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**CHAPTER ONE**

**The Hippocampal Formation, Amygdala, and Associative Memory**

**Introduction**

One central function of a complex nervous system is to perceive stimuli from the external environment, perform internal computations, and output actions that ensure survival. To do so, the brain must have machinery to store and retrieve that information as well as its associated behaviors. For example, a street mouse needs to remember where in the city it might find bountiful food scraps and seek them at appropriate times of day. The ability for an organism to learn and recall relationships such as these is called associative memory. Although other types of learning and memory exist, in this thesis, I will focus solely on how associative and “episodic” memories are supported by structures in the temporal lobe. In particular, I will pay special attention to the hippocampal formation and the amygdalar complex.

* 1. **Historical considerations of the hippocampal formation and amygdalar complex in learning and memory**

One of the earliest theorists of human memory function was a German scientist named Richard Semon. He was one of the first thinkers to put forth the idea that memory resided on a physical substrate rather than in the intangible psyche (Semon, 1921). Thus, he proposed the term “engram” as the physical manifestation of a memory trace, despite no apparent means for observing such an entity. Years later, the synaptic plasticity mechanisms endorsed by Donald Hebb (Hebb, 1949) provided the foundations for how an engram could form and exist, as a network of coactive neurons via potentiated connections. However, early attempts to localize the engram in the rat brain demonstrated its elusiveness (Lashley, 1950). A few years later, the neuropsychological patient H.M. attracted much attention after his medically mandated hippocampal resection left him with profound anterograde amnesia and temporally graded retrograde amnesia despite retention of most other intellectual faculties (Scoville and Milner, 1957). This serendipitous finding propelled the field into investigating the medial temporal lobe (MTL) as the brain’s center for episodic memory encoding.

The investigations surrounding H.M. and related patients’ memory deficits launched a search for an animal model of amnesia. It was eventually found that in nonhuman primates the MTL, but not the amygdala, was required for normal performance at a memory probe called the delayed non-match to sample task (Squire and Zola-Morgan, 1991). Instead, the amygdala is involved in “emotional” memory such as fear conditioning (Ledoux, 1995) and facial recognition of fear in humans (Adolphs et al., 1994). Thus, research on the amygdala has generally been focused on how it is involved in forming associations between environmental cues and aversive stimuli.

* 1. **Anatomical connections of the hippocampal formation**

The anatomy of the MTL has been thoroughly studied throughout the years and extensive literature exists on its connectivity within itself and between other cortical and subcortical regions. In rodents, the MTL consists of the hippocampal formation, entorhinal cortex (EC), perirhinal cortex, and postrhinal cortex. The hippocampus is a laminated structure that can be further subdivided into the dentate gyrus (DG) and Cornu Ammonis (CA) fields, CA1, CA2, and CA3. The output region of the hippocampus is the subicular complex, which is comprised of the subiculum proper, presubiculum, and parasubiculum.

When referring to circuitry in the hippocampal formation, there are two canonical pathways originating from its primary input region, the EC. However, recent studies have uncovered novel connections that are just beginning to be investigated (Kitamura et al., 2014; Kohara et al., 2014; Rajasethupathy et al., 2015; Witter, 1993). The first canonical circuit is commonly referred to as the “trisynaptic loop”, where neurons from layer II of EC (ECII) project to granule cells in the DG, which in turn send axons called mossy fibers to pyramidal cells in CA3. CA3 Schaffer collaterals then synapse onto CA1, which finally sends projections to layer V/VI of EC (ECV/VI). The second circuit, the temporammonic pathway, is a monosynaptic pathway from layer III of EC (ECIII) that synapses directly onto CA1.

* + 1. *Dentate gyrus (DG)*

The principal cell type of the DG is the granule cell, which is glutamatergic. These receive excitatory input from ECII, a projection often referred to as the perforant path. Granule cells are the only cell type in the DG that have axons leaving the DG to project to CA3, though contacts are also made onto DG mossy cells in the hilus. Until recently, it was thought that DG innervation halted at the CA3/CA2 border, but optogenetic studies have since found that granule cell mossy fibers also contact neurons in CA2 (Kohara et al., 2014). Another major cell type in the DG is the mossy cell, which is large and sends axons exclusively to the contralateral DG onto granule cells. The remaining cell types in the DG are a heterogeneous population of GABAergic interneurons that have various axonal ramification patterns onto distributed domains of postsynaptic granule and mossy cells.

The DG is known for its sparse activity and for being one of few brain regions that exhibit adult neurogenesis (Gonçalves et al., 2016; Jung and McNaughton, 1993). These features are thought to synergistically support “pattern separation”, or the neural orthogonalization of similar events (Leutgeb et al., 2007; Neunuebel and Knierim, 2014; Yassa and Stark, 2011). Recently, two-photon imaging experiments in the DG found evidence for a pattern separation mechanism supported by mossy cells and adult-born granule cells (Danielson et al., 2016a, 2017). In a general sense, information from cortical inputs may be parsed by the DG into discrete events to then be funneled into CA3 for additional processing.

* + 1. *CA3*

From the DG, mossy fibers synapse onto pyramidal cells of CA3, though there is also a direct EC-CA3 projection (van Strien et al., 2009) as well as inhibitory synapses from local interneurons. DG-CA3 mossy fiber boutons are uncharacteristically large and their contacts are known as “detonator synapses” for their ability to reliably discharge the postsynaptic cell in the absence of dendritic summation from other compartments (Henze et al., 2002). Thus, mossy fibers inputs from DG into CA3 have been hypothesized to serve as an unmitigated source of depolarization necessary for synaptic strengthening between DG and CA3 (McNaughton and Morris, 1987).

CA3 itself is widely acknowledged to have bountiful excitatory autoassociative connections originating from both ipsilateral and contralateral CA3 (via the hippocampal commissure). This feature is believed to support episodic memory through an autoassociative network possibly involving neuronal sequences (Levy, 1996; Rolls, 1996; Salz et al., 2016). The theory suggests that the highly recurrent connectivity of CA3 is conducive for establishing a synaptic matrix that would enable retrieval of a detailed representation given minimal input. Thus, a small cue could trigger the recall of a larger memory, a process called pattern completion (Rolls, 1996; Treves and Rolls, 1994). It has been recently discovered that CA3-CA3 synapses have unusually large plasticity windows which may support a specialized role of this circuit for associative recall (Mishra et al., 2016). Knierim and colleagues have shown that pattern completion occurs in CA3 (Lee et al., 2004; Neunuebel and Knierim, 2014), though more recent work from their lab suggests that this process is topologically heterogeneous along the transverse axis (Lee et al., 2015). Early modeling theories proposed that pattern completion could be mechanistically realized via cell sequences (Levy, 1996; Wallenstein et al., 1998). Indeed, a recent tour de force *in vitro* recording study showed that CA3 exhibited connectivity motifs that supported its role as a network of sequentially activated cells that could enable pattern completion (Guzman et al., 2016). Furthermore, work from our laboratory confirmed cell sequences in CA3 (Salz et al., 2016).

In addition to its recurrent outputs, CA3 also sends projections to CA2 and CA1. The CA3-CA2 projection’s functional implications have been almost entirely unexplored, but there has been more attention paid to the CA3-CA1 connection. The CA3 axons that innervate CA1 are called the Schaffer collaterals and are the primary inputs into the pyramidal cells of CA1.

* + 1. *CA1*

The principal cell in CA1 is the pyramidal neuron, which has been extensively studied by the neuroscience field. CA1 pyramidal cells receive input from CA3 Schaffer collaterals as well as ECIII (temporoammonic path) and local inhibitory interneurons. However, a recent study observed a subpopulation of clustered cells in ECII, termed “island” cells, that also sent projections to CA1, onto inhibitory interneurons that regulated ECIII excitatory input (Kitamura et al., 2014). Additional monosynaptic inputs come from the nucleus reuniens of the thalamus (Ito et al., 2015), CA2 (Hitti and Siegelbaum, 2014; Kohara et al., 2014), and anterior cingulate cortex (Rajasethupathy et al., 2015). Also prevalent is a reciprocal connection between basolateral amygdala (BLA) and ventral CA1 (Herry et al., 2008; Pikkarainen et al., 1999).

In contrast with CA3, CA1 pyramidal cells form very limited connections with themselves. Instead, CA1 is viewed as the primary output region of the hippocampus, with much of its information conveyed to extrahippocampal structures through the subiculum, with which it also has reciprocal connections (Amaral et al., 1991; Xu et al., 2016). Other notable output regions include ECV/VI, retrosplenial cortex (Wyss and Van Groen, 1992), medial prefrontal cortex (Jay and Witter, 1991; Kim and Cho, 2017), and the BLA (Kim and Cho, 2017; Kishi et al., 2006). CA1 pyramidal cells also contact local inhibitory neurons, which then synapse onto other CA1 pyramidal neurons.

The role of CA1 is under active research, and many functions have been ascribed to this highly-studied subregion. Its claim to fame is that it was the region where “place cells” were first discovered (O’Keefe et al., 1971). These are pyramidal neurons that exhibit spatial selectivity patterns, prompting early theories on the hippocampus as the locus of a “cognitive map” (O’Keefe and Nadel, 1978), although contemporary scholars now mostly agree that the hippocampus is involved in cognition beyond the spatial domain (Eichenbaum, 2004, 2017; Eichenbaum and Cohen, 2014; Smith and Bulkin, 2014; Squire, 1992).

CA1 seems suited for processing conjunctive inputs, possibly acting as an input comparator or coincidence detector for multiple sources of incoming information. Evidence for this theory comes from intracellular recordings that demonstrate CA1 neurons integrating inputs from CA3 (presumably containing internally stored information) and EC (presumably containing external sensory information) to drive firing (Bittner et al., 2015). Additionally, our lab has observed complex conjunctive responses in CA1 pyramidal cells to combinations of objects, locations, and contexts (Komorowski et al., 2009; McKenzie et al., 2014, 2016). However, this view is complicated by the fact that CA1 consists of multiple parallel processing streams within its radial axis (Danielson et al., 2016b; Soltesz and Losonczy, 2018). Also in question is the role of the temporal organization of CA1 pyramidal cell firing patterns in its mnemonic function (Buzsáki and Tingley, 2018; Eichenbaum, 2014).

* + 1. *Subicular complex*

The subicular complex is comprised of the subiculum, presubiculum (the dorsal aspect being called the postsubiculum), and parasubiculum. CA1 sends a dense, topographical projection to subiculum (Amaral et al., 1991), which then is relayed to ECV, mirroring the CA1-ECV projection. While it has long been thought that this intrahippocampal connection was unidirectional, there has been accumulating evidence that there is also a subiculum-CA1 backprojection (Berger et al., 1980; Sun et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2016). The subiculum also sends projections to the pre- and parasubiculum, subcortical regions such as the amygdala (Kishi et al., 2006), and numerous neocortical targets, one notable example being the retrosplenial cortex (Wyss and Van Groen, 1992).

The subiculum proper is regarded as one of the primary outputs of the hippocampal formation, but despite this important role, not much is known about its function. A recent study dissected the CA1-subiculum-EC circuit and suggested that the CA1-subiculum-ECV projection was involved in memory retrieval, whereas the CA1-ECV direct projection was essential for memory formation (Roy et al., 2017). On the other hand, there is a respectable amount of literature on the pre- and parasubiculum, most of which focus exclusively on its contributions to spatial navigation via head-direction cells, which were first discovered by Jeffrey Taube in these regions (Taube et al., 1990).

* + 1. *CA2*

CA2 is a small subregion that rests in between CA1 and CA3. It receives bilateral inputs from CA3 (Lorente de Nó, 1934), as well as newborn granule cells from DG (Kohara et al., 2014; Llorens-Martín et al., 2015). Extrahippocampal inputs also arise from subcortical areas such as the EC (Hitti and Siegelbaum, 2014), hypothalamus, medial septum, diagonal band of Broca, supramammillary nuclei, and median raphe nucleus (Cui et al., 2013). The primary output of CA2 is CA1.

In part, due to the difficulty of reliably and accurately recording from the narrow band of cells in CA2, it has mostly been overlooked until recently. As a result, the function of CA2 is unclear and is currently being pursued from many different directions. One prominent theory suggests that CA2 is important for “social” memory (Dudek et al., 2016), an idea supported by high expression of a receptor for the “social” neuropeptide vasopressin in CA2 (Young et al., 2006) and the finding that CA2 lesions impact the ability to recognize familiar conspecifics (Hitti and Siegelbaum, 2014). Others propose a specialized role of CA2 in tracking changes in context and time (Mankin et al., 2015; Wintzer et al., 2014). Additional studies recently identified the role of CA2 in initiating sharp-wave associated activity during immobility and sleep (Kay et al., 2016; Oliva et al., 2016). The diversity of research in CA2 is apparent and the search for a common explanation for all these phenomena is currently ongoing.

* + 1. *Medial septum*

The medial septum provides GABAergic, cholinergic, and glutamatergic innervations onto the hippocampus and also receives GABAergic input from CA1 and CA3. In the rat, GABAergic cells exclusively synapse onto hippocampal GABAergic interneurons (Freund and Antal, 1988). However, recent optogenetic experiments in mice have found evidence for GABAergic and glutamatergic synapses onto both interneurons and pyramidal cells (Sun et al., 2014). Septal cholinergic projections also terminate onto CA1 pyramidal cells.

The medial septum is intimately involved in the generation of the theta rhythm in the hippocampus. Theta is often characterized by a continuous 4-12 Hz oscillation in rodents, which is thought to be important for temporal organization of neural activity and coordination of synaptic modifications (Buzsáki, 2002; Hasselmo et al., 2002). An interesting phenomenon is also exhibited by hippocampal place cells, which spike at progressively earlier phases of theta with each theta cycle as the place field is traversed. “Phase precession” might provide an additional channel of information for spatial location based on spike-phase timing (O’Keefe and Recce, 1993; Skaggs et al., 1996). In addition, theta may play a role in arranging cell assemblies into temporally compressed sequences to inform previously visited versus upcoming locations (Colgin, 2013; Dragoi and Buzsáki, 2006; Foster and Wilson, 2007; Hasselmo, 2005; Lisman and Redish, 2009; Wikenheiser and Redish, 2015).

* + 1. *Lateral entorhinal cortex*

The EC can be regarded as the gateway to the hippocampus and the lateral entorhinal cortex (LEC) is a subdivision of the EC that is distinct from the medial entorhinal cortex (MEC) on the basis of cytoarchitecture and connectivity. As a general rule, the EC sends axons bound for hippocampal targets and receives neocortical input at layers I-III, while it receives hippocampal input and delivers neocortical ouputs at layers IV-VI. The LEC has reciprocal connections with the MEC, amygdala, perirhinal cortex, piriform cortex, subicular complex, and CA1, as well as afferents to DG (Burwell and Amaral, 1998; Kerr et al., 2007; Köhler, 1988; van Strien et al., 2009).

The function of the LEC is unclear, though some hypotheses proposed its role as a relay station for “what” information to be integrated with “where” information, originating from the MEC, at the hippocampal junction (Eichenbaum, 2016; Eichenbaum et al., 2012). This view is consistent with experimental findings of LEC showing sensitivity to objects (Deshmukh and Knierim, 2011; Deshmukh et al., 2012; Keene et al., 2016; Tsao et al., 2013). However, a recent study demonstrated that LEC might also support the associations of events across episodic timescales (Tsao et al., 2018).

* + 1. *Medial entorhinal cortex*

The medial entorhinal cortex (MEC), in contrast, receives most of its cortical inputs from the postrhinal and piriform cortex, but is also connected with the retrosplenial cortex, posterior parietal cortex, visual association areas, CA1, and DG (Burwell and Amaral, 1998; van Strien et al., 2009).

The MEC is perhaps most well-known for being the home of “grid cells”, which are (mostly pyramidal) neurons that fire in a hexagonal-lattice pattern tiling the environment (Hafting et al., 2005; Tang et al., 2014). Thus, many subsequent studies have focused on MEC contributions to spatial navigation. However, there have been multiple demonstrations that MEC is not required for place cell formation in the hippocampus (Hales et al., 2014; Rueckemann et al., 2016; Schlesiger et al., 2015), leaving the field perplexed on its true function. Other efforts have focused on the temporal correlates of the MEC and downstream hippocampal spiking patterns. The MEC itself contains neurons that exhibit temporal firing fields during a delay (Kraus et al., 2015), and inhibiting it disrupts hippocampal sequences and temporal associative memory (Kitamura et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2017; Schlesiger et al., 2015). A more recent hypothesis has suggested that the MEC might define a coordinate system of cognitive space for abstract associations (Bellmund et al., 2018).

* + 1. *Amygdala*

The amygdala is an almond-shaped subcortical structure known to be involved in emotional learning and memory. Approximately 80% of the cells are glutamatergic spiny projection neurons, with the remainder being GABAergic interneurons (McDonald, 1982, 1985; Rainnie et al., 2006). The amygdala’s basolateral nucleus is reciprocally connected with ventral CA1, subiculum, and medial prefrontal cortex, as well as the central nucleus of the amygdala (McDonald, 1991; McDonald et al., 1996; Pitkänen et al., 2000). To contrast, the central amydala sends inhibitory projections to the periaqueductal gray and the hypothalamus (Tovote et al., 2015).

* 1. **Hippocampal function**

Special interest is being paid to how temporally-arranged cell sequences arise in CA1, independent of spatial correlates (Buzsáki and Tingley, 2018; Eichenbaum, 2013, 2014; Howard and Eichenbaum, 2013).

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