Face Memory: Effects of Verbal Description and Visual Imaging

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The present research examines the effects of post-exposure description and imaging activities on subsequent face recognition. Subjects performed one of three target-directed description tasks: a descriptor generate task, a checklist task, or a rating task. Other subjects performed a distractor activity. Also, half the subjects were told to image the target face while they performed the description tasks. The experiment showed that the checklist activity lowered subsequent recognition performance compared to an activity where subjects generate their own descriptions. Imaging with the descriptor generation task facilitated recognition, while it hindered recognition with the checklist and rating tasks. Further analyses showed that the highest quality descriptions were produced by subjects in the descriptor generate condition. The quality of the generate and rating descriptions was diagnostic of recognition performance, but this was not true for the checklist descriptions. The recognition decrements produced by the descriptor checklist tasks are discussed in terms of memorial confusion produced by the presence of irrelevant face descriptors. Overall, the results show that descriptor generation is preferred over checklists because it does not degrade subsequent recognition, it produces the best quality descriptions, and description quality is diagnostic of subsequent recognition performance.