

## **Topic: Eyewitness Testimony and Memory**

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**ENC 2135**

**Loftus, Elizabeth F. “Eyewitness Testimony.” *Harvard University Press*, 1996.**

Loftus explains how human memory works and why eyewitness testimony is often unreliable. She shows that memory is not a perfect recording of events and can be changed by stress, time, and the way questions are asked. The source discusses how leading questions and misinformation can cause witnesses to remember events inaccurately.

This source is useful because it provides psychological explanations for why eyewitnesses make mistakes in criminal cases. Elizabeth Loftus is a well known expert in memory research, making this source credible and commonly used in both psychology and legal studies. I will use this source to explain the limits of memory in criminal investigations.

**Wells, Gary L., et al. “Eyewitness Identification Procedures.” *American Psychologist*, vol. 55, no. 6, 2000, pp. 581–598.**

This article focuses on how police procedures influence eyewitness Choices. The authors explain how lineup instructions, feedback from officers, and the structure of lineups can increase the risk of wrong identification emphasizes that system variables, which are controlled by law enforcement, play a major role in eyewitness accuracy.

This source is important because it connects psychological research directly to criminology and law enforcement. Gary Wells is a leading researcher in this field, and the article is peer reviewed which makes it a reliable academic source. I will use this source to discuss how investigative procedures can impact criminal outcomes.

**Cutler, Brian L., and Steven D. Penrod. *Mistaken Identification*.  
Cambridge University Press, 1995.**

Cutler and Penrod analyze factors that increase the likelihood of mistaken eyewitness identification, such as stress, poor viewing conditions, and identifying someone of a different race. They also explain how jurors often overestimate the accuracy of eyewitness testimony.

This source helps connect eyewitness errors to courtroom decision making. It works well with Loftus and Wells because it shows how memory issues and police procedures affect jury judgments and verdicts. This source will help support my argument that eyewitness testimony can strongly influence criminal trials.

## **Investigative Field Essay**

Eyewitness testimony has long been viewed as one of the most persuasive forms of evidence in the criminal justice system. Jurors often trust eyewitness accounts because they come from real people who claim to have directly observed a crime. As a result, eyewitness testimony frequently plays a major role in criminal investigations and trials.

However, psychological research challenges the assumption that eyewitness testimony is always reliable. Studies in cognitive psychology show that memory is not exact and can be influenced by stress, suggestion, and time. Research has also shown that common law enforcement practices, such as lineups and questioning methods, can shape what witnesses remember. These findings raise concerns about how eyewitness testimony is used in criminal cases.

Despite this research, eyewitness testimony continues to be heavily relied upon in the legal system. There is often a gap between psychological science and real world criminal justice practices. This gap can lead to wrongful convictions and unfair trials.

This essay shows how psychological research on memory explains the limits of eyewitness testimony and how these findings apply to criminology.