The biological substrate of interpersonal bonds

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Social relationships are a basic element of social life and, among these, interpersonal relationships are the most substantial. In this article biological changes related to the development of social bonds are reviewed. The main principles of attachment theory, laid out by Bowlby, Ainsworth, and others, in order to explain emotional bonds, have been expressed with terms that facilitate the investigation of the biological substrate of interpersonal bonds. Bowlby maintained that attachment systems have a neurobiological structure, but it took quite a while before this theoretical premise could become the subject of research. Attachments function in such a way as to facilitate reproduction, to promote a sense of security, to reduce anxiety and help coping with stressful events. Parturition, breast-feeding, sexual behavior, and coping with stressful circumstances are some of the situations that promote the development of interpersonal bonds, but in these cases the body mobilizes different neurotransmitters and activates different neuronal circuits in the brain. Oxytocin, vasopressin, corticosterone, as well as brain dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrin have a central role in these functions.

Key words: interpersonal bond, attachment, hormones, neurotransmitters.

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