

Hrdy, S.B. (1999). *Mother nature: Maternal instincts and how they shape the human species*. New York: Ballantine.

In this book the author discusses the behavioral patterns of human and primate mothers in dealing with their children and how these patterns may have come about. She discusses how these behaviors are either positive or negative to the life and survival of the mother, the child, and the species. Hrdy's main topic is that of whether love and nurturing of a child by the mother is learned or instinctual. She explains why it is some of both and uses many interesting examples to show why.

She argues that many of the sacrifices women make seem to be non-beneficial to herself but benefit children greatly. This brings up the issue of post-partum depression making it seem that the choices that the mother is making are making her depressed but she somehow feels compelled to continue to do so based on some instinct. It talks about how mothers have many children within a small amount of time making it more and more difficult on the mother but she still does it. Indeed the mother makes many "trade-offs," setting aside her own needs so that she can take care of her child. This clearly indicates that it is instinctual because it is not beneficial to her to do so.

She discusses the evolutionary benefits of maternal instincts and why they would have risen. The obvious benefits she discusses are that it is a better success rate for children if the mother cares for and nurtures the child. It talks about particular instincts like fear of strangers and attachment to a child - presenting the idea that these instincts would have developed to account for the many males that would prefer that their infants were dead. This instinct is due to either the fact that males want the female for their own offspring or because of the higher amount of energy it takes for all to raise a child.

An interesting topic it discusses is that of an apparently instinctual attraction to children of all women starting at an early age. This is a great advantage for children and a great incentive for mothers to take care of them. The book discusses that some primate mothers will kill other mothers' babies in order to get more help with their own. This is yet more proof that mothering is highly instinctual. This book is good to learn about why mothers do what they do. It also questions the common idea in our society of a "perfect mother" who cares without thought of herself but only for her children. It takes into account the long evolutionary history of why humans act the way we do and why in our modern society mothers have so much expected of them.