The Credibility of Eyewitness Memories

Bernhardt, Blake (School: Wing Public School)

The purpose behind this experiment was to determine the reliability of eyewitnesses as evidence in court cases and other legal proceedings. It was hypothesized that none of the participants in this experiment would show above 80% accuracy in their memory of a given scene. To test this, a minute long video of a common scenario was first selected. Then, two separate surveys (survey A and survey B) were constructed with questions relating to the details in this video. The surveys consisted of 5 general questions, meant to test memory of the events in the video, 2 misleading questions, meant to test how participants would respond when they were unsure of the answer, and 2 trick questions, meant to deceive the participants into remembering incorrectly. The only distinction between the two surveys is that survey A was prefaced with the information that a crime had been committed in the video, aiming to set the precedent that someone in the video is a criminal. The video was then shown once to 5 participants, who all answered the questions to a survey (3 were given survey A and 2 were given survey B) immediately after. All participants showed exactly sixty percent accuracy among the general questions. Additionally, none of the participants in the survey B group were deceived by the trick questions, but one participant in the survey A group was deceived by both. Based on these results, the original hypothesis was supported, and it is safe to say that the testimony of eyewitnesses is not entirely reliable and should not be used as hard evidence in court. It has been shown that eye witnesses can be deceived into remembering information incorrectly, and even when deception is not present, general memory of an event is still only around 60% accurate.

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