

Verbal descriptions hurt face recognition in children and adults

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Abstract: The verbal overshadowing effect (VO), first demonstrated by Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990), indicates that providing a verbal description of a previously seen face may impair its recognition on a subsequent lineup identification task. This phenomenon, widely demonstrated in adults, was investigated in children only once (Memon & Rose, 2002): no VO effect was found with 8-9 years old participants. However, some procedural details were not controlled in this experiment and the absence of a control adult group did not allow determining whether the procedure used was able to induce a VO effect. Current experiments examine the VO effect in several groups of children (7-8, 10-11, 13-14 years old) and adults to determine the developmental trajectory of the phenomenon across the ages. In both experiments, verbalization interfered with identification performance in all children's and adults' groups. The influence of descriptors' quality provided by subjects was analyzed and discussed.