that a change in one current automatically induces a change in the other (MacLean et al 2005). Neuromodulatory environment may also play a role in coordinating ion channel levels (Khorkova & Golowasch 2007). In such cases, one may use this model for the channels that are controlled by activity and augment it by explicitly modelling the remaining mechanisms that are independent of activity.

Biological Relevance

One application for the simulations involving the self-assembly of activity may be to model the initial phases of neural development, when a neuron transitions from having no electrical activity to possessing it (Baccaglini & Spitzer 1977). As shown in **Figure 6**, the timescale of (in)activation curve alterations define a neuron's activity characteristics and intrinsic properties. As such, neurons may actively adjust these timescales to achieve a specific electrical activity aligned with a developmental phase's activity targets. Indeed, developmental phases are marked by changes in ion channel density and voltage-dependence, leading to distinct electrical activity at each stage (Baccaglini & Spitzer 1977, Gao & Ziskind-Conhaim 1998, Goldberg et al 2011, Hunsberger & Mynlieff 2020, McCormick & Prince 1987, Moody & Bosma 2005, O'Leary et al 2014, Picken Bahrey & Moody 2003).

Additionally, our results suggest that that activity-dependent regulation of channel voltage dependence can help to homeostatically stabilize a neuron's activity in response to perturbations (**Figure 5**). Although homeostatic activity-dependent alterations in channel voltage-dependence have been reported in a few studies of activity-dependent homeostasis (Gasselin et al 2015, Haedo & Golowasch 2006, Thoby-Brisson & Simmers 2002), many studies report these changes are small, variable, and ultimately statistically insignificant (Desai et al 1999, Mizrahi et al 2001, Turrigiano et al 1995). However, even small, coordinated shifts in the half-(in)activations of multiple ion channels may collectively have a significant impact. In our simulations, the half-(in)activation changes are relatively minor for some currents. Despite this, these currents act in concert to shape the observed electrical activity profiles, and their combined effects are evident in the overall activity characteristics (**Figure 4A**). Thus, averaging small shifts in (in)activation curves across a population may obscure the important role of these small, coordinated changes in multiple (in)activation curves have on an individual neuron's activity. As such, the small changes in these channel voltage dependences observed in studies of activity-dependent homeostasis may be significant. A similar issue regarding averaging maximal conductances has been reported (Golowasch et al 2002). As such, our findings may have implications for conditions such as addiction (Kourrich et al 2015) and Alzheimer's disease (Styr & Slutsky 2018), where disruptions in homeostatic processes are thought to contribute to pathogenesis.

In conclusion, our findings suggest that when the neuron begins from a state of no activity and small randomly specified channel densities, changes in channel density are essential for attaining activity. In this context, activity-dependent changes in channel voltage-dependence alone are insufficient to attain bursting (**Figure 2**). Based on this evidence alone, one might conclude that shifts in (in)activation curves have negligible impact, effectively being overshadowed by the larger changes in excitability driven by alterations in channel density. This perspective aligns with a common assumption in systems analysis: that short- and long-timescale processes are sufficiently distinct and can be studied independently without significant interaction. However, our results demonstrate that fast shifts in half-(in)activation constrain the types of activity characteristics and intrinsic properties a neuron ultimately expresses (**Figure 6**). These fast alterations, while subtle, manifest over long timescales required to assemble activity. This study exemplifies how interactions between processes operating on different timescales can influence one another. Such

principles are particularly relevant for understanding multiscale interactions in neuroscience, such as the connections between subcellular, cellular, and network-level properties (Bhalla 2014, Marom 2010).

Methods

Details of the Model and its Implementation

Box 1 presents the equations used for the model: a Hodgkin-Huxley type equation with 7 intrinsic currents, Ca^{2+} sensors, and an activity-dependent regulation mechanism.

The Hodgkin-Huxley type neuron consisted of 7 intrinsic currents (Box 1, Supplement 1, Equations 1-3) and an intracellular Ca^{2+} concentration calculation (Box 1, Supplement 1, Equation 4). The neuron's capacitance (C) was set to 1 nF. The currents were labeled by the index i and were in order: fast sodium (I_{Na}), transient calcium (I_{CaT}), slow calcium (I_{CaS}), hyperpolarization-activated inward cation current (I_H), potassium rectifier (I_{Kd}), calcium-dependent potassium (I_{KCa}), and fast transient potassium (I_A). Additionally, there was a leak current (I_L). The maximal conductances were given by $\bar{g}_i$. Activation and inactivation dynamics were given by m_i and h_i, respectively. The exponents q_i were given by 3,3,3,1,4,4,3, respectively. The equilibrium/reversal potentials of the sodium current, hyperpolarization activated cation current, potassium currents, and leak current were +30 mV, −20 mV, −80 mV and −50 mV respectively. The calcium equilibrium potential was computed via the Nernst Equation (Box 1, Supplement 1, Equation 5) using the computed internal Ca^{2+} concentration ($[Ca^{2+}]_i$) and an external Ca^{2+} concentration of 3 mM (temperature was 10 °C).

The activation curves and inactivation curves were given by $m_{i,\infty}$ and $h_{i,\infty}$. Their associated time constants were τ_{m_i} and τ_{h_i}, respectively. The (in)activation curves and their associated time constants were functions of the membrane voltage, V (see tables in Box 1, Supplement 1). Note that I_{KCa} had an activation curve that depends on internal Ca^{2+} concentration. The internal calcium concentration was computed using I_{CaT} and I_{CaS} (Box 1, Supplement 1, Equation 4).

There were three Ca^{2+} sensors that responded to different measures associated with fluctuations of $[Ca^{2+}]_i$ during a burst. They were used to determine how close these measures are to their targets. These measures were the amount of $[Ca^{2+}]_i$ that entered the neuron: as a result of the slow wave of a burst (S), as a result of the spiking activity of a burst (F), and on average during a burst (D). They were computed using Equations 6-8 (Box 1, Supplement 2). $\bar{S}$, $\bar{F}$, $\bar{D}$ were prespecified targets of these sensors that encoded the target activity pattern. Box 1, Supplement 2, Equations 9-11 created moving averages of the mismatches between the calcium sensors and their targets. These moving averages were taken over two seconds (τ_S = 2000 ms).

These mismatches between the moving averages and their targets were combined in Equation 12 (Box 1, Supplement 2) to create a "match score", S_F (Equation 12). The L^8 norm, defined as $(\sum_{i=1}^{3} x_i^8)^{1/8}$, is used in Equation 12 to combine the errors. This expression was slightly modified from Alonso et al (2023). This formulation is particularly sensitive to the largest error values. By raising each error to the 8th power, large deviations became even more prominent in the combined score, allowing us to examine the errors in each sensor independently.

Equations 13 and 14 were used to evaluate whether the match score was sufficient for the model to cease altering maximal conductances and (in)activation curves, indicating that the target had been achieved. In Equation 14 (Box 1, Supplement 2), the "match score" was compared to a preset threshold value the model would accept, ρ. This equation returned 1 if the match score is below ρ, a 0 if the match score is above ρ, and some number in between 0 and 1 if the match score was close to the threshold, ρ. Equation 13 (Box 1, Supplement 2) then effectively computed a 2

second time average of Equation 14. Equation 13 was an activity sensor, α, that was plotted in **Figure 1**. It took the value zero when all three Ca^{2+} sensors were close to the Ca^{2+} targets but remained close to one otherwise. The value of this activity sensor was used to slow the evolution of maximal conductances and half-(in)activations as the Ca^{2+} sensors reached their targets. It also served as a measure for how well the model satisfied the Ca^{2+} sensors. In this model, $\rho = 0.3$. The "sharpness" of the threshold at $\rho = 0.3$ was set by Δ_α. We set $\Delta_\alpha = 0.01$ indicating that when the match score, S_f, was greater than ~0.32, the model considered the calcium targets satisfied.

Using the information regarding how well the Ca^{2+} sensors were satisfied, the model regulated conductance densities and (in)activation curves. The maximal conductances $\bar{g}_i$, and the ion channel voltage-sensitives, as measured by activation curve shifts, $V_{s_i^m}$, and inactivation curve shifts, $V_{s_i^h}$, from their specified locations ($V_{m^0_{i,1/2}}$ for activation curves and $V_{h^0_{i,1/2}}$ for inactivation curves), were altered by the model in response to deviations from the calcium targets (Box 1, Supplement 3, **Equations 15-17**). The latter were adjusted on a time scale given by τ_{half} and the former by τ_g. The index i ran from 1 through 7 for the maximal conductances (**Equation 15**) and half-(in)activations (**Equation 16**). In **Equation 17**, the index only took on a subset of values: $i = 1,2,3,7$ – because only some intrinsic currents in this model had inactivation (the associated currents being listed above).

Equations 16 and **17** were new equations added to the model. They were built in analogy to **Equation 15**. In **Equation 15**, the maximal conductances were altered when the calcium sensors didn't match their targets. There were two parts to **Equation 15**: a part that converted calcium sensor mismatches into changes in maximal conductances and a cubic term. The cubic term prevented unbounded growth in the maximal conductances. We set the constant associated to the cubic term, γ, to 10^{-7}. The other term adjusted the maximal conductance based on fluctuations of calcium sensors from their target levels. The parameters A_i, B_i and C_i informed how the sensor fluctuations contributed to the changes of each maximal conductance. These values were provided in Liu et al (1998). Importantly, note that this term is multiplied by $\bar{g}_i$. This prevented the maximal conductance from becoming negative and scaled the speed of evolution so that smaller values evolved slower and larger values faster. As such, multiplication by $\bar{g}_i$ effectively induced exponential changes in the maximal conductance, allowing $\bar{g}_i$ to vary over orders of magnitude.

Equations 16 and 17, introduced in this paper, enabled the adjustment of the ion-channel voltage dependence. Equations 16 and 17 also had two components: a component that converted calcium sensor mismatches into changes in half-(in)activations and a cubic term. The cubic term prevented unbounded translations. The cubic term's constant, $\hat{\gamma}$, was set to 10^{-5}. The other term adjusted the half-activations (Equation 16) and half-inactivation (Equation 17) based on fluctuations of calcium sensors from their target levels.

Finally, we discuss how the coefficients A_i, B_i and C_i in Equation 15, and the corresponding parameters in Equation 16 and 17 were chosen. The same coefficients used to adjust maximal conductances were used for the inactivation curve shifts, $\hat{A}_i, \hat{B}_i,$ and $\hat{C}_i$. The coefficients of the activation curve shift are their negatives, $\hat{A}i$, $\hat{B}i$, and $\hat{C}i$. To understand this choice, consider a scenario where the neuron is bursting more rapidly than desired. In that case, then $F > \bar{F}$, $S > \bar{S}$, and $D > \bar{D}$. To reduce the excitability of the neuron, we made the depolarizing current, for example, I_{Na}, harder to activate, by shifting the activation curve of I_{Na} to a more depolarizing potential. This implies $\frac{dV_{s_1^m}}{dt} > 0$. Therefore, the coefficients $\hat{A}i$, $\hat{B}i$, and $\hat{C}i$ must be non-positive. The coefficients for I_{Na} in Liu et al (1998) were given as $A_1 = 1$, $B_1 = 0$ and $C_1 = 0$ and were chosen so that $\frac{d\bar{g}_1}{dt} < 0$, thereby decreasing the maximal conductance of sodium in the same scenario. So, we flipped the signs to give $\hat{A_1} = -1,\ \hat{B_1} = 0$ and $\hat{C_1} = 0$. In this way, only F Ca^{2+} sensor contributed to the modulation of I_{Na}, but the activation curves were now adjusted in a homeostatic way.

Furthermore, the model makes it harder to de-inactivate I_{Na} by shifting its activation curve to more hyperpolarizing values $\left(\frac{dV_{s_1^h}}{dt} < 0\right)$. In the scenario where the activity sensors are greater than their activity targets, this corresponds to setting $\hat{A}_1 = 1, \hat{B}_1 = 0$, and $\hat{C}_1 = 0$,

A similar logic can be used to understand how the activation curves of hyperpolarizing currents were adjusted. In the scenario described above, the neuron was made less excitable by increasing the amount of a hyperpolarizing current, for example I_A. This was done by increasing its maximal conductance or moving its activation curve to more hyperpolarized values. Liu et al (1998) assigned the coefficients $A_7 = 0$, $B_7 = -1$ and $C_7 = -1$ to adjust the maximal conductance of I_A. In this scenario where all sensors are above their targets, this implies $\frac{dg_7}{dt} > 0$ 0. Following the prescription we outlined above, flipping the signs gives $\widehat{A_7} = 0$, $\widehat{B_7} = 1$ and $\widehat{C_7} = 1$. This, in turn, implied $\frac{dV_{s_7^m}}{dt} < 0$ – creating hyperpolarizing shifts in I_A's activation curve when the activity is greater than its target, as we expect. In a similar spirit, we assign the coefficients $\hat{A}_7 = 0$, $\hat{B}_7 = -1$, and $\hat{C}_7 = -1$, so that I_A's inactivation curve shifts to more depolarizing potentials $\left(\frac{dV_{s_7^h}}{dt} > 0\right)$ to make it easier to de-inactivate.

Note, the coefficients in Liu et al (1998) don't perfectly correspond with this reasoning. In Liu et al (1998), some coefficients were assigned values to ensure convergence of the model. Nevertheless, we followed the prescription above and kept this caveat in mind (Box 1, Supplement 3, **Table 1**).

Starting Parameters

In total, the model was given by 40 ordinary differential equations: 13 equations described the neuron's electrical activity, 9 equations described calcium sensor components, and 18 equations that altered the maximal conductances and half-(in)activations (Box 1). This means we needed to specify 40 starting values for the model. We defined starting parameters (SPs), as the bursters the model assembles from a particular set of randomly chosen starting maximal conductances and half-(in)activations. The maximal conductances were randomly selected between 0.3 nS and 0.9 nS and half-(in)activation shifts are randomly offset between −0.5 mV and +0.5 mV from their specified half-(in)activation values ($V_{m^0_{1,1/2}}$ and $V_{h^0_{1,1/2}}$ in Box 1, Supplement 1, **Table 2**). Other starting values were $V = -50$ mV and the gating variables of activation and inactivation were randomly selected between 0.2 and 0.3. The starting value of intracellular calcium concentration was set as $[Ca^{2+}]_i = 0.4\ \mu$M. **Equations 9**-**11** (Sensor Errors) and **Equation 13** (Activity sensor, α) were initialized with the value 1. H_X (**Equation 7**) and M_X (**Equation 6**) were initialized to 0 and 1, respectively.

The random initialization of gating variables was not expected to significantly impact the formation of an activity profile that satisfied the activity target. Bursters may exhibit bistability if they are initialized with different gating variables. However, this is for a fixed set of maximal conductances and half-(in)activations. Any bistability in the initially specified profile was likely lost as the model altered the maximal conductances and half-(in)activations.

The model was integrated using the Tsitouras 5 implementation of Runga-Kutta 4(5) in Julia's DifferentialEquations.jl package (Tsitouras 2011). The simulation was saved every 0.5 milliseconds regardless of step size (step size of the integrator was adaptive and left unspecified). Maximum number of iterations was set to 10^{10} and relative tolerance was set to 0.0001.

Burster Measurements

We defined regular bursters as activity patterns that exhibited groups of spikes separated by regular quiescent gaps in activity. We developed methods to analyze the activity patterns and identify regular bursters. To this end, we measured the following activity characteristics: period, burst duration, interburst interval, spike height, maximal hyperpolarization, and slow wave amplitude. Peaks were identified as local maxima in the activity pattern. We used the 'findpeaks' function in MATLAB on the last 90 secs of activity to identify local maxima in the trace, setting the

minimum ‘prominence’ at 2. The latter parameter rejected certain local maxima from counting as peaks. This parameter is one we arrived at by trial and error. **Figures 7-B1** and **7-B2** show red arrows where this function identified peaks. Note in **Figure 7-B2**, panels A-C have local maxima that are not counted as peaks (there is one local maxima following the sequence of peaks in the burst). Our choice of ‘prominence’ in the ‘findpeaks’ function was intentionally set to exclude these. To find troughs, we took the negative of the activity profile and found local maxima using the ‘findpeaks’ function. For this, the same ‘prominence’ parameter was used over the same time window. The arrows in **Figure 7C** show an example of what was identified by the algorithm as a peak in this case. Troughs were defined as the negative of the identified points. The red arrow in **Figure 7C** shows the maximum hyperpolarization of a cycle obtained using the method described below. The green arrows are the troughs associated with each spike in the burst (**Figure 7C**).

Maximum hyperpolarization was found as follows. First all troughs were identified in the manner described above. Then, starting at −85 mV, we checked whether there were any troughs below this value. If there were none, we incremented by 1 mV to −84 mV and checked again if there were any troughs below this value. This process was repeated until troughs are detected. The troughs identified this way demarcated the ends of a cycle in the activity pattern. They were averaged to obtain the maximum hyperpolarization measurement for the activity pattern.

The time interval between successive maximum hyperpolarizations in the activity was used to measure the cycle period (**Figure 7C**). We averaged these cycle period measurements to give a measurement for the activity pattern’s period. To obtain the burst duration, we segmented the activity pattern into cycles using the time of maximum hyperpolarization (**Figure 7-B1**). The burst duration of a cycle was measured as the time between the first and last spike in the cycle. The interburst interval of the cycle was computed by subtracting the cycle’s burst duration from the cycle’s period measurement.

To measure the slow wave amplitude, we used the segmentation described above to identify the troughs of each cycle. The slow wave amplitude of a cycle is the difference between the maximum hyperpolarization (**Figure 7C**, red arrow) during a cycle and the average of the membrane potential at the troughs associated with each spike in a burst (**Figure 7C**, green arrows). The slow wave amplitudes across all cycles were averaged to obtain a measurement for the activity pattern’s slow wave amplitude.

The spike height was obtained by finding the peaks of the membrane potential during each cycle. A measure for the cycle’s spike height was obtained by averaging over all peaks, subtracting the cycle’s maximum hyperpolarization, then subtracting the cycle’s slow wave amplitude. This value was averaged over all cycles to obtain a measure of the activity pattern’s spike height.

We distinguished regular bursting from tonic spiking or irregular bursting using the following procedure. We classified an activity pattern as a regular burster when the following three criteria were met: 1) there was more than 1 spike per cycle, 2) the maximum hyperpolarization measurements for all cycles were within 3 mV of one another, and 3) the spikes per cycle varied by no more than 1 spike. The first condition eliminated tonic spiking, the second condition is a crude measure to check the average voltage wasn’t increasing, and the third was a condition that checked for irregular bursting. In addition, we verified that the cycle-to-cycle measurements exhibited low variability to ensure the appropriateness of averaging across all cycles. The relative standard deviation for all cycle-to-cycle measurements was less than 3% for the assembled bursters.

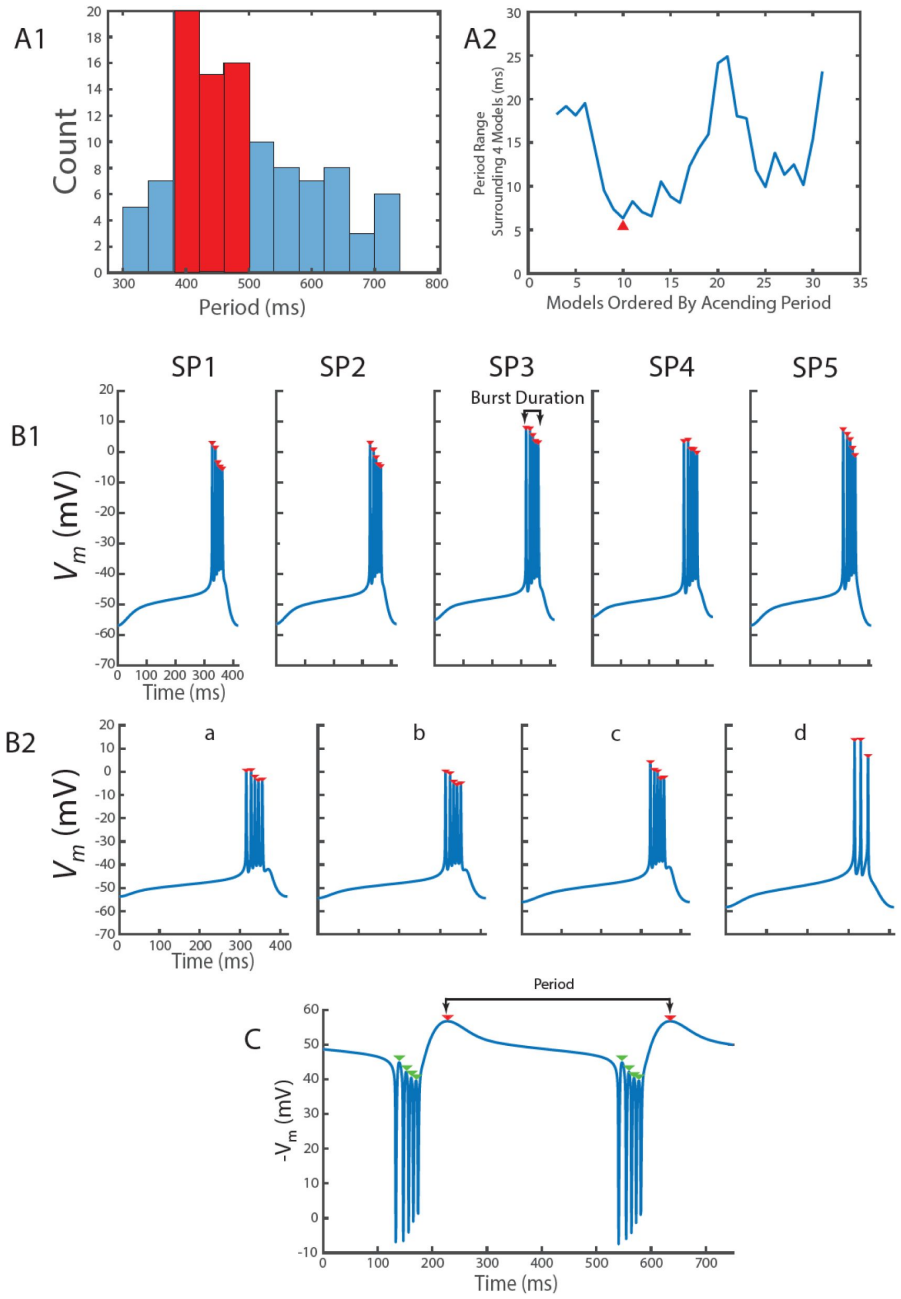

Figure 7

We constructed the Group of 5 Bursters by selecting a putative representative of the entire population and then identifying bursters with similar activity patterns. A - The Group of 5 bursters was created by starting with 111 bursters and narrowing this group to a "selection group" (see Methods). Panel A1 shows the period distribution of this "selection group," while panel A2 illustrates how closely the periods align with their two neighbors after they were ordered from smallest to largest. The first model, SP1, was chosen as the neuron with neighbors that also have close periods (red arrow, A2). B - To assemble the Group of 5, we identified neighboring models with waveforms similar to SP1. Depolarizing excursions (spikes) were detected using MATLAB's findpeaks function with a prominence threshold of 2 (red arrows). Panel B1 shows the neighboring models included in the Group of 5, while B2 shows those excluded. In B2, models a–c were excluded due to small bumps at the end of the slow wave, which SP1 does not have. Model d was excluded for having a different number of spikes than SP1. C – Troughs were identified using the findpeaks function on the negative waveform of a cycle period, applying the same prominence threshold. The detected troughs are indicated by red arrows. The example displayed here represents the inverted voltage trace of the burster assembled by the model from SP1. The period was measured as the time difference between successive points of maximum hyperpolarization.

Activity Target Selection

We needed to identify a set of sensor targets that *consistently* produced regular bursters, regardless of the starting parameters selected. To determine whether a set of calcium targets consistently produced a burster, we monitored the activity sensor α. α approached 0 when the calcium sensors were close to their specified targets. There were small oscillations in α that resulted from calcium fluctuations associated with the neuron's activity. These fluctuations were smoothed out by taking a running average over the 8 previous seconds. When a simulation fell below $\alpha = 0.02$ for the last time and remained there for 100 minutes, we considered the simulation to have "*assembled*" a burster that satisfied the calcium targets.

To ensure the activity pattern obtained did not depend on feedback from the activity regulation mechanism, the mechanism was then turned off ($\tau_{half} = \infty$, $\tau_g = \infty$) and the simulation run for an additional 9000 secs to ensure $\alpha < .02$ for the duration. This step was taken in the initial generation of bursters (111 in total, described below). This step was not taken for the analysis where the time constants of the half-activation alterations were changed from $\tau_{half} = 6$ s (**Figures 3** and **4**).

'*Consistently*', in this context, meant that the model assembled bursters from over 95% of the randomly chosen starting parameters. The remaining simulations did not complete assembly within the given simulation period. For the calcium targets we found ($\bar{S} = 0.03$, $\bar{F} = 0.25$, and $\bar{D} = 0.02$), our model 'consistently' produced bursters. To obtain these targets, we tried different combinations of calcium targets until a suitable set of targets consistently produced regular bursters.

Groups of Bursters

Using the obtained targets, we assembled 111 regular bursters by running the model from many 'random' starting parameters. From this collection, we created a Group of 5 that were very similar to each other but representative of the population. We expanded to a Group of 20 bursters by relaxing the restrictions used for the Group of 5.

To obtain this Group of 5, from this original 111 bursters, we went through three steps. First, we selected all activity patterns that had slow wave amplitude less than 25 mV. This choice had the effect of only including activity patterns that looked like those given in **Figure 7-B1** and **7-B2**. This procedure reduced the number of bursters to 80. Second, we restricted this group by period. The distribution of these bursters' periods are shown in **Figure 7-A1**. The peak of this distribution is between 380 and 500 ms (**Figure 7A1**, highlighted in Red). We further restricted the range of bursters, resulting in 33 bursters (the "selection group"). This range contained about 30% of the distribution.

Through a third round of restriction, we obtained a Group of 5 from this "selection group". This was done in two steps. In the first step, we attempted to find a group of 5 bursters that were even more closely matched in period. In the second step, we selected activity patterns that looked very similar based on two other criteria noted below. To complete the first step, we ordered the bursters from shortest to longest period. For each burster from the 3rd to the 31st position, we examined the two bursters immediately preceding and the two bursters immediately succeeding in this sorted list and computed the range of burst periods across these five bursters (**Figure 7-A2**). This method provided a rough estimate of the variability in periods among neighboring bursters. The burster exhibiting the smallest inter-instance period variability was selected as the first member of the group of 5 (**Figure 7-A2**, Red Arrow). This first burster, referred to as SP1 in **Figure 1** (also shown in **Figure 7-B1**). This burster had a period of about 416 ms. In the second step, we symmetrically expanded the inter-instance period range around SP1's period until four additional models with similar activity patterns were found. Similarity of activity pattern to SP1 was judged on the following criteria: spikes per burst and the slow wave only contained spikes

and no other features (like minor bumps). The bursters that were deemed similar to SP1 by this procedure are shown in **Figure 7B-1**. These bursters constituted the Group of 5. Those that were rejected are shown in **Figure 7B-2**. The Group of 5 had periods within 2% of each other. We then extended this range to 20% and randomly selected an additional 15 models from the selection group to create the Group of 20.

Bootstrap Analysis

We used a bootstrap method to statistically compare the variability of burster characteristics (e.g., Period, Burst Duration, Interburst Interval, Spike Height, Maximum Hyperpolarization, and Slow Wave Amplitude) and intrinsic properties between two groups of bursters: Group of 5 (SP1-SP5) and Group of 20 (SP1-SP20). This variability is reported as relative standard deviation (**Figure 2**). To compare variability between groups, relative standard deviation was converted to coefficient of variation (CV). For each activity measurement, we generated 10,000 bootstrap samples to estimate the coefficient of variation (CV) for the Group of 5 and the Group of 20, separately, then calculated the difference in CVs between the resampled groups. We then computed the 95% confidence interval for the differences in CVs by identifying the 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles of the bootstrap distribution. The observed difference was computed by finding the actual difference between CVs between groups. If the observed difference fell inside the 95% confidence interval, it was considered statistically insignificant.

Data availability

The code and parameters required to reproduce the results in this work are accessible and at Zenodo. Repository: [*https://github.com/YugarshiM/fastTimescaleHomeostasis*] [DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12585617]

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Box 1

Model Components

- *Neuron Model*
  - Hodgkin-Huxley representation of a single compartment neuron - voltage- and Ca- dependent currents plus leak
  - Basic $[Ca^{2+}]_i$ handling
- *Ca^{2+} Sensors*
  - Three different sensors that reflect $[Ca^{2+}]_i$ associated with slow wave of activity (*S*), spiking activity (*F*) and the average during a burst (*D*).
  - Targets are set for each sensor independently
  - The three different sensor values are compared to their target values and computed into a single score (α) that reflects the degree to which each is satisfied.
- *Homeostatic Mechanisms*
  - α is used to adjust the maximal conductances on a time scale τ_g and shifts in half-(in)activations voltages on a time scale of τ_{half}

Box 1, Supplement 1

$$(1)\quad C\frac{dV}{dt} = -\sum_{i=1}^{7} \bar{g}_i m_i^{q_i} h_i (V - E_i) - g_L (V - E_L) + I_{app}$$

$$(2)\quad \frac{dm_i}{dt} = \frac{m_{i,\infty}\left(V - V_{s_i^m}\right) - m_i}{\tau_{m_i}(V - V_{s_i^m})}$$

$$(3)\quad \frac{dh_i}{dt} = \frac{h_{i,\infty}\left(V - V_{s_i^h}\right) - h_i}{\tau_{h_i}(V - V_{s_i^h})}$$

$$(4)\quad \frac{d[Ca^{2+}]_i}{dt} = \frac{1}{20}(-.94\,(I_{CaT} + I_{CaS}) - [Ca^{2+}]_i + .05)$$

$$(5)\quad E_{Ca}([Ca^{2+}]_i) = 12.197 * log\left(\frac{[Ca^{2+}]_i}{3000.0}\right)$$

I_{CaT} and I_{CaS} are the $i = 2$ and $i = 3$ parts of the sum in *Equation 1*.

Table 1

Activation Curve Exponents & Equilibrium Potentials

Current	Index (i)	q_i	E (mV)
I_{Na}	1	3	30
I_{CaT}	2	3	[set by Nernst Equation – Equation 5]
I_{CaS}	3	3	[set by Nernst Equation – Equation 5]
I_H	4	1	-20
I_{Kd}	5	4	-80
I_{KCa}	6	4	-80
I_A	7	3	-80

Table 2

Normative values of Half-Activation and Half-Inactivation used to generate all starting parameter sets by randomized shifts. Final parameter sets are converted to the normative value minus the shift.

Current	Index (i)	$V_{\hat{m}^0_{i,1/2}}$ (mV)	$V_{\hat{h}^0_{i,1/2}}$ (mV)
I_{Na}	1	-25.5	-48.9
I_{CaT}	2	-27.1	-32.1
I_{CaS}	3	-33	-60
I_H	4	-70	
I_{Kd}	5	-12.3	
I_{KCa}	6	-28.3	
I_A	7	-27.2	-56.9

Current	$m_{i,\infty}$ (mV)	τ_{m_i} (ms)
I_{Na}	$\frac{1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{V-\left(V_{\hat{m}^0_{1,1/2}}+V_{s_1^m}\right)}{-5.29}\right)}$	$1.32-\frac{1.26}{1+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_1^m}\right)+120}{-25}\right)}$
I_{CaT}	$\frac{1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{V-\left(V_{\hat{m}^0_{2,1/2}}+V_{s_2^m}\right)}{-7.2}\right)}$	$21.7-\frac{21.3}{1+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_2^m}\right)+68.1}{-20.5}\right)}$
I_{CaS}	$\frac{1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{V-\left(V_{\hat{m}^0_{3,1/2}}+V_{s_3^m}\right)}{-8.1}\right)}$	$1.4-\frac{7}{\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_3^m}\right)+27}{10}\right)+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_3^m}\right)+70}{-13}\right)}$
I_H	$\frac{1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{V-\left(V_{\hat{m}^0_{4,1/2}}+V_{s_4^m}\right)}{6}\right)}$	$272-\frac{-1499}{1+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_4^m}\right)+42.2}{-8.73}\right)}$
I_{Kd}	$\frac{1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{V-\left(V_{\hat{m}^0_{5,1/2}}+V_{s_5^m}\right)}{-11.8}\right)}$	$7.2-\frac{6.4}{1+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_5^m}\right)+28.3}{-19.2}\right)}$
I_{KCa}	$\frac{1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{V-\left(V_{\hat{m}^0_{6,1/2}}+V_{s_6^m}\right)}{-12.6}\right)}\frac{[Ca^{2+}]_i}{[Ca^{2+}]_i+3}$	$90.3-\frac{75.1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_6^m}\right)+46}{-22.7}\right)}$
I_A	$\frac{1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{V-\left(V_{\hat{m}^0_{7,1/2}}+V_{s_7^m}\right)}{-8.7}\right)}$	$11.6-\frac{10.4}{1+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_7^m}\right)+32.9}{-15.2}\right)}$

Table 3

Activation Curves and Associated Time Constants

Current	$h_{i,\infty}$ (mV)	τ_{h_i} (ms)
I_{Na}	$\frac{1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{V-\left(V_{\tilde{h}^0_{1,1/2}}+V_{s_1^h}\right)}{5.18}\right)}$	$\left(1.5-\frac{-1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_1^h}\right)+34.9}{-3.6}\right)}\right)\left(\frac{.67}{1+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_1^h}\right)+62.9}{-10}\right)}\right)$
I_{CaT}	$\frac{1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{V-\left(V_{\tilde{h}^0_{2,1/2}}+V_{s_2^h}\right)}{5.5}\right)}$	$105-\frac{89.8}{1+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_2^h}\right)+55.0}{-16.9}\right)}$
I_{CaS}	$\frac{1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{V-\left(V_{\tilde{h}^0_{3,1/2}}+V_{s_3^h}\right)}{6.2}\right)}$	$60-\frac{150}{\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_3^h}\right)+55}{9}\right)+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_3^h}\right)+65}{-16}\right)}$
I_H	1	1
I_{Kd}	1	1
I_{KCa}	1	1
I_A	$\frac{1}{1+\exp\left(\frac{V-\left(V_{\tilde{h}^0_{7,1/2}}+V_{s_7^h}\right)}{4.9}\right)}$	$38.6-\frac{29.2}{1+\exp\left(\frac{\left(V-V_{s_7^h}\right)+38.9}{-26.5}\right)}$

Table 4

Inactivation Curves and Associated Time Constants

Box 1, Supplement 2

$$(6)\quad \frac{dM_X}{dt} = \frac{\bar{M}_X\,(I_{CaT} + I_{CaS}) - M_X}{\tau_{M_X}};\ X = F, S, D$$

$$(7)\quad \frac{dH_X}{dt} = \frac{\bar{H}_X\,(I_{CaT} + I_{CaS}) - H_X}{\tau_{H_X}};\ X = F, S, D$$

$$(8)\quad F = G_F M_F^2 H_F \quad S = G_S M_S^2 H_S \quad D = G_D M_D^2$$

$$(9)\quad \frac{dE_F}{dt} = \frac{(F - \bar{F}) - E_F}{\tau_S}$$

$$(10)\quad \frac{dE_S}{dt} = \frac{(S - \bar{S}) - E_S}{\tau_S}$$

$$(11)\quad \frac{dE_D}{dt} = \frac{(D - \bar{D}) - E_D}{\tau_S}$$

$$(12)\quad S_f = e^{-((E_F/\Delta_F)^8 + (E_D/\Delta_D)^8 + (E_S/\Delta_S)^8)^{1/8}}$$

$$(13)\quad \tau_\alpha \frac{d\alpha}{dt} = \alpha_\infty(S_f) - \alpha$$

$$(14)\quad \alpha_\infty(S_f) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{\frac{-(S_f + \rho)}{\Delta_\alpha}}}$$

G_F, G_S and G_D are set to 53, 3, and 1, respectively. Also, Δ_F = .1, Δ_S = .008, and Δ_D = .015.

Box 1, Supplement 3

$$(15)\quad \frac{\tau_g}{\alpha}\frac{d\bar{g}_i}{dt} = [A_i(\bar{F} - F) + B_i(\bar{S} - S) + C_i(\bar{D} - D)]\bar{g}_i - \gamma\bar{g}_i^3$$

$$(16)\quad \frac{\tau_{half}}{\alpha}\frac{dV_{s_i^m}}{dt} = [\hat{A}_i(\bar{F} - F) + \hat{B}_i(\bar{S} - S) + \hat{C}_i(\bar{D} - D)] \quad -\hat{\gamma}\left(V_{s_i^m}\right)^3$$

$$(17)\quad \frac{\tau_{half}}{\alpha}\frac{dV_{s_i^h}}{dt} = [\hat{\hat{A}}_i(\bar{F} - F) + \hat{\hat{B}}_i(\bar{S} - S) + \hat{\hat{C}}_i(\bar{D} - D)] \quad -\hat{\gamma}\left(V_{s_i^h}\right)^3$$

In this paper, the values $\hat{A}_i$, $\hat{B}_i$, and $\hat{C}_i$ are the negative of A_i, B_i, and C_i, respectively. The values $\hat{\hat{A}}_i$, $\hat{\hat{B}}_i$, and $\hat{\hat{C}}_i$ are equal to A_i, B_i, and C_i, respectively. The manner at which we arrive at these values are outlined in Methods. As outlined in the discussion, these coefficients do not need to take these values.

Table 1

M_X Parameters and Time Constants

$\bar{M}_X$ is a sigmoid function with centering parameter Z:

$\bar{M}_X = \frac{1}{1 + \exp\left(Z + (I_{CaT} + I_{CaS})\right)}$

	Z	τ_{M_X}
F	14.8	0.5
S	7.2	50
D	3	500

$\bar{M}_X = \frac{1}{1 + \exp\left(Z + (I_{CaT} + I_{CaS})\right)}$

Table 2

H_X Parameters and Time Constants

$\bar{H}_X$ is a sigmoid function with centering parameter Z:

$$\bar{H}_X = \frac{1}{1 + \exp\left(-Z - (I_{caT} + I_{caS})\right)}$$

	Z	τ_{H_X}
F	9.8	1.5
S	2.8	60
D	-	-

$$\bar{H}_X = \frac{1}{1 + \exp\left(-Z - (I_{caT} + I_{caS})\right)}$$

Table 1

Parameters describing Homeostatic Modulation of Intrinsic Current Properties (Li Matrix)

Current	Index (i)	A_i	B_i	C_i	$\hat{A}_i$	$\hat{B}_i$	$\hat{C}_i$	$\hat{\hat{A}}_i$	$\hat{\hat{B}}_i$	$\hat{\hat{C}}_i$
I_{Na}	1	+1	0	0	-1	0	0	+1	0	0
I_{CaT}	2	0	+1	0	0	-1	0	0	+1	0
I_{CaS}	3	0	+1	0	0	-1	0	0	+1	0
I_H	4	+1	-1	0	-1	+1	0	+1	-1	0
I_{Kd}	5	0	-1	-1	0	+1	+1	0	-1	-1
I_{KCa}	6	0	-1	-1	0	+1	+1	0	-1	-1
I_A	7	0	+1	+1	0	-1	-1	0	+1	+1

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Reviewer #1 (Public review):

This computational study builds on a previous study (Liu et al) from the Marder lab from 1998, where a model was proposed that demonstrated activity-dependent homeostatic recovery of activity in individual bursting neurons, based on three "sensors" of intrinsic calcium concentration. The original model modified levels of ion channel conductances. The current model builds on that and adds activity-dependent modifications of the voltage-dependence of these ionic currents, implemented to happen concurrently with maximum conductance levels, but at a different timescale. The faster timescale change in voltage dependence is justified by the assumption that such changes can occur by neuromodulatory chemicals or similar second messenger-based mechanisms that presumably act at a faster rate than the regulation of channel densities. The main finding is that the difference in timescales between the two homeostatic mechanisms (channel density vs. voltage dependence) could result in distinct subsets of parameters, depending on how fast the second messenger mechanisms operate.

This study is an interesting and noteworthy extension of the theoretical ideas proposed by the classic study of Liu et al, 1998. It addresses a very important question: How do two known mechanisms of modifications of neuronal activity that occur at different timescales interact within an activity-dependent homeostatic framework? However, the study and its presentation have some major shortcomings that should be addressed to strengthen the claim.

Major comments:

(1) The main issue that I have with this study is the lack of exploration of "why" the model produces the results it does. Considering this is a model, it should be possible to find out why the three timescales of half-act/inact parameter modifications lead to different sets of results. Without this, it is simply an exploratory exercise. (The model does this, but we do not know the mechanism.) Perhaps this is enough as an interesting finding, but it remains unconvincing and (clearly) does not have the impact of describing a potential mechanism that could be potentially explored experimentally.

(2) A related issue is the use of bootstrapping to do statistics for a family of models, especially when the question is in fact the width of the distribution of output attributes. I don't buy this. One can run enough models to find say N number of models within a tight range (say 2% cycle period) and the same N number within a loose range (say 20%) and compare the statistics within the two groups with the same N.

(3) The third issue is that many of the results that are presented (but not the main one) are completely expected. If one starts with gmax values that would never work (say all of them 0), then it doesn't matter how much one moves the act/inact curves one probably won't get the desired activity. Alternately, if one starts with gmax values that are known to work and randomizes the act/inact midpoints, then the expectation would be that it converges to something that works. This is Figure 1 B and C, no surprise. But it should work the other way around too. If one starts with random act/inact curves that would never work and fixes those, then why would one expect any set of gmax values would produce the desired response? I can easily imagine setting the half-act/inact values to values that never produce any activity with any gmax.

(4) A potential response to my previous criticism would be that you put reasonable constraints on gmax's or half-act/inact values or tie the half-act to half-inact. But that is simply arbitrary ad hoc decisions made to make the model work, much like the L8-norm used to amplify some errors. There is absolutely no reason to believe this is tied to the biology of the system.

(5) The discussion of this manuscript is at once too long and not adequate. It goes into excruciating detail about things that are simply not explored in this study, such as phosphorylation mechanisms, justification of model assumptions of how these alterations occur, or even the biological relevance. (The whole model is an oversimplification - lack of anatomical structure, three calcium sensors, arbitrary assumptions, and how parameter bounds are implemented.) Lengthy justifications for why channel density & half-act/inact of all currents are obeying the same time constant are answering a question that no one asked. It is a simplified model to make an important point. The authors should make these parts concise and to the point. More importantly, the authors should discuss the mechanism through which these differences may arise. Even if it is not clear, they should speculate.

(6) There should be some justification or discussion of the arbitrary assumptions made in the model/methods. I understand some of this is to resolve issues that had come up in previous iterations of this approach and in fact the Alonso et al, 2023 paper was mainly to deal with these issues. However, some level of explanation is needed, especially when assumptions are

made simply because of the intuition of the modeler rather than the existence of a biological constraint or any other objective measure.

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Reviewer #2 (Public review):

Summary:

In this study, Mondal and co-authors present the development of a computational model of homeostatic plasticity incorporating activity-dependent regulation of gating properties (activation, inactivation) of ion channels. The authors show that, similar to what has been observed for activity-dependent regulation of ion channel conductances, implementing activity-dependent regulation of voltage sensitivity participates in the achievement of a target phenotype (bursting or spiking). The results however suggest that activity-dependent regulation of voltage sensitivity is not sufficient to allow this and needs to be associated with the regulation of ion channel conductances in order to reliably reach the target phenotype. Although the implementation of this biologically relevant phenomenon is undeniably relevant, the main conclusions of the paper and the insights brought by this computational work are difficult to grasp.

Strengths:

(1) Implementing activity-dependent regulation of gating properties of ion channels is biologically relevant.

(2) The modeling work appears to be well performed and provides results that are consistent with previous work performed by the same group.

Weaknesses:

(1) The writing is rather confusing, and the state of the art explaining the need for the study is unclear.

(2) The main outcomes and conclusions of the study are difficult to grasp. What is predicted or explained by this new version of homeostatic regulation of neuronal activity?

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Reviewer #3 (Public review):

Mondal et al. use computational modeling to investigate how activity-dependent shifts in voltage-dependent (in)activation curves can complement activity-dependent changes in ion channel conductance to support homeostatic plasticity. While changes in the voltage-dependent properties of ion channels are known to modulate neuronal excitability, their role as a homeostatic plasticity mechanism interacting with channel conductance has been largely unexplored. The results presented here demonstrate that activity-dependent regulation of voltage-dependent properties can interact with plasticity in channel conductance to allow neurons to attain and maintain target activity patterns, in this case, intrinsic bursting. These results also show that the rate of channel voltage-dependent shifts can influence steady-state parameters reached as the model stabilizes into a stable intrinsic bursting state. That is, the rate of these modifications shapes the range of channel conductances and half-(in)activation parameters as well as activity characteristics such as burst period and duration. A major conclusion of the study is that altering the timescale of channel voltage dependence can seamlessly shift a neuron's activity characteristics, a mechanism that the authors argue may

be employed by neurons to adapt to perturbations. While the study's conclusions are mostly well-supported, additional analyses, and simulations are needed.

(1) A main conclusion of this study is that the speed at which (in)activation dynamics change determines the range of possible electrical patterns. The authors propose that neurons may dynamically regulate the timescale of these changes (a) to achieve alterations in electrical activity patterns, for example, to preserve the relative phase of neuronal firing in a rhythmic network, and (b) to adapt to perturbations. The results presented in Figure 4 clearly demonstrate that the timescale of (in)activation modifications impacts the range of activity patterns generated by the model as it transitions from an initial state of no activity to a final steady-state intrinsic burster. This may have important implications for neuronal development, as discussed by the authors.

However, the authors also argue that the model neuron's dynamics - such as period, and burst duration, etc - could be dynamically modified by altering the timescale of (in)activation changes (Figure 6 and related text). The simulations presented here, however, do not test whether modifications in this timescale can shift the model's activity features once it reaches steady state. In fact, it is unlikely that this would be the case since, at steady-state, calcium targets are already satisfied. It is likely, however, as the authors suggest, that the rate at which (in)activation dynamics change may be important for neuronal adaptation to perturbations, such as changes in temperature or extracellular potassium. Yet, the results presented here do not examine how modifying this timescale influences the model's response to perturbations. Adding simulations to characterize how alterations in the rate of (in)activation dynamics affect the model's response to perturbations-such as transiently elevated extracellular potassium (Figure 5) - would strengthen this conclusion.

(2) Another key argument in this study is that small, coordinated changes in channel (in)activation contribute to shaping neuronal activity patterns, but that, these subtle effects may be obscured when averaging across a population of neurons. This may be the case; however, the results presented don't clearly demonstrate this point. This point would be strengthened by identifying correlations, if they exist, between (in)activation curves, conductance, and the resulting bursting patterns of the models for the simulations presented in Figure 2 and Figure 4, for example. Alternatively, or additionally, relationships between (in)activation curves could be probed by perturbing individual (in)activation curves and quantifying how the other model parameters compensate, which could clearly illustrate this point.

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Author response:

We thank the reviewers for their detailed and constructive comments on our manuscript entitled “Activity-Dependent Changes in Ion Channel Voltage-Dependence Influence the Activity Patterns Targeted by Neurons.” We appreciate the time and effort the reviewers invested in critiquing our work and are grateful for the opportunity to clarify and improve our manuscript.

As noted by the reviewers, the main message of the manuscript is that the intrinsic properties and activity characteristics of targeted bursters depend on the timescale of half-(in)activation alterations in the homeostatic mechanism. However, the concerns of the reviewers reveal that the manuscript is organized in ways that detract from this message. Below we respond to the points the reviewers raise and close by outlining the changes that we will make to the manuscript as a result. Our goal will be to streamline the message of the paper while addressing the concerns of the reviewers.

Response to Reviewer #1:

Point 1: We interpret the reviewer's question about "mechanism" to be: why do half-(in)activation alterations redirect degenerate bursters to different parameter regions? (A separate aspect of "mechanism," namely how these alterations might be biologically implemented, is already addressed in the paper.)

We speculate that Figure 3 illustrates this process. As conductance densities slowly evolve, rapid half-(in)activation changes cause the sensor variable (α) to jump abruptly as it searches for a voltage-dependence configuration that meets calcium targets (Figure 3A). The channel densities are slightly altered and this process continues again. Slowing the half-(in)activations alterations reduces these abrupt fluctuations (Figure 3B). Making the alterations infinitely slow effectively removes half-(in)activation changes altogether, leaving the system reliant solely on slower alterations in maximal conductances (Figure 3C). Because each timescale of half-(in)activation produces a different channel repertoire at each time step, the neuron follows distinct trajectories through the space of activity characteristics and intrinsic properties over the long term.

Point 2: We appreciate the reviewer's skepticism regarding our statistical approach with the "Group of 5" and "Group of 20." These groups arose from historical aspects of our analysis and this analysis does not directly advance the main point—that changes in the timescale of channel voltage-dependence alterations impact the properties of bursters to which the homeostatic mechanism converges. Therefore, we plan to remove the references to the Group of 5 and focus on how the Group of 20 responds to variations in the timescale of voltage-dependent alterations.

Point 3: Our paper claims that the half-(in)activation mechanism is subordinate to the maximal conductance mechanism. We agree with the reviewer that making this claim requires more care. The simulations we run are controls in the spirit described below.

The reviewer notes that in our simulations, half-(in)activations are already near the range required for bursting, which forces maximal conductances to undergo larger changes and thus appear more critical. We however note that the opposite can also occur: if half-(in)activation values were already positioned in ranges required for bursting, an arrangement of small maximal conductances may potentially produce bursting. The latter might give the impression that maximal conductance alterations and half-(in)activation alterations are equally important. The simulations we ran are simply suggested this wasn't true for these models.

Points 4 - 6: In Point 4, the reviewer highlights model choices (e.g., constraints on maximal conductance and half-(in)activation, use of the L8 norm) are not clearly justified. In Point 5, the reviewer suggests that the paper provides excessive detail about other model choices. Point 6 appears to reiterate concerns about insufficient justification for some modeling decisions.

Our intent was to acknowledge every caveat, which led us to include long section on Model Assumptions in the Discussion. However, as Point 5 notes, this makes the Discussion cumbersome. The Discussion should focus on remarks regarding the impact that timescale of half-(in)activation alterations have on the family of bursters targeted by the homeostatic mechanism. Consequently, we will relocate the extended discussion of model assumptions from the Discussion to the Methods section. This section already touches on how the constraints on half-(in)activation alterations compare to earlier versions of the model (noted in Point 6) and will be expanded to further explain our choice of the L8 norm (Point 4).

Response to Reviewer #2:

Weakness 1: The reviewer notes that the writing is “rather confusing.” This likely arises from the fact that we did not consistently emphasize the core message: the timescale of half-(in)activation alterations influences the intrinsic properties and activity characteristics of bursters targeted by the homeostatic mechanism. We will address this by reorganizing the manuscript to make that focus clearer, and we outline these planned revisions at the end of these responses.

The reviewer specifically points out that the state-of-the-art is not clearly articulated. We will reorganize the Introduction to highlight this. Briefly, work on activity-dependent homeostasis has historically focused on changes in channel density. This is supported by experiment and has been modelled theoretically. In comparison, changes in channel voltage-dependence, while documented, are less explored due to the challenges of measuring them. In this work, we attempt to study the impact that alterations in channel voltage-dependence have on activity-dependent homeostasis. To do this, we extend existing computational models of activity-dependent homeostasis—models that have hitherto only altered channel density—by incorporating a mechanism that also adjusts channel voltage-dependence.

Weakness 2: The Discussion highlights two potential implications of our findings—one for neuronal development and another for activity recovery following perturbations. However, they were outlined after the Model Assumptions section which, as Reviewer 1 points out, is quite detailed and cumbersome.

Another aspect that may contribute to the challenge in interpreting our results may be our conceptual approach to neuronal excitability, which relies on a computational model of activity-dependent homeostasis that abstracts much of the underlying biochemistry. Our message is general: the timescale of half-(in)activation alterations influences the intrinsic properties and activity characteristics of bursters targeted by a homeostatic mechanism. As such, the implications are general. Their value lies in circumscribing a conceptual framework from which experimentalists may devise and test new hypotheses. We do not aim to predict or explain any specific phenomenon in this work. To address this concern however, we will expand our discussion of how these findings may guide experimental considerations, particularly regarding neuronal development and activity recovery during perturbations, to better illustrate the practical utility of our results.

Response to Reviewer #3:

Point 1: This reviewer suggests that our core message—namely, that the timescale of half-(in)activation alterations affects the intrinsic properties and activity patterns targeted by a homeostatic mechanism—should also apply during perturbations. We plan to address this by extending our analysis on the Group of 20 models. We will perturb activity by increasing extracellular potassium concentration and change the timescale of half-(in)activation alterations during the perturbation. This should underscore how the neuron’s stabilized activity pattern depends on this timescale, reinforcing our central message.

Point 2: In this part of the Discussion, we noted that multiple half-activation shifts collectively shape the neuron’s global properties, and that averaging might obscure these effects. However, in light of the reviewers’ comments, we recognize that this observation alone does not directly advance the paper’s main message. To make it relevant, we would need to (1) identify correlations between intrinsic parameters (i.e., half-(in)activation and maximal conductance) and the resulting activity patterns, and (2) examine how these correlations shift under different timescales half-(in)activation alterations. Since we have not performed that analysis, we will revise this part of the Discussion to clarify its connection to the paper’s principal focus by noting that a deeper exploration of this notion using correlations will be the topic of future work.

Conclusion: We outline updates we will make to the paper here.

Introduction: In response to Reviewer 2, we will provide a clearer explanation of the state-of-the-art in activity-dependent homeostasis and highlight our specific contribution. We will emphasize that our conclusions, while generic, are relevant in experimental contexts.

Results: We will reorganize this section to underscore the main point: the timescale of half-(in)activation alterations affects the intrinsic properties and activity characteristics of bursters in the homeostatic mechanism. Figures 1 will remain as it is. It shows assembly from random initial conditions and explain that for these simulations we must always consider the half-(in)activation mechanism with a mechanism that alters maximal conductances as the half-(in)activation alterations alone cannot form bursters. Figure 2 will remain as is, but we will remove any discussion of the “Group of 5,” addressing Reviewer 1’s feedback. What is presently Figure 4 will then follow, illustrating how timescale differences shape the properties of 20 degenerate solutions. We then present Figure 3 to address Reviewer 1’s critique on mechanism. Here we will explain how different timescales of half-(in)activation alteration cause the homeostatic mechanism to update channel properties differently, leading to distinct trajectories through the space of intrinsic properties and activity characteristics (as described in the response of Point 1 of Reviewer 1’s feedback). Finally, following Point 1 of Reviewer 3, we will add a new figure highlighting the role of half-(in)activation timescale during perturbation.

Discussion: To streamline the Discussion, the “Model Assumptions” section will be moved to Methods. In line with Point 2 of Reviewer 3, we will clarify how the concept of "small half-(in)activation shifts lead to global changes in neuronal properties" aligns with our core message. Additionally, following Reviewer 2’s comments, we will expand our discussion of implications by including how experimentalists might use our findings to inform studies on perturbations and development.

Methods: We will expand “Model Assumptions” to explain in more detail why we chose the L8 norm.

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