

Harry harlow



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Compare and contrast research by Harry Harlow and Mary Ainsworth on understanding attachment. This essay is looking at the similarities of two researchers into attachment. The aim is to present their work so as to compare and contrast the different approaches and techniques used by both Harry Harlow and Mary Ainsworth. Even though they both had their different techniques in carrying out their experiments, the conclusion of their findings was very similar and this essay will be showing these findings by contrast.

Both psychologists wanted to find out the underlying mechanics of attachment of mothers and their young. Firstly an American psychologist namely Harry Harlow who almost by accident started the most influential work in understanding attachment, fortunately discovered he was unable to carry out his original study regarding intelligence in rats, so he turned to the abilities of monkeys after seeing strange behaviour portrayed by the monkeys as he cleaned their cages. Subsequently he realised the fuss was being made from the extraction of the soft sanitary towels that were used in lining their cages.

With this in mind he set out to prove the affection these monkey had for the sanitary towels was in fact "contact comfort" seeing as all their other needs were catered for and there was only adverse behaviour on the removal of the towels. He used rhesus macaques a medium sized monkey, which shares 94% DNA with humans "yet one must not be very careful how one interprets this genetic similarity. We share 50 per cent of our DNA with a banana"(DiscoveringPsychology, p. 204, 2010). Harlow constructed two surrogate mothers for these babies to show affection or need. wire cylinder that provided milk, also in the cage was a structure made of wood covered in

foam with a layer of towelling(also known as terry cloth in America). On viewing the action of the baby monkeys Harry Harlow confirmed his theory of “ contact comfort”. He witnessed the baby clinging on to the terry cloth mother for comfort and only reaching for the wire surrogate for food then returning back to the terry cloth mother. “ In another experiment he showed that the babies treated the terry cloth mother as a “ safe base” (Discovering psychology, p. 07, 2010) On displacement of the mothers the only distressing reaction came about on removal of the terry cloth mother with no reaction to the removal of the wire mother which produced food. Upon this observation“ Harlow hypothesised that the tactile qualities of stimuli were more important for infant monkeys bonding then the provision of food”(Discovering psychology, p202, 2010) So the previous assumption of the cupboard love theory was superseded by Harlows observation of contact comfort.

However this conclusion was reach in monkeys and does not automatically prove the same in humans but does give a basis for the t In looking at Marry Ainswoth's work on attachment it is seen there is a great difference in the subject and in the condition surrounding the research. Unlike Harlow who conducted his experiments in the controlled conditions of a laboratory, Ainsworth observed young babies from Ugandan families where she moved with her husband in 1953. Through the observation of the babies over “ two hours every fortnight over a period of nine month”(Discovering Psychology, p. 16, 2010) She witnessed that upon the mothers showing comfort to their young, the affection that was shown calmed them and stopped them crying, Ainsworth arrived at the conclusion similar to Harlow that the babies needed

tactile stimuli or “ contact comfort” the findings she reached coincided with the work of Harlow. She discovered that the displays witnessed and the validation of contact comfort showed infants became more confident to explore as long as the mothers were present, acting as a safe base in the same way the monkeys reacted to the terry cloth mother.

This was shown through Harlows placing the monkey in an unfamiliar playroom, using both surrogate mothers. The positive reaction only came when the terry cloth mother was present, acting as a safe base “ allowing infants to go off and explore or play, but also to rush back to if they felt threatened” (Discovering psychology, p. 207, 2010) In comparison to Harlow's work Ainsworth because of ethics could not separate the baby from its mother due to the damage to their emotional and psychological well being.

So upon which she used the technique of observation to seemingly reach the same result as Harlow in that attachment is based on “ contact comfort”. Also realising in her study the importance of a “ safe base” to infants, as in the observation research carried out on the Uganda families “ if the mothers were unresponsive and emotionally detached, their infants seem to cry a lot more and often seemed clingy or insecure”(Discovering psychology, p. 216, 2010). We see the advantages of Ainsworth's study in wanting to find out about attachment in humans, by studying humans.

As well as showing more credibility into the mechanics of human attachment it also provided Ainsworth with the opportunity to develop a highly influential procedure called the strange situation because of the complexity of humans. This procedure consisted of a series of seven episodes involving three

participants, namely mother, baby and a stranger. Page 3 personal identifier: C3257246

On completion of the procedure in the highly controlled environment (which limited the amount of emotional upset to the child on encountering and being left alone with the stranger that was constructed in one of the episodes) Ainsworth identified four different types of attachment in the infants used in the observation. While benefiting from the conclusion reached it was only on the basis of a single observation and did not take into account important factors such as the mood of the infants and how well they slept.

The study also produced a further problem when the research was carried out in different countries revealing a great difference in the four types of attachment witnessed in her strange situation. This begs the question of ecological validity and how a controlled observation with a set of episodes is not the same for mothers and infants where these circumstances never arise, as in Japan the strange situation procedure never took place as it seemed to be inappropriate since "those mothers never left their babies in a room alone with a stranger" (Discovering psychology, p. 20, 2010). However Harlow had his advantages too. The behaviour in non-human animals that Harlow used can be easier to interpret and to explain the results as unequivocal. Like Ainsworth Harlow carried out further experiments to strengthen the theory of a safe base now that contact comfort was established. In one of the further experiments "Harlow found that when the babies were placed in a large room full of toys they would curl up in a terrified ball if there was no mother or just the wire surrogate

present”(Discovering Psychology, p. 07, 2010) So even though we cannot be sure of the degree of findings on non humans and how applicable they are to humans, we see that the findings of at least “ contact comfort” are shared with the observations of Mary Ainsworth. In contrast to the different approaches taken by both the physiologists we understand that ethics plays a major role. In the case of Mary Ainsworth we see the question of ethics need not be approached, even In her later research the strange situation. If necessary procedures were put in place so not to cause suffering to the infants. The view on ethics taken by Harlow was quite inadequate and became cruel and inhumane which was not a surprising as Harlow did not have too much love for animals. He once said that all he cared about was “ whether a monkey will turn out properly I can publish. I don't have any love for them. I never have” (Discovering Psychology, p. 212, 2010)unlike Ainsworth who morally complied and stopped her experiment immediately when the infant showed any sign of distress.

Although there was not any ethical guidelines in place upon Harlow carrying out his research, the British psychological society states that “ psychologists must be able to demonstrate that the benefits of a study justify the cost to the animal in terms of suffering”(Discovering Psychology, p. 211, 2010) So the influential work carried out by Harlow could be argued “ the suffering was justified because human society benefits greatly from the knowledge”. (Discovering Psychology, p. 212, 2010)

In conclusion this essay has shown the different approaches both psychologists took, By doing so the essay showed the similarity and differences of both studies. The essay showed that the main underlying issue

in the two studies was of ethics and because of this the approaches were very different. However the influential work of Harry Harlow proved that “contact comfort” was the mechanism for attachment by showing systematically “that contact comfort was more important than food in the formation of attachment”. Discovering Psychology, p. 206, 2010) This essay also found the similarity in Mary Ainsworth's studies without approaching the question of ethics, and like Harlow came to a similar conclusion of “contact comfort”, Also appreciating the safe base theory Finally this essay appreciates the discoveries made by both Harry Harlow and Mary Ainsworth on producing relevant information through there respective studies. Word count 1518 References: Brace, n. and Byford, j. (eds)Discovering Psychology(2010), Milton Keynes, The Open University. \*