

JEAN PIAGET ON THE EXTINCTION BURST

Although it is a perfect example of an extinction burst, Piaget interprets the behavior of his 1-year-old daughter, Jacqueline, as an instance of magic-phenomenism. The passage also bears a remarkable resemblance to Skinner's account of shaping 9-month-old Deborah's hand movements using the lighting of a lamp as reinforcement (Skinner, 1979, p. 293).

J. banged a key on the bottom of a basket behind the bed where I was lying. I said "Oh . . ." and she laughed and did it again. This was repeated six or seven times. When I finally stopped saying "Oh . . .," she took the key out of the basket, which she pushed a few inches away with her other hand, put it straight, and banged again louder than before. She was thus behaving as if my exclamation had depended merely on the material arrangement of the basket and the key (Piaget, 1951, p. 257).

Compare this last sentence with:

I was amazed. But why should I have been? If I had put a rattle in her hand and she had moved it slightly and heard the noise, I should not have been at all surprised if she had then shaken it more vigorously. But there was a difference. The contingencies which reinforced the rattle-shaking were built into the rattle. I had *contrived* my contingencies, and their effect was therefore surprisingly conspicuous (Skinner, 1979, p. 293).

Piaget, J. (1951). *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood* (C. Gattegno & F. M. Hodgson, Trans.). New York: Norton. (Original work published 1945)

Skinner, B. F. (1979). *The shaping of a behaviorist*. New York: Knopf.

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