

Saturday night at the birthday party

Life



Introduction

Saturday, March 13th 2004, my friend Hannah had a costume party for her 13-year-old son Jason. Hannah invited 13 children to Jason's birthday costume party at her home in Kissimmee. The children's ages ranged from three to thirteen years old. Mostly everyone came to her home dressed in colorful costumes. Some were friendly, scary or funny, others were homemade or store bought. A young married couple arrived around 4: 30 pm with their three-year-old son, Matthew, who is the subject of this paper..

His father John was dressed as a tattered bum and his wife Sarah was dressed as a friendly pretty witch. Little Matthew who is usually a white, blond hair male was dressed in a black cat outfit complete with the painted face to resemble a cat. He also wore the red nose, red cheeks and whiskers. He is tall and thin for his age. According to John and Sarah, Matthew's parents, their son is a curious little boy by nature. Emotional Deveopment and StrangerAnxietyMatthew demonstrated a wide range of basic emotions as Kail and Cavanaugh predicted. Most scientists agree that complex emotions don't surface until 18 to 24 months of age (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2006, pa. 186). " Complex emotions require the additional step of reflecting on one's own behavior and how one feels about it. Matthew moved his big blue eyes as he scanned the busy room filled with wild assortments of costumes that floated around him. Matthew did not speak much but his facial expressions of wonderment seemed to say what his mouth did not. Sometimes, his face would light up with excitement and other times he seemed to be paralyzed by fear.

He reacted to the hip-hop music by bouncing up and down and clapping his hands. Matthew demonstrated “stranger wariness; by the end of the first year the child becomes wary in the presence of an unfamiliar adult (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2006, pa. 188).” He ran to his mother and father and hid his face in his mother’s lap when someone approached him to try to engage him in a dance. Until then he appeared to have forgotten about his parents. His ability to explore and his quick return to his parents when frightened showed that he had a secure attachment to his mother’s presence (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2006, pa. 177).

Temperament I myself was dressed as Raggedy Annie. Matthew did not seem to be impressed with or afraid of my costume. He showed much interest in some of the other more outrageous costumes i. e. : a Martian with antennas, and a “Bug’s Life” look alike. Matthew just simply sat and stared at other costumes. He also smiled and laughs at others. When his parents allowed him to move about freely, Matthew hesitated and clung to his parents. That did not last for very long. As the night wore on, Matthew adjusted to his freedom and ventured away from the safety of his parents. This behavior can be easily related to temperament. Temperament is a consistent style or pattern in a child’s behavior (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2006, pa. 93).” When Matthew was first introduced to his new environment, he seemed slow to the adjustment. He seemed to be processing new information rather than just reacting to it. His activity level was very low at first. As time passed, he became more and more comfortable in his new surroundings and began to respond to it more favorably. This is evidence of “Slow-To-Warm-Up” temperament in which the child’s behavior is initially

inhibited and then becomes more like the Easy or Difficult temperament types.

He did not pay much attention to the people who were not dressed in costumes. He did not play or laugh with them at all. Rather, he appeared to be more interested in the array of colorful costumes and the behavior that they were engaged in, either laughing and/or dancing. Psychosocial Development Erikson predicted that by age 2 children strive for autonomy, " independence from others and control over their own behavior (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2006, pa. 179). " Around 6: 00 pm it was time to eat. John and Sarah tried to get Matthew to sit with them so that they could eat together.

Matthew did not want to sit. He began to cry and pull away when his dad tried to lift him up. When they got Matthew to the table, Matthew did not want to eat. His parents tried everything. He was too excited about all that was going on around him. Clearly Matthew wanted to regulate what was and was not going to happen by exerting his independence so profoundly. He had demonstrated his autonomy by resisting, crying, and pulling away. He is probably still going through his terrible two years. He has a strong will power, but it is short lived.

His reaction to some of the other more scary costumes and his need to be in the safety of his parents at that time showed some doubt as to his ability to deal with the unexpected. Once again, Matthew became unsure of himself. Erikson would classify this type of behavior as " AUTONOMY vs SHAME & DOUBT". Cognitive Development Some of the other guests sensing what was going on with Matthew, attempted to help John and Sarah. A happy smiling

clown went over and played with Matthew. The clown got him to eat some of his hamburger and french fries.

A white rabbit with a big fuzzy tail pretending to nibble on an orange carrot went over to play with him and Matthew laughed and played joyfully. A silly puppet went over and danced in front of Matthew. The puppet also got Matthew to eat a little more of his french fries and drink some of his apple juice. When the colorful clown and the silly puppet interacted with Matthew he reached out to them, smiled and laughed with them. They got him to eat. Then a hungry pig came over to Matthew and tried to play with him. Matthew cried and pulled away. A ghost and a Freddy Kruger look alike went to say hello to Matthew.

Matthew cried, swatted his hands at them to leave, twisted away from them, and started yelling no-no. Matthew's fear of Freddy reveals the quality of "Appearance as reality" which is characteristic of the Preoperational stage of cognitive development (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2006, pa. 138). During the preoperational stage, magical thinking is the rule and children have great difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality. In Matthew's mind he believed the costumes were real. He believed the scary characters wanted to harm him (twisting away, swatting hands, crying out no no).

His behavior was guided by a mistaken belief (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2004, pa. 123). I asked Matthew about the clown and the rabbit. Matthew said, "FUNNY, I WANT GO DOWN AND PLAY WITH THEM". Matthew was also displaying "CONFUSION BETWEEN APPEARANCE AND REALITY". Matthew is probably in the pre-operational stage of development. Although Matthew's parents as well as he himself were dressed in costumes he still could not

understand that these were simply people dressed up as he and his parent's were. Theory of Mind This behavior is typical for a pre-operational thinker.

Piaget stated that children typically believe others see the world - literally and figuratively - exactly as they do. (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2004, pa. 134). Matthew may have seen these types of characters in other settings, like television. Based on the animated characters portrayals, and the way others reacted toward them, his memory has probably developed a schema toward those characters (fear-bad or friendly-nice). After getting permission from his parents I spoke with Matthew. I asked him why he cried when the pig and ghost tried to play with him? Matthew said because they are bad.

Then I asked if the pig and the ghost had been mean to him. His reply was "SCARY". This statement has led me to believe that Matthew was exercising a "theory of mind" by attributing motivations to the other characters (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2006, pa. 123). (Kail and Cavanaugh, 2006, pa. 186) Conclusion: In Matthew's preoperational thinking, an object's appearance tells what the object is really like. Matthew is learning how to assert his wishes and to categorize his likes and dislikes. He has a theory of mind which includes attributes of good vs. evil.

He showed no emotion towards the people who were not in costumes even though they were strangers to him. He paid much more attention to the people who were in costumes and perceived them to be what they were imitating. Matthew distinguished between the clown, puppet, rabbit, pig, ghost and the "Freddy Kruger" look alike. He had an idea of what was safe and what was not safe, no matter how friendly they were to him. He

demonstrated a wide range of emotion and secure attachment to his parents.

Bibliography

1. Kail, V. C. , Cavanaugh, J. C. (2004). Human Development-A Life-Span View Belmont, CA. ; Wadsworth,