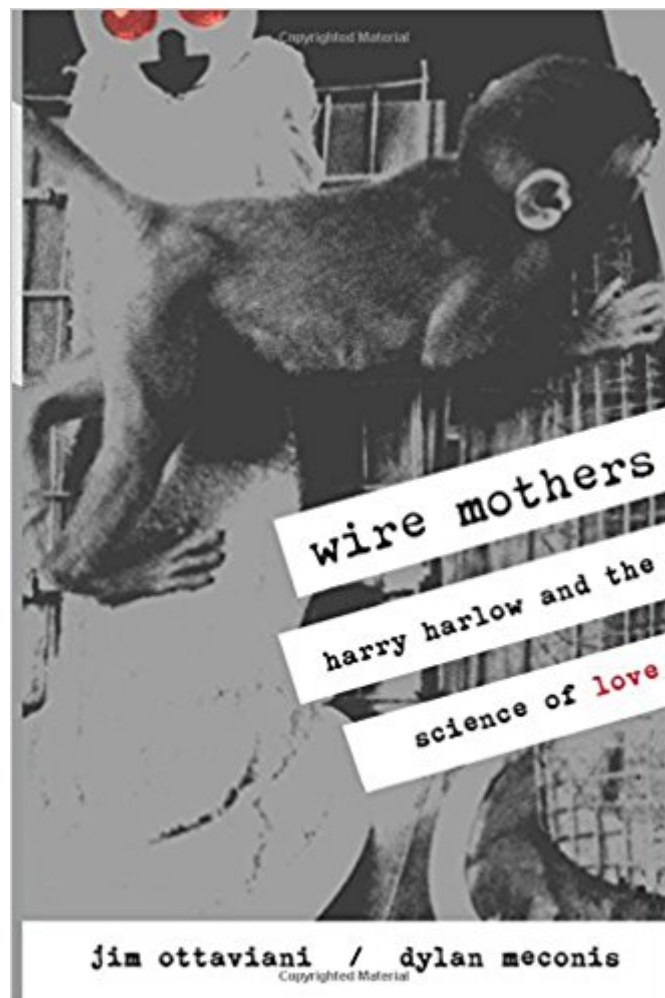




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# Wire Mothers & Inanimate Arms: Harry Harlow And The Science Of Love



## Synopsis

Psychologists know best, of course, and in the 1950s they warned parents about the dangers of too much love. Besides, what was “love” anyway? Just a convenient name for children seeking food and adults seeking sex. It took an outsider scientist to challenge it. When Harry Harlow began his experiments on mother love he was more than just an outside the mainstream, though. He was a deeply unhappy man who knew in his gut the truth about what love • and its absence • meant, and set about to prove it. His experiments and results shocked the world, and *Wire Mothers & Inanimate Arms* will shock you as well.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This nonfiction graphic novel retelling psychologist Harry Harlow’s famous experiments is as disturbing as it is excellent. We’ll show you what love looks like • and what it does, says the young researcher, as he turns to TV to make his case after regular scientists reject his experiments. Harlow showed that rhesus monkeys preferred the soft, cloth stuffed-animal mother over wire surrogates, even when nursed by the wire doll. The famous images of the scary cloth mother and the even scarier wire mother has great cultural weight, but the real drama of the story Ottaviani tells is the contemporary scientists who won’t admit the word love into their clinical language. Harlow’s journey is tinged with subtle class and immigrant issues • the big-jawed, jowly figures, drawn with meaty shadows, express these divisions wonderfully, and help give Harlow emotional weight as he simultaneously finds success and sinks into alcoholism. The repetition of the term proximity, how

scientists explained away love, is chilling, and the largely forgotten Skinner boxes and the theories behind them give the work a sense of deep foreboding as a cautionary tale of how behaviorists once tried to declare affection to be scientifically unsound. (July) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

About the storytellers: All of Jim Ottaviani's books have been nominated for multiple awards, including Eisners & ALA Popular Paperback of the Year, and they also receive critical praise in publications ranging from The Comics Journal to Physics World to Entertainment Weekly to Discover Magazine, and get national broadcast attention in outlets such as NPR's Morning Edition and the CBS Morning Show. Dylan Meconis was an original contributor to the groundbreaking Flight series and a nominee for the Friends of Lulu Kim Yale award. She is also a launch contributor to Girlamatic, a member of the Pants Press collective and Mercury Studio, and has been blogged just about everywhere.

I really don't understand the hugely negative reviews for this. It's based on extensive research, as I would expect from Ottaviani, including Harlow's own autobiography in both published and unpublished forms. 'Wire Mothers' takes you through a tour of Harry Harlow's lab just before the famous CBS 'Mother Love' episode of 'Conquest'. At this time, B.F. Skinner's operant conditioning theory was king - everything and everyone was a black box, to the point that you don't even really comprehend or understand the words you are uttering - you are just regurgitating patterns you were trained in as a child. Love or affection were meaningless, because such concepts are null concepts to mindless automatons. It was the prevailing climate of the day, as strange as it sounds now. Harry Harlow thought this was ridiculous, so he engaged in a series of now painful to contemplate experiments with baby rhesus monkeys where he provided them with wire 'mothers' with bottles (food) and wire mothers with plush carpet skins (affection) or raised them with no mothers whatsoever, then subjected them to various stresses to see how they'd react. As the afterword says, this is cruel, but someone 'had' to do it and by the standards of the day it was no worse than subjecting minerals to acids. I really thought this was quite sympathetic to Harlow. He's pictured here as a nuanced, conflicted, but principled David who beat down the B.F. Skinner Goliath of the day with a simple, yet utterly compelling series of experiments. The presentation is clever, the art is appropriately realistic yet stylized. It portrays him as a very (likeable) human being, which I guess isn't acceptable to people who need everything to be in broad swathes of good/evil white/black paragon/fiend. But science is never so clean. Really, if you were going to complain, it should be

about the caricaturization of Skinner and Watson (even though it's accurate!). This and all of Ottaviani's books are excellent windows into the real world of science, if you can handle it, and I'm sorry that I waited so long to read this because I stupidly trusted other reviews. I read about this in psychology classes, of course, but it never really hit home so well until now. Honestly, if I have any complaint at all it's that this is 'only' 80 pages, so for \$10 you get a single concept well elucidated instead of 300 pages of dense text, but there's something to be said for quality.

i was really disappointed in this book. The cartoon format is interesting, but confusing about people and events involved. i was a graduate student in psychology at the time Harlow's work was becoming famous, and this account doesn't gibe with my impressions at the time.

If you plan to use this book for reference material, forget it! It is merely a comic book that portrays Harlow as a disturbed individual, speculating as to why he was obsessed with love. It does not appear to provide fact based info that would be necessary for a research information.

This is an excellent work. You get to know the main character as a human being. You get to see the way science really happens, and how hard it can be for the truth to get out, when all you have is proof, and no clout. And you are introduced to the very, very fascinating process that happens when a *\*real\** scientist--a true seeker of knowledge--looks at a problem like "how does the behavior/affection of a parent affect the development of a child?" and says, "yes, but how do we *\*know\** this? What could we do to test it? What is a reproducible experiment that would give us some insight?". It's been a while since I read it. If I recall correctly, there was some irony in the end that at some point some of Harlow's interpretations of his own experiments started to become authority that no one doubted (like Skinner's ideas had been before Harlow toppled them). If I am remembering correctly, it was that Harlow felt like he had "solved" the problem of what causes autism, that it must be lack of affection given to the child. This is actually untrue [what *\*is\** true is that if you give a monkey zero comfort but just give it food, it will display symptoms similar to autism--but just because that's true doesn't mean that symptoms of autism imply no affection was given. Kind of a rookie mistake if that's how it really went down, but it can be hard to resist the eureka moment when you think you have the answer to an important problem], but when Harlow became the new "authority", finally toppling Skinner, people followed him as religiously as they had previously been following Skinner. Which is also what happens in science, and thus, also worth exploring. Note that I'm not saying that this is the definitive work on Harlow's life. What I *\*am\** saying

is that this is an engaging and interesting introduction to him and some of the history of psychology that was happening around him. For me, it inspired an interest in him and what he tried to do, and encouraged me to dig more. How many of the hours that you spent in history classes did the same for you? It's too bad this hasn't seen a wider audience, because I'm pretty sure that the positive reviews of this would far outweigh the negative if you had a larger sample size. If you're wondering whether to bother checking this out, and in doubt because the current average review is low, my advice would be to take a chance on it. Seems to be a bit of axe grinding in the negative reviews IMHO.

The topic of this graphic nonfiction sounded interesting from a pre-pub review I read. At a library conference I visited the publisher's booth and got a copy signed by the author. While stuck in the airport, I started reading this...and couldn't stop. I read it twice through on the trip home. When I got home, I made my father (who's more of a scientist than I am) read this too. I don't have a degree in "real" science (writing and library science,) but I have always been interested. I do read a lot of graphic novels. This is graphic non-fiction as it should be done. In fact everything from GT Labs is worth your time and your dollars. All of GT Labs publications might not be great, but this is. The art is well done. The story is compelling. The information is well integrated into the story. Excellent!

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