

Maternal and Paternal Influences

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss the various parental influences that can play a role in developmental psychology.

The specific areas of focus include:

1. Gender Roles in Parenting
2. Parental Influences
 - a. Maternal
 - b. Paternal
3. Role of Love and Attention

1. Gender Roles in Parenting

As we discussed in a previous lesson, arguably the most important relationship that a person can have, particularly as a young child, is with his or her parents.

A large amount of research in developmental psychology has gone into determining the effects of parents on their children, as well as how parenting can be improved.

One way these effects occur is through parental influence, and it's important to note that these parental influences are not necessarily the same all the way across the board.

If you remember from when we discussed cultural relativity, an action depends on the values of the culture in which it's taking place. Different cultures have different values, and so the actions that they approve of or tend to support can be different.

This idea really comes into play when discussing the concept of gender roles. Gender roles are the sorts of roles that different men and women can take on in different societies.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Generally in Western society, or American society, we see the father as the worker or the wage earner, and the person who's providing the food. The mother is seen as the caretaker, or the person who looks after the house and the children.

As a result of these gender roles, we tend to see women as more caring and nurturing because they're at home, whereas men are viewed as more emotionally distant because they're away from home more often. Men are assumed to not be in contact with the children as much, so often we also see women as having the most influence on children.

However, it's important to note that these gender roles are constructed as a result of our culture and society. In fact, children learn the gender roles from their parents themselves. These roles aren't innate or biological in any way.

2. Parental Influences

Because of these differences in gender roles, there's a corresponding difference in the influence that the parents have on their child's development.

2a. Maternal

Maternal influences are those that the mother has on the child. Mothers generally speak to children as infants more than fathers do; they tend to be more communicative.

Mothers also tend to perform a lot of the caregiving responsibilities, such as feeding, changing, or bathing the children. In general, the maternal influences tend to include the physical and emotional care and support of the children.



TERM TO KNOW

Maternal Influences

Influences a mother has on a child--caregiving, physical and emotional care

2b. Paternal

On the other hand, **paternal influences** are those that the father has on the child. Fathers tend to play more with their children, and to tell them stories. In other words, fathers are more physically involved; they do more tactile or physically stimulating activities with their children.

As a result, children with strong paternal influences usually develop in different types of ways. They tend to develop their physical skills a bit more; these children may be more tactile or physically adept.

Now, this isn't to say that fathers don't have any kind of emotional or social interactions with their children. In fact, studies show that the more caring and nurturing the father is, the more well-developed the child tends to be further down the line.



TERM TO KNOW

Paternal Influences

Influences a father has on a child--play and tell stories, teach competence and limits, vocabulary

3. Role of Love and Attention

Previously in psychology, a lot of studies have shown that love and attention can be too much or bad for a child's development. In fact, John Watson, the behaviorist, called love and attention a dangerous instrument for a child.

However, later studies by a psychologist named Harry Harlow in the 1960s showed the importance of love and attention to a child's development. In his experiments, Harlow took baby rhesus monkeys away from their mothers, and instead, placed them in a room with different **surrogate mothers**. A surrogate mother is a substitute mother, something that takes the place of a mother or an important caregiver in some way.

In one of the experiments, the surrogate mothers came in two different varieties. One was made of wire, meaning it was cold and didn't feel physically like a mother monkey. However, it did have milk in order to provide food and sustenance.

The other surrogate was covered with terry cloth, much like a towel, and thus felt a bit more like a mother monkey. What Harlow discovered was that the baby monkey would actually cling to the terry cloth monkey even more. The baby needed that kind of tactile contact with the mother to feel like it was receiving the right sort of attention.

Thus, when a fear stimulus--something that scared the baby monkey--was introduced, the baby monkey would automatically go over to the terry cloth monkey, instead of the monkey that would provide food and nourishment. This was because the wire monkey didn't feel the same. The baby monkey needed that kind of love and attention to be able to develop appropriately.

When that surrogate mother was taken away, the baby monkey would do less exploration in the room; it would tend to curl up in a ball and show signs of extreme anxiety and fear, all because it was taken away from that touch and affection of the surrogate mother.

On the other hand, too much attention might not always be a good thing. Recent studies have shown that mothers' attention in the form of direction during play can influence children's feelings of independence, as well as their ability to self-organize and thus cognitively drive themselves later on in life.

In other words, if a mother becomes more involved in a child's play by telling the child what to do, this could have an adverse effect on the child. So as with all things, it's important to find a balance when considering the degree of parental influences.



TERM TO KNOW

Surrogate Mother

Something that takes the place of a mother



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about **gender roles in parenting**. While gender roles are learned as a result of cultural influences rather than being innate, they can have significant effects on a child's development. In terms of **parental influences**, there are two types: **maternal** and **paternal**. Maternal influences tend to be focused more on physical and emotional care, while paternal influences tend to center more on physical activities.

You now understand that there has also been significant research done on the **role of love and attention** in developmental psychology. While love and attention are essential to a child's development, finding a balance is important because too much involvement has been shown to have a negative effect.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Erick Taggart.



TERMS TO KNOW

Maternal Influences

Influences a mother has on a child - caregiving, physical and emotional care.

Paternal Influences

Influences a father has on a child - play and tell stories, teach competence and limits, vocabulary.

Surrogate Mother

Something that takes the place of a mother.