

Alan Sroufe's Guidelines for Conducting and Coding the Strange Situation

I. Conducting the Strange Situation

A. Instructions to the Stranger

- 1) The stranger's chair should be accessible to the door, so she doesn't walk between the camera and mother, camera and baby, or mother and baby. The stranger should not sit in the mother's chair.
- 2) In Episode 3, when the stranger enters, if the mother is not in her chair, the stranger may remind the mother to move to the chair.
- 3) The stranger should not position herself between the baby and mother, especially in Episode 3.
- 4) When playing with the baby, the stranger should take her cue from the baby and elaborate on his play.
- 5) In Episodes 4 and 7, if the baby is upset, the stranger should pick him up and try to settle him. She should not simply distract him with toys if he is crying. As soon as the baby is settled somewhat, she may engage him in play and return to her chair. The point is to settle the baby, but the goal is not to make him so comfortable that he won't respond when the mother returns.
- 6) At the end of Episodes 4 and 7, the stranger NEVER should be playing or interacting with the baby, so that the baby is not distracted when the mother returns. If the baby is so upset that the stranger has not been able to put him down, the stranger should turn her head away from the baby and face the baby towards the door.
- 7) In Episode 7, if the baby is not upset, the stranger should not pick him up. She should greet him and offer a toy, then return to her chair.
- 8) In leaving during reunion episodes, the stranger MUST be unobtrusive and NEVER interfere with the reunion (i.e., say nothing to the mother or baby, do not move between them, leave quietly). If necessary, the stranger should wait to exit.
- 9) The baby should not be near the door when the mother returns in Episodes 5 and 8. The stranger should assure that the baby can be seen by the camera.
- 10) The stranger must learn to remain calm in the presence of very distressed babies and must not feel distressed if she cannot calm a crying baby.

B. Other Instructions

- 1) Keep records of babies' illnesses, fatigues, and teething, as these conditions may increase fussiness, contact-seeking, and resistance.
- 2) Instructions to the mother should indicate that at the beginning, she is to take the baby into the room, show him the toys, and then go to her chair. Magazines are on the chair for her to read if she wishes.
- 3) If a mother is reluctant to leave and is prolonging the leave-taking, she can be asked to leave quickly and reassured that someone will return to the child immediately.
- 4) Episodes 4, 6, and 7 may be cut short if the baby is highly distressed and does not appear to be settling down (1 minute of continuous crying; 30 seconds of hard crying).
- 5) In reunion episodes, the mother should knock and call the baby before she opens the door. When she opens the door, she should call the baby, wait for the baby's reaction, pick him up if she wants, and if he settles, she should return to her chair. (If the baby is distressed, of course, she may go to him immediately).
- 6) In Episode 8, the mother does not have to return to her chair immediately.
- 7) Reunion episodes NEVER should be cut short.
- 8) In reunions, the camera person MUST assure that the camera is focused on the baby at all times.

II. Scoring interactive behaviors (excluding resistance and avoidance)

A. Proximity- and contact-seeking behavior

- 1) If the baby is too distressed to crawl well but does move toward the mother in some manner and does assist with contact achievement, then the baby should receive a 7.
- 2) In order to get a 7, the baby has to prevent the mother from releasing him within 5 seconds.
- 3) Look at the degree to which the baby works with the mother.

B. Contact-maintaining behavior

- 1) If the mother breaks contact and moves away but the baby crawls after her (e.g., accompanied by a protest), this an “active and fairly persistent effort to maintain physical contact” and should receive a score of 6a.
- 1) If the baby does not cry, the baby would not usually be given a score higher than 3.
- 2) As a last resort, when nothing seems to fit, it is possible to add up the various signs by the baby of wanting and trying to maintain contact. For example, in one of tape, in episode 8, the baby approached the mother and they began to play together. He broke into a full cry when she moved away and he followed after her. She picked him up, put him down, and he tried to regain contact by climbing back into her lap. She put him down, moved away and again he followed and tried to clamber up. She picked him up again. In this case, the baby was really trying hard without a great deal of cooperation from the mother. Even though no scoring category fits this baby, he would get at least a 4 (5 or 6?).
- 3) If the baby does not actively resist release, no score greater than 5 is appropriate.
- 4) In terms of classification, CM is pretty irrelevant at 18 months except perhaps for B4. See scoring 18-month-olds versus 12-month-olds.

C. Distance Interaction

- 1) Distance interaction does not discriminate attachment classification, so usually it is not scored.

D. Affective sharing

- 1) Affective sharing with the mother is noted whenever the baby directs a smile plus another behavior toward her (e.g., offer + smile, vocalize + smile, show + smile + vocalize). While not a classification criterion, it does correlate with security.

E. Crying

- 1) The length of this behavior will help discriminate among subgroups.
- 2) Record the number of 15-second intervals in which crying occurs. If necessary, extrapolate to 12-15 intervals (cf., Appendix IV, Ainsworth et al., 1978).

F. Overview

- 1) In trying to decide on a numerical score for a particular interactive behavior, use the verbal description of the number to help decide whether that score is the correct one.

III. Resistance versus Avoidance

A. Resistance

- 1) If the baby is angry during separation (particularly at the door), he will usually show resistant behaviors during reunion.
- 2) If the baby wants to maintain contact but engages in other (negative or passive) behaviors rather than actively attempting to regain it, then light resistance (2 or 3) may be scored (behaviors may include bending over to the side, lowering head, or fussing, rather than reaching for mother). The point is that if the baby truly wanted contact, he would be active in trying to get it.
- 3) Scattering toys in anger is a sign of resistance if done when the baby is engaged with mother.
- 4) Wanting to get down from the mother's lap is resistance, only if that baby also wants to get back up or it is done in an angry manner.
- 5) There is a difference between protesting release and crying angrily.
- 6) If the baby throws toys, not given to him by the mother, this is anger but not necessarily resistance.
- 7) Crying because the baby wants something is not resistance.
- 8) If there is no proximity-seeking or contact maintenance, there can not be much resistance. Resistance should only be high when the baby has been held.
- 9) Fussing even when the mother doesn't try to put the baby down (i.e., changing positions) is scored as resistance.
- 10) Look at behaviors in context. Resistance to playing with toys can be contact maintenance, rather than resistance.
- 11) A pout at the mother, even if the baby is not in contact with her is resistance.
- 12) If the baby is in contact and screams at the mother to be picked up, resistance is scored.

- 13) Add the resistance scores together and see how high they are. If the baby has resisted strongly in the first reunion, he may be too exhausted to resist in the second.

B. Avoidance

- 1) Avoidance is behavior that interferes with contact. It can only be scored in the context of reunion.
- 2) If the baby has been playing with a toy during separation and then looks to that toy when the mother returns, this behavior is not scored as avoidance (particularly true of episode 5, but episode 8 should be watched carefully to determine whether other signs of avoidance are present).
- 3) If the baby waves good-bye to the stranger as she leaves during the reunion, this behavior is not scored as avoidance.
- 4) An absence of greeting from the baby during reunions is avoidance.
- 5) Displacement behavior to toys when mother approaches is a sign of avoidance.
- 6) Moving toward the wall to play with a toy when the mother returns is a sign of avoidance.
- 7) If the baby is not distressed, smiles when the mother enters, then goes back to playing with the toy that he was using before the mother came in, this is not avoidance.
- 8) If the baby has given a good greeting, is not distressed, and he doesn't come over when the mother calls him, this is not avoidance.
- 9) Ask: Is the baby avoiding looking at the mother or is he looking toward something else? Looking down and away is clearly avoidance.
- 10) Communicative acts are not avoidance. Looking down to pick up a toy and then showing it to the mother is not avoidance.
- 11) If there is initial avoidance, continue to score. If the baby gives a clear greeting, avoidance behaviors cannot be weighted too heavily. Avoidant behaviors must be very clear cut to be scored.
- 12) If the baby completes a full approach at the opening of reunion, avoidance must be low.

C. Differences between the resistance and avoidance

- 1) If the baby seeks contact and then stiffens or squirms, his behavior is resistance. However, if the mother seeks contact and the baby then squirms or stiffens, his behavior may be avoidance.
- 2) Avoidance represents a conflict between anger and proximity and contact-seeking behavior. Resistance represents a conflict between anger and contact-maintaining behavior. In the latter case, the anger prevents the contact from working and the baby from getting settled.
- 3) Resistant squirming or stiffening has an angry quality. Avoidant squirming or stiffening does not.

IV. Classifying babies into the 3 categories

A. Avoidant (A)

- 1) Avoidance should stay high, or go up from the first reunion to the second.
- 2) If the baby is distressed in the second reunion and doesn't make contact this is an indicator of an avoidant relationship.
- 3) Avoidant babies rarely make contact with the mother during preseparation. If they approach the mother during preseparation, it will usually be in an instrumental way.
- 4) Avoidant babies rarely perform search behavior (going to the door and crying) during the first separation.
- 5) Avoidant babies do not like to be picked up.
- 6) Avoidant babies do not get settled quickly during reunions. They show that they are unsettled by not returning to good quality play quickly. Unlike Resistant babies, their unsettled state is not expressed through prolonged crying during reunion. Thus, they may appear settled.
- 7) Avoidant babies (particularly A₂ babies) can be distressed during the separation episodes (e.g., fussing and/or crying).
- 8) If upset, Avoidant babies may be more easily settled by the stranger than the mother.
- 9) Consider the 2 reunions equally when deciding between A₁ and A₂.

10) Weigh the second reunion more heavily when deciding between Avoidant and Secure.

B. Resistant (C)

- 1) The strategy of Resistant babies is hypervigilance, even with minimal distress.
- 2) Resistant babies do not initiate contact or interaction with the stranger during pre-separation. Even during separation, they rarely accept interaction with the stranger.
- 3) They may approach the mother when the stranger approaches.
- 4) Furious behavior during separation is characteristic of Resistant babies (e.g., angry, crying, kicking feet, falling to the floor in anger).

C. Secure (B)

- 1) When the system is well organized, you can predict the baby's behavior.
- 2) When classifying babies, ask yourself "How is this child not like a B₃?"
- 3) An affective sharing of discoveries characterizes Secure babies and mothers.
- 4) As Secure babies get more distressed, they need more contact and seek it, and the contact always works.

D. Secure babies versus Resistant babies.

- 1) During reunion, Secure babies (i.e., B₃ and B₄) settle much more easily than Resistant babies (Secure babies will return to play). The anger of Resistant babies will prevent them from getting settled.
- 2) While both Secure babies (i.e., B₃ and B₄) and Resistant babies need contact, the Resistant babies often need it in order to subsequently express their anger. Thus, Secure and Resistant babies may look similar at the beginning of the reunion episodes but not at the end.

V. Discriminating among the Secure (B) subcategories.

A. B₃ versus B₄

- 1) B₃ babies settle more easily than B₄ babies in reunion episodes. They settle more quickly in contact with their mothers and are then able to go off on their own (go out of proximity to mother) and return to exploration and play. In contrast, B₄ babies settle more slowly in contact with their mothers and do not move away

from their mothers. Rather, B₄ babies play while either in contact with or proximity to their mothers (e.g., they are “comfortable playing on mother’s lap”).

- 2) B₄ babies are more distressed at the first separation (episode 4) than are B₃ babies.
- 3) B₄ babies are more preoccupied with their mothers throughout the Strange Situation.
- 4) A fuss in the middle of contact-maintaining behavior is characteristic of B₄ babies, but not of B₃ babies.
- 5) B₃ babies will not allow themselves to be put down if they still need contact; they will resist release actively or try to regain contact. B₄ babies may allow contact to be broken without active attempts to regain it.
- 6) B₃ babies are more accepting of the stranger’s comforting during separation than are B₄ babies. B₄ babies are more likely to draw away from the stranger either during the pre-separation or separation episodes.

B. B₁ versus B₃

- 1) B₃ babies show more proximity seeking than B₁.
- 2) B₁ babies do not usually mold their bodies to the stranger when she tries to comfort them during episode 4 or 7; B₃ babies may do so.

C. B₂ versus B₃

- 1) B₃ babies show little or no sign of avoidance. B₂ babies show more. It is possible for a B₃ baby to receive a 2 (or very rarely a 3 on avoidance, but no more). A score of 4 or more indicates a B₂ baby (or an Avoidant baby).

D. B₁ versus B₂

- 1) B₁ babies receive lower scores on proximity- and contact-seeking behaviors as well as contact-maintaining behavior than B₂ babies (e.g., a B₁ baby would never have a score as high as 5 on proximity- and contact-seeking; a B₂ could).

E. B₁ babies

- 1) B₁ babies may show a little avoidance during reunion. However, it doesn’t interfere with the process of greeting the mother to the extent that the avoidance of Avoidant babies does.
- 2) Distance interaction is strong. These babies rarely seek contact with the mother, instead are content with proximity.

F. B₂ babies

- 1) B₂ babies are a heterogeneous group, less competent or efficient group of babies than B₃'s in proximity seeking, contact maintenance, and in getting back to play. B₂ is the "default" secure group.

G. B₃ babies

- 1) A baby may seek no contact in the first reunion and still be a B₃ baby. However, a B₃ does seek some proximity in the second reunion, not just interaction at a distance.
- 2) Babies who show no resistance and no avoidance and who cling, cuddle, or lean into their mothers during contact are B₃ babies.
- 3) B₃ babies will actively resist release from contact or actively attempt to regain it rather than fuss and wait for mother to respond.
- 4) B₃ is the model or prototypical baby. If distressed, the distress will gradually decrease. Distress is not episodic. B₃'s must show active proximity seeking. They show automatic reactions of positive affect.

H. B₄ babies

- 1) A baby does not have to seek contact in order to receive a B₄ classification; staying in proximity suffices. (Mothers of these babies often stay close also.)
- 2) Similarly, B₄ babies do not have to show resistance. However, they will be unsettled when out of proximity and contact to mother following separation.
- 3) B₄ babies usually cry some during the separation episodes.
- 4) B₄'s do not initiate contact or interaction with the stranger during pre-separation.

VI. Discriminating between the Avoidant (A) subcategories

1. A₂ babies show more conflict than A₁ babies

- a) A₂ babies often show proximity-seeking behavior as well as proximity-avoiding behaviors.
- b) A₂ babies are often unhappy and avoidant due to the conflict between proximity- and contact-seeking on the one hand and avoidance on the other hand.

2. Although neither A_1 nor A_2 babies will have much of anything to do with the stranger in episodes 4 or 7, A_1 babies have less to do with her than A_2 babies.
3. A_2 babies cry more than A_1 babies. Often they will break into a full cry, rather protesting or fussing.

VII. Discriminating between the Resistant (C) subcategories

1. The exploratory behavior of both C_1 and C_2 babies is weak. However, that of C_2 babies is weaker than that of C_1 babies.

VIII. Scoring of 18-month-olds versus 12-month-olds

- A. Walking over to the mother with a toy to show is proximity-seeking at 18 months. At 18 months, B_3 babies use this form of proximity-seeking; B_1 babies rely on distance interaction exclusively.
- B. At 18 months, B_3 's settle very quickly with brief contact. They get a quick pick-up by the mother and are then ready to play again.
- C. In scoring contact-maintaining behaviors at 18 months, remember that mothers require more active effort from older babies before they will help them to maintain contact.
- D. The means for contact-maintaining behavior for Secure babies are lower at 18 months (approx. 2) than at 12 months (Ainsworth et al. give 2.64 and 4.98 as the means for episodes 5 and 8, respectively, for Secure babies).
- E. At 18 months, if the baby approaches the mother during pre-separation, and again several times during reunion, this baby is probably a B_4 , even if it settles fairly easily. At 12 months, this same pattern of easy settling and high proximity- and contact-seeking would be characteristic of a B_3 baby.
- F. One very delayed brief approach to the mother (without contact-seeking) during reunion would indicate little proximity-seeking at 12 months and would probably characterize a B_1 baby. At 18 months, this same behavior indicates high proximity-seeking and would probably characterize a B_3 baby.
- G. Toddlers will frequently try to leave the room, so code this type of avoidance cautiously.
- H. Getting angry while searching at the door is not a clear indication of resistance at 18 months.