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Code Link: https://github.com/saifeemustafaq/Define_Project_Hypothesis_and_Aim/

Hypotheses

1. Specific subtypes of inhibitory neurons in the prefrontal cortex are selectively vulnerable in Alzheimer's disease (AD) and their depletion correlates with cognitive decline [1], [2].
2. Upregulation of DNA damage response and cohesin complex genes in excitatory neurons and oligodendrocytes is associated with AD pathology and cognitive impairment [3]–[5].

Project Aims

1. Characterize inhibitory neuron subtype-specific vulnerabilities in AD:
   a) Analyze single-cell transcriptomic data from the prefrontal cortex to identify inhibitory neuron subtypes depleted in AD samples compared to controls [6].
   b) Correlate the abundance of specific inhibitory neuron subtypes with cognitive function scores and AD pathology measures [7].
   c) Identify gene expression signatures associated with vulnerable vs. resilient inhibitory neuron subtypes [8].
2. Investigate DNA damage response and cohesin complex dysregulation in AD:
   a) Quantify expression of DNA damage response and cohesin complex genes in excitatory neurons and oligodendrocytes across AD and control samples [3], [9].
   b) Assess correlation between expression of these gene sets and AD pathology measures (e.g. amyloid, tau) [5], [10].
   c) Perform pathway and network analysis to elucidate potential mechanisms linking DNA damage/cohesin dysregulation to AD progression [10].

Rationale

Recent single-cell studies have revealed cell type-specific vulnerabilities in AD, with certain inhibitory neuron subtypes showing particular susceptibility [1], [6]. Understanding which subtypes are most affected and how this relates to cognitive decline could provide new therapeutic targets [8]. Additionally, emerging evidence points to DNA damage and chromosomal instability as contributors to AD pathogenesis [3], [9]–[10]. Investigating the upregulation of DNA damage response and cohesin complex genes in specific cell types may shed light on these processes [4], [10].

These hypotheses and aims leverage the rich single-cell and spatial transcriptomic datasets now available for AD research, including those in the Stanford atlas, TACA, and ssREAD databases [6], [8]. The project would utilize advanced computational approaches, potentially accelerated by NVIDIA GPUs, to analyze these large-scale datasets and uncover new insights into AD pathobiology [10].

Glossary

- **Alzheimer's Disease (AD)**: A progressive neurodegenerative disorder characterized by cognitive decline, memory loss, and personality changes, often associated with the accumulation of amyloid plaques and tau tangles in the brain.
- **Inhibitory Neurons**: A type of neuron that reduces or inhibits the activity of other neurons, helping to regulate neural circuits. Specific subtypes in the prefrontal cortex may be more vulnerable in AD.
- **Excitatory Neurons**: Neurons that increase the activity of other neurons. Changes in excitatory neuron function are often involved in neurodegenerative diseases like AD.
- **Oligodendrocytes**: Glial cells in the central nervous system responsible for producing myelin, which insulates nerve fibers. Dysfunction in oligodendrocytes may contribute to neurodegenerative processes.
- **Prefrontal Cortex**: The front part of the brain involved in complex cognitive behavior, decision making, and moderating social behavior, which is affected in AD.
- **Single-Cell Transcriptomics**: A technique that allows for the analysis of gene expression at the individual cell level, providing insights into cell-type-specific behaviors in diseases like AD.
- **DNA Damage Response (DDR)**: A cellular process activated when DNA is damaged. An increase in DDR activity has been linked to AD, potentially contributing to the progression of the disease.
- **Cohesin Complex**: A protein complex that regulates the separation of sister chromatids during cell division and plays a role in DNA repair and transcription. Dysregulation of the cohesin complex has been implicated in neurodegeneration.
- **Pathology Measures**: Biological indicators of disease presence and severity, such as amyloid plaques and tau tangles, which are hallmark features of AD.
- **Amyloid**: Protein fragments that accumulate in the brains of AD patients, forming plaques that disrupt cell function.
- **Tau**: A protein that forms tangles inside neurons in AD, contributing to cell death and neurodegeneration.
- **Gene Expression Signatures**: Patterns of gene activity that can indicate specific cellular behaviors or responses, such as vulnerability or resilience in AD.
- **Pathway Analysis**: A bioinformatics approach that examines how genes interact within specific biological pathways, helping to understand disease mechanisms in AD.
- **Network Analysis**: An analytical method used to explore the interactions and relationships between molecules, often applied to understand complex systems like the brain’s response to AD.
- **Stanford Atlas, TACA, ssREAD Databases**: Databases that provide access to single-cell and spatial transcriptomic data relevant to AD, useful for analyzing gene expression patterns across different cell types.

References:

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[4] G. C. Wong et al., "DNA Damage Response-Associated Cell Cycle Re-Entry and Neuronal Senescence in Brain Aging and Alzheimer's Disease," Journal of Alzheimer's Disease, 2023.

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