ATTEMPTS TO REDUCE THE HIGH FALSE ALARM RATE IN OLDER ADULTS’ ASSOCIATIVE MEMORY

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ABSTRACT

Older adults seem to show an age-related associative deficit, which is partially driven by high false alarms. The purpose of the current research was to examine if manipulating recollection (via schematic support) and item familiarity (via repetition) could decrease older adults’ false alarm rate in the associative test. In the current study, younger and older adults were tested for their memory after viewing product-price pairs ( Experiment 1) and face-name pairs ( Experiment 2). We hypothesized that older adults would benefit from low item familiarity and from pre-existing schematic knowledge in learning associations at encoding, and especially, in rejecting recombined pairs at retrieval. Item familiarity was manipulated by having a pre-exposure phase of the item components for both experiments. 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, 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. Results indicate that low item familiarity (Experiment 2) and schematic knowledge (Experiments 1 and 2) increase older adults’ ability to recall-to-reject recombined product-price and face-name pairs at retrieval, resulting in a reduced associative memory deficit.