

The Strange Situation - Mary Ainsworth

But can the essential elements of home life be translated into a standard laboratory setting for controlled scientific study? After conducting extensive observations of parents and children at home, a student of Bowlby's, Mary Ainsworth, devised such a procedure called the Strange Situation which places the child under some stress. It has become the most widely used standardized way to assess the quality of a child's attachment to their caregiver.

Here the researchers are recording how 14 month old Lisa responds in this attractive but unfamiliar setting. How will she react to a stranger? What will happen when her mother leaves the room and when she returns? It's Lisa's behavior when her mother returns, what psychologists call the reunion, that they are particularly interested in.

Most importantly is to look for the type of balance that a child strikes between an attachment to need and the other hand to explore the play material.

Once Lisa has settled down to play, a stranger enters the room and sits in the chair reading a magazine.

After a couple of minutes the stranger attempts to interact with Lisa. Soon after Lisbeth gets a cue to leave the room. A stranger tries to comfort Lisa but in vain. Lisbeth comes back into the room and the camera records how Lisa reacts.

Now the first part of the procedure is over and LisBeth settles Lisa down again. The stranger leaves them alone together. Soon after that LisBeth goes too. Lisa is on her own. Her distress is plain to see. Once again the efforts of the stranger to console Lisa are to no avail. But LisBeth manages to calm her almost at once and shortly afterwards the observation ends.

Lisa showed outward signs of what's called secure attachment.