
Proof the attachment principle exists

EVIDENCE OF ATTACHMENT THEORY

Why do some children cry on their first time at daycare while others are completely at ease the entire day? Is it the uncertainty of being in a new environment that drives some college students to tears the moment their parents leave? Both of these situations can be clarified by looking at the Attachment Theory. Attachment Theory describes the dynamics of long-term interpersonal relationships. Empirical evidence to the theory was provided by psychologist Harry Harlow and his student, developmental psychologist, Mary Ainsworth. Through various experiments and the observation of infants—human and nonhuman—they determined that the most important factors in a child's attachment are touch and maternal sensitivity.[1]

Ainsworth observed one-year olds in a new environment with their mother, with their mother and a stranger, with just a stranger, and alone to see how the child acted in each scenario and how they reacted to their mother's return. She called this the strange situation.[2] This is how Ainsworth came to the conclusion that maternal sensitivity affected the child's attachment to their parent and how they'll interact with new people. Seventy percent of the infants she observed fit into the category of Secure Attachment, meaning the child "shows distress when the mother leaves," "avoids the stranger when alone," and is "happy when the mother returns." [3] Fifteen percent of the infants had ambivalent attachment meaning they showed "intense distress when the mother leaves," "avoids and shows signs of fear of stranger," and "resists contact when the mother returns." [4] Those children cried the most overall and explored the least. The final type of attachment is avoidant attachment where the child is indifferent when the mother leaves or returns and is as comfortable with the stranger as they are with the mother. [5]

Harlow observed something similar using rhesus monkeys. Harlow and his colleague Robert Zimmerman did an experiment with infant rhesus monkeys starting 6 to 12 hours after their birth and lasting several months. They created two environments. For four monkeys there was a surrogate mother covered with soft cloth that lactated and a wire mesh mother that didn't. For the other four monkeys the wire mesh mother lactated while the cloth covered mother did not. [6] Harlow was mistaken when he presumed that the baby monkeys would grow more attached to the mother that provided food. In both environments the monkeys spent more time with the cloth mother, only going to the wire mesh mother when they were hungry. This displayed the importance of touch. [7] When placed in an unfamiliar environment alone the baby monkeys showed signs of anxiety, crouching, crying, and rocking but when the cloth mother was placed in the room they immediately clung to her. This is similar to Ainsworth's description of secure attachment, the baby monkeys using their cloth mother as a safe base.

The earliest attachment a child forms is with their caregiver and is an impression that lasts an entire lifetime. A strong maternal bond is important because it enables humans to make successful, lasting relationships throughout the rest of their lives. Strong bonds also provide stability for future endeavors, such as moving away from home or embarking on a new career path. Touch and maternal sensitivity are only two of many important determining factors that can shape a person's future.

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