

Eyewitness Testimony

How much can you trust your memory?

Snapshots at jasonlove.com



"So you're sure it's number four who clawed through your door, demolished the living room, and, after soiling the carpet, stole away with your French poodle?"

How Much Do You Know?

- How much emphasis does the legal system place on eyewitness testimony?
- What factors can limit an eyewitness' accuracy?
- What role do police officers and crime scene investigators play?

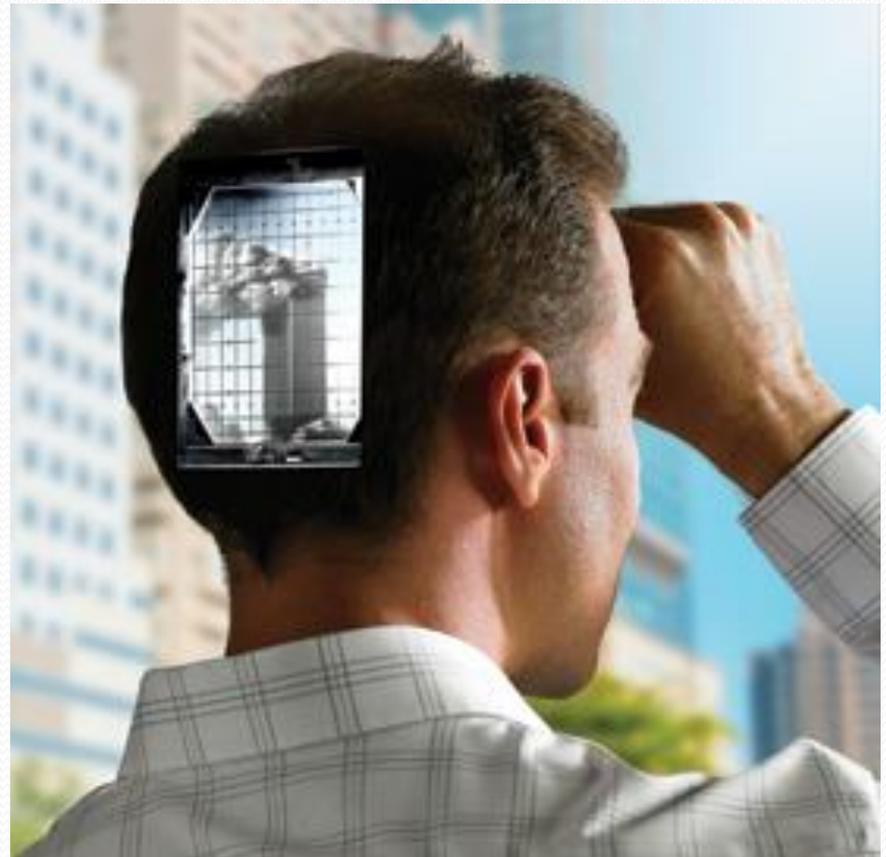
The Facts

- In this country, it is estimated that 75% of wrongly convicted defendants, later cleared by DNA evidence, were convicted based largely on eyewitness testimony



Flashbulb Memories

- Vivid recollection of dramatic or emotionally charged events
- Example: Can anyone tell me what you were doing when...?
 - You first saw or heard about September 11
 - Barack Obama became president
 - Michael Jackson died



You Be the Eyewitness

- Imagine you are at a gas station buying milk
- A man walks in, threatens the employee at the counter, robs the cash register, and runs out
- The entire ordeal lasts about five seconds
- This is the man you saw...



You Be the Eyewitness

- The police have asked you to help them identify the perpetrator
- They will show you a set of pictures, and it is your responsibility to select the picture of the man you saw rob the gas station...



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10

How Did You Do?

- So, which picture did you choose?
- And the correct answer was...
- Were you right?
- What does this tell you about eyewitness testimony?

According to Research...

- Studies show that the longer it takes an eyewitness to decide if the perpetrator is in a lineup, the less confident they actually are about their decision
- Why?
- Eyewitnesses typically take several minutes to point out the perpetrator because they often feel pressured to choose the correct one
- However, if they are truly confident, they should be able to decide in **under 10 seconds**

Choosing From a Lineup

- Buckhout (1974) and Wells (1993) indicate that an eyewitness is more likely to falsely identify a person in a set of lineup photographs if there is anything that separates one picture from another
- For example:
 - If one picture is larger than the others
 - If facial features in all the photographs are not identical



More Research...

- Malpass and Devine (1981)
 - Half of their participants in the staged act of vandalism were told that the perpetrator was in the lineup while the other half were told that the perpetrator may or may not be present
 - Results: the participants who were led to believe that the perpetrator was present felt compelled to pick *someone*, and more often than not, they chose an innocent person

What Makes Memories Inaccurate?

- **Misinformation Effect:**
Exposure to misinformation makes us remember it as real.
- **Wade et. al., 2002:**
Showed digitally altered photos of selves taking hot balloon ride. After seeing this three times over two weeks, ½ of participants “remembered” the non-existent experience.



What Makes Memories Inaccurate?

- **Misimagination Effect:**
Imagining nonexistent actions and events can create false memories.
- Visualizing something and actually perceiving it activate similar brain areas.

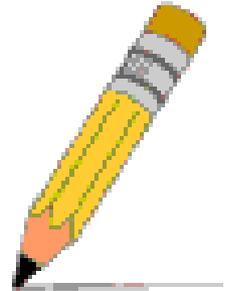
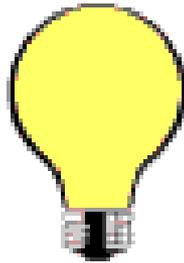
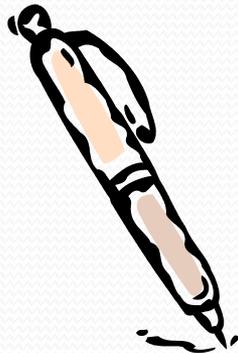
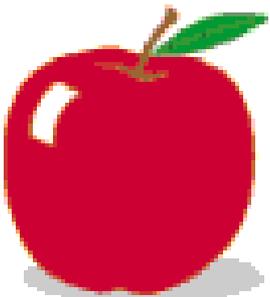


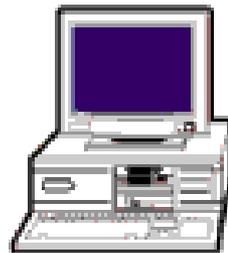
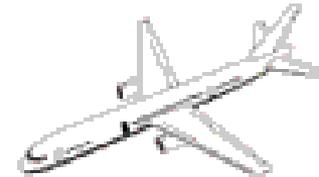
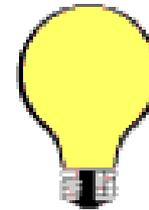
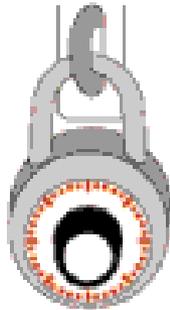
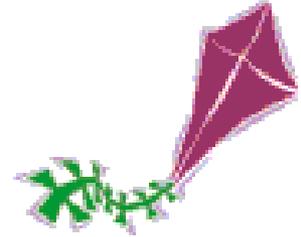
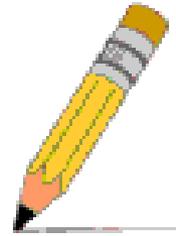
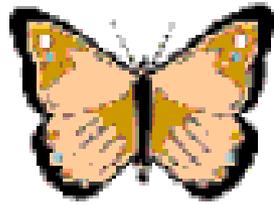
Other Factors...

- Heightened stress and anxiety levels
- The own-race bias (the tendency for people to recognize faces of their own race more accurately than faces of other races)
- Existing schema

Memory Test

- Let's do another memory test...
- You will have 30 seconds to view the next slide
- Try to memorize all 20 items you see
- You are not allowed to write anything down until after the screen has been shown
- GOOD LUCK!!







Finished!

Write down all the items
you can remember

How'd You Do?

- How many of you remembered seeing...
 - A banana?
 - A pen?
 - A nail?
- Why?
- Remember that I asked you if you saw a banana, a pen, and a nail...none of those were on the test! My comments affected your memory – I was able to implant false memories!
- What does this tell you about real eyewitness questioning by the police?

Questioning an Eyewitness

- Leading questions
 - Example: “Was the man wearing a black jacket?”
 - Why could this question present problems?
 - It doesn't leave room for open-ended answers
 - It encourages eyewitness to reinvent memories (in this example, it coerces eyewitnesses into believing the man was wearing a particular color jacket, just like I convinced you that you saw pictures that weren't really there)

Crime Scene Challenge

- Now that your eyes and brain are warmed up, let's test your observation skills a bit more
- You will have 2 minutes to study a photograph of a crime scene on the next slide
- Try to pay close attention to details
- You are not allowed to write anything down until time is up
- Ready?





Answer Each Question Below:

- What color was the coffee mug? Blue Red Yellow
- When was the deadline? Yesterday Today Tomorrow
- What time was on the clock on the wall? 10:40 11:05 1:55
- How many sticky notes were on the whiteboard? 4 6 8
- What was NOT in the picture? Stapler Trash Can Printer
- What was the name on the plaque? Bill Brian Carl
- What color was the victim's shirt? Black Blue Red
- How many plants were in the picture? None One Two
- What color was the marker in the drawer? Red Blue Green
- Where was the book? On a box In the trash can Under the body

Check Your Answers

- Yellow
- Today
- 11:05
- 6
- Stapler
- Brian
- Blue
- Two
- Green
- On a box