

The neurophysiological regulation of temperament in sheep

By

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Certification

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Abbreviations

Working definitions for thesis

Chapters

References

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Abstract

This thesis examines the neurophysiological underpinning mechanisms which may be pertinent for understanding temperament and its relationship to fearfulness in sheep. In the dose response experiment conducted in chapter 3, administration of diazepam (GABA agonist) and m-CPP (5-HT agonist) gave the most consistent physiological responses in the arena test and isolation box test, which aligned with extrapolated data. The interpretation of the behavioural responses was less clear.

We designed a psychological challenge (the fear potentiation model) to induce fear utilizing a line of sheep selected for calm and nervous temperament. The final model consisted of two prior exposures to an isolation and dog challenge, and a final exposure to isolation only. Manipulation of the fear response was achieved with a potentiated fear state, causing the sheep to respond to the final isolation exposure with a marked reduction in the behavioural response, similar to freezing behaviour, which was still evident after a long period of time. This implies memory of the situation resulting in a behaviourally potentiated fear response. Physiologically, the isolation and dog challenge caused only a slight potentiated response. Additionally, sheep were able to perceive the dog's presence without visual or auditory cues, suggesting possible olfactory detection.

We employed the use of selected pharmacological treatments to target neurotransmitter pathways to investigate their role on fearfulness and temperament whilst exposed to the challenge test, however the role of the pathways targeted (GABA and 5-HT) and influence upon temperament was not obvious. The selected pharmacological treatments did convey effects on behavioural and physiology; however this was not evident in observing differences in the temperament selection lines. The primary observation was that of a divergent behavioural response whilst the physiological response between calm and nervous was fairly inconsistent. The marked divergence in behaviour and limited divergence of the physiological response was consistent throughout the experiments using the selection line. It appears that selection has mostly resulted in common characteristics that differentiate the line behaviourally and not physiologically, whilst the physiological data for the selection line is not tightly linked to the behavioural responses during the challenge periods.

Certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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Kelly Anne Drake

Chapter 1 Literature review

1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Fear, fearfulness and temperament	3
1.2.1	Fear and fearfulness	3
1.2.3	Temperament	3
1.2.3.1	<i>Temperament tests</i>	3
1.2.4	Associations between temperament and production traits	6
1.2.5	Factors affecting the expression of temperament	6
1.3	Neurological regulation of fear and temperament	8
1.3.1	γ -aminobutyric acid (GABA)	9
1.3.1.1	<u><i>GABA Receptors</i></u>	9
	<u>GABA_A receptor</u>	10
	<u>GABA_B receptor</u>	10
	<u>GABA_C receptor</u>	10
1.3.1.2	<u><i>Ligands</i></u>	11
1.3.1.3	<u><i>GABA and fearfulness</i></u>	12
1.3.2	Serotonin (5-HT)	14
1.3.2.1	<u><i>5-HT receptors</i></u>	14
	<u>5-HT₁ receptor family</u>	16
	<u>5-HT₂ receptor family</u>	17
1.3.2.2	<u><i>5-HT and fearfulness</i></u>	18
1.4	Combination between behavioural genetic tools and pharmacologic models	22
1.5	Summary	23

Chapter 2 General materials and methods

2.1	Animals	25
2.2	Behavioural tests	25
2.2.1	Isolation box test (IBT)	26
2.2.2	Arena test	26
2.2.2.1	Behavioural measures	27
2.3	Physiological measurements	28
2.3.1	Heart rate (HR)	28
2.3.2	Blood sampling	29
2.3.2.1	<i>Cortisol radioimmunoassay (RIA)</i>	29

Chapter 3 Dose response studies of GABAergic and serotonergic agonists and antagonists

3.1	Introduction	31
3.2	Hypotheses	33
3.3	Materials and methods	34
3.3.1	Animals	34
3.3.2	Experimental design	34
3.3.3	Treatments	34
3.3.4	Procedure	35
3.3.4.1	<i>Blood sampling measures</i>	36
3.3.4.2	<i>Cortisol assay</i>	36
3.3.5	Challenges	37
3.3.5.1	<i>Arena test</i>	37
3.3.5.2	<i>Behavioural measures</i>	37
3.3.5.3	<i>Isolation box test (IBT)</i>	38
3.4	Statistical analysis	38
3.5	Results	39
3.5.1	GABA receptor treatments (Exposure 2)	39
3.5.2	GABA treatment groups (Exposures 1 and 3)	41
3.5.3	5-HT receptor treatments (Exposure 2)	43
3.5.4	5-HT treatment groups (Exposures 1 and 3)	46
3.6	Discussion	48
3.6.1	GABA treatments	48
3.6.2	5-HT treatments	51
3.7	Conclusion	56

Chapter 4 Three phase development of a fear potentiation model for sheep

4.1	Introduction	57
4.2	Hypotheses	60
4.3	Materials and methods	60
4.3.1	Animals	60
4.3.2	Challenges	61
4.3.3	Blood sampling	62
4.3.4	Experimental procedures	62
4.3.4.1	<i>Phase 1: Fear response after one exposure to a dog</i>	62
4.3.4.2	<i>Phase 2: Fear potentiation after two exposures to a dog</i>	62
4.3.4.3	<i>Fear reaction to the presence of a dog without visual or auditory contact</i>	63
4.3.5	Cortisol assay	63
4.3.6	Statistical analysis	64
4.3.6.1	<i>Phase 1: Fear response after one exposure to a dog</i>	64
4.3.6.2	<i>Phase 2: Fear potentiation after two exposures to a dog</i>	64
4.3.6.3	<i>Fear reaction to the presence of a dog without visual or auditory contact</i>	65
4.4	Results	65
4.4.1	Phase 1: Fear response after one exposure to a dog	65
4.4.2	Phase 2: Fear potentiation after two exposures to a dog	70
4.4.2.1	<i>Agitation score and cortisol responses</i>	70
4.4.2.2	<i>Longevity of potentiated fear response</i>	75
4.4.3	Phase 3: Fear reaction to the presence of a dog without visual or auditory contact	81
4.5	Discussion	82
4.6	Conclusion	86

Chapter 5 Modulation of the fear response of sheep *via* the GABAergic and serotonergic pathways

5.1	Introduction	87
5.1.1	Hypotheses	90
5.2	Materials and methods	90
5.2.1	Animals	90
5.2.2	Fear potentiation model	91
5.2.3	Manipulation of fear <i>via</i> the serotonergic pathway	91
5.2.4	Manipulation of fear <i>via</i> the GABAergic pathway	92
5.2.5	Experimental procedure	92
5.2.6	Sampling measures	92
	5.2.6.1 <i>Blood sampling</i>	92
	5.2.6.2 <i>Heart rate monitoring</i>	92
5.2.7	Cortisol assay	93
5.2.8	Statistical analysis	93
5.3	Results	94
5.3.1	Manipulation of fear <i>via</i> the serotonergic pathway	94
	5.3.1.1 <i>Step 1: Initial response to the Iso+Dog challenge</i>	94
	5.3.1.2 <i>Step 2: Reinforcement of exposure to Iso+Dog challenge</i>	99
	5.3.1.3 <i>Step 3: Expression of the fear potentiated response to the Iso challenge</i>	101
5.3.2	Manipulation of fear <i>via</i> the GABAergic pathway	104
	5.3.2.1 <i>Step 1: Initial fear response to the Iso+Dog challenge</i>	104
	5.3.2.2 <i>Step 2: Reinforcement of exposure to the Iso+Dog challenge</i>	109
	5.3.2.3 <i>Step 3: Expression of the fear potentiated response to the Iso challenge</i>	112
5.4	Discussion	119
5.5	Conclusion	124

Chapter 6 The role of glucocorticoids in the expression of temperament in sheep

6.1	Introduction	125
6.2	Hypothesis	129
6.3	Materials and methods	129
6.3.1	Animals	129
6.3.2	Fear potentiation model	129
6.3.3	Experimental design and procedure	130
6.3.4	Treatment	130
6.3.5	Sampling	130
	6.3.5.1 <i>Blood sampling</i>	130
	6.3.5.2 <i>Heart rate monitoring</i>	130
	6.3.5.3 <i>Cortisol assay</i>	131
6.4	Statistical analysis	131
6.5	Results	132
6.5.1	Step 1: Initial response to the Iso+Dog challenge	132
6.5.2	Step 2: Reinforcement of exposure to the Iso+Dog challenge	134
6.5.3	Step 3: Expression of the fear potentiated response to the Iso challenge	138
6.6	Discussion	140
6.7	Conclusion	143

Chapter 7 General Discussion

7.1	Introduction	144
7.2	Main findings	144
7.2.1	Dose response study using Diazepam and <i>m</i> -CPP	144
7.2.2	Development of the fear potentiation model	145
7.2.3	Modulation of the fear response in sheep divergent for temperament using GABA and 5-HT receptor agonists	147
7.2.4	The use of a glucocorticoid (GC) receptor antagonist to Modulate the fear response of sheep divergently selected for temperament	150
7.3	Future research	150
7.4	Summary	152

List of Figures

Chapter 2

Fig 2.1	Isolation box test with animal exiting box	26
Fig 2.2	a) Merino wether fitted with heart rate monitor and belt	27
	b) pouch and polar monitor on belt	28

Chapter 3

Fig 3.1:	The arena test layout (black circle marks observer)	37
Fig 3.2:	Mean cortisol concentration (nmol/L) for the five blood sampling times for the two Diazepam treatment dose groups (low - 0.3 mg/kg and med – 0.6 mg/kg)	40
Fig 3.3:	Mean cortisol concentration (nmol/L) for the five blood sampling times for the PTZ treatment dose groups (low - 1 mg/kg, medium - 5 mg/kg and high - 10 mg/kg)	41
Fig 3.4:	Mean of the cortisol concentration for the 5-HT agonist 8-OH-DPAT at low (0.2 mg/kg), medium (0.5 mg/kg) and high (0.7 mg/kg) dose rates for each of the five sample times	45
Fig 3.5:	Mean for the cortisol concentration for the 5-HT agonist <i>m</i> -CPP at low (0.5 mg/kg), medium (1 mg/kg) and high (2 mg/kg) dose rates for each of the sample times	46

Chapter 4

Fig 4.1:	a) Overview of the isolation + dog challenge, b) view from inside the isolation box and c) front view into the isolation + dog challenge	61
Fig 4.2:	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between challenge x challenge sequence for IBT min2-9 agitation score	66
Fig 4.3:	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between challenge x challenge sequence for number of vocalisations	67
Figs 4.4 (a and b):	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between challenge	

	x challenge sequence for cortisol a) Cortisol concentration (nmol/L) immediately after the challenge (15 min) and b) AUC	68
Fig 4.5:	Unadjusted agitation scores over the 10 minutes during the Iso+Dog and Iso challenges for exposure 1 and 2	69
Fig 4.6a:	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between challenge x exposure for IBT min2-9	71
Fig 4.6b:	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between challenge x exposure for IBT min10	72
Fig 4.6c:	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between challenge x exposure for vocalisations	73
Fig 4.7:	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between challenge x exposure for AUC	74
Fig 4.8:	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between challenge x time for IBT min1	76
Fig 4.9:	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between challenge x time for the IBT min2-9 agitation scores	77
Fig 4.10:	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between challenge x time for the IBT min10 agitation score	78
Fig 4.11:	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between challenge x time for vocalisations	79
Fig 4.12:	Least square means (\pm se) for the interaction between time x challenge for the total integrated cortisol response (AUC)	80

Chapter 5

Fig 5.1:	Effect of selection line x challenge (\pm se) for the IBT min2-9 agitation score (Step 1)	96
Fig 5.2:	Effect of selection line x challenge (\pm se) for the number of vocalisations (Step 1)	97
Fig 5.3:	Effect of selection line x challenge (\pm se) for the total integrated cortisol response (AUC) (Step 1)	97
Fig 5.4:	Effect of selection line x challenge (\pm se) for the mean heart rate during the post challenge period (Step 1)	98
Fig 5.5:	Effect of selection line x treatment (\pm se) for the mean heart rate	

	during the challenge period (Step 2)	99
Fig 5.6:	Effect of selection line x challenge (\pm se) for the mean heart rate during the pre-challenge period (Step 3)	103
Fig 5.7:	Effect of selection line x treatment (\pm se) for the mean heart rate during the post challenge period (Step 3)	104
Fig 5.8:	Effect of challenge x selection line (\pm se) for the IBT min1 agitation score (Step 1)	106
Fig 5.9:	Effect of challenge x selection line (\pm se) for the IBT min2-9 agitation score (Step 1)	107
Fig 5.10:	Effect of challenge x selection line (\pm se) for mean heart rate during the challenge period (Step 1)	108
Fig 5.11:	Effect of challenge x selection line (\pm se) for the IBT min2-9 agitation score (Step 2)	111
Fig 5.12:	Effect of challenge x selection line (\pm se) for heart rate during the actual challenge period (Step 3)	114
Fig 5.13:	Effect of challenge x selection line (\pm se) for heart rate during the post-challenge period (Step 3)	115
Fig 5.14:	Effect of selection line x treatment (\pm se) for heart rate during the pre-challenge period (Step 3)	116
Fig 5.15:	Effect of selection line x treatment (\pm se) for HR variability during the actual challenge period (Step 3)	117
Fig. 5.16:	Effect of selection line x treatment (\pm se) for heart rate for the post-challenge period (Step 3)	118

Chapter 6

Fig 6.1:	Effect of selection line x treatment for IBT min2-9 (\pm se) to exposure to the Iso+Dog challenge during exposure 2	136
Fig 6.2:	Effect of selection line x treatment for IBT min10 (\pm se) during the second exposure to the Iso+Dog challenge	137
Fig 6.3:	Effect of selection line x treatment for heart rate (\pm se) during the Iso+Dog challenge period	137
Fig 6.4:	Effect of selection line x treatment on heart rate (\pm se) during the post-challenge period presenting the Iso+Dog challenge	138

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Table 1.1:	GABA receptor subtype and location in mammals	9
Table 1.2:	Distribution and function or known effect of the 5-HT receptor Families	15

Chapter 3

Table 3.1:	Number of exposures, days and animals	35
Table 3.2:	Number of exposures, days and animals	36
Table 3.3:	Least square means (\pm sed) for the integrated cortisol response (AUC), arena test variables (TIME, ZX, ZT, CLOSE and Vocs) and for the isolation box score and vocalisations for the GABA treatments, DZP and PTZ, and the control	40
Table 3.4:	Least square means (\pm sed) of the arena test (vocalisations, TIME, number of zones crossed, closest zone to observer and amount of time spent in zone), IBT score and vocalisations in the IBT during the first and last exposure	42
Table 3.5:	Least square means (\pm sed) of the integrated cortisol response (AUC), arena test measures and IBT score and vocalisations at low, medium and high dose rates for the serotonin anxiogenic (<i>m</i> -CPP) and anxiolytic (8-OH-DPAT) treatments	44
Table 3.6:	Least square means (\pm sed) from the arena test (vocalisations, TIME, number of zones crossed, closest zone to observer and amount of time spent in each zone) and score and vocalisations during the IBT for the first and last exposure for animals tested with the 5-HT ligands during exposure 2 (treatment exposure)	47

Chapter 4

Table 4.1:	Least square means for agitation scores at IBT min1, IBT min2-9, IBT min10, number of vocalizations (Vocs), cortisol at 15 min and total integrated cortisol response (AUC)	65
------------	---	----

Table 4.2:	Least squared means for responses measured in the Isolation box test (IBT min1, IBT min2-9, IBT min10, vocalisations) and total integrated cortisol (AUC) for the three exposures	70
Table 4.3:	Least square means for agitation scores and vocalizations measured in the IBT and total integrated cortisol response (AUC) in response to the challenges over time	75
Table 4.4:	Least square means for the agitation score and vocalisations during the first minute of the challenge	81

Chapter 5

Table 5.1:	Effect of temperament selection line, fear challenge, day of testing and significance of the interactions on the agitation scores (IBT min1, IBT min2-9, IBT min10 and number of vocalizations), total integrated cortisol response (AUC), mean heart rate and heart rate variability (Step 1)	95
Table 5.2:	Effect of temperament selection line, fear potentiation challenge and day of testing and significance of the interactions on the agitation scores (IBT min1, IBT min2-9, IBT min10, and number of vocalizations), total integrated cortisol response (AUC), mean heart rate and heart rate variability (Step 2)	100
Table 5.3:	Effect of temperament selection line, fear potentiation challenge, pharmacological treatment and day of testing and significance of the interactions on the agitation scores (IBT min1, IBT min2-9 and number of vocalisations (Step 3)	102
Table 5.4:	Effect of temperament selection line and fear potentiation challenge for the agitation scores on the IBT min1, IBT min2-9, IBT min10 and vocalisations (Step 1)	105
Table 5.5:	Effect of temperament selection line and fear potentiation challenge for the agitation scores of IBT min1, IBT min2-9, IBT min10 and vocalisations	110
Table 5.6:	Effect of temperament selection line, fear potentiation challenge and pharmacological treatments on the agitation scores (IBT min1,	

IBT min2-9, IBT min10 and vocalisations), total integrated cortisol response, mean heart rate and variability (Step 3)	113
--	-----

Chapter 6

Table 6.1: Effect of temperament selection line, treatment, day of testing and significance of the interactions for the agitation scores (IBT min1, IBT min2-9, IBT min10) number of vocalisations, total integrated cortisol response. mean heart rate and variability during the first step of the Iso+Dog challenge (Step 1)	133
Table 6.2: Effect of temperament selection line, treatment, day of testing and significance of the interactions on the agitation scores (IBT min1, IBT min2-9, IBT min10), number of vocalizations, total integrated cortisol	135
Table 6.3: Effect of the temperament selection line, treatment, day of testing and significance of the interactions for the agitation scores (IBT min1, IBT min2-9, IBT min10), number of vocalisations, total integrated cortisol response, mean heart rate and variability on presentation of the Iso challenge (step 3)	139

Abbreviations

ACh	acetylcholine
ACTH	adrenocorticotrophine
AMS	Australian Merino Society
ANS	autonomic nervous system
BZP	benzodiazepine
Ca ²⁺	calcium ion
cAMP	cyclic adenosine monophosphate
CBG	corticosteroid binding globulin
CBZ	central benzodiazepine
CCK	cholecystokinin
Cl ⁻	chloride
CNS	central nervous system
CRH	corticotropin releasing hormone
CSF	cerebrospinal fluid
DA	dopamine
DAT	dopamine transporter
DOPA	3,4-dihydroxyphenylalanine
DOPAC	3-4-dihydroxyphenylacetic acid
DRN	dorsal raphe nuclei
GABA	γ -amino- <i>n</i> -butyric acid
EPM	elevated plus maze
GABA-T	γ -amino- <i>n</i> -butyric acid-transaminase
GAD	glutamate decarboxylase
GC	glucocorticoid
GI tract	gastro-intestinal tract
GR	glucocorticoid receptor
HPA axis	hypothalamic-pituitary adrenal axis
IBT	isolation box test
IUPHAR	International Union of Pharmacology
K ⁺	potassium ion
LDH	lactate dehydrogenase

LS means	least square means
LH	luteinising hormone
MAO	monoamine oxidase
MR	minerolocorticoid receptor
MRN	medial raphe nuclei
<i>m</i> -CPP	<i>m</i> -chlorophenylpiperazine
NA	noradrenaline
NT	neurotransmitter
Na ⁺	sodium ion
PAG	periaqueductal grey
PBS	phosphate buffered saline
PNS	peripheral nervous system
RIA	radioimmunoassay
RU-486	Mifepristone
QTL	Quantitative trait loci
SAM axis	sympatho-adrenal medullary system
SIH	stress-induced hyperthermia
SNPs	single nucleotide polymorphisms
SSA	succinic semi-aldehyde
SSRI's	selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors
SUCC	succinic acid
TBPS	<i>t</i> -butylbicyclophosphorothionate
UWA	University of Western Australia
5-HT	5-hydroxytryptamine (serotonin)
5-HTP	(<i>L</i> -5-hydroxytryptophan)
5-HIAA	5-hydroxyindoleacetic acid
8-OH-DPAT	8-hydroxy-2-(di- <i>n</i> -propylamino) tetralin
γ MSH	gamma melanocyte stimulating hormone

Working definitions for thesis

Temperament:

Is the inherent fearfulness of an animal in response to a variety of situations, including the response to humans or to strange, novel or threatening situations. This has also been referred to in the literature as emotional reactivity, emotionality and reactivity.

Fearfulness:

Is a temperament trait that incorporates the general susceptibility of an animal to react to a variety of potentially threatening situations. Fearfulness helps to motivate an animal to avoid a potentially aversive or threatening situation and facilitates a learned response.

Fear potentiation:

Prior exposure to a more severe stressor will increase or potentiate the fear response on a subsequent exposure to a different challenge. For example, exposure to an Isolation and dog challenge will potentiate the fear response to a subsequent presentation of Isolation only.

Stress:

Stress is a very broad term, which implies a threat to an animal, in which it needs to adjust.

Stressor:

Intrinsic and extrinsic factors, both real and perceived that alter an animal's homeostatic balance, activating behavioural, physiological and neurophysiological systems of the body.

Anxiety:

A normal and pathological state, however in this instance it is considered more of a psychological state and can be caused by real and/or imagined threats