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Component 1: Essay

According to eyewitness accounts, emotional tension can impair memory, resulting in less accurate recall of unpleasant emotional situations compared to neutral or daily ones (Christianson, 1992). Emotional stress is only one of the many factors that may cause impairment to one's ability to recall their memory. This leads to the question, what are some theories which can explain what may influence an eyewitness's memory of an event?

Past events can be remembered through various sources, including episodic memories and general knowledge (Hemmer & Steyvers, 2009). According to Hemmer & Steyvers (2009), information stored in episodic memory is a direct source for directing recollection, albeit it may be partial or noisy, in which case general knowledge about a previous experience can help fill in missing information and mitigate the consequences of such noise. Emotional stress impairs memory, resulting in less accurate recall of negative emotional events compared to neutral events (Christianson, 1992). Therefore, the stress faced by the eyewitness may affect their ability to recall the events in question or their ability to remember the traumatic event that they were asked to remember. Witnesses who encode memories in high arousal levels are less likely to make accurate identifications (Davis et al., 2019 as cited in Bisht, n.d.).

Another factor that may affect an eyewitness's testimony would be the Weapons-Focus Effect. Weapon focus is the visual attention that eyewitnesses pay to a perpetrator's weapon during the commission of a crime (Stebly, 1992). According to Stebly (1992), it is predicted and expected that the firearm is supposed to focus the eyewitness's attention, making it difficult

to remember peripheral details. Besides that, Bisht (n.d.) stated that longer durations between the seen event and the lineup task, as well as low-optimality scenarios with a challenging identification job, appear to enhance the weapon focus effect. Therefore, the presence of a firearm or weapon in an event will cause an eyewitness to focus on the danger it presents which in return will affect the eyewitnesses' ability to provide a clear testimony.

One other factor which may affect an eyewitness's testimony would be the Stimulus-Sampling Theory. According to Bisht (n.d.), according to the Stimulus-Sampling theory, our vision of the world is based on a selection of available sensory information rather than a direct portrayal of reality. This indicates that our judgements and decisions are based on incomplete and probabilistic data, which can lead to errors in perception and cognition (Bisht, n.d.). According to Wells & Windschitl (1999), although the problem of neglecting to sample stimuli can occur in any field of research, we believe it is more likely to occur when individuals are utilised as stimuli, as most of our cases demonstrate. This shows that any stimuli involving other humans tend to be difficult to make any observations and decisions on. This applies to eyewitness selection in a line-up as well as they involve other humans as stimuli as well.

In conclusion, there are several factors which can cause discrepancies in an eyewitness's testimony. This is why the guidelines in the study by Wells et al. (2006) would help minimise the error in accuracy during line-up questioning. Wells et al. (2006) suggested that the line-up should only include 1 suspect per line-up in order to avoid the eyewitness choosing the suspects that best match the descriptions and not on their recollection of events. Secondly, Wells et al. (2006) suggested for all the fillers (non-suspects) in the line-up to match the suspect's general

description in order for the eyewitness to pick a suspect based on their own memory instead of a suspect standing out amongst the rest. And thirdly, Wells et al. (2006) suggested that the investigators should inform the eyewitness that the suspect may or may not be in the line-up. This is done so that the eyewitness does not make a decision based on the pressure that there is a suspect in the line-up and potentially picking someone that is not the suspect. Adhering to these guidelines will help reduce errors and discrepancies in eyewitness testimonies.

References

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