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Review

Dopamine phenotype and behaviour in animal models: in relation to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

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Abstract

The phenotypic expression of behaviour is the outcome of interacting neuronal networks and is modulated by different subcortical systems. In the present paper the role of a major subcortical neurochemical system, dopamine (DA), is reviewed. In particular, knockout (KO) technology has given an overwhelming insight into the effects of specific component of the dopaminergic system. Therefore, the behavioural profile of dopamine transporter (DAT), tyrosine hydroxylase (TH), DA and cAMP-regulated phosphoprotein (DARPP 32), and D1, D2, D3, D4 and D5 dopamine receptors knockouts (and their combination) is reviewed.

TH, D1, D2, D4 KO mice exhibit decreased locomotor activity, perhaps due to decreased motivational level. D3 KO and DAT KO mice show an increase in basal and novelty-induced activity respectively. It is possible that the increased dopamine levels in DAT KO mice enhance motivation. These observations support the hyperDA hypothesis in hyperactive phenotypes. Moreover, they suggest that the inhibitory effect of psychostimulant drugs, such as methylphenidate and amphetamines, in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder may be the outcome of an altered balance between auto- and hetero-receptors. However, since KO technology is hampered by blockade of the target at early stages of development, some alternatives have been proposed, such as inducible mutagenesis and inhibitory small RNAs conveyed to target by viral vectors in adulthood.

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Keywords: Dopamine receptors; Knockouts; Dopamine transporter; Tyrosine hydroxylase

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1. Introduction

The phenotypic expression of behavioural traits is the outcome of interacting neuronal networks and is modulated by different subcortical systems [1].

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Therefore, the relation between behaviour and lower systems, from neuronal networks to single neurons and genes is increasingly complex. A direct linear or monotonic relationship between the properties of lower systems and behaviour is unlikely. Therefore, the genes, that must be considered the lowest basic system, which subserve behaviour, are related to the highest behavioural traits in complex ways.

As a matter of fact, no single gene can be regarded as responsible for a certain behaviour, and a great number of genes seem to be necessary for different behavioural repertoires. A number of knockout mice for different genes appear indeed to share the same behavioural impairments. An example is the impairment of hippocampal functions and hippocampal-dependent learning, which appear to be present in a great number of mutant mice [2–4]. This might be due to (i) limited understanding of behavioural tasks and poor descriptive value of behavioural indices (ii) limited changes due to the restricted behavioural repertoire (iii) mechanisms of compensation during development [2–4].

Moreover, it is now well established that the genetic background interacts with the single knocked-out gene, leading to completely opposite behavioural traits.

However, the depicted scenario contrasts with some expected findings from the knockout technology. In particular, knockout of DA pathways and DA receptors yielded valuable insights into the regulation of dopamine system and behaviour.

In fact, all cortical networks and subcortical structures (basal ganglia, amygdala complex, hippocampus), are modulated by subcortical influences (see [5]), represented by cholinergic neurons of Meynert's basal nucleus, dopamine (DA) neurons in the Ventral Tegmental Area (VTA), serotonergic neurons in the Raphè nuclei, norepinephrine neurons in the *Locus coeruleus*, and histamine neurons in the posterior hypothalamus. Each subsystem is involved in different aspects of behavioural performance, i.e. accuracy for ACh, latency for DA, impulsivity for serotonin, and distractibility for norepinephrine [6].

Though behaviour emerges from complex interactions, the DA component is very important for the phenotypic expression of attention and reward (see below). Moreover, the involvement of DA in behaviour is also supported by neuropsychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia, manic-depressive psychosis and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

The pivotal role of dopamine systems in the regulation of motivation results in striking behavioural phenotypes, which confirm previous models of dopamine regulation.

This, in turn, is of relevance, as different neuropsychiatric disorders have been linked to a dysfunction of the dopamine system. Though this is mainly inferred 'post hoc' i.e. from the effectiveness of dopamine-regulating drugs on these disorders (see e.g. antipsychotic for schizophrenia, methylphenidate for ADHD, L-DOPA for Parkinson

disease), the exact neurobiological substrate underlying each of these diseases is not completely elucidated.

In ADHD, for instance, there is still much debate whether the dopamine system is hyper or hypofunctioning. On the one hand, methylphenidate ameliorate ADHD symptoms, 6OHDA striatal lesions cause hyperactivity in rats, there are evidences for a hypofunctioning DA system in SHR rats [7–9] and for striatal hypoplasia in ADHD children [10].

On the other hand, methylphenidate stimulates normal children, many DA receptor KO mice are hypoactive, whereas DAT KO mice are hyperactive (see below), the basal tone of DA in SHR rats is high (see Carboni et al. this issue), some rat lines with hyperactive behaviour show morphological and biochemical evidences of increased DA innervation [11–13]. The overall picture simply underlines our incomplete understanding of a system that serves basic behavioural functions.

2. Dopamine networks

DA is a highly conserved neurotransmitter, present in invertebrates such as *Drosophila M.* [14,15] and *C. elegans* [16], as well as in all vertebrates [17]. Two main dopamine systems, a central and a peripheral one, are involved in a number of complex functions such as regulation of blood pressure, movements, goal-directed behaviour, cognition, attention and reward. In particular, a number of studies have shown the involvement of DA projections to the *nucleus accumbens* and frontal cortex in reward, motivation, consummatory behaviour and learning [18–23].

The central dopaminergic system has been associated with several neuropsychiatric disorders including Parkinson's disease (PD), which is the result of selective degeneration of mesostriatal (MS) DA neurons, schizophrenia and ADHD, both of which are associated with dysfunction of mesocorticolimbic (MCL) DA neurons. In fact, most of the anti-psychotic drugs used to treat schizophrenia act as DA receptors antagonists, whereas ADHD symptoms are generally alleviated by drugs that regulate DAergic transmission. Moreover, drugs of abuse such as cocaine, amphetamine, opiates, nicotine and alcohol, act by modifying DA neurotransmission [20,24,25].

The cell bodies of DA neurons are present all along the ventral part of the brain. Though isolated cells can be identified, the vast majority is grouped into functional and anatomical units and has been progressively numbered. In our study, we will focus on cellular groups in the ventral mesencephalon, which are numbered from A8 to A10 in the caudo-lateral to rostro-medial direction [26], and particularly on the VTA and *Substantia Nigra pars compacta* (SN), although other dopamine systems, such as the olfactory or hypothalamic one are also especially important in rodent behaviour.

Ontogenetic studies in the rat showed that midbrain dopamine neurons appear between embryonic days E 12–15, near the midbrain–hindbrain junction (rhombic isthmus) [27]. These neurons begin to express tyrosine hydroxylase (TH) by E12.5, and then extensively migrate from the rhombic isthmus in a rostro-ventral direction to the ventral midbrain [27]. The floor plate and the notochord could influence the development of particular neuronal classes. Indeed, the floor plate is involved in the specification of DA neuron fate along the dorso-ventral axis. This depends on molecular differentiation cascades ([28–30]; for a review see [31,32]), and requires the orchestration of a number of genes such as Sonic hedgehog [33], Engrailed1 [34,35], Engrailed2 [36], Pax2 [37], Pax5 [38], Wnt1 [34], and Fgf8 [29,30]. The two transcription factors Ptx3 and Nurr1 are implicated in specification of the mesencephalic DA system ([39] see also other articles in this issue), The homeobox gene Ptx3, whose expression in brain is restricted to DA neurons [40] and the orphan nuclear hormone receptor Nurr1, are in fact required for induction of the enzyme tyrosine hydroxylase, which catalyzes the initial step in DA biosynthesis [41,42]. Moreover, the LIM homeobox gene Lmx1b has been shown to take part to this phenomenon [43].

Sex hormones further influence the development of DA neurons [44] and the pruning of axonal arbors, whereas BDNF, retinoic acid are thought to be necessary for striatal innervation. The projection of these axons to the target site requires signals from the target as well as from intermediate regions. Indeed, the action of genes such as Semaphorins [45] and ephrins [46] is required. It is interesting to note that the expression of such genes continue throughout life and can change after cocaine treatment [46]. Finally, extracellular molecules such as perisynaptic chondroitin sulphates (so called perineuronal nets, see [47]), could be implicated in the final asset of the dopamine network, as suggested by developmental data [48], enzymatic treatments [49], and the evidence for a complementary disposition of chondroitin sulphates and TH immunoreactivity ([50]; see also companion paper in this issue).

On the postsynaptic site, D1, D2 and D3 receptors mRNA are the first dopamine signaling molecule to appear (around E14, though the protein is synthesized later; see below [51]). Notably, the specification of DA receptor subclasses appears to be independent on the synthesis of DA itself, as suggested by studies on tyrosine hydroxylase KO mice (see below).

The axons of SN and VTA neurons topographically project to the caudate nucleus and *Putamen* (dorsal *Striatum*, CPu), to the ventral *Striatum* including *nucleus accumbens*, and to most areas of neocortex, especially the prefrontal cortex (PFC) [52]. These three systems, namely mesostriatal (MS), mesolimbic (ML) and mesocortical (MC), are not strictly separated from anatomical perspective, since DA efferents from both the *Substantia Nigra* and

VTA overlap in a large ventral and medial segment of the CPu [53].

The MS system is described as the projection originating in the SNpc (A9 cell group) and the retrorubral field (A8 cell group) and terminating in the CPu (dorsal *Striatum*). DA terminals in the CPu synapse mainly on GABA medium spiny neurons [26,54,55] which represent the major output of this system. Two different pathways have been described, originating from striatal neurons expressing D1 (named direct pathway) or D2 (indirect pathway) receptor types. They are anatomically and functionally independent, though substantial revisions to this model, as well as the anatomical strict segregation of the DA receptors, have been proposed. Another level of CPu organization consists of the heterogeneous distribution of DA innervation: a patch or striosomal DA innervation is, in fact, surrounded by a later developing diffuse matrix compartmental subdivision.

On the other hand, DA neurons in the VTA project mainly to the ventral *Striatum* (*nucleus accumbens* and olfactory tubercle complex) and to the PFC, giving rise to the mesolimbic (ML) and mesocortical branches of the MCL system. In fact, the medial ML system is primarily derived from the A10 neurons situated in the VTA from where axons arrive to the ventral *Striatum* and PFC [52,53].

The ML DA system synapses on the shafts of the dendritic spines of medium spiny GABA neurons of *nucleus accumbens* [56], whereas glutamate inputs from a variety of cortical sources synapse on the heads of medium spiny neurons [57].

In CNS dopamine is a slow-acting molecule; however, the pattern of DA firing is functionally significant. It is possible to differentiate single-spike firing (which can be divided into regular and random types [58,59]), burst type firing, which releases a higher amount of DA [60] and colocalized peptides [61], and is able to activate early immediate genes in target regions [62], and tonic activity.

The phasic component has been subdivided into a fast (100–300 ms) and slow (s–min) components, the first being involved in reward prediction error, the second in reinforcement, sex, movement, punishment and stress [63]. An increased DA release has been shown in the *nucleus accumbens* during behavioural activation [64] and a previous study investigated the involvement of the MCL and MS DA systems in the control of activity, orienting, scanning times towards environmental stimuli and emotional reactivity in mouse model systems.

Anatomical, functional and neurochemical evidence all justify the division of the *nucleus Accumbens* in a rostral area, termed pole, a dorso-caudal area (*Accumbens-core*) and a ventro-caudal component (*Accumbens-shell*).

No anatomical separation exists between the *Accumbens-core* and the CPu: they are anatomically continuous, and both show a patch-matrix organization. Viceversa, the border between core and shell can be rapidly recognized using immunohistochemical markers such as substance P, calbindin, neurotensin, enkephalin [64].

Moreover, the core and shell connections are very different. The core region is involved in a corticostriatal circuitry with parts of the frontal lobe, and has reciprocal connections to the VTA (see [65]). The shell has a complex organization and could be included in a loop comprising the dorsal PFC, the lateral ventral *Pallidum* and *Substantia Nigra*.

Mesencephalic VTA DA neurons receive glutamate inputs mainly from the frontal cortex, and lead to reward effects, as demonstrated by electrical and pharmacological stimulation with phencyclidine of glutamate frontal neurons [57,66–68]. Other psychostimulants such as amphetamine and cocaine when injected into the *nucleus accumbens* are rewarding as they induce self-administration and place preference behaviour by interaction with presynaptic ML DA terminals [69–72].

3. Biosynthesis

The aminoacids phenylalanine and tyrosine are precursors for catecholamines (dopamine, norepinephrine and epinephrine). The sequence of enzymatic steps starts with the enzyme tyrosine hydroxylase, which converts the aminoacid L-tyrosine into 3,4-dihydroxyphenylalanine (L-DOPA). L-DOPA is then converted in dopamine and, in noradrenergic neurons, it is further oxidized to norepinephrine by dopamine-beta-hydroxylase (which is, therefore, a marker for noradrenergic neurons). Recently, a mouse knockout for TH has been generated [73,74]. Since TH is the rate-limiting enzyme for both DA and norepinephrine synthesis, these mice are DA and NE KO [73,74]. They survive embryogenesis, but die at 3–4 weeks of age because of the severe hypoactivity/hypophagic behaviour. However, by transgenic expression of TH under the control of the DA-beta-hydroxylase promoter the synthesis of NE can be normalized, generating in that way a pure DA KO mouse. This survives, displays normal norepinephrine synthesis, but makes no DA [75]. Mice lacking DA are severely hypoactive. Interestingly, the same DA KO mice displayed an enhanced behavioural response to D1-like or D2-like receptor agonists. The expression of D1-like and D2-like receptor, in fact, was normal in the DA KO *Striatum*, suggesting that DA is not required during embryonic and postnatal development for adequate expression of D1-like and D2-like receptors [74].

The expression of TH is finely regulated to modulate the rate of synthesis of catecholamines, despite the marked fluctuations in the activity of catecholamine-containing neurons. In fact, prolonged sympathetic neuronal activity increases also TH synthesis in neuronal perikarya. TH is modulated by (i) end-product inhibition and (ii) phosphorylation-induced activation by depolarization of chatecolaminergic terminals [76]. The phosphorylation of TH is carried out by protein kinase C, cAMP-dependent protein kinase A and Ca/calmodulin protein kinases. An alteration

of TH expression in basal state and after stimulation of the dopamine system has been recently observed in animal models of ADHD (see companion paper and papers by Carboni et al. and Leo et al. in this issue).

4. Dopamine release and reuptake

The conversion of tyrosine to L-DOPA and L-DOPA to DA occurs in the cytosol. DA is then taken up into the storage vesicles by the Vesicular Monoamine Transporter (VMAT-2), which is blocked by reserpine. Knockout mice lacking the VMAT2 dye at P6 and show alterations in the cortical organization [77]. However, VMAT2 is also responsible for storage of serotonin, which is important for the development and plasticity of the cerebral cortex [78]. An alteration of the storage of dopamine has been recently suggested in an animal model of ADHD (Carboni et al. this issue). The main point of release of dopamine from axon terminals is represented by regular enlargements of the axon, called axonal varicosities. DA varicosities contain vesicles that can store and release DA.

The vesicles then release their content through Ca-activated fusion with the neuronal membrane. Afterwards, the action of DA released at the synapse is terminated by diffusion and reuptake into presynaptic nerve terminals. In fact, the main mechanism for clearance of released DA is represented by the dopamine transporter (DAT) a membrane transporter that clear DA from the synaptic cleft [79, 80]. DAT represents the major target for amphetamine and methylphenidate, the main pharmacological treatment for ADHD [81]. The DAT gene has 15 exons, and many polymorphisms. An association between ADHD and polymorphisms in the DAT gene has been reported [82–84]. In particular, the 10-repeat polymorphism has been associated with an increased dopamine reuptake [85].

The DAT KO mice have been generated. They are viable, but show growth retardation phenotype, that is anterior pituitary hypoplasia, dwarfism, lactation deficits, and high mortality [86]. A mutant mouse which expresses 10% of wild-type DAT levels (DAT knockdown) has also been developed [87]. These mice are in a chronic state of hyperDArgic activity and do not display the growth retardation phenotype.

The DAT KO and Knockdown mice display novelty-induced hyperactivity [88], that is likely to be due to higher levels of brain DA, due to absent clearance of DA from the synaptic cleft.

Therefore, hyperactivity may be related to increased responses to novelty [89] and decreased habituation [90–93].

Strikingly, the DAT KO reduces hyperactivity after treatment with psychostimulants, although they lack the target of psychostimulants (DAT). This suggests that psychostimulants such as methylphenidate could improve ADHD symptoms acting on non-DA sites, such

as the serotonin system or the result of an altered balance between autoreceptor and heteroreceptor functions.

5. DA receptors

Dopamine synapses in *Striatum* are ‘open’ synapses, i.e., synapses which favour diffusion of the transmitter into the surrounding ECF (volume transmission; [94]). Therefore, dopamine released from the axonal varicosity can reach targets far from the release site. As a matter of fact, there is evidence for abundance and wide distribution of dopamine receptors at various extrasynaptic sites in the *Striatum* and the *Substantia Nigra* [95]. Five dopamine receptors have been classified (see e.g. [96,97]). They can be subdivided into two subfamilies, the D1 like (D1, D5 receptors) and D2 like (D2, D3 and D4 receptors) on the basis of structure and pharmacological properties [98].

In the *Striatum* D1 and D2 receptors are expressed on two different populations: the striatonigral GABA neurons express D1 receptors, substance P (SP) and dynorphin, and project to entopeduncular nucleus and *Substantia Nigra pars reticulata*, whereas striatopallidal GABA neurons express D2 receptor and enkephalin. A third population coexpresses, D1Rs and D2Rs [99,100]. Similarly, in the *Accumbens* D1 expressing cells are SP positive, whereas D2 expressing ones are enkephalin and neurotensin positive.

DA neurons can also express D2-type receptors, which function as autoreceptors. The DA release associated with behavioural activation [64] is regulated by presynaptic DA acting at D2 and D3 autoreceptors and by blockade of the firing of DA neurons in the VTA by DA D2 autoreceptors. This short-term regulation of DA release is also controlled by afferent excitatory and inhibitory inputs from a variety of different neural systems.

D3–D2 interactions are very complex (see below for a discussion from the behavioural perspective). For example, D3 receptors in the *Accumbens*-shell activate neurotensin gene expression, whereas D2 in the *Accumbens*-pole inhibit neurotensin expression. Generally, D3–D2 receptors appear to be expressed in different locations.

D4 receptor distribution markedly differs from that of D2 and D3, and it has a high affinity for clozapine, which is used in schizophrenic patients treatment.

Below we analyze the distribution of DA receptors, along with functional aspects and their role on behaviour, reviewing data from knockout technology. Indeed, so far, mice lacking D1, D2, D3, D4 and D5 receptors or some of their combination have been produced [101,102].

5.1. D1R

The dopamine receptor 1 (D1 R) is the most widely distributed central DA receptor. In cerebral cortex it is largely represented in the frontal, anterior cingulate, orbital, insular, piriform, and entorhinal cortex, predominantly in

layers V and VI, which are known to be the receptive layers for DA projections. However, they are also represented in cortical areas lacking of DA terminals, thus suggesting that other sources of DA may exist, such as norepinephrine terminals [103]. D1 receptor is also localized in the anterior olfactory nuclei, where an independent DA system has been largely described [32,104].

In the *Striatum* and *Accumbens* shell/pole D1 receptor mRNA expression is high and could modulate cortical activity, providing a functional interaction between basal ganglia and cerebral cortex [105]. In particular, a subpopulation of medium spiny neurons co-expresses also dynorphin and substance P and projects to the *Substantia Nigra pars reticulata* [100]. A subpopulation of medium spiny neurons also expresses substance P, enkephalin, and both D1-type and D2-type DA receptors [99,106].

D1 receptor is also expressed in amygdaloidal nuclei, where it might be important in alterations of motivational aspects of D1 KO mice, such as rearing frequency. There are high levels of D1 receptor binding in the SNpr, but not in the SNpc or VTA. This is in agreement with the primary postsynaptic function of D1 R. Interestingly, D1, D3 receptors have been described in the rat cerebellum, although no DA fibers have been detected in the same region in rats (but not in humans; see also D3 receptor [107]). This is notable because alterations in cerebellar development have been suggested in ADHD children [108]. Finally, cells expressing D1 receptor are also present in several other locations (e.g. hippocampus, *septum*, various thalamic and hypothalamic nuclei, and few hindbrain nuclei). In particular, it is expressed in *Locus Coeruleus* and dorsal Raphè where it could regulate norepinephrine and serotonin systems.

Animals lacking the D1 receptor show an approximately 30% reduced body weight and a smaller brain [109]. They show normal or increased horizontal locomotor activity when tested in a standard rat cage with photocells [110–113]. However, the rearing rate in these animals is strongly decreased [109,112–114], as well as grooming sequences. The decrease in rearing frequency could indicate an alteration in motivational or attentive aspects of behaviour. Moreover, sniffing sequences did not differ from wild type animals, in contrast with the effects of D1 antagonists, which reduce both rearing and sniffing behaviours. There is also evidence of retarded habituation in several tasks in the same KO mice with a different genetic background, thus raising the problem of the interaction of phenotype with background genes [112,114].

The effect of a different background on D1 KOs (KO) could be explained in terms of basal state of the DA system. In fact, recent evidences show that the modulation of D1 receptor using selective agonists or antagonists, gives different results in normal rats and in hyperdopaminergic, hyperactive rats or mice such as the NHE rats (see companion paper in this issue). It is also possible that the D1 KO has compensatory changes or the effects of D1 receptors in the wild type animal are interactive on a neural

network basis. This issue remains to be resolved, perhaps by development of conditional postnatal D1 receptor KO mice.

5.2. D2R

The activity of DA neurons in the midbrain is modulated by the release or exogenous DA, that interacts with a subclass of DA receptors that act as ‘autoreceptors’ and belong to the D2 receptor family [115–122]. They regulate the firing rate of DA neurons in the short term (depolarization block [123]), and are involved in hormonal [124–126] and motor activity control [115–117]. In fact, DA D2 receptors represent the major target of antipsychotic drugs and are involved in various neuropathological conditions, including Parkinson’s disease, Tourette’s syndrome, and drug addiction [115,127,128].

By alternative splicing, the D2 receptor gene encodes two molecularly distinct isoforms [127], named long (D2L) and short (D2S) [129]. They differ by an insertion of 29 aminoacids in the third intracellular loop of the D2L receptor, and are co-expressed in a ratio favouring the long isoform. D2L mainly acts at postsynaptic sites and D2S serves presynaptic autoreceptor functions [121,130–133].

D2 receptors are widely expressed in CNS. The limbic cortices (anterior cingulate, orbital, and insular) express high levels of D2 receptor mRNA, but it is mainly expressed in the neostriatum, particularly in large cells of the external *globus pallidus*, pole and core of the *nucleus accumbens* and olfactory tubercle. Indeed, the D2-type receptors are largely restricted to a subpopulation of medium spiny neurons expressing enkephalin and projecting primarily to the *pallidum* ([134]; see also above, D1 receptors).

D2 receptor in the midbrain and hindbrain is likely to be involved in a host of autonomic functions and in the regulation of DA release. Here cells expressing D2 receptor mRNA are detectable in the DAergic cells of the *Substantia Nigra* pars compacta, the VTA, and in the magnocellular cells of the red nucleus that are part of the rubrospinal pathway.

In the dorsal mesencephalon, cells expressing D2 receptor mRNA are localized in the intermediate and deep layers of the superior colliculus and in the periaqueductal gray, where they may be important in modulating analgesic responses. Morphine-induced analgesia could be related to D2 R expressed in midbrain and pontine nuclei. In Raphè nuclei D2 R may regulate serotonin release. In the hypothalamus (lateral preoptic area, anterior and lateral hypothalamic area) D2 is likely to be involved in the regulation of pituitary hormones.

Several other regions also express the D2 R, such as *septum*, the diagonal band of Broca, hippocampus, basomedial amygdala, brainstem nuclei [104].

A linkage between D2 gene and ADHD has been reported by some authors [135].

The D2L KO [121,126] and the combined D2L + S [116] KO mice have been generated and could be studied in

our laboratory, in collaboration with H. Westphal and E. Borrelli, in different behavioural paradigms [116,136]. In particular, we have studied behavioural activation in novelty situations [137].

In the latter the D2R KO demonstrated a lower horizontal locomotor activity than wild type littermates [116,136,138,139].

Moreover, in novel situations also the rearing frequency was lower, with increased scanning durations relative to the WT group. Therefore, the D2 receptor appears to be important in the modulation of scanning phase of attention. Moreover, these data suggest that D2 receptors control activity, as D2R KO mice could represent an animal model of Parkinson’s disease [116].

Interestingly, for this last variable the heterozygotes D2 KO mice showed the highest score and the homozygotes an intermediate, thus revealing a non-linear relation between the number of normal alleles and the duration of the rearings.

The absence of depolarization-block due to the lack of mesencephalic autoreceptors in DA neurons is likely to increase DA release and subsensitivity of D1 receptors. This leads to reduced firing of thalamo-cortical neurons. It is interesting to note that the lack of D2L R subtype is able to reduce locomotor activity and rearings as well [139]. Moreover, the interaction of D2L with D1 receptor might be selectively involved in rearing behaviour, whereas D2S with D1 in stereotypy [140].

However, the interpretation of these KO mice is complicated by a large reshaping of DA network, as suggested by their hyper-DA-innervation and the increased DAT expression [141].

5.3. D3R

The dopamine D3 receptor, cloned by Sokoloff and colleagues [142], is mainly expressed in limbic areas [142] and regulates the inhibitory effect of 7-OH-DPAT to produce hyperlocomotion [143,144]. Examination of DA3 receptor in the rat brain indicates that the distribution is distinct from D2 receptor, more localized and less expressed. It is expressed on post- and pre-synaptic sites, where it can function as autoreceptor, though (i) studies on KO mice and (ii) the absence of D3R in midbrain areas (though this is still controversial [145,142]) would suggest that D2R is the only release regulating autoreceptor [146].

Cells expressing D3 receptor mRNAs are not detected in either neocortical or paleocortical areas, but are predominantly in the ventral *Striatum*, in particular in the *nucleus accumbens* shell and septal pole. The expression of D3 receptor mRNA in the islands of Calleja is the highest observed in the CNS and appears to be selective for D3 (the same region display no expression of D1 and D2 receptors). The localization of D3R in these regions might be responsible for the hyperactive behaviour of D3 KO mice.

Other brain regions that express D3R are the *septum*, hippocampus, geniculate bodies and various hypothalamic regions, suggesting a role in hypothalamic regulation.

Low levels of D2 receptor mRNA expression are also seen in the cerebellum, in large Purkinje cells. In fact, the lobules 9 and 10 of the cerebellum contain high densities of dopamine D3 receptors and almost no D2 receptors [107]. D3 receptor in cerebellum has been shown to modulate locomotor activity, a function similar but weaker than the D3 receptor system in the *Accumbens* [107].

The D3R KO mice [147,148] have been studied in different behavioural paradigms. Here we review their response to behavioural activation in novelty situations using the same experimental paradigm already described (see D2 receptors).

The heterozygous D3 demonstrated a biphasic time-dependent locomotor activation, as there was an increase in the first 15 minutes of exposure to novelty, followed by a steep decrease in the second 15 minutes of the test. This contrasts with a monotonic decline in the WT group and the absence of significant habituation for the D3 homozygous KO mutant mice. The frequency of rearings of the heterozygous and homozygous D3R groups was higher and lower respectively, as compared to WT (see also [147]).

In summary, D3R KO heterozygous mice were more active than D3R KO homozygous and WT animals, which contrasts with previous observations [147]. In other words, D3R heterozygous apparently show a cognitive defect, whereas the homozygous are slightly better in comparison to heterozygous and control mice (see also [148]).

The non-selective attention of D3R mutants was not different from WT; therefore, the D3 receptor appears not to be involved in the modulation of scanning phase of attention.

5.4. D2–D1 and D2–D3 double knockouts

The study of D1, D2 and D3 KO raise the question of the possible interaction of these receptors in modulating complex behavioural phenomena (Table 1).

A double KO D1/D3 R has been previously characterized. This mice display a summation of the behavioural

profiles of D1 and D3 KO mice, e.g. increased locomotor activity (see D3 KO) and reduced rearing frequency (see D1 KO) [149].

Moreover, in our laboratory we have previously characterized double homozygous D2/D3 (D2^{-/-}; D3^{-/-}) or double heterozygous D2/D3 (D2^{+/-}; D3^{+/-}) mutants and WT (D2^{+/+}; D3^{+/+}). The double mutant mice were then tested in the Lâ maze (spatial novelty).

The D2/D3^{-/-} double mutants were less active than the WT littermate group. In particular, the activity decline was significant only between WT and double homozygous mutants D2/D3^{-/-} as assessed by regression analysis.

Only the homozygous double D2/D3^{-/-} mutant groups were significantly less active than WT in the first part as well as in the second part of the testing period.

The double homozygote D2/D3^{-/-} mice presented a lower rearing frequency than wild type controls over the entire testing period.

The homozygous D2/D3 KO mice displayed significantly lower scanning times as compared to control mice in the first part of the test. In addition, the homozygous and the controls prolonged rearing duration in the second part as compared to the first part of the testing period.

Therefore, for the double mutant D2R/D3R phenotype, the D2/D3^{-/-} were less active than WT mice. Thus, in the interaction between D2 and D3 receptor subtypes the D2R phenotype seems predominant.

Further, the D2R/D3R^{-/-} double mutants demonstrated shorter scanning times compared to WT controls but limited to the first part of the test.

The double D2R/D3R mutants indicate an interaction between these two receptor subtypes and prevalence D2R on D3R gene expression.

5.5. D4R

The gene for D4 receptor (D4R) is mapped on chromosome 11p15.5 and presents several insertions in the functionally significant third intracellular loop. A 48-base pair sequence in this region is present in single or multiple (4, 7 or 2 most commonly) copies [97]. The D4R has received great attention because of reports that specific tandem repeat polymorphisms of the human D4R gene correlate with a higher than average novelty-seeking scores on questionnaires [150–154]. Indeed, the 7-repeat form codes for a subsensitive postsynaptic receptor [97] and has been linked to ADHD [155–158].

The D4R plays a role in modulating approach-avoidance responses in general and novelty-related exploration in particular [159], as suggested in KO mice studies, and by the distribution in brain areas that could mediate the observed reductions in behavioural responses to novelty.

Glutamatergic pyramidal neurons of frontal cortex [106, 160,161] that project to the CPu and the *Substantia Nigra* [162] display high expression of D4 R [163]. This receptor

Table 1
Summary of behavioural data on dopamine knockouts

Target	Rearing frequency	Locomotor activity
TH	L [73–75]	L
DAT	N [86–88]	H only in novel situations
D1	L [112,113,109]	N [112,113]; H [111]
D2 L + S	L [137,139]	L [137,139,116]
D3	H [137,147,148]	H [137,147,148]
D4	N	L [109,159]
D5	N [187]	N [187]
D1 + D3	L [149]	H [149]
D2 + D3	L [137]	L [137]

N = normal; H = high; L = low.

in the frontal cortex is likely to be under influence of both noradrenergic inputs and DAergic inputs. In fact, norepinephrine is only fivefold less potent at this receptor than DA [164]. This circuit plays an important role in regulating cognitive processes and emotional status and is, in fact, one of the main targets of antipsychotic drugs.

D4 receptor is also highly expressed in amygdala, hippocampus, hypothalamus and *globus pallidus*. It is also represented in *Substantia Nigra pars reticulata* [97].

The D4R KO mouse [109,159] show reduced behavioural responses to novelty [159]. This is consistent with the hypothesis that a lack of D4R function may lead to decreased novelty-seeking in humans [150,151]. D4 KO mice show also increased locomotor response to ethanol, cocaine, and methamphetamine [161]. These mice have also increased DA synthesis and its conversion to DOPAC in the CPu [161].

This phenotype can be explained observing that the stimulation of MS pathway [165] by glutamate induces DA release [166].

Thus, frontal D4Rs may alter the activity of MS DA neurons by modulating the release of glutamate onto these neurons.

An association between polymorphisms of the D4R gene and personality profile of the novelty-seeking trait [150,151] is in agreement with D4R role in modulating behavioural responses to novelty.

Moreover, behavioural disorders, such as drug abuse [167,168], pathological gambling [169], and ADHD [158, 170] have been recently correlated to the same D4R alleles which are associated to novelty-seeking.

Interestingly, in humans 2% of the population has a null allele for the D4R [171], though no behavioural reports are available.

5.6. D5R

The D5 DA receptor (D5 DAR) is functionally coupled to the activation of adenylate cyclase, and GABAA receptor-mediated activity through both second messenger cascades [172] as well as through direct receptor–receptor interactions [173]. It has a high affinity for DA, compared with other DA Rs, and has constitutive activity [174,175], suggesting that the D5 DAR may be activated in the absence or presence of low concentrations of endogenous agonist. Interestingly, recent reports have suggested a possible association of the D5 DAR gene with schizophrenia [176], substance abuse [177], ADHD [178–180].

The physiological and behavioural roles of the D5 receptor have been difficult to characterize, due to overlapping pharmacological properties of the D1 and D5 receptors. There are few ligands selective for either subtype [98], and DA is one, demonstrating ~10-fold higher affinity at the D5 DAR compared with the D1. The D5 receptor mRNA has very restricted expression, in the hippocampus (where it is more expressed than D1), entorhinal and

prefrontal cortex, basal ganglia [106,181] and to specific thalamic (lateral nucleus) and hypothalamic (lateral mammillary nucleus [175], diagonal band of Broca) nuclei. Characteristically, D5 receptors are localized on large cholinergic interneurons. In the hypothalamus, D5R may regulate circadian rhythms [182] and female sexual behaviours [183,184].

Within the periphery, D5 R have been found in adrenal tissue [185], kidney, and also the gastrointestinal tract, where they may exert a protective effect on the intestinal mucosa [186].

Approaches to the problem of D5R roles include the use of antisense technologies to downregulate D1 or D5 DAR expression as well as the creation of D1 DAR- deficient mice [101,102,187].

The antisense ‘knock-down’ of D5 receptor expression have suggested a role for the D5 DAR in regulating female sexual behaviours [183,184] and locomotor responses to DAergic agonists [188].

The D5 DAR-KO mice are viable, with normal development, and are fertile [187]. This contrasts with antisense studies [183,184] that described a suppression of lordosis behaviour in D5 DAR knockdown receptive females. D5 KO animals were hypertensive, exhibiting significantly elevated blood pressures [187]. This can be attributable to increased sympathetic tone, possibly of central origin. In fact, D5 receptor deletion results in an oxytocin-dependent sensitization of V1 vasopressin and non-NMDA glutamatergic receptor-mediated pathways, potentially within the medulla, leading to increased sympathetic outflow [187].

6. Transduction mechanisms

D1-like receptors have been shown to couple the stimulation of adenylate cyclase activity, whereas D2-like subfamily can reduce cAMP production as well as regulate the activity of various ion channels.

In fact, systemic administration of D1 but not D2 agonists induces enhanced expression of immediate-early genes *c-fos* and *zif268* in the cerebral cortex and *Striatum*. Concomitant D1 and D2 receptor stimulation appear to produce a synergistic effect on *c-fos* expression, modulating cognitive, sensorimotor, and neuroendocrine phenomena.

DA and numerous other neurotransmitters may alter the phosphorylation and/or dephosphorylation state of a cAMP-regulated protein named DARPP-32 (DA and cyclic adenosine 3', 5'-monophosphate-regulated phosphoprotein). Indeed, DARPP plays a central role in the biology of dopaminergic neurons. Its phosphorylated form is an extremely potent inhibitor of protein phosphatase-1 (PP-1), a major multifunctional serine/threonine protein phosphatase in the brain. This, in turn, regulates phosphorylation and activity of many physiological effectors, such as voltage-gated ion channels and neurotransmitter.

Mice lacking the DARPP-32 gene in the basal state showed hyperlocomotion and decreased grooming in females and a reduced number of rearings in both genders [189]. Moreover, pharmacological evidences suggest DARPP-32 to mediate the biological effects of presynaptic D2-like autoreceptor and specific behaviour. In fact, the developmental absence of DARPP-32 appears to be associated with compensatory processes that maintain some topographies of spontaneous and agonist-induced DAergic function, while other topographies remain impaired [189]. These studies have also shown that the DARPP-32/PP-1 cascade is a major target for psychostimulants and antipsychotic drugs (for a review see e.g. [190]).

7. DA receptor phenotype and behaviour

Several studies have shown an increased DA release in the *nucleus accumbens* associated with behavioural activation [65]. When an animal is introduced in a non-familiar environment, novelty triggers an array of behavioural traits: walking about, rearings on the hindlimbs, leanings against walls and sniffing (see e.g. [191]). Walking and rearing have been genetically dissociated in mice [192] and rats [193], suggesting that different genes control these behavioural traits.

Recent studies demonstrated that the duration of rearing episodes in a novelty situation index the level of non-selective attention towards environmental stimuli [194, 195].

The novelty-induced DA release can be controlled by the activation of presynaptic DA D2 autoreceptors and by the blockade of the firing of DA neurons in the VTA (VTA), wherein DA is also released at somatodendritic level, activating D2 autoreceptors, which hyperpolarize membrane potential. In addition, this short-term regulation of DA release is controlled by afferent excitatory and inhibitory inputs from Raphè serotonin (5HT), *Locus Coeruleus* norepinephrine (NE) neurons, GABA VTA interneurons, *Accumbens* medium spiny neurons and glutamate frontal neurons in a complex manner [196].

The participation of each DA receptor in such processes is of interest because their selective regulation could be useful in the treatment of several psychiatric disorders. In particular, ADHD has been hypothesized to be underlined by a DA dysfunction on the bases of theoretical considerations, and experimental and clinical observations (for a review see e.g. [108]). In fact, ADHD has a substantial genetic component, with a heritability of 0.75–0.91 [87], and recent studies have indicated an association between a polymorphism in the human DAT gene and ADHD [83,84,108].

The KO technology has been useful to study the role of each component of the dopamine system in behaviour. The studies reviewed here suggest that D1 and D4 receptors

could be directly involved in the pathogenesis of hyperactivity and lack of attention, and that D2 receptors might be important for the action of some therapeutic drugs such as methylphenidate.

Taken together, results from both DA KO, DA receptors KO and the DAT KO and knockdown mice support the hyperDAergic hypothesis for ADHD. In fact, DAT KO and knockdown mice are hyperdopaminergic and hyperactive, whereas DA KO mice are severely hypoactive. Moreover, all DA receptors KO mice are hypoactive in different tasks, with the exclusion of DA D3 mice.

By the time DA terminals complete their development under the guidance of Eph/Semaphorins, a hyper DA state might lead to DA-induced neurotoxicity. DA itself, its oxidation and formation of free radicals, which might lead to neuronal death via apoptosis and/or necrosis at low or high dopamine level, respectively, can bring this about. This will eventually lead to an altered network asset with estrogens having a neuroprotective role, partially explaining the different F/M ration in the incidence of ADHD.

Unfortunately, KO mice studies are hampered by the blockade of the expression of a given receptor at early stages of development. In fact, DA systems that develop in absence of the deleted receptor might undergo compensatory changes, if the deletion is not lethal. An alternative strategy is represented by inducible mutagenesis that allows blocking in the adult organism the expression of a given protein. The main disadvantage of the latter is tissue responsiveness as, for instance, skin responds in 100% of the cases, whereas the brain in 10–15% only.

Therefore, other strategies have been proposed. These include injection of antisense oligonucleotides in brain regions, the use of sequence-selective ribozymes, RNA interference (RNAi), transcriptional regulators (reviewed in [197]).

Antisense oligonucleotides are thought to work by several mechanisms, including RNAase H digestion of mRNA made double stranded by hybridizing to antisense DNA or RNA. An advantage is the ease with which naked antisense oligonucleotides seem to enter brain neurons for reasons which are not fully understood [197].

Ribozymes consist of a conserved catalytic domain between targeting sequences in the ribozyme-RNA molecule, which may be applied exogenously or synthesized from a suitable vector in the cell. This method is still being developed [197].

The RNAi method is based on a defense mechanism against viruses and transposomes, with emerging regulatory role as well. The presence of double-stranded RNA of a defined sequence activates a ribonuclease III, termed dicer, which chops into small pieces (small interfering RNAs, si RNAs). These, in turn, become incorporated into a RNA-protein complex termed RISC (RNAi-induced silencing complex), which recognizes and degrades mRNA of the same sequence. It has been successfully used 'in vitro' and 'in vivo' only in *Drosophila* and *C. elegans* [197].

Transcriptional regulators require the knowledge of the promoter of the target gene and the relative silencing elements.

A problem common to most of the methods discussed above, is getting exogenous DNA, RNA or analogue into the target region. Cationic lipid-based transfection reagents or various alternatives generally have reasonable efficiency but have transient effects. An alternative is represented by viral vectors such as those based on adenovirus, adeno-associated virus, herpes virus, lentiviruses etc. [188,198–200].

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