**TYPES OF ATTACHMENT**

**INTRODUCTION**

There are differences in the type of attachments that babies form. There is a variation in the in the strength and type of attachment. Mary Ainsworth worked with John Bowlby and developed a technique to investigate these different types of attachment. This technique is called **“The Strange Situation”.**

**Ainsworth (1970)**

Infants aged 12-18 months were observed through video cameras in a laboratory playroom. The room contained two comfortable chairs and toys for the children. The procedure consisted of a series of standardised situations:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | Mother and infant enter the room. Mother sits in one of the chairs and reads a magazine. Child is placed on the floor and is free to explore the toys. |
| 2 | After about three minutes, a stranger enters, sits on the second chair and talks briefly with the mother |
| 3 | The stranger approaches the infant and attempts to interact and play with them |
| 4 | Mother leaves the room so the infant is alone with the stranger. The stranger comforts the baby if they are upset and offers to play with them |
| 5 | After around three minutes mother returns and the stranger leaves |
| 6 | Three minutes later mother departs again leaving the baby briefly alone in the room |
| 7 | The stranger re-enters and offers to comfort and play with the baby |
| 8 | Mother returns and the stranger leaves |

During this procedure, four different aspects of behaviour are assessed using this technique:

1. The use of the mother as a secure base, i.e. leaving her side to explore the environment, but returning at intervals to her side.
2. The response of the child on separation from the mother when she leaves the room, separation anxiety
3. The way the child responds when the stranger tries to interact with him/her, stranger anxiety
4. The child’s behaviour on reunion with the mother

After using this technique Ainsworth identified three patterns of attachment

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Attachment | Behaviour patterns |
| Secure infants(Type B attachment) | These babies used their mother as a safe base and were happy to explore the room when she was present. They showed distress by crying when she left, and welcomed her back on her return, settling back down to play fairly quickly. They were wary of the stranger and treated them very differently to their mother. 70% of babies fell into this category |
| Insecure-avoidant attachment (Type A) | These babies did not orient their behaviour towards their mother in the same way. They showed some distress at her departure but did not seek comfort from her when she returned. They also rejected the stranger’s attempts to comfort them. The relationship style of these babies involved keeping a distance and avoiding closeness. 15% of babies fell into this category |
| Insecure-resistant/ambivalent attachment (Type C) | These babies were very upset at separation but were not easily comforted when the mother returned. They appeared to be angry and rejected her attempts to comfort them. These babies seemed to expect the relationship to be difficult and they alternated between seeking closeness and wanting distance. 15% of babies fell into this category. |

|  |
| --- |
| **Methodological issues – *Choose any 4 from these***☺The method developed has been a really useful tool, giving a great deal of information about babies’ attachments in a relatively short space of time.☺ The procedure is easy to replicate. This has led to a rapid increase in the amount of work carried out on attachment types. Many studies have found similar results which suggests that the strange situation is a reliable method of studying attachment types.☹ It has been criticised for lacking validity because of the strange and unfamiliar surroundings of the playroom. This is not the child’s home and may be the children’s behaviour was just a response to these surroundings. ☺ The playroom is, however, similar to new environments, such as at nursery or playgroup so it may be a valid method.☹ As a volunteer sample was used, participants have self-selected. This means that a particular type of person has volunteered, so there is a high chance of bias. This means that we cannot generalise to the target population which means it has low population validity.☹ The technique used was a disclosed observation. The mothers being observed may have changed their behaviour because they knew they were being observed. This means there will be an increase in demand characteristics.☹ This technique has been used with both parents of a child (Main & Weston, 1981), with the results showing that the baby is categorised as a different attachment type with each parent. The strange situation is, therefore, not measuring the baby’s attachment style, but is measuring different parental relationships.☹ As the same researcher classifies the mother’s behaviour and the attachment style, there may be observer bias. The researcher will have detailed knowledge of the area of research, so may interpret behaviours which support what they expected to find. ☹ The procedure has been repeated, at intervals, on the same children. Sometimes the baby’s attachment classification can change. This usually happens if the family’s circumstances have changed. If attachment style is a permanent characteristic, this shouldn’t happen.  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Ethical issues**crying baby☹ To deliberately expose children to stress is a questionable. Although children may, on occasion, be left for a short time with strangers, this doesn’t necessarily mean it is a suitable thing to do for the purposes of research. ☺ It is, however, no more stress than a baby may encounter in real life. ☺ The procedure was stopped if the baby showed signs of extreme distress. ☺ This issue has been addressed by True et al (2001) who have adapted the strange situation technique for use during a weigh-in at a baby clinic for infants in Mali. |

Further attachment type

|  |
| --- |
| D |

The research by Ainsworth(1970) failed to identify a fourth attachment type. Not all infants fall into the category of A, B or C. A further insecure attachment type was identified by Main & Solomon (1990). This is where a child shows both the behaviours of Type A (anxious avoidant) and type C (anxious resistant). They may appear wary of the caregiver rather than the stranger. They may maintain close proximity but resist being cuddled. This has been identified as the disorganised attachment pattern (Type D) and is found in families where the mother is depressed, or where there is child abuse.