

Children's Reality Perceptions

TYPES OF REALITY DISTINCTIONS

[Source: Berry & Anderson: ch. 3]

Reality type 1 = **nonmediated vs. mediated** [**telepresence** as 'illusion of nonmediation']

Reality type 2 = **actual vs. not actual** (it's happening/has happened, as in news, vs. it's fiction/fantasy, as in entertainment; a sub-distinction: if it's actual, is it **live or recorded**?)

Reality type 3 = **plausible vs. implausible** (even if it's not actual, could it happen? Is it 'socially realistic' and/or 'perceptually realistic'?)

WHEN DO CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THESE DISTINCTIONS?

[Source: Flavell et al.; Lombard & Ditton, 1997]

Step 1 (0-3): TV objects are perceived as physically present objects that can be acted on; "there are people in the box."

Step 2 (3-?): TV objects are perceived as having a different status so that they can't be acted on, but what they are is unknown.

In these steps, children may ask someone to turn on the TV and regardless of the program, the child will want to see their favorite character.

Step 3: TV objects are understood to exist somewhere else, with the images only representing the objects, but the child thinks the images and sounds perfectly represent the referents themselves (i.e., everything is actual); "what's an actor?" is still a valid question in this step.

Step 4: Not every object and event on TV is believable/plausible (i.e. what Berry authors call social realism). These perceptions depend on experience, not just cognitive development.

WHAT ARE CUES CHILDREN AND ADULTS USE TO EVALUATE REALISM?

→ What formal cues indicate it IS "real as ACTUAL" (did happen or is happening)?

Live: poor sound, sloppy speaking, no background music or special effects...

News: narrator/anchor, voice-overs, few close-ups, special graphics, b&w (documentaries)...

→ What formal cues indicate it's NOT "real as ACTUAL":

Fiction: close-ups of faces, mood-setting music, hi quality sound, special effects

Sitcoms: laugh tracks, applause

Dramas: adult voices, music

Cartoons: animation, fast pace, sound effects, strange voices

What are roles of screen size, picture quality, surround sound, interactivity, volume, direct address, 'reality TV,' realistic dolls, etc.? And what are **implications** for advertising, violence, etc.?