

provide yet another brick for our castle of 'scientific knowledge'. At least this study does provide a different angle on the same story. Most analyses would include all possible variables without any reference to theory. The theory used in this article may not be particularly elaborate, but at least Coulton and Frost have made some attempt to build on it.

Health Care Research Unit
University of Newcastle on Tyne

Psychology and Psychiatry

Jeffrey Garland

Jerome A. Yesavage, Terrence L. Rose and Gordon H. Bower, 'Interactive Imagery and Affective Judgments Improve Face-Name Learning in the Elderly', *Journal of Gerontology*, **38** (1983), 197-203.

In hideously vivid pyjamas, an old man, white-bearded but ruddy-cheeked and with a meaning glint in his eye, advances on a nubile blonde in the adjoining twin bed.

'What, again!' protests the damsel. 'You only came over ten minutes ago!'

Quick as a flash comes the classic rejoinder from an inspired ancient: 'Well, love, you're lucky it's only my memory that's going.'

This postcard, a favoured souvenir from a Northern seaside town, illustrates our ready acceptance of memory failure being involved in old age, while neatly deflating the assumption that for old people sex is a thing of the past.

While we must indeed accept that many, if not most, people suffer memory impairment in later life, research is beginning to give us hopeful glimpses of the prospect of minimising or compensating for some aspects of this impairment.

In a brief review of memory retrieval in 1978, Botwinick¹ expressed surprise at the lack of research into helping old people to cope more effectively with memory impairment. In the last five years, however, much more effort has been going in, and papers such as this are to be welcomed, although there is clearly still a very long way to go before a prosthetic course in memory retraining will be handed out as a bonus to the pensions queue in your local post office.

Yesavage *et al.* take up and develop a study by McCarty,² who found that a visual imagery mnemonic significantly improved young adults'

name recall for a face, by: identifying a prominent facial feature (e.g. a large mouth); deriving a transformation of the person's name (e.g. 'Whalen' becomes 'A whale'); and forming a visual image associating the prominent facial feature with the name transformation (e.g. a whale in the person's mouth).

The recall process as taught by McCarty was: identify the prominent feature of the face; use the feature as a retrieval cue for the image association (the most problematic step); reconstruct the name transformation from the image association; and finally, decode the name from the name transformation.

In developing this approach for use with elderly subjects, Yesavage *et al.* draw on evidence that certain instructional sets facilitate retention of visual information: specifically, that recognition memory is improved by requiring subjects to make semantic judgements of faces as they are viewed, since a stimulus processed in additional, non-redundant ways is more likely to be remembered later.

Retired middle managers, volunteers for what the authors described as 'a brief course on memory improvement', were each assigned to one of three groups on the basis of preference for dates. A no-image group ($n = 21$), were taught only to identify a prominent feature of the face and to develop transformations for a series of names. This control group spent the rest of its time discussing the history of mnemonics. An image group ($n = 21$), had teaching in identifying and transformations, together with training in forming a visual image incorporating both the prominent facial feature of the person and a concrete transformation of his or her name, with practice using faces and names of class members. An image + judgement group ($n = 18$), had the same experience as the image group, with additional instruction on making a judgement about the pleasantness or unpleasantness of each visual image association.

Average age of the subjects was 65.6 years (s.d. = 5.4), and on age, educational, sexual composition and health, the groups were not significantly different.

The materials used were three sets of slides showing both male and female faces of high school age and selected on the basis of judges' agreement in identifying the prominent facial feature of each. Each face was paired with a randomly assigned common surname.

During study trials spread over 5 days, in daily 2-hour sessions, subjects were asked to learn a 12-face-name pair set under a variety of conditions, including: with no mnemonic; with a mnemonic specified by the authors; and self mnemonic in which participants were instructed to generate components for each face-name pair on their own.

Results for recall success under the different conditions indicated that

when subjects incorporated both the name and the facial feature of each person into a single unified image, name recall was better than when name and face were encoded separately. The image + judgement group showed superior performance, recalling more than twice as many names after learning the mnemonic than they did initially, with several individuals getting perfect scores.

With due modesty, the authors conclude that their mnemonic approach may prove to be a useful feature of a cognitive retraining programme for old people. As they point out, the results overall show their techniques to be by no means *completely* efficient, and reserve is only proper since much remains to be done.

Nevertheless, this paper is a respectable contribution to a growing body of knowledge which is already being usefully applied by psychologists working with clients who have memory impairment.

Oxford District Health Authority

- 1 Botwinick, Jack, *Aging and Behavior*. Springer, 1978.
- 2 McCarty, D. L., Investigation of a visual imagery mnemonic device for acquiring face-name associations. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory*, 6 (1980), 145-155.