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Memory is a malleable store of information that has been demonstrated to be unreliable and easily manipulated (Loftus & Palmer, 1974) by language alone. Post-event information can alter a witness's memory of details of the crime and the offender (Loftus & Greene, 1980).

Consequently, interview and questioning techniques have been proposed to reduce the unconscious manipulation of the eyewitness's memory by police. The Cognitive Interview technique (Geiselman & Fisher, 1984) is used to enhance a witness's information retrieval during police questioning. Cognitive Interview (CI), in actuality, consists of four memory retrieval prompt techniques.

Witnesses are encouraged to report every detail, no matter how trivial they may perceive such information to be, so as to try trigger retrieval of key details (Smith, 1983). The interviewer mentally recreates the personal (e. g. emotions, senses) and environmental context of the crime (Bower, Gilligan, & Monteiro, 1981; Smith 1979). The interviewer asks the witnesses to report the crime from an array of different perspectives, and to describe what they think others may have seen (e.

g. other witnesses or the perpetrator themselves). These two techniques stem from the encoding specificity principle (Tulving & Thomas, 1983) that suggests information recall is increased when the conditions of the event and retrieval are similar. The recency effect is an aspect of the serial position effect (Ebbinghaus) refers to the findings that an item's position in a list affects recall accuracy. The recency effect refers to the higher probability

of recall of the most recently stored information. Consequently, witnesses should recount the incident backwards.

The changes in perspective and order of events serve to reduce the involvement of schemas, expectations, and pre-existing knowledge in the witness's memory retrieval (Geiselman et al, 1984). Geiselman et al conducted an experiment in 1984 in order to evaluate the CI procedure, in which students were interviewed immediately following a class disruption by actor through a questionnaire. Those whose questionnaires featured the four cues within the CI technique were able to recall more information correctly than those who were instructed to continue trying to remember as much information as possible. Numerous lab and field studies have shown also CI technique increases the number of correct and accurate details, and only a minor rise in incorrect information. After reviewing 27 studies, Bekirian and Dennett (1993) found that in all cases using CI, more accurate information was obtained than the other interview techniques.

However, Cognitive Interview has its limitations. The four components of the overall techniques result in a long process that requires intensive attention and questioning in response to the witness's answers, and is overall a demanding task for the interviewer. Context recreation introduces the risk of involving imagination (particularly with children) and rendering the technique counterproductive as once a memory is altered, it is difficult to reverse this effect.