Comparing Adult and Child Eyewitnesses Using Video Line-ups

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Background and Aims

In the UK, identification procedures are subject to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (1984), or PACE. The latest codes of practice of this act, in 2008, stated that when practicable a video identification should be conducted. Video Identification Parades by Electronic Recording, or VIPER is now most commonly used. This was a move away from live line-ups that had previously been employed as the favoured identification method. In a VIPER parade, the witness views 15 sec randomly ordered head-and-shoulders moving videos of the suspect and eight foils, selected for their similarity of appearance to the suspect.

Research into the efficacy of video identification parades, using adult participants, has demonstrated that as well as producing comparable correct identifications for Target Present line-ups, VIPER line-ups may serve to reduce the number of false identifications (incorrectly selecting a foil as the culprit) in Target Absent parades (Valentine, Darling & Memon, 2007). In addition, research has also shown that VIPER line-ups are fairer than live lineups to suspects (Valentine & Heaton, 1999) and equally fair to suspects of different races (Valentine, Harris, Colom Piera, & Darling, 2003). Although a small, but growing, body of research exists in the use of VIPER with adult witnesses, little research has been conducted with children. And yet, research conducted in Scotland demonstrated that one third of VIPER parades were viewed by children under 16 years of age (Memon, Havard, Clifford, & Gabbert, 2009, as cited in Havard, Memon, Clifford, & Gabbert, 2009). This level of prevalence of child eyewitnesses indicates the great need for continued research in this area.

Havard et al. (2009) found evidence to suggest older children benefit in a similar manner to adults from viewing moving images, as presented in a VIPER line-up. On the other hand, such improvements were not evident with younger children. However, although the findings of this study suggest a similarity between the effects found in older children and adults, no conclusions could be drawn as adults were not included in the study. Therefore it is hoped that the inclusion of both adults and children in the current proposed study will produce results that are more readily comparable. This study will present the VIPER line-ups in two different ways, sequentially and simultaneously. Research using static images has shown that presenting images sequentially significantly reduces incorrect identifications in Target Absent line-ups (Steblay, Dysart, Fulero, Lindsay, 2001; Kneller, Memon, & Stevenage, 2001; Maclin, Zimmerman & Malpass, 2005).

However, other research has shown that children can perform better on facial discrimination tasks when images are presented simultaneously, for unlimited periods of time (Mondloch, Dobson, Parsons, & Maurer, 2004). Therefore, this study seeks to explore whether simultaneous presentation can increase the number of correct line-up rejections made by younger children.

This study also aims to extend the current body of research into the effects of using VIPER line-ups, by comparing the performance of adult and child participants of different ages. It will also explore whether simultaneous presentation of VIPER images can increase the number of correct rejections in Target Absent line-ups.

Methodology

This study will adopt a 3 (Adult, 10-year-old children and 7-year-old children) by 2 (sequential VIPER presentation and simultaneous VIPER presentation) by 2 (Target Present and Target Absent) between participant design.

Participants of differing ages will be recruited using different means. Children will be recruited through local primary schools, after informed consent is gathered from care-givers. Adults will be recruited through the university’s student participation scheme. There will be 60 participants group each age group.

Participants in schools, and universities will witness a live event, in which the ‘suspect’ will enter the classroom/lecture theatre and be introduced to the children/students by the teacher/lecturer. There will be no attempt to replicate a crime scene. After a delay of 2-3 days participants will individually be asked to view either a Target Present or Target Absent, sequential or simultaneous line-up. Line-ups will consist of 9 moving images. This is in accordance with PACE guidelines that stipulate that line-ups must contain at least 8 foils in addition to the suspect. Target Present line-ups will contain the target and 8 foils, whereas Target Absent lineups will contain 9 foils. The lineups will be created in concordance with PACE rules, so that foils resemble the suspect in age, gender, ethnicity and ‘station in life’.

References


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