

MEMORY: BAHRICK ET AL
DURATION OF LTM

Aim: To establish the existence of very long-term memory (VLTM), and to see whether there was any difference between recognition and recall.

Procedures:

- ❑ Investigators tracked down the graduates from a particular high school in America over a 50 year period.
- ❑ 392 graduates were shown photographs from their high-school yearbook
- ❑ For each photo, participants were given a group of names and asked to select the name that matched the person in the photo (recognition group)
- ❑ Another group of participants was simply asked to name the people in the photo without being given a list of possible names (recall group)

Findings:

- ❑ In the name-matching condition, participants were 90% correct even 14 years after graduation
- ❑ After 25 years, these participants were 80% accurate; after 34 years, 75% accurate and, even after 47 years, 60% accurate
- ❑ The second group who had to identify the photos without any name cues were not quite as successful. They were 60% accurate after seven years, but the level of accuracy had dropped to less than 20 % after 47 years

Conclusions:

- ❑ People can remember certain types of information for almost a lifetime
- ❑ The accuracy of very long term memory is better when measured by recognition tests than by recall tests

Criticisms:

- ❑ Unlike many memory experiments, this study used meaningful stimulus material (high-school yearbooks) and tested people for memories from their own lives
- ❑ It is unclear whether the drop-off in accuracy after 47 years reflects the limits of duration or a more general decline in memory with age