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# G<sub>i</sub>- and G<sub>s</sub>-coupled GPCRs show different modes of G-protein binding

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More than two decades ago, the activation mechanism for the membrane-bound photoreceptor and prototypical G protein-coupled receptor (GPCR) rhodopsin was uncovered. Upon light-induced changes in ligand–receptor interaction, movement of specific transmembrane helices within the receptor opens a crevice at the cytoplasmic surface, allowing for coupling of heterotrimeric guanine nucleotide-binding proteins (G proteins). The general features of this activation mechanism are conserved across the GPCR superfamily. Nevertheless, GPCRs have selectivity for distinct G-protein family members, but the mechanism of selectivity remains elusive. Structures of GPCRs in complex with the stimulatory G protein, G<sub>s</sub>, and an accessory nanobody to stabilize the complex have been reported, providing information on the intermolecular interactions. However, to reveal the structural selectivity filters, it will be necessary to determine GPCR–G protein structures involving other G-protein subtypes. In addition, it is important to obtain structures in the absence of a nanobody that may influence the structure. Here, we present a model for a rhodopsin–G protein complex derived from intermolecular distance constraints between the activated receptor and the inhibitory G protein, G<sub>i</sub>, using electron paramagnetic resonance spectroscopy and spin-labeling methodologies. Molecular dynamics simulations demonstrated the overall stability of the modeled complex. In the rhodopsin–G<sub>i</sub> complex, G<sub>i</sub> engages rhodopsin in a manner distinct from previous GPCR–G<sub>s</sub> structures, providing insight into specificity determinants.

rhodopsin | GPCR | G protein | pulsed dipolar spectroscopy

Low-light vision requires photon absorption by the G protein-coupled receptor (GPCR) rhodopsin and subsequent catalytic activation of heterotrimeric G proteins (G $\alpha\beta\gamma$ ) by GDP–GTP nucleotide exchange. As the photoreceptor of rod cells, rhodopsin was the first GPCR to be functionally and structurally characterized, and serves as a model for class A GPCRs. It was discovered by Franz Boll (1), subsequently studied in the late 19th century by Wilhelm Kühne (2), and has become since then a subject of intensive research (3). In the inactive state, the inverse agonist, 11-*cis*-retinal, is linked via a protonated Schiff base to the receptor. Absorption of light isomerizes the 11-*cis*-retinal to the agonist all-*trans*-retinal, which subsequently results in conformational changes within the receptor. Salient features of the activation mechanism of rhodopsin triggered by light were revealed via site-directed spin labeling (SDSL) and EPR spectroscopy as an outward motion of transmembrane helix (TM) 6 and a smaller inward movement of TM7 at the cytoplasmic surface (4–6). The main features of this model were subsequently confirmed by crystallography (7–9). Additional details regarding the molecular mechanism of GPCR activation have since been revealed by breakthroughs in GPCR structural biology (10–12), cryoelectron microscopy (13, 14), and spectroscopic techniques (15, 16). However, despite this wealth of information, questions remain regarding the structural origin of GPCR specificity for cognate G proteins (e.g., G<sub>s</sub>, G<sub>i</sub>, G<sub>12/13</sub>, G<sub>q</sub>). For example, are all complexes between G proteins and GPCRs homologous at the level of the backbone fold,

differing only by specific side-chain interactions, or is there a specificity code in the receptor involving the allowed magnitude of displacement of particular helices? Of considerable interest are GPCRs which couple to multiple G-protein subtypes and can sample diverse conformational landscapes.

In the present study, SDSL and double electron–electron resonance (DEER) spectroscopy (17) are employed to map distances between pairs of nitroxide spin labels, one in activated rhodopsin and the other in the Ras-like domain of the inhibitory G protein, G<sub>i</sub>. The data provide structural constraints for modeling the nucleotide-free rhodopsin–G<sub>i</sub> complex in a native-like lipid environment, free from the confines of a rigid crystalline lattice and in the absence of accessory proteins used in crystallization. In the photoreceptor cell, rhodopsin couples to transducin, G<sub>t</sub>, which belongs to the G<sub>i</sub> subfamily. We use the close homology between G<sub>t</sub> and G<sub>i</sub> to gain insight into coupling of G<sub>i</sub>-selective GPCRs.

## Results

G<sub>i</sub> binding to rhodopsin in lipid nanodiscs was recently shown by SDSL DEER studies to select a TM6 conformation which is similar to active metarhodopsin II crystal structures but is apparently dynamic in nature (18, 19). Hence, G<sub>t</sub> does not induce a new conformation in rhodopsin with respect to these helices but selects a

## Significance

Activation of G protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs) initiates conformational shifts that trigger interaction with a specific G-protein subtype from a structurally homologous set. A major unsolved problem is the mechanism by which this selectivity is achieved. Structures of GPCR–G protein complexes so far fail to reveal the origin of selectivity because they all involve one G-protein subtype (G<sub>s</sub>). In this work, we report a structural model of the activated GPCR rhodopsin in complex with another G-protein subtype (G<sub>i</sub>) derived from intermolecular distance mapping with DEER-EPR and refinement with modeling. Comparison of the model with structures of complexes involving G<sub>s</sub> reveals distinct GPCR–G protein-binding modes, the differences of which suggest key features of the structural selectivity filter.

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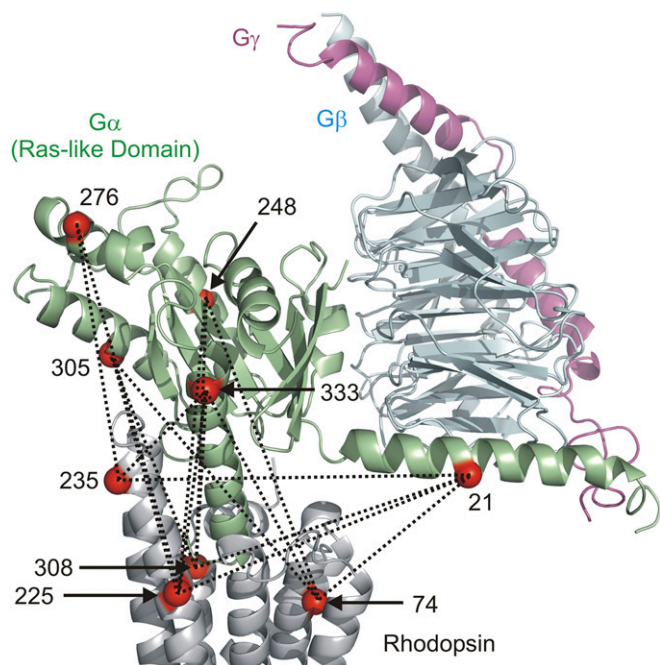
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preexisting conformational substate of the receptor. For the purpose of modeling based on sparse distance data, it is assumed that rhodopsin is in the metarhodopsin II crystallographic conformation.

**Selection of Sites for Distance Mapping.** Fig. 1 shows sites on the Ras-like domain of the G protein and on rhodopsin that were mutated to single cysteines to introduce the nitroxide side chain designated R1 (20) for DEER distance measurements between the molecules in the complex. Dotted lines in the figure indicate intermolecular distances that were measured between spin pairs within the complex. Rhodopsin sites (residues 74, 308, 225, and 235) were selected based upon previous continuous-wave (CW) EPR studies (5, 21). The helical domain of the  $G\alpha_i$ -subunit (residues 60 to 182), which acts as a lid covering the GDP-binding pocket, was omitted from Fig. 1 for clarity; no intermolecular distances involving the helical domain were collected in this study. However, previous EPR studies showed that there is disorder in the position of the helical domain with respect to the Ras-like domain in the complex (22, 23).

Sites for introduction of R1 in the Ras-like domain of  $G\alpha_i$  were a subset of those from previous CW EPR studies (22–25), and include residue 21 in the  $G\alpha$  N-terminal helix that contacts the  $G\beta$ -subunit and residue 333 in the C-terminal  $\alpha 5$ -helix, a key interaction element with the receptor (24). Sites 248, 276, and 305 were selected to sample other helical segments in the Ras-like domain. In each case, most residues in rhodopsin and  $G\alpha_i$  were located on the outer, solvent-exposed surfaces of the helices, where structural perturbation due to R1 is minimal. CW EPR spectra of all labeled mutants are shown in Fig. S1. The purity of the  $G\alpha_i$  mutants used to form the complexes was typically >95% as judged by SDS/PAGE (Fig. S2).

For the DEER measurements, spin-labeled rhodopsin mutants incorporated into lipid nanodiscs [70% 1-palmitoyl-2-oleoyl-*sn*-glycero-3-phosphocholine (POPC), 30% 1-palmitoyl-2-oleoyl-*sn*-glycero-3-phospho-L-serine] were mixed with spin-labeled  $G\alpha_i$  mutants in the presence of  $G\beta\gamma$ -subunits (1:1:1 molar ratio of rhodopsin: $G\alpha$ : $G\beta\gamma$ ) and light-activated to initiate complex formation.



**Fig. 1.** Rhodopsin- $G_i$  ( $G\alpha_i G\beta_1 \gamma_1$ ) complex showing spin-labeling sites within  $G_i$  and rhodopsin. Dotted lines indicate the pairwise distances measured. The helical domain of  $G\alpha_i$  is omitted for clarity. The gray ribbon is the rhodopsin backbone, while the green, cyan, and magenta ribbons identify the Ras-like domain,  $G\beta$ -subunit, and  $G\gamma$ -subunit, respectively.

Fig. 2A shows the background-corrected dipolar evolution functions (DEFs) (26) from the four-pulse DEER experiment for the 16 spin-labeled rhodopsin- $G_i$  pairs measured. For a random distribution of spins, the background-corrected DEF is a featureless horizontal line (Fig. S3); only when discrete spin pairs are present is the oscillatory behavior of the DEF seen in Fig. 2A obtained. Thus, the appearance of the nonzero DEF signal confirms complex formation. The distance distributions directly derived from the DEFs are shown in Fig. 2B.

**Modeling of the Rhodopsin- $G_i$  Complex.** Fig. 2 reveals that the distance distributions are multimodal and the complete distribution can span more than 20 Å in width, outside the range for the known rotamers of R1 (27). In simple proteins whose function does not involve changes in global backbone topology (such as hemoglobin), the distance distributions between R1 pairs in stable helices are much narrower, on the order of 5 Å or less (28). Thus, the widths likely reflect structural heterogeneity of the complex, and hence flexibility under physiological conditions. The molecular origin of the heterogeneity and flexibility is of great interest and will be the subject of future studies, but for the purposes of modeling the most significant complex structure the most probable distances of the distributions were used as initial global constraints. The first step of modeling assumed that the activated G protein and activated rhodopsin could be approximated as rigid bodies (at the level of the backbone fold) upon which relative rotation and translation operations could be performed to minimize differences between the most probable measured and model distances.

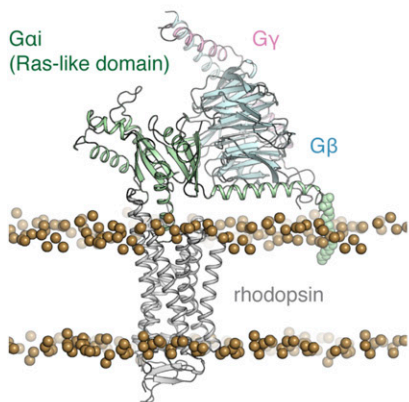
For modeling, the Ras-like domain of  $G_s$  in the  $\beta_2$ -adrenergic receptor- $G_s$  complex [ $\beta_2$ AR- $G_s$  complex; Protein Data Bank (PDB) ID code 3SN6 (12)] was used as an initial template for the  $G\alpha_i$  backbone fold. The backbone folds of the nucleotide domains of  $G\alpha_i$  and  $G\alpha_s$  are essentially identical in crystal structures, with the main difference being an extended loop in  $G\alpha_s$  preceding the  $\alpha 4$ -helix. The Ras-like domain of  $G\alpha_i$  [PDB ID code 1GP2 (residues 5 to 59 and 183 to 326) (29)] was overlaid on that of  $G\alpha_s$  in the complex with  $\beta_2$ AR. The last six amino acids in the C-terminal  $\alpha 5$ -helix of  $G\alpha_i$  are not resolved in the 1GP2 structure (29). Therefore, the  $\alpha 5$ -helix from a different  $G\alpha_i$  structure [PDB ID code 1AGR (residues 330 to 354) (30)] was overlaid with the corresponding helix of  $G\alpha_s$  in the  $\beta_2$ AR- $G_s$  complex. This construct was the initial template for  $G\alpha_i$ . Finally,  $G\beta\gamma$ -subunits were taken to have the same orientation relative to the Ras-like  $G\alpha$ -domain as in the heterotrimeric G-protein crystal structures [i.e., PDB ID code 1GP2 (29)], although no experimental distances were measured to confirm this orientation. The metarhodopsin II crystal structure [PDB ID code 3PXO (19)] was used as a template for the activated receptor backbone fold. These templates with modeled nitroxide R1 side chains were then docked to minimize the differences between the measured (most probable) and modeled internitroxide distances. The modeling process at this point was entirely “data-driven,” with no manual alignment steps. Details of the modeling are provided in *Materials and Methods*. The interspin distances in the final model and the most probable experimental values are in excellent agreement, as shown in Fig. 2B as vertical dashed lines in the distance distributions.

The DEER model was further refined as described in *Materials and Methods* and *SI Materials and Methods*. In particular, missing residues were added and hydrogen atoms included to fully model the hydrogen-bonding network, and known post-translational modifications were added. The protein was placed in a bilayer using the OPM database [Orientations of Proteins in Membranes (31)]. In the complex, the N-terminal helix of the Ras-like domain lies along the surface of the polar head groups of the lipids, as expected, with the residue C3 palmitoylation acting as an anchor on the membrane surface (32). Energy minimization steps were carried out to reduce clashes at the  $\alpha 5$ -helix-rhodopsin interface. The final refined DEER model is shown in Fig. 3A (see *Materials and Methods* and *SI Materials and Methods* for details). The interspin distances in the refined model were essentially unchanged from the DEER model (Fig. 3B, *Left* and Fig. S4). In addition to the DEER distance constraints, earlier CW EPR





### A Refined DEER model



### B Fluctuations in Gα ras-like domains in simulations of GPCR-G protein complexes



**Fig. 3.** Structural models of receptor–G protein complexes. (A) Rendering of the refined rhodopsin–G<sub>i</sub> complex embedded in the lipid bilayer based on DEER distance mapping. Lipid bilayer head group phosphates are shown as gold spheres. The refined model has posttranslational modifications on both rhodopsin and G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub>. (B) Overlaid snapshots from simulations of rhodopsin–G<sub>i</sub> (simulation 3 of this paper) and β<sub>2</sub>AR–G<sub>s</sub> (simulation 24, table S1 of ref. 34) complexes. In both cases, snapshots are shown every 54 ns of simulation between 0 and 500 ns, after removing frames within the first 100 ns to account for relaxation of the complex. Simulation snapshots were aligned on TM1 to TM4 of the receptor. As receptor conformation remained fairly constant across all simulations, we display multiple snapshots of only the G<sub>α</sub> Ras-like domain. The overall orientation of the G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub>-subunit, including the α5-helix, remains fairly constant in MD simulations. Some fluctuations are observed in terms of the tightness of packing at the rhodopsin–G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub> interface and in terms of the position of the N-terminal helix of G<sub>α</sub>. The starting DEER model is outlined in darker lines (B, Left).

(Fig. 5A). Residues in this loop are in proximity to the TM3–TM4 loop of GPCRs. Local interactions in this region may yield additional contributions to selectivity. Indeed, V217 in the β<sub>2</sub>–β<sub>3</sub> loop of G<sub>s</sub> (analogous to L194 in G<sub>i</sub>) makes contact with the TM3–TM4 loop of the receptor (residue F139) in the β<sub>2</sub>AR–G<sub>s</sub> structure (12). Mutation of F139 to alanine disrupted receptor–G protein coupling (40).

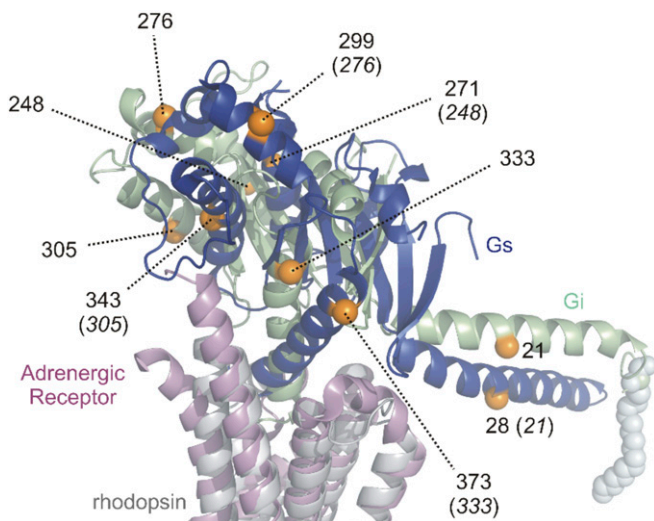
**Conserved Residues Across G-Protein Subtypes.** Fig. 5B shows a subset of residues in G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub> which are conserved across G-protein subtypes (35). Site F336 has been shown to increase basal nucleotide exchange rates upon mutation to alanine (41) by creating a cavity between the Ras-like domain body and the C-terminal helix of G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub>. This residue is displaced upon G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub> binding to rhodopsin with corresponding α5-helix movements. A translation and rotation of the α5-helix in the nucleotide-free model is compatible with a similar motion reported earlier (24). The F336 site comes into contact with another conserved phenylalanine (F196) of G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub> in the refined model. The F196 sequence region of the β<sub>3</sub>-sheet of G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub> is just upstream of the well-known “switch II” helix, and perturbations in the β<sub>3</sub>-sheet may propagate to this helix. Indeed, switch II conformational rearrangements have been detected in G proteins upon receptor binding (33). Some additional conserved residues shown in Fig. 5B include two leucines (L348 and L353), which in the refined model pack against the interior surface of TM6 in rhodopsin but do not influence selectivity.

In conclusion, the structural model presented reveals an alternative docking mode of heterotrimeric G proteins bound to GPCRs. We believe that the specificity of GPCR interactions is related to the binding orientation of the Ras-like domain on the cell-surface receptors and the corresponding differences in the C-terminal helix insertion angle. Comparing the rhodopsin–G<sub>i</sub> and β<sub>2</sub>AR–G<sub>s</sub> complexes shows that the bulkiness of the receptor-interacting part of the G<sub>α</sub> α5-helix also determines the degree of TM6 movement needed for coupling, which is in agreement with earlier MD simulations on β<sub>2</sub>AR with C-terminal peptides derived from G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub> and G<sub>α<sub>s</sub></sub> (42). In regard to the proposed specificity barcodes for heterotrimeric G proteins (35), it appears that residues within the β<sub>6</sub>-sheet of the Ras-like domain of G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub> contribute to the contact interface with the TM5–TM6 loop of rhodopsin [as evidenced by the data-driven model and earlier CW EPR studies (24)]. Hence, it is clear that this region of G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub> is also crucial for receptor engagement. This is

consistent with peptide competition studies which showed transducin peptides covering this sequence region competed against the heterotrimeric G protein for rhodopsin engagement (43). MD simulations of the rhodopsin–G<sub>i</sub> complex together with DEER distance measurements are beginning to uncover dynamic elements of the nucleotide-free GPCR–G protein complex that are crucial for guanine nucleotide exchange.

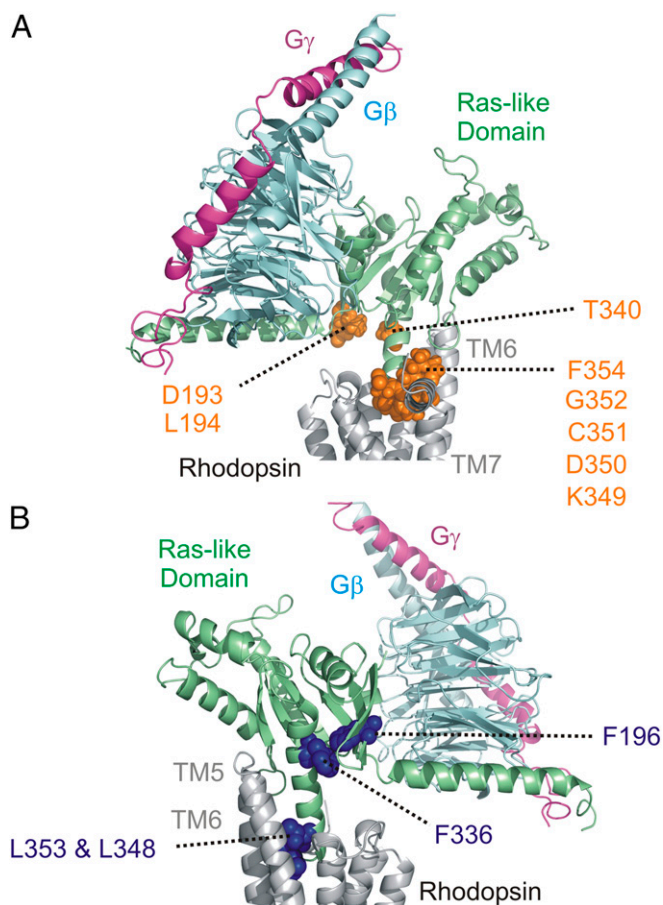
### Materials and Methods

**Protein Expression and Spin Labeling of Rhodopsin Mutants.** Expression, purification, and spin labeling of bovine rhodopsin mutants were performed as previously described (18, 44). For the present study, single rhodopsin cysteine mutants Y74C, Q225C, A235C, and M308C in a C140S/C316S base mutant were produced in stable HEK293S GnT1<sup>−</sup> cell cultures.



**Fig. 4.** Comparison of the Ras-like domain orientation in the different ternary complex structures of rhodopsin–G<sub>i</sub> and β<sub>2</sub>AR–G<sub>s</sub> (PDB ID code 3SN6). Sites in the Ras-like domain of G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub> used for distance mapping are shown as orange spheres of the C<sub>α</sub> atoms. Corresponding residues in G<sub>α<sub>s</sub></sub> (orange) are indicated with G<sub>α<sub>i</sub></sub> numbering in parentheses to guide the eye in assessing the magnitude of structural differences.





**Fig. 5.** Conserved G-protein residues and selectivity determinants. **(A)** Residues across G-protein subtypes that are involved in G-protein selectivity. Side chains are colored orange on the rhodopsin- $G_i$  complex model. The residue numbers for  $G_{\alpha_i}$  are indicated. **(B)** Conserved residues across G-protein subtypes involved in stabilizing the receptor-bound state. Side chains are indicated in dark blue on the rhodopsin- $G_i$  complex model.

All buffers used for purification were filtered and degassed. Rhodopsin cysteine mutants were immobilized on a 1D4 resin and spin-labeled with 100  $\mu\text{M}$  5-(1-oxy-2,2,5,5-tetramethylpyrrolidine-3-methyl)-methanethiosulfonate (Toronto Research Chemicals) for 2.5 h at room temperature. The excess of spin label was removed by successive washes (18, 44). The spin-labeled mutants were eluted from a 1D4 antibody resin in a buffer containing 90 mM octylglucoside at 4  $^{\circ}\text{C}$  (for incorporation into nanodiscs) using a peptide with sequence identity to the last 18 amino acids of rhodopsin's C terminus. Each spin-labeled rhodopsin mutant showed wild-type UV-visible absorption characteristics consistent with previous reports (5, 18, 21).

**Purification of the MSP1E3D1 Scaffold Protein and Reconstitution of Rhodopsin Nanodiscs.** The MSP1E3D1 scaffold protein was expressed in *Escherichia coli* and purified as described (18). Nanodiscs containing mutant rhodopsin were made using published protocols (45). The phospholipid composition of the prepared nanodiscs was 70% 1-palmitoyl-2-oleoyl-*sn*-glycero-3-phosphocholine and 30% 1-palmitoyl-2-oleoyl-*sn*-glycero-3-phospho-L-serine.

**G-Protein Expression, Purification, and Spin Labeling.** A rat  $G_{\alpha_{i1}}$  construct with six cysteines replaced [C35-C66A-C214S-C305S-C325A-C351I (25)] was cloned into a modified pET15b vector, generously provided by David Eisenberg, University of California, Los Angeles, which produced a fusion construct coding for an N-terminal hexahistidine tag, maltose-binding protein (MBP), and tobacco etch virus (TEV) protease-specific cleavage site merged to  $G_{\alpha_i}$  (with its start methionine). Expression of the protein in *E. coli* BL21Gold(DE3) cells was performed as previously described (22). The purity of the cleaved  $G_{\alpha_i}$  mutants was >95% as judged by SDS/PAGE. Purified  $G_{\alpha_i}$  mutants were spin-labeled by mixing equimolar amounts of protein with 5-(1-oxy-2,2,5,5-

tetramethylpyrrolidine-3-methyl)-methanethiosulfonate for 10 min followed by extensive washes in Amicon filters to remove noncovalently attached label.  $G_{\beta\gamma}$  ( $\beta_{1\gamma_1}$ -isoform) was purified from bovine retinae essentially as described (23, 46). The functionality of each  $G_{\alpha_i}$  cysteine mutant was assessed by aluminum fluoride activity tests as previously described (25). The excitation and emission wavelengths of tryptophan fluorescence assays were 290 and 340 nm, respectively.

#### Double Electron-Electron Resonance and Continuous-Wave EPR Spectroscopy.

For DEER measurements, spin-labeled rhodopsin in nanodiscs (90  $\mu\text{M}$ ) was mixed with an equivalent concentration (90  $\mu\text{M}$ ) of reconstituted G-protein heterotrimer (i.e.,  $G_{\alpha\beta\gamma}$ ). The G-protein heterotrimer was reconstituted by mixing spin-labeled  $G_{\alpha_i}$  with  $G_{\beta\gamma}$  in a 1:1 molar ratio. DEER experiments were performed in 20 mM Mops, 100 mM NaCl, 2 mM  $\text{MgCl}_2$ , 20  $\mu\text{M}$  GDP, and 20% deuterated glycerol. Samples were illuminated within quartz capillaries (1.5 mm i.d. and 1.8 mm o.d.) before freezing using a >515-nm long-pass filter and loaded into an EN 5107D2 resonator (Bruker). Q-band measurements were performed at 80 K on a Bruker Elexsys 580 spectrometer with a Super Q-FTu bridge. A 32-ns  $\pi$ -pump pulse was applied to the low-field peak of the nitroxide field-swept spectrum, and the observer  $\pi/2$  (16 ns) and  $\pi$  (32 ns) -pulses were positioned 50 MHz (17.8 G) upfield, which corresponds to the nitroxide center line. Distance distributions were obtained from the raw dipolar evolution data using the program LongDistances (developed in-house using National Instruments LabVIEW). It can be downloaded from [www.biochemistry.ucla.edu/Faculty/Hubbell/](http://www.biochemistry.ucla.edu/Faculty/Hubbell/).

As a control, a few DEER experiments were collected in the dark versus light. Data collected in the dark showed only background signal and were consistent with no ternary complex formation. All samples in the light, however, showed clear dipolar oscillations consistent with rhodopsin- $G_i$  protein interactions.

#### Modeling of the Rhodopsin-G Protein Complex Using Sparse Distance Constraints.

R1 rotamers for the starting positions in each molecule corresponded to one of the three most probable as determined from crystal structures (27). For rhodopsin, the rotamers were those determined in earlier DEER distance mapping of rhodopsin (6). In those experiments, the rotamers were chosen to best match the experimental distances in dark rhodopsin, assuming that the crystal structure of the inactive molecule represented the structure in solution. For  $G_i$ , rotamer selection [from the most probable set (27)] was based on lack of steric clash in the structure and best match to experimental intramolecular distances from earlier DEER distance mapping (22, 24, 25).

Starting with the initial coordinates, two sets of constraints were simultaneously imposed for the geometry optimization of the nitroxide spin positions: All measured intermolecular nitroxide spin distances (between rhodopsin and  $G_i$ ) were assigned from the DEER results. All intramolecular nitroxide spin distances between the investigated sites (within rhodopsin or within  $G_i$ ) were assigned from the existing starting positions of the modeled R1 side chains. The intramolecular distances ensured approximate rigid-body movements of the two molecules, while still allowing some local flexibility when trying to accommodate the intramolecular distance constraints from DEER.

The DEER data only reflect pairwise distances and not absolute locations, so the molecular coordinates of the proteins need to be realigned with the optimized geometry. This was done in two steps. First, the optimized geometry (of all nitroxide spin positions) was realigned to best match the respective starting positions on rhodopsin in terms of least squares residual distances. Second, the entire  $G_i$  was realigned to best match the best fit  $G_i$  positions, and the PDB file was rewritten with the transformed new coordinates. These steps result in two aligned PDB files (rhodopsin and  $G_i$  aligned to satisfy the distance data) that can be used as a starting point for further modeling. Note that the process was entirely data-driven to avoid any possible bias from manual alignment. The relative weighting of intra- vs. intermolecular distance constraints was varied over two orders of magnitude giving very similar results, indicating that the set of distances is consistent. There is some amount of uncertainty, because we do not exactly know the spin positions relative to the molecules, and each molecule can be moved or rotated within (narrow) limits without changing the constraints considerably. While this method is purely geometrical and does not account for molecular overlap, the resulting complex showed a near-perfect fit.

**Model Refinement and Molecular Dynamics Simulation.** Missing residues in the DEER-based model were added, including residues at the  $G_{\alpha_i}$  N terminus,  $G_{\gamma}$  C terminus, and rhodopsin C terminus, to add lipid modifications important for membrane anchoring. In total, the final system contained three palmitoylcysteines. All spin-labeled cysteines were reverted to their wild-type identities, several acidic residues known to be protonated in the active state

of rhodopsin were protonated (47), and the stabilizing disulfide between mutated residues N2C/D28C on the extracellular face of rhodopsin was introduced to stabilize the active binding pocket (48, 49). Finally, the Minimize tool in Maestro (Schrödinger) was used to optimize intermolecular contacts formed at the rhodopsin-G<sub>i</sub> interface, followed by an additional minimization performed on the entire complex.

The refined and prepared rhodopsin-G<sub>i</sub> complex was inserted into a hydrated POPC bilayer, creating a final system of 231,641 atoms. We performed three unbiased simulations of the prepared rhodopsin-G<sub>i</sub> complex with the CHARMM36 force field (with CHARMM36m protein parameters) using the AMBER 16 software suite on graphics processing units (GPUs) (50, 51). Each of

the three simulations was ~600 ns in length. See *SI Materials and Methods* for a complete description of structure refinement and simulation protocols.

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