

Catriona - Presentation

Catriona Havard:

Hello, my name is Catriona Havard and I am a Psychology Lecturer here at the Open University. And I'm also a member of the Forensic Cognition Research Group.

Today I'm going to talk to you about some new research that we've been conducting, trying to improve the accuracy of eyewitness evidence using a new procedure called the Mystery Man.

I'm going to begin my talk by just talking more generally about eyewitness research. Then I'm going to talk about a couple of studies we conducted and the findings that we have. And then I'm going to conclude by looking at some future research that we could carry out.

When we look at eyewitness evidence we use what we call an Eyewitness Paradigm. And this is an experiment in two phases. So in the first phase we have a group of witnesses who view some type of event, so it could be a live crime or it could be a film of a staged theft. And then we implement some kind of delay and then they see a lineup.

Now it could either be a target present lineup that doesn't contain the culprit that they've seen. And obviously here we're interested in how accurate an eyewitness is and how able they are to pick somebody out of that lineup that they've seen before. But we also use a lineup that we call a Target Absent lineup. And this doesn't contain the culprit that they've seen before.

And with this scenario we're trying to simulate the situation that the police have arrested the wrong person. And what we want to look at is, does the witness choose somebody from the lineup even though the person that they've seen previously isn't actually in that lineup.

And prior to seeing a lineup we always ask our witnesses that the person may or may not be there. So that they know that there is a chance that actually the lineup may not contain the culprit.

So depending on the type of lineup that a witness sees may influence the response that they give. So for our Target Present lineups there's three possible responses you can give. There is a Correct Identification or a Hit and that is when they correctly identify the person that they've seen before. There's also a Foil or Filler Identification and that is when they choose somebody from the lineup that isn't the culprit. So it's somebody that's a sort of known innocent. And there's also an incorrect rejection or what we also call a Miss and that is when they incorrectly say that the person isn't in the lineup.

And there's also the Target Absent lineups. So these are the lineups that don't contain our culprit and here there's two possible responses that our witnesses can give. So they can correctly reject the lineup. That is they can correctly say that the person isn't there or they can make what we call a false identification. And this is when they've incorrectly picked somebody from the lineup when obviously the culprit isn't actually in that lineup.

So what we use in the UK is Video lineups. So unlike the States and other countries that use Static Photographic lineups we use Video lineups and they're now the main method of identification in the UK.

Now Video lineups were actually created to reduce the number of live parades that had to be cancelled. So some research by in fact one of the OU Professors here, Graham Pike, found out that 50% of the time live lineups had to be cancelled. And this was due to either the suspect not turning up, the witness not turning up or a lack of suitable stand-ins on the day.

So obviously the great thing about Video lineups are that they can be created shortly after the suspect is arrested. Then once you've got this video image of your suspect you can then match it to a large database of other video images that you have. And then once that Video lineup is created it's portable. It can be taken to your witness rather than expecting your witness to come to the police station.

So what is a Video lineup? Well it's a series of moving clips each of which is 15 seconds long, it begins with the person looking straight at the camera, looking over to the left, to the right and then back at the camera again. And on average a witness would see nine of these clips presented one at a time. And one would be the suspect and then there would be eight similar looking foils.

So just before I go on to talk about my research I'm just going to briefly tell you a little bit about some research that's looked at Video and Photo lineups.

So some of the research that's compared Video and Photographic lineups has found that when it comes to making a Correct Identification from a Target Present lineup there's overall no differences in whether a witness sees a Video lineup compared to a Static Photographic lineup. However, when a witness is presented with a Target Absent lineup that doesn't contain our culprit young adults and adolescents aged 13 to 15 are much less likely to make a false identification from a Video lineup as compared to a Photograph lineup. So Video lineups seem to be increasing the accuracy of identifications with these groups.

However, research with children under the age of 14 and adults over the age of 60 has found that they're much more likely to make a false identification from a Target Absent lineup and that's regardless of whether they see a Video or a Photographic lineup.

Now there's a number of reasons why we think children and older adults are much more likely to make false identifications. Now one is that social demands and expectations that these groups have. So most witnesses when they're actually presented with a lineup have this social demand that they should choose somebody. And it could be that in fact children and adults over the age of 60 are less able to resist this compulsion to choose. There's also this issue of expectation.

So there is some evidence that older adults in particular have an expectation that a culprit will be in the lineup therefore they should choose somebody even if perhaps they don't recognise any one.

There's also the issue of giving a positive response and this appears to be specifically important for child witnesses. So they have a feeling that adults desire them to give a positive response. So they should say yes rather than no or I don't know. And therefore they feel they'd need to pick somebody from a lineup when perhaps actually they don't recognise anybody in that lineup.

There's also the issue of forgetting the unbiased instruction. So as you may remember I said that before seeing a lineup a witness is always told that the person may or may not be there. And there is some evidence that older adults in particular forget this unbiased instruction therefore again they assume that the culprit is in the lineup and they should pick somebody.

So what we've developed to try and reduce this false choosing rate is what we call the Mystery Man procedure. And the Mystery Man is a simple silhouette, a black silhouette with a question mark on it. And it's placed within the lineup and the witness has the option to pick this silhouette if they don't recognise anybody from the lineup.

And there's a number of reasons why we think this might help to reduce the false choosing rate. So given this extra option it allows the witness to pick somebody without making a false identification. It also allows children in particular to give a positive response. They can say it's him but again they're not making a false identification because it isn't a person. And if the issue of forgetting the unbiased instructions is an issue for older adults perhaps seeing this black silhouette of a sort of non-person helps to make the idea more salient that perhaps the culprit isn't in the lineup.

So we carried out two different studies. We had a group of children aged 5 to 12 and in another study we had a group of older adults aged between 60 and 84. And we used the typical eyewitness paradigm. In the first phase our witnesses viewed a film of a staged crime and it was of a young man going in to an office, stealing a laptop, a mobile phone and a wallet. And then after a delay of one to two days our witnesses saw either a Target Present lineup or a Target Absent lineup. And in the controlled condition they just saw the typical Video lineup whereas in our Mystery Man condition the Video lineup had the addition of this black silhouette or Mystery Man.

Prior to seeing the lineup our witnesses were always told the person may or may not be there and they viewed the lineup twice before being asked to make any decision. Now the reason they viewed this twice was because we were following the Police and Criminal Evidence Act which states that a real witness, when they view a crime has to be view a lineup twice before they're allowed to make any decision. So we were trying to stick as closely as we could to what a real witness would experience if they saw a crime.

So now looking at the results that we got for our children first of all. This graph shows you the responses for the Target Present lineups. As I've mentioned previously there's three types of responses. There's the Hit or Correct Identification rate. There's the Miss rate where they incorrectly say the person isn't there. And there's also the Foil Identification rate and that is when they pick somebody other than the target from the lineup.

Now if you have a look at this graph you'll see that actually there's very little difference between the Mystery Man and the control condition. So the good thing is that when we have the Mystery Man it doesn't reduce accuracy. So children are not going to pick the Mystery Man when they have the real target in the lineup.

Looking at our Target Absent lineups with our child witnesses, again you might remember there's two types of responses they can give here. There is to correctly reject the lineup which is to say the person isn't there or there's to make a false identification. And that's to choose somebody from the lineup when obviously the culprit isn't in the lineup.

And what we found here was that when children were given the option of the Mystery Man it significantly reduced that false identification rate. So they were much more likely to correctly reject the lineup when they had the option of the Mystery Man as compared to the standard Video lineup.

So this is great because it shows us that having this Mystery Man increases the accuracy of eyewitness identification, especially when the police arrest the wrong person.

So looking at the responses for our older adults, again first of all we wanted to look at the Target Present lineups. So this is the ones that contain our culprit. And what we found here was that overall there was no differences in accuracy for either the Mystery Man lineup or the standard control Video lineup. So this was good because it shows us that when the older adults have the option to pick the Mystery Man they're not choosing him over the actual culprit of the lineup.

Now moving on to the Target Absent lineups. Again what we found here was a similar pattern to what we found with the child witnesses. When our older adults were given the option to choose the Mystery Man it significantly increased the correct rejection

rate. Whilst in the standard Video lineup they were much more likely to make a false identification and pick somebody from the lineup. So again this is really good because it shows us that this option of having a Mystery Man significantly increases the accuracy for older adult witnesses as well.

So what our two studies show us is that using the Mystery Man procedure in lineups can significantly increase the accuracy for Target Absent lineups for child witnesses and older adults over the age of 60. And using the Mystery Man doesn't reduce the Correct Identification rates when the culprit is placed in the lineup.

So I think this research shows that actually there's quite an easy option here to insert a silhouette in a lineup and it can increase the accuracy of eyewitness evidence. So future research could perhaps conduct some surveys and some focus groups with the police to see how easy it would be to actually implement this procedure.

I would just like to finish by saying thank you very much for listening and there's a number of people who I would like to acknowledge for helping this research take place.