

Eyewitness Testimony & Forensic Psychology

by
Dr David La Rooy
Kingston University, London

• Eyewitness recall

- Almost all crimes that are investigated involve the interviewing of witnesses
- In a typical investigation:
 - 1. Crime is reported
 - **2. Witnesses are interviewed**
 - 3. Police try to solve the case
 - 4. Evidence is evaluated in court

• What do eyewitness memory researchers do?

- 1. Stage an 'eyewitness memory event'
- **2. Interview witnesses**
- 3. Find out the best way to interview witnesses
- It is desirable to:
 - Increase correct recall
 - Decrease errors
 - Improve accuracy

- One way to enhance recall is to use 'repeated interviews'

- Provide witnesses with more than one opportunity to recall the events in question
- New forensically relevant details may be recalled
- Today we will examine -
 - Early research by Ballard
 - Recent research by myself
 - A Case study

Ballard (1913)

- Subjects = 12-year-old boys (N=19)
- Memorise a 36 line poem in 13 minutes
- Memory test 1: recall = 27 lines
- Concluded that memory was ok!

And then the schoolmaster said.....

- "By tomorrow most of it will have been forgotten, and in a week's time it will all have gone."
- So what did Ballard do next?

- Memory test 1: recall = 27 lines of poetry
- 2-day delay
- **Memory test 2: recall = 30 lines of poetry**
- More information was recalled!!!!
- Does this apply to eyewitness memory?

La Rooy (2005)

- What would happen if eyewitnesses were repeatedly interviewed?
- Children experienced a 'Pirate Event'
- They were interviewed twice about what they could remember

- **Correct recall**
 - The second interview contained 6 pieces of new correct information
- **Errors**
 - The second interview contained less than 1 error
- **Accuracy**
 - The accuracy of new information was 92%

Real-Life Case Study

“I quickly ran into my Mom's room and said: Mom, Dad, Elizabeth is Gone!”

The Smart Case

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah. 2002



Brian David Mitchell



Mary Katherine, Ed, and Elizabeth Smart

Orbach, Y., Lamb M.E., La Rooy, D., Pipe, M-E., & Stewart, H. L. (2006, July). A witness to abduction: A case study of repeated interviewing? In D. La Rooy (Chair), Repeated interviews with children. Symposium conducted at the International Investigative Interviewing 2nd Conference, Portsmouth, UK

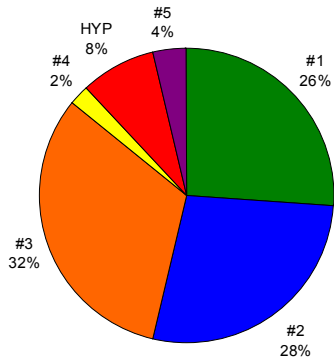
Interview Chronology

- **Abduction - 5 June 2002**
- **Many Interviews**
 - Interview # 1 - 5 June 2002
 - Interview # 2 - 5 June 2002
 - Interview # 3 - 10 June 2002
 - Interview # 4 - 15 June 2002
 - Hypnosis interview - 15 June 2002
 - Interview # 5 - 16 October 2002
- **Elizabeth found - 12 March 2003**

Principal Questions

1. Did Mary Katherine provide new information in the repeated interviews?
2. How useful was this information?

Total number of details = 1075



Disclosure of Suspect's Identity:

Interview 5

· Interviewer: Do you know why you came to see me today?

Child: action response (negative)

Interviewer: You talked to you mom the other night about something that you remembered. I need you to tell me about that.

Well anyways, um, I hopped out of bed and I went in my mom and dad's room and I said: I think I know who it is. And she said 'who?' And I said, remember that one guy who, that you, you found on the street, that you gave him the one dollar and he came and worked for you. She said Emanuel, Emanuel"

- There is a long history in psychology showing that repeated 'tests' improve recall
- Eyewitness memory research shows that repeated interviews help witnesses recall more information
- Case studies show that this happens in real life
- In the future I hope that repeated interviews are used to help solve more crimes
