



Love at Goon Park: Harry Harlow and the Science of Affection

By Deborah Blum

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In *Love at Goon Park*, Pulitzer Prize winner Deborah Blum charts this profound cultural shift by tracing the story of Harry Harlow—the man who studied neglect and its life-altering consequences on primates in his lab. The biography of both a man and an idea, *Love at Goon Park* ultimately invites us to examine ourselves and the way we love.

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Love at Goon Park: Harry Harlow and the Science of Affection By Deborah Blum Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this surprisingly compelling book, Blum (*The Monkey Wars*) reveals that many of the child-rearing truths we now take for granted infants need parental attention; physical contact is related to emotional growth and cognitive development were shunned by the psychological community of the 1950s. As Blum shows, Freudian and behavioral psychologists argued for decades that babies were drawn to their mothers only as a source of milk, motivated by the instinctual drive for sustenance, and that children could be harmed by too much affection. Harry Harlow's experiments, Blum finds in this deeply sympathetic investigation of his life and work, changed all this, conclusively demonstrating that infant monkeys bond emotionally with a specific "mother" a dummy figure made of cloth even if it is not a source of food. The experiments also revealed, astonishingly enough, that puzzle-solving monkeys who were not rewarded with food actually performed better than those who were rewarded, leading him to conclude that baby primates and by extension, baby children are motivated by a range of emotions, including curiosity, affection and wonder. Born Harry Israel, Harlow changed his name because 1930s anti-Semitism prevented him from getting a research position (though he wasn't Jewish). His first marriage ended because his wife, who had given up her own promising scientific career, felt he was spending too much time at the lab and not enough at home with the kids. *Monkey Wars* fans who have been waiting for a follow-up will find this book irresistible.

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From Library Journal

Not too long ago, the predominant paradigm maintained that infants should be denied love or even physical contact lest they be threatened with infectious microbes. Countering the authority of reigning behavioral psychologists like B.F. Skinner and John Watson, the brilliant renegade Harry Harlow attempted to find the essence of mother love and its influence on child development. Rather than work with rats, Harlow studied primate affection using his classical inanimate surrogate mothers. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Blum (*The Monkey Wars*) rivetingly recounts Harlow's work while examining the man himself. Harlow argued that mother-child bonding was crucial for normal development, and his experiments with monkeys showed that social organisms cannot survive isolation. But as Blum reveals, Harlow was an enigma, brilliant but distant from his own children, and his work raised ethical and controversial dilemmas concerning the research treatment of animals. Harlow had a major impact on psychologists like Abraham Maslow (who happened to be his graduate student), yet he is little known today outside the scientific community. Blum's excellent biography, the first major new work devoted to him, should change that. Highly recommended for public and academic libraries.

Rita Hoots, Woodland Coll. Lib., CA

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From Scientific American

It's one of the iconic images in psychology. Two "surrogate" primate mothers sit side by side. One is made of chicken wire with a milk bottle sticking out of the torso. The other, milkless, is swathed in terry cloth. And there is the infant rhesus monkey, clinging like mad, squeezing every bit of comfort and attachment it can out of the cloth mother. The work was revolutionary: it overturned remarkably damaging dogma about love and attachment in the 1940s and 1950s, and it was carried out by a contrarian psychologist with a troubled personal life, one in ironic contrast to what his science was demonstrating. In her 1994 book, *The Monkey Wars*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Deborah Blum superbly balanced opposing views of the incendiary issue of primate vivisection. In *Love at Goon Park*, Blum does an equally skillful job balancing the pictures

of that psychologist, Harry Harlow, as troubled soul and brutal abuser of his experimental subjects versus helper of humankind through brilliant science. Harlow's career, mostly at the University of Wisconsin, had a unifying theme--tilting against the then dominant paradigm in psychology, the ideology of mindless behaviorism. In the first of three phases of his work, he demolished the behaviorist view that animal learning is rudimentary and solely motivated by reward. Instead Harlow showed animals strategizing, learning to learn, demonstrating curiosity and mastering tasks for their own sake, rather than for food reward. Nice, and preparatory for the brilliant second phase of his work. Why do infants become attached to their mothers? Savants agreed: because Mom supplies food. For behaviorists, this was obvious: attachment was thought to arise solely from the positive reinforcement of food. For Freudians, it was also obvious: infants were thought to lack the "ego development" to form a relationship with anything or anyone other than Mom's breast. For physicians, it was obvious and convenient: no need for mothers to visit hospitalized infants; anyone with a bottle would supply attachment needs. No need to worry about preemies kept antiseptically isolated in incubators: regular feeding suffices for human contact. No need for children in orphanages to be touched, held, noted as individuals. What's love got to do with healthy development? Everything, and when some scientists suggested this in the 1940s and 1950s, Harlow's study of surrogates was the irrefutable, scientific battering ram that they cited. Infant monkeys chose the cloth mothers. Attachment had nothing to do with having your caloric needs met. Blum does the excellent, requisite historian's job, illuminating a period whose zeitgeist differs from ours. Once, all experts really believed that affection not only wasn't needed for development but was a squishy, messy thing that kept kids from becoming upright, independent citizens. This view dominated despite the evidence of its being wrong, even fatally so. And that we now regard that view as ludicrous reflects the impact of those surrogate mothers. But there is more to mothering than being warm terry cloth: the cloth mother-reared monkeys matured into social cripples. This prompted the dark, last phase of Harlow's work. What is missing in a monkey raised with a cloth mother? In one raised with a living mother but no peers? In complete isolation? Can "therapists" (younger, unthreatening and highly socialized monkeys) repair the broken animal produced by isolation? What kind of mothers do isolated monkeys become (are they often violently abusive)? This period produced a horrific finding: if an infant is punished for hugging a surrogate mother (with, for example, a jet of air shot from the surrogate's torso), the infant hugs more, not less. This violated every tenet of behaviorist reinforcement theory but is obvious to anyone who loves the wrong person. These were brutal studies, animals shattered by isolation. They made Harlow a pariah in many circles. Useful science was produced (though not nearly enough to justify the extent of what was done, in my opinion). Animals suffered unspeakably. And Blum documents Harlow's personal demons during this period: alcoholism, estrangement from his children, depression requiring hospitalization and electroconvulsive therapy. It's an irresistible story told exceedingly well. I do have a few obligatory minor complaints. Good-guy scientists are always "passionate," which, though probably true, gets thin; individuals, along with their academic pedigrees and current positions, are introduced repeatedly. And one wishes for more insight into Harlow's childhood, beyond his mother's being the cold, chicken-wire type. Blum makes two important points. First, that part of the problem with Harlow is that he did ethically troubling work without seeming ethically troubled. He responded to feminist and animal-rights critiques with caustic hostility, dinosaurish misogyny and flaunted indifference to his animals. His writing was savage and crude: I recall being moved to tears and outrage by those papers as a student. (An example: females who were socially isolated as infants were inept at mating. How to get them pregnant, to study their subsequent maternal behavior? Harlow wrote, proudly, of his "rape rack.") Blum's other point is deep and eloquent: Harlow's pioneering work was required to demonstrate the unethical nature of that work. But wasn't it obvious before? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you socially isolate us as infants, do we not suffer? Few in the know thought so. The main point of Harlow's work was not teaching what we might now assume incorrectly to have been obvious then--that if you isolate an infant monkey, she saddens and suffers for long after. It was the utterly novel fact that if you do the same to a human infant, the same occurs.

Robert Sapolsky, author of Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers and A Primate's Memoir, is professor of biology at

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