



Pre- and Post-Acquisition of Object Permanence and Its Role in Psychological Development

Hessah Saleh

Blackhawk College

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Dr. T. Davis

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Introduction

As infants grow, they develop an understanding that objects remain even when they do not see them. Kail & Cavanaugh explain that as part of development children begin to realize that “objects exist independently” (121). This is known as object permanence (Issitt, 2016). This phenomenon was analyzed and explained by Piaget, who has claimed that infants did not have the ability to understand that things remain objects and real even when their attention is directed elsewhere (Kail & Cavanaugh, 121). When things are out of sight, they are not necessarily out of existence. Although Piaget talks about this capability developing later, post 18 months of age, he explains that the child develops at least fragmented object permanence around the age of four to eight months (Kail & Cavanaugh, 121). The purpose of this paper is to explain the developmental states of pre- and post-acquisition of object permanence and why it is a necessary aspect of psychological development.

Research to support this topic comes in the form of studies, quantitative and qualitative analyses and historical observations by professionals in the field. It is significant to the topic of developmental psychology (Issitt, 2016). As well as the textbook by Kail & Cavanaugh, which outlines human growth and development with vast detail, this paper uses two more peer-reviewed articles. In a study by Kramer, Kennedy & Hill, the topic is explored in the manner of a study where 36 infants, ages ranging 5-36 months, are exposed to several displacements of objects in a singular and sequential task process. In 80% of the infants, the results showed ordination to Piaget’s expectations of object permanence. This study demonstrates Piaget’s theory of object permanence development and supports it. In a more modern study, by Bertenthal, Gredebäck & Boyer, sixty infants underwent a series of tasks to recognize object

permanence. Their ages were less variant than the previous study. Instead, this study concentrated on infants between five and seven months old. The study looked for patterns in the recognition of continuity and discontinuity of objects as well as how predictive tracking proves that children develop at least fragmental object permanence at that age. The peer reviewed articles show structure that is befitting of research within the discourse and use experimentation and analyses from the studies as well as external research for comparisons.

Discussion

Studies and researchers indicate that behaviors of infants pre- and post-acquisition of object permanence vary. Many modern studies uncover that there are intermediate stages of acquisition, where fragmented object permanence is observed. Piaget has noted this in his studies, but later studies showed that this fragmented acquisition is more substantial than he believed (Bertenthal, Gredebäck & Boyer, 2013; Kail & Cavanaugh, 121-8; Kramer, Kennedy & Hill, 1975).

Pre-acquisition of Object Permanence

Before the acquisition of object permanence, the behavior of infants lacks the understanding that objects still exist when they are not visible. Because infants do not understand this concept, when an object is hidden in any way, such as discarded or has a barrier put between it and the child, there are no reactions that show knowledge of the object's continuous existence (Kail & Cavanaugh, 121). An example would be reaching, when the object is desirable, or relaxing when the object is not desirable. Infants before development of object permanence believe that when objects are "out of sight", they no longer exist (Kail & Cavanaugh, 121). Therefore, when playing with a three-month-old child, hiding the toy behind your back will cause the infant to stop play without reaction. The responses of infants 4-8 months old with

fragmental recognition of object permanence include shock, laughter, smiling, and other exclamations (Kail & Cavanaugh 121-8). The age of the infant is very related to the conception of object continuity. Infants 5-36 months old showed a sliding mastery of single and sequential object recognition in displacement experiments (Kramer, Kennedy & Hill, 1975). In general, infants approaching eight months of age show an increasing awareness of objects and can use predictive tracking as an indication of object permanence (Kramer, Kennedy & Hill, 1975). However, there are experiments that show that this happens as early as 3.5-4.5 months of age (Kail & Cavanaugh, 127-8).

Post-acquisition of Object Permanence

After the acquisition of object permanence, infants behave differently. Behaviors such as surprise, reaching, entertainment and looking for things develop and solidify as responses to things that disappear (Kail & Cavanaugh, 127-8). A child might reach around a screen to find the ball that the parent was using to play with them prior to hiding it. They might also still demand to be carried by the parent when a spider runs out of sight because they realize that just because they cannot see it, it does not mean that it is gone. In subjects 18 months and older, there was a definite increase in perception and responses to the displacement tasks in Kramer, Kennedy & Hill's study (1975). The children then were almost completely aware of the objects, regardless of the task. The study showed an increase of awareness to 100% in that age group by the end of the third session. Variances were negligible in the subjects 18 months and older – they showed a “uniformly high performance” (Kramer, Kennedy & Hill, 1975). This aligns very well with Piaget's theory that infants acquire full object permanence by the time they are 18 months old.

Importance to Psychological Development

The significance of awareness of object permanence to psychological development lies in the infant's developing capability to evaluate real objects and realize that the world goes on even though they do not see it. The fact that children learn by experiencing allows them to over time to understand appearance and reality, and eventually how to distinguish them (Kail & Cavanaugh, 123-4). Object permanence helps the child go through cognitive growth as the child constructs and evolves a perception of reality (Kail & Cavanaugh). Piaget believed that the "equilibration" of a person's mind is attacked periodically by dissatisfaction because of new information (Issitt, 2016). With object permanence, there is less attack on the stability of development because there is less possibility of surprise.

Conclusion

The development states of pre- and post- acquisition of object permanence include different behaviors because of this awareness. It is a necessary aspect of psychological development because it encourages increased cognition and perception capabilities by limiting interruptions from displacement and reappearance of objects. Studies show that infants under 18 months old show little to no perception of object permanence. This makes them less likely to react to object disappearance or displacement. As they approach 18 months old, the infants develop fragmental object permanence, which allows them to begin minor reactions. Infants older than 18 show a constant increase of perception of object permanence. They can predict and track objects with high levels of awareness and with appropriate responses. The importance of this topic lies in its function in allowing a child to develop reality. Without object permanence, we remain only aware of what we directly see.

Importance

I believe that this paper is important to my fellow classmates because it highlights an important precursor to rationality and awareness. Kail & Cavanaugh talk about three skills that hinder children from comprehensive perception: egocentrism, animism and centration. Egocentrism is being unable perceive from another's perspective, animism is to give inanimate objects animate skills, and centration is very focused thought that children go through. These three things present a gap between appearance and reality in children – which is what made things such as magic tricks very popular and just as bewildering to children. Shape, displacement and appearance hinder the child's ability to perceive reality. Acquisition of object permanence allows a child to develop reality and to recognize physical continuity.

The development of perception is an important topic to psychology. Object permanence is related to the stages of development because it highlights the child's "awareness of objects beyond themselves" (Issitt, 2016). In fact, it is a core concept in studies regarding the psychological development of infants and children (Issitt, 2016). Its studies show how children develop tracking and prediction patterns, which later aids in their ability to perceive, coordinate and navigate. It also helps develop logic, caution and exploration. "Children actively try to understand the world around them and to organize their knowledge" (Kail & Cavanaugh, p. 125).

Relevance to Modern Society

This topic is relevant to modern society in many ways. It helps evaluate a developing child's ability to construct and develop reality, which is a vital skill. It also helps identify issues in being able to develop object permanence, which could lead to an early discovery of a learning or cognitive disability. Modern society seems to be skipping over many major steps in child development, such as emphasis on object permanence. Instead of playing with a child using objects and tricks, the modern parent puts an iPad in front of the child. While entertaining and

great for observational skills, it is no help to the understanding of reality. In fact, it is an extension of the skills that Kail & Cavanaugh covered as hindrance to the development of reality (egocentrism, animism and centration). The modern society needs to be more aware of this topic beyond research among the professionals.



References

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