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## The Perception of Children as Reliable Eyewitnesses

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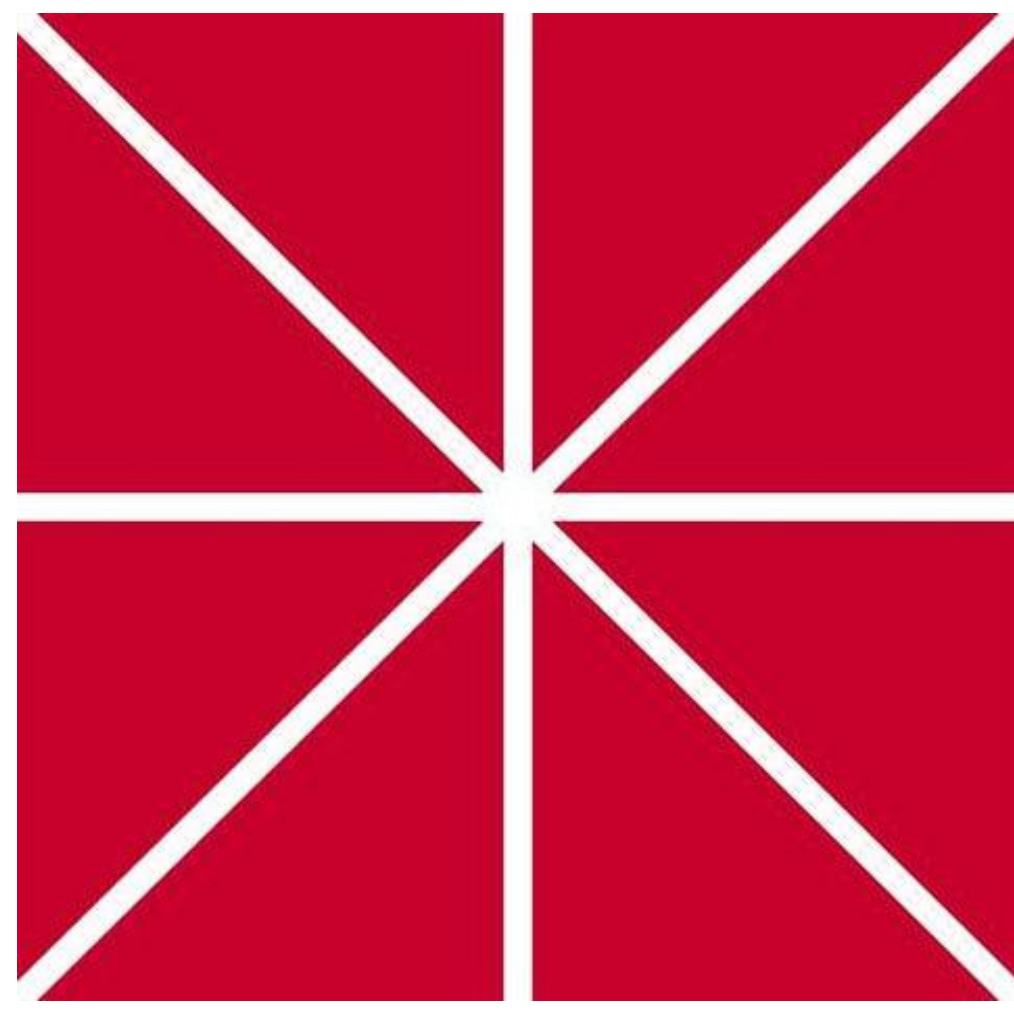
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# The Perception of Children as Reliable Eyewitnesses

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PSY 497: Senior Thesis

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## Introduction

- The Witness Credibility Model → confidence, likeability, knowledge, and trustworthiness (Brodsky et al., 2010)
- Younger eyewitnesses were frequently rated as less credible than older child eyewitnesses, despite the type of crime and a written versus videotaped mock trial (Goodman et al., 1987)
- Black defendants (90%) were more likely than white defendants (70%) to be convicted when race is not salient (Sommers & Ellsworth, 2001)
- Female participants found child victims more credible than male participants (Bottoms & Goodman, 1994)
- Child sexual assault victims were seen as credible, but child bystanders may be doubted (Bottoms, 1993)

## Hypotheses

1. Older child eyewitnesses will be believed more than younger child eyewitnesses
2. White child witnesses will be believed more than Black child witnesses
3. Female participants will be more likely than male participants to view the child eyewitness as believable
4. Participants will be more likely to believe a child witness when they are the victim of a crime rather than a bystander

## Methods

- Scenario 1: child bystander witnessed a man's backpack being stolen under threat of injury
- Scenario 2: child as victim of theft under threat of injury
- Child: female, Black or White, six or 10 years old
- Witness Credibility Scale
- Additional question: how believable would you rate the eyewitness to be?

## Results

- There was not a statistically significant difference in believability scores ( $t(71) = -.3, p = .371$ ) between older child eyewitnesses ( $M = 142.8, SD = 28.8$ ) and younger child eyewitnesses ( $M = 140.5, SD = 29.6$ )
- There was not a statistically significant difference in believability scores ( $t(71) = -1.2, p = .125$ ) between White child eyewitnesses ( $M = 137.6, SD = 30.4$ ) and Black child eyewitnesses ( $M = 145.5, SD = 27.5$ )
- There was not a statistically significant difference in believability scores ( $t(68) = -1.1, p = .143$ ) between female participants ( $M = 143.7, SD = 30$ ) and male participants ( $M = 135.4, SD = 27.7$ )
- There was not a statistically significant difference in believability scores ( $t(71) = -1.1, p = .139$ ) between child bystanders ( $M = 138.2, SD = 29$ ) and child victims ( $M = 145.6, SD = 29$ )
- There was a statistically significant difference between the female and male participant groups in terms of score on the believability measure for the additional question ( $t(68) = -1.7, p = .043$ )

## Discussion

- While most of the results were not statistically significant, the direction of the means was as predicted (except for race), which suggests future research may find statistical significance with more participants
- Reliability of eyewitnesses may depend on both the eyewitness themselves and the people perceiving them
- Bias exists when examining eyewitness believability
- The need to enforce diverse juries

### Limitations:

- No funding
- Limited time span
- Homogenous student population
- Number of participants
- Scenario length

## References

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