

Public Abstract

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Title:RECOGNIZING FAMILIARITY:
ASSESSING THE ROLE OF PAIR FAMILIARITY
IN THE ASSOCIATIVE DEFICIT OF OLDER ADULTS

While aging causes relatively minor impairment in recognition memory for components, older adults' ability to remember associations between components is typically significantly compromised, relative to that of younger adults (see Naveh-Benjamin, 2000). Moreover, using dual process models of memory, Jennings & Jacoby (1997) have demonstrated that age differences are much larger for measures of recollection than for familiarity. Because older adults have intact use of familiarity, one possibility is that they rely too heavily on their familiarity of the components when making judgments about associations, causing them to mistakenly recognize novel pairings of familiar items. The purpose of the current study is to explore possible methods that allow older adults to capitalize on their intact familiarity in order to accurately remember pairings of information. Experiments 1 and 2 investigated this by unitizing two components of a pair such that the color information enables certain pairings to appear as one unit. In Experiments 3 and 4, participants were repeatedly presented with pairings prior to a study list so that the pairs were already familiar during the study phase. Remember/know judgments were collected in order to determine if any advantages in associative tests were related to reliance on familiarity or recollection. Evidence shows that both unitization and repetition increase associative memory in both younger and older adults.