Person description abilities in children, adolescents and adults.

Valentine Vanootighem *, Serge Brédart *, Hedwige Dehon *

University of Liège, Liège, Belgium
Department of Psychology: Cognition and Behavior

Université de Liège

BACKGROUND

· Research has shown that children's descriptions are significantly less detailed than those of adolescents and adults (e.g., Davies et al., 1989; Pozzulo & Warren, 2003). However, participants in these studies were presented with a live target interaction in conditions that may have distracted the participants from processing the target.

· The aim of this study was to realize a further inspection of person descriptive abilities of children (7-8, 10-11-year-old), adolescents (13-14-year-old) and adults, using a method that did not include any potential distracting stimulus. Types of descriptor (e.g. internal and external facial features and subjective details) provided as a function of age were examined and discussed.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS:

· Four groups of participants were recruited (N=301)

· 7-8-year-old (M=7.54, SD=0.51, 38 ♀, n=76).
· 10-11-year-old (M=10.52, SD=0.53, 38 ♀, n=76).
· 13-14-year-old (M=13.38, SD=0.48, 37 ♀, n=76).
· Young adults (from 18 to 25-year-old, M=24.01, SD=3.23, 37 ♀, n=74).

MATERIAL AND PROCEDURE:

· The participants were tested individually and presented with a 2min video-clip. They were instructed to pay attention to the video-clip and warned that they would be asked questions about what they had seen. The videotape depicted a 25-year-old Caucasian male (face and the shoulders apparent, wearing a black t-shirt). His face had no visible distinctive sign such as beard, glasses, whiskers, and scars. During the two minutes, the individual did not speak, had neutral facial expression and made different neutral actions (e.g., knocking at the screen, moving forward and backward from the screen).

Figure 1: Target face presented in the video.

· After viewing the video-clip, participants were instructed to spend five minutes to verbally describing the previously seen target face from memory : «*Please describe in as much detail as possible the face that was presented to you in the videotape. Try to describe the person in sufficient detail so that someone else could identify him on the basis of your description*».

RESULTS

Accuracy of description as a function of age

An ANOVA 4 (Age) X 3 (Response Type) with repeated measures on the last factor was run on the number of descriptors reported (see Table 1).

A main effect of Response type was revealed, $F(2,594) = 1649.27$, $p < .001$. Overall, participants were far more likely to produce correct descriptors than incorrect and subjective descriptors. They also produced more incorrect than subjective descriptors.

A main effect of age [$F (3,297) = 91.64$, $p < .001$] revealed that the number of descriptors increased gradually with age.

A significant Age x Response Type interaction, $F(6,594) = 59.69$, $p < .001$ indicated that the number of correct descriptors increased with age whereas the number of incorrect and subjective descriptors were very low in general and did not significantly change across age.

	7-8	10-11	13-14	Adults
Correct	1.93 (0.93)	2.96 (1.16)	3.87 (1.08)	4.74 (1.12)
Incorrect	0.33 (0.53)	0.34 (0.5)	0.35 (0.56)	0.43 (0.72)
Subjective	0.13 (0.38)	0.17 (0.38)	0.09 (0.29)	0.09 (0.29)
Total	2.39 (1.06)	3.47 (0.94)	4.31 (1.25)	5.27 (1.15)

Table 1: Mean number of correct, incorrect and subjective descriptors as a function of Age (standard deviations are presented into brackets).

Types of descriptor as a function of age

An ANOVA 4 (Age) X 3 (Descriptor Type) with repeated measures on the last factor was run on the number of descriptors reported.

A main effect of Descriptor Type was revealed, $F(2,594) = 605.24$, $p < .001$. Overall, participants produced more internal facial features (IFF) than external facial features (EFF) and subjective details (SD, e.g. personality traits, age). They also produced more EFF than SD.

A significant Age x Descriptor Type interaction, $F(6,594) = 30.40$, $p < .001$ indicated that IFF increased gradually with age, whereas EFF only increased significantly from 10-11-year-old to adult age. Indeed, EFF did not differ significantly between 7-8 and 10-11-year-old. Subjective details did not significantly change across age.
Moreover, participants produced more IFF than EFF, except children of 7-8-year-old that produced more EFF than IFF.

	7-8	10-11	13-14	Adults
IFF	1.07 (0.74)	1.93 (0.79)	2.57 (1.19)	3.20 (1.09)
EFF	1.19 (0.59)	1.37 (0.74)	1.64 (0.69)	1.97 (0.70)
SD	0.13 (0.38)	0.17 (0.38)	0.09 (0.29)	0.09 (0.29)
Total	2.39 (1.06)	3.47 (0.94)	4.31 (1.25)	5.27 (1.15)

Table 2: Mean number of IFF, EFF and SD as a function of Age (standard deviations are presented into brackets).

7-8	10-11	13-14	Adults
Eye color (79.1%)	Eye color (80.2%)	Eye color (85.5%)	Eye color (83.7%)
Hair color (73.71%)	Hair color (78.8%)	Hair color (80.3%)	Hair color (83.5%)
Hair length (31.6%)	Hair length (50%)	Hair length (61.8%)	Hair length (79.72%)
Nose Width (17.1%)	Nose Width (32.9%)	Nose Width (37.3%)	Nose Width (54%)
Color skin (11.8%)	Color skin (22.4%)	Color skin (26.3%)	Head shape (45.9%)
Hand size (10.5%)	Nose length (18.41%)	Head shape (23.7%)	Color skin (29.7%)
Nice (10.5%)	Eyebrow thickness (11.8%)	Forehead size (22.4%)	Eyebrow thickness (27.7%)
Forehead size (7.9%)	Eye size (9.2%)	Eyebrow thickness (18.4%)	Nose length (24%)
Eyebrow thickness (5%)	Head shape (7.9%)	Nose length (13.1%)	Forehead size (21.6%)
	Serious (6.6%)	Ear size (11.8%)	Eye shape (14.9%)
	Forehead size (5.3%)	Eye size (10.5%)	Ear size (14.9%)
	Corpulence (5.3%)	Corpulence (10.5%)	Corpulence (13.5%)
		Mouth size (7.9%)	Mouth size (10.8%)
		Serious (7.9%)	Age (8.1%)
		Eye shape (5%)	Eye size (5.3%)
< 5% Friendly (3.9%) Mouth size (2.6%) Funny (2.6%) Corpulence (2.6%) Age (1.3%) Nose length (1%)	< 5% Mouth size (3.9%) Friendly (3.9%) Ear size (3.9%) Hand size (2.6%) Lip thickness (2.6%) Age (2.6%) Funny (2.6%) Nice (1.3%) Eye shape (1%)	< 5% Lip thickness (2.6%) Age (3.9%)	< 5% Lip thickness (4%) Nice (1.3%) Hand size (1%)

Table 3: Percentage of each provided descriptor as a function of age. Data are presented in descending order of frequency.

CONCLUSIONS

· As in studies presenting a live event interaction to participants (e.g., Davies et al., 1989; Pozzulo & Warren, 2003), we found that younger children provided less detailed descriptions that older children and adults.

· We found that the types of descriptor provided by witnesses change as a function of age. As in previous studies, we found that younger children recalled fewer IFF than older children and adults (Pozzulo & Warren, 2003). More precisely, we found that younger children provided more EFF than IFF. The explanation for this result could be that children might focus on EFF initially because they are more salient. With increasing age, IFF are more observed, encoded, and recalled, along with exterior facial features. IFF may be more difficult to describe, requiring a richer vocabulary. Moreover, in order to describe IFF, one may need to be able to describe subtle differences between features, an ability that may emerge later in childhood (Carey & Diamond, 1977).

· However, we found that older children, adolescents and adults provided more IFF than EFF. This finding is not in line with some studies suggesting that EFF are the most frequently reported descriptor by children and adults. Further studies are needed to examine whether these findings are related to the encoded event or to specific instructions.

REFERENCES

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Contact: valentine.vanootighem@ulg.ac.be