



## Eyewitness testimony for a simulated juvenile crime by male and female criminals with consistent or inconsistent gender-role characteristics<sup>☆</sup>

Lauren R. Shapiro<sup>\*</sup>

Emporia State University, Psychology and Special Education, 1200 Commercial Street, CB 4031, Emporia, KS 66801, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

Available online 28 October 2009

#### Keywords:

Eyewitness testimony  
Memory  
Child witnesses  
Adolescent witnesses  
Adult witnesses  
Sex/gender-role beliefs  
Juvenile crime

### ABSTRACT

Eyewitness recall by 60 adolescents and 60 young adults in Experiment 1 and by 64 children and 63 preadolescents in Experiment 2 for a simulated theft in which gender-role characteristics and sex of criminal were manipulated (i.e., masculine male, feminine male, feminine female, masculine female) was investigated. Gender-role flexibility impacted on crime details and accuracy for criminal features and children's reports included fewer crime and criminal features and central crime details than did preadolescents. Children's gender-role beliefs differentially affected errors made when describing criminals with inconsistent gender-role characteristics. Adolescents provided fewer crime and criminal details and criminal features than did young adults, although both converted inconsistent into consistent gender-role information for the "feminine male" criminal. Forensic implications of the findings are discussed.

© 2009 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

Eyewitnesses serve as a critical part of legal strategy because they can provide police with evidence that leads to the arrest and prosecution of criminals, specifically descriptions of what transpired during the crime and descriptions of the criminal(s). Arrest records show that bystanders are available for police to interview in over half of all misdemeanor crimes (Smith & Visher, 1981) and that their presence encourages victims to report the crime (Greenberg, Wilson, Ruback, & Mills, 1979), resulting in more than 75% of all arrests. Juvenile crimes are oftentimes spurred by peer pressure, making it likely bystanders and/or victims will be the same-age or younger than the criminal (Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986; Zimring, 1998). Surprisingly, juveniles are an underrepresented group in research on eyewitness behavior, even though they commit 18% of the crimes and represent one-fourth of crime victims in the United States (Finkelhor, 1998, as cited in Office for Victims of Crime Monograph, 1999). Preadolescents and early-to-middle adolescents (ages 10 to 15 years) constituted 32% of the 1999 juvenile arrests (Snyder, 2003) and were responsible for 42% of property crimes (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999), with larceny-theft accounting for 70% of the Property Crime Index from 1997–2001. High as they are, these arrest records are conservative estimates of actual delinquent behavior because only one-third of all crimes are reported to police (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 1982). Accordingly, the eyewitness ability of juveniles to provide accurate and reliable legal testimony has been of considerable interest to both legal and psychological professionals.

Accuracy in describing a crime and criminal is complicated by the fact that eyewitness recall is incidental. That is, people's attention is usually directed to completing the goals for the activities in which they are engaged (e.g., shopping, waiting for a bus)

<sup>☆</sup> This research was partially funded by internal grants from Emporia State University. Portions of this research were presented at the Society for Applied Research in Memory and Cognition, Boulder (1999, July) and at the Conference for the Society for Research in Child Development, Boston, March 2007. Acknowledgements are given to Merry Bullock and to the anonymous reviewers for their advice on earlier drafts of this article. My gratitude is extended to the principals and teachers of Emporia and North Lyon County schools, and to the participants and their parents for their role in this project. Finally, I thank Dale Pember for his help in data management and the Child Study Team members for their help in interviewing, transcription, and in data collection, coding, and entry, particularly Corey Palmer, Telisa Purdy, Cassandra Russell, and Elizabeth Brooks.

<sup>\*</sup> North Dakota State University, Department of Child Development and Family Science, 283 EML Hall, Fargo, ND 58105, United States.

E-mail address: lauren.shapiro@ndsu.edu.

at the time of a crime rather than on memorizing a criminal's actions and appearance. Consequently, eyewitnesses may fill in gaps in their recall. One way that they may do that is to rely on cognitive schemas (i.e., mental representations that organize and interpret experiences), preconceived notions, or stereotypes about crimes and criminals when reporting crimes they witnessed (Holst & Pezdek, 1992; List, 1986; Smith, 1991; Tuckey & Brewer, 2003b) and when describing and identifying a criminal (MacLin & Herrera, 2006; Shoemaker, South, & Lowe, 1973), regardless of whether these beliefs are accurate (Bull, 1979).

The goal of the research reported in this article was to address the impact of such schemas, particularly stereotypes about crimes (e.g., bank robberies) and about criminals (e.g., young adult), on eyewitness memory. I chose to focus on and manipulate one salient schema, the gender schema, as an illustration of how beliefs may influence eyewitness memory. Societal expectations about criminals include information in terms of their probable sex, appearance, and behavior. Thus, evoking ideas of a criminal are likely to activate eyewitness' gender schema (i.e., stereotypes of being a male or female in our culture). Information that is congruent with this schema (e.g., criminals are male) may be remembered differently than information that is incongruent (e.g. interpreting a female suspect's behavior of taking a bicycle without permission as borrowing rather than stealing, but interpreting identical behavior by a male suspect as stealing rather than borrowing). Gender schemas themselves may also affect eyewitnesses' understanding of a crime. A given behavior, such as patting victim on head while asking to use the bicycle, judged to be feminine will be considered gender-consistent when performed by a female suspect and may be interpreted as sweet-talking, but will be considered gender-inconsistent when performed by a male suspect and may be interpreted as bullying. These differential interpretations presumably influence police discretionary decisions about consequences, such as to arrest or not arrest the suspect (Hoyt & Scherer, 1998).

### *Role of cognitive schemas in eyewitness memory*

The current investigation examined how cognitive schemas affect eyewitnesses' incidental memory for a simulated juvenile crime by an adolescent criminal who varied in both sex and gender-role characteristics. Cognitive schemas for crimes and criminals, organized as expectations about what typically occurs in crimes and about criminals' physical attributes, behaviors, motives, and personality (Hansel, 1987; Stalans, 1993), are likely to guide eyewitnesses' memory processes (Hamilton, Sherman, & Ruvalo, 1990; Hamilton & Sherman, 1994; Sherman, Macrae, & Bodenhausen, 2000). Experiment 1 compared immediate recall by adolescents (12 to 15 years) and young adults (18 to 22 years), and Experiment 2 compared immediate recall by children (6 to 7 years) and preadolescents (9 to 11 years).

Evidence from the adult and developmental literatures on eyewitness recall has shown that more expectancy-consistent information than expectancy-inconsistent information is recalled (e.g., Srull & Wyer, 1989), but this advantage is affected by the strength of the expectations and the type of information reported (Stangor & McMillan, 1992). For example, in Farrar and Goodman's (1990) schema confirmation-deployment model, there is a three-step process of activating a schema, confirming information consistent with the schema, and then deploying the schema in recall. That is, eyewitnesses will activate (or formulate if none exists) appropriate cognitive schemas to aid perception, comprehension, encoding, and retention of the crime and criminal. During the schema confirmation phase of processing, the eyewitness will devote cognitive resources to verifying expectancy-consistent information in the activated schemas, distinguishing it from expectancy-inconsistent information. Thus, schema activation decreases cognitive effort, making schema-consistent information easier to interpret and more accessible during recall (Sherman et al., 2000; Smith & Studebaker, 1996; Srull & Wyer, 1989; Tuckey & Brewer, 2003a) and provides a framework for remembering the experience.

Schema deployment begins after schema activation and leads to selective attention to expectancy-inconsistent information to establish a distinct memory for the crime and criminal while devoting little attention to processing expectancy-consistent information.

The model also suggests that if there are no existing schemas, the eyewitness will generalize from past experiences, but will not differentiate event information presented in the crime as consistent or inconsistent with expectations, and thus will not engage in schema deployment.

Although crime and criminal schemas can facilitate recall of expectancy-consistent information, errors of omission, distortion, or commission in testimony often occur when a criminal's actions and/or physical characteristics are expectancy-inconsistent. Under low cognitive demands of familiar events, even children can attend to expectancy-inconsistent information; however, under high cognitive demands of eyewitness situations, people fail to process expectancy-inconsistent information, instead focusing on expectancy-consistent information (Van Knippenberg, Dijksterhuis, & Vermeulen, 1999). This leads to filling in memory gaps with expectancy-consistent, but inaccurate information about the criminal and the crime (Sherman & Bessenoff, 1999). Thus, eyewitnesses may provide incomplete reports by omitting expectancy-inconsistent information or produce inaccurate reports by distorting stored inconsistent information to reflect their biases or adding expectancy-consistent information that was not actually present (Harris, Lee, Hensley, & Schoen, 1988; Holst & Pezdek, 1992; Smith & Studebaker, 1996). For example, Tuckey and Brewer (2003a) found that adult eyewitnesses who were shown a filmed bank robbery converted expectancy-inconsistent information (e.g., robbers were carrying bags) into expectancy-consistent information (e.g., robbers were carrying guns). Eyewitnesses also mistakenly report salient details that are typical of a particular kind of crime, but that were not actually present (Greenberg, Westcott, & Bailey, 1998; Smith and Studebaker, 1996), perhaps as a way of filling-in-the-gaps for missing, ambiguous, or forgotten information (Brewer & Nakamura, 1984). The production of such "intrusion errors" during a trial would decrease eyewitness reliability (Holst & Pezdek, 1992).

Drawing from the adult literature, there is evidence that people have well-developed event schemas for crimes, such as different kinds of robberies (e.g., bank, convenience store, mugging) (García-Bajos & Migueles, 2003; Holst & Pezdek, 1992; List, 1986; Tuckey & Brewer, 2003b), and have well-developed schemas for criminals including typical physical attributes and

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات