Review of Jim Ottoviani and Dylan Meconis' *Wire Mothers: Harry Harlow and the Science of Love*

By Star Hoffman

"When Harry started his work, the word 'love' basically didn't exist in science. Not in casual talk, not in any scientific dictionary. Nowhere."
– Ottaviani & Meconis (80)

1 Jim Ottaviani and Dylan Meconis's *Wire Mothers: Harry Harlow and the Science of Love* is at once a deeply informative work and a thoroughly enjoyable experience. It describes scientist Harry Harlow's research on motherly love during the 1950s and 1960s. His experiments showed different responses in infant monkeys to surrogate "mothers" made of wire versus those made of cloth, proving the existence and importance of affection ("love" in Harlow's terms, "proximity" in the accepted terminology of the day).

2 It is difficult to capture the compelling nature of this work in a brief description. The comic traces Harlow's work from his early days through his later wire mother experiments, but it also explores his various struggles: alcoholism, proving himself as a young university teacher, overcoming a speech impediment, and the highs and lows of his two marriages. The subject matter may imply a dry or depressing narrative, but this is far from the case. Ottaviani and Meconis have created a work that brims with gentle humor, hope, and memorably captures a researcher's passion for learning.

3 Harlow's personality is fully realized, subtly conveyed through aside comments, slips of the tongue, awful puns, and boyish expressions of delight. Throughout the book, his alcoholism is poetically implied, never mentioned in the text but ever-present in the panel backgrounds. Harlow's enthusiasm and affability shine in a sequence near the end of the book, communicated by the lovingly exasperated reactions of his team as well as his spurts of dialogue. Throughout, art and script mesh impeccably.

4 Ottaviani has authored a number of books including *Two-Fisted Science: Stories About Scientists*, most of which are also graphic novels about scientific topics. He has several scientific degrees, including a master's in nuclear engineering. This expertise no doubt contributes to the ease with which he writes about science, and in particular his striking ability to communicate the wonder of scientific discovery. Researchers in any academic discipline will recognize the passion and joy that Harlow exhibits upon a breakthrough.

5 Meconis was previously published in the comic anthology *Flight: Volume One* and recently released the...
graphic novel Bite Me, which anthologizes her webcomic of the same title. Her style is simple and conveys detail all the better for it, such as the rumples in Harlow's lab coat and the ever-present cigarette butts in the lab. Her characters' facial expressions are particularly evocative. The panels are full of emotive power, displaying a young romance, Harlow's struggle with alcoholism, and the sheer terror of the infant monkeys raised with wire mothers. Her art is detailed and crisp.

6 The subject matter and nature of this book make it ideal for a wide audience. It is as suited for a leisurely evening pleasure read as it is as required reading for a science or psychology course. It is particularly effective as a model of passion and persistence in scientific research, and may therefore be valuable for students considering science as a career. The detailed text and comprehensive bibliography prove the extensive research that went into this book, as well provide an excellent starting point for further education on Harlow's research.

7 The end result is an absorbing work that is at once instructive, entertaining, and poignant.

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