

# Harlow and ainsworth



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Attachment refers to the early relationships of caregivers, usually mothers, to infants and the manner in which such early care giving relationships foster development in infants (Senior, 2009). In this sense, attachment can refer to the emotional or affective bond given by caregivers to infants and vice versa (Harlow, 1958; Ainsworth, 1969, 1979, 1982, 1989; Ainsworth et. al., 1978; Casady & Shaver, 1999; Burman, 2008; Senior, 2009; Shaffer & Kipp, 2009). Two of the most major contributors to our understanding of attachment are Harry Harlow and Mary Ainsworth, who have provided a series of work that has improved our understanding of this psychological phenomenon. There are many similarities and differences between the two sets of work. As such, this paper will compare and contrast the work of Harry Harlow and Mary Ainsworth on understanding attachment.

As mentioned in the above introduction, there are many similarities and difference between the work of Harry Harlow and Mary Ainsworth. For example, a similarity between the work of Harlow and Ainsworth is that both sets of work demonstrated that attachment in humans and animals is not solely due to the role of imprinting (Shaffer & Kipp, 2009), as first believed by Lorenz (1943, as cited by Shaffer & Kipp, 2009, p. 450). On a similar note, both sets of work showed that attachment is more than a means of remaining in close contact with the mother (Shaffer & Kipp, 2009). Thus, these two sets of work expanded the understanding of animal and human attachment past previous thinking that imprinting and contact were the sole reasons for attachment.

The major difference between the sets of work on attachment is that of the form of study employed by these two researchers. For example, Harry

Harlow's work focused on examining the behaviours of rhesus monkeys in relation to feeding or comfort behaviour from a wire surrogate mother. In contrast, the work by Mary Ainsworth concerned human infants and attachment behaviour demonstrated in the Strange Situation Protocol. The Strange Situation is a twenty minute laboratory experiment wherein the mother and infant are exposed to a stranger, who is then left alone with the infant before the infant being finally left on their own before being reunited with both stranger and mother (Bretherton, 1992; Casady & Shaver, 1999; Shaffer & Kipp, 2009). The series of work by Ainsworth in the Strange Situation demonstrated that children are more likely to explore the setting in the presence of the mother than the stranger. In light of this, Ainsworth's work can be seen as involving elements of separation and reunion, which Harlow's does not include, as Ainsworth's work was more complex and expanded the original ideas of Bowlby and Harlow (Bretherton, 1992). What is more, Ainsworth added an understanding that an attachment figure acts as a form of secure base, which is used by the infant to explore the rest of the world and make further attachments (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bretherton, 1992). Therefore, a difference between the two sets of work on attachment is that the work by Harlow studied attachment of monkeys whereas Ainsworth conducted studies on the attachment of humans. Furthermore, the means through which these two researchers investigated the phenomenon of attachment is highly different. Yet, in comparison, both sets of work can be said to be experimental in nature so the methodology is similar but the form this methodology took is different. Moreover, due to the fact that both sets of work support their theories with empirical evidence,

both sets of work could be said to be similar due to the fact that they are both high in construct validity.

In a similar sense, a problem with the work by Harlow is that of extrapolation, which refers to the problem of transposing the results of studies on animals to the behaviour and cognition of humans. This is different to that of the work by Ainsworth which does not suffer from problems of extrapolation, as her work on attachment was conducted on human infants, as mentioned above. Thus, the work by Ainsworth can be argued to be high in generalisability and usefulness.

A further similarity between the two sets of work on the understanding of attachment is that both researchers argued that attachment has very important consequences on the individual throughout their life (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). As such, both researchers could see the importance of forms of attachment of subsequent behaviour, cognition and personality (Bretherton, 1992). In this sense, both sets of work are similar because they demonstrate the importance of gaining an understanding of attachment for future behaviour.

The work by Harlow and the work of Ainsworth both view the relationship between mother and infant as the most important and primary variable of attachment. In addition to this, both sets of work argue that intimate physical contact is highly important in the relationship between mother and infant attachment (Harlow, 1960; Ainsworth, 1979; Bretherton, 1992). Hence, the primary focus of these two sets of work is that of the affectional bond

between mother and infant and in this sense both sets of work can be seen as being highly similar in content.

Harlow's work can be seen as inspiring the research on attachment by such psychologists as Bowlby and Ainsworth, as it was his work on feeding and comfort with rhesus monkeys that stimulated research on attachment.

Hence, it can be argued that the work of Harlow is high in usefulness as it has generated a great deal of research in this subject area. In a similar sense, it can be argued that the work of Ainsworth has been highly influential in generating interest and research in attachment. In addition to this, the research methodologies of experiments and observations employed by Ainsworth can be seen as guiding subsequent research in examining attachment. Moreover, the work by Ainsworth has generated the basis for policies, education and child welfare (Bretherton, 1992; Shaffer & Kipp, 2009). Hence, the work by Ainsworth provides a more holistic understanding of attachment than does the work by Harlow. However, it is certainly the case that both sets of work are high in usefulness.

Another difference between the work of Harlow and Ainsworth is that Harlow's work was the origin of theories on attachment whereas Ainsworth's work expanded the understanding of attachment that came from Harlow's original work. As such, Ainsworth's work can be said to be more complex and more sophisticated than Harlow's as seen by reference to different forms of attachment, such as, secure or anxious-avoidant, for example. In contrast, Harlow's work focused on feeding and comfort behaviour rather than the forms of attachment shown by infants.

On the same lines as this, a difference in the two sets of work is that Harlow's work claimed that there were four types of affectional patterns or attachment styles, which were: infant for mother, maternal/paternal, peer for peer, and heterosexual patterns (Harlow, 1960). In contrast, Ainsworth's and Bowlby's work argued that there were three forms of attachment styles. However, in comparison, Ainsworth's work indirectly implied these four affectional patterns but did not view them as forms of attachment. As such, it could be said that these two sets of work are very similar in content but dissimilar in the explanation and context.

Finally, another difference between the two sets of work is the background theories and principles that these sets of work were based on. For example, the work by Harry Harlow was mainly based on behaviourist theory whereas the work by Ainsworth was based on principles of Freud and psychoanalysis and ethologist theories (Bretherton, 1992; Shaffer & Kipp, 2009). Therefore, it can be said that the constructs underlying these sets of work are completely different and demonstrate a change in trends in psychology. In this sense, both researchers can be seen as investigating attachment from very different viewpoints and schools of psychological thought. Thus, this may explain the differences in methodology and explanation.

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated that there are many similarities and differences between the work of Harry Harlow and Mary Ainsworth on understanding attachment and it may be the case that these two sets of work are fairly similar in content but dissimilar in the explanation, context and means through which this psychological phenomenon is explained. One of the major differences between the two sets of work is the form of research

conducted by these two researchers, as well as the subjects used in this research. Ainsworth's work was more complex and built upon Harlow's initial groundbreaking work. Nevertheless both researchers contributed heavily to our knowledge of attachment and it is the case that each sets of work are high usefulness in enhancing our understanding of this subject and generating a whole host of research aiming to further the understanding of this psychological phenomenon.