

Social influences on the metacognitive regulation of eyewitness memory reports

Citation for published version (APA):

Rechdan, J. (2017). *Social influences on the metacognitive regulation of eyewitness memory reports*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University, Department of Psychology, University of Portsmouth Portsmouth, United Kingdom.]. Datawyse / Universitaire Pers Maastricht. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20170628jr>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2017

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20170628jr](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20170628jr)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

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Valorization Addendum



This chapter addresses the application of scientific knowledge in practice, or valorization. The topic and results of this thesis are primarily of theoretical importance, and their practical applications are not overt. However, here I will demonstrate how they are relevant and innovative. I will also discuss the implementation of plans for future research related to this topic, and the dissemination of the results to target groups.

Relevance

Misconceptions about human memory abound. The results of a survey of the U.S. population showed that 63% of respondents believe that memory works like a video camera, 48% believe that memory is permanent, and 37% supported the notion that the testimony of one confident eyewitness should be enough to convict a criminal defendant (Simons & Chabris, 2011). Eyewitness testimony can exert a great deal of influence on the outcome of a trial. In criminal courts, confident eyewitnesses who provide detailed accounts can sway the opinion of judge and jury, forever altering the fate of the individual on trial (O'Neill Shermer, Rose, & Hoffman, 2011). Eliciting accurate, detailed accounts from eyewitnesses is therefore of utmost importance for investigators. Research on eyewitness memory has contributed to our understanding of human memory, and to the development of investigative tools and methods. Despite this, miscarriages of justice still occur. The Innocence Project is an organization dedicated to justice reform and exonerating the wrongly convicted through DNA evidence. According to the organization's statistics, over 70% of cases of wrongful conviction involved either erroneous eyewitness identification or testimony. Clearly, there is still much that research can do to increase the general public and legal practitioners' understanding of the limitations of human memory, and establish best practice guidelines for eliciting accurate and detailed information from eyewitnesses. The present thesis adds to the large body of research on eyewitness memory, which spans well over fifty years and is still as relevant today as it ever was.

Target Groups

One of the primary aims of this thesis was to test the validity of a theoretical model of metacognitive monitoring and control of memory reporting under varied social conditions. As such, academic researchers are the primary target group for dissemination of results. The results reported here raise many new questions that should be addressed by future research. Findings from further work in this area

may later aid in the development of investigative interviewing tools and techniques. At present however, replication and further investigation of the results of this thesis by researchers is needed to clarify how the social context in which memories are reported influences the content of reports.

A second target group for the results of this research is the general public. As noted above, many people still have a poor understanding of how memory functions. Such misunderstandings can prove highly problematic. Non-specialists can become witnesses or serve as jury members. It is therefore important that research findings be communicated to the public in an accessible manner. A proper understanding of the limitations of human memory, and the influence of the social context in which memories are communicated can make for more reliable witnesses and more qualified jurors and judges.

Activities/Products

The results of this thesis have been presented at three international conferences. Two manuscripts of the findings have been submitted to memory and cognition journals. A third article aimed at furthering non-specialists' understanding of socially reported memories was published in an online peer-reviewed journal. In addition to the five experiments that comprise this thesis, I have also been involved in two additional experiments during my doctoral training. The first investigated the effects of question order on metacognitive monitoring and control, and the second investigated the efficacy of three different interview techniques in conditions of divided and full attention. I hope to continue using the knowledge and training gained from my doctoral studies to contribute to research and public outreach.

Innovation

The eyewitness memory literature has addressed the accuracy and quantity of details in memory reports in varied conditions. A handful of previous studies have examined meta-memory in eyewitnesses through the lens of Ackerman & Goldsmith's (2008) model. There is also a well-developed literature on how feedback and witness conformity affect eyewitnesses' memory reports. However, to my knowledge, this thesis represents the first set of experiments designed to assess the effects of social comparative feedback and misinformation on metacognitive monitoring and control of eyewitnesses' memory reports. The experiments reported here were designed based on findings from two distinct literatures (research on

social influences on eyewitness memory reporting, and meta-memory), and represent an innovation in that they combine the two. Memory reporting often occurs in a social setting, or with the potential for some level of social influence (Paterson & Kemp, 2006; Hirst & Echterhoff, 2012). It is therefore an important contribution of this thesis that the validity of the prevailing model of meta-memorial monitoring and control was assessed in similar conditions.

Implementation

As mentioned above, I have already taken steps to disseminate the results of this thesis to other academics through conference presentations and journal articles. One of the manuscripts resulting from the present work was submitted to an open-source journal, so that other academics may have unpaid access to it. I have also authored a peer-reviewed article in an online journal aimed at a non-specialist audience. I am active on several social media outlets, and post information that is relevant to my research. Recently, I contributed my specialist knowledge of meta-memory in a research collaboration with colleagues at the University of Portsmouth. I hope to continue to conduct research on eyewitness memory, teach, and communicate findings to the public throughout my academic career.