What Do You See?

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Annually approximately 20,000 people are wrongfully accused and imprisoned for crimes. Key eyewitnesses are often relied upon to help make these convictions. Cognitive Psychology studies the way our brains can perceive and observe the world around us. The hypothesis we tested in our project was; Does the mind exclude smaller, less detailed observations during overwhelming events? A mock robbery was staged in a junior high classroom. A pre-selected student was disguised and sent in to blatantly steal an item then exit the classroom. Students in the classroom were immediately surveyed about details of the perpetrator. After analyzing survey data, we calculated the averages of details found to be correct. Younger students were able to recall more detailed descriptions of the perpetrator than those of junior high students. 54.16% of the students could identify key traits of the perpetrator correctly. “Data showed that although more than half of the students could identify key traits that were more easily to pick up on like what the robber stole, they were not as keen on important details like height and age. Less than 50 percent of the polled students could recall those exact facts.” This study shows that eyewitnesses should not be the stand-alone evidence when convicting felons. More data would be necessary to determine if some sexes or ages are more accurate at identifying a perpetrator.

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