The Effect of Age and Gender on the Accuracy of Eyewitness Testimonies

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Eyewitness testimony plays a major role in jury verdicts. This experiment is designed to determine if—and how—gender and age affect the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. We hypothesized that women between ages 31-45 would provide the most accurate testimony due to the larger hippocampus in women and the maturity level of that age. We filmed a short video depicting a fictitious theft and showed the video to 100 random subjects. We then asked the subjects to answer 15 written questions. The first four questions had nothing to do with the video and were intended to distract the participants, much like the distractions witnesses face from the time of the crime to their initial statement. The remaining 11 questions asked about the content of the video. Two of these questions were leading questions that suggested to the participants details not in the video. We included leading questions to simulate how others—such as lawyers and police—can impact the accuracy of eyewitness statements. Using a rubric, we calculated a final average for each age and gender category. This experiment suggested that age and gender affect the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. In our study, women scored an average of 75.18% on the questionnaire, while men scored an average of 66.41%—a difference of 8.77%. Females between ages 16-30 scored the highest with a score of 80.95%, while our hypothesized group, women between 31-45, scored second highest at 76.6%. Thus, our hypothesis, while not fully supported by the data, proved generally correct.

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