3.1 Attachment types: Ainsworth's Strange Situation and cultural variations in attachment

AQA 7182 · about 60 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 The Strange Situation includes both separation episodes and reunion episodes.

(a) Outline what happens during the separation episodes of the Strange Situation. **(3)**

(b) Outline what happens during the reunion episodes of the Strange Situation. **(3)**

(Total for Question 1 is 6 marks)

2 Several categories of behaviour are coded during the Strange Situation to classify an infant's attachment type.

(a) Identify two categories of behaviour used to classify an infant's attachment type in the Strange Situation, other than reunion behaviour. **(2)**

(b) Explain what is meant by 'secure-base behaviour', and why it is used as one of the categories assessed. **(4)**

(Total for Question 2 is 6 marks)

3 Secure attachment (Type B) is one of the three main attachment types identified by Ainsworth.

(a) Describe the behaviour typically shown by a securely attached (Type B) infant during the Strange Situation. **(3)**

(b) Outline what Ainsworth's original American research found about the proportion of infants classified as securely attached, compared with the two insecure types combined. **(2)**

(Total for Question 3 is 5 marks)

4 Insecure-avoidant attachment (Type A) is one of the two insecure attachment types identified by Ainsworth.

(a) Describe the behaviour typically shown by an insecure-avoidant (Type A) infant during the Strange Situation. **(3)**

(b) Suggest why an observer might initially mistake an insecure-avoidant infant for a very confident, well-adjusted infant, and explain why this classification would be incorrect. **(2)**

(Total for Question 4 is 5 marks)

5 Insecure-resistant attachment (also called insecure-ambivalent, Type C) is the second insecure attachment type identified by Ainsworth.

(a) Describe the behaviour typically shown by an insecure-resistant (Type C) infant during the Strange Situation. **(3)**

(b) Give one behavioural difference between an insecure-avoidant (Type A) and an insecure-resistant (Type C) infant on reunion with their caregiver. **(2)**

(Total for Question 5 is 5 marks)

6 The validity of the Strange Situation can also be evaluated, both as a general measure of attachment and as a tool for cross-cultural comparison.

(a) Outline one limitation of the Strange Situation in terms of its validity as a measure of attachment. **(4)**

(b) Explain one limitation of using the Strange Situation to study cultural variations in attachment, referring to the concept of 'imposed etic'. **(4)**

(Total for Question 6 is 8 marks)

7 During a Strange Situation observation, a 12-month-old infant named Oliver explores the toys in the room freely while his mother is present. When his mother leaves the room, Oliver becomes distressed and stops playing. When a stranger enters, Oliver is wary of them. When his mother returns, Oliver goes to her immediately, is easily comforted, and soon returns to playing.

Another infant in the same study, Freya, largely ignores her mother both when she leaves the room and when she returns, and treats the stranger and her mother in a similar, indifferent way throughout.

(a) Using the information given, identify Oliver's likely attachment type, and justify your answer using at least two pieces of evidence from the scenario. **(4)**

(b) Using the information given, identify Freya's likely attachment type, and justify your answer using at least two pieces of evidence from the scenario. **(4)**

(Total for Question 7 is 8 marks)

8 The reliability of the Strange Situation as a measurement tool can be evaluated.

(a) Explain what is meant by 'inter-rater (inter-observer) reliability' in the context of the Strange Situation. **(2)**

(b) Outline evidence that suggests the Strange Situation has high inter-rater reliability, and explain why this is a strength of the method. **(4)**

(Total for Question 8 is 6 marks)

Mark scheme · 3.1 Attachment types: Ainsworth's Strange Situation and cultural variations in attachment

Question 1

(a) the caregiver leaves the room, either leaving the infant with the stranger or completely alone oe **M1**

(a) the infant's distress/behaviour is observed during this separation oe **A1**

(a) this happens twice during the procedure, allowing separation anxiety to be assessed oe **A1**

(a) Answer: The caregiver briefly leaves the room (once with the stranger present, once completely alone) so separation anxiety can be observed; this happens twice.

(b) the caregiver returns to the room after each separation oe **M1**

(b) the infant's response to the caregiver's return is observed, e.g. whether they approach, are comforted, or ignore/resist the caregiver oe **A1**

(b) this happens twice, allowing reunion behaviour to be assessed and compared across infants oe **A1**

(b) Answer: The caregiver returns after each separation, and the infant's response (approach, comfort, avoidance or resistance) is observed; this happens twice.

Question 2

(a) separation anxiety (distress shown when the caregiver leaves) oe **B1**

(a) stranger anxiety (wariness/distress shown towards the unfamiliar adult); secure-base/exploration behaviour is also acceptable oe **B1**

(a) Answer: Separation anxiety and stranger anxiety (secure-base/exploration behaviour is also acceptable).

(b) secure-base behaviour is the extent to which the infant uses their caregiver as a safe base from which to explore the unfamiliar playroom and its toys oe **M1**

(b) an infant showing good secure-base behaviour explores freely while the caregiver is present, returning to them periodically oe **A1**

(b) it is used because confident exploration in a caregiver's presence is thought to indicate a well-functioning, secure attachment relationship oe **A1**

(b) whereas little or no exploration, even with the caregiver present, may indicate a less secure attachment oe **A1**

(b) Answer: Secure-base behaviour is how far the infant uses the caregiver as a safe base for exploring the room; confident exploration is taken as a sign of a secure attachment.

Question 3

(a) explores the room freely, using the caregiver as a secure base oe **M1**

(a) shows moderate distress when the caregiver leaves (separation anxiety) and is wary of the stranger (stranger anxiety) oe **A1**

(a) is easily comforted and greets the caregiver positively on reunion, quickly returning to play oe **A1**

(a) Answer: Explores freely using the caregiver as a base, shows moderate distress on separation, and is easily comforted on reunion.

(b) the majority of infants in Ainsworth's original sample were classified as securely attached (Type B) oe **B1**

(b) with insecure-avoidant (Type A) and insecure-resistant (Type C) infants together making up a smaller minority oe **B1**

(b) Answer: The majority of infants were classified as securely attached, with the two insecure types together forming a smaller minority.

Question 4

(a) explores the room relatively freely but shows little interest in, or reference to, the caregiver oe **M1**

(a) shows minimal distress when the caregiver leaves oe **A1**

(a) tends to avoid or ignore the caregiver on reunion, and treats the stranger in a similar way to the caregiver oe **A1**

(a) Answer: Explores independently, shows little interest in the caregiver, minimal separation distress, and avoids/ignores the caregiver on reunion.

(b) the infant's apparent independence and lack of distress could look like confidence rather than avoidance oe **B1**

(b) this is misleading because the lack of distress reflects an indifferent/avoidant relationship with the caregiver rather than genuine security, shown by the infant's lack of proximity-seeking or reference to the caregiver oe **B1**

(b) Answer: Their apparent independence could look like confidence, but it actually reflects an avoidant, indifferent bond, not genuine security.

Question 5

(a) seeks closeness to the caregiver and explores the room very little, showing little independent exploration oe **M1**

(a) shows high distress when the caregiver leaves oe **A1**

(a) shows ambivalent/inconsistent behaviour on reunion, seeking contact with the caregiver but also resisting or pushing away comfort oe **A1**

(a) Answer: Clingy, explores little, very distressed on separation, and ambivalent (seeks then resists contact) on reunion.

(b) a Type A infant avoids or ignores the caregiver on reunion oe **B1**

(b) whereas a Type C infant seeks contact with the caregiver but simultaneously resists/rejects the comfort offered oe **B1**

(b) Answer: Type A avoids/ignores the caregiver on reunion; Type C seeks contact but then resists the comfort offered.

Question 6

(a) the Strange Situation only measures the infant's attachment behaviour in one specific, relatively brief and artificial laboratory situation oe **M1**

(a) an infant's attachment behaviour might differ in other contexts, e.g. at home, or with a different caregiver such as a father rather than a mother oe **A1**

(a) so the classification given may not fully or validly capture the overall quality of the infant's attachment relationship(s) oe **A1**

(a) some researchers have also questioned whether the Strange Situation measures the attachment relationship itself or partly reflects the infant's individual temperament oe **A1**

(a) Answer: It measures behaviour in one brief, artificial situation, which may not fully or validly capture the infant's attachment in other contexts, and may partly reflect temperament rather than attachment alone.

(b) the Strange Situation was designed based on American/Western assumptions about what indicates a secure attachment, e.g. that confident independent exploration is desirable and only moderate distress on separation is typical oe **M1**

(b) applying this Western-designed tool to assess attachment in different cultures, with different childrearing norms/goals, is known as an imposed etic oe **A1**

(b) e.g. in cultures where infants are raised with multiple caregivers, or where independence is valued differently, the same infant behaviour could be misclassified by Strange Situation criteria oe **A1**

(b) so cross-cultural comparisons using the Strange Situation may not validly compare attachment across genuinely different cultural contexts oe **A1**

(b) Answer: The Strange Situation applies Western-based assumptions about ideal attachment behaviour to all cultures (an imposed etic), risking misclassification in cultures with different childrearing norms.

Question 7

(a) secure (Type B) cao **B1**

(a) justification 1: explores freely using his mother as a secure base, and shows separation and stranger anxiety oe **M1**

(a) justification 2: is easily comforted and greets his mother positively on reunion, quickly returning to play oe **A1**

(a) both pieces of evidence are correctly and specifically drawn from the scenario oe **A1**

(a) Answer: Secure (Type B): he explores using his mother as a base, shows moderate separation/stranger anxiety, and is easily comforted on reunion.

(b) insecure-avoidant (Type A) cao **B1**

(b) justification 1: shows little interest in, or reference to, her mother oe **M1**

(b) justification 2: ignores her mother on reunion and treats the stranger similarly to her mother oe **A1**

(b) both pieces of evidence are correctly and specifically drawn from the scenario oe **A1**

(b) Answer: Insecure-avoidant (Type A): she shows little interest in her mother, and treats the stranger and mother similarly, ignoring her mother on reunion.

Question 8

(a) the extent to which two or more different observers, independently coding the same infant's behaviour, agree on the attachment classification given oe **B1**

(a) high inter-rater reliability means independent observers reach the same/similar classification for the same infant oe **B1**

(a) Answer: How closely independent observers agree when classifying the same infant's attachment type.

(b) because the Strange Situation uses a standardised procedure and clearly defined, operationalised behavioural categories, trained observers watching the same session have generally been found to agree closely on their classifications oe **M1**

(b) agreement between independent observers has often been reported as very high oe **A1**

(b) this is a strength because it means the classification given does not depend heavily on which individual observer is coding the session oe **A1**

(b) making the measure more objective and scientifically credible oe **A1**

(b) Answer: Independent trained observers have generally been found to agree closely (often reported as very high) on classifications, showing the measure is objective rather than dependent on a single observer's judgement.