

Sociability in Bottle Fed vs. Mother Fed Lambs

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Abstract

In this study, we compared the behavior of bottle fed lambs versus mother fed lambs in three testing scenarios; the sociability test, the paired attachment test, and the mismatch attachment test. The tests sought to determine if a familiar human can serve as a secure base for lambs in a strange situation and, if given the choice. The tests were performed in an isolated area where the lamb was separated from its herd and could not see others. For the first test on sociability, there were 30 lambs used. We compared ten bottle fed Polypay lambs to ten mother fed Polypay lambs. We matched each bottle fed lamb up to a mother fed lamb similar in age, gender, and breed. When possible, paired individuals were siblings. In addition to the sociability tests, we also compared ten mother fed Suffolk lambs to the mother fed Polypay lambs to determine if different breeds behaved in similar ways. In the second test, the paired attachment, we gave the 20 Polypay lambs a choice to approach a human or their mother. The third test, mismatch attachment, the lambs choose between their own mother and a randomly selected ewe from the same heard. In both cases we recorded the lamb's choice (who it approach first) and approach latency (time to approach). We found that the bottle fed lambs, mother fed lambs and Suffolk lambs spent a similar length of time near the walls and door of the testing area. Additionally, the average number of bleats of all lambs decreased in the return phase in the first test. All lambs preferred their mother over a human, and 72% of lambs choose their mother over another ewe. There are several ways to interpret the results shown, one of which is that lambs will behave in a similar fashion despite different rearing and feeding techniques at a young age.