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INVESTIGATION IN FEMALE RATS OF THE EFFECTS OF
ANDROGEN TREATMENT, DURING THE PRE- AND POSTNATAL
PERIODS, ON GROWTH AND REPRODUCTIVE FUNCTION

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at Massey University

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1984

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by

Elizabeth Mary Sommerville

In experiments investigating the perinatal period of sensitivity to androgen of hypothalamic functions, testosterone propionate (TP) was administered to female rats at different ages before and after birth and for varying time intervals.

Administration of TP was by subcutaneous injection in oil, or by subcutaneous polydimethylsiloxane (PDS) capsules. Plasma testosterone concentrations were measured by radioimmunoassay in adult female rats after insertion and removal 72h later, of 3 sizes of TP-filled capsule (5, 10 and 20mm crystal length); in 3 day old female neonates after insertion and removal 4h later of a TP-filled capsule (2.5mm crystal length), or after injection of TP (90 μ g in oil); and in growing female rats after neonatal implantation with a TP-filled capsule (2.5mm crystal length) which was not removed (chronic implantation). The plasma half-life of testosterone estimated after implantation with TP capsules was much shorter in adults (1h) than in neonates (8.6h). After TP injection to 3 day old rats the half-life was 48h and after chronic implantation of TP capsules was 69h.

Exposure of foetal rats to exogenous androgen, achieved by subcutaneous implantation of pregnant rats with TP capsules (3 sizes) for 24h or 72h at varying stages during gestation, did not alter ovarian function, feminine sexual behaviour or growth, despite abnormal development of the external vaginal opening in rats exposed to TP during the last 6 days of gestation.

Female rats aged 2, 3 or 5 days given brief periods of TP treatment by subcutaneous 2.5mm PDS TP-filled capsules, removed after 4, 8 or 24h, were compared with rats given 90 μ g TP by injection at the same ages. Control of gonadotrophin secretion, as indicated by ovarian morphology and cyclic changes in the vaginal epithelium, was sensitive to alteration by brief periods of exposure to TP. Treatment on days 2 or 3 with 4h implants produced anovulatory sterility at 90 days in at least 50% of animals. Feminine sexual behaviour, assessed by lordosis quotient, was depressed only by treatment longer than 24h at any of the 3 ages. Injection with TP prevented ovulation and depressed the lordosis quotient regardless of day of treatment. Although analysis of variance demonstrated an increased body weight from 14 weeks in rats injected with TP on days 2 or 5, regression analysis did not confirm an increased growth rate. The external vaginal orifice was altered by 4h TP implants given on days 2 or 3, but was unaffected by TP treatment of any duration given on day 5.

Testosterone propionate-filled capsules (2.5mm), implanted in female rats on days 2, 3 or 5 and not removed, prevented ovulation and abolished feminine sexual behaviour. Adult body weight was severely retarded by treatment commencing on day 2, but not altered by treatment beginning on days 3 or 5.

It can be concluded from this investigation that the hypothalamic control of gonadotrophin secretion in the female rat is insensitive to androgen prenatally, and is very sensitive 2 or 3 days after birth, when even brief (estimate of 28h exposure) periods of treatment are able to prevent ovulation. The control of feminine sexual behaviour is insensitive to prenatal TP. Depression of behaviour appears to require a longer neonatal period of exposure to TP (estimate of 48h minimum exposure) than that required to modify gonadotrophin secretion. Stimulation of growth appears to be a variable feature of the androgenized rat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my chief supervisor, Dr M.F. Tarttelin, for his guidance, encouragement and practical assistance at all stages of my work.

For his continued encouragement, advice on statistical matters and assistance in preparation of the tables, I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor R.E. Munford.

My thanks are due also to many members of the staff of the Department of Physiology and Anatomy, Massey University. In particular I would like to thank Mr H.J. Elgar, for assistance with radioimmunoassays, Mr M.J. Birtles and Mr R.I. Sparksman, for help with histological processing, and Mr R.N. Ward, for practical advice on numerous occasions.

Mr J.E. Ormsby and the staff of the Small Animal Production Unit, Massey University, generously assisted with care of the animals.

I thank Miss S.J. Shirriffs for typing the thesis and I appreciate her attention to detail.

I am grateful to my husband, my parents and friends who have assisted during the writing of this thesis by caring for my daughter Charlotte.

Finally, I owe special thanks to Stuart MacDiarmid, my husband, for his unfailing support and help in innumerable ways.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
CHAPTER 1 A REVIEW OF SEXUAL DIFFERENTIATION IN THE RAT	1
CHAPTER 2 PLASMA TESTOSTERONE CONCENTRATIONS AFTER IMPLANTATION OF TESTOSTERONE PROPIONATE- FILLED POLYDIMETHYLSILOXANE CAPSULES FOR VARYING PERIODS IN ADULT AND NEONATAL FEMALE RATS, AND AFTER INJECTION OF TESTOSTERONE PROPIONATE IN NEONATAL FEMALE RATS	38
CHAPTER 3 THE EFFECTS ON FEMALE OFFSPRING OF TESTOSTERONE PROPIONATE, ADMINISTERED TO PREGNANT RATS BY POLYDIMETHYLSILOXANE CAPSULES AT VARYING TIMES DURING PREGNANCY	55
CHAPTER 4 THE EFFECTS ON FEMALE RATS OF VARYING DURATIONS OF TREATMENT WITH TESTOSTERONE PROPIONATE AT DIFFERENT NEONATAL AGES	91
CHAPTER 5 THE EFFECTS ON FEMALE RATS OF PROLONGED TESTOSTERONE PROPIONATE TREATMENT COMMENCING AT DIFFERENT NEONATAL AGES	133
CHAPTER 6 GENERAL DISCUSSION	164
APPENDIX	172
REFERENCES	200

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>FIGURE</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
2.1	Plasma Concentrations of Testosterone in Adult Female Rats over a 24h Period following the Implantation of Three Different Sizes of PDS Capsules Containing TP	45
2.2	Plasma Concentrations of Testosterone in Adult Female Rats over a 72h Period following the Implantation of Three Different Sizes of PDS Capsules Containing TP	46
2.3	Plasma Concentrations of Testosterone in Adult Female Rats over a 48h Period following the Removal of TP-Filled PDS Capsules Implanted for 72h	47
2.4	Plasma Levels of Testosterone in Neonatal Female Rats after Injection of 90 μ g TP and after Insertion of a TP-Filled PDS Capsule	49
2.5	Plasma Levels of Testosterone in Neonatal Female Rats after Injection of 90 μ g TP (open symbols) and after Insertion of a TP-Filled PDS Capsule (closed symbols)	50
2.6	Plasma Levels of Testosterone in Female Rats after Implantation of a TP-Filled PDS Capsule on Day 3	52
3.1	Experimental Design: Periods of Exposure of Foetal Rats to Testosterone Propionate	58
3.2	Body Weight Growth Week 3 to 12 with Prenatal Treatment at Gestational Age 19-21 Days: 95% Confidence Limits for Linear Regression Coefficients ($X = 1/\text{Age}$, $Y = \log(\text{base } 10) \text{ BW}$)	76
3.3	Body Weight Growth Week 3 to 12 with Prenatal Treatment at Gestational Age 16-18 Days: 95% Confidence Limits for Linear Regression Coefficients ($X = 1/\text{Age}$, $Y = \log(\text{base } 10) \text{ BW}$)	76
4.1	Experimental Design: Period of Treatment of Neonatal Female Rats with Testosterone Propionate	97
4.2	Ovarian Weight at 90 Days: Mean and SE for each Group and Significant Differences between Treated and Control Groups	108
4.3	Sexual Behaviour (LQ): Mean and SE for each Group and Significant Differences between Treated and Control Groups	112
4.4	Body Weight Growth Week 3 to 12 for Rats Treated on Day 2: 95% Confidence Limits for Linear Regression Coefficients ($X = 1/\text{Age}$, $Y = \log(\text{base } 10) \text{ BW}$)	116
4.5	Body Weight Growth Week 3 to 12 for Rats Treated on Day 3: 95% Confidence Limits for Linear Regression Coefficients ($X = 1/\text{Age}$, $Y = \log(\text{base } 10) \text{ BW}$)	117

<u>FIGURE</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
5.1	Experimental Design: Time at which Treatment with Testosterone Propionate was Commenced in Neonatal Rats	137
5.2	Ovarian Weight at 100 Days: Mean and SE for each Group and Significant Differences between Treated and Control Groups	142
5.3	Sexual Behaviour (LQ): Mean and SE for each Group and Significant Differences between Treated and Control Groups	144
5.4	Body Weight Growth Week 3 to 14 for Rats Treated on Day 2: Linear Regressions, $X = \text{Age}$, $Y = \log(\text{base } 10) \text{ BW}$ and Bar Diagrams for Selected Ages	149
5.5	Body Weight Growth Week 3 to 14 for Rats Treated on Day 3: Linear Regressions, $X = \text{Age}$, $Y = \log(\text{base } 10) \text{ BW}$ and Bar Diagrams for Selected Ages	150
5.6	Body Weight Growth Week 3 to 14 for Rats Treated on Day 5: Linear Regressions, $X = \text{Age}$, $Y = \log(\text{base } 10) \text{ BW}$ and Bar Diagrams for Selected Ages	151
5.7	Body Weight Growth Week 3 to 14 for Rats with Treatment Beginning on Day 2, 3 or 5: 95% Confidence Limits for Linear Regression Coefficients ($X = 1/\text{Age}$, $Y = \log(\text{base } 10) \text{ BW}$)	152

LIST OF TABLES

<u>TABLE</u>		<u>PAGE</u>
2.I	Summary of Experimental Design	42
3.I	Summary of Experimental Design: Number of Rats Investigated	60
3.II	Schedule of Experimental Procedures: Experiment I	62
3.III	Summary of Experimental Procedures	63
3.IV	Age (days) at Vaginal Opening	68
3.V	Appearance of External Genitalia at Slaughter	72
3.VI	Weight of Liver (g) at 130 Days	78
3.VII	Weight of Brain (g) at 130 Days	80
3.VIII	Weight of Kidneys (g) at 130 Days	81
4.I	Summary of Experimental Design: Number of Rats Investigated	98
4.II	Appearance of External Genitalia at Slaughter (126 days)	102
4.III	Age (days) at Vaginal Opening	104
4.IV	Vaginal Cyclicity as Determined by Cytological Study of Vaginal Smears for a Ten Day Period (D 63-73)	105
4.V	Presence of Corpora Lutea at 90 Days	107
4.VI	Incidence of Sterility at 90 Days	110
4.VII	Receptivity Scores (1-5) for Sexual Behaviour	113
4.VIII	Growth of Body Weight from 3 to 12 Weeks: The Slope of the Regression of Log(base 10) BW on 1/Age	115
5.I	Summary of Experimental Design: Number of Rats Investigated	138
5.II	Age (days) at Vaginal Opening	141
5.III	Presence of Corpora Lutea at 100 Days	141
5.IV	Receptivity Scores (1-5) for Sexual Behaviour	145
5.V	Growth of Body Weight from 3 to 14 Weeks: The Slope of the Regression of Log(base 10) BW on 1/Age	148
5.VI	Growth of Body Weight from 15 to 17 Weeks: The Slope of the Regression of Log(base 10) BW on Age	154
5.VII	Nose-Anal Length (mm) at 100 Days	155