

Eye-Witness Testimonies: Effects of Co-Witnesses on Reconstructed Memories

Jenna N. King, Rebecca A. Berth
Faculty Mentor: Allen Keniston, Ph.D



Introduction

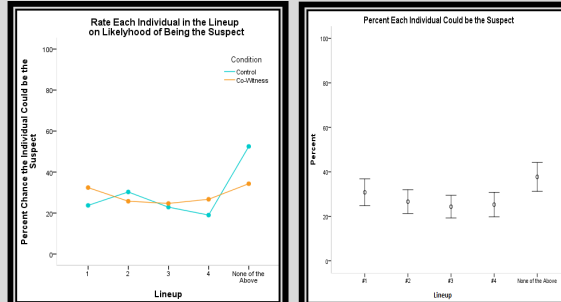
- ❖ Eyewitness testimonies are considered to have a very persuasive impact on judges and juries; it has been shown to exert an important influence on jurors' evaluations of witnesses and judgments, with more confident witnesses generally regarded as being more believable (Brewer & Burke 2002).
- ❖ 88 percent of eyewitnesses reported having at least one co-witness present when their crime occurred (Skagerberg & Wright, 2008).
- ❖ Memories are often constructed and reconstructed, not only on the basis of the observed event but from information obtained afterward (Loftus & Palmer, 1974). In this study the information obtained after witnessing event will be misinformation from a co-witness.
- ❖ An eyewitness's confidence is always changing with new information presented to them (Lus & Wells, 1994).
- ❖ A benefit of this research will display the validity of the use of eye-witness testimonies in court.

Hypotheses

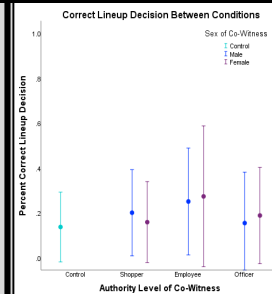
- ❖ Participants in the different conditions will have a lower rate of being correct in the final lineup decision.
- ❖ Males will be more helpful, provide higher confidence levels and a lower rate of being correct in final lineup decision.
- ❖ The higher the authority level of the co-witness will provide higher confidence, be considered more helpful and produce less correct final lineup decisions.
- ❖ When provided with misinformation from a co-witness, participant confidence levels will be lower than control group.

Participants

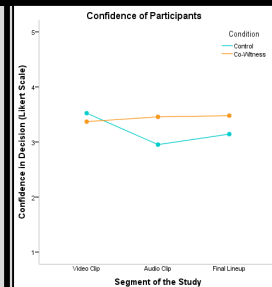
- ❖ 117 participants. 40 males 77 females.
- ❖ Ages ranged from 18 to 59 with a mean of 22.
- ❖ Education levels of participants ranged from less than high school to Masters degrees.



- Each participant rated the probability that each individual in the lineup could be the offender they viewed in the video clip.
- Participant condition nearly influenced rated probability that each individual in the lineup was the offender, $F(4, 460) = 2.01, p = .091$.
- Lineup options influenced rated probability that individuals were the offender, $F(4, 460) = 4.55, p = .001$.
- The "None of the above" option received significantly higher ratings than options #2, #3, and #4 (the offender). The difference between ratings for "none of the above" and the offender (#4) was significant, $t(116) = 2.61, p = .010$.

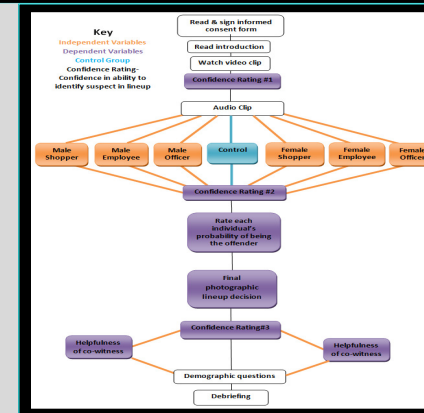


- Participants' identification of the offender occurred at a chance level (.19).
- Co-witness sex did not affect participants' ability to identify the offender.
- Co-Witness authority level did not affect participants' ability to identify the offender.



- Participation in the control versus any of the experimental conditions interacted with timing of confidence ratings, $F(2, 222) = 3.77, p = .025$.
- Control subject confidence declined but experimental subject confidence remained constant.

Method



Discussion

- ❖ All hypotheses were rejected.
- ❖ When given the option that the offender is not in the lineup participants were more likely to think that the offender was not present. This could be an example of a type II error, allowing guilty people to be set free.
- ❖ Since no significance was found between the conditions and their accuracy in lineup decisions, it is possible the misinformation provided by the co-witness may not have been encoded by participant.
- ❖ Participants with a co-witness were more confident in their ability to correctly identify the offender in a lineup than the control group. This could demonstrate that the witness' memory of the event was not reconstructed by the co-witness' misinformation. This however could be a methodological error.

Limitations

- ❖ The methodology used in this research may not be externally valid due to the event being witness through video and no consequences applied for participants lineup decision.

Implications

- ❖ Using security cameras as a form of evidence to prove guilt may not be a reliable method because people have a difficult time identifying the offend with this method.
- ❖ Witnesses may be less accurate in their decision than what their confidence implies.
- ❖ Presence of co-witness may help a witnesses feel confident but will not help their accuracy.