A DROSOPHILA CIRCUIT FOR HABITUATION OVERRIDE

Abbreviated Title: A neural mechanism for dishabituation

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ABSTRACT:

Habituated animals retain a latent capacity for robust engagement with familiar stimuli. In

most instances, the ability to override habituation is best explained by postulating that

habituation arises from the potentiation of inhibitory inputs onto stimulus-encoding assemblies

and that habituation override occurs through disinhibition. Previous work has shown that

inhibitory plasticity contributes to specific forms of olfactory and gustatory habituation in

Drosophila. Here we analyze how exposure to a novel stimulus causes override of gustatory

(proboscis-extension reflex or "PER") habituation. While brief sucrose contact with tarsal

hairs causes naïve *Drosophila* to extend their proboscis, persistent exposure reduces PER to

subsequent sucrose stimuli. We show that in so habituated animals, either brief exposure of

the proboscis to yeast or direct thermogenetic activation of sensory neurons restores PER

response to tarsal sucrose stimulation. Similar override of PER habituation can also be induced

by brief thermogenetic activation of a population of TH (Tyrosine-Hydroxylase) positive

neurons, a subset of which send projections to the subesophagial zone (SEZ). Significantly,

sensory-neuron induced habituation override requires transmitter release from these TH-

positive cells. Treatments that cause override specifically influence the habituated state, with

no effect on the naïve sucrose response across a range of concentrations. Taken together with

other findings, these observations in female flies are consistent with a model in which novel

taste stimuli trigger activity in dopaminergic neurons which, directly or indirectly, inhibit

GABAergic cells that drive PER habituation. The implications of these findings for general

mechanisms of attentional and sensory override of habituation are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION.

Habituation is a form of non-associative learning in which the response to a stimulus reduces

after repeated or extended passive exposure. However, a latent ability to respond to the

innocuous stimulus remains. "Dishabituation" is a classical, defining feature of the habituated

state, distinguishing it from sensory or synaptic fatigue (Thompson and Spencer, 1966; Rankin

et al., 2009; Ramaswami, 2014). In this article we often use the term "override" in place of

dishabituation, which while largely synonymous, better acknowledges that behavioral

responses can be reinstated by not only classic dishabituating (novel) stimuli, but also top-

down attentional mechanisms (Cooke and Ramaswami, 2020). For instance, in volitional

inspection of a familiar object on a shelf, habituation is overcome by attention to the object,

and not by an extraneous novel stimulus.

Habituation and the associated phenomenon of dishabituation/ override are well known across

different phyla of animal kingdom (Glanzman et al., 1989; Zaccardi et al., 2004; Smith et al.,

2009; Ramaswami, 2014). Two broad observations are relevant here. First, mechanisms

underlying very short and longer lasting forms of habituation may differ; some forms of the

latter are known to involve inhibitory potentiation (Ramaswami, 2014; Shen et al., 2020).

Second, largely due to the difficulty of necessary behavioral experiments, in most (but not all

e.g. Semelidou et al., 2018) instances, habituation override is not distinguished from a potential

confounding process of response sensitization (Castellucci et al., 1970; Hawkins et al., 1998;

Asztalos et al., 2007a; Asztalos et al., 2007b). Thus, although arguments and evidence support

a disinhibitory mechanism (Fischer et al., 1997; Das et al., 2011; Kato et al., 2015; Ogg et al.,

2018) the neural pathways and mechanisms of habituation override remain incompletely

characterized. Here we address this issue in the gustatory system of *Drosophila*.

Drosophila sample and taste potential foods via chemosensory hairs on their tarsi and their

proboscis (Stocker, 1994; Montell, 2009). Sugars detected by sensory hairs trigger a proboscis

extension reflex (PER), which enables feeding (Minnich, 1921; Dethier, 1976). The neural

circuit for PER is only partially understood. Sensory information is processed in subesophagial

zone (SEZ) and then communicated to command neurons whose activation triggers the motor

programme required for PER (Flood et al., 2013). Repeated sucrose stimulation of the tarsus

under conditions where proboscis extension is futile, leads to reduced PER response through a

process that shows several classic features of habituation (Duerr and Quinn, 1982; Le Bourg,

1983; Fois et al., 1991; Engel and Wu, 2009; Paranjpe et al., 2012). Importantly, in habituated

animals, PER to sucrose is quickly restored if the fly is presented with a strong, novel sensory

stimulus (Le Bourg, 1983; Fois et al., 1991; Paranjpe et al., 2012). Here, we investigate circuit

mechanisms that drive override of PER habituation.

We first reproduced prior experiments providing key support for increased inhibition in the

PER pathway being the core mechanism for PER habituation (Paranjpe et al., 2012).

Thereafter, we addressed mechanisms of habituation override, which we found could be

achieved by yeast stimulation of the proboscis, thermogenetic activation of yeast-responsive or

bitter responsive sensory neurons, or activation of a dopaminergic neuron subpopulation.   We

show that sensory stimulation procedures induce habituation override through dopaminergic

neuron activation. Crucially, each dishabituation protocol specifically affects the response of

habituated animals; none sensitize the naïve response. While the data do not yet conclusively

define all elements of the dishabituation circuit or the mechanism by which dopaminergic

neurons trigger override, they support a model in which novel stimuli induce dopamine release,

which acts to directly or indirectly inhibit inhibitory neurons that drive PER habituation. We

suggest that this work: (a) circumscribes core elements of a sensory-central circuit for

habituation override; (b) provides evidence for a new disinhibitory pathway in the Drosophila

brain; and (c) supports an emerging framework in which latent perceptions, memories and

behaviors may be generally activated through disinhibition (Sridharan and Knudsen, 2015;

Barron et al., 2017; Wang and Yang, 2018).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Experimental Design:

Drosophila stocks*:* Fly stocks were maintained on standard corn meal media. Canton S (CS)

flies were used as wild-type controls unless otherwise stated. The stocks were obtained either

from stock centres or as generous gifts from following sources: *Ir25a-Gal4* was provided by

Carlos Ribeiro (Champalimaud Centre for the Unknown, Lisbon, Portugal), *TH-C'-Gal4*, *TH-*

D'-Gal4 and *TH-C-Gal80* were generously provided by Mark Wu (Johns Hopkins University,

Baltimore, MD), *Gad1-Gal4* was from Gero Miesenbock (Oxford University, Oxford, UK),

TH-Gal4 was provided by Gaiti Hassan (National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bangalore,

India), *Gr66a-LexA, lexAop-CD4::spGFP11; UAS-CD4::spGFP1-10* and *LexAop-TRPA1*

were provided by Kristin Scott (University of California, Berkley). *rut^{2080}* and *UAS-rut^{+}* were

provided by Martin Heisenberg. *UAS-Shi^{ts}* was obtained from Toshi Kitamoto (University of

Iowa, Iowa city, IA), *UAS-TRPA1* was provided by Paul Garrity (Brandeis University,

Waltham, MA)**.** *Wg/CyO; Gr66a-Gal4* (BL 57670), *UAS-mCD8::GFP* (BL 5130), *UAS-*

CD8::RFP, *LexAop-CD8::GFP* (BL 32229) were obtained from Bloomington Drosophila

Stock Centre. Dopamine receptors were downregulated using lines *UAS-DopR1-miR, UAS-*

DopR2-miR and *UAS-D2R-miR* obtained from Mark Wu (Johns Hopkins University,

Baltimore, MD) in *Gad1-Gal4* expressing neurons (data not shown). Tyrosine hydroxylase was

downregulated in *TH Gal4* neurons using TH-miR-G/TM6, Sb and TH-miR-9/Cyo; TH-miR-

2/TM6, Tb provided by Mark Wu (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD) (data not

shown). However, the results were inconclusive.

Proboscis extension behaviour: Proboscis extension behaviour was carried out as described in (Paranjpe et al., 2012). Briefly, 3-4 days old female flies were mounted individually, ventral side up, on a cover slip. The flies were kept in a humidified chamber for 2 hours for recovery. Tarsal hairs were stimulated with 2% sucrose using 1ml syringe needle. The naïve response score was determined after stimulating tarsal hairs five times. Failed PER response was scored as zero and complete proboscis extension was scored as one. Flies that showed naïve PER response less than three out of five times were discarded and not used for habituation experiments.

Habituation of proboscis extension reflex: Tarsal hairs were stimulated with 10% sucrose for 10 minutes after which the legs were washed using distilled water. The habituated response or post exposure response was recorded by stimulating tarsus with 2% sucrose five times, similar to naïve response.

Habituation Override 10% yeast was presented to the proboscis over one minute, in a "spaced manner" to prevent consumption of yeast and satiation. In gist, the yeast paste was applied to labellar bristles for about a second but withdrawn rapidly before consumption could occur and this was repeated (about 6 times) over a one minute period. After exposure to yeast, flies were allowed to groom for 1 minute so that yeast sticking to the proboscis could be cleaned. PER responses were subsequently recorded as usual.

For habituation override using mechanical stimulus, flies mounted on the cover slip were placed in a petri dish (35mm) and vortexed for 1 minute on a Scientific Industries Vortex-Genie 2 instrument at the highest setting. Flies were allowed to recover from the shock for 1 minute before testing the response.

To distinguish override from sensitization, naïve response of flies was recorded at concentrations of sucrose lower than 2%. This was done as the PER response is maximum at 2%, any difference as a result of manipulation would have been difficult to observe. Four

concentrations of sucrose were tested- 0.1%, 0.5%, 1% and 2%. Flies were then exposed to

either stimulus used for override or heat, for 1 minute. Post response was tested after 1 minute

rest at RT.

Heat-mediated manipulation For TRPA1 and Shi^{ts} experiments, flies were transferred to 32°

and 34°C respectively on a dry bath for 1 minute. In case of Shi^{ts} experiments, proboscis was

stimulated with 10% yeast while at 34°C. Flies were given 1 minute rest at RT before testing

PER response.

Immunohistochemistry: Adult brains were dissected in 1X PBS and fixed in 4%

paraformaldehyde diluted in 1X PBS with 0.3% Triton-X (PTX) for 30 minutes at room

temperature. Samples were washed with 0.3% PTX for 20 minutes three times at room

temperature and incubated with primary antibody for 48 hours at 4°C on a shaker. Samples

were again washed three times with 0.3% PTX for 20 minutes each. Secondary antibodies

conjugated with Alexa Fluor-488, Alexa Fluor- 568 and Alexa Fluor- 647 (1:500, Invitrogen),

diluted in 0.3% PTX, were added and samples were incubated for 24 hours. Brain samples

were again washed repeatedly three times for 20 minutes each and mounted in Vectashield (H-

1000, Vector laboratories) on a glass slide with spacers. Images were acquired using Zeiss

LSM 510 Meta microscope and Olympus Fluoview (FV- 3000).

Following primary antibodies were used: rabbit anti-GFP (1:100, invitrogen), mouse anti-

Bruchpilot (n82) (1:20, DSHB), mouse anti-GFP (Sigma, 1:100), rabbit anti-TH (1:1000,

Invitrogen), chick anti-GFP (Abcam, 1:5000), rabbit anti-DsRed (1:100, Clontech).

Statistical analysis:

Non parametric tests were used to analyse data. Friedman test was used to analyse habituation

override experiments which had three matched groups, followed by Dunn's multiple

comparisons post hoc test to determine difference among different treatments. Wilcoxon sign

rank test was used for comparing two paired groups whereas Mann Whitney U test was used

to compare two unpaired groups in Fig1C. All the data was analysed using GraphPad Prism

v8.4.2 software.

RESULTS.

Habituation of the proboscis-extension reflex to sucrose

Two-percent sucrose applied to tarsal hairs of immobilized, naïve flies induces robust and

reproducible proboscis extension response. However, following extended 10-minute exposure

to 10% sucrose solution, PER decreases from 92.41% to 28.96% (***p<0.0001, Wilcoxon test)

(Fig 1A-B). No change in naïve PER response is seen if water is presented for 10 minutes

instead of 10% sucrose (Fig1B). A previous study concluded that plasticity in central

GABAergic neurons is required for PER habituation (Paranjpe et al., 2012). Given their

significance for the inferred inhibitory mechanism for PER habituation, and because these

observations were made exclusively in male flies, we independently repeated key experiments

to re-examine: first, the need for the *rutabaga*-encoded adenyl cyclase in PER habituation; and

second, its reported sufficiency in *GAD1-Gal4* expressing, predominantly GABAergic neurons

for this function in our hands and in female flies. Our results were consistent with and

confirmed previously reported observations (Figure 1C).

Habituation is often distinguished from sensory or muscular fatigue by demonstrating the rapid

reinstatement of the sensory response by strong, novel stimuli (Rankin et al., 2009;

Ramaswami, 2014). Consistently, PER-habituated animals retain the ability to respond

relatively robustly to sucrose, as evidenced following strong or novel sensory stimulation.

Similar to olfactory habituation, strong mechanical stimulation (vortexing in a dish) for 1

minute substantially reinstates the sucrose-induced PER in habituated flies (p< 0.001, F-stat =

47.08, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, *p= 0.01), without affecting baseline

sucrose sensitivity in naïve animals (Figure 1D-E; (Das et al., 2011; Paranjpe et al., 2012).

Thus, the effect of mechanical stimulation on PER is selective on the habituated state and

represents a form of habitation override and not sensitization. In order to address the

underlying circuit mechanisms, we first looked to identify more precisely defined sensory

stimuli that could cause override of PER habituation.

Novel stimuli override PER habituation

Drosophila are attracted by the taste of yeast. Gustatory receptor neurons (GRNs) that respond

to yeast components have been recently identified (Fischler et al., 2007; Wisotsky et al., 2011;

Ganguly et al., 2017); (Steck et al., 2018). To examine whether the novel taste of yeast could

influence PER habituation to sucrose, we applied a 10% yeast solution to the fly labellum,

which has previously been shown to possess yeast-responsive GRNs (Steck et al., 2018), and

tested if this resulted in override of sucrose habituation. Application of yeast to the labellum

substantially reinstated the PER response to tarsal sucrose stimulation in PER-habituated

animals ($p<0.0001$, F-stat = 31.15, Dunn's multiple comparison post-hoc test, *$p= 0.014$; Fig

2A-B). In contrast, 10% sucrose solution, which should be familiar to the flies, when applied

to the labellum of habituated flies had no effect on PER (Fig 2B). Thus, a brief experience of

a novel and in this case, attractive stimulus appears capable of inducing habituation override.

We further looked to identify a single GRN class responsive to yeast components that may be

sufficient to drive dishabituation. To do this, we expressed heat-activated cation-permeable

TRPA1 channels in yeast-responsive GRNs and tested if heat-induced activity in these cells,

which bypassed the need for normal ligand-receptor interactions, would result in dishabituation

(Hamada et al., 2008). Such experiments showed that "thermogenetic" activation of the Ir25a

class of sensory neurons is sufficient to cause PER habituation override.

TRPA1 channels open at temperatures above 25°C; thus, activation of TRPA1-expressing

neurons can be temporally controlled by exposing experimental animals to temperatures where

the channel is either closed (RT) or open (above 25°C). We expressed TRPA1 in yeast

responsive *Ir25a-Gal4* positive sensory neurons (Steck et al., 2018).   These flies were

habituated to sucrose at room temperature (RT, 21°C), transferred to 32°C post-habituation for

1 minute and then tested for PER. Thermogenetic activation of Ir25a-expressing GRNs was

sufficient to cause rapid override of sucrose habituation (Fig 2C). Thus, after Ir25a activation,

PER-habituated animals showed significantly increased PER to tarsal sucrose stimulation (p

<0.0001, F-stat = 38.66, Dunn's multiple comparison post-hoc test, **p=0.0012). Similarly,

32°C exposure of genetic control animals not expressing TRPA1 did not affect PER habituation

(Fig 2C).

To distinguish between the novelty and attractiveness of yeast taste as being primarily

instrumental in override, we also examined, whether thermogenetic activation of bitter-

compound responsive Gr66a expressing GRNs could similarly affect override of PER

habituation. Thus, we expressed TRPA1 in *Gr66a-Gal4* positive neurons and examined how

sucrose-responsiveness of flies habituated at RT was altered after a brief 1-minute shift to 32°C.

Sucrose induced PER increased from 6.67% to 56.29% (p<0.0001, F-stat = 39.85, Dunn's

multiple comparison post-hoc test, **p = 0.0042) indicating that brief activation of bitter-taste

sensing *Gr66a*-positive neurons is sufficient to induce dishabituation. The observation that

perception of novel bitter taste as well as novel yeast taste can promote override of PER

habituation strongly indicates that it is the novelty of the dishabituating stimulus, rather than

its attractiveness, that drives habituation override (Fig 2D). We also tested the effect of

thermogenetic activation of olfactory and visual sensory neurons by expressing TRPA1 in all

Or83b-Gal4 positive olfactory sensory neurons (OSNs)*,* in subsets (*Or85a-Gal4* or *Gr21-Gal4*

positive) of OSNs that mediate strong repulsion, or *Rh1-Gal4* expressing photoreceptors, but

we did not observe an effect on PER habituation (data not shown). Therefore, we did not

explore these stimuli further.

Does novelty-induced override of PER habituation represent a specific effect on the habituated

state or a general sensitization of the sensory response? To differentiate between these

possibilities, we tested whether and how yeast exposure, *Ir25a*-neuron activation or *Gr66a*-

neuron activation altered PER in naïve flies to a range of sucrose concentrations. If the increase

in PER response in habituated flies were due to sensitization, then we would expect an increase

in PER after the novel stimulus is applied to naïve animals. However, as shown in 3A, 3B and

3C, there is no significant difference in PER response before and after presentation of yeast or

Ir25a or *Gr66a*-GRN activation respectively. Thus, it can be concluded that the reinstatement

of PER response that we observe in our experiments is due to a process that specifically acts

on neural correlates of PER habituation, not broadly on taste perception.

Artificial activation of Tyrosine-Hydroxylase (TH) expressing neurons overrides PER

habituation.

Across species, novel stimuli trigger central release of neuromodulators that confer or enhance

their salience (Ranganath and Rainer, 2003; Kafkas and Montaldi, 2018). In particular, the

activity of dopaminergic neurons has been implicated in the novelty response both in insects

and in mammalian systems, (Hattori et al., 2017; Morrens et al., 2020). We therefore

investigated whether thermogenetic activation of *Drosophila* tyrosine-hydroxylase (TH)

expressing central dopaminergic neurons would be (a) sufficient and (b) necessary for novel-

taste induced override of PER habituation.

In PER-habituated *TH-Gal4>UAS-TRPA1* animals, 1-minute exposure to 32°C to drive

thermogenetic activation of *TH-Gal4* expressing neurons resulted in rapid habituation override

(Fig 4A). In PER-habituated animals, sucrose-induced PER was close to 12%; in these same

animals, activation of TH expressing neurons increased PER to 60% (p<0.0001, F-stat = 50.54,

Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p = 0.0004).   Significantly, activation of TH

Gal4 neurons had no effect on the innate response to sucrose in naïve flies (Fig 4B). Thus,

activation of these modulatory neurons causes habituation override, not general taste

sensitization.

TH-Gal4 labels around 200 neurons in the Drosophila brain (Friggi-Grelin et al., 2003). In

order to more tightly define *TH*-expressing cells involved in PER-habituation override, we

tested two non-overlapping subsets of *TH-Gal4* positive neurons, marked by *TH-D'-Gal4* and

TH-C'-Gal4 drivers (which labels ~54±5 and ~45±3 neurons respectively) for their potential

roles. While 1-minute thermogenetic activation of *TH-D'* neurons had no effect on PER

habituation, similar activation of neurons labelled by *TH-C'-Gal4* significantly increased PER

response from 28.72% in control habituated flies, to 57.81% after *TH-C'* activation (p<0.0001,

F-stat = 69.50, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test,**p= 0.0042 Fig 4C). Moreover,

TH-Gal4-driven habituation override required activity in *TH-C'* cell population: thus, 32°C

exposure did not trigger PER habituation override in *TH-C-Gal80; TH-Gal4> UAS TRPA1*

flies, in which Gal80 expression prevented TRPA1 expression in the *TH-C'* subset of *TH-Gal4*

neurons (Fig 4D).   This indicates that activity in *TH-C'* subset of cells is necessary and

sufficient to cause habituation override. To further support this conclusion, we checked and

confirmed that activation of *TH-C'* neurons had no significant effect on the PER of naïve flies

across a range of sucrose concentrations (Fig 4E) confirming that *TH-C'* neurons specifically

influence mechanisms of habituation, rather than general taste perception.

Significantly, a small subset of *TH-C'* neurons (~13±6) are present locally in the SEZ

(suboesophagial zone), an area which not only receives inputs from taste sensory neurons, but

also houses interneurons and motor neurons involved in proboscis extension (Gordon and

Scott, 2009; Kain and Dahanukar, 2015). Thus, some *TH-C'* neurons are well positioned to

mediate sensory-driven novelty signals that influence mechanisms of PER habituation.

A subset of TH-expressing neurons mediates novelty-induced habituation override.

In order to test whether the activity of *TH-Gal4* and *TH-C'-Gal4* neurons is necessary for

novel-taste induced override of PER habituation, we examined whether novel-taste stimulation

could cause habituation override under conditions where synaptic output from *TH-Gal4* or *TH-*

C'-Gal4 neurons was blocked. To achieve this, we expressed the temperature-sensitive,

dominant-negative Shi[ts1] mutant form of dynamin in these neurons and tested whether a one-

minute exposure to 10% yeast at 34°C could override habituation in *TH-Gal4, UAS-Shi[ts1]* and

TH-C'-Gal4 UAS-Shi[ts1] at temperatures restrictive for Shi[ts1] dynamin function.

At permissive (room) temperatures, *TH-Gal4, UAS-Shi[ts1]* and *TH-C'-Gal4, UAS-Shi[ts1]* flies

behaved similarly to wild-type flies, showing both robust PER habituation after 10 minutes of

tarsal sucrose exposure (Fig 5A) and significant PER dishabituation following brief (1 min)

exposure of their labella to 10% yeast solution (Fig 5A). The respective efficiency of PER in

habituated and dishabituated animals (before and after yeast exposure) were 34.05% and

77.29% (p<0.0001, F-stat = 42.47, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p = 0.0008)

and 13.46% and 48.46% (p<0.0001, F-stat = 41.01, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test,

*p = 0.045) respectively (Fig 5A).

In contrast, if after PER habituation the same flies were shifted to and exposed to 10% yeast at

34°C, where the essential function of dynamin in transmitter release would be compromised in

Shi[ts1]-expressing cells, then habituation override was significantly impaired as compared to

controls (Fig 5A). Thus, yeast-induced dishabituation of control flies not expressing *Shi[ts1]* at

34°C was substantially more efficient (p<0.0001, F-stat = 35.83, Dunn's multiple comparisons

post-hoc test,**p= 0.0015), than of *TH-Gal4, UAS-Shi[ts1]* flies at the same temperature (Fig

5A). Similarly, dishabituation of control flies not expressing Shi^{ts1} was also substantially more

efficient at 34°C (p< 0.0001, F-stat = 46.90, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p

= 0.0001), than of *TH-C'-Gal4, UAS-Shi^{ts1}* flies, expressing temperature-sensitive mutant

dynamin in *THC'-Gal4* neurons. These data argue that presynaptic activity in *TH-C'-Gal4* and

TH-Gal4 positive cells is required for yeast-induced override of PER habituation (Fig 5A).

An important caveat to the above conclusion is that dopaminergic neuron activation may be

associated with motivation or reward prediction and therefore be fundamentally required for

high levels of PER. In such a scenario, inactivation of TH-expressing cells would be expected

to generally reduce levels of PER. To address this issue and test whether the apparently

reduced override in Fig 5A is an artifact of blocking dopaminergic neurons during yeast

exposure, we measured the innate response to sucrose in naïve flies with and without blockage

of synaptic transmission in dopaminergic neurons (Fig 5B). There was no significant

difference in the innate response to 2% sucrose, confirming a more restricted role for these TH

positive cells in the override of habituation.

Sensory neurons projections in SEZ overlap spatially with projections of TH-neurons

In the mushroom body, dopaminergic neurons potentially compute novelty by combining

excitatory inputs from olfactory sensory channels with inhibitory inputs driven by familiarity

encoding interneurons (Zhao et al., 2021) (and see Discussion). If TH-positive cells were to

play a similar role in the SEZ, then they would be predicted to receive direct or indirect inputs

from taste sensory neurons as well as input from familiarity-representing inhibitory neurons.

Previous work has shown that processes from some TH-positive neurons are present in the SEZ

which also contains presynaptic endings of taste sensory neurons, processes of local

interneurons and dendrites of motor neurons involved in proboscis extension (Figure 6A; (Liu

et al., 2012)). Therefore, we considered the possibility that taste sensory neurons make contacts

with *TH*-positive processes.

To test whether taste-sensory neurons carrying dishabituating signals form connections, direct

or indirect, with TH-neuron processes in the SEZ, we used the GFP-reconstitution across

synaptic partners (GRASP) technique, which requires the use of dual binary transcription

systems (based on LexA and Gal4 transcription factors) to separately express two

complementing fragments of GFP, one in sensory neurons and the other in TH neurons.

Limited by the immediate availability of transgenes, we were technically restricted to analyzing

TH connections with neurons in which gene expression could be controlled by LexA. This

was possible for bitter-taste responsive *Gr66a* neurons but not for the yeast-responsive *Ir25a*

class.

We first examined whether *Gr66a* axonal projections and *TH-Gal4* marked processes were

present in close proximity within the SEZ, by examining the relative localization of GFP driven

in *Gr66a*-expressing neurons with RFP in *TH*-positive cells. Processes of sensory neurons

expressing *Gr66a-LexA*-driven GFP and dopaminergic neurons expressing *TH-Gal4* driven

RFP showed close proximity (Fig6A). Further, GRASP experiments showed that two halves

of split GFP, one expressed in *Gr66a* neurons and the other in *TH*-positive cells could combine

to reconstitute GFP fluorescence within the SEZ (Fig 6B). Robust fluorescence reconstitution

was seen in 8/13 experimental animals compared to 0/15 total animals expressing only one

split-GFP component. Thus, GRASP experiments confirm that the processes of *Gr66a* axons

and tyrosine-hydroxylase expressing cells come in close proximity of each other. However,

due to the limitation of the GRASP technique used it cannot be established certainly if there is

a direct synapse between the two cell types.

These data predict that habituation override induced by thermogenetic activation of Gr66a cells

should require activity in *TH-Gal4* positive cells. We tested this prediction by creating and

analysing PER habituation and dishabituation in *Gr66a-LexA/ LexAop-TRPA1; TH-Gal4/*

UAS-Shi^{ts1} and control *Gr66a-LexA/LexAop-TRPA1; TH-Gal4/+* lines at temperatures

permissive and restrictive for Shi^{ts1} dynamin.   As shown (Fig 6C), both lines showed robust

PER and PER habituation. One minute-exposure to 34°C in control flies permissive for

synaptic transmission from *TH*-positive neurons resulted in significant (p<0.0001, F-stat =

44.02, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, *p = 0.02) override of habituation.

However, similar 34°C thermogenetic stimulation of *Gr66a* neurons in experimental flies

where synaptic transmission from TH-positive neurons is blocked did not result in override of

PER habituation. Together the anatomical and behavioral data indicate that *Gr66a*-expressing

bitter taste sensory neurons are functionally connected to *TH*-expression modulatory neurons

whose activity is required for PER habituation override.

Control experiments demonstrating that blocking synaptic output from *TH*-expressing cells

has no effect on basal PER response in naïve animals further confirm that transmitter release

from *TH*-neurons is required for override of neuronal mechanisms of habituation, not for the

innate response to sucrose (Fig 5B).

DISCUSSION

Animal behavior is profoundly flexible. Thus, at any time, multiple potential behavioral

programmes remain dormant, while a subset relevant to specific contexts are active. A growing

body of evidence suggests that inhibitory inputs play a major role in preserving perceptions,

behaviors and memories in dormant form until required (Barron et al., 2017).   Thus, a given

context, by recruiting disinhibitory circuits may override inhibition to release latent

perceptions, motor programmes and memories appropriate to that context.   While the

overarching principles are increasingly appreciated, there is still limited understanding of how

these are implemented in cells and circuits. While there are many potential reasons for this,

the difficulty in studying mechanisms of override has been substantially caused by the paucity

of systems in which both mechanisms of habituation or cognitive silencing can be addressed

as well as where robust override can be experimentally achieved.

The results we present outline essential elements within a *Drosophila* circuit that overrides

habituation of the sucrose-evoked proboscis extension reflex. In doing so, they connect sensory

neurons mediating override to neuromodulatory neurons projecting to the SEZ, which may

override habituation by silencing inhibitory neurons that drive habituation

Previous work in *Drosophila* concluded that PER habituation arises from increased sucrose-

evoked inhibition onto neurons that drive proboscis extension (Paranjpe et al., 2012). Two

findings, which closely mirror observations on olfactory habituation, provided key support for

this conclusion (Das et al., 2011; Paranjpe et al., 2012). First, the *rutabaga*-encoded adenyl

cyclase is required specifically in inhibitory neurons for PER habituation, an observation that

we have independently confirmed in this study (Figure 1). Second, experimental silencing of

inhibitory neurons causes override of habituation. Together these observations indicate first,

that increased GABAergic activity is required for the expression of PER habituation and

second, that disinhibition could serve as strategy for habituation override. How might such

disinhibition be biologically achieved? Our current experiments show that novel sensory

experience induces override of PER habituation through a pathway that requires activity in the

TH-C' class of dopaminergic neurons. As thermogenetic activation of *TH-C'* cells is also

sufficient to override PER habituation, the data suggest a framework in which sensory stimuli

activate *TH-C'* neurons, which directly or indirectly, inhibit GABAergic neurons responsible

for habituation (Figure 7).

An important question to address is why novel but not familiar taste stimuli are effective for

override? In physiological terms, how could activation of a novel subset of (*Ir25a or Gr66a*)

sensory-neurons result in strong excitation of *TH-C'* cells, while similar levels of activation of

sucrose-response sensory-neurons causes weaker excitation of the same *TH-C'* cells? We

suggest that this occurs because familiar stimuli also result in decreased activation (or likely

increased inhibition) of *TH-C'* neurons. A schematic circuit level model is shown in Figure 7.

More detailed information on the anatomical and physiological connectivity across key

elements of the dishabituation circuit will be required to test and elaborate on this broad model.

The subtypes and connectivities of relevant inhibitory neurons in the SEZ remain unknown and

crucially important to establish. It is particularly important to know whether different classes

of SNs activate different subgroups of iLNs in the SEZ. In addition, the exact subset of *TH-C'*

cells involved as well as the mechanism by which they function and modulate GABAergic

iLNs need to be identified. While the relevant *TH-C'* cells are marked by three independent

dopaminergic reporter lines, *TH-Gal4*, *TH-C'* and *TH-C-Gal80*, and therefore probably

dopaminergic, it remains unclear whether dopamine release is required for habituation

override. Our attempts to address the last issue via knockdown of tyrosine hydroxylase

through RNAi, or by various genetic manipulations of dopamine receptor expression did not

yield definitive results (Materials and Methods), often because these manipulations affected

baseline levels of PER and PER habituation.

Despite the above lacunae, given that the SEZ, which contains gustatory neurons axons as well

as dendrites of motor neurons that drive PER, is likely to be numerically simple, the most

parsimonious model for override would posit that taste sensory neurons trigger direct excitation

of dopaminergic processes, which in turn acts within the SEZ to directly inhibit GABAergic

cells (Pimentel et al., 2016) whose potentiation drives PER habituation.

The model above is consistent with observations on habituation override in mouse and Aplysia

brains (Bristol and Carew, 2005; Smith et al., 2009; Kato et al., 2015; Ogg et al., 2018). In

mouse, long term auditory habituation to a passively experienced tone is accompanied by

increased activity in tone-responsive SOM+ neurons that inhibit similarly tuned pyramidal

cells in the auditory cortex. However, if habituated mice are coaxed to attend to the same tone

(by a reward for successful engagement), then the behaving mice show overriding inhibition

of SOM+ neurons and increased activity of downstream L2/3 pyramidal neurons (Kato et al.,

2015). It appears likely that this disinhibition is accomplished by modulatory inputs onto

upstream VIP+ neurons. A more recent analysis showed that cholinergic inputs into the mouse

olfactory bulb could cause override of a fast form of olfactory habituation. Thus, electrical or

optogenetically induced acetylcholine release into the bulb caused mice to override habituation

and investigate a previously ignored odor (Ogg et al., 2018). While sensitization is not formally

excluded here, these studies are consistent with an emerging theme wherein neuromodulators

released in response to novel or meaningful stimuli (Vankov et al., 1995; Giovannini et al.,

2001; Ranganath and Rainer, 2003; Hattori et al., 2017; Kafkas and Montaldi, 2018; Morrens

et al., 2020) result in disinhibition which can either enhance learning or override habituation.

The experimental results described here provides multiple lines of circumstantial evidence in

support of a novelty-induced dopaminergic pathway for disinhibition of sensory perception. It

outlines a habituation override circuit all the way from sensory neurons that detect stimulus, to

motor neurons that mediate behavioral response. In context of the increasingly widely

appreciated role for disinhibition in the control of perception, cognition and behavior (Letzkus

et al., 2015; Sridharan and Knudsen, 2015; Barron et al., 2017; Wang and Yang, 2018) we

suggest that this work provides a valuable intellectual and biological foundation for future

studies to comprehensively identify neurons and mechanisms involved in a central pathway for

behaviorally important disinhibition.

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FIGURE LEGENDS

Figure 1. Gustatory habituation of PER to sweet taste.

(A) Behavioural protocol of PER habituation to tarsal stimulation following sucrose exposure.

(B) Tarsal exposure to 10% sucrose for 10 minutes leads to decrease in PER response (***p<

0.0001, Wilcoxon signed rank test) whereas exposure to water does not affect the response (p

= 0.6133, Wilcoxon signed rank test). **(C)** As previously described (Paranjpe et al, 2012),

gustatory habituation is dependent on the Rutabaga adenylate cyclase since it is impaired in

rut^{2080} mutants. Habituation can be restored by expressing wild type *rut* in inhibitory *Gad1-*

Gal4 neurons (**p < 0.006, Mann Whitney U stat = 227). **(D)** The habituated response can be

overridden by a novel mechanical stimulus like vortexing (p<0.001, F- stat = 47.08, Dunn's

multiple comparison post-hoc test, ***p <0.001, *p = 0.01). **(E)** Vortexing does not have an

effect on naïve response to sucrose at concentrations 0.1% (p = 0.0518, Wilcoxon signed rank

test), 0.5% (p= 0.6880, Wilcoxon signed rank test) and 1 % (p= 0.1626, Wilcoxon signed rank

test) as, determined by testing PER response pre and post vortexing at different sucrose

concentrations. Therefore, the enhanced PER response after vortexing habituated animals is

not a result of general sensitization but instead represents a specific override of habituation to

sucrose. Bars represent mean±SEM, triangles represent individual data points, ns represents

not statistically significant, p>0.05.

Figure 2. Habituation override mediated by novel stimulus

(A) Behaviour protocol of PER habituation and its override by presenting stimulus to the

labellum **(B)** Presentation of novel 10% yeast stimulus to labellum restores PER response

(p<0.0001, F-stat = 31.15, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, *p =

0.014) whereas 10% sucrose, which is a familiar stimulus, does not have an effect on habituated

response (p<0.0001, F-stat = 43.49, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001,

p > 0.99). **(C1)** Expression pattern of *Ir25a-Gal4* in the adult brain. Ir25a-Gal4 is expresssed

in gustatory receptor neurons, predominantly bitter and sweet sensory neurons in the

subesophageal zone (SEZ), as well as some olfactory receptor neurons in the antennal lobe

(AL). **(C2)** Directly activating yeast responsive *Ir25a-Gal4* cells expressing heat activated

channel *TRPA1* for 1 minute after habituation at 32°C, is sufficient to override PER habituation

to sucrose (p<0.0001, F-stat = 38.66, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001,

**p = 0.0012) whereas at permissive temperature, *Ir25a>TRPA1* flies do not show an increase

in habituated response (p<0.0001, F-stat = 22.62, Dunn's multiple comparisons post hoc test,

***p = 0.0002, p>0.99) (*Ir25a-Gal4/+* p<0.0001, F-statistic = 38.99, Dunn's multiple

comparison post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, p > 0.99, *UAS-TRPA1/+*, p<0.0001, F-stat = 33.88,

Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, p > 0.99. **(D1)** Expression pattern of

Gr66a-Gal4 in the subesophageal zone (SEZ) region of adult brain. The bitter sensory neurons

marked by Gr66a form a ringed structure; they project to the anterior region of the SEZ. **(D2)**

Thermogenetic activation of bitter *Gr66a*-marked GRNs for 1 minute after habituation at 32°C,

also overrides sweet-taste habituation (p<0.0001, F-stat = 39.85, Dunn's multiple comparisons

post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, **p = 0.0042) whereas no difference is observed in controls

(Gr66a>UAS-TRPA1 at RT p<0.0001, F-stat = 17.56, Dunn's multiple comparisons post hoc

test, ***p= 0.0009, p>0.99, *Gr66a-Gal4/+* p<0.0001, F-stat = 44.60, Dunn's multiple

comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, p = 0.97, *UAS-TRPA1/+*, p<0.0001, F-stat = 40.22,

Dunn's multiple comparison post-hoc test, p<0.0001, p > 0.99). Together the data show that

stimulus-novelty drives override of habituation. Bars represent mean±SEM, triangles represent

individual data points, ns represents not statistically significant, p>0.05.

Figure 3. Novelty induced habituation override does not induce sensitization of sensory

response

(A) Labellar exposure to 10% yeast does not increase the naïve PER response to 0.1%, 0.5%,

1% or 2% sucrose stimulation (Probabilities of PER being unchanged using the Wilcoxon sign

rank test: p = 0.6404, p = 0.6731, p = 0.1957, and p = 0.1208 at the 4 respective sucrose

concentrations). **(B)** Thermogenetic activation of *Ir25a-Gal4* does not sensitize response to

sucrose tested at concentration 0.1% (p > 0.99, Wilcoxon sign rank test), 0.5% (p = 0.5938,

Wilcoxon sign rank test), 1% (p = 0.7588, Wilcoxon sign rank test), 2% (p = 0.4814, Wilcoxon

sign rank test,). **(C)**Thermogenetic activation of *Gr66a-Gal4* does not have an effect on

response to 0.1% (p = 0.5, Wilcoxon sign rank test), 0.5% (p > 0.99, Wilcoxon sign rank test),

1% (p = 0.375, Wilcoxon sign rank test), 2% (p = 0.3828, Wilcoxon sign rank test)

concentrations of sucrose. Points represent mean±SEM, ns represents not statistically

significant, p>0.05.

Figure 4. Activation of TH expressing neurons overrides habituation

(A) Thermogenetic activation of TH expressing neurons for 1 minute at 32°C after habituation

results in habituation override (p<0.0001, F-stat = 50.54, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-

hoc test, ***p<0.0001, ***p = 0.0004) (*TH-Gal4/+*, p<0.0001, F-stat = 49.56, Dunn's multiple

comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, p >0.99, *UAS-TRPA1/+*, p <0.0001, F-stat = 37.31,

Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, p>0.99, *TH-Gal4/UAS-TRPA1*

temperature control, p<0.0001, F-stat = 26, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test,

***p<0.0001, p = 0.8665). **(B)** Activation of TH expressing neurons does not lead to

sensitization of gustatory response tested at 0.1% (p = 0.09, Wilcoxon sign rank test), 0.5% (p

= 0.1, Wilcoxon sign rank test), 1% (p = 0.14, Wilcoxon sign rank test), 2% (p = 0.1367,

Wilcoxon sign rank test). **(C)** Activation of a subset of TH expressing cells marked by *TH-C'-*

Gal4 for 1 minute after habation at 32°C is sufficient to override habituated response to

sucrose (p<0.0001, F-stat = 69.50, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001,

**p = 0.0042) (*TH Gal4/+*, p<0.0001, F-stat = 59.70, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc

test, ***p<0.0001, p = 0.4914 *, UAS-TRPA1/+*, p<0.0001, F-stat = 63.52**,** Dunn's multiple

comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, p > 0.99) (*TH-C'- Gal4* temperature control,

p<0.0001, F-stat = 21.41, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, **p = 0.0017, p > 0.99).

(D) Activation of *TH-D'* subset of neurons, which marks subset of neurons that does not

overlap with *TH-C,'* for 1 minute after habituation at 32°C does not override habituation

(p<0.0001, F-stat = 42.70, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p <0.0001, p> 0.99)

(*UAS-TRPA1/+*, p<0.0001, F-stat = 76.79, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test,

***p<0.0001, p = 0.3710). **(E)** Combining *TH-C-Gal80* along with *TH Gal4* blocks the

expression in *TH-C'* subset of neurons only, as observed by GFP expression (SEZ represents

subesophageal zone). **(F)** The flies carrying *TH-C-Gal80* along with *TH-Gal4* fail to show

habituation override when these are activated at 32°C after habituation further confirming the

role of *TH-C'* subset of neurons (p<0.0001, F-stat = 35.74, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-

hoc test, ***p<0.0001, p >0.99) (*TH-Gal4/ UAS-TRPA1*, p<0.0001, F-stat = 45.65, Dunn's

multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, **p = 0.0025) (F-stat = 35.38**,** *TH-C-*

Gal80/+, p <0.0001, F-stat = 35.38, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001,

p = 0.9061) (*UAS-TRPA1/+*, p<0.0001, F-stat = 30.55, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc

test, ***p<0.0001, p > 0.99). **(G)** Activation of *TH-C'* Gal4 neurons does not affect the naïve

response to sucrose tested at 0.1% (p = 0.5635, Wilcoxon sign rank test), 0.5% (p = 0.3748,

Wilcoxon sign rank test), 1% (p = 0.7338, Wilcoxon sign rank test), 2% (p = 0.3125, Wilcoxon

sign rank test). Bars represent mean ±SEM, triangles represent individual data points, points in

figure 4B and 4G represent mean ±SEM, ns represents not statistically significant, p>0.05.

Figure 5. Activity of *TH-C'* subset of neurons is necessary for novelty induced override

(A) At permissive temperature (RT = 21°C), presentation of 10% yeast to the labellum

overrides habituation in both *TH-C' Gal4/ UAS-Shi^{s1}* (p<0.0001, F-stat = 41.01, Dunn's

multiple comparisons post-hoc test,***p<0.0001, *p = 0.0457) and *TH-Gal4/+;UAS-Shi^{ts1}/+*

flies and (p<0.0001, F-stat = 42.47, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001,

***p = 0.0008) respectively. However, at restrictive temperature (34°C) blocking the synaptic

transmission of *TH-Gal4* and *TH-C'-Gal4* neurons by expressing *Shi^{ts1}* during presentation of

novel yeast stimulus after habituation to sucrose, impairs habituation override (*TH-*

Gal4/+;UAS-Shi^{ts1}/+, p<0.0001, F-stat = 102.8, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ,

***p<0.0001, p = 0.3897) (*TH-C'-Gal4/ UAS-Shi^{ts1}*, p<0.0001, F-stat = 37.98, Dunn's multiple

comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, p > 0.99) respectively. The genotypic controls show

override of habituation to 10% yeast presented to the labellum (*TH-Gal4/+*, p<0.0001, F-stat

= 35.83, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, **p = 0.0015) (*UAS-*

Shi^{ts1}/+, p<0.0001, F-stat = 56.96, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, p<0.0001, ***p

= 0.0009), (*TH-C'-Gal4/+*, p<0.0001, F-stat = 46.90, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc

test, ***p<0.0001, ***p = 0.0001) **(B)** Blocking *TH-Gal4* neurons and *TH-C'-Gal4* neurons

does not have an effect on PER itself (p = 0.1909 and p = 0.9141, respectively, Wilcoxon sign

rank). Bars represent mean ± SEM, triangles represent individual data points, ns represents not

statistically significantly, p>0.05.

Figure 6. TH Gal4 neurons are functionally connected to GRNs

(A) Expression pattern of Gr66a with respect to TH expressing neurons. **(B)** GRASP between

Gr66a and TH expressing neurons show GFP signal in animals expressing both the components

of split GFP. No signal is observed in controls lacking either of split GFP component. **(C)**

Controls do not show any significant increase in response at 34°C (*Gr66a LexA/ +; TH-Gal4/+*,

p<0.0001, F-statistic = 55.06, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, p=

0.9079, *LexAop-TRPA1/+; UAS-Shi^{ts1}/+*, p<0.0001, F-stat = 53.41, Dunn's multiple

comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, p = 0.0580,). Activation of Gr66a while inhibiting

TH expressing neurons simultaneously fails to reinstate habituated response (*Gr66a LexA/*

LexAop-TRPA1; TH-Gal4/ UAS-Shi^{ts1}, p<0.0001, F-stat = 52.57, Dunn's multiple comparisons

post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, p= 0.9494), whereas activating Gr66a solely overrides habituation

(*Gr66a LexA/ LexAop-TRPA1; TH-Gal4/ +,* p<0.0001, F-stat = 44.02, Dunn's multiple

comparisons post-hoc test, ***p<0.0001, *p = 0.0205). Control at permissive temperature does

not show any difference in habituated response (*Gr66a LexA/ LexAop-TRPA1; TH-Gal4/ +,*

***p= 0.0004, F-stat = 15.50, *p= 0.0322, p > 0.99, Dunn's multiple comparisons post-hoc

test). Bars represent mean ± SEM, triangles represent individual data points, ns represents not

statistically significantly, p>0.05, SEZ represents subesophageal zone.

Figure 7: Model for habituation override in the *Drosophila* gustatory system. As shown

in Paranjpe et al, 2012, potentiation of GABAergic neurons ("strong inhibition") underlies PER

habituation to a familiar stimulus (Right side). A novel stimulus (left side) activates TH-C'

subset of (likely) dopaminergic neurons which in turn inhibits GABAergic neurons that are

potentiated during habituation. The resulting disinhibition restores strong PER to familiar

stimulus (habituation override). Familiar stimuli cause only weak activation of THC' neurons

(potentially through increased inhibition onto THC') and do not alter the habituated PER

response.

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Figure1

Figure2

Figure3

Unhabituated Flies

● Pre activation ● Post activation

Figure 4

Figure 5

A

B

Figure 6

A

Gr66a-LexA; TH-Gal4 > UAS-mCD8:: RFP, LexAop-mCD8::GFP

B

C

Figure7