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Facial Attractiveness and Recognition of Faces: Effects of Age and Gender
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Introduction
Recognizing faces is a complex, important, and frequent task. Older compared to younger adults experience declines in face recognition. Older adults have been shown to have more difficulty recognizing faces than younger adults. The present study examined the influence of facial attractiveness on recognition of faces in adults of different ages.

Research Questions
(1) Facial Attractiveness and Face Recognition Memory: Does facial attractiveness predict successful recognition of faces? Does this relationship vary by age and gender of the viewer?
(2) Facial Attractiveness and Face Looking Time: Does facial attractiveness predict time spent viewing faces? Does this relationship vary by age and gender of the viewer?

Methods
Sample
n = 25 younger adults (M = 22.2 yrs., SD = 2.9 yrs., range: 19–29 yrs., 60% women)
n = 24 older adults (M = 73.9 yrs., SD = 7.8 yrs., range: 63–92 yrs., 71% women)

Stimuli
Neutral faces from FACES Database Ebner et al., 2010
Encoding: 24 younger and 24 older faces; half male, half female
Test: 48 younger and 48 older faces; half male, half female; half target, half distractor

Facial Attractiveness
Attractiveness rating of face 0.00
Intercept 2.24
Age group of participant 1.27
Gender of participant 1.14
Age group of participant X Gender of participant 0.88
Attractiveness rating of face 1.00
Age group of participant X Attractiveness rating of face 0.96
Gender of participant X Attractiveness rating of face 1.02
Age group of participant X Gender of participant X Attractiveness rating of face 1.01
Random Effects
Attractiveness rating of face 0.00

Results
(1) Facial Attractiveness and Face Recognition Memory
Older adults were better at remembering faces rated as less attractive; younger adults were better at remembering faces rated as more attractive.

(2) Facial Attractiveness and Face Looking Time
Older males had shorter looking time overall than all other groups; overall face looking time effect was independent of facial attractiveness.

Discussion
• Attractive faces may be less distinctive Light et al., 1981, and thus harder for older adults to recognize.
• Younger adults may have better recognition for more attractive faces because of mating and competition goals; these motivations may become less salient with age.
• Differences between younger and older men and women in ratings of facial attractiveness may affect effects observed in the study.

References
Nezlek, J. B., & Loewenstein, G. (2000). Attitudes and attractiveness: The attraction effect is not due to more attractive targets being more rewarding. Personality, 8(3), 199-205.