Interplay between cohesin kinetics and polymer relaxation modulates chromatin-domain structure and dynamics

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The three-dimensional organization of chromatin into domains and compartments leads to specific scaling of contact probability and compaction with genomic distance. However, chromatin is also dynamic, with active loop extrusion playing a crucial role. While extrusion ensures a specific spatial organization, how it affects the dynamic scaling of measurable quantities is an open question. In this work, using polymer simulations with active loop extrusion, we demonstrate that the interplay between the timescales of extrusion processes and polymer relaxation can influence the 3D organization of chromatin polymer. We point out this as a factor contributing to the experimentally observed non-trivial scaling of relaxation time with genomic separation and mean-square displacement with time. We show that the dynamic scaling exponents with loop extrusion are consistent with the experimental observations and can be very different from those predicted by existing fractal-globule models for chromatin.

I. INTRODUCTION

DNA in eukaryotic cells is packaged inside the nucleus with the help of various proteins to form chromatin [1, 2]. In the first level of packaging, DNA is wrapped around histone octamers, forming a chain of nucleosomes [2–4]. In the length-scale of genes, this chain gets further condensed into a hierarchical but dynamic structure having several loops and closely interacting topologically associating domains (TADs) [2, 5–8]. As revealed by recent experiments, chromatin organization plays a crucial role in regulating gene expression by modulating enhancer-promoter interactions [9–12]. This structural organization is thought to be a mechanism to bring multiple genes in spatial proximity (within TAD) while restricting other genes from mixing by compartmentalizing them into different TADs across TAD boundaries of varying strengths [12, 13].

The hierarchical assembly of chromatin results in interesting polymer organization and polymer properties [14]. It was proposed that the chromatin polymer can be approximated as a fractal globule, as opposed to an equilibrium globule, given its locally folded web of loops and TAD structures [15–18]. In an equilibrium globule, the overall polymer has collapsed conformation, with radius of gyration of the whole polymer $R_g \sim N^{1/3}$, where N is the total number of repeat units. However, within the polymer, sub-chains of length $s < N^{2/3}$ can have extended configurations like a random-walk giving rise to $R_g(s) \sim s^{1/2}$ and the scaling of contact probability as $P(s) \sim s^{-3/2}$ [16, 17]. On the other hand, the fractal globule has a non-equilibrium fractal structure with sub-chains having a similar globule structure as the overall polymer leading to $R_g(s) \sim s^{1/3}$ and $P(s) \sim s^{-1}$ for all values of s [15–17, 19]. However, more recent studies that analyzed high-resolution data suggest that, strictly speaking, chromatin may not be a fractal globule as it shows different scaling exponents depending on the epigenetic states or different genomic size regimes and the exponents can have a distribution [20, 21].

While recent experiments have uncovered a lot about the TAD structure and other details of the static 3D organization of the chromatin polymer [2, 7, 22–25], very little is known about the dynamics of chromatin [26–30]. How this hierarchical assembly emerges and how it is maintained are questions of great current interest. The two leading hypotheses for the formation of the TAD-like structures are the active loop extrusion model and microphase separation of chromatin segments [21, 24, 31–44]. Theoretical studies have argued that the experimentally observed large chromatin loops and non-random organization are not probable by a purely thermal process and predicted an active loop extrusion process as the potential mechanism [33, 45–48]. Several studies found supporting evidence for this idea and discovered that dynamic loop formation by cohesins is crucial for chromatin organization in the interphase and CCCTC-binding factor (CTCF) plays an essential role in maintaining TAD boundaries [27, 49–57]. These findings led to the emergence of a dynamic picture where, in the interphase, structural maintenance of chromosomes (SMC) complexes like cohesins (and associated proteins) extrude a loop until they encounter a CTCF barrier. A set of different

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proteins are involved in extrusion and chromatin organization in the mitotic phase. Recent microscopy experiments observed live loop extrusion *in vitro*, supporting the active loop extrusion hypothesis [51, 53, 58]. More recent imaging studies showed the dynamic nature of loop extrusion and the role of associated proteins in live cells [59, 60].

While several studies focused on the nature of extrusion process itself [61–65], a set of computational investigations have examined the role of loop extrusion in chromatin organization [21, 33, 37, 45–47, 50, 66–69]. Many of the earlier studies modeled the loop extrusion as a rate process (purely kinetic events) without explicitly accounting for the dynamics of chromatin as a polymer chain [45, 66]. They showed that the processivity of the extruders determines the loop size, coverage, and other characteristics of folded chromatin. On the other hand, polymer studies investigated the TAD formation and role of boundaries via loop extrusion [21, 33, 37, 46, 47, 50, 68, 69]. These models were used to examine the interplay between intra-chromatin interaction and loop extrusion in the formation of folded structures [37]. In short, while the role of extrusion in interphase chromatin structure has been investigated, very little is known about the effect of extrusion on chromatin dynamics itself [60, 70].

As alluded to above, the chromatin loop extrusion has two aspects: first is the motor-like movement of cohesins, their processivity, and so on. The second aspect is the polymer nature of the chromatin itself. The chromatin polymer at the length scale of genes and TADs has a thermal relaxation time that depends on the gene/TAD size. An interplay between this polymer relaxation time and the extrusion time is likely to be crucial in determining the chromatin organization. However, there is no systematic study on how this interplay affects chromatin organization. Moreover, recent live microscopy experiments show interesting dynamic properties of chromatin (at the scale of a few genes) with non-trivial dynamical scaling exponents for relaxation time with genomic separation and mean-square displacement with time [30]. Bruckner et al. suggest that a model with a fractal globule nature and a set of dynamic rules may not explain these exponents [30]. Can a loop extrusion model explicitly incorporating the polymer nature of chromatin with its inherent thermal relaxation and binding/dissociation of cohesin explain such experimental observations?

In this paper, we present a polymer model for chromatin at the scale of a few TADs (few genes) and investigate if we can explain both the TAD organization as well as the dynamic exponents of the chromatin polymer simultaneously. Our model takes a specific gene region on chromosome 15 of mouse embryonic stem cells (mESC), having known CTCF boundary sites, as an example. First, we show that the model recapitulates contact map patterns, boundary probabilities, and 3D distances observed in experiments in the absence or presence of CTCF and cohesin. Then, we systematically explore how intra-chromatin interactions and various parameters of the loop extrusion mechanism (cohesin density, sliding rate, and binding/dissociation rate) affect the dynamical organization of chromatin. We show that, beyond the processivity of cohesins, the relative time scales of polymer relaxation and extrusion activity affect the chromatin organization. More specifically, we quantify how various parameters in the extrusion process affect the scaling exponents of relaxation time with genomic separation and single-locus and two-locus MSD with time.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We present results from our study of chromatin organization and dynamics resulting from the interplay between loop extrusion and intra-chromatin interactions, systematically examining the role of loop extrusion parameters. The model we used to simulate chromatin has the following features: chromatin is a flexible bead-spring polymer consisting of N beads, with each bead representing chromatin of size 2 kb (see Fig. 1a). The beads are interconnected by harmonic springs and interact with other non-bonded beads through intra-chromatin interactions such as attractive Lennard-Jones potential (see Methods section). We vary the attractive strength of these intra-chromatin interactions to gain insights into their impact on chromatin organization.

The major aspect of our model is that it incorporates the process of loop extrusion, which is a fundamental mechanism involved in the dynamic reconfiguration of chromatin structure. This is governed by two sets of processes: (i) kinetic process of binding, dissociation, and energy-consuming sliding of cohesin and (ii) thermal relaxation of the chromatin polymer (see Fig. 1a and Methods). We implement kinetic rate processes such as binding and dissociation of cohesin with rate $r_{\pm}$ and the sliding activity of cohesin with rate r_s using Monte Carlo methods [71]. During a binding event, cohesin binds to randomly chosen two adjacent empty beads. Two anchors of bound cohesins slide in opposite directions along the chromatin polymer to form a loop. This extrusion process continues until the cohesin dissociates from the chromatin polymer or encounters any barrier, such as a CTCF site or another cohesin (see Methods section). For simplicity, we assume that the CTCFs are permanently bound and can block the extrusion from both directions. This mechanism is visually represented in Fig. 1a. We vary parameters of the model like the intra-chromatin interactions (ϵ), the rate of extrusion (r_s), the rate of binding and dissociation of the cohesin ($r_{\pm}$), and the mean number of cohesins (N_c^0) to study their effect on the chromatin organization and dynamics. We have reported all the simulation parameters in dimensionless units. Nevertheless, these dimensionless values can be converted into real units for comparison with biological systems (see Supplementary Note A). Unless specified otherwise, we choose the chromatin polymer length and CTCF locations to model a specific region of chromatin of size 1 Mb (39.2 Mb to

40.2 Mb, chromosome 15) from mESC. We consider four CTCF sites in this region at genomic locations 39.216 Mb, 39.35 Mb, 39.84 Mb, and 40.146 Mb. This region is adopted from mouse chromosome 15, experimentally studied by Szabo et al. [72].

A. Role of loop extrusion and intra-chromatin interactions on inter-TAD and intra-TAD compaction

First, we investigate the role of loop extrusion in chromatin organization. Fig. 1b-d (top panel) compares contact maps for different cases in the presence or absence of cohesin and CTCF proteins. A contact map visually represents the frequency of pairwise interactions between chromatin segments within the polymer. It is clear from Fig. 1(b-d) and Fig. S1 that, even in the presence of a constant intra-chromatin attractive LJ interaction, the TAD-like structures appear only when both cohesin and CTCF are present. Topologically associating domains (TADs) are regions (domains) where chromatin polymer is locally folded to generate high intra-chromatin interactions among the local subunits of the polymer. The boundary of these locally folded regions is typically marked by CTCF sites. These locally folded TADs have minimal interactions with nearby TADs, resulting in contact maps as shown in Fig. 1b. We observe higher inter-TAD mixing in the absence of the CTCF (Fig. 1c). However, when cohesin is absent, the contact probability values decrease drastically, implying the presence of extended polymer configurations (Fig. 1d). The TAD structure is quantified by computing the boundary probability P_b (Fig. 1(b-d) middle panel). It is the probability of finding the boundary of a high contact domain at a given genomic location computed by analyzing individual polymer configurations in an ensemble (see Supplementary Note B). The case with CTCF and cohesin shows boundary peaks at CTCF sites, suggesting the presence of TADs. If either CTCF or cohesin is absent, the boundary probability is uniform with no peak.

We computed the mean 3D distance $\langle R(s)\rangle$ between any two beads i and j (that are either within the same TAD or two different TADs) with genomic separation $s = |i - j|$ between them, for the three different cases (Fig. 1b-d bottom panel). We present the distance between beads within a TAD and between two TADs as separate curves. We find that the order of magnitude of the 3D distance is comparable to the experimentally observed numbers by Szabo et al. [72], if we take the effective size of a 2 kb bead as 25 nm. As expected, for the same genomic distance, the 3D distance within a TAD is smaller than the 3D distance across two TADs. In the absence of the boundary element CTCF, we observe similar compaction with no difference in the 3D distance between beads that are within the same TAD or across two different TADs. On the other hand, the removal of cohesin leads to a significant increase in both within TAD and between TADs 3D distances, consistent with the observations from contact maps.

In Fig. 1e, we present the contact map of the polymer under different interaction strengths, keeping all extrusion parameters constant. We observed a consistent trend: as the attractive interaction between chromatin beads increased in strength, there was a general increase in the average number of contacts formed between any two segments. On the other hand, when non-bonded beads interact with each other through self-avoiding Weeks-Chandler-Anderson (WCA) interaction [73], there are some intra-TAD contacts and very few inter-TAD contacts. In this case, the intra-TAD contacts are primarily arising from extrusion events. The CTCF sites act as a boundary for the extrusion process and prevent inter-TAD mixing. In the case of large attractive interactions ($\epsilon = 0.4$), both intra-TAD and inter-TAD contacts increase significantly. Even though there is a 1D CTCF boundary, the collapse due to intra-chromatin interactions makes 3D inter-TAD mixing possible. This shows that, unlike the prevalent notion in the field, one-dimensional boundaries do not necessarily prevent the three-dimensional mixing of polymer segments. However, when the intra-chromatin interaction is moderate ($\epsilon \sim 0.2$), we can obtain large intra-TAD interactions and minimal inter-TAD mixing. To provide further clarity, we included representative snapshots of polymer conformations in the lower row of the figure. We distinguished various TAD regions using distinct colors in these snapshots, as indicated by the color strip atop the contact maps. Furthermore, red beads are used to represent CTCF sites, and cohesin complexes are illustrated in yellow. The polymer with self-avoiding WCA interaction has an extended conformation with loops and very little inter-TAD and intra-TAD mixing. The $\epsilon = 0.4$ configuration points to a collapsed polymer with high inter-TAD and intra-TAD mixing. The configuration shows collapse within a TAD and very few inter-TAD contacts for the intermediate interaction strength ($\epsilon = 0.2$).

For the interaction parameter $\epsilon = 0.2$, we investigated the role of cohesin density on the chromatin compaction. Results are depicted in Fig. S2 showing the contact map and corresponding representative snapshots for an increasing mean number of cohesin complexes (N_c^0). Upon close examination, it becomes evident that the overall number of contacts between chromatin segments increases with the increase in N_c^0, leading to higher compaction. However, this increase in contacts primarily occurs within individual TADs. Unlike the effect of intra-chromatin interactions seen in Fig. 1e, the effect of increasing the number of cohesins on inter-TAD interactions is minimal. This preservation of inter-TAD interactions is attributable to the cohesins' predominant role in compacting individual TADs without significantly impacting the contacts between distinct TADs.

From the polymer configurations, we computed the average radius of gyration ($\langle R_g\rangle$), which is one of the biophysical

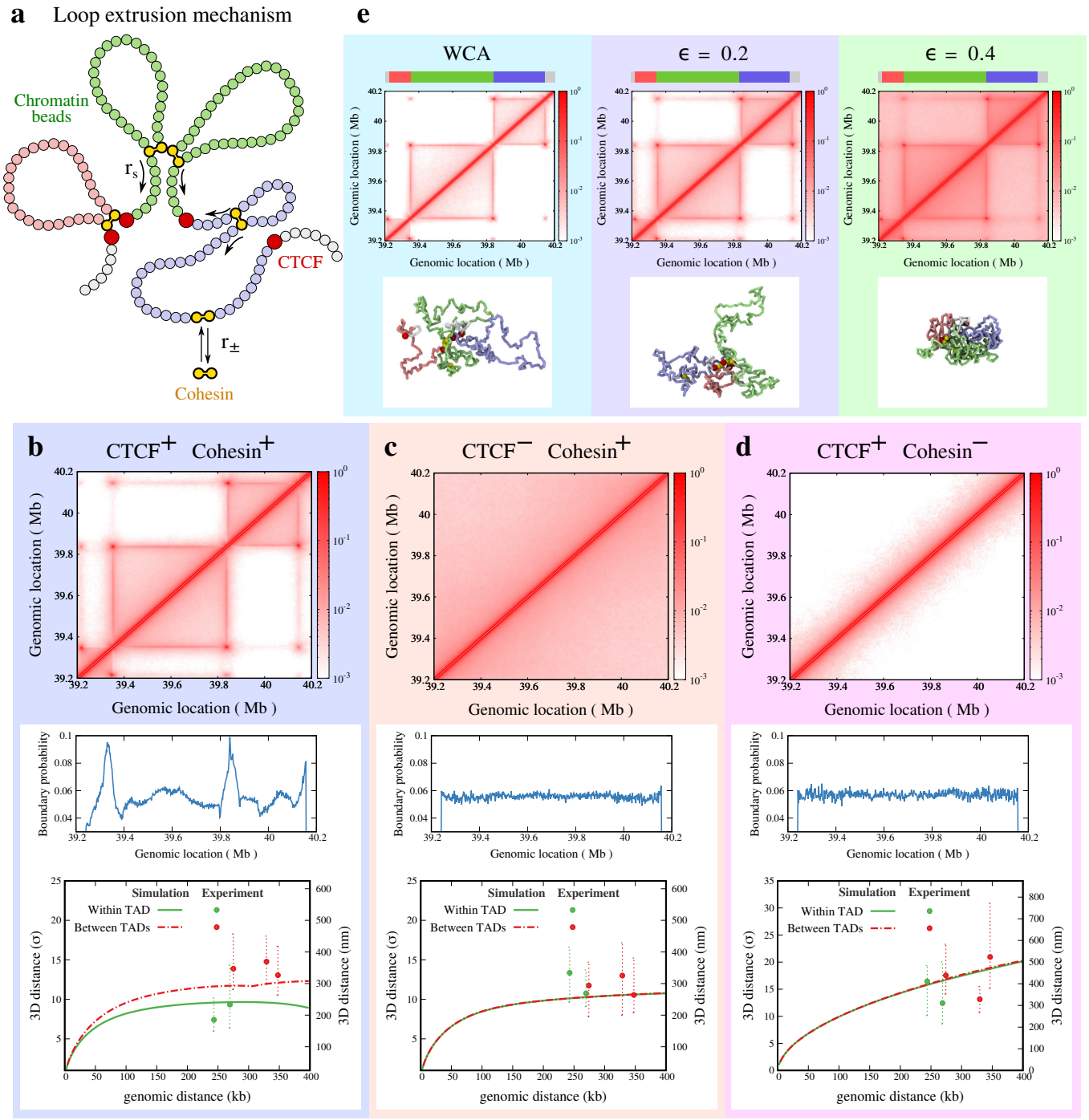

FIG. 1. Chromatin organization with loop extrusion mechanism. **a** Schematic illustrating the loop extrusion mechanism where the cohesins (yellow color) bind/dissociate the chromatin polymer with rate $r_\pm$. Two anchors of the bound cohesin slide in opposite directions with rate r_s on the chromatin polymer to form loops until they are blocked by the CTCF proteins (red beads) or another cohesin complex. **b-d** Comparison of contact map, boundary probability, and 3D distance plots for chromatin polymer with (**b**) both CTCF and cohesin extruders present, (**c**) CTCF absent but cohesin present and (**d**) CTCF present but cohesin absent (i.e., no extrusion). The 3D distance versus genomic distance plot at the bottom compares the inter-bead 3D distance from simulations with the 3D distance measurements from super-resolution microscopy experiments by Szabo et al. [72]. The parameter values used are $\epsilon = 0.3$, $N_c^0 = 5$, $r_\pm^0 = 5 \times 10^{-6}$ and $r_s^0 = 5 \times 10^{-4}$. **e** Contact maps of polymer with loop extrusion mechanism for different intra-chromatin interactions are shown in the top row. The bottom row shows representative snapshots for respective interactions. The polymer segments are colored to distinguish different TADs, as shown in the color strip on top. The remaining parameter values are fixed $N_c^0 = 5$, $r_\pm^0 = 5 \times 10^{-6}$ and $r_s^0 = 5 \times 10^{-4}$.

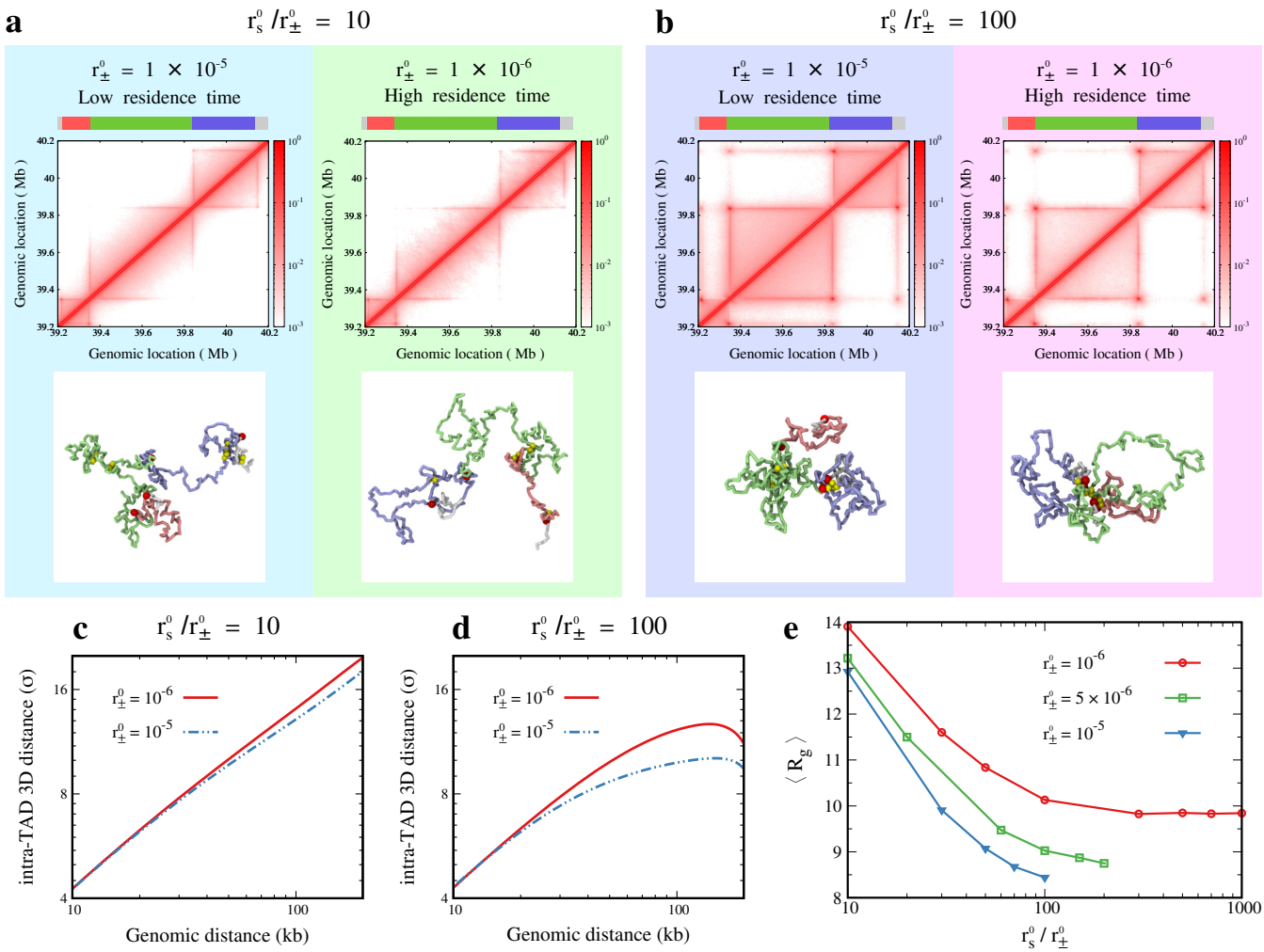

FIG. 2. The interplay between residence time and the processivity of cohesin complexes. **a,b** Contact maps for different binding/dissociation rates $r_\pm^0$ are shown for fixed processivity values (**a**) $r_s^0/r_\pm^0 = 10$ and (**b**) $r_s^0/r_\pm^0 = 100$. The corresponding representative snapshots are shown below the contact maps. The polymer segments are colored to distinguish different TADs, as shown in the color strip on top. **c, d** Average intra-TAD 3D distance versus genomic distance (s) is plotted for different values of $r_\pm^0$ for fixed processivity values (**c**) $r_s^0/r_\pm^0 = 10$ and (**d**) $r_s^0/r_\pm^0 = 100$. **e** Average radius of gyration as a function of $r_s^0/r_\pm^0$ is plotted for different values of $r_\pm^0$. All other parameter values for all plots are fixed to intermediate values: $\epsilon = 0.2$ and $N_c^0 = 5$.

quantities that can be experimentally measured. Fig. S3a shows $\langle R_g \rangle$ as a function of the average number of cohesins (N_c^0) for various intra-chromatin interactions. As expected, $\langle R_g \rangle$ exhibits a decreasing trend as the strength of attractive interactions between chromatin segments is increased. This observation suggests that stronger intra-chromatin interactions lead to a more compact polymer structure with more mixing of inter-TAD segments. Similarly, an increase in the average number of cohesin complexes also leads to the overall compaction of the polymer structure, however, to a much lesser extent(see Fig. S3a).

Additionally, we explore the boundary probability (P_b) as a function of genomic location (Fig. S3b). We observe that the strength of boundary formation at CTCF sites increases with both the strength of attractive interactions and the average number of cohesins. However, it is important to note that the increase in N_c^0 has a much stronger effect on boundary probability, making it more prominent at peak locations (CTCF sites). On the other hand, increasing attractive interactions increases the overall compaction ($\langle R_g \rangle$).

B. Beyond the processivity, cohesin residence time also determines chromatin compaction

The dynamics of cohesin plays an important role in shaping the spatial structure of the chromatin polymer. Two key parameters that influence this process are the intrinsic binding and dissociation rate of cohesin ($r_{\pm}^{0}$) and the sliding rate (r_{s}^{0}). The $r_{\pm}^{0}$ essentially controls how long a given cohesin remains attached to the chromatin polymer, i.e., residence time. During the period a cohesin complex is bound, its sliding rate (r_{s}^{0}) determines the amount of loop extruded. To quantify the efficiency of this process, we introduce the ratio of the sliding rate to the binding and dissociation rate, denoted as $r_{s}^{0}/r_{\pm}^{0}$, which serves as a measure for the processivity of the cohesin [33, 66]. Even though some studies have investigated the role of processivity [33, 47, 66], they have not systematically explored the role of thermal relaxation of the chromatin polymer during the extrusion process. From various experiments, we know that the speed of extrusion can range from 100 bp/s to 2 kb/s [51, 53, 59, 60], while the residence time can vary from 5 minutes to 20 minutes [74–76]. Moreover, recent experiments have provided estimates for the relaxation time of chromatin segments a few hundred kb in size, ranging from 3 minutes to 15 minutes [30]. Since the relaxation time of the chromatin polymer is an additional time scale in the problem, we expect that, beyond the processivity, the relative timescales of binding/dissociation (which determines the residence time), sliding, and polymer relaxation might become important. In this section, we investigate whether the processivity solely determines chromatin organization or if the interplay between the extrusion process and polymer relaxation also plays some role.

We begin by comparing the contact maps of chromatin for fixed values of processivity ($r_{s}^{0}/r_{\pm}^{0}$), varying the binding and dissociation rates ($r_{\pm}^{0}$). The range of parameter values that we explore is consistent with the experimentally observed numbers (see Supplementary Note A). In Fig. 2a, we present the contact maps for $r_{s}^{0}/r_{\pm}^{0} = 10$ along with different binding and dissociation rates corresponding to two residence times, which we refer as low and high residence times ($r_{\pm}^{0} = 10^{-5}$ and $r_{\pm}^{0} = 10^{-6}$, respectively). Notably, the contact maps exhibit minimal differences for fixed processivity values. The lack of full loop contacts in the contact maps (See Fig. 2a TAD corner locations) indicates that cohesins with low processivity do not reach the CTCF sites. Corresponding snapshots (see panel below the contact maps) of the polymer reveal extended conformations and the presence of smaller loops. Conversely, when we consider higher processivity ($r_{s}^{0}/r_{\pm}^{0} = 100$), the contact maps show strong loop contacts emerging due to the formation of complete loops that bring CTCF sites into proximity (Fig. 2b). The associated polymer snapshots (panel below) exhibit more compacted configurations compared to the polymer with lower processivity. Although the general contact map pattern remains consistent for a fixed value of processivity, we observe a slight decrease in intra-TAD contacts for $r_{s}^{0}/r_{\pm}^{0} = 100$ as the residence time increases (compare TAD interiors of both the contact maps in Fig. 2b) We quantify this by plotting the average intra-TAD 3D distance (distance between beads i and j that are within the same TAD) as a function of genomic distance ($s = |i-j|$) between them (Fig. 2c-d). For both low and high processivity values, we observe higher intra-TAD 3D distances when the residence time is higher. This difference in intra-TAD 3D distance having the same processivity but different residence time is because of the competition between the extrusion process and the polymer relaxation. For fixed processivity, when residence time is longer, the extruded polymer will have more time to relax. Conversely, when residence time is low, the cohesin extruders dissociate and bind back quickly before the polymer relaxes, leading to higher compaction (see supplementary Movie S1). To quantify this further, we calculate the average radius of gyration($\langle R_g \rangle$) of the chromatin polymer as a function of $r_{s}^{0}/r_{\pm}^{0}$ (see Fig. 2e). $\langle R_g \rangle$ is consistently higher for $r_{\pm}^{0} = 10^{-6}$ (green curve), implying that longer residence times may allow the polymer to relax more. As we decrease the residence time, we observe a reduction in $\langle R_g \rangle$ for all values of $r_{s}^{0}/r_{\pm}^{0}$. The relaxation time of the polymer segment of a few 100 kb size is of the order of 10^{6} (see the following section for details). This is comparable to the higher residence time associated with $r_{\pm}^{0} = 10^{-6}$. Therefore, in addition to the processivity of the cohesin complex, the relative value of the residence time as compared with the polymer relaxation time also contributes to the chromatin topology.

We also compute the 3D distance between two chromatin segments within the same TAD or two neighboring TADs (see a schematic description in Fig. S4a). We choose these segments for comparison with the super-resolution microscopy experiments that measure the 3D distance between the same regions [72]. A trend similar to what is seen in Fig. 2e is observed when we examine the 3D distance between the center of mass of these segments (Fig. S4b). In this case, both the 3D distances within the TAD and between TADs are consistently higher for the polymer with longer residence time of the cohesin for a given processivity (green solid and dotted curves). These 3D distances decrease as the residence time is reduced (red and blue curves). Moreover, the 3D distance between TADs is considerably higher than the 3D distance within TAD, consistent with the experimental observations [72].

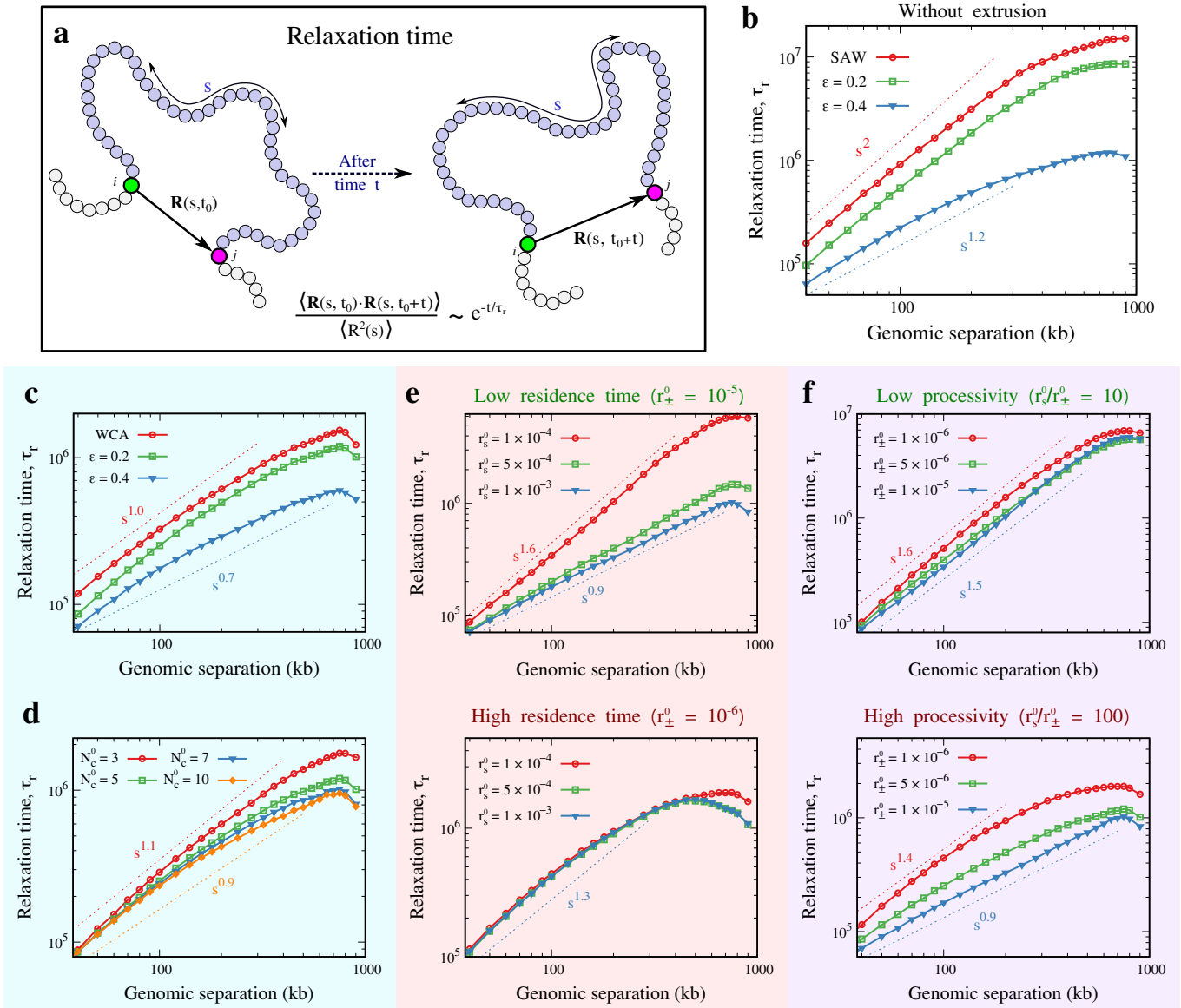

FIG. 3. **a** Schematic showing the calculation of relaxation time for a polymer segment of size s. The two-locus auto-correlation function, for any two bead pairs i and j with genomic separation s, decays exponentially with time. **b** The relaxation time for a polymer without an active loop extrusion mechanism is plotted as a function of genomic separation s for different intra-chromatin interactions. **c** The scaling of relaxation time with genomic separation for a polymer with the loop extrusion mechanism is shown for different intra-chromatin interactions. **d** The plot shows how scaling of relaxation time varies with the mean number of cohesin complexes. **e** The scaling of relaxation time with genomic separation is plotted for different sliding rates of cohesin (r_s^0) for a lower value of residence time (top) and for a higher value of residence time (bottom). **f** The Effect of residence time on the scaling of relaxation time is compared for polymers with low processivity (top) and with high processivity (bottom). In all the plots, apart from the parameters that we vary in each plot, all other parameter values are fixed to an intermediate value: $\epsilon = 0.2$, $N_c^0 = 5$, $r_s^0 = 5 \times 10^{-4}$ and $r_\pm^0 = 5 \times 10^{-6}$.

C. Loop extrusion mechanism and intra-chromatin interactions influence the relaxation time of chromatin segments

Apart from the static spatial organization, we also quantify the effect of the intra-chromatin interactions and loop extrusion mechanism on the chromatin dynamics. First, we compute average auto-correlation function of the 3D

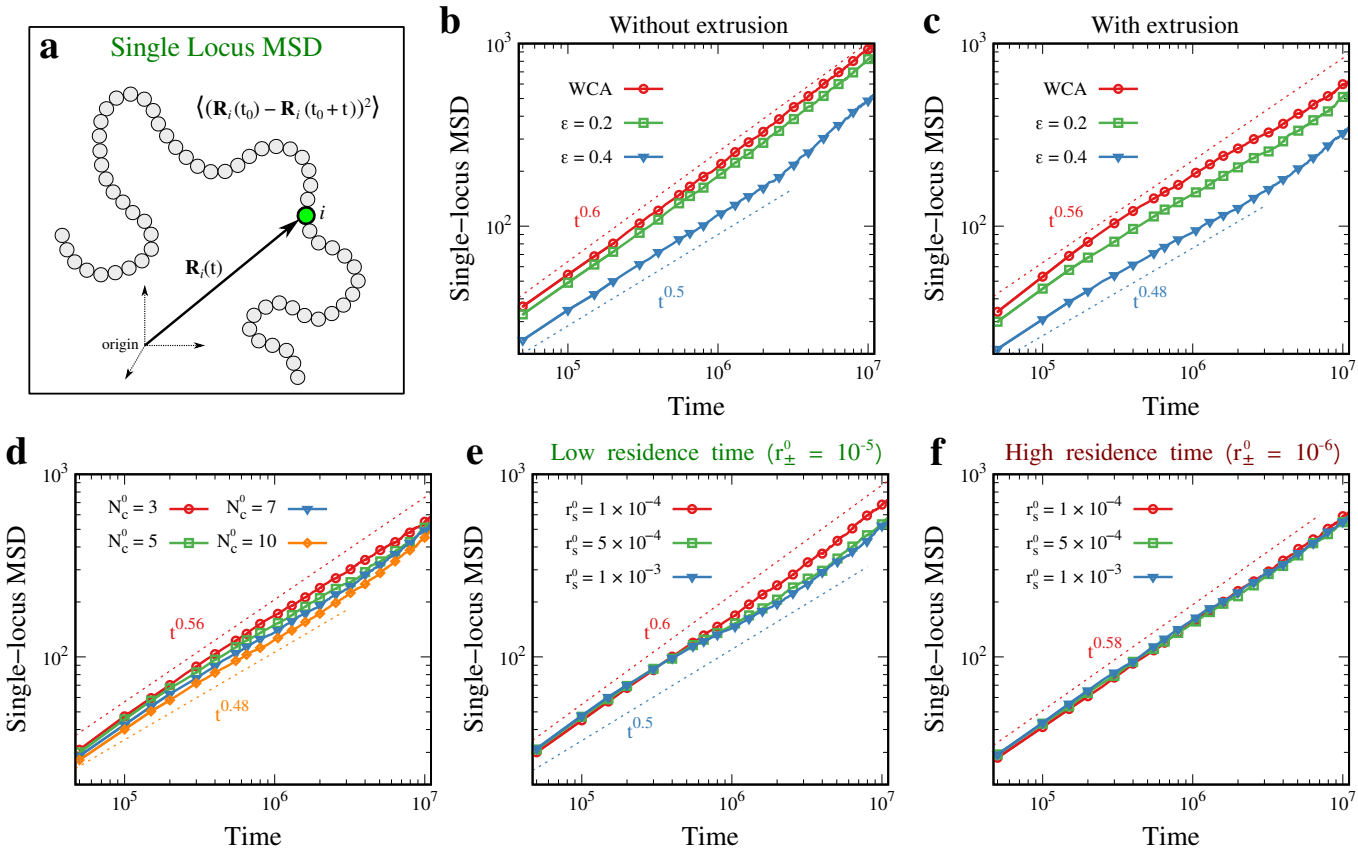

FIG. 4. **a** Schematic representing the calculation of single-locus MSD. **b-c** Single-locus MSD as a function of time for different intra-chromatin comparisons is shown for (**b**) a polymer without loop extrusion mechanism and (**c**) polymer with loop extrusion. **d** Single-locus MSD versus time is plotted for different values of average number of cohesins. **e-f** Effect of sliding rate of cohesin on single-locus MSD is shown for (**e**) low residence time and (**f**) high residence time of cohesin complexes. In all the plots, apart from the parameters that we vary in each plot, all other parameter values are fixed to an intermediate value: $\epsilon = 0.2$, $N_c^0 = 5$, $r_s^0 = 5 \times 10^{-4}$ and $r_\pm^0 = 5 \times 10^{-6}$.

distance vectors $\mathbf{R}(s,t)$ between any bead pairs i and j separated by a genomic distance $s = |i-j|\sigma$ (see Fig. 3a) as

$$C(s,t) = \frac{\langle \mathbf{R}(s,t_0) \cdot \mathbf{R}(s,t_0+t) \rangle}{\langle R^2(s) \rangle}$$

Here $\langle R^2(s) \rangle$ is the mean square distance between chromatin loci separated by genomic distance s. The relaxation time τ_r is defined as the time it takes for this correlation to decay to the value of $C(s,t=0)/e$. We perform this analysis for different values of genomic separation (s) and present the data for different parameter sets (Fig. 3).

Theories of polymer dynamics expect a power law scaling of $\tau_r \sim s^\gamma$ [77]. The Rouse dynamics predicts $\gamma = 2.2$ for a self-avoiding walk (SAW) polymer and $\gamma = 5/3$ for the fractal globule [77]. However, a recent experiment found that for chromatin $\gamma \approx 0.7$, which is far from what is predicted for the fractal globule [30]. How to explain this surprising experimental finding is an open question. In this section, we examine how active loop extrusion and intra-chromatin interactions affect the value of γ.

We computed $\tau_r(s)$ for our chromatin model with loop extrusion and intra-chromatin interactions. The results are presented in Fig. 3b-f for different parameters associated with the loop extrusion mechanism. First, we consider the control case of the chromatin polymer without any loop extrusion (Fig. 3b). When attractive intra-chromatin interactions are absent (WCA), the γ value is close to 2. With increasing strength of attractive interactions ($\epsilon \geq 0.2$), the γ decreases further. Then, we investigate the role of extrusion by studying chromatin polymer by varying the extrusion parameters. In the presence of extrusion, γ decreases from its value in the absence of extrusion for all corresponding values of ϵ (compare Fig. 3b and Fig. 3c). Note that the dependence of relaxation time (τ_r) on genomic separation (s) with extrusion and intra-chromatin interactions is close to what is experimentally observed [30].

We further systematically investigate how extrusion parameters influence γ. Fig. 3d shows the impact of varying

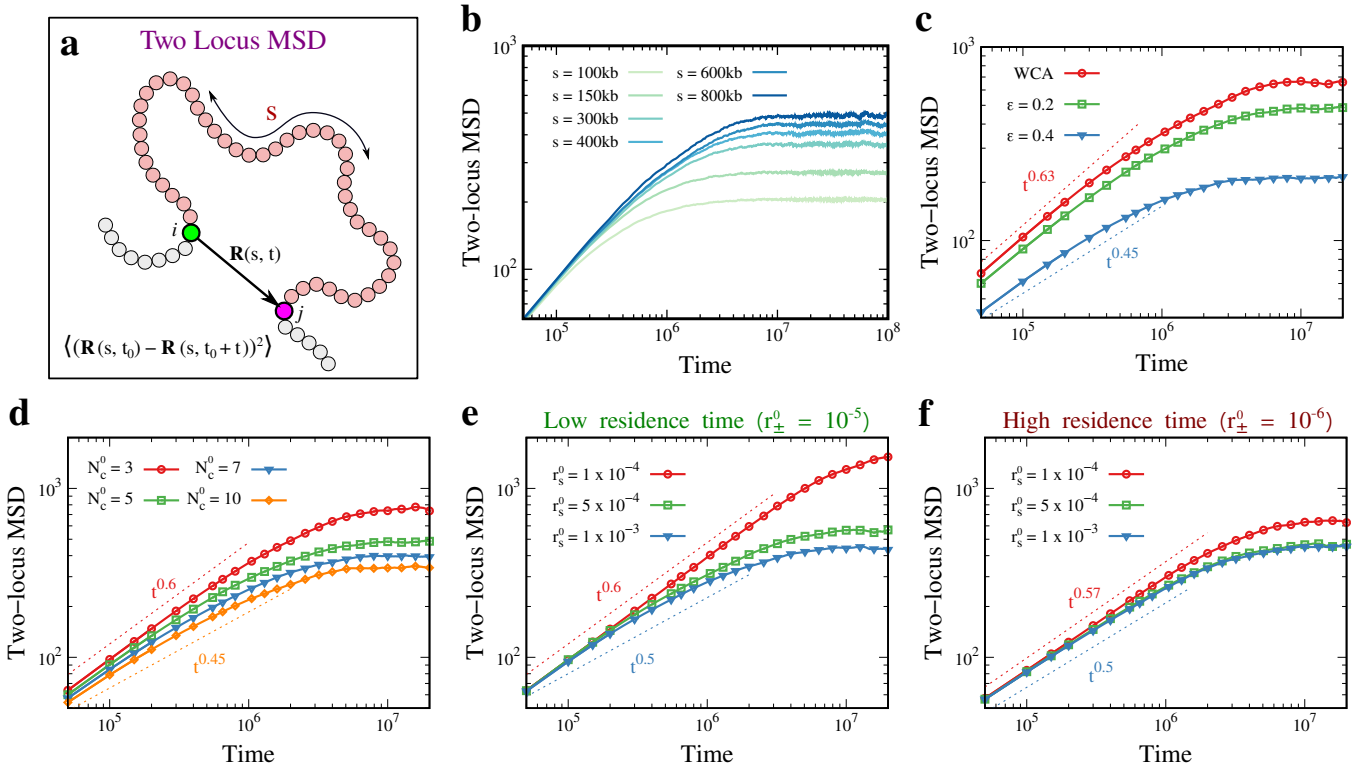

FIG. 5. **a** Schematic showing the calculation of two-locus MSD of bead pairs separated by genomic distance s. **b** Two-locus MSD as a function of time is plotted for different values of genomic separation s. The MSD values saturate to corresponding $\langle R^2(s)\rangle$ values. **c** Two-locus MSD ($s = 800$ kb) as a function of time for different intra-chromatin interactions is shown for a polymer with loop extrusion. **d** Two-locus MSD ($s = 800$ kb) versus time is plotted for different values of average number of cohesins. **e-f** Effect of residence time of cohesin on two-locus MSD ($s = 800$ kb) is shown for (**e**) polymer with low processivity and (**f**) high processivity. In all the plots, apart from the parameters that we vary in each plot, all other parameter values are fixed to an intermediate value: $\epsilon = 0.2$, $N_c^0 = 5$, $r_s^0 = 5 \times 10^{-4}$ and $r_\pm^0 = 5 \times 10^{-6}$.

the mean number of cohesins on the scaling of the relaxation time. We find that γ decreases slightly as the cohesin density increases. Next, in Fig. 3e, we explore the effects of altering the sliding rate and residence time of the cohesin on the scaling of relaxation time ($\tau_r(s)$). When residence time is shorter ($r_\pm^0 = 10^{-5}$), the increase in sliding relaxes the polymer faster (see Fig. 3e top panel). Interestingly, at this low residence time, as we increase the sliding rate r_s, the γ value decreases from that predicted by the fractal globule model ($\gamma = 5/3$) towards the experimentally observed value $\gamma = 0.7$ [30]. However, as we increase the residence time, we observe that the scaling of relaxation time appears to be independent of the sliding rate (Fig. 3e bottom panel). At such values of residence times, the cohesins would form complete loops and stay at the CTCF sites, reducing the effect of the sliding rate. Similarly, we also check the impact of processivity on the value of γ (Fig. 3f). For lower processivity, residence time has minimal effect on the exponent γ. However, for higher processivity, the effect of residence time is more pronounced with increasing residence time, leading to an increase in γ and vice versa.

Overall, we observe that the attractive intra-chromatin interactions and the extrusion activity (higher cohesin density and higher processivity) lead to faster relaxation. This activity-based effect may explain the observed scaling exponents in the experiments [30].

D. Single-locus and two-locus mean square displacement reveals anomalous diffusion in chromatin

To quantify the dynamics further we compute the mean squared displacement of any bead i as a function of time $M_1(t) = \langle(\mathbf{R}_i(t_0 + t) - \mathbf{R}_i(t_0))^2\rangle$, averaged over all beads (Fig. 4a). According to the Rouse dynamics, one expects the single-locus MSD $M_1 \sim t^\alpha$, where $\alpha = 0.5$ for ideal polymer [78]. Studies of the fractal globule polymer have suggested $\alpha \approx 0.4$ [79]. However, recent chromatin experiments found α to be varying around 0.5. In this section, we investigate how the time dependence of MSD is affected by loop extrusion and intra-chromatin interactions.

First, we check the scaling of MSD with time for polymer without loop extrusion mechanism (Fig. 4b). The polymer

with WCA potential shows a scaling of $\alpha = 0.6$ while an attractive LJ polymer with $\epsilon = 0.4$ has a scaling of $\alpha = 0.5$. The Rouse dynamics predicts the value of the exponent for a self-avoiding walk (SAW) polymer $\alpha \approx 0.55$ [77]. This shows that the attractive interactions, even without active loop extrusion, reduce the scaling exponent of MSD with time. As we introduce the active loop extrusion mechanism into the system, this scaling reduces further for all corresponding intra-chromatin interactions (Fig. 4c). In the parameter regime we simulated in this figure (for fixed extrusion parameters), α varies in the range of 0.48 to 0.56. Next, we check the effect of other extrusion parameters on the single-locus MSD. We find that the increasing average number of cohesins slightly decreases the scaling of MSD with time (Fig. 4d). However, the exponent α remains in a narrow range of 0.48 to 0.54 for the parameters used in Fig. 4d. Next, we compare the effect of sliding rates on single-locus MSD for two extreme values of the residence time of cohesin (Fig. 4e and f). As we saw in the previous section, we expect the time dependence of MSD to be affected by the residence time. For the lower value of the residence time ($r_{\pm}^{0} = 10^{-5}$), increasing the sliding rate reduces the scaling exponent α, while there is no considerable effect of the sliding rate on single-locus MSD when residence time is higher ($r_{\pm}^{0} = 10^{-6}$). This effect is similar to what we observed for relaxation time (Fig. 3e). Note that for different sets of parameter values, the exponent α varies around 0.5, which is consistent with what is observed in experiments [30, 80, 81].

Beyond the dynamics of a single locus, to understand the coupled dynamics of two chromatin loci separated by genomic distance s, we compute the two-locus MSD given by $M_2 = \langle(\mathbf{R}(s, t_0 + t) - \mathbf{R}(s, t_0))^2\rangle$. Here $\mathbf{R}(s, t)$ is the vector from any bead i to bead j separated by distance $s = |i - j|\sigma$ along the polymer contour (see Fig. 5a). At short time ($t < \tau_r$), two loci diffuse independently, while at long time scale the MSD saturates to $2\langle R^2(s)\rangle$ for given genomic separation (see Fig. 5b) [30]. At short times, we expect $M_2 \sim t^{\beta}$. The experimentally observed scaling of two-locus MSD is $\beta \approx 0.5$ [30]. We study M_2 as a function of time for different strengths of intra-chromatin interactions. Similar to single-locus MSD, the scaling exponent of two-locus MSD with time decreases with increasing attractive interactions with a decrease in the exponent from 0.63 to 0.45. (Fig. 5c). A similar decrease in scaling exponent is also found with an increasing number of cohesins; the scaling of two-locus MSD decreases from 0.6 to 0.45 as N_c^0 increases from 3 to 10 (Fig. 5d). Next, we study the effect of the sliding rate on the two-locus MSD for low and high residence time values. For lower residence time, the scaling of two-locus MSD with time decreases with increasing sliding rate, while the sliding rate has minimal effect on the scaling of two-locus MSD when residence time is higher (Fig. 5e-f).

III. CONCLUSIONS

In this work, we used a chromatin model with intra-chromatin interactions and active loop extrusion mechanism to systematically probe the effect of various model parameters on the structure and dynamics of the chromatin. Our model predictions of contact map patterns, 3D distance, and boundary probability are consistent with the experimental observations. We showed how intra-chromatin interactions and cohesin density provide two different mechanisms of chromatin compaction. We demonstrate, contrary to the current notion, that the processivity of the cohesin extruders is not enough to explain the chromatin structure [33]. Beyond the processivity, the compaction and dynamics of the chromatin domains also depend on the interplay between the residence time of cohesin and the polymer segment's relaxation time. This observation has implications beyond the TADs, as the relative timescales of extrusion activity and polymer relaxation time can affect the complex higher-order structures.

We also investigated how the extrusion activity affects the chromatin dynamics. We observed that the scaling exponent of relaxation time with genomic separation decreases with an increase in the overall extrusion activity and strength of attractive intra-chromatin interactions. The increased extrusion activity can be through higher processivity or cohesin density. However, if the residence time is long enough, such that the cohesins form the complete loop and remain there, then the increase in processivity has no effect on the relaxation time. A similar effect of the extrusion activity was observed on the scaling of single-locus and two-locus MSD with time.

One of the limitations of our work is that we do not explicitly include dynamic properties of the medium in which the polymer is embedded. Since chromatin *in vivo* is in a highly crowded environment, the hydrodynamic interactions are expected to be screened, and a study without hydrodynamics may be reasonable. However, we were able to establish how extrusion parameters contribute to the trends of increase or decrease in the scaling exponents of dynamic quantities. Our comprehensive analysis provides important insights into how various parameters of the extrusion mechanism can affect the structure and dynamics of chromatin loci.

IV. METHODS

We model chromatin as a coarse-grained bead-spring polymer consisting of N beads connected by harmonic springs. The whole polymer represents the chromatin region of size 1 Mb, with each bead of size 2 kb. At this resolution, chromatin can be regarded as a flexible polymer [14, 21]. We integrate the loop extrusion process into our 3D polymer model by introducing rate-dependent binding, dissociation, and sliding of cohesins on the chromatin polymer (Fig. 1a). These rate processes update the positions of bound cohesins, which in turn affect the 3D polymer configurations. The total energy of the polymer is given by

$$E = E_{\text{spring}} + E_{\text{intra}} + E_{\text{coh}}. \tag{1}$$

The first term E_{spring} in the above equation represents the spring energy between the neighboring beads along the polymer, the second term E_{intra} represents the non-bonded intra-chromatin interactions, and the third term E_{coh} captures the energy due to the cohesin complexes connecting monomer beads at their anchor positions during the extrusion process (see detailed implementation of loop extrusion mechanism below). The spring energy E_{spring} is given by

$$E_{\text{spring}} = \frac{k_s}{2} \sum_{i=1}^{N-1} (|\mathbf{r}_i - \mathbf{r}_{i+1}| - r_0)^2. \tag{2}$$

Here, $\mathbf{r}_i$ is the position vector of ith bead, r_0 is the equilibrium bond length, and k_s is the spring constant. For the intra-chromatin interactions (E_{intra}), we use either Lennard-Jones (LJ) potential or Weeks-Chandlers-Andesron (WCA) potential [73]. The LJ potential has a repulsive core and short-range attractive interaction, which is given by

$$E_{\text{LJ}}(r) = \begin{cases} 4\epsilon \left[\left(\frac{\sigma}{r}\right)^{12} - \left(\frac{\sigma}{r}\right)^{6} \right] & r < 2.5\sigma \\ 0 & r \geq 2.5\sigma \end{cases} \tag{3}$$

Here, σ is the diameter of the monomer bead, while the LJ energy parameter ϵ denotes the depth of the potential and controls the strength of attractive interactions. The WCA potential consists of only the repulsive part of LJ potential [73] and is given by

$$E_{\text{WCA}}(r) = \begin{cases} 4\left[\left(\frac{\sigma}{r}\right)^{12} - \left(\frac{\sigma}{r}\right)^{6} \right] + 1 & r < 2^{1/6}\sigma \\ 0 & r \geq 2^{1/6}\sigma. \end{cases} \tag{4}$$

Loop extrusion mechanism

We have modeled the loop extrusion mechanism using rate events, where cohesin can bind, dissociate, and slide along the chromatin (Fig. 1a). We also consider four CTCF sites bound at the following genomic locations: 39.216 Mb, 39.35 Mb, 39.84 Mb, and 40.146 Mb. These sites are considered permanently bound by CTCF unless specified otherwise. The bound cohesin occupies two beads on the chromatin polymer, representing the two anchor sites. When a cohesin binding event occurs, a binding site is chosen randomly so that the two adjacent beads are not occupied by either CTCF or other cohesins. Each anchor site of bound cohesins independently slides in opposite directions to form a loop. If one of the anchor sites of cohesin is blocked by a CTCF barrier or another cohesin, then that anchor site does not slide, while the opposite anchor site can keep moving. Since each cohesin occupies two beads on the chromatin polymer, the number of occupied sites by N_c number of cohesins is $2N_c$. If there are $2N_c$ number of cohesin bound sites and N_f number of free binding sites available at a given moment, then the binding and dissociation rates of cohesin are given by the following equations:

$$\begin{aligned} r_+ &= r_\pm^0 \quad \frac{1}{\eta + \exp\big(\mu[2N_c - N_f - A_0]\big)} \\ r_- &= r_\pm^0 \quad \frac{1}{1 + \exp\big(-\mu[2N_c - N_f - A_0]\big)} \end{aligned} \tag{5}$$

Here, $A_0 = 2N_c^0 - N_f^0$ is an asymmetry parameter where N_c^0 and N_f^0 are the average number of bound cohesins and average number of free sites, respectively. The value of the parameter η is chosen so as to satisfy the detailed balance at steady state. Therefore, the condition at steady state $N_f^0\ r_+ = 2N_c^0\ r_-$ gives us the value $\eta = \frac{N_f^0}{N_c^0} - 1$. The parameter μ controls the fluctuations around the steady state value, and $r_\pm^0$ is the attempt rate for the binding/dissociation process. When a binding event is chosen, cohesin binds at a randomly chosen available site occupying the adjacent beads (i and $i+1$). The cohesin complexes slide along the chromatin polymer at a rate $r_s = 2N_c r_s^0$, such that both the anchor sites move in opposite directions provided that the site is not occupied by any other cohesin or CTCF. r_s^0 is the intrinsic rate of sliding of each cohesin anchor. The two anchor sites of each cohesin are connected by a harmonic spring represented by the last term in Eq.1, which is given by

$$E_{\text{coh}} = \frac{k_s}{2} \sum_{k=1}^{N_c} (|\mathbf{r}_{\text{left}}^k - \mathbf{r}_{\text{right}}^k| - r_0)^2. \tag{6}$$

Here $\mathbf{r}_{\text{left}}^k$ and $\mathbf{r}_{\text{right}}^k$ are the position vectors of beads where the corresponding left and right anchor sites of the kth cohesin are present.

We simulate the system using the Monte-Carlo algorithm [71]. We have three types of moves: 1. change the position of a randomly selected bead, 2. perform binding and dissociation events of cohesin complex with rate $r_\pm$, and 3. slide each cohesin anchor with rate r_s. The position move is performed by adding uniform random numbers $r_n \in [-\delta r, +\delta r]$ to the x, y, and z coordinates of the chosen bead. The position move is accepted based on the Metropolis criterion with the total energy computed using Eq. 1. A single Monte-Carlo step (MCS) consists of N such moves. The binding and dissociation moves are attempted N times during a single MCS. From the instantaneous number of bound cohesin, we get the values of rates $r_\pm$ from Eq. 5. Similarly, the sliding event is attempted N_c number of times (for both left and right anchor sites) with rate r_s^0 during a single MCS (resulting in an effective sliding rate $r_s = 2N_c r_s^0$). The corresponding probability of accepting these events is given by $P_\pm = \min(1, \mathrm{r}_\pm)$ and $P_s = \min(1, \mathrm{r_s})$.

Initialization and sampling: We initialize the polymer trajectories in self-avoiding random walk configurations. We simulate the system for 10^8 MCS and sample configurations every 50,000 MCS. All the steady state properties are computed by excluding the data for initial 2×10^7 MCS. For each parameter set, we have simulated 15 such trajectories.

Parameters: All quantities are expressed in dimensionless units, with length measured in bead diameters (σ), energy in units of k_BT, and time in units of MCS. The polymer size is $N = 500$. In Eq. 2 and Eq. 6, the spring constant is set to $k_s = 100$ and the equilibrium distance to $r_0 = \sigma$. We vary the strength of attractive interactions in Eq. 3 within the range $\epsilon \in [0.2, 0.4]$. The parameter controlling the fluctuations of the number of bound cohesins in Eq. 5 is $\mu = 10$. The mean number of cohesins is varied in the range $N_c^0 \in [3, 10]$. The attempt rate for the binding/dissociation process in Eq. 5 varies within $r_\pm^0 \in [10^{-6}, 10^{-5}]$, while the sliding rate varies within $r_s^0 \in [10^{-5}, 10^{-3}]$. For position moves in Monte Carlo algorithm, δr is set to 0.5σ. The conversion of these dimensionless quantities into real units for comparison with experiments is discussed in Supplementary Note A.

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