Contraction Kinetics of 
Intact and Skinned Frog Muscle 
Fibers and Degree of Activation

Effects of Intracellular
Ca^{2+} on Unloaded Shortening

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ABSTRACT  This study addresses a long-standing controversy on the effects of the degree of activation on cross-bridge kinetics in vivo, by utilizing isolated intact and skinned fiber preparations. Steady force levels ranging from 0.1 to 0.76 P_0 were achieved at 0°C with temperature-step stimulation of intact fibers by varying the amount of caffeine in the bathing medium. The speed of unloaded shortening (by slack test) was found to be practically constant, which suggests that intracellular Ca^{2+} in the intact preparation has relatively little effect on isotonic shortening. Along with the results on tetanically stimulated fibers (force, P_0), we observed a minor but significant trend for the speed to decline with lowered force levels. This trend is explained by the presence of a constant internal load equaling ~1% P_0. The effect of Ca^{2+} on the shortening behavior of skinned fibers was examined at 0 and 10°C. At 0°C, there was practically no effect of Ca^{2+} on the shortening response in slack tests. At 10°C, there was also no Ca^{2+} effect during the first activation cycle, but in subsequent cycles the speed of shortening was reduced during partial activation, which indicates that there were permanent changes in the fiber properties under these experimental conditions. The latter result could be explained if the internal load had increased to ~5% P_0 in the modified skinned fiber (compared with 1% P_0 in intact fiber). These findings show that isotonic contraction of frog fibers is intrinsically unaffected by the variations in intracellular Ca^{2+} that modulated the force over a nearly complete range. The results provide support for the idea that Ca^{2+} influences the force development in vivo by on-off switching mechanisms.
INTRODUCTION

Calcium has a central role in the contraction mechanism of muscle. The concentration of free intracellular Ca$^{2+}$ is low in the unstimulated muscle cell (Blinks et al., 1978), and the interaction of myosin cross-bridges with actin is blocked. Upon stimulation, as free Ca$^{2+}$ in the myoplasm is elevated and binds to thin-filament regulatory proteins, the inhibition for cross-bridge attachment on thin filaments is removed (Ebashi, 1980). This suggests that Ca$^{2+}$ is a switch for cross-bridge attachment. The attached cross-bridges exert force, but do so only during their stay in some of those configurations (H. E. Huxley, 1969; A. F. Huxley, 1980). The relative durations in the various configurations are influenced by the kinetic rate constants and affect the mean force of muscle. Therefore, to understand the cross-bridge mechanisms of force generation, it is important to establish whether or not Ca$^{2+}$ influences the cross-bridge turnover kinetics.

However, in spite of a great deal of effort, the issue has remained controversial. Most previous studies measured force-velocity relationships and contraction transients on skinned fiber preparations, because the degree of activation of such preparations is altered in steady state simply in response to direct changes of free Ca$^{2+}$ concentration in the bathing milieu. However, the results and conclusions varied, in part because the experimental protocols differed (see Table III in Gulati and Podolsky, 1981). Thus, with 190 mM ionic strength at 4–7°C, the relative force-velocity relationships and velocity transients were the same at various degrees of activation, which suggests that the cross-bridge kinetics underlying these properties are unaffected by Ca$^{2+}$ (Podolsky and Teichholz, 1970; Gulati and Podolsky, 1978). However, with low ionic strength (100–150 mM) above 4°C and also with 190 mM ionic strength at 10°C, the mechanical kinetics of skinned fibers were altered by changes in [Ca$^{2+}$] in the bath, which suggests a different action of Ca$^{2+}$ (Julian, 1971; Thames et al., 1974; Julian and Moss, 1981). Thus, a question remains as to which mechanism operates in the physiological condition. The resolution of this controversy is important not only for establishing the cross-bridge theory of skeletal muscle contraction, but also for understanding the physiology of myocardium in which the level of calcium activation varies widely under normal conditions (e.g., Allen and Blinks, 1978).

The study of the effects of intracellular Ca$^{2+}$ on contraction kinetics has also been attempted with intact fibers, but the efforts have been limited to non-steady state conditions by the difficulty of manipulating the levels of intracellular Ca$^{2+}$. Twitch force was depressed by including dantrolene in the bathing medium (Edman, 1979) or by replacing H$_2$O with D$_2$O (Cechhi et al., 1981). However, the isotonic shortening properties of the fibers were constant with these agents. Since a reduction in the amount of Ca$^{2+}$ release was a probable cause of the decrease in force with D$_2$O (Allen et al., 1984) and dantrolene, the results supported the view that Ca$^{2+}$ does not affect the shortening response during the twitch.

The present study extends the examination of the Ca$^{2+}$ effect in intact fibers to the steady state conditions for the degree of activation. The activation level was modulated by applying a temperature step at various concentrations of caffeine in the bathing medium. The contraction speed of intact fibers is
practically independent of the degree of activation, which is in agreement with the Ca\textsuperscript{2+} effect in skinned fibers at 190 mM ionic strength at low temperatures as well as in intact fibers during the twitch. We also find a minor but significant trend for the speed to decline at the lowered activation levels, but this is explained as being the result of constant internal load. Furthermore, we present evidence on skinned fibers at 10°C that the effects of Ca\textsuperscript{2+} previously seen at this temperature were the result of permanently altered properties of the contractile system.

Brief reports of these results have appeared (Gulati and Babu, 1983, 1984b).

**METHODS**

**Fiber Preparation**

**INTACT FIBER** Isolated fibers from anterior tibialis muscles of *Rana temporaria* were used in most of the experiments. The isolation procedures and the experimental setups were the same as described recently (Gulati and Babu, 1982, 1984a). The mean sarcomere length for all intact fiber experiments was 2.2–2.3 μm, as determined by laser diffraction.

**SKINNED FIBER** In part of the study, we used preparations of skinned fibers from semitendinosus muscles of *Rana pipiens pipiens* (Gulati and Podolsky, 1981; Gulati, 1983). Some of the fibers were also briefly exposed (10 min) to a 50% (by volume) glycerol solution (solution 5, Table I) and then to a detergent solution (solution 6) for a similar duration in accordance with Julian’s (1971) protocol. The mean sarcomere length for all skinned fiber experiments was ~2.4 μm. The experimental setup (transducers, chambers, etc.) for the skinned fibers was the same as that for the intact fibers (Gulati and Babu, 1984a).

**Solutions**

The various solutions used for the intact and skinned preparations are listed in Table I. Solution 1 was used during dissection of the muscle and solution 2 was used for most of the experiments on intact fibers, with both temperature-step and electrical stimulation. Whenever a modified solution was used, it is noted in the text. Caffeine was omitted for all electrical stimulations. In the case of skinned fibers, solutions 4 and 7 were used as relaxing solutions. For maximal and partial activations of the skinned fiber, EGTA in solutions 4 and 7 was replaced with Ca-EGTA. The various proportions of these amounts were calculated on a microcomputer as before (Gulati, 1983). Note that of solutions 4 and 7, only solution 4 contains creatine phosphate with kinase added just before the experiment.

The pH of each solution was adjusted to 7.00 ± 0.01 at room temperature just before the experiment. All chemicals were of the best grade available from Sigma Chemical Co. (St. Louis, MO) or Fisher Scientific Co. (Pittsburgh, PA).

**Experimental Protocol**

**ACTIVATION OF INTACT FIBERS** The fibers were activated either electrically or by rapid cooling from 25 to 0°C in the presence of caffeine. The electrical tetanic stimulation was achieved with 1-ms pulses (duration, 1–2 s; frequency, 20 Hz of 15–26 V amplitude that was two to three times above rheobase). The rest period between tetani was ≥10 min. In temperature-step activation, the force levels were modulated by varying the concentration of caffeine.

A typical temperature-step activation of an isolated fiber for maximal force is shown in
Fig. 1A. The step was applied by using a four-chamber device as described earlier (Gulati and Babu, 1984a). The fiber was initially equilibrated in the caffeine-containing solution for 30–60 min at 25°C, removed from the solution (arrow a in Fig. 1A), and then plunged (arrow b) into an identical solution at 0°C. Force was produced. On return to 25°C (arrow d in Fig. 1A; arrow c indicates when the fiber was lifted out of the 0°C solution), the fiber was relaxed. If caffeine was omitted, there was no force following the temperature step. The first temperature-step contraction of a fiber was usually induced with 1 mM caffeine. Caffeine was then gradually increased in increments of 0.5 mM (allowing a 15-min equilibration in each new solution) until the force was maximal. This force level could be reproduced throughout the experiment. Caffeine for maximal force varied from fiber to fiber (1.5–2 mM).

To get partial activations, caffeine was lowered from the maximal level in increments of 0.1–0.01 mM. The pattern of force development with partial activation was slightly different in that there was a significant delay in the appearance of force (second and third traces in Fig. 1B). (There was a similar delay in skinned fibers with submaximal Ca\(^{2+}\) [Hellam and Podolsky, 1969].) The entire caffeine-force relationship on the same fiber in Fig. 1B is shown in Fig. 1C (marked "intact fiber"). The threshold caffeine concentration, as well as the steepness of the caffeine-force response curve, varied from fiber to fiber. In some fibers, the maximal response was obtained with merely 0.1–0.2 mM above the threshold level of caffeine, but we were able to get partial activations on all fibers tested. The force plateau for a given partial activation was often, but not always, reproduced. The results of the slack test (see below) were used only when a given force level was reproduced (to within 10%) in at least three consecutive activations.

### Table I

**Composition of Solutions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For intact fiber</th>
<th>For skinned fiber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1     2     3</td>
<td>4     5     6     7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCl</td>
<td>NaCl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>115.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>115.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The concentrations of all materials are given as millimolar except where noted otherwise.

**CONTROL STUDIES OF CAFFEINE EFFECT ON SKINNED FIBERS** A number of recent reports suggest that the presence of caffeine increases the Ca\(^{2+}\) sensitivity of the myofilaments of both skeletal (rat fibers, Wendt and Stephenson, 1983) and cardiac muscles (Fabiato and Fabiato, 1976; McClellan and Winegrad, 1978). Although there is evidence that contractions of frog intact fibers with rapid cooling in the presence of caffeine are a direct result of intracellular Ca\(^{2+}\) release from the sarcoplasmic reticulum (Kurihara et al., 1984), a few controls were made with frog skinned fibers to see to what extent the caffeine effect on Ca\(^{2+}\) sensitivity itself might contribute toward partial activations in our experiments of living fibers. (Another study was made to check for the effect of maximal caffeine in slack tests; those results are given below.)
Contraction of isolated tibialis fibers with temperature step. (A) Maximal activation (experiment 26 xi 82; fiber diameter, 134 μm). (B) Partial activation by varying caffeine (experiment 16 iv 82; fiber diameter, 146 μm). The force is close to maximal (0.76 $P_0$) in the top trace, 0.36 $P_0$ in the second trace, and 0.09 $P_0$ in the third trace. Arrows marked e indicate where the length release was applied for the slack test (see Fig. 4). (Note that in these slow time base responses, the force does not fall to zero with the length releases because of the inability of the chart recorder to follow.) (C) Solid line: caffeine-force relationship from temperature steps on the same fiber as in B. Dashed line: the relationship estimated from direct caffeine effects on the pCa-force relations on skinned fibers (see Fig. 2 and the text).
Fig. 2 shows the leftward shift in the pCa-force relationship with 5 mM caffeine at 0°C. Solution 4 (Table 1) was used, except that all the KCl was replaced by KPr. (The caffeine effect at 3 mM appears to be somewhat variable in KCl, and two fibers with Cl− gave no effect at this concentration. Certain other differences in the results between KCl and KPr on skinned preparations were also noted [Kentish, 1984; Brenner et al., 1984].) The inset in Fig. 2 is a composite plot relating caffeine concentration to its effects on the amount (ΔpCa50) of leftward shift in paired studies with 11 fibers. This was used to estimate the contribution of caffeine to the force in the temperature-step study (Fig. 1C, dashed line labeled "skinned fiber"). In making this estimation, we used the right-most curve in Fig. 2 as control; the curve was shifted to the left according to the caffeine concentration, and pCa 5.6 was taken as the resting value. The "skinned fiber" curve in Fig. 1C shows that the effect of caffeine on Ca2+ sensitivity cannot contribute significantly to the force of intact fiber during the temperature step.

The possibility that the caffeine effect may be amplified (40–50 times) in intact fibers (because of the greater amount of membrane structure) is not supported by the result in Fig. 2, which was made in the presence of detergent (1–2% Triton-X). Triton-X shifted the pCa-force relationship, which is similar to the result of Hellam and Podolsky (1969) with another detergent (deoxycholate). The addition of 5 mM caffeine further shifted the relationship in the present study, but the amount of this shift (ΔpCa50) was approximately the same as without the detergent.

If a similar direct effect of caffeine occurs in intact fibers, that should give rise to force in the unstimulated fiber. However, no tension with up to 3 mM caffeine at 25°C was
observed when checked carefully with the greatly increased sensitivity of the recorder. This raised the possibility that the effect of caffeine on Ca\(^{2+}\) sensitivity may be smaller, not greater, in intact preparations. (The lack of unstimulated force at 25°C with caffeine in intact fibers is unlikely to be due to a difference in the effect of caffeine itself at 0 and 25°C, since in rat skinned fibers the effect on Ca\(^{2+}\) sensitivity was the same at 25 and 5°C [Wendt and Stephenson, 1983].) Another possibility worth noting is that, based on earlier results (Stephenson and Williams, 1981; Godt and Lindley, 1982), also on skinned fibers, the control pCa-force relationship is itself shifted to the right at 22°C. The estimated leftward shift by caffeine (up to 3 mM), assuming that it occurs in the intact fiber, remains insufficient to give resting tension in vivo.

These control experiments and calculations, which show that caffeine effect on Ca\(^{2+}\) sensitivity does not make a significant contribution to the force development in intact fibers at 0°C, suggest that the role of caffeine in the temperature-step study is mainly confined to the effect on sarcoplasmic reticulum and that force is modulated with caffeine by Ca\(^{2+}\) levels in the myoplasm.

**SLACK TESTS**

The unloaded speeds of shortening were determined by the slack test method for both the temperature-step and tetanic stimulations as described earlier (Gulati and Babu, 1984a). The speeds by this method on whole muscle and single fibers under various conditions are similar to the extrapolated estimates of unloaded speed from the force-velocity relations found from quick release or load steps in careful studies (A. V. Hill, 1970; Edman, 1979; Rome et al., 1985).

Calculations in which the thermal conductivity (\(k\)) of the fiber was taken as that of water (1.4 \(\times\) 10\(^{-5}\) cal s\(^{-1}\) cm\(^{-1}\) °C\(^{-1}\); Weast, 1972) at 20°C, and the largest fiber was assumed to be an approximate cylinder 200 \(\mu\)m in diameter, indicated that the average temperature should be near 0°C in slightly over 60 ms after the step (Carslaw and Jaeger, 1959). For practical reasons, we usually waited at least 3 s (during maximal activations and much longer during partial activations) after the step to apply the slack release. Since with electrical stimulations the fibers were retained at 0°C throughout, the slack release in this case was applied sooner (~300 ms) after force reached the plateau. These precautions assured that the speeds were obtained at the desired temperature.

The computer analysis of the records to find the slack duration (\(\Delta t\)) was as described previously (Gulati and Babu, 1984a). By this method, the \(\Delta t\) values were reproduced within 1 ms with repeated analysis.

**Data Analysis**

**HILL'S FORCE-VELOCITY RELATIONSHIP**

This relationship (A. V. Hill, 1938) is written in the following form to give speed of shortening, \(V_e\), for an external load, \(P_e\):

\[
\frac{P_e}{P_0} = \frac{1 - (V_e/V_{max})}{1 + \left(\frac{P_0}{a} \frac{V_e}{V_{max}}\right)^2}
\]

(1)

where \(P_0/a\) is an empirical constant (= 4; A. V. Hill, 1970). Other symbols are listed below.

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\(^1\) The time to reach 0°C throughout the fiber was found by using the curve corresponding to \(kt/a^2 = 0.8\) in Fig. 24 of Carslaw and Jaeger (1959). \(k\) is thermal diffusivity and equals \(k/p \cdot c_p\), where \(p = 1\) g/cm\(^3\) and \(c_p\) (specific heat) = 1 cal/g/0°C. \(t\) is in seconds and \(a\) (fiber radius for the calculation) = 100 \(\mu\)m.
To include the level of activation and the effect of internal load ($F_R$), two assumptions are made: (a) that the intrinsic relative force-velocity relation is unaffected by the degree of activation, and (b) that the internal load affects the isotonic motion in the same way as the external load. Thus,

$$\frac{F_R}{P} = \frac{1 - \left(\frac{V_0}{V_{\text{max}}}\right)}{1 + \left(\frac{P}{a \cdot V_{\text{max}}}\right)}.$$

Eq. 2 is used in the present study by taking $P/a = P_0/a = 4$. This treatment is similar to that described earlier (Gulati and Babu, 1984a).

**Figure 3.** Laser diffraction patterns (first order) of a typical fiber at two lengths, for calibration of the motor arm. The centrally illuminated region is due to the main beam. The fiber length was altered by a signal of the known amount to the motor arm, and the distribution of the applied length change per half-sarcomere was calculated from the change in the distance between the first orders. The scale bars were photographed from the original screen and were useful for calibration. The relationship between applied and measured length changes gave a slope of 0.94.

**Statistics** Regression lines are found as best fits on the computer by least squares. Exponential best fits are computed similarly by using the equation: $A_1 \exp(A_2 x) + A_3$.

All data in the present study are reported as means ± standard error. Statistical significance was assumed when Student's $t$ test gave a $P$ value of ≤0.05. The paired $t$ test was used whenever appropriate.
CALIBRATION OF THE SERVO-MOTOR ARM  To translate the magnitude of an applied length step at one end of the fiber to the displacement within the sarcomeres, a standard calibration curve was made by direct measurements on a number of intact, relaxed fibers at 25° C. The excursion of the motor arm, 1.25 mm/V, was first determined under the microscope with an eyepiece micrometer (× 80). Next, the fiber length was adjusted to make the sarcomere length 2.5–2.6 μm. The first-order laser diffraction pattern was projected onto a screen and photographed using Polaroid film (Fig. 3). Release steps of various amounts were applied with the motor arm, and the resulting changes in the diffraction patterns at three points along the length of the fiber (usually two near the ends and one in the middle) were photographed separately. The relation between the applied and the actual sarcomere length changes was plotted and the slope of the line from the least-squares fit was found to be 0.94. This factor is included in the conversion of applied length steps into nanometers per half-sarcomere in all experiments.

LIST OF SYMBOLS

- \( F \): internal load
- \( L_0 \): resting intact fiber length (millimeters) between tendons, corresponding to a sarcomere length of 2.2–2.3 μm
- \( \Delta L \): magnitude of the shortening step during a slack test (expressed as %\( L_0 \) or as nanometers per half-sarcomere)
- \( P_0 \): tetanic force with electrical stimulation; \( P_1 \), maximal isometric force level with temperature step; \( P \), force level for partial activation
- \( P_e \): external load
- \( t_0 \): time zero at which the slack release is initiated
- \( \Delta t \): slack time (from \( t_0 \) to the time at which the period of slack ends)
- \( V_e \): speed of shortening for an external load \( P_e \)
- \( V_0 \): speed of shortening at zero external load as determined by the slack test; \( V_0 = V_{max} \) for electrical stimulation

RESULTS

The slack test was used to determine the speed of unloaded shortening at 0° C. The temperature-step method with caffeine allowed an experimental control of the degree of activation under relatively steady state conditions (Fig. 1) and was used for the majority of studies. However, in the first few cases, the contraction properties under maximal activation by temperature step were compared with tetanus.

Fig. 4 shows typical results of slack tests on one fiber. Six slack releases varying from 49 to 110 nm per half-sarcomere were applied during the force plateau. With each release, force dropped to zero and stayed there for \( \Delta t \) ms (duration measured between \( t_0 \) and the time marked by the white arrowhead in each trace). \( \Delta t \) varied with the amount of release. Fig. 4C plots these values and yields estimates of the speeds of unloaded shortening: 2.5 and 2.7 μm per half-sarcomere per second with temperature-step activation and tetanus, respectively.

The results of such paired studies on four fibers in Table II gave: 2.7 ± 0.3 (temperature step) and 3.1 ± 0.3 μm per half-sarcomere per second (tetanus). The difference was significant (paired t test, \( P < 0.02 \)).

Table II also gives the results of isometric force with the two types of activations for 13 fibers. Tetanic force was somewhat greater than the maximal force with
Figure 4. Speed of unloaded shortening with slack tests (experiment 21 vs 82; fiber diameter, 116 μm; L₀, 7.12 mm). (A) Maximal activation with temperature step. (B) Tetanic stimulation. The top traces in A and B show typical length steps; upward deflection indicates shortening. The remaining six traces in each case show force responses to progressively larger shortening steps, indicated by ΔL values. The numbers in parentheses indicate the random order in the step sequence. The vertical dashed lines mark the start of step at t₀, coinciding with arrow e in Fig. 1B; the arrowheads mark the end of the slack period computed by the method described earlier (Gulati and Babu, 1984); the horizontal dashed lines mark the zero of force. Note that the slack duration Δt becomes progressively longer for larger shortening steps. (C) Plots of ΔL vs. Δt, with regression lines.
**TABLE II**

Contraction Parameters at 0°C with Different Modes of Activation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Activation</th>
<th>Electrical stimulation</th>
<th>Temperature-step activation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximal isometric force per area (kN/m²)*</td>
<td>312±16 (13)</td>
<td>238±12 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unloaded speed of shortening (µm/half-sarcomere/s)</td>
<td>3.07±0.32 (4)</td>
<td>2.70±0.31 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The results are from paired measurements for 13 fibers. Four of these fibers were used for the determination of speed in the second row.

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To rule out the possibility that the lower force in temperature step was a transient effect following the step, we did a control experiment with electrical stimulation where the fiber at 25°C was similarly brought down to 0°C (without caffeine). Tetanic force after 3, 10, 15, and 20 s at 0°C was 239 ± 5 kN/m², nearly the same as after 15 min equilibration at 0°C (227 ± 5 kN/m²) in four different trials, which indicates that the temperature in the fiber was at 0°C soon after the step. The fact that force of temperature step is constant for >10 s (Fig. 1 A) (in other cases, we had measured the same behavior up to 25 s [Fig. 1A in Gulati and Babu, 1984a; semitendinosus fiber]) further supports this view.

The difference in the forces of temperature-step activation and tetanus was maintained after Cl⁻ in the bathing medium was replaced by NO₃⁻ (Table III), which suggests that the above effect is not due to the anion. The possibility of caffeine having an indirect effect of selectively turning off a part of the contractile system is discussed later (p. 497).

**Partial Activation**

To determine the effects of the degree of activation on contraction speed, slack tests were next applied to partially activated intact fibers. Fig. 5 shows typical

**TABLE III**

Effect of Nitrate Anions on the Maximal Isometric Force at 0°C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activation</th>
<th>Force per cross-sectional area (kN/m²)</th>
<th>Cl solution</th>
<th>NO₃ solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electrical stimulation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitch</td>
<td>192±12</td>
<td>239±11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetanus</td>
<td>300±11</td>
<td>300±11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature-step activation</td>
<td>245±9</td>
<td>236±12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All data in this table were obtained on the same five fibers at a sarcomere length of 2.3 µm. The effects of NO₃⁻ in twitch and tetanus are comparable to the finding of Lopez et al. (1981) that twitch was greatly potentiated, but tetanic force was affected by <7%.
results on one fiber at activation levels, $P/P_0$, of 0.76 and 0.44. The force responses to three releases, varying between 74 and 105 nm per half-sarcomere in increasing order, gave 2.6 $\mu$m per half-sarcomere per second for the speed of unloaded shortening for both the maximal and partial activations.

Fig. 6 shows the force response to the same release (112 nm, corresponding to ~10% of $L_0$) for another fiber, at three activation levels ($P/P_0 = 0.76, 0.60$, and 0.29). The slack durations for these records were found to be 33.3, 34.2, and 35.8 ms, respectively, which are nearly the same. The combined data ($\Delta L - \Delta t$ plots) for nine fibers in the range of 0.1–0.76 for $P/P_0$ are shown in Fig. 7. The data points are grouped into two batches; one batch is for maximal activations ($P/P_0 = 0.76$) and the second batch includes all the results for partial activations ($P/P_0 = 0.1–0.6$). The former gave a speed of shortening of 2.4 and
the latter 2.1 μm per half-sarcomere per second, which shows that the speed is substantially constant over a wide range of activation levels with the possibility of only a small (~15%) effect on speed at lower force levels. The exponential fits to the data give similar results, and the conclusion is therefore independent of the type of the fit. The mean ΔL₀ intercept from the linear fits was slightly higher for the partial activations than for maximal activations (ΔL₀ = 47 nm for

![Graph showing speed of shortening vs degree of activation](image)

**Figure 7.** Combined results on nine fibers with temperature step (range of fiber diameter, 78–180 μm; L₀, 5.9–7.62 mm; caffeine, 0.85–2 mM). The regression lines give values for the speeds of shortening: 2.3 ± 0.2 (dotted line, P/P₀ = 0.76), 2.0 ± 0.3 (dashed line, P/P₀ = 0.1–0.6), and 2.2 ± 0.2 (solid line, P/P₀ = 0.1–0.76) μm per half-sarcomere per second. Inset: exponential best fit of the data. Fitted parameters are: full activation: A₁ = 2.21 ± 1.16, A₂ = 0.024 ± 0.002, A₃ = 0; partial activation: A₁ = 1.85 ± 1.40, A₂ = 0.025 ± 0.003, A₃ = 0.

P/P₀ < 0.76; 43 nm for P/P₀ = 0.76), but this was not a consistent finding from fiber to fiber (e.g., see inset to Fig. 5, where the ΔL₀ intercept is less in partial activation).

Fig. 8 gives the relationships between the speed of unloaded shortening and degree of activation, obtained by arranging the data in five batches. The dashed line is a fit through points up to 0.76 P₀ and it has a small positive slope (0.29 ± 0.42). The full line in Fig. 8 includes the results of tetanus, which extends the force range, and the slope is still positive, which indicates that the downward trend for the speed with lower force levels may be real. A similar trend is seen also when the data for individual fibers are plotted as in the inset to Fig. 8. Each
point is a paired measurement normalized to the value at \( P/P_0 = 0.76 \). The regression line in this case gives an intercept of 0.8 at zero relative force.

Studies on Skinned Fibers

COMPARISON OF RESULTS AT 0 AND 10°C

The previous studies on skinned fibers (ionic strength, 190 mM; 0–5°C) gave results that are similar to the present results on intact fibers. However, the results in low ionic strength were different: Ca\(^{2+}\) had an effect on shortening, but the skinned fibers in low ionic strength developed increasing amounts of irreversible residual tension on repeated acti-

![Figure 8. Speed of unloaded shortening as a function of the degree of activation.](https://example.com/image)

**Figure 8.** Speed of unloaded shortening as a function of the degree of activation. Speeds were determined for each fiber with its own \( \Delta L / \Delta t \) plot as in Fig. 5. Symbols: ○, data for nine fibers, used exclusively for temperature step; ●, four new fibers for temperature jump; ■, tetanus on the four new fibers as above and one additional fiber. Dashed line: \( y = 2.24 \pm 0.26 + 0.29 \pm 0.42 \times \); this is the least-squares fit for temperature jump only. Solid line: \( y = 1.99 \pm 0.25 + 0.79 \pm 0.36 \times \); this is the fit through all data points. Both fits show a decrease in speed with decreasing activation levels. Inset: relative speed on individual fibers normalized to the speed at \( P/P_0 = 0.76 \) for the same fiber.

A recent study at 10°C that employed 180 mM ionic strength still found a Ca\(^{2+}\) effect (Julian and Moss, 1981) and we wanted to check whether this condition also induced permanent changes in fiber properties.

The results on four chemically skinned frog fibers in Fig. 9 provide a test of their stability on activations at 0°C in solution 4 (another fiber was tested in a slightly modified solution with 1 mM total Mg), and at 10°C in solution 7 (two different fibers). The fiber was first contracted in pCa 5 for maximal force and then partially activated in pCa 5.3–6.2, selected to give about half-maximal force. In each contraction, during the plateau of force, a 20% \( L_0 \) length release was applied and the resulting force response was used for the slack test (inset to Fig. 9). One maximal contraction followed by one partial contraction is referred to as a cycle.
FIGURE 9. Behavior of the skinned fibers with repeated contraction cycles. Each point is the ratio of slack duration with maximal activation to the duration in partial activation for the same amount of length release (20% $L_0$). Note that the relative duration is close to unity at 0°C for all five cycles (open circles and squares; solution 4 used for Q; for O, solution 4 was modified so that total MgCl$_2$ was 1 mM with the same ionic strength). At 10°C, this value is still one in the first cycle, but drops with each subsequent cycle (closed circles). Inset: the typical slack responses at 0°C for one cycle. The upper trace is the force response in pCa5 ($\Delta t = 81$ ms) and the force in the lower trace was 0.46 times maximal ($\Delta t = 83$ ms).

The results are shown in two parts. At 0°C, the slack duration is constant for all five cycles, which indicates that there is no Ca$^{2+}$ effect on speed under these conditions throughout the experiment. In the second set of experiments at 10°C, the relative duration is still near 1 in the first cycle, which indicates that there is no Ca$^{2+}$ effect in this cycle. However, the slack duration with partial activation increased as cycling was continued. By the fourth and fifth cycles, the estimated relative speed (i.e., the ratio of slack duration in partial to that in maximal activation) was close to 0.5. This factor is similar to that found by Julian and Moss (1981). Because in our study the effect of Ca$^{2+}$ was not seen in the first cycle of contraction and appeared gradually with subsequent cycling, the results make clear that this apparent Ca$^{2+}$ effect is not an original property of the fiber. Whether these alterations are the combined result of 10°C and the lack of regenerating system for ATP or of temperature alone was not further examined in this study.

FORCE AND THE SPEED OF SHORTENING WITH CAFFEINE In view of the fact that caffeine increased the Ca$^{2+}$ sensitivity of the myofilaments in skinned fibers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caffeine</th>
<th>5 mM</th>
<th>10 mM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative force</td>
<td>1.00±0.01 (5)</td>
<td>0.96±0.02 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative $V_0$</td>
<td>1.03±0.02 (4)</td>
<td>0.98±0.01 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are the ratios of measurements in caffeine to those without caffeine. The numbers in parentheses refer to the fibers. The relative $V_0$ in these experiments was estimated from the 20% $L_0$ slack releases.
(see Methods), it was of interest to know whether this agent had effects on other contraction parameters of the frog fibers. We tested this by measuring the maximal force and by performing slack tests on skinned fibers in the presence of 5 and 10 mM caffeine (0°C). The results are given in Table IV.

Force in pCa 3 solutions (solution 4 with Pr) was the same with up to 10 mM caffeine. The slack duration following releases of up to 20% L0 in paired studies is also found to be unaffected by caffeine in frog fibers. These results show that, aside from the effect in Fig. 2, there is no direct effect of caffeine on the force-generating properties and the turnover kinetics of the cycling cross-bridges (underlying the unloaded shortening). This gives greater confidence that the conclusions below regarding the degree of activation in intact fiber are valid.

DISCUSSION

The principal finding of this study is that the speed of unloaded shortening of isolated living fibers from frogs is practically independent of the degree of activation, with only a minor tendency for the speed to decrease at low force values. A wide range of force levels was attained in these experiments by employing rapid cooling at different caffeine concentrations, and this range probably reflects related changes in free Ca2+ concentrations in the myoplasm during activation. Therefore, the lack of a major effect on the intrinsic shortening speed at various force levels provides evidence that the contraction speed is insensitive to Ca2+ in the internal medium. This extends the conclusions of previous studies during twitch contractions with dantrolene (Edman, 1979) and D2O (Cechhi et al., 1981) and during the rising phase of the tetanus (Lombardi and Menchetti, 1984). The results are expected on the basis of general steric blocking models (see Squire, 1981), where Ca2+ is an on-off switch for shifting the position of tropomyosin at the actin filament, and the modulation of force with Ca2+ is simply the result of change in the number of active bridges (Podolsky and Teichholz, 1970; Gulati and Podolsky, 1978). Furthermore, since the particular value of the intrinsic speed of shortening is determined by a rate-limiting step in the cross-bridge turnover cycle, and is also correlated with the Vmax of ATPase by actomyosin (Barány, 1967), the present results indicate that the rate-limiting steps for both shortening and ATPase in the fiber are relatively unaffected by Ca2+.2

There are also studies of actomyosin in solution, which suggests that Ca2+ has direct influence on a specific kinetic step (different from the rate-limiting step for Vmax) in the turnover cycle for ATPase. In these studies, at low ionic strength (Chalovich and Eisenberg, 1982), the regulatory proteins troponin-tropomyosin had little effect on the binding of actin and myosin (S-1) but, in the absence of Ca2+, they still inhibited the rate of ATP hydrolysis by acto-S-1 (possibly by slowing the P, release step). If this kinetic evidence is accepted for the range of physiological ionic strengths (150–200 mM) in the fiber, and because the cross-

2 The exact molecular rate-limiting steps for the cross-bridge cycle are not yet determined. Some of the current possibilities included in a recent model of Eisenberg and Greene (see Eisenberg and Hill, 1985) were that the rate-limiting step for the ATPase cycle is an isomerization step (A·M·ADP·P; I → II), and the motion is associated with a step after the P, release.
bridge number is graded with partial activation (Yu et al., 1979; Brenner and Yu, 1983), a dual mechanism may be proposed for the regulation by Ca^{2+}. According to this, the Ca^{2+} effect on the above kinetic step in the fiber should also be essentially on-off, on top of steric blocking and unblocking by the structural shift in the tropomyosin position.

Since fewer cross-bridges are attached in the partially activated muscle, and since the turnover kinetics of the attached bridges are still the same, the results provide additional evidence that cross-bridges are independent force-generators in vivo (Gordon et al., 1966; A. F. Huxley, 1980).

**Internal Load**

In Fig. 8, there is a small but significant downward trend in speed at the lower activation levels, and a number of explanations may be considered for this effect.

One rests on the associated increase of the mean $\Delta L_0$ intercept (an indicator in part of the overall fiber compliance) in the composite $\Delta L - \Delta t$ plot of partial activations (Fig. 7). We question this explanation because, in a previous study of compressed fibers (with 100 mM sucrose), a twofold decrease in speed was accompanied by a 20% decrease in $\Delta L_0$ (see Fig. 5 in Gulati and Babu, 1984a).

Another possible explanation for the downward trend in speed is that it is a direct effect of Ca^{2+} ion. One way to imagine this is to consider that the Ca^{2+} effect on the kinetic rate-limiting step is slightly graded. This would complicate the interpretation of the steric blocking mechanism, but, even so, it is not a major effect.

The most straightforward explanation rests on the idea of an internal load within the fiber. An estimate for the internal load is derived in Fig. 10. The upper shaded area represents the range of observed speeds at the various activation levels (obtained from ±1 SE of the solid regression line in Fig. 8). The dashed lines in Fig. 10 were calculated from Eq. 2. An internal load as small as 1–2% $P_0$ adequately explains the present results.

It is interesting that a frictional force of similar size had been measured in unstimulated whole muscle (D. K. Hill, 1968) and isolated fibers (Ford et al., 1977; Haugen and Sten-Knudsen, 1981; Gulati and Babu, 1984c) from their characteristic force response to stretching over a wide range of speeds. It was suggested that this resting force is the result of unusual cross-bridges in the unstimulated fiber (D. K. Hill, 1968), but the evidence is conflicting over whether these bridges are also present in the stimulated fiber. For instance, Ford et al. (1977) used this property to make corrections in their force transients, but the results were uneven for stretching and shortening and this was taken to suggest that the factors underlying the characteristic resting tension may be altered during contraction. On the other hand, radially compressed fibers (with the addition of impermeant solutes NaCl or sucrose to the bathing medium) were found to have both a much slower shortening speed and a greatly increased, and nearly matching, frictional force (Gulati and Babu, 1984a, c). This suggested that the bulk of the resistive component arising from the resting bridges persisted during active shortening. Clearly, more work would be useful in examining this point.
The elaborate cytoskeletal matrix may also be a factor for the internal load, in analogy with the proposal for passive tension (Wang and Ramirez-Mitchell, 1983; Maruyama et al., 1984). However, parts of the matrix should be collapsed in radially compressed fibers, where the internal load was increased (Gulati and Babu, 1984a), and any contribution of the cytoskeletal structures must therefore be small.

The explanation according to internal load (independent of its origin) for the drop in contraction speed at low activation levels is consistent with the main conclusion of this study that Ca\textsuperscript{2+} ions do not grade the cross-bridge properties but rather affect them in all-or-none manner.
Effect of Caffeine on the Contractile System of Intact Fiber

The force level in tetanic stimulation is slightly greater than the maximal force with temperature step (Table II). The speed is also lower with temperature step, but this follows the trend with partial activations (Fig. 8). A number of possibilities were considered for the force effect. One, that insufficient calcium was released from the sarcoplasmic reticulum, is not supported by the preliminary measurement with aequorin (Kurihara et al., 1984). Increasing the extracellular caffeine to a supramaximal level enhanced the light signal (produced by $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ binding to aequorin), but this caused no additional force. Also, the lower maximal force with temperature step is not the result of direct inhibition by caffeine of force generation by the cycling cross-bridges (Table IV). An indirect action by the altered intracellular constituents (cAMP, cGMP, etc.) is still possible if, for instance, a fraction (~24%) of the cross-bridge population is selectively blocked. This can be examined separately by studying the effects of the above constituents on skinned fibers.

$\text{Ca}^{2+}$ Effect in Skinned Fibers at 10°C

The present study, by comparing the results of repeated contraction cycles at 0 and 10°C near physiological ionic strength, also helps resolve the controversy regarding $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ effects in frog skinned fibers. Consistent with previous results (Table III in Gulati and Podolsky, 1981), as well as with the present intact fiber results (Fig. 8), $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ has practically no effect on the unloaded shortening speed at 0°C (Fig. 9). We show that at 10°C (in solution 7), there is also no intrinsic $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ effect on slack duration (in Fig. 9, the speed in the first cycle is same in partial and full activations), although here (10°C) the effect of $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ was modified progressively over the course of the experiment, which indicates that the fiber properties were being permanently altered (see also Thames et al., 1974). By the fifth contraction cycle, the $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ effect in our study was similar to that found by Julian and Moss (1981). Interestingly, Fig. 10 shows that the assumption of an increased internal load (to 4–5% $P_o$) could explain their results at 10°C over most of the force range, which suggests that the decrease in speed in partially activated fibers under those conditions is an indirect effect. A number of ways can be imagined that may cause such an effect when the fiber is modified (for instance, by the loss of troponin and/or myosin light chains), but a detailed discussion on this issue is outside the scope of the present study (see Podolin and Ford, 1983).

Relation to Cardiac Muscle

The present results have relevance to the study of $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ effects in the heart muscle. The inset in Fig. 10 plots the results of Daniels et al. (1984; modified from their Fig. 6 by combining the $[\text{Ca}]_o$-force and the $[\text{Ca}]_o$-velocity plots) on rat trabeculae and includes fits of the data with Eq. 2. We assume that the internal load in the cardiac muscle is comparable to (or less than) that for intact fibers. The success of the present fits further supports the view that $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ has relatively little effect on the intrinsic mechanism of shortening, and suggests that $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ is a simple on-off switch in the intact myocardium as well.
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