

A LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

Lesson Element


The Strange Situation methodology – an introduction and evaluation

Instructions and answers for teachers

These instructions should accompany the OCR resource 'The Strange Situation methodology' activity which supports OCR A Level Psychology.

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Lesson Element			
The Strange Situation methodology – an introduction and evaluation			
Task 1 – Strange situation procedure			
Episode 1	Episode 2	Episode 3	Episode 4
Introduction – the observer takes the mother (M) and baby (B) to the testing room and leaves them to get accustomed to the room.			

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The Activity:

The aim of this lesson element is to introduce the 'Strange situation' methodology and evaluate it.

Objectives

Students will:

- Know and understand the different episodes of the 'Strange situation' method
- Know and understand the observational measurement in the 'Strange situation'.
- Have a critical understanding of the 'Strange situation'.



This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.



This activity offers an opportunity for maths skills development.

Associated materials:

'The Strange Situation methodology' Lesson Element learner activity sheet.

Suggested timings:

Task 1: 20 minutes **Task 2:** 30 minutes



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This lesson is to accompany the Key research by Ainsworth and Bell (1970) “Attachment, Exploration and Separation: Illustrated by the Behavior of One-year-olds in a Strange Situation” which is in the Development of attachment (Social) topic from the child psychology option from component 3 (Applied psychology). It requires a video of the strange situation in action of which there are many on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s608077NtNI> works well with these activities.

The ‘Strange situation’ is a widely used measure of attachment between an infant and care giver. The key research is the first study to describe how to carry out the test and also shares the findings from the use of it with 56 mothers and children. There are later publications from Ainsworth which discuss the 3 types of attachments in depth however in this original study there are some indications of insecure attachments but there is little detail. This could cause some confusion if students research the topic online and find the later research/conclusions. This lesson introduces the key features of the strange situation which is a good introduction to the key research. It should take about 60 – 90 minutes dependent on the group.

The teacher versions of the tasks should help to explain the evidence that students are required to know. Reading the original article is highly recommended

<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1127388?uid=3738032&uid=2482552367&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=3&uid=60&sid=21104510905373> This can be viewed online for free. A detailed summary would be a suitable alternative but may miss some key details. This will also be crucial as in the next lesson it would make sense to look at the sample and results from the original research.

There are three tasks involved in this lesson. Two tasks involve the use of the video described above.



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Task 1 – The Strange situation procedure

Task 1 is to complete a procedure story board. There are 8 episodes in the 'Strange situation'. The idea is that students identify the 8 episodes, give a brief description and make an artistic representation of each one on the sheet (A3 size will probably work best). Stick people should make it achievable in about 20 minutes. The first description is completed to help. The video should help them to break the procedure down to its component episodes. This could be done by showing the video to the whole class or if there are enough computers available they could view it individually or in pairs. Dependent on the group, you may wish students to complete the sheet collaboratively or individually. Pairs would be ideal. The teacher handout is based closely on the original article but if students descriptions are clear and are generally correct they don't need the exact same wording (so just use the teacher handout as guidance rather than "gospel"). Once they've completed the sheet, you could randomly select a student for each episode to state their description. This acts as a good motivator. Once students have fed back and any misunderstandings have been clarified then move onto the second task.



The strange situation procedure – teacher version

Episode 1	Episode 2	Episode 3	Episode 4
Draw stick people here!	Draw stick people here!	Draw stick people here!	Draw stick people here!
(M, B, O) Mother (M), accompanied by observer (O), carried the baby (B) into the room. O leaves.	(M,B) M puts B down in the centre of the room, then sits quietly in chair, participating only if B seeks attention.	(S,M,B) Stranger (S) entered, quiet for 1 minute, speaks to M for 1 minute, then gradually approaches B with toy. M leaves.	(SB) If B active, S ignores. If B inactive S tries to engage B with toys. If B distressed S tries to comfort.
Episode 5	Episode 6	Episode 7	Episode 8
Draw stick people here!	Draw stick people here!	Draw stick people here!	Draw stick people here!
(M,B) M Returns, S leaves. M settles B to play with toys. M leaves [1st reunion].	(B alone) B left alone for 3 minutes or until distressed.	(S,B) Stranger returns – follows same behaviours as in episode 4 for 3 minutes unless B too distressed.	M,B) M returned, S left, after reunion is observed, situation terminated [2nd reunion].



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Task 2 – Observation categories

Give students the observation categories sheet. This may require some explanation. (The rating scales are a simplification but the full detail is too complex for all but the most able students. Here is a link though http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/attachment/measures/content/ss_scoring.pdf). Students must explain and give an example for each behavioural category. There is a teacher version but once again it is just for guidance. This probably works best as a paired task. Again randomly select individuals to share their examples and invite other students to add more detail or suggest different examples. Then show the video again and get students to tick behaviours that they see the children in the videoclip displaying. This can allow some good discussion of the behavioural categories and allows students to consider how the observational measures work in practice. If students disagree on what behaviours were displayed, this leads into discussion of the reliability or validity of the measurement. This is a good segue into Task 3. This task should take 20-30 minutes.



Strange situation – observation categories – teacher version

Observers are covert and are scoring behaviours in each episode in 2 ways.

1. Time sampling – 15 second time intervals. If a behaviour occurs within time interval it gains a score of 1. Max length of episode = 3 minutes therefore maximum score is 12.

Behaviours		Explanation/example
Exploration	Locomotion	<i>Exploratory movement, eg crawling around room to investigate toys.</i>
	Manipulation	<i>Using hands to explore the environment, eg picking up a toy.</i>
	Visual	<i>Using eyes to investigate environment, eg looking at a distant toy.</i>
Crying		<i>Self-explanatory</i>

2. Rating scales – each behaviour is rated on a 7 point rating scale. In simple terms 1 = No effort/activity, 7 = Very active effort.

Behaviours		Explanation/example
Interaction	Proximity and contact seeking	<i>Trying to get close to mother, eg crawling towards or reaching out.</i>
	Contact maintaining	<i>Once in contact ensuring they stay close, eg clinging on.</i>
	Proximity and interaction avoiding	<i>When parent returns avoiding contact, eg ignoring them or moving away.</i>
	Contact and interaction resisting	<i>Attempts to resist being held or comforted, eg pushing away, hitting, screaming, etc.</i>
Searching		<i>Attempts to find absent parent, eg crawling to door.</i>



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Task 3 – Evaluation

Task 3 builds upon their knowledge and understanding of the ‘Strange situation’ and gets them to critically evaluate the test. The Evaluation sheet should be filled in. This could be a paired or small group task. Again random selection of individuals or groups to feedback to the class would work well. As before, inviting student comments on the responses provided is valuable. There is a teacher version which has some suggested issues but these are not exhaustive. The value in the activity is the students generating their own issues but also being able to justify the point they are making. This task should take 20-30 minutes.

Strange situation evaluation sheet

Identify the research method and think of at least 2 evaluation issues.

Method = controlled observation

+ *High in control*

+ *Easy for observers*

- *Lacks ecological validity*

- *Increased demand characteristics.*

Validity – does the situation, or measurements within the situation, measure what they are supposed to?

The strange situation is designed to measure attachment, exploration and reaction to separation in infants. It could be argued that it has face validity as it does measure all of these variables.

As with all observations you could argue there could be observer bias.

The time sampling variables should accurately measure the frequency of these behaviours.

Rating scales require more subjective interpretation and could lack validity because of this.



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Strange situation evaluation sheet

Reliability – is the procedure, or measurements within the situation, carried out in a consistent way? Would similar results be found if it was repeated?

The procedure is quite standardised with the 8 episodes, however if children become distressed the episodes can be cut short which leads to a lack of consistency.

Also parent/stranger behaviours may vary slightly from trial to trial reducing reliability.

The time sampling is very consistent, however you could argue that the rating scales may not be applied consistently.

Inter-rater reliability was high in Ainsworth & Bell (1970).

Later research has found that attachments seem to be consistent over time when re-tested.

Data – What type of data is gathered in the study? (Qualitative/Quantitative?)

In the original study the time sampling was done for a continuous narrative. It could be argued that this is qualitative data which is converted into quantitative.

Both time sampling and rating scales are quantitative so easy to analyse and compare but lack depth and detail.

Ecological and Population Validity – can the behaviours displayed within the situation be generalised to real world situations and to different groups of people?

This is a very artificial situation which could influence parent/infant behaviours – so lacks ecological validity.

However it could be argued that as children about 1 year old are the target population, they are unlikely to show demand characteristics so are behaving naturally.

Furthermore, the sample of caregivers in the study were white, middle-class, American mothers. Therefore the study lacks population validity and findings cannot be generalised to fathers and those from other classes and cultures.

Ethics – have the ethical guidelines for psychological research been adhered to?

Protection from harm – infants can become distressed, this could distress parent. However if infant distress was great care giver would return immediately.

Ainsworth argued that the distress is not that different to everyday situations that infants would experience. Also it is short lived.



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