



Brief Report

Paternal influences on infant temperament: Effects of father internalizing problems, parenting-related stress, and temperament



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ABSTRACT

Temperament ratings were obtained from 98 fathers when their infants were 4 and 6 months of age to examine effects of paternal characteristics on infant temperament. Parental stress, internalizing symptoms, and father's temperament were considered as factors possibly contributing to differences in their child's temperament.

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Assessment of temperament for research and clinical purposes often relies on parent-report largely because a number of reliable/valid tools are widely available at a low cost and can be easily administered (Gartstein, Bridgett, & Low, 2012). Mothers have generally been involved as informants, especially in infancy, because they typically play the role of primary caregivers, in single parent and traditional families. Few studies have obtained father reports of their children's temperament, especially in infancy. Notable exceptions suggest that paternal depressive symptoms may predict infant fussiness and overall more difficult infant temperament, especially in boys (Dave, Nazareth, Sherr, & Senior, 2005; Diener, Heim, & Mangelsdorf, 1995; Hanington, Ramchandani, & Stein, 2010; Schoppe-Sullivan & Mangelsdorf, 2013).

Studies conducted with mothers indicate that internalizing symptoms, parenting stress, along with personality factors make important contributions to infant temperament. For example, mother's symptoms of depression have been linked with infant fearfulness and negative affectivity (Bridgett et al., 2009; Gartstein et al., 2010; Gartstein & Bateman, 2008). Parenting stress has been associated with overall increased infant crying (Beebe, Casey, & Pinto-Martin, 1993), fussiness, and activity levels (Atella, DiPietro, Smith, & St James-Roberts, 2003) as reported by both mothers and fathers, and, based on maternal report, slower growth/development in infant expressions of positive affectivity (Bridgett, Laake, Gartstein, & Dorn, 2013). With respect to parental personality, mother's effortful control has been linked with infant orienting/regulation and, separately, toddler effortful control (Bridgett et al., 2011). Associations between mother's higher positive affectivity (specifically social closeness) and infant's lower levels of distress have also been reported, along with the links between mother's negative affectivity and infant's proneness to distress (Mangelsdorf, Gunnar, Kestenbaum, Lang, & Andreas, 1990).

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The primary goal of this study was to evaluate how paternal temperament, internalizing symptomatology, and parenting stress contribute to infant temperament ratings provided at 4 and 6 months of age. We expected that fathers' temperament characteristics would predict infant temperament at 4 and 6 months, specifically, that father higher Extraversion/Surgency, Negative Affectivity, and Effortful Control would predict infant higher Extraversion/Surgency, Negative Affectivity, and Regulation/Orienting, respectively. We also anticipated that higher levels of father's internalizing symptomatology would predict higher Negative Affectivity, lower levels of Extraversion/Surgency and Regulation/Orienting in infants. Similarly, we expected father's parenting stress to affect infant temperament characteristics in the same direction. Specifically, higher parental stress (i.e., lower competence, attachment to child, and social relation, and higher role restriction) would be related to infant lower Extraversion/Surgency and Regulation/Orienting, as well as higher Negative Affectivity. It has been suggested that gender effects may be best conceptualized as moderation of associations among other variables (Crick & Zahn-Waxler, 2003), and we explored this possibility. That is, we expected the examined predictors would make a differential contribution to infant temperament for boys and girls.

Two samples of fathers, combined for the purposes of this study, were recruited on the basis of birth announcements between 2004 and 2007 and provided ratings of infant temperament ($N=98$; 52.7% male infants). Fathers from Eastern Washington and Northwestern Idaho provided temperament ratings for 75 infants (53.4% male) at 4 and 6 months of age, respectively. A second sample of fathers recruited from Washington, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Nevada rated their infants ($n=23$, 44.0% male) on the same occasions. The majority of fathers in the combined sample were Caucasian (71.7%) and their family Revised Duncan Sociometric Index (TSEI2; Stevens & Featherman, 1981), an indicator of occupational prestige fell within 15 and 90 ($M=35.35$, $SD=25.74$). Comparison analyses revealed no significant differences between the two samples' demographic variables, including race and occupational prestige.

The Infant Behavior Questionnaire-Revised (IBQ-R; Gartstein & Rothbart, 2003), which has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties (Gartstein & Rothbart, 2003; Parade & Leerkes, 2008), was utilized to measure temperament at 4 and 6 months via fathers' report, providing three overarching temperament factors: Extraversion/Surgency, Negative Affectivity, and Regulation/Orienting. Fathers provided information concerning their own temperament by completing the Adult Temperament Questionnaire (ATQ; Rothbart, Ahadi, & Evans, 2000) and information regarding their parenting stress using the Parent Stress Inventory (PSI; Abidin, 1995), when their infants were 4 months of age. The ATQ consists of four temperament factors: Positive Affectivity/Extraversion, Neuroticism, Effortful Control, and Orienting Sensitivity, and four PSI scales, specifically Competence, Role Restriction, Attachment to Child, and Social Relationship, were also considered. Both of these instruments have demonstrated adequate psychometric properties at broad construct and factorial/scale levels (Bigras, LaFreniere, & Dumas, 1996; Evans & Rothbart, 2007). Fathers also rated their depressive and anxiety symptoms via Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, Ball, & Ranieri, 1996; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996) and Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck & Steer, 1993), demonstrated as reliable and valid (Creamer, Foran, & Bell, 1995; Steer, Ball, Ranieri, & Beck, 1999). Because of the significant association ($r=.50$ $p<.001$) between fathers' BAI and BDI-II ratings, these were combined to form an Internalizing problems composite.

Comparison analyses were conducted to determine possible gender differences in fathers' report of infant temperament and they revealed no significant differences. Next, simple correlations were performed among the variables in this study, producing a number of significant associations (Table 1). Regression equations were examined next, wherein ATQ and PSI indicators, and the Internalizing Composite scores served as independent variables, associated with fathers' temperament ratings for their infants, revealing multiple significant effects (Table 2). Specifically, fathers' Extraversion/Surgency and Orienting Sensitivity were linked with infants' 4-month Extraversion/Surgency, whereas greater paternal bonding/attachment difficulties were predictive of lower infant Extraversion/Surgency and Regulation/Orienting at 6 months of age. Additionally, fathers' difficulties with parenting competence were linked to higher infant Negative Affectivity at 4 months, and Regulation/Orienting at 6 months of age, whereas fathers' internalizing score predicted higher infant Negative Affectivity at 6 months of age. Finally, two of the interaction terms reflecting potential gender moderation effects reached statistical significance: infant sex by fathers' Extraversion/Surgency and infant sex by fathers' parenting competence. Follow-up regressions conducted separately for boys and girls indicated a significant contribution of fathers' Extraversion for female infants only, and of paternal parenting competence related stress to Regulation/Orienting only for male infants.

The aim of this study was to evaluate how paternal temperament, internalizing symptoms, and parenting stress contribute to the development of infant temperament at 4 and 6 months. Overall, fathers' attributes appear to play a role in explaining early infant temperament development. Specifically, fathers' temperament, internalizing symptoms, and parenting stress predicted infant Extraversion/Surgency and Negative Affectivity at 4 and 6 months and Regulation/Orienting only at 6 months. Fathers' Extraversion/Surgency and Orienting Sensitivity positively predicted infant Extraversion/Surgency at 4 months of age. It is not surprising that fathers' and infants' extraversion-related indicators were associated as this link may be in part genetic in nature, as heritability has been demonstrated for this trait (Deater-Deckard & O'Connor, 2000). It is also possible that early modeling and responsive parenting could have contributed to this association, as infants with more positive affectivity are more likely to elicit positive parenting responses (Kyrios & Prior, 1990).

Greater paternal attachment difficulties predicted lower Extraversion/Surgency and Regulation/Orienting in 6-month-old infants, whereas higher difficulties with parenting competence was associated with higher Negative Affectivity at 4 months and higher Regulation/Orienting at 6 months. Infants, whose fathers reported attachment problems, may display less positive affect (i.e., pleasure and joy) when interacting with their fathers, leading these caregivers to provide lower ratings for Extraversion/Surgency items. It may be that fathers who feel that their emotional bond with the infant is a source

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