WHO DID WHAT? AGE-RELATED DIFFERENCES IN MEMORY FOR PEOPLE AND THEIR ACTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The associative-deficit hypothesis (ADH), proposed by Naveh-Benjamin (2000), holds that the decline in episodic memory that accompanies aging is at least partially due to an inability to bind single units of information into more complex units. In order to extend the ADH to relatively dynamic stimuli, participants in the present experiments viewed a series of brief video clips, each showing a different person performing a different action. Memory for the actions, for the people, and for who did what, was then assessed in recognition tests. Different versions of the tests were completed on the following day.

Experiment 1 revealed an associative deficit of older adults under intentional, but not incidental, learning instructions. In Experiment 2, a somewhat similar associative deficit of young adults under divided attention (DA) at both encoding and retrieval test was found. This partially supports Craik's (1983, 1986) idea that older adults have relatively few processing resources. Taken together, results suggest that the age-related associative deficit is partially due to a decline in strategic processing, and to problems which occur during the retrieval processes of older adults.