

## The Ethics of Research - Methodology Case Study

source text: adapted from Giddens, *Sociology* (1989:67) and Atkinson et. al. *Psychology* (1990)

Harry Harlow experimented in socialisation in the 1950s and 1960s by taking baby rhesus monkeys from their mothers.

All material needs were provided for the baby monkeys, they were fed and given all they needed materially.

The baby monkeys which were brought up in isolation from other monkeys behaved in a very bizarre and unusual way.

When they were introduced to other monkeys, they were hostile or fearful and they refused to interact. They spent their time huddling in the corners of their cages and their posture was not dissimilar from that of humans who experience schizophrenia.

The monkeys could not, or would not mate with other monkeys. Some females were impregnated by artificial insemination, but they did not pay attention to their young.

Monkeys raised in partial isolation where they could see other monkeys, but could not interact were also unable to mate correctly. They did however masturbate which showed that normal sexual function was in fact present.

Harlow refined his experiment to see if the mother was essential to the develop of the social behaviour of the monkey. He brought up the babies in age group cohorts, without access to adults who would provide a substitute mother. These monkeys all behaved in a normal monkey manner.

Monkeys were reared in cages with feeders attached to substitute mothers. Each baby monkey had two model mothers, wire and terry cloth. In groups, some wire mothers were rigged to provide food, and some wire mothers were rigged to provide food. In all cases, the baby monkey preferred the cloth mother regardless of which provided food.

### **Discussion Points:**

1. Was it necessary for Harlow to use monkeys rather than babies for this research exercise? Why?
2. Was what Harlow learned essential knowledge to us? How else could this knowledge have been gained?
3. Is what Harlow and his associates learned about monkeys applicable to human beings in your view?
4. Is their emotional language about the experiment in the account that you have just read of the experiments?
5. How relevant do you think animal experimentation is to the study of society?
6. How could you design a study to learn about the nature of an infant's relationship with its mother which did not use animal experimentation?
7. In your view, was this experimentation ethical? Give reasons for your opinion which refers to theory and sociological knowledge.