

Public Abstract

First Name:Hope

Middle Name:C.

Last Name:Fine

Adviser's First Name:Moshe

Adviser's Last Name:Naveh-Benjamin

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

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Title:Attempts to Reduce the High False Alarm Rate in Older Adults' Associative Memory

Whereas memory for individual items stays relatively intact with age, associative memory, (e.g., memory for pairs of items), seems to show a noticeable decline (what is known as older adults' associative memory deficit). When given a pair of items at test that are recombined and that were shown with other item-components at study, older adults are more likely to wrongly believe that they previously saw that pair at study (i.e. false alarm). The purpose of the current research was to examine if we could help older adults decrease their false alarms and increase their overall associative memory performance. When given a pair at test, older adults tend to make more memory judgments based on feelings of familiarity (i.e. the belief that they saw that pair at study but are not really sure why) and less on contextual recollection (i.e. remembering something they were thinking about while studying that pair). We predicted that if we could help older adults use recollection more efficiently, by decreasing their reliance on familiarity (via use of repetition) and increasing their use of recollection (via pre-existing schematic knowledge) that their memory accuracy for pairs would improve. In Experiment 1, products were paired with either an underestimated price, a market value price, or an overestimated price, with the match or mismatch in the product-price relationships between study and test serving as the manipulation of schematic information. In Experiment 2, participants studied face-name pairs and schematic information was manipulated by the match of the age of the face (young or old) appearing with a given name between study and test. In both experiments, familiarity was manipulated by repetition (pre-exposure) of the components of a given pair. Results indicate that low item familiarity (Experiment 2) and schematic knowledge (Experiments 1 and 2) decreased older adults' false alarms in the test for the pairs resulting in a reduced associative memory deficit. The current results are an important step in helping older adults use their recollection processes more efficiently to increase their associative memory performance.