



Object Permanence: Do Children Have it and When Do They Acquire It?

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Object Permanence

- The realization that objects (including people) still exist even when they cannot be seen, touched, or heard.





Why search at all?

- Motivations
- Prior experience
- Set a goal and achieve it





Jean Piaget (1954)

- Said a child must be at least 8 months old to know about object permanence
 - By that he means: search for hidden objects





Piaget Test

- Show the child a toy
- Hide it under a blanket, pillow, or object
- Make the child go find it
 - If the child goes and finds it, it means he has object permanence





The problems with Piaget

- His methodology
 - Too many concepts to handle
- His choice of toys
 - Why search for a cigar box?!
- His Conclusions
 - Thought because child at that age could not come and get the toy he did not know it existed





Piaget revisited

- Piaget was valued as a genius in child psychology until the mid 80's
- His studies were confirmed by Bower among others (1974)
 - Bower took away coordinated actions
 - Bower suggested children as young as 2 months of age have object permanence





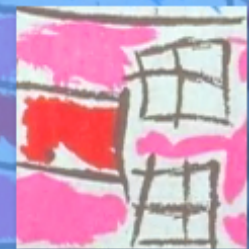
A not B test

- Piaget test led to A not B trials
 - Instead of only hiding it behind 1 object, now toy has been moved



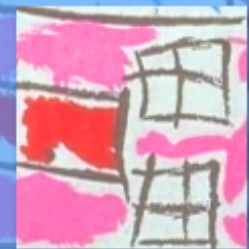
What does A not B mean?

- Child sees toy is put under object A
- Child gets it from under A and is rewarded by playing with the toy
- Child sees toy is put under object B
- Child still looks under A



Different Ages and A not B trials

- With a delay at 8 months
 - Child will give up if they don't find it under A on the first try
- Takes about 12 months before child catches on and knows the difference
- Even 3 year olds have problems
 - Hide and go seek





Child's Expectations

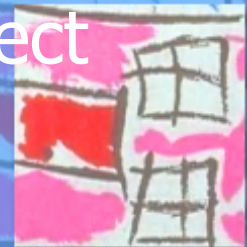
- Why does the child fall for it?
 - Had good outcome the first time, why not try the same thing again





Renee Baillargeon (1985)

- Worked with 3.5, 4.5 and 5.5 month olds
- Thought perhaps object permanence could be demonstrated easier than in Piaget's experiment
 - Take away hard motor skills
 - It would mean children acquire object permanence earlier in life





Baillargeon Test

1. Habituation
 - Hinged door moves back and forth
3. Box Placement
 - Box is placed on table and screen is down so child can see it
3. Possible Event
 - Screen stops when it hits the box
4. Impossible Event
 - Screen moves like it had in habituation even with box there



Results of Baillargeon's Test

- Child looked at impossible event longer than possible event
 - Means they knew the box still exists
- Showed that child possesses object permanence
 - Not a matter of not knowing but higher level activity that Piaget didn't account for





Take home point

- Just because the child is not physically capable of going there and getting it, it does not mean the child isn't aware of the toy
- Children are like adults, we're lazy and we'll look at the first place you put it until we're old enough and see you put it somewhere else
- Yes, children have object permanence
 - They are aware of the outside world around 3-5 months

