

In the eighties, the United Nations asserted that the rights of children should include a supportive and nurturing environment in which to be raised in a family unit. Childhood attachment continues to be studied using a range of various methods.

In designing a study, psychologists select the method of collecting data based on the cycle of enquiry. By looking at existing evidence, evaluating it and using that to inform the development of the theory behind the study and the research question itself, the most appropriate method is selected.

Non-intrusive approaches such as observation and interview are focused on acknowledging actions of participants and not just the results contributed. By investigating the ethical issues, types and validity of data provided and relevance of environment in collecting data, an assessment can be made in the usefulness of non-intrusive methods in studying attachment in children.

To begin with, ethical considerations are integral in any study. In all studies concerning adults and children a code of ethics must be adhered to. The case is the same for animals following on from the study completed by Harry Harlow in the 1950's that involved experimentation on macaque monkeys. By depriving the monkeys of a live mother, he placed infant monkeys in a cage with a wire mesh and towelling mother but provided food through only, testing which 'mother' the monkey preferred to spend time with. Harlow's results proved the monkey favoured the towelling mother regardless of who provided food. Custance acknowledges (2012) this data was extremely valuable in supporting John Bowlby's theory that the 'cupboard love' concept was wrong, instilling a profound change in peoples views on parenting. However, further research by Harlow included social isolation experiments that would not pass an ethics committee today. Although still considered less 'problematic' (Online, 2020) than using humans, strict guidelines now have to be adhered to courtesy of the awful experiences Harlow's monkeys had.

Non-intrusive methods however can be designed to take place outside of a laboratory and can take advantage of following a less structured process. For example, Mary Ainsworth's The Strange Situation involved putting babies between 12-18 months into a room and measuring responses when the mother left, re-entered and when they were left with a stranger. Although, to show comparable results all children taking part went through the same process, if a child was particularly upset at any stage the mother was able to engage quicker than planned to prevent distress. Ainsworth's research suggested links between how a child is attached to its mother around 1 year old and the consequences these have on future relationships with others (Ainsworth, 1979).

Ethically, Ainsworth's observations were far more considerate than Harlow's treatment of the monkeys, although upset possibly caused to the child on the removal of the mother in the first place means the Strange Situation is not infallible. As Custance points out (2012), an additional

limitation of the Strange Situation was its inability to transfer to certain cultures. Some locations healthy attachment presented differently to that in the UK and USA.