Endocrinology of Social Relationships

An Outstanding Tour Of Hormones, Behavior, And Evolution

In social relationships—whether between mates, parents and offspring, or friends—we find much of life’s meaning. But in these relationships, so critical to our well-being, might we also detect the workings, even directives, of biology? This book, a rare melding of human and animal research and theoretical and empirical science, ventures into the most interesting realms of behavioral biology to examine the intimate role of endocrinology in social relationships.

The importance of hormones to reproductive behavior—from breeding cycles to male sexual display—is well known. What this book considers is the increasing evidence that hormones are just as important to social behavior. Peter Ellison and Peter Gray include the latest findings—both practical and theoretical—on the hormonal component of both casual interactions and fundamental bonds. The contributors, senior scholars and rising scientists whose work is shaping the field, go beyond the proximate mechanics of neuroendocrine physiology to integrate behavioral endocrinology with areas such as reproductive ecology and life history theory. Ranging broadly across taxa, from birds and rodents to primates, the volume pays particular attention to human endocrinology and social relationships, a focus largely missing from most works of behavioral endocrinology.

My Personal Review:
Edited by two biological anthropologists, Endocrinology of Social Relationships is a wonderfully thoughtful survey on the effect of hormones on human social behavior, including a critical detour into the effect of hormones on non-human social behavior.

With chapters authored by such influential scientists as Kim Wallen, John Wingfield, Hillard Kaplan, and Sue Carter, ESR applies evolutionary theory
and behavioral neuroendocrinology to human social relationships, in
particularly mating relationships, dominance relationships, maternal care,
paternal behavior, and friendship formation. Peter Ellison also advances
the very interesting perspective of "reproductive ecology," suggesting that
the effects of hormones on sexual behavior can be best understood as a
system that evaluates the energy sources available for successful
reproduction. The weakest chapter in the book is a rather vague and
cursory treatment of the influence of hormones on homosexuality (or
"diversity", as the author characterizes it).

If you want to learn about the cutting edge of what is known about the
intersection of hormones, evolution, and human social interactions, this is
a great place to start.

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