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| **Learning Table 6 – Ainsworth’s Strange Situation and Types of Attachment** | | | |
| **A01 (Knowledge and Understanding)** | | **AO3 (Evaluation)** | |
| **The Strange Situation (Ainsworth and Bell, 1970)** | | | |
| A sample of American middle class infants and their mothers were used. The children were aged between 12 and 18 months old. The laboratory playroom consisted on a play area with toys and two comfortable chairs.  A **controlled observation** was carried out which measured:   1. The infants’ **separation anxiety** (the distress felt when left by their carer) 2. Their **willingness to explore** their environment 3. **Stranger anxiety** (how they react when being approached by a stranger) 4. **Reunion behaviour** (their behaviour when their mothers returned).   There are 8 stages to this, each lasting 3 minutes long. | | 1. Reliability   P: One strength of the strange situation is that it is high in reliability.  E: This is because it has been repeated numerous times and gained consistent results in the USA, indicating test-retest reliability.  E: Furthermore, reliability would have been ensured through extensive training of researchers indicating inter-observer reliability. This would have guaranteed consistency between results.  L: This suggests that the strange situation controlled observation is an effective, reliable and credible tool that allows research to measure the attachment types in infants.   1. Internal Validity   P: However, one weakness of the strange situation procedure is that it is low in internal validity.  E: This is because Main and Weston (1981) found children behave differently depending on which parent they were with.  E: This is an issue because it may be that the infant may be securely attached to their mothers, but insecurely attached to their fathers.  L: As a result, the strange situation may not be measuring what it intends to measure – the attachment type of the infant itself. It may be measuring the quality of relationship with a particular carer. This reduces the credibility of the strange situation as a measure of individual difference in attachment.   1. Ecological Validity   P: A negative aspect about the strange situation procedure is that it lacks in ecological validity.  E: This is because Ainsworth and Bell had strict control over the events that occurred in the controlled observation and its extraneous variables.  E: For example, the strange situation eradicated extraneous variables such as distractions (e.g. television) or other people present in the room (e.g. family members). The presence of a television or other people present in the room may result in different behaviours being displayed by the infant. This means that any findings gathered from this artificial environment cannot be generalised to real life situations.  L: Therefore, this weakens the credibility of the findings about individual differences in attachment drawn from the strange situation procedure. | |
| **Types of Attachment (AO1 only)** | | | |
| 1. **Type A – Insecure Avoidant**  * Infant is indifferent to mother. * Play is not affected by her presence. * Does not seek proximity * No distress in presence of stranger. * Distress is caused by being alone. * Can be comforted by stranger. * Makes no contact on reunion. | 1. **Type B – Secure**  * Plays happily in mother’s presence. * Uses mother as safe base, seeks proximity. * Unaffected by stranger when mother present. * Moderate distress caused by mother leaving. * Moderate distress in presence of stranger. * Seek comfort from mother on reunion, easily settles. | | 1. **Type C – Insecure Resistant/Ambivalent**  * Fussy and wary in mother’s presence. * Difficulty using mother as safe base. * Intensely seeks proximity. * Very distressed when mother leaves. * Very distressed in strangers presence. * Seeks contact but resists comfort on reunion. |