

Stress – From Molecules to Behavior

A Comprehensive Analysis of the Neurobiology
of Stress Responses

Edited by
Hermona Soreq, Alon Friedman,
and Daniela Kaufer



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Contents

Preface	XV
List of Contributors	XIX

Part I Systems

1	On the Role of Stress in Evolution	3
	<i>Lilach Hadany</i>	
1.1	Introduction	3
1.2	Stress Through the Gene's Eye: the Evolution of Stress-Induced Genetic Mixing	3
1.2.1	Stress-Induced Recombination	4
1.2.1.1	Classic Models of the Evolution of Recombination	4
1.2.1.2	The Evolution of Stress-Induced Recombination	4
1.2.1.3	Evidence for Stress-Induced Recombination	6
1.2.2	Stress and Sex	6
1.2.3	Stress and Outcrossing	7
1.2.4	Stress and Dispersal	8
1.3	The Effect of Stress-Induced Variation on the Evolvability of Complex Traits	9
1.4	Stress-Induced Variation and Pathogen Evolution	10
1.5	Stress-Induced Mortality	10
	Summary	12
	References	13
2	Catecholamines and Stress	19
	<i>Esther L. Sabban</i>	
2.1	Rapid Stress-Triggered Changes in Catecholamines	19
2.2	Catecholamines and Stress-Related Disorders	20
2.2.1	Cardiovascular Disease	20
2.2.2	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	21
2.2.3	Depression	21
2.2.4	Immune Disorders	21

2.2.5	Pain	22
2.3	Stress-Triggered Regulation of Catecholamine Biosynthetic Enzymes in Different Locations	22
2.3.1	Pathway of Catecholamine Biosynthesis	22
2.3.2	Adrenomedullary Hormonal System	23
2.3.3	Sympathetic Nervous System	27
2.3.4	Noradrenergic Systems in the Brain	28
	Summary	30
	References	30
3	Stress and the Cholinergic System	37
	<i>Mariella De Biasi</i>	
3.1	Acetylcholine and Stress	37
3.1.1	Cholinergic Innervation of the Brain	38
3.1.2	Brain Cholinergic Receptors	38
3.1.3	AChR Distribution in the CNS	39
3.1.4	The Septohippocampal Pathway and Stress	40
3.1.5	Stress-Induced Molecular Adaptations in the Cholinergic System	41
3.1.5.1	The Nicotinic Cholinergic System and Stress	41
3.2	Contribution of Genetically Engineered Mouse Models to the Understanding of the Role of Cholinergic Receptors in Stress	42
	Summary	43
	References	44

Part II Cells and Circuits

4	Effects of Stress on the Function of Hippocampal Cells	55
	<i>Marian Joëls and Henk Karst</i>	
4.1	Introduction	55
4.2	Non-Genomic Effects of Corticosterone	57
4.3	Genomic Effects of Corticosterone	58
4.3.1	Ion Currents	59
4.3.2	Amino Acid Responses	61
4.3.3	Aminergic Responses	62
4.3.4	Implications for Hippocampal Function	64
	Summary	66
	References	66
5	Stress and Adult Neurogenesis in the Mammalian Central Nervous System	71
	<i>Elizabeth D. Kirby and Daniela Kaufer</i>	
5.1	Introduction	71
5.2	Adult Neurogenesis: a Brief Primer	71
5.3	Measuring Neurogenesis: How to Find New Neurons	72

5.3.1	Using DNA Replication to Detect New Cells	72
5.3.2	Endogenous Markers of Cell Cycle	73
5.3.3	Retroviral Labeling of New Cells	73
5.3.4	Determining Cell Fate	73
5.4	Stress-Induced Alteration in Cell Proliferation	74
5.4.1	Acute Stress	74
5.4.2	Chronic Stress	78
5.4.3	Cell Cycle Arrest Versus Progenitor Death	78
5.5	Stress-Induced Alteration of New Cell Survival	79
5.6	Stress-Induced Alteration of Cell Fate Choice	79
5.7	Mechanism of Stress-Induced Changes in Adult Neurogenesis	81
5.7.1	Direct Effects of Glucocorticoids on Adult Neurogenesis	82
5.7.2	Indirect Effects of Glucocorticoids on Adult Neurogenesis	82
5.7.2.1	Excitatory Amino Acids	82
5.7.2.2	Serotonin	83
5.7.2.3	Growth Factors	83
5.7.3	Intracellular Mechanisms of Glucocorticoids Effects	84
5.7.4	An Overall Picture of Mechanism: Putting the Pieces Together	84
5.7.5	Function of Regulation of Adult Neurogenesis by Stress and Glucocorticoids	84
	Summary	85
	References	86

6 Individual Differences in Reactivity to Social Stress in the Laboratory and Its Mediation by Common Genetic Polymorphisms 93

Idan Shalev, Elad Lerer, Salomon Israel, Florina Uzefovsky, Inga Gritsenko, David Mankuta, Marsha Kaitz, and Richard P. Ebstein

6.1	Stressors and HPA Axis Regulation: Naturalistic Studies	93
6.2	Trier Social Stress Test	94
6.3	Genes and Regulation of the HPA Axis	95
6.4	Jerusalem Studies	97
6.4.1	Experimental Design	97
6.4.2	Genes Associated with TSST Response	98
6.5	Growth Factors	98
6.5.1	BDNF Gene	98
6.6	Neuropeptides	103
6.6.1	Arginine Vasopressin 1a Receptor (AVPR1a)	103
6.7	Serotonin Transmission	104
6.7.1	Serotonin Transporter (SLC6A4)	104
6.7.2	Monoamine Oxidase A (MAOA)	104
6.8	Sex Steroids	105
6.8.1	Estrogen Receptor Alpha (ESR1)	105
6.8.2	Genes Not Associated with TSST Response	106
	Summary	107
	References	108

Part III Cognition and Behavior

- 7 Corticosteroid Hormones in Stress and Anxiety – Role of Receptor Variants and Environmental Inputs 119**
Roel H. DeRijk, Efthimia Kitraki, and E. Ronald de Kloet
- 7.1 Introduction 119
- 7.2 Corticosteroid Hormones, Fear and the Stress Response 121
- 7.2.1 Neuroanatomical Basis 121
- 7.2.2 Role of Corticosteroids and Other Stress Mediators 122
- 7.2.3 Cognitive and Emotional Aspects of Stress 124
- 7.3 Gene Variants and Early Life Experiences 125
- 7.4 MR and GR Gene Structure 126
- 7.5 Genetic Variants of the MR and GR Genes 127
- 7.5.1 MR Gene 129
- 7.5.2 GR Gene 129
- 7.6 HPA Axis Regulation 131
- 7.6.1 Basal Cortisol Levels 131
- 7.6.2 Feedback Sensitivity 131
- 7.6.3 Psychosocial Challenges 132
- 7.7 Epigenetic Modifications Affecting GR and MR Actions 133
- 7.8 Stress-Related Psychopathology 135
- 7.8.1 Corticosteroid-Controlled Pathways as Targets for New Therapeutic Interventions 135
- 7.9 Early Experience and Psychopathology 136
- 7.10 Genetic Variants and Psychopathology 137
- 7.11 Concluding Remarks 140
- Summary 141
- References 142
- 8 Corticotropin-Releasing Factor (CRF) and CRF-Related Peptides – a Linkage Between Stress and Anxiety 151**
Thomas Blank and Joachim Spiess
- 8.1 The CRF Family, Its Receptors and Ligands 151
- 8.2 The Role of CRF and CRF-Related Peptides in Neuroendocrine Aspects of Stress 153
- 8.3 The Role of CRF and CRF-Related Peptides in Behavioral Aspects of Stress 154
- 8.4 The Role of CRF and CRF-Related Peptides in Anxiety 156
- 8.5 Crosstalk Between the CRF and Serotonin Systems 158
- 8.6 Future Directions 159
- Summary 159
- References 160

9	Stress, Emotion and Memory: the Good, the Bad and the Intriguing	167
	<i>Marie-France Marin, Tania Elaine Schramek, Françoise S. Maheu, and Sonia J. Lupien</i>	
9.1	Introduction	167
9.2	The Relativity of Stress	168
9.3	Important Characteristics of Stress Hormones	169
9.3.1	Stress Hormone Receptors	169
9.3.2	The Impact of Stress Hormones on Cognition	170
9.4	Effects of GCs on Learning and Memory	171
9.4.1	Direct Effects of GCs	172
9.4.2	Modulatory Effects of GCs	173
9.4.3	Chronic Effects of GCs on Cognition and Brain Integrity	174
9.5	Stress, Emotion and Memory	176
9.5.1	Central Focus Phenomenon	176
9.5.2	Retention Intervals and Emotional Memory	177
9.5.3	Stress Hormones and Emotional Memory	178
9.5.4	Stress Hormone Effects of the Encoding and Consolidation of Emotional Material	178
9.5.5	Stress Hormone Effects of the Retrieval of Emotional Material	179
9.6	Contextual Effects	180
9.7	New Directions	181
9.8	Conclusion	182
	Summary	183
	References	183
10	Contribution of Early Life Stress to Anxiety Disorder	189
	<i>Marta Weinstock</i>	
10.1	Introduction	189
10.2	Organization of the Stress Response	190
10.2.1	Glucocorticoid Receptors	190
10.2.2	CRH and Its Receptors	191
10.2.3	Role of the Amygdala and CRH in Mediating Anxiogenic Behavior	192
10.3	Alterations in Circulating Hormonal Levels Induced by Chronic Gestational Stress	192
10.3.1	Experimental Animals	192
10.3.2	Human Subjects	193
10.4	Alterations in the Regulation of the HPA Axis as a Result of Prenatal Stress	194
10.4.1	Experimental Animals	194
10.4.1.1	Effects on Basal HPA Axis Activity	194
10.4.1.2	Effect of Prenatal Stress on the Response to Stress of the HPA Axis	194

10.4.2	Human Subjects	195
10.4.2.1	Effects of Prenatal Stress on Basal HPA Axis Activity	195
10.4.2.2	Effect of Prenatal Stress on the Response to Stress of the HPA Axis	196
10.5	Alterations in the Regulation of the HPA Axis as a Result of Postnatal Stress	196
10.5.1	Experimental Animals	196
10.5.2	Human Subjects	197
10.6	Association Between Prenatal Stress and Anxiety Disorder	197
10.6.1	Experimental Animals	197
10.6.2	Human Subjects	199
10.7	Association Between Early Life Stress and Anxiety Disorder	200
10.7.1	Experimental Animals	200
10.7.2	Human Subjects	202
	Summary	202
	References	203

Part IV Immune Responses

11	Stress Effects on Immunity in Vertebrates and Invertebrates	209
	<i>Michael Shapira</i>	
11.1	Introduction	209
11.2	The Neuroendocrine Stress Response in Vertebrates and Invertebrates	210
11.2.1	Stress Responses and Hormones in Invertebrates	211
11.3	The Immune System in Vertebrates and Invertebrates	212
11.3.1	Effects of Acute Stress on Immunity	216
11.3.1.1	Vertebrates	216
11.3.1.2	Invertebrates	218
11.3.2	Effects of Chronic Stress	219
11.3.2.1	Vertebrates	219
11.3.2.2	Invertebrates	220
	Summary and Future Prospects	221
	References	222
12	Immunity to Self Maintains Resistance to Mental Stress: Boosting Immunity as a Complement to Psychological Therapy	229
	<i>Gil M. Lewitus, Osnat Schwartz-Stav, and Michal Schwartz</i>	
12.1	Introduction	229
12.2	Stress and the Blood–Brain Barrier	230
12.3	Lymphocyte Surveillance of the CNS	230
12.4	Stress-Induced Lymphocyte Mobilization	231
12.5	Stress Hormones and Lymphocyte Trafficking	232
12.6	The Physiological Relevance of Lymphocytes in the Brain	233

12.7	Protective Autoimmunity	233
12.8	Behavioral Immunization	235
12.9	Immune Memory to Self Antigens Underlies Resilience to Mental Stress	235
	Summary	237
	References	238
13	Brain Interleukin-1 (IL-1) Mediates Stress-Induced Alterations in HPA Activation, Memory Functioning and Neural Plasticity	243
	<i>Inbal Goshen and Raz Yirmiya</i>	
13.1	Introduction	243
13.2	The Bi-Directional Interaction Between IL-1 and the HPA Axis	243
13.3	Stress-Induced HPA Axis Activation is Regulated by Brain IL-1	246
13.3.1	IL-1 Mediates Immunological Stress-Induced HPA Axis Activation	246
13.3.2	Brain IL-1 Mediates Psychological Stress-Induced HPA Axis Activation	246
13.4	Stress-Induced Alterations in Memory and Neural Plasticity are Regulated by Brain IL-1	249
13.4.1	Brain IL-1 Underlies Stress-Induced Memory Impairment by Modulating Glucocorticoids Secretion	250
13.4.2	Stress-Induced IL-1 Reduces Hippocampal Neurogenesis: Implications for Memory Impairments	253
	Summary	254
	References	255
Part V	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	
14	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Animal Models	263
	<i>Hagit Cohen, Nitzan Kozlovsky, Gal Richter-Levin, and Joseph Zohar</i>	
14.1	Introduction	263
14.2	Animal Models of PTSD	265
14.2.1	Trauma/Stress-Based Models	265
14.2.2	Mechanism-Based Models	266
14.2.2.1	Enhanced Fear Conditioning	267
14.2.2.2	Impaired Extinction	267
14.2.3	Individual Differences in Response to an Exposure to a Traumatic Experience	268
14.2.4	Behavioral Assessments	268
14.2.5	Classification According to Cut-Off Behavioral Criteria	269
14.3	Selected CBC-Based Studies	271
14.3.1	Behavioral Response Patterns Versus Time	271
14.3.2	Physiological Correlates	272
14.3.3	Strain/Genetic Studies	272

- 14.3.3.1 HPA Axis Response in Lewis and Fischer Rats 273
- 14.3.3.2 Stress-Induced Behavioral Responses in Inbred Mouse Strains 273
- 14.3.4 Molecular Neurobiological Correlates 273
- 14.3.5 Drug Studies 274
- 14.3.5.1 Early Intervention with an SSRI (Sertraline) 275
- 14.3.5.2 Early Intervention with Corticosterone 275
- 14.3.5.3 Early Intervention with Benzodiazepine (Alprazolam) 276
- Summary 276
- References 277

15 The Cholinergic Model for PTSD: from Acute Stress to PTSD, from Neuron to Network and Behavior 283

Alon Friedman and Lev Pavlovsky

- 15.1 From Acute Stress to PTSD 283
- 15.2 Stress and Brain Cholinergic Pathways 283
- 15.3 Anatomical Considerations 284
- 15.4 Neurophysiological Considerations 285
- 15.4.1 The Role of ACh in Behavior, Learning and Memory 288
- 15.5 Stress Induces Cholinergic Dysfunction 288
- 15.5.1 Stress Event Affects Cholinergic Functions 289
- 15.5.2 Cholinergic Dysfunction Persists After Stress 289
- 15.5.3 Cholinergic Dysfunction May Underlie Short- and Long-Term Clinical Symptoms 290
- 15.6 The Cholinergic Basis for PTSD: the Model 290
- Summary 292
- References 292

Part VI Vulnerability to Disease

16 Stress and Neurodegeneration: Adding Insult to Injury? 299

Amit Berson, Mor Hanan, and Hermona Soreq

- 16.1 Abstract 299
- 16.2 Alzheimer's Disease Shares Phenotypic Biomarkers with Stress Reactions 299
- 16.3 Molecular Underpinnings of Stress-Induced Cognitive Impairments 300
- 16.4 Direct Evidence Linking Stress Reactions and AD 303
- 16.5 The Cholinergic System Connects Stress Reactions and AD 304
- 16.6 Chronic Stress Affects Behavior Through Chromatin Remodeling and Alternative Splicing 307
- 16.7 GCs Regulate Neuronal Excitability by Modifying Alternative Splicing 309
- Summary 310
- References 310

- 17 Stress and Neurotransmission: Clinical Evidence and Therapeutic Implications 317**
Hadar Shalev and Jonathan Cohen
- 17.1 Introduction 317
- 17.2 Serotonin 319
- 17.3 Adrenergic Antagonists 321
- 17.4 γ -Aminobutyric Acid 323
- Summary 325
- References 327
- 18 Metabolic Components of Neuroendocrine Allostatic Responses: Implications in Lifestyle-Related Diseases 331**
Ronan M.G. Berg and Bente Klarlund Pedersen
- 18.1 Introduction 331
- 18.2 Neuroendocrine Allostatic Responses and Fat Metabolism 332
- 18.2.1 Background 332
- 18.2.2 Effects of GCs on Fat Metabolism and Distribution 333
- 18.2.3 Effects of Catecholaminergic Signaling on Lipolysis and Dyslipidemia 334
- 18.3 Neuroendocrine Allostatic Responses and Glucose Metabolism 335
- 18.3.1 Background 335
- 18.3.2 The Effects of GCs on Gluconeogenesis and Glycogen Synthesis 335
- 18.3.3 Effects of Catecholaminergic Signaling on Hepatic Glucose Metabolism 337
- 18.3.4 Effects of GCs on Peripheral Insulin Sensitivity 337
- 18.3.5 Effects of Catecholaminergic Signaling on Peripheral Glucose Transport 338
- 18.4 Discussion 339
- Summary 342
- References 342
- 19 Environmental Stress is Not Always Vicious: a Lesson from Heat Acclimation-Mediated Neuroprotection After Traumatic Brain Injury 349**
Michal Horowitz and Esther Shohami
- 19.1 Introduction 349
- 19.2 TBI Damage – Detrimental Signaling and Possible Protective Pathways 349
- 19.2.1 Short Background 349
- 19.2.2 TBI-Induced Tissue and Cellular Stress Response 350
- 19.2.2.1 Glutamate 350
- 19.2.2.2 Reactive Oxygen Species 351
- 19.2.2.3 Neuroinflammation 351
- 19.2.3 Treatments 352

19.3	Preconditioning: Inherent Protective Mechanisms Are Induced by Preceding Sub-Lethal (Multiple) Stressors	352
19.4	Heat Acclimation and Neuroprotection	353
19.4.1	Heat Acclimation	353
19.4.2	Heat Acclimation Affords Neuroprotection After TBI	354
19.4.2.1	Physiological Evidence	354
19.4.3	Underlying Signaling Pathways	356
19.4.3.1	Oxidative Stress	356
19.4.3.2	HIF-1-Erythropoietin Pathway	356
19.4.3.3	Acute Inflammatory Response	357
	Summary	359
	References	359
	Index	365

Preface

This book is entitled “Stress: from Molecules to Behavior”, which immediately highlights the complexity of the topic and the difficulty of assembling a decent representation of its various features and perspectives. To refine what we tried to cover in this volume, we added a subtitle statement attempting to present a comprehensive analysis of the neurobiology of stress responses, which in retrospect was even more presumptuous. One year later, we obviously realize that we aimed at the impossible; however, thanks to the efforts of those friends and colleagues who agreed to contribute chapters to this volume, we also learned that the assembled collection of chapters does provide a multi-leveled view of stress, substantially adding to our knowledge on this subject, while emphasizing to the readers the immense and intricate scope of the topic of stress.

Trying the impossible, in turn, brings to mind the 17th century poet Margaret Cavendish, who implemented conceptualization of mind through mathematics and is often called “the first poetess of science”. One of her famous poems portrays the brain as a circle and states, as a metaphor, that *The Circle of the Brain Cannot be Squared*. Mirrored in poetic language, showing how mathematics in the 17th century influenced people’s view of reality, Cavendish also explains in this succinct and powerful poem that man’s attempt to take control over irrational nature will never cease; which is compatible with our ambitious effort.

The Circle of the Brain Cannot be Squared

*A Circle round divided in four parts
Hath been great Study ‘mongst the men of Arts;
Since Archimed’s or Euclid’s time, each Brain
Hath on a Line been stretched, yet all in Vain;
And every Thought hath been a Figure set,
Doubts Cyphers were, Hopes as Triangles met;
There was Division and Subtraction made,
And Lines drawn out, and Points exactly laid,
But none hath yet by Demonstration found
The way, by which to Square a Circle round:
For while the Brain is round, no Square will be,*

*While Thoughts divide, no Figures will agree.
And others did upon the same account,
Doubling the Cube to a great Number mount;
But some the Triangles did cut so small,
Till into equal Atoms they did fall:
For such is Man's curiosity and mind,
To seek for that, which is hardest to find.*

The different chapters comprising this book are loosely grouped into more general stress-related topics. We open with the topic of *Systems*, encompassing studies on the role of stress in evolution by Lilach Hadany, on catecholamines and stress by Esther L. Sabban and on stress and the cholinergic system by Mariella De Biasi. These are clearly not the only systems that are relevant yet, when reading these chapters one gets a glimpse of the systems which might contribute to stress reactions and their significance. We then proceed with the topic of *Cells and circuits*, under which we collected diverse subjects such as the effects of stress on the function of hippocampal cells by Marian Joëls and Henk Karst, the “burning” issue of stress and adult neurogenesis in the mammalian central nervous system by Elizabeth D. Kirby and Daniela Kaufer and the state-of-the-art neurogenetic search for individual differences in reactivity to social stress in the laboratory and its mediation by common genetic polymorphisms by Richard P. Ebstein and co-workers.

Next, we moved on to *Cognition and behavior*, a highly complex topic by its own merit in which recent studies show causal links to specific molecules and cognitive functions. Ronald de Kloet and colleagues open this section with a coverage of corticosteroid hormones in stress and anxiety, as it is reflected in the role of particular receptor variants and environmental inputs. Thomas Blank and Joachim Spiess proceed with corticotropin-releasing factor (CRF) and CRF-related peptides, which together present a linkage between stress and anxiety. Sonia J. Lupien and co-authors then deal with the intriguing subject of stress, emotion and memory. Marta Weinstock closes this topic with the recently much-discussed contribution of early life stress to anxiety disorders.

The immune system and inflammatory responses are emerging as central components of stress reactions. In *Immune responses*, these are covered by Michael Shapira, who describes stress effects on immunity in vertebrates and invertebrates; by Michal Schwartz and co-workers, who present the concept of immunity to self as a mechanism to maintain resistance to mental stress and argue that boosting immunity can serve as a complement to psychological therapy; and by Inbal Goshen and Raz Yirmiya, whose chapter on brain interleukin-1 (IL-1) describes this pro-inflammatory cytokine as a mediator of stress-induced alterations in the activation of the hippocampal–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis, as well as in memory functioning and neural plasticity.

Last, but not least, we turn to studies of stress-related diseases in animal models and human patients. Hagit Cohen leads this section with a comprehensive coverage of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in animal models, then Alon

Friedman and Lev Pavlovsky proceed with the cholinergic model for PTSD as it progresses from acute stress and as it extends from a single neuron to functional networks and altered behavior. Stress-related vulnerability to other diseases is also represented, although the presented examples should be viewed as a sample of the very broad and diverse field rather than as in-depth coverage. The link between stress and neurodegeneration is covered by Amit Berson and co-workers, and a glimpse into the relevant clinical evidence and therapeutic implications of the inter-relationship between stress and neurotransmitter systems is provided by Hadar Shalev and Jonathan Cohen. The pertinent topic of the metabolic aspects of neuro-endocrine allostatic responses as it implicates on lifestyle-related diseases is also presented from the clinician's view point by Ronan M.G. Berg and Bente Klarlund Pedersen. The final chapter by Michal Horowitz and Esther Shohami, on environmental stress, bears a positive message by covering the added values of heat acclimation-mediated neuro-protection from traumatic brain injury.

Together, these chapters reflect a dynamic, evolving field of research of tremendous dimensions and spheres and possessing clinical and social implications that are of interest to many. We wish to thank all of the contributors to this volume, accept the blame for any errors or exclusion of important topics and promise our readers that there is much more to stress than is presented in this book.

Beer Sheva, Berkeley, Jerusalem
October 2009

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Part I

Systems

1

On the Role of Stress in Evolution

Lilach Hadany

1.1

Introduction

Most of the work on stress considers its mechanisms and effects during the lifetime of the stressed individual. In this chapter, we concentrate on the possible effects of stress on genes and populations. In particular, we consider the effects of the information contained in the stress response, especially in chronic stress: namely, that the stressed individual is maladapted to its current environment.

In addition to the physiological responses induced by stress, it can also have genomic responses. One type of response which is of particular interest is an increase in genetic variation, especially the mixing of different genotypes through recombination, sex and outcrossing. Here, we consider the evolution of such a genomic response and its possible implications for the long-term success of the population and for the evolution of complex traits.

When considering the evolution of a genomic response to stress, we can take one of two approaches: we can either consider what would be the “best” response at the level of the population (i.e., the response that would, on average, maximize the average fitness of the population), or consider the fate of a selectively neutral modifier allele [1] inducing the genetic response—would such an allele increase in frequency within the population, due to the forces of natural selection?

1.2

Stress Through the Gene's Eye: the Evolution of Stress-Induced Genetic Mixing

Let us consider the point of view of a gene that regulates genetic mixing—for example, recombining with a different genotype—in response to stress. This gene affects its own probability of moving to a different genetic background in the next generation. When would it be advantageous (at the level of the gene) to move to a different background? The answer depends on the quality of the current genetic background. If the current background is maladapted to the current environment

(e.g., includes multiple deleterious alleles), there is a much greater advantage in “taking the risk” of moving to a different, unknown, background. But how can the gene “know” the quality of the whole genome? One crucial source of information can be stress responses, which relay information about the well-being of the whole organism down to the molecular level. An individual carrying an unfit genome is more likely to be stressed, and the stress responses it experiences can affect the gene regulating genetic mixing. As a result, an increase in mixing is more likely to occur in the presence of stress.

An increase in genetic mixing can occur through various mechanisms, acting at different levels. Each of these mechanisms carries its own costs and benefits. Below we specifically discuss four of these mechanisms—recombination, sex, outcrossing and dispersal.

1.2.1

Stress-Induced Recombination

1.2.1.1 Classic Models of the Evolution of Recombination

The evolution of recombination has been the subject of scientific debate for over 70 years, see [2–7] for reviews. One major problem is that uniform recombination not only generates new advantageous combinations, but also breaks down existing good ones that were generated by selection [8, 9].

Models concentrating on population-level effects show that recombination might be advantageous only under limited conditions [10, 11]. Specifically, recombination can only be advantageous when associations between different loci in the genome result in decreased variation within the population (a situation termed negative linkage disequilibrium). Such associations can be generated by drift [12], synergistic epistasis [13, 14], or environmental changes [15–17]. In these cases recombination reduces linkage disequilibrium and leads to increased average fitness, resulting in a long-term advantage for the population as a whole.

The same question was also studied using modifier models, concentrating on the short-term dynamics of an allele affecting the rate of recombination. These models found that, in the absence of deleterious mutations or environmental changes, a recombination modifier tends to increase from rarity only if it *reduces* the recombination rate between selected loci [18], a result known as “the reduction principle”. However, negative epistasis between deleterious mutations [19, 20], drift [21], or adaptation [22, 23], including inter-species interactions [24, 25], can explain the evolution of recombination modifiers under some circumstances. Nevertheless, none of these models fully accounts for the wide abundance of sex and recombination among higher eukaryotes.

1.2.1.2 The Evolution of Stress-Induced Recombination

When introducing the possibility of stress-induced recombination, radically different results are obtained. Let us first consider the modifier approach: a modifier regulating the level of recombination in a haploid organism according to the state