

TALK

TESTOSTERONE REACTIVITY AND PARENTAL CARE MOTIVATION IN MEN AS A FUNCTION OF PARENTAL STATUS

Nathan Boone*, Amanda Hahn

Cal Poly Humboldt, Arcata, USA

[*nb155@humboldt.edu](mailto:nb155@humboldt.edu)

ABSTRACT

Paternal investment and caregiving quality have lasting impacts on children's well-being. Children with sensitive, involved fathers typically develop more secure attachments and have fewer behavioral and psychological problems than children with less sensitive and involved fathers. While the importance of fathers' engagement with their children is well established, the biological mechanisms that underpin paternal behavior are not fully understood. Previous research has found that baseline testosterone levels and testosterone reactivity to infant stimuli are both relevant predictors of paternal sensitivity. Short-term decreases in testosterone in nurturant contexts, and short-term increases in testosterone in challenging contexts have both been linked to sensitive paternal caregiving. The current study investigated the relationship between parental care motivation and testosterone reactivity in fathers and non-fathers after simulating a nurturing caregiving interaction or observing infant distress. The RealCare Baby 3 doll was used as an infant simulator in both conditions. The nurturant interaction was expected to lower participants' testosterone levels, and the infant distress was expected to raise participants' testosterone levels. Men who were more motivated to care for infants were expected to have larger testosterone responses to both simulated interactions. Fathers were expected to have greater parental care motivation and testosterone responses than non-fathers. The within-subjects design (all participants completed both conditions) enables the analysis to examine whether the same men tend to have large testosterone responses to each interaction, and whether these men tend to be high in parental care motivation. Results to be discussed (data collection concludes May 15th).