

Week 4 – Early Childhood

Piaget's Pre-operational Stage of Development

Before we move on from the first couple of years of life, let's just recap this very important concept that Charisse raised in the last teaching. First watch this youtube video...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gWJrZ7MHpY>

This is a delightful video of a baby not yet able to cognitively understand that when something cannot be seen it still exists. And it is also the most beautiful example of creating object constancy - which means the parent's response is entirely authentic – there is no double message – the father is genuinely delighted and taking immense joy in his baby – there is no pretending delight and being annoyed that the task cannot yet be achieved. The double (parallel) and inconsistent messages parents give a child leads to emotional instability and anxiety in the child's attachment to the parent. (Anxious attachment)

Before a baby has developed the cognitive ability to understand that something can be hidden, it will not show distress if the parent disappears as long as it's needs are met. It will just be happy, when the cucumber reappears, so to speak and unconcerned when it is gone.

However, once a baby understands cognitively that what you can see, actually can go away and be hidden from view, there is the fear of it not reappearing and this leads to separation anxiety – around 14 months to 18months. Playing simple games like peek-a-boo are developing this capacity in a child in un-awareness by the parent of what is actually happening. This is the period of having instinctual fear when mommy leaves baby with someone else for a while. The child gradually learns that what is gone from sight is gone but reappears consistently – **IF** the parent does this in short periods of time and is consistent in reappearing. If the parent is not responsive to this fear, the baby will develop a very anxious and distrustful relationship to the parent, and this then generalizes to all people.

Object Permanence = cognitive understanding that an object that cannot be seen is still there
Object Constancy = emotional experience of relationship being stable and loving. In other words, even if mommy goes away, she always comes back in the same way, and even if I cannot see her, I trust she is there and will be back when I need her.

- Consider in yourself whether you feel safe when someone you love is out of sight – or do you imagine something bad happening and this person not returning to meet your needs?
- Consider if you can hold in your consciousness that what is not seen still exists – Eg. Co-vid virus
- Consider if you feel secure in yourself, even if you do not have someone with you

- How do you feel punished, rejected, alone, frightened, abandoned, when you do not hear from someone you care about? Can you feel the constancy of love, even if someone is not there in your sight?
- How does this impact your relationship with the divine? – can't see it, it doesn't exist?
- Consider the ramifications in adulthood. Because people do not feel their feelings and cannot identify their needs due to the psychological distancing they have done, they do not believe they exist. This is a very young stage of development. It is the age of an infant whose mommy has gone away and apparently is not there to meet the infants needs and feelings. This is now internalized and you are developmentally "fixated," or "Stuck." Only your loving presence and reparenting can undo the fixation. A redo has to happen. The *good parent* will know the baby's feelings and needs and always come back to meet them. Just because she was gone, does not mean she has forgotten the baby or it's needs.

The successful attainment of this stage of cognitive development then lays the foundation for further brain development, which Piaget called the Preoperational Stage of Development. One of the functions of this stage is the substage of the symbolic reasoning and is children are able to understand, represent, remember, and picture objects in their mind without having the object in front of them – in other words they can think in images and symbols. Consider the poem below and see if you can find this stage of symbolic play development inside of you. Tell your own story – write your own poem – this is the development of creativity that can either be encouraged or discouraged as "just your imagination," as a child. Were you treated with superiority from adults in Rational-Logic Stages of development? Were you played with and encouraged in this realm of development? Did you get stuck in this magical realm of fantasy? How do you use this realm as an escape now when the world seems hard?

The Land of Counterpane

[Robert Louis Stevenson](#) - 1850-1894

When I was sick and lay a-bed,
I had two pillows at my head,
And all my toys beside me lay
To keep me happy all the day.

And sometimes for an hour or so
I watched my leaden soldiers go,
With different uniforms and drills,
Among the bed-clothes, through the hills;

And sometimes sent my ships in fleets
All up and down among the sheets;

Or brought my trees and houses out,
And planted cities all about.

I was the giant great and still
That sits upon the pillow-hill,
And sees before him, dale and plain,
The pleasant land of counterpane.

How do you imagine that the inner workings of this little boy were precursors to his life?

We know that the more violent the images and symbols and play at this age are, the more the adult will have tendencies towards anti-social behaviors and relationships.

What process and dynamics are being learned in this imaginative state?

How were you encouraged as a young child to link sound and experience to symbol – eg. A visual experience of banana – to the word banana. The experience of “cat,” to the word cat, and so on? Was this encouraged or discouraged? What was the quality and intention in your parents to either encourage or discourage this development?

Magical or pre-causal thinking is the realm of consciousness before being able to see “cause and effect in the material world.” Outside of time in the realm of spaciousness, all processes and dynamics are possible. In time (the physical world of cause and effect) they are not. I remember my nephew, Carl, climbing on to the roof of their house when he was about 4 dressed in his superman outfit that my mother made him, and was about to fly off like superman when he was brought into the harsh reality of the physical world by his frantic and furious mother. Yes. Fear and shame help us survive in the physical world and move us out of the realm of space! Think of your own examples in childhood. How this stage is handled will result in developmental difficulties – consider in an example like this how a “good mother,” would have responded? How would most mothers have responded in a not so good way?

Consider this little video and see which of these give you trouble in understanding...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyyzfxtx2Ew> –

Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Reasoning – Pre-conventional Stage

Little children are not yet “moral,” beings. They have no values, beliefs, rules, or understanding of cause and effect. It is the same as with animals. They instinctually do what they need to do to survive without any concern for whether it is deemed “moral,” or not. A wolf does not consider it immoral to kill and eat a deer. Young children have not yet internalized the rules and norms, values and beliefs of their community. They learn this only through “reward,” and “punishment.” They will adhere to the morality of the family to avoid punishment (not getting needs met) and reward (getting needs met). The worse the punishment the more “wrong and

bad” something is. The greater the reward, the more “right and good.” Morality can only develop once there is some cognitive development that can understand “cause and effect.”

Consider how you learned your morality, values, rules and norms about society. Have you ever examined the reasons for adhering to the conventional morality of your culture? It is time to deeply examine the notions of “good and bad,” and “right and wrong,” in order to move from a very primitive adherence to external expectations, to an internal understanding of “what is loving?” rather than what is “good and right,” rooted in childhood fear and shame and external demands for obedience.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP8AEeT5Mz4> – watch this for a sweet short introduction

Erikson – Psycho-social crisis of Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt

In terms of social (relationship) development, the child is being expected to become more “socialized,” and expected to develop some autonomy in terms of feeding, toilet training, clothing, brushing teeth etc. It becomes the age of “my will,” over “mom and Dad’s will.” There is resistance to developing ways in which you can meet your own needs and to the instinctual world of “just being me.” And this me is still quite instinctual like an animal and needs to be “civilized.” With greater mobility the child is freer to explore the environment, and as in the example of Carl, above, this could be very dangerous as the child explores the limits and boundaries of its autonomy.

Consider the relationship of your parents to this stage of your development. Did you develop an easy autonomy and self-confidence, or is the attainment of external demands filled with shame and self-doubt, anxiety and anger. Are you perfectionistic and anxious or sloppy, resistant and angry about being an autonomous, self-sufficient human being? Do you have well established routines of basic hygiene and self-care, or do you ignore your body’s needs? Or over-indulge them? Do you want others to take care of your needs instead of doing it yourself? Are you fiercely independent and do everything yourself without help and resent offers of help? In what kind of attachment to others does this result? What are your patterns?

A healthy framework was laid between 2 – 4, by parents that lovingly and supportively and safely encouraged self-sufficiency. Such an adult is autonomous with confidence and without fear and fear of feeling shame. They can ask for help and guidance and own when they cannot do something or understand something without feeling diminished and stupid.

If this stage of development was met with anxiety and over-control it creates shame and self-doubt. If there was not sufficient guidance, protection it creates shame and self-doubt as well.

Can you re-do the parenting you received correctly now? This requires dedicated active meditation. I know that the blueprint for brushing teeth was habitualized for me, but not flossing – and it requires real work to discipline the inner child into doing this regularly!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrjRMarTCYU> – Watch this video – we will get to Childhood egocentricity in a later lesson