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| **Learning Table 8 – Factors Affecting Eyewitness Testimony****ANXIETY** |
| **AO1 – Knowledge and Understanding** | **AO3 - Evaluation** |
| **Johnson and Scott (1976)**They led participants to believe they were going to take part in a lab experiment. While seated in a waiting room participants heard an argument in the next room. In the ‘low anxiety’ condition a man then walked through the waiting area, carrying a pen with grease on his hands. Other participants overheard the same heated argument, but this time accompanied by the sound of breaking glass. A man walked out of the room, holding a paper knife that was covered in blood. This was the ‘high anxiety’ condition. Participants later picked out the man from a set of 50 photos. They found that **49%** of the low anxiety condition correctly identified the man carrying the pen, with just **33%** of the participants correctly identifying the man with the knife. From this they concluded that the **tunnel theory** of memory argues that a witness’s attention narrows to focus on a weapon, because it is a source of anxiety.  | **An Alternative Explanation**One issue with Johnson and Scott’s research into the effect of anxiety on EWT is that it lacks internal validity. This is because **Pickel** (1998) argues that Johnson and Scott’s research may be testing surprise rather than anxiety. For example, he conducted an experiment using scissors, a handgun, a wallet or a raw chicken as the hand held items in a hairdressing salon video. Eyewitness accuracy was significantly poorer in the unusualness conditions (chicken and handgun). This suggests that the weapon focus effect is due to unusualness (surprise) rather than anxiety and therefore tells us nothing specifically about the effect of anxiety on EWT. As a consequence, this reduces the explanatory power of Johnson and Scott’s research into the effect of anxiety on EWT.  |
| **Yuille and Cutshall (1986)**They conducted a study of a real life shooting in a gun shop in Canada. The shop owner shot a thief dead. There were 21 witnesses – 13 agreed to take part in the study. The interviews were held 4-5months after the incident and these were compared with the original police interviews made at the time of the shooting. Accuracy was determined by the number of details reported in each account. The witnesses were also asked to rate how stressed they had felt at the time of the incident, using a 7 point scale and asked if they had any emotional problems since the event such as sleeplessness. They found that the witnesses were very accurate in their accounts and there was little change in the amount of accuracy after 5 months – though some details were less accurate such as recollection of the colour of items and age/height/weight estimates. Those participants who reported the **highest levels of stress were most accurate.** *\*\*Furthermore, participants were very resistant to the effects of leading questions. (You can use this study as part on an answer on leading questions if you include the above sentence.)* | **Lacks Internal Validity**However, a weakness of Yuille and Cutshall’s research it that it is low in internal validity. This is because they had little control over any extraneous variables that may have occurred. For example, they would not have had control during the four month period after the crime had happened. Variables such as witnesses conferring about what the thief looked like, what the shop owner said, whether he was provoked etc or not. Also the questions asked by the police may have had an impact on the accuracy of what happened. This is an issue because if witnesses had conferred, they may have induced false memories and believed they saw something which may not have happened. Additionally, we know from previous research that if the police had not followed protocol and asked leading questions, this too can affect the accuracy of EWT. If the majority of witnesses have the same answer this could influence others to change their memory of the gun crime incident. This would then impact on the accuracy of EWT, in which researchers would not be measuring whether real-life crime and anxiety does lead to more accurate recall. As a consequence, this lowers the credibility of Yuille and Cutshall’s research into the effect of anxiety on the accuracy of EWT. |
| **Yerkes-Dodson Law**http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/61/YerkesDodsonLawGraph.pngThe effect of anxiety on eye witness testimony is unclear as the research present contradictory findings. Deffenbacher (1983) applied the Yerkes-Dodson Law to EWT. Lower levels of anxiety produce lower levels of recall accuracy. But memory becomes more accurate as the level of anxiety experienced increases. However there comes a point when the optimal level of anxiety is reached. This is the point of maximum accuracy. If an eyewitness experiences any more stress than this, then their recall of the event suffers a drastic decline.  | **Anxiety is difficult to operationalise**One issue with the research into the effect of anxiety on EWT is that the concept of anxiety is very difficult to define and measure (operationalise).For example, anxiety has many elements including emotional, cognitive and behavioural. Furthermore, what one person may class as an anxiety-inducing situation may not be classed in the same way by another. Therefore this reduces the internal validity of the research into the effect of anxiety on EWT as it is so subjective.As a consequence this reduces the overall explanatory power of the research into this area.  |