

# Presence and Media Effects Research

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## Quote: Frightened Media User

- “When the Martians were spraying the people at Grover’s Mill with heat ray... at first we couldn’t believe it was happening but it was so *real*....”
- Q: Is this in response to an IMAX movie, or video game, or other advanced medium?
- A: No, it’s in response to a radio broadcast from the late 1930s!

## The War of the Worlds Broadcast

- Halloween evening, 1938—CBS radio show *Mercury Theater of the Air* (narrated by Orson Welles) broadcast an adaptation of H. G. Wells's novel *War of the Worlds*.
- Around **6 million** heard the broadcast.
- More than **1 million** were frightened or disturbed.

# Orson Welles on the radio





# Aftermath



# The War of the Worlds Broadcast

- Aftermath studied by Cantril (1940).
- Why did it frighten some and not others?
- Although not explicitly studied or mentioned at the time, PRESENCE very likely played a part:
  - 1) The broadcast was highly realistic and praised for its dramatic excellence (content variables).
  - 2) Listeners were new to the technology and its conventions (form/content variables).

# Presence and Media Effects Research

- The scientific study of media effects has a rich history dating back to prominent events like the War of the Worlds broadcast and World War II propaganda studies.
- This presentation highlights the potential for the concept of presence to illuminate and inform media effects scholarship areas beyond entertainment and persuasion.



# Presence and Media/Communication Theory

- A number of theories have been developed to explain the media's influence, including:
- Agenda setting (Dearing & Rogers, 1996)
- Cultivation (Gerbner et al., 2002)
- Priming (Jo & Berkowitz, 1994)
- Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2002)
- Each can be linked to the presence concept.



# Example: Presence and Social Cognitive Theory

- From Albert Bandura (1960s) as Social Learning Theory.
- Says children and others learn through observation.
- May imitate what they see on television and in other media, as shown in the Bobo doll studies and numerous investigations since.

# Example: Presence and Social Cognitive Theory

- Has since become *Social Cognitive Theory*, which takes a host of variables into account:

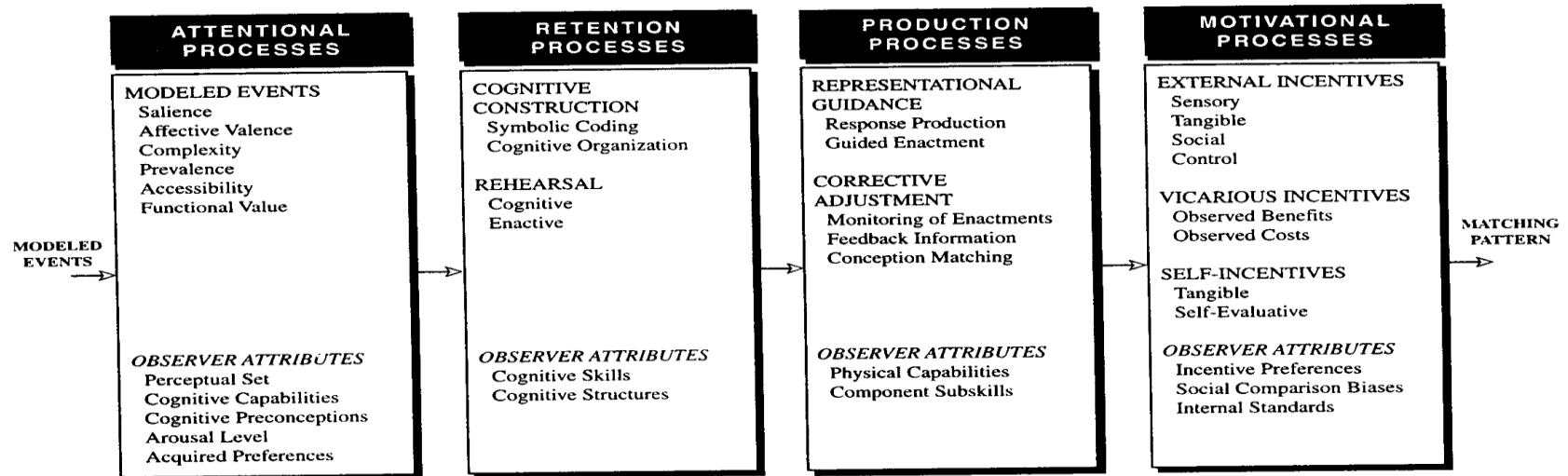


FIG. 6.2. The four major subfunctions governing observational learning and the influential factors operating within each subfunction.

## Example: Presence and Social Cognitive Theory

- Presence clearly fits into the Attentional Processes subfunction, likely as an observer attribute affected by modeled events.
- The presence and mental models work of Wirth et al. (2007) and others would also suggest that presence affects retention.
- Implication: Presence fits somewhere between attention and retention, facilitating social cognitive theory outcomes.

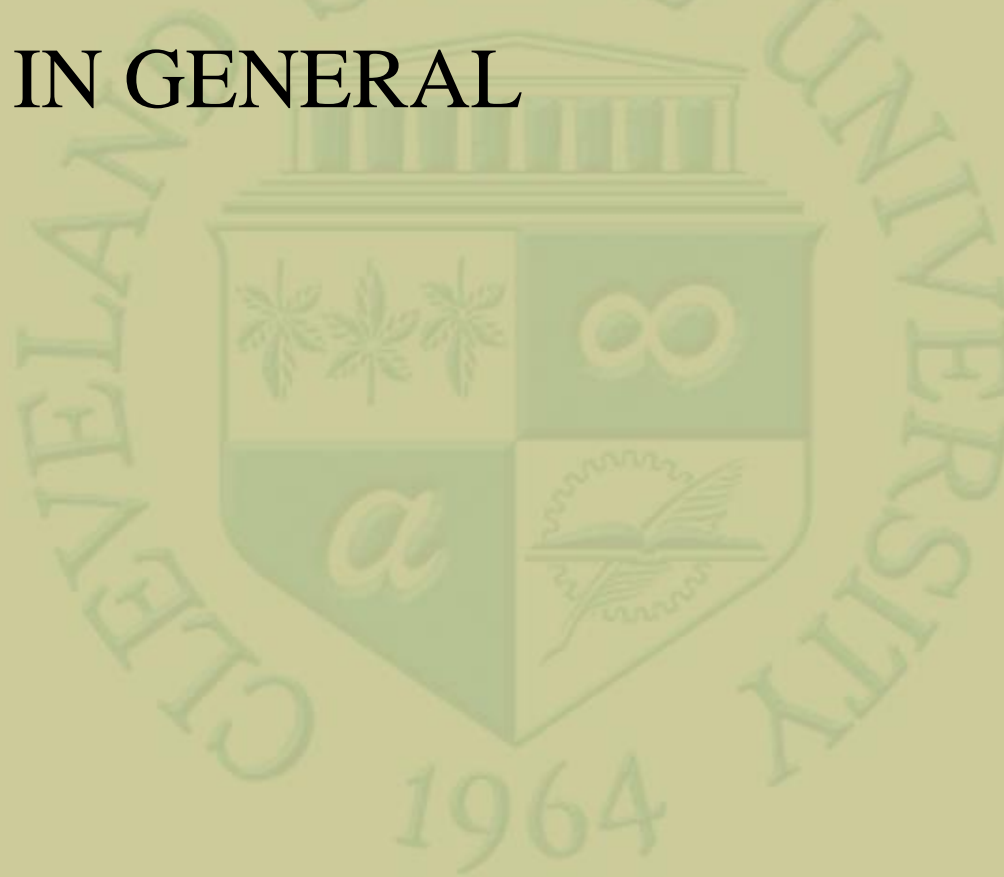
# Presence and Media Effects Research Domains

- The role of presence in three popular media effects research areas are highlighted here:
- 1. Media Violence
- 2. Media Sex/Pornography
- 3. Frightening Media



# Media Violence Research

- INFO IN GENERAL



# Presence and Media Violence

- A handful of studies have looked at the role of presence in video game violence effects (e.g., Tamborini et al., 2004; Nowak, Krcmar, & Farrar, 2006).
- Why might presence in response to games and other media technologies affect violent outcomes?

# Presence and Media Violence

- Tamborini & Skalski (2006) suggest that feeling spatially present in violent games that require players to repeatedly aggress against others can foster the development of mental models for real-life aggression.
- This should be intensified when games have naturally mapped controls that increase presence.

# Example: The Nintendo Wii





# Example: *Manhunt* games

