

Over the last decade there has been much interest in when the ability to speculate about counterfactual worlds develops. In this paper I argue that recent evidence indicates that a range of different abilities, developing over a relatively long period between at least 2 and 7 years, allow children to think counterfactually. I will review empirical evidence from my own and others' studies that suggest that at least three distinct abilities must develop: ignoring the actual world to consider an alternative (Beck, Riggs, & Gorniak, under submission), holding multiple possible worlds in mind (Beck, Robinson, Carroll, & Apperly, 2006), and making comparisons between these possibilities (see e.g. Guttentag & Ferrell, 2004). Understanding what develops when will inform us not only about changes in children's thinking, but also provide insight into the processes involved in adults' counterfactual thinking.

References:

Beck, SR, Riggs, KJ, & Gorniak, SL (under submission) Are developments in preschoolers' counterfactual thinking driven by developments in executive function?

Beck, SR, Robinson, EJ, Carroll, DJ, & Apperly, IA (2006) Children's thinking about counterfactuals and future hypotheticals as possibilities. *Child Development* 77(2), 413–426.

Guttentag, R. & Ferrell, J. (2004) Reality compared with its alternatives: Age differences in judgments of regret and relief. *Developmental Psychology*, 40, 764–775.