Pozzulo et al. (2011): Line-ups

Lesson 1.2.3 | Concepts and methods

1. Psychology and aims

Eyewitness testimony: evidence based on a witness's memory. A **target** is the person/character originally seen; a **foil** is an alternative face. In a target-present line-up, correct identification means selecting the target. In a target-absent line-up, selecting any face is a false positive.

Children may choose a face because they think adults expect an answer, as well as because of memory limits. Familiar cartoons should make recognition easier. The aim was to investigate whether poor recognition alone explains children's target-absent errors.

2. Participants and design

Sample	Children	Adults
Number	59	53
Ages	4-7; mean 4.98	17-30; mean 20.54
Sex	21 female, 38 male	36 female, 17 male
Recruitment	Three private schools	University psychology pool

Laboratory-style experiment with age as a naturally occurring between-group factor. Participants encountered both cartoon and human targets. Target presence/absence was randomised across participants. Outcomes were correct identification and correct rejection, supplemented by interviews/questionnaires.

3. Materials and procedure

Four silent six-second clips showed Dora, Diego, a woman brushing her hair and a man putting on a coat; each included a 2-3-second close-up. Four-face arrays contained target plus three foils, or four foils. A silhouette allowed a "not there" response.

Children were tested individually at school after rapport-building crafts; interviews created an approximately two-minute delay, then children pointed to a choice. Adults completed the task in a laboratory and wrote responses. Adults supplied their own familiarity/demographic information; parents supplied children's information.

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Lesson 1.2.3 | Evidence and interpretation

1. Controls

Instructions stated that the target might be absent and demonstrated the silhouette. Videos and arrays were standardised; clip order and target positions varied. Similar foils were selected using ratings. Child-testing researchers avoided uniforms/lab coats that might heighten authority cues.

2. Target-present: correct identification

Target type	Children	Adults
Familiar cartoons	99%	95%
Unfamiliar humans	23%	66%

When the cartoon target was present, children could identify it almost perfectly. Their unfamiliar-human identification was much lower than adults'. This supports a role for familiarity/recognition, with stimulus-type limits.

3. Target-absent: correct rejection

Target type	Children	Adults
Familiar cartoons	74%	94%
Unfamiliar humans	45%	70%

These percentages are **correct rejection**, not false positives. A lower rejection rate means more wrong face choices. Children rejected fewer absent line-ups correctly for both target types.

4. Interpretation

Near-perfect present-cartoon identification did not eliminate children's absent-cartoon errors. Poor recognition alone is therefore insufficient as an explanation. Perceived pressure to choose may contribute, alongside cognitive factors.

> Conclusion: recognition and social responding can interact. The experiment did not independently manipulate social pressure, so it cannot establish pressure as the sole cause of false positives.

Hint: Before describing a percentage, identify target presence/absence and whether accuracy means selecting a face or choosing the silhouette.

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Lesson 1.2.3 | Evaluation and connections

1. Strengths

Within-person target comparison: each participant encountered cartoons and humans, reducing stable participant differences.
Controlled presentation: short clips, similar foils, standard instructions and varied order/position improved consistency.
Multiple measures: identification, rejection, recall and familiarity information helped distinguish possible explanations.

2. Limitations

Confounded familiarity: familiar cartoons differ from unfamiliar human photographs in more than familiarity.
Group procedures: children spoke/pointed at school, while adults wrote in a laboratory. Age was not the only difference.
Ecological validity: benign six-second clips and a short delay differ from a stressful crime and later identification.

3. Research with children

Written parental consent was obtained. Children were told they could change their minds without getting into trouble. Crafts built rapport; researchers monitored fatigue, anxiety and stress. Everyday clips reduced exposure to distressing material; crayons and a colouring book were given afterwards.

Parental permission does not replace the child's willing agreement or ongoing right to stop. Rewards and adult authority must not create pressure to participate. Developmentally suitable instructions improve both welfare and measurement validity.

4. Applications and debates

Application: make rejecting an absent target a clear and acceptable option in identification procedures. This study did not test every police practice.
Individual/situational: age-related cognition and familiarity combine with expectations in an adult-led task.
Nature/nurture: age differences do not separate maturation from accumulated experience.

> Do not confuse identifying a known target with rejecting a target-absent array. Being able to recognise someone does not guarantee freedom from false positives.

Hint: A developed evaluation links a concrete task difference to why it could change performance or limit transfer to real witnesses.