

A Survey-Based Study of the Eyewitness Accounts of the Gender and Mood

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Abstract. Thousands of people depend on news media for everyday information. The news media is based on the accounts of many different people. How accurate are eyewitness accounts? A student was set to enter a high school classroom five minutes after the class started and act out the scenario to a group of students that were unaware of the experiment. The entering student was disciplined by the teacher for a few minutes. As the teacher disciplined the late student, the students in the class were supposed to pay attention. Thirty minutes later, the students were tested on the event that just occurred. On a Scantron form, the test taker was instructed to state their gender, current mood, and grade level. This analysis indicated that mood greatly affects how accurate eyewitness accounts are. There were a total of 150 students tested, 93 students were female and 57 students were male. On average, the females scored with a 76 and the males scored with a 74. As for mood there were a total of 42 students who indicated that they were in a positive mood and 30 students who indicated they were in a negative mood. Those who were classified as negative received an average of 73 and those who were happy received a 68. Those students with negative moods were exceedingly accurate compared to those with positive moods. Yet, for gender and grade level there was no significant difference. This study also indicates that it is not wise to confide in eyewitness news because of its lack of accuracy.

Keywords: Forensic Psychology, Eyewitness Accounts, Effects of Memory, and Survey-Based Studies

INTRODUCTION

Media includes newspapers, magazines, television, blogs, Myspace, and radio that is widely based on the accounts of others. Eyewitness accounts are largely affected by memory. Memory is made up of systems that play a different role in storing and recalling your memory. [7] The storing and recalling of memory is often referred to as encoding and retrieval. [7] Encoding involves storing information in memory and retrieval is remembering the information. Within encoding there is item-specific encoding and relational encoding. [7] With item-specific encoding certain features of the incident are encoded. [7] With relational encoding words are organized by relationships. [7] Item-specific tends to produce accurate memories about particular instances. [7] Relational encoding can produce memory intrusions and false memories. [7] Moreover, people with negative moods are more reliable, exercise superior thinking, and communication skills. [8] People with positive moods are unreliable, have poor judgment, and poor critical thinking skills. [8] Short term memory lasts for a short time in the brain before it is lost. Some causes for lost memory are diet, lack of activity, lack of thinking, and old age. [9] Overall, a desirable eyewitness is a person that is very descriptive and precise. For example, a good eyewitness would identify the eye color, hair color, body type, hair, and complexion, tattoos, deformity, scars, missing teeth, and walking style. [9] Our results are correlative to Joseph Forgas' experiment. Yet our experiment is different from his because he decided to put the "subjects" he was studying a positive or negative mood and then tested them. [2] Furthermore, he had the subjects write an argument on "a particular proposition". [2]

METHODS

A scene was acted out in which a visiting student entered a classroom five minutes after the bell has rung and the teacher begins to yell at the subject, for a few minutes. Forty minutes later, an exam of 18

questions and 5 choices each was administered to the class. On the Scantron form the student was instructed to state their gender, current mood, and grade level. For 8 questions, there was only one correct answer; this answer received 5 points. For 10 questions, the answer was scored by likelihood, for example, “How likely would it be that they were wearing glasses?” The test taker had to select from 1, meaning least likely, to 5, meaning most likely. The right answer received 5 points; one away from the right answer received 4 points, and so on.

RESULTS

Based on our study we are able to conclude that people with positive moods are more likely to give inaccurate and insufficient information than those with negative moods, who are most likely give a much more reliable and detailed description (Figure 2). Overall, there was no significant difference between genders (Figure 1).

DISCUSSION

Our results are interesting due to the fact that in court many people rely on eyewitness accounts to help figure out who is guilty. Some sources of evidence that helped with this experiment were accounts of people taken from different events. The result of this led us to our evidence to the inaccuracy of eyewitness accounts. We discovered that people with negative moods have a clear and more accurate understanding of an event that occurred than a person with a positive mood. People with positive moods seem to be over confident and tend to pay less attention with an event because they are excited about their situation. People with negative moods pay attention to what is in front of them in order to forget about their problems that may affect them. Overall, through previous studies and this particular experiment eyewitness accounts should never be fully confide in because of the different views many people and a particular event.

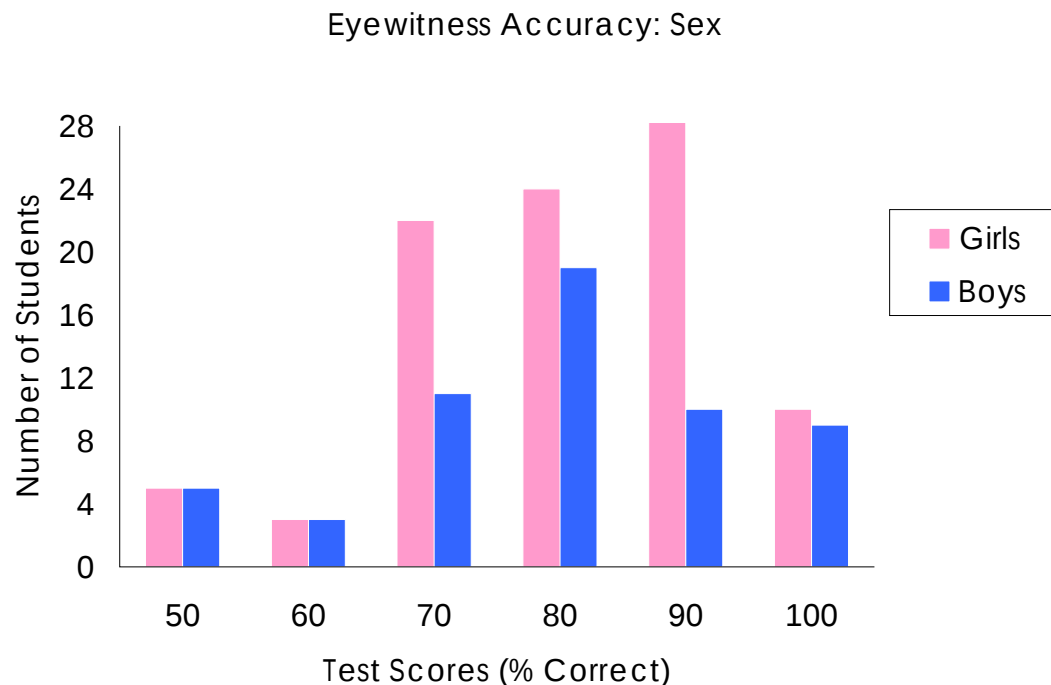


Figure 1. Based on this graph above, the scores of all of the females and males have been recorded. As shown above, that females did a bit better at scoring high on the test opposed to males.

Eyewitness Accuracy: Mood

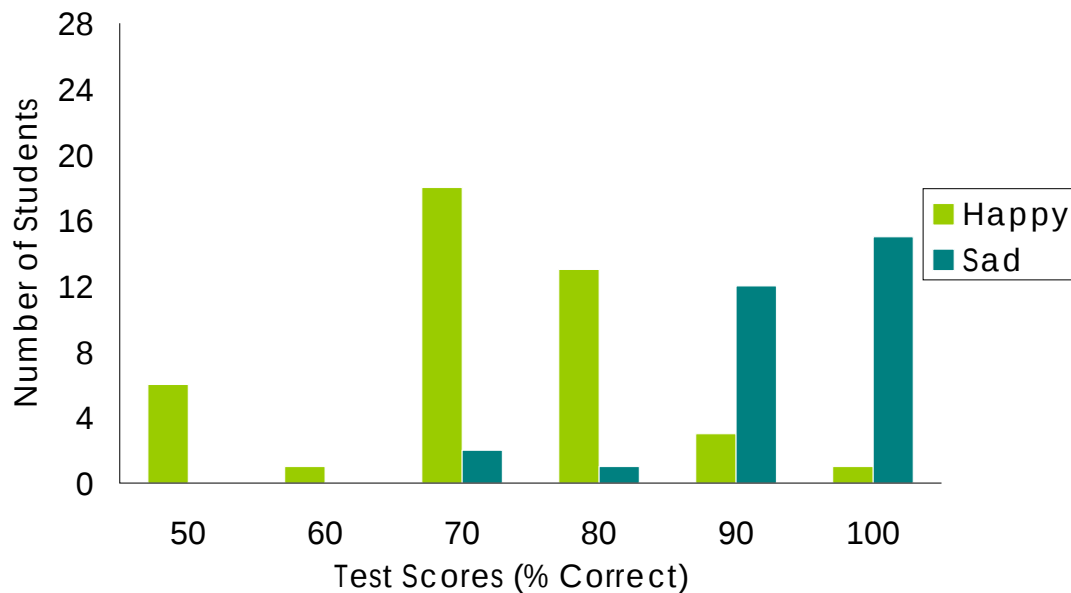


Figure 2. The graph above shows the scores of those students with negative and positive moods. You can see that those with a negative mood did exceedingly better compared to those with a positive mood. This analysis indicates that mood greatly affects how accurate eyewitness accounts are.

CONCLUSION

Eyewitness accounts are highly deceptive. Yet, we also found how great mood affects memory. People with positive moods most likely will give unreliable information compared to those with negative moods that will most likely give a much more reliable and detailed description. Overall, if you are looking for correct information you should not depend on eyewitness news.

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APPENDIX A

Recorded below is a sample of the test distributed to the students in each classroom that was tested.

You have just witnessed something.

Let's just say someone just came into your class room, someone you may or may not know. They came and spoke to your teacher. I need your help! Tell me what just happened. Answer the questions below the best you can on your Scantron.

On a few questions there will be numbers from one to five.

One meaning least likely, three meaning maybe, and five meaning most likely.

Where it says date state your gender.

Where it says subject state your current mood.

Where it says period state what grade you are in.

1. What was the person's gender?
a) Female b) Male
2. What did they have on?
a) Dress b) Jeans and shirt c) Jeans and sweater d) Shirt and sweats e) Sweater and sweats
3. What color was their hair?
a) Red b) Light brown c) Blonde d) Dark brown e) Black
4. How long was their hair?
a) Bald b) Shoulder length c) In the middle of their back d) none, because they do not have hair
5. How likely would it be that they have hair?
a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5
6. How was their hair?
a) A ponytail b) Not in a ponytail
7. How likely would it be that they were wearing a book bag?
a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5
8. How likely would it be that they were wearing glasses?
a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5
9. How likely would it be that they were wearing a watch?
a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5
10. How likely would it be that they were wearing a ring?
a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5
11. How likely would it be that they were wearing earrings?
a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5
12. How likely would it be that they were wearing a headband?
a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5
13. How likely would it be that the person has braces?

a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5

14. What emotion did the teacher express?

a) Upset b) Happy c) Disgust d) Sad

15. How likely would it be that they were short?

a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5

16. How likely would it be that they were tall?

a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5

17. What color was their book bag?

a) Black b) Green c) White d) Brown/ Tan e) None, because they did not have a book bag

18. When the person left what was their emotion?

a) Sad b) Happy c) Mad d) Disgusted