Peregrination of the selectivity filter delineates the pore of the human voltage-gated proton channel hH\textsubscript{V1}

Deri Morgan,\textsuperscript{1} Boris Musset,\textsuperscript{1} Kethika Kulleperuma,\textsuperscript{2,3} Susan M.E. Smith,\textsuperscript{4} Sindhu Rajan,\textsuperscript{5} Vladimir V. Cherny,\textsuperscript{1} Régis Pomès,\textsuperscript{2,3} and Thomas E. DeCoursey\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1}Department of Molecular Biophysics and Physiology, Rush University, Chicago, IL 60612
\textsuperscript{2}Molecular Structure and Function, Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, Ontario M5G 1X8, Canada
\textsuperscript{3}Department of Biochemistry, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1, Canada
\textsuperscript{4}Department of Biology and Physics, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA 30144
\textsuperscript{5}Department of Medicine, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637

Extraordinary selectivity is crucial to all proton-conducting molecules, including the human voltage-gated proton channel (hH\textsubscript{V1}), because the proton concentration is \(>10^6\) times lower than that of other cations. Here we use “selectivity filter scanning” to elucidate the molecular requirements for proton-specific conduction in hH\textsubscript{V1}. Asp\textsubscript{112}, in the middle of the S1 transmembrane helix, is an essential part of the selectivity filter in wild-type (WT) channels. After neutralizing Asp\textsubscript{112} by mutating it to Ala (D112A), we introduced Asp at each position along S1 from 108 to 118, searching for “second site suppressor” activity. Surprisingly, most mutants lacked even the anion conduction exhibited by D112A. Proton-specific conduction was restored only with Asp or Glu at position 116. The D112V/V116D channel strikingly resembled WT in selectivity, kinetics, and ΔpH-dependent gating. The S4 segment of this mutant has similar accessibility to WT in open channels, because R211H/D112V/V116D was inhibited by internally applied Zn\textsuperscript{2+}. Asp at position 109 allowed anion permeation in combination with D112A but did not rescue function in the nonconducting D112V mutant, indicating that selectivity is established externally to the constriction at F150. The three positions that permitted conduction all line the pore in our homology model, clearly delineating the conduction pathway. Evidently, a carboxyl group must face the pore directly to enable conduction. Molecular dynamics simulations indicate reorganization of hydrogen bond networks in the external vestibule in D112V/V116D. At both positions where it produces proton selectivity, Asp frequently engages in salt linkage with one or more Arg residues from S4. Surprisingly, mean hydration profiles were similar in proton-selective, anion-permeable, and nonconducting constructs. That the selectivity filter functions in a new location helps to define local environmental features required to produce proton-selective conduction.

INTRODUCTION

Voltage-gated proton channels (H\textsubscript{V1}s) enable phagocytes to kill pathogens (Henderson et al., 1988; DeCoursey et al., 2003; Morgan et al., 2009; DeCoursey, 2010; Demaurex, 2012), basophils to secrete histamine (Musset et al., 2003; Morgan et al., 2009; DeCoursey, 2010; Lishko et al., 2010), and B lymphocyte signaling (Capasso et al., 2010), and may be neutralized by mutating it to Ala (D112A), we introduced Asp at each position along S1 from 108 to 118, searching for “second site suppressor” activity. Surprisingly, most mutants lacked even the anion conduction exhibited by D112A. Proton-specific conduction was restored only with Asp or Glu at position 116. The D112V/V116D channel strikingly resembled WT in selectivity, kinetics, and ΔpH-dependent gating. The S4 segment of this mutant has similar accessibility to WT in open channels, because R211H/D112V/V116D was inhibited by internally applied Zn\textsuperscript{2+}. Asp at position 109 allowed anion permeation in combination with D112A but did not rescue function in the nonconducting D112V mutant, indicating that selectivity is established externally to the constriction at F150. The three positions that permitted conduction all line the pore in our homology model, clearly delineating the conduction pathway. Evidently, a carboxyl group must face the pore directly to enable conduction. Molecular dynamics simulations indicate reorganization of hydrogen bond networks in the external vestibule in D112V/V116D. At both positions where it produces proton selectivity, Asp frequently engages in salt linkage with one or more Arg residues from S4. Surprisingly, mean hydration profiles were similar in proton-selective, anion-permeable, and nonconducting constructs. That the selectivity filter functions in a new location helps to define local environmental features required to produce proton-selective conduction.

An acidic group in the middle of the S1 transmembrane helix is critical to the proton specificity of H\textsubscript{V1} and is provided by Asp\textsubscript{112} in human H\textsubscript{V1} (hH\textsubscript{V1}; Musset et al., 2011) and Asp\textsubscript{51} in H\textsubscript{V1} from a dinoflagellate, Karlodinium veneficum (Smith et al., 2011). Despite only 15% amino acid identity of the proteins, the conservative Asp→Glu mutation preserved proton specificity, whereas Ser, Ala, or His substitution for Asp at this position resulted in anion permeability in both species, strongly suggesting that the selectivity mechanism is widely conserved evolutionarily. The presence of an Asp facing the pore is not sufficient, however, because Asp\textsubscript{51} can be neutralized without compromising proton selectivity, and does not preserve selectivity when Asp\textsubscript{112} is neutralized (Musset et al., 2011). Other molecular elements that may be required are not known. Our homology model indicates that the second of three Arg residues in...
the S4 segment, Arg208, forms a salt bridge with Asp112, and that the resulting charge compensation is important for proton selectivity (Kulleperuma et al., 2013). To refine further the molecular requirements of the selectivity filter, we explore here the extent to which the critical Asp can be moved along the S1 segment. We find that an excellent proton channel is produced when Asp is shifted from position 112 to position 116. The mutant channel is proton specific, exhibits ΔpH-dependent gating characteristic of all H+1s, and surprisingly, neutral amino acid substituents at this location produce anion conductances. Buffers used were Mes at pH 5.5–6.0, HomoPIPES at pH 6.5, and TMAOH. Bath and pipette solutions contained 60–100 mM of buffer, 1–2 mM CaCl2 or MgCl2 (intracellular [IC] solutions were Ca2+ free), 1–2 mM EGTA, and 1–2 mM MgATP to adjust the osmolality to 300 mOsm, titrated with TMAOH. Buffers used were Mes at pH 5.5–6.0, HomoPIPES at pH 4.5, and PIPES at pH 7.0. For Zn2+ measurements, EGTA was omitted. Currents are shown without leak correction. Reversal potentials were corrected for measured liquid junction potentials. Unless stated otherwise, cells were held at a holding potential, Vhold, before pulses and returned to Vhold after families of pulses. Reversal potentials were determined by two methods, depending on the relative positions of Vthreshold and Vrev. For most constructs, Vthreshold was positive to Vrev, and the latter was determined by examining tail currents (e.g., Fig. 2 B). Because hHV1 currents were the only time-dependent conductance present, estimates of the amplitude and direction of current decay during deactivation were used to establish Vrev (Morgan and DeCoursey, 2007). By this procedure, time-independent leak or other extraneous conductances do not affect Vrev. For mutants in which Vthreshold was negative to Vrev (for example, D112A/V116D in Fig. 2 C), it was possible to observe the reversal of the direction of currents activated during pulse families. Tail currents were not observed in nontransfected cells; for example, Fig. 1 B illustrates the absence of tail currents in a cell with the nonconducting D112V mutant.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Gene expression**

Site-directed mutants were created using the Stratagene QuikChange (Agilent Technologies) procedure according to the manufacturer's instructions. Transfection was done as described previously (Kulleperuma et al., 2013). Both HEK-293 cells and COS-7 cells were used as expression systems, the latter more frequently. In a previous study, we systematically compared the properties of WT channels by their high Zn2+ sensitivity (see Results).

**Electrophysiology**

GFP-tagged proton channels were identified using inverted microscopes (Nikon) with fluorescence capability. Conventional patch-clamp techniques were used at 21°C or at room temperature (20–25°C) (Kulleperuma et al., 2013). Bath and pipette solutions contained 60–100 mM of buffer, 1–2 mM CaCl2 or MgCl2 (intracellular [IC] solutions were Ca2+ free), 1–2 mM EGTA, and TMA sulfate, to adjust the osmolality to ~300 mOsm, titrated with TMAOH. Buffers used were Mes at pH 5.5–6.0, HomoPIPES at pH 4.5, and PIPES at pH 7.0. For Zn2+ measurements, EGTA was omitted. Currents are shown without leak correction. Reversal potentials were corrected for measured liquid junction potentials. Unless stated otherwise, cells were held at a holding potential, Vhold, before pulses and returned to Vhold after families of pulses. Reversal potentials were determined by two methods, depending on the relative positions of Vthreshold and Vrev. For most constructs, Vthreshold was positive to Vrev, and the latter was determined...
RESULTS

We generated a series of mutants in which the Asp residue critical to proton specificity was effectively shifted up and down the S1 helix to each position from 108 to 118. In the initial series of experiments, we replaced Asp\textsuperscript{112} with Ala (D112A) to produce an anion-permeable channel (Muset et al., 2011), and then introduced a second mutation with the goal of restoring proton selectivity ("second site suppression"). Additional studies were done in the D112V background, which in a sense is more rigorous, because this single mutant does not conduct at all (Musset et al., 2011). All mutations were introduced into a Zn\textsuperscript{2+}-resistant background (H140A/H193A), so that spurious small native \textit{H}\textsubscript{1} currents often present in COS-7 or HEK-293 cells (Muset et al., 2011) could be identified by their sensitivity to 10 \textmu M Zn\textsuperscript{2+}. Distinct Zn\textsuperscript{2+}-insensitive currents were observed only in mutants with Asp at positions 116 or 109 (D112A/V116D, D112A/V109D).

The second site mutation V116D restores proton selectivity to nonconducting or anion-permeable mutants

Fig. 1 shows that although the single-point mutation D112V eliminates current altogether (Muset et al., 2011), introducing Asp at position 116 restores robust proton current to the double mutant, D112V/V116D. Similarly, the D112A single mutant is anion permeable (Muset et al., 2011), but introducing Asp at position 116 restored proton-specific current to the double mutant, D112A/V116D. The proton selectivity of both double mutants, D112A/V116D and D112V/V116D, was confirmed by the proximity of their reversal potentials, \( V_{\text{rev}} \), to the Nernst potential for \( \text{H}^+ \), \( E_{\text{H}} \) (Fig. 2 A), over a wide pH range (pH\textsubscript{4}, 4.5–7.5 and pH\textsubscript{5}, 5.5–7.0). Fig. 2 B illustrates determination of \( V_{\text{rev}} \) from tail currents in a cell with D112V/V116D channels at pH\textsubscript{5} 5.5 and 7.0, with pH\textsubscript{5} 5.5. As indicated by the arrows, \( V_{\text{rev}} \) shifted from 0 to \(-77 \text{ mV} \), near \( E_{\text{H}} \) of \(-87 \text{ mV} \). The D112A/V116D mutant activated in a more negative voltage range so that inward currents were observed negative to \( E_{\text{H}} \) in families of currents. Fig. 2 C illustrates currents from pulses bracketing \( V_{\text{rev}} \) that reveal an \(-60-\text{mV} \) shift between pH\textsubscript{5} 5.0 and 6.0. In addition, substituting Na\textsuperscript{+}, Li\textsuperscript{+}, or K\textsuperscript{+} for TMA\textsuperscript{+}, or Cl\textsuperscript{−} for CH\textsubscript{3}SO\textsubscript{3}\textsuperscript{−} had no effect on \( V_{\text{rev}} \) (Table S1). In summary, shifting Asp from position 112 to 116 moves the proton selectivity filter outward by one turn of the helix.

Asp supports current only when facing the pore

Surprisingly, moving Asp to positions other than 109 or 116 eliminated voltage-gated current altogether. All mutants were tagged with GFP, and transfected cells with green “halos” indicating membrane expression were selected under fluorescence for recording. Nonconducting Asp mutants included (mutation, number of cells): positions 108 (D112A/L108D, 10), 110 (D112A/V110D, 4), 111 (D112A/L111D, 4), 113 (D112A/A113D, 5), 114 (D112A/L114D, 4), 115 (D112A/L115D, 4), 117 (D112A/L117D, 7), and 118 (D112A/A118D, 4). Positions 116, 112, and 109 (Fig. 1, cartoon) all face the “pore” in the predicted open-state structure of hH\textsubscript{1} (Kulleperuma et al., 2013). Evidently, Asp at a nonpore-facing location fails to support conductance, confirming that positions 109, 112, and 116 line the pore of hH\textsubscript{1}.

As a control for the possibility that nonconducting mutants did not fold properly, we created a single mutant, A113D, in which the native Asp\textsuperscript{112} was preserved. If Asp at a nonpore-facing location caused the protein to misfold, A113D should not conduct. Instead, A113D displayed small voltage-gated currents that were kinetically different from WT currents but were unequivocally
proton selective (Fig. 3). Thus, nonconducting mutants, including D112A/A113D, most likely were expressed but nonfunctional. If, despite the appearance of green protein in the membrane, some mutants misfolded, the fact remains that these proteins do not function as channels.

At position 109, Asp plays a permissive role

Introducing Asp at position 109 into the nonconducting D112V background (Musset et al., 2011) did not overcome the lack of conductance produced by the D112V single mutation (n = 8 cells). However, the D112A/V109D mutant exhibited distinct currents at pHo, 5.5 and pHi, 5.5 (Fig. 4 A), in contrast to the majority of mutants that did not conduct (D112A/L108D, D112A/V110D, D112A/L111D, D112A/A115D, D112A/L114D, D112A/L115D, D112A/L117D, and D112A/A118D). Replacing CH3SO3- with Cl- increased the outward current (Fig. 4 C), reflecting Cl- influx, and produced a large negative shift of \( V_{\text{rev}} \) (Fig. 4 B vs. D), confirming Cl- permeability. The shift of \( V_{\text{rev}} \) when Cl- replaced CH3SO3- was \(-35.9 \pm 4.2 \text{ mV (SEM; } n = 5)\), in the range reported for the D112A single mutant, \(-29 \text{ mV (Musset et al., 2011).} \)

Evidently, introducing Asp at position 109 did not interfere with anion conduction seen in the D112A single mutant (Musset et al., 2011). Both the anion selectivity of D112A/V109D and the lack of conductance in D112V/V109D suggest that at position 109, Asp cannot mediate proton selectivity and has no discernible effect on the selectivity that is established elsewhere. The two positions where Asp produced proton selectivity are in the external vestibule in our model, outside the highly conserved charge transfer center delimiting Phe150 (Tao et al., 2010).

The engineered Asp116 proton channel functionally resembles WT

To what extent does moving the selectivity filter outward by one turn of the helix reinstate native hHv1 properties? The gating and pH dependence of the D112A/V116D and D112V/V116D mutants are illustrated in Fig. 5. The general appearance of the proton currents is unremarkable; the voltage dependence and gating kinetics are roughly similar to WT. In D112V/V116D, the time constant of tail current decay, \( \tau_{\text{tail}} \), was \(1.1 \pm 0.02 \text{ s (mean } \pm \text{ SEM; } n = 3)\) at \(-40 \text{ mV and pH} \)

![Figure 2. Second site suppression in double mutants.](https://example.com/figure2.png)
changes in the gating of the mutant channels were not observed.

A characteristic property shared by all known H1v1 is tight regulation of the position of the \( g_{\text{H}} - V \) relationship by the pH gradient, \( \Delta pH \) (Cherny et al., 1995; Musset et al., 2011). Thus, marked

5.5/5.5, which is close to the WT value of 0.81 s measured under the same conditions (Musset et al., 2011). The activation time constant, \( \tau_{\text{act}} \), was \( 2.3 \pm 0.3\) s \( (n = 3) \) at \(+40\) mV in D112V/V116D, compared with the WT value of 1.1 s (Musset et al., 2011). Thus, marked

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Mutations at position 116 (in D112V channels) mimic mutations at 112
That proton selectivity was restored to D112V and D112A mutants by introducing Asp at position 116 suggests that the intramolecular interactions at both positions that contribute to proton selectivity are similar. To explore the extent of equivalence of these positions, we compared effects of several other mutations at 116 with those at 112. Fig. 6 shows that robust proton-selective currents were observed when Glu replaced Asp at position 116 (in the D112V background), just as with replacement of Asp by Glu at position 112 (Musset et al., 2011). We found previously that neutral mutants of Asp112 were anion selective (Musset et al., 2011). Astoundingly, both Asn and Ser at position 116 produced anion-permeable channels in the D112V background, which itself does not conduct. Fig. 7 illustrates a current family

Figure 5. Voltage and pH dependence of gating of hHv1 mutants with the selectivity filter shifter from 112 to 116. Families of currents in a COS-7 cell expressing D112A/V116D channels at pH 6.5 and pH 7.5 (A), pH 6.5 (B), or 5.5 (C) are shown in 10-mV increments as labeled, from \( V_{\text{hold}} = -60 \text{ mV} \) (A) or \(-30 \text{ mV} \) (B and C). Cells were returned to \( V_{\text{hold}} \) after pulses. (D) Current-voltage relationships in this cell. Currents were fitted to a rising exponential function and extrapolated to infinite time. Note inward currents at pH 5.5. (E) Conductance-voltage relationships for the same currents. Limiting slope conductance for the most negative voltages provides a gating charge estimate of 5.3–6.0 \( e^- \). (F) Regulation of voltage gating by \( \Delta pH \). \( V_{\text{threshold}} \) is plotted against \( V_{\text{rev}} \) measured in the same cell and solution. Lines show linear regression fits defined by \( V_{\text{threshold}} = 0.64 V_{\text{rev}} + 0 \text{ mV} \) (D112V/V116D; red circles) or \( V_{\text{threshold}} = 0.63 V_{\text{rev}} - 26 \text{ mV} \) (D112A/V116D; blue diamonds).
in a cell with D112V/V116S in symmetrical pH 5.5 TMACH$_3$SO$_3$ solutions (Fig. 7 A), with $V_{\text{rev}}$ near 0 mV (Fig. 7 B). Replacing bath CH$_3$SO$_3^-$ with Cl$^-$ increased the outward current (Fig. 7 C) and shifted $V_{\text{rev}}$ strongly negatively (Fig. 7 D): on average, by $-37.0 \pm 2.4$ mV (mean ± SEM; $n = 7$) for Asn and $-35.8 \pm 1.8$ mV ($n = 4$) for Ser. These values are similar to those obtained previously for single mutants D112N and D112S upon Cl$^-$ addition: $-33.1$ and $-40.8$ mV, respectively (Musset et al., 2011). Thus, the introduction of Glu, Ser, or Asn at position 116 conferred permeability onto the non-conducting D112V mutant, in each case recapitulating the selectivity of the corresponding single mutations at position 112. Viewed in terms of the ability of a single–amino acid substituent to produce anion or proton selectivity, positions 112 and 116 were identical.

Zn$^{2+}$ sensitivity of Arg$\rightarrow$His mutants shows S4 position in open channels

It seemed possible that shifting the selectivity filter outward might alter the position of S4 in open channels. As a frame of reference, R211H currents were found previously to be sensitive to internal but not external Zn$^{2+}$ during depolarizing pulses, suggesting that Arg$^{211}$ remains...
Selectivity filter scanning of hHV1 (Cherny and DeCoursey, 1999). Thus, His at position 211 in R211H/D112V/V116D was accessible to the internal solution even in the open state, indicating similar accessibility of the S4 Arg residues in open channels with the selectivity filter at either position 112 or 116.

Introducing Asp into S2 or S3 did not support proton conduction.

Given that Asp can produce proton selectivity at two locations on S1, we moved Asp to several positions in the S2 or S3 transmembrane segments, always in the nonconducting D112V background. We chose five locations in the outer vestibule (S143D, I146D, L147D, V178D, and S181D) that face the pore in our model and are located roughly between the levels of positions 112–116. Four failed to produce distinct current. D112V/S143D generated small Zn$^{2+}$-insensitive currents that reversed at $-17 \pm 6.6$ mV (mean ± SEM; $n = 5$) at pHo 7.0 and pHi 5.5, well positive to $E_H$, which is $-87$ mV. In five cells, $V_{rev}$ shifted by $-24.3 \pm 1.6$ mV when CH$_3$SO$_3^-$ was replaced with Cl$^-$ at pHo 5.5 and pHi 5.5, demonstrating Cl$^-$ permeation. That Asp at position 143 (in the S2 segment) overcame the nonconduction of D112V is consistent with position 143 facing the pore, as predicted in our model, but in a location incompatible with its producing H$^+$ selectivity.

MD simulations reveal significant differences in the electrostatic properties of mutant channels.

To assess the structural impact of the filter shift, MD simulations were performed on the WT protein, single-point mutants D112V and D112S, and double mutants D112V/V116D (VD) and D112V/V112S (VS) in a hydrated lipid bilayer bathed in 500 mM NaCl, based on our homology model (Kulleperuma et al., 2013). The overall structure of the channel was preserved in the mutants. In particular, the average root-mean-square deviation between WT and mutants ranged from 2.0 Å internally accessible in the open state (Kulleperuma et al., 2013). The third Arg in S4 of the Ciona H$_V$1 was reported to be internally accessible in closed but not open channels (Gonzalez et al., 2010), perhaps reflecting the large size of the MTSET probe. Internal accessibility of position 211 in the filter-shifted R211H/D112V/V116D mutant was evaluated by testing the Zn$^{2+}$ sensitivity of inside-out patches. This construct was proton selective (Table S1). In nine patches with R211H/D112V/V116D, 10 µM Zn$^{2+}$ was introduced into the bath at pHI 7.0, and test pulses were applied. The H$^+$ current was inhibited by 90.0 ± 3.6% (mean ± SEM), significantly ($P < 0.0001$ by unpaired $t$ test) more than 29.7 ± 6.8% in six control patches (D112V/V116D). These results show that the 211 position is accessible to internally applied Zn$^{2+}$, but they do not distinguish whether the site is accessible in closed or open channels.

Accessibility of His$^{211}$ in R211H/D112V/V116D channels in the open state was evaluated by adding Zn$^{2+}$ or EGTA during pulses. In Fig. 8A, shortly after the start of a pulse, 10 µM Zn$^{2+}$ was introduced (red record), producing slowly progressing block. The subsequent pulse (Fig. 8A, blue) illustrates the full extent of inhibition. Given that the probability of being open is high during large pulses—95% at pH 5.5 and 75% at pH 6.5 (Cherny et al., 2003)—and that gating is slow, cycling of channels through closed states during the pulse seems unlikely. Because Zn$^{2+}$ must diffuse through the unstirred volume at the tip of the pipette to reach the membrane, onset of block was slow and likely dependent on pipette and patch geometry, but was observed unequivocally in four patches for long pulses. The addition of EGTA during a pulse to remove Zn$^{2+}$ resulted in rapid reversal of block (Fig. 8B) in six patches. The application of 10 µM Zn$^{2+}$ to inside-out patches from cells expressing the control construct D112V/V116D produced comparatively minor effects on the current (Fig. 8C), reminiscent of its effects on native H$_V$1 (Cherny and DeCoursey, 1999). Thus, His at position 211 in R211H/D112V/V116D was accessible to the internal solution even in the open state, indicating similar accessibility of the S4 Arg residues in open channels with the selectivity filter at either position 112 or 116.

Figure 8. The third arginine position in the S4 segment is accessible to the internal solution in the open state. (A) The black trace shows proton current in D112V/V116D/R211H in an inside-out patch from a HEK-293 cell. 10 µM Zn$^{2+}$ was introduced into the internal solution during the red trace, and blue is the subsequent pulse in the continued presence of Zn$^{2+}$. (B) The blue record is from D112V/V116D/R211H in the presence of 10 µM Zn$^{2+}$, and the red record shows recovery from block on the addition of EGTA shortly after the start of the pulse. Black represents after washout. (C) The control mutant, D112V/V116D, in a COS-7 cell exhibits weak IC Zn$^{2+}$ sensitivity: black, before; blue, in 10 µM Zn$^{2+}$; gray, after washout. All pulses are to +50 mV at pH 7.0 and pH 7.0 in inside-out patches of membrane.
Despite these overall similarities (Fig. 9), differences were evident in the local structure of the pore near the EC bottleneck (Fig. 10). In the WT (Fig. 10 A), the EC constriction usually consists of a salt bridge between Arg208 and Asp112 (or occasionally Asp185), whereas the other charged residues in the EC vestibule, namely Asp185 and Arg205, usually form a spatially distinct ion pair. Consistent with our previous simulation study (Kulleperuma et al., 2013), Asp112–Arg208 in WT is present as an ion pair most of the time but is occasionally disrupted by water molecules, resulting in the transient appearance of a water chain. In all four mutants considered, however, the absence of a charged side chain at position 112 led to the reorganization of the ionic network in the EC vestibule. In the proton-selective VD mutant (Fig. 10 B), various arrangements of ionic networks involving between two and four charged side chains from helices S1 (Asp116), S3 (Asp185), and S4 (Arg205 and Arg208) were observed. Fig. 11 illustrates the most frequent configurations adopted by Asp116. Most of the time (~82%), it interacts with Arg205 (Fig. 11 A) or Arg208 (D112S) to 2.2 Å (D112V). In all five systems, the average axial position of helices S1–S4 relative to the rest of the bundle was 0.73 ± 0.06 Å, 0.34 ± 0.05 Å, −1.80 ± 0.16 Å, and 0.53 ± 0.06 Å (SEM), respectively, indicating that the registry of the four helices was conserved in all the simulations. Combining data from the five systems leads to axial distributions that fit a single Gaussian distribution for each of the four helices, S1–S4, with standard deviations σ = 0.4, 0.5, 0.7, and 0.4 Å, respectively, emphasizing the small amplitude of axial fluctuations. Furthermore, the average hydration profiles of the pore in WT and various mutants did not differ significantly from one another (Fig. 9). The pore is characterized by an hourglass shape with an ~13-Å-long narrow region comprising an IC bottleneck at Phe150 and an extracellular (EC) bottleneck at Asp112. It is noteworthy that average pore hydration was quite similar for proton-selective (WT, VD), anion-permeable (VS, S = D112S), and nonconducting mutants (VAL = D112V), indicating that the mean hydration profile is not a good predictor of selectivity.

Figure 9. Pore hydration is similar in WT and several mutant channels despite very different selectivity. Average water density within a 0.7-nm radius of the mean axis of the pore is plotted, normalized to the bulk water density for 5,000 snapshots from each replica of different systems. The membrane boundaries are indicated by dashed lines, with the external surface to the right. The nadir is near Phe150 in all cases. Average axial water density for: (A) WT (proton selective) and D112V (VAL, nonconducting); (B) WT and D112V/V116S (VS) and D112S (S), two anion-permeable channels; (C) WT and D112V/V116D (VD), of which both are proton selective.
(Fig. 11 D) or both (Fig. 11 C). Similarly, in WT hHv1, Asp$^{112}$ was engaged in salt linkage 90% of the time but almost exclusively with Arg$^{208}$. However, in WT hHv1, a continuous water chain was present only when the Asp$^{112}$–Arg$^{208}$ salt bridge was broken, which occurred \( \sim 10\% \) of the time (Kulleperuma et al., 2013). In contrast, water pathways were observed in all configurations of the VD mutant, reflecting the greater width of the pore at this level compared with position 112. That an aqueous pathway is not predictive of proton selectivity is not surprising given the example of aquaporin channels that conduct water at high rate but are impermeable to protons (Zeidel et al., 1994). In contrast with WT, pore hydration is not significantly modulated by the configurations of Asp$^{116}$ in the VD mutant.

In particular, Arg$^{208}$ was observed to form ion pairs with Asp$^{116}$, Asp$^{185}$, or neither, or both. In contrast to WT, the local hydration of the constriction at the bottom of the EC funnel does not depend on whether or not Arg$^{208}$ is engaged in ion pairing (Fig. 10 B). Furthermore, our models predict the presence of water pathways in the anionic mutants D112S and VS (Fig. 10, C and D), and even in the nonconducting D112V mutant (Fig. 10 E). In all systems considered, the channel contains a narrow bottleneck \( \sim 0.5 \text{ nm} \) in length \(( -0.68 < z < -0.18 \text{ nm}) \) between the tips of the EC and IC funnels. Although this bottleneck is lined with nonpolar residues including Val$^{109}$, Phe$^{150}$, Val$^{178}$, and Val$^{209}$, it contains a single file of two water molecules at least 75% of the time, consistent with a putative ion pathway between the EC and IC funnels.

As a first step toward characterizing the energetics of ion permeation in the channel, we computed the static-field energy for a virtual positive point charge along water pathways spanning the length of the channel. Fig. 12 A shows that D112V, D112S, and VS mutants contain an

![Figure 10](https://example.com/figure10.png)

Figure 10. The EC salt-link network realigns in mutants. Representative snapshots of ionic networks in the WT and mutants, with the external end up. (A) WT protein in contact (left) and water-mediated (right) states of the D112–R208 ion pair. (B) VD mutant, with R208 participating in (left) and free from (right) the EC salt-link network. (C) VS mutant. (D) D112S mutant. (E) D112V mutant. Acidic and basic side chains in the external and internal funnel, together with side chains of residues 112, 116, F150, and R211 are shown in licorice representation together with ribbon traces of the four \( \alpha \)-helical transmembrane regions: red, S1; yellow, S2; green, S3; blue, S4. Salt bridges are shown as orange lines. The volumetric surface of water within the pore is shown with a water radius of 0.14 nm.
of the static field, which, although it does not explain proton selectivity, is consistent with the fact that these two channels are permeable to a cation.

**DISCUSSION**

Nonconducting mutants

When the critical Asp$^{112}$ residue was moved along the S1 segment from position 108 through 118 (with D112A), 8 of 10 mutants did not conduct, proton current was seen at 116, and anion current was seen at 109. Positions 116, 112, and 109 all face the “pore” in the predicted open-state structure of hHV1 (Kulleperuma et al., 2013). Asp at pore-facing position 143 in the S2 segment also exhibited anion current. Evidently, the Asp carboxyl group must face the pore to enable conductance of any kind, and with Asp at a nonpore-facing location, the S1 segment is not free to rotate enough for the carboxyl group to reach the pore. When Asp faces away from the pore, its $pK_a$ likely increases substantially, making it permanently neutral. When Lys was introduced at a series of locations in the acetylcholine receptor channel, its $pK_a$ was decreased, often drastically, when it did not face the pore directly (Cymes et al., 2005). When ionizable amino acids are inserted inside proteins by mutation, their $pK_a$ generally shifts in the direction that promotes neutrality (Isom et al., 2008). In contrast, in native proteins, ionizable residues have evolved to establish interactions with their neighbors that favor ionization (Kim et al., 2005; Gunner et al., 2011).

The rules of the game

The selectivity of various mutants summarized in Table 1 reveals “the rules of the game” for hHV1. In the mutants studied, the presence of Asp or Glu at position 112 or 116 was necessary and sufficient to produce $H^+$ selectivity. The identity of the amino acid at position 109 had no effect; selectivity was determined entirely by positions 112 and 116. When Val was present at both critical positions, 112 and 116, the channel failed to conduct (an effect that was not overcome by introducing Asp at 109). That Val seems to disfavor permeation may reflect its relative hydrophobicity (Kyte and Doolittle, 1982; Hessa et al., 2005). The VxxDxxxV motif (or a closely conserved version in which Leu replaces Val109 and/or Val116) appears in the S1 segment of all eight species with electrophysiologically confirmed $H_V^+$ (DeCoursey, 2013). In hHV1, when positions 112 and 116 were occupied by Val and a small neutral amino acid (Ala or Ser, for example) in either order, the result was anion permeation.

Microenvironment of positions 112 and 116

With respect to selectivity, voltage dependence, kinetics, and $\Delta pH$ dependence of gating, the filter-shifted D112V/V116D channels were quite similar to WT. In...
addition, the effects of point mutations at position 116 closely resembled those at 112. Glu replacing Asp at either position preserves proton specificity. Channels with neutral residues like Ser or Asn at either position (with Val occupying the other) conduct anions. These phenomenological parallels indicate that in terms of the molecular details required to establish proton (or anion) selectivity, the two positions are virtually indistinguishable. However, the identities of individual neighbors of the critical aspartate differ substantially at the two positions. Side chains with atoms within 6 Å of Asp\textsuperscript{112} (WT) or Asp\textsuperscript{116} (in the D112V background) at least 50% of the time were identified from time-averaging of MD simulations. Intriguingly, in WT, the nearest neighbors to Asp\textsuperscript{112}, excluding those on the S1 segment (Ala\textsuperscript{113}, Leu\textsuperscript{111}, Leu\textsuperscript{115}, Val\textsuperscript{116}, and Val\textsuperscript{109}), include residues on both S2 (Ile\textsuperscript{146}, Ser\textsuperscript{143}, and Phe\textsuperscript{150}) and S4 (Arg\textsuperscript{208}), whereas in the VD mutant, only S4 residues (Arg\textsuperscript{205} and Arg\textsuperscript{208}; along with S1 residues Leu\textsuperscript{117}, Glu\textsuperscript{119}, Leu\textsuperscript{115}, and Leu\textsuperscript{120}) are within 6 Å of Asp\textsuperscript{116}. In the D112V/V116D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>109</th>
<th>112</th>
<th>116</th>
<th>Selectivity</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WT hHV1</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Asp</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>H\textsuperscript{+}</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A113D</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Asp</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>H\textsuperscript{+}</td>
<td>This</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D112E</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Glu</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>H\textsuperscript{+}</td>
<td>Musset et al., 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D112A/V116D</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Ala</td>
<td>Asp</td>
<td>H\textsuperscript{+}</td>
<td>This</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D112V/V116D</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Asp</td>
<td>H\textsuperscript{+}</td>
<td>This</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D112V/V116E</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Glu</td>
<td>H\textsuperscript{+}</td>
<td>This</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D112V</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Musset et al., 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D112V/V109D</td>
<td>Asp</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>This</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D112A, N, S, H, K, F</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Ala</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Cl\textsuperscript{−}</td>
<td>Musset et al., 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D112A/V109D</td>
<td>Asp</td>
<td>Ala</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Cl\textsuperscript{−}</td>
<td>This</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D112V/V116S</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Ser</td>
<td>Cl\textsuperscript{−}</td>
<td>This</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D112V/V116N</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Asn</td>
<td>Cl\textsuperscript{−}</td>
<td>This</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selectivity to H\textsuperscript{+} means $V_{\text{rev}}$ was close to $E_{\text{H}}$ at various ΔpH; 0 means no credible currents; Cl\textsuperscript{−} means $V_{\text{rev}}$ shifted negatively when Cl\textsuperscript{−} replaced CH\textsubscript{3}SO\textsubscript{3}\textsuperscript{−} in the external solution. Acidic residues are bold; neutral residues other than Val are italicized.
mutant, the selectivity filter is roughly twice as far from Phe$^{150}$ (the external delimiter of the charge transfer center; Tao et al., 2010) as Asp$^{112}$ is in the WT channel. This result means that immediate proximity of the carboxyl group to the most hydrophobic point in the channel, which in all constructs occurs at Phe$^{150}$ (Figs. 9 and 10), is not essential to establishing any of the main features of the channel, including proton specificity, gating kinetics, and ΔpH-dependent gating.

Why does 109 not work?
The lack of influence of position 109 (Table 1) suggests that selectivity is established in the external vestibule, outside the charge transfer center boundary at Phe$^{150}$. All current models of hHV1 place Asp$^{112}$ in the external vestibule (Musset et al., 2010; Ramsey et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2012; Kulleperuma et al., 2013). The MD simulations provide additional insight. In WT hHV1, Asp$^{112}$ is frequently paired with Arg$^{208}$. During the 10% of the time that these residues were unpaired, a continuous water wire was present. With Asp moved to 116, there was an electrostatic barrier to cation permeation when Arg$^{208}$ was unpaired, but not when it was paired with either Asp$^{116}$ or Asp$^{116}$. In support of these findings, an unpaired Arg residue near the EC mouth of aquaporin channels is essential to block the translocation of protons (Beitz et al., 2006; Wu et al., 2009).

Limited plasticity of the channel with respect to axial helix movement does not support a change of S1 registry in the mutants
The interpretation of measurable effects of point mutations assumes conservation of the global protein conformation. Accordingly, we have modeled the structure of the mutants by substituting individual side chains in our model of the WT. An alternative interpretation for the native-like phenotype of the VD double mutant is that the S1 helix is shifted by one turn toward the interior of the cell, so that D112V and V116D take the place of V109 and D112, respectively. However, the analysis of collective fluctuations from the simulations shows that not only were the overall structure and hydration of the channel conserved, but there was also no significant axial displacement of individual helices in response to any of the mutations, and the plasticity of the channel with respect to axial helix movement remained limited in all the systems studied (Figs. S1 and S2). Although the possibility of a change in S1 registry with respect to the rest of the bundle cannot be ruled out, these results suggest that such a change is unlikely in any of the mutants considered in the present study.

Collectively, our current findings suggest that charge neutrality resulting from the presence of Asp (or Glu) vis-à-vis Arg$^{208}$ at the external constriction is required for the charge selectivity of the channel; in particular, the presence of an excess positive charge at the narrow end of the external funnel in neutral Asp$^{112}$ mutants leads to a barrier opposing cation movement but compatible with anion selectivity. In addition, the presence of an ionic network involving Arg$^{208}$ results in dynamic fluctuations of pore hydration and/or electrostatic properties that may contribute to the mechanism of proton selectivity in the WT and VD channels.

Parallels in other molecules
To our knowledge, hHV1 is the first example of a selective ion channel whose selectivity filter can be moved by a pair of point mutations. The acetylcholine receptor channel remains nonelective among cations when its ring of Glu residues is shifted by one turn of the α helix (Cymes and Grosman, 2012). Several other proton-conducting pathways permit shifts of critical amino acids, although in these molecules the portable function is primarily rapid proton flux rather than proton selectivity per se. For example, in F$_{1}$F$_{0}$-type ATP synthase (Escherichia coli), proton translocation is preserved when Asp$^{61}$ is shifted to position 24 on another helix (Miller et al., 1990). Asp$^{61}$ can be replaced by Glu$^{61}$, but with diminished proton transport, suggesting that precise location of the carboxyl is critical (Fillingame, 1990). Portability of Asp shows that the precise structure of apolar neighbors of the carboxyl group is not critical (Fillingame, 1990). Another essential residue in ATP synthase is Arg$^{210}$, which is thought to lower the pK$_{a}$ of Asp$^{61}$ transiently to ensure proton release (Fillingame et al., 2003; von Ballmoos et al., 2009).

As in ATP synthase, an Asp$^{213}$ critical for proton translocation in nicotinamide nucleotide transhydrogenase can be replaced by Glu, but activity is decreased to 18% (Yamaguchi et al., 2002). In enzyme studies, activity that is rate-limited by proton translocation is assessed. The correlate in hHV1 is single-channel conductance, which was not examined here. Our criterion is perfect proton selectivity, which is preserved when Glu replaces Asp at either position 112 or 116 in hHV1. We cannot say whether Glu is equally efficient.

When Asp$^{135}$ in the proton entry channel in cytochrome $b_{5}$, ubiquinol oxidase of E. coli is neutralized, its function can be restored by shifting Asp to position 139 or 142 (Garcia-Horsman et al., 1995).

Neutralizing Asp$^{132}$, the namesake of the D channel in cytochrome c oxidase from Rhodobacter sphaeroides, by mutations D132N or D132A nearly abolishes proton uptake (Fetter et al., 1995), which is restored by repositioning the Asp at N139D (Varanasi and Hosler, 2011, 2012). Intriguingly, proton uptake is also restored by removing subunit III (Adelroth and Hosler, 2006) and also in the D132N/N139T double mutant, showing that in the D channel, rapid proton uptake can be accomplished without an acidic group, although enzyme turnover remains impaired (Johansson et al., 2013). Asn$^{139}$ is thought to serve a special “gating” function in cytochrome...
c oxidase that may normally limit WT H’ flux (Henry et al., 2009); Thr193 appears to optimize aqueous connectivity within the pore (Johansson et al., 2013).

Finally, His64 shuttles protons from the catalytic center of human carbonic anhydrase II, and function is preserved with His shifted to His67 (H64A/N67H), but not His62 (H64A/N62H), despite crystal structures indicating that the side chains of both His62 and His67 extend into the active-site cavity at distances from the catalytic zinc similar to His64 (Fisher et al., 2005).

These examples show that an amino acid side chain must be positioned correctly to maintain a high rate of proton transfer, but that in some cases a reasonable rate of proton transfer can be retained upon moving the side chain, especially if it is not moved too far. Given that proton transfer via titratable amino acid side chains is a way to achieve proton selectivity, proton transfer and proton selectivity may be the same process, and thus in some cases, a side chain essential for H’ selectivity may be moved without losing selectivity.

In summary, shifting Asp along the S1 segment identified three locations in hHv1 that line the pore and permit conduction: 109, 112, and 116. Asp produced proton specificity only at positions 112 and 116. When introduced at nonpore-facing positions, Asp abolished function. Glu at either position preserved selectivity, indicating leeway in side-chain length. We conclude that the minimal requirements for proton specificity of hHv1 include Asp or Glu, which must face the pore directly, and evidently must be located in the external vestibule, above the charge transfer center, Phe150. The portability of the selectivity filter indicates latitude in the requisite local environment. This observation seems consistent with the suggestion that ionizable groups that enable proton transport could have evolved by random mutation without the need to simultaneously develop a specialized micro-environment for charge stabilization (Isom et al., 2008). On the other hand, the inability of Asp to produce H’ selective conductance at most positions tested argues that additional factors are involved. Modeling indicates frequent salt-bridge formation between Asp and several partners, which may contribute to selectivity, proton transfer, and conformational stability. Ionizable residues favor the incorporation of water molecules (Pless et al., 2011) that may also facilitate proton translocation. However, neither the presence of a continuous water pathway nor the mean hydration profile was found to have any clear relationship with the selectivity of the channel. Detailed computational studies of H’ and other ions in the permeation pathway will be required to examine the molecular basis of ion movement and achieve a full understanding of the mechanism of proton selectivity in hHv1.

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