



Example Answer A

Eye witness testimony is responsible for the highest number of wrongful convictions in the US. Groups such as the innocence project have worked hard to exonerate over 300 wrongly convicted individuals in America in the past decade. However there is some debate as to whether eyewitness accounts by children are reliable and whether they should be used in a court of law.

Leading questions are proven to have far more of an effect on children. In the McMartin sexual abuse trials in the 1980's in America, leading questions were repeatedly asked. These were suggestive and leading questions that would manipulate and influence the children's responses into fabricating evidence for the allegations. The impact the question had on the children could suggest that children are overly susceptible to distortion and that therefore their accounts are less reliable than those of adults.

However, that is not to say adults are not influenced by leading questions. Loftus and Palmer's study in the 1980's on the reliability of eyewitness testimony proved that even a group of intelligent university students were susceptible to the influence of leading questions. Therefore if adults are too influenced by leading questions then the only real difference in adults and child eyewitness accounts is the degree of influence.

When looking at the reliability a study was done with a group of children between the ages of 8-15. After watching a video of an event they were asked questions on it. The study found that children who were younger were more likely to agree with incorrect information when suggested by an older or authority figure, whereas children from 13-15 were far less compliant. Although this suggests that a child's willingness to comply with the researcher could impact the reliability of their eyewitness testimony, to some degree adults are just as willing to add or leave out details they have been challenged. A study by Emerson found that after conferring with another individual, 71% of adults added details that had not been included in their condition of the study. This would suggest that adults are just as influenced by co-witnesses or a willingness to comply as children only to a lesser extent.

In conclusion the eyewitness testimony of children is no less reliable than adults provided the account is handled carefully to ensure they cannot be influenced by leading questions. This understanding of what can influence eyewitnesses has allowed law systems globally to develop and improve the treatment of witnesses (use of cognitive interview). As Ceci and Bruck found that although as previously mentioned they are more likely to exaggerate, when dealt with correctly children are just as reliable as those of adults.



Example Answer B

Eye witness testimonies are essential in helping the police find out more about crimes, a huge 70% of crimes in the USA use eye witness testimonies. In America 65% of 500 people were wrongly convicted. This suggests that sometimes they are not very reliable. Children are being used as eyewitnesses frequently; however there is a debate as to whether we should use children because they can be 'less reliable'.

A case that provides evidence of unreliable testimonies is that of the McMartin Day Care centre in America whereby a mother of a 2 year old son, Judy Johnson accused Raymond Buckley, a member of staff, of sexually abusing her child. This sparked off other parents coming forward to tell the police about staff abusing their child. Interviews were had with the children and a letter was sent out to parents telling them to ask their children about sexual things. The interviews were not very sensitive or dealt with well. They were structured questions such as 'did you play any games?' and the children initially replied no. However as the interviews went on, children were replying yes so they could please the authority figure. The children were in nursery and were at the pre-conventional stage. They were also influenced by their parents, who distorted their memories. This suggests that children are less reliable and are heavily influenced by other people.

On the other hand, Ceci and Bruck suggested that children are capable of recalling more than what they let on. However they found out that children's memories can be distorted into thinking that something is real. This suggests that without leading questions children can be reliable but it needs to be dealt with more sensitively. However adults are more reliable because they are more in the post conventional stage of human rights.

There are some cognitive and social factors to be taken into account, one of them being compliance. This means that you want to please the interviewer/police to give the 'right' answer, rather than give your own answer. Children are more compliant than adults because they want to please a person of authority. Another factor is that of suggestibility meaning the questions the police ask may be leading to something e.g. Loftus and Palmer (1974) found out that using a different word in the question changed the participants answer. This study was based on adults so this could suggest that adults can be just as suggestible as children. However the McMartin case shows that children are more likely to change their answers.

Overall eye witness testimonies are more reliable when it comes to adults, they are able to record in more detail e.g. Yuille and Cutshall conducted an experiment of a real life robbery and adults had to describe what happened and were very accurate. Children can be used as eye witnesses but they are less reliable and need to be treated sensitively.



Example Answer C

The reliability of eyewitness testimony has been questioned recently due to the amount of false eyewitness testimonies being revealed. However it is not fair to state that the 'eyewitness reports of children are less reliable than those of adults' due to the fact that any type of eyewitness testimony has the possibility to lack reliability regardless of age. Age does not necessarily affect recall and therefore testimony.

Ceci and Bruck support this idea and state that children can recall events just as accurately as adults and therefore can give just as a reliable testimony as adults. The results that they found support this claim and show there is no difference in recall ability between adults and children. This therefore refutes the statement that the testimonies of adults are less reliable than those of children as there was no difference in ability to recall detail and therefore there was no difference in reliability. However Ceci and Bruck did state that children were more susceptible to manipulation, which could in turn affect their recalling of events and thus the reliability.

Additionally the McMartin day care case strongly suggests that the eyewitness testimony of children is unreliable as the children recalled things that did not ever actually happen and this led to false and severe accusations towards those who worked in the day care. This shows that a child's eyewitness testimony can indeed be unreliable. However the children in this case were supposedly asked leading questions which would have affected their recall.

Generally the eyewitness testimony of children has questionable reliability but that is not different to the questionable reliability that adults' testimonies face.

When trying to determine the reliability of children's eyewitness testimonies in comparison to the reliability of adults, it is important to assess the reliability of adult eyewitness testimony. Several studies show that adult eyewitness testimony is just as flawed as children's.

Loftus and Palmer's study on the effect of leading questions on memory recall revealed that adults can be just as easily affected / manipulated and provide false recall of events. This also suggests that eyewitness reports are not 'less reliable than those of adults' as both adults and children have been shown to have their recall affected. Additionally the 'Innocence Project' revealed statistics highlighting that 60% of false imprisonment was due to faulty adult eyewitness testimony, further supporting this. However this can be argued against as Loftus and Palmer's study was carried out in an artificial environment. Yuille and Cutshall conducted a study that revealed that after 4 months the recall of witnesses to a real life crime was still accurate and reliable, suggesting that they are not always flawed.



Overall adults eyewitness testimony has been shown to be unreliable, just as the testimonies given by children have been. Generally however the belief that the 'eyewitness reports of children are less reliable than those of adults' can be argued as both adults and children are susceptible to things such as leading questions and therefore it cannot be argued that the testimony given by a child is less reliable.

Example Answer D

The use of children's eyewitness testimonies has been a topic of controversy for decades.

Researchers have found that children can in fact remember a great deal of factual information. This shows that their testimonies are relevant and useful sources of evidence. However, studies have also shown that children are much more prone to suggestibility. This means that the interviewer must be very careful when wording questions in order to prevent a change in a child's memory. Closed questions should be avoided but if necessary should be followed with a question such as 'tell me more about that'. This ensures the child is answering from their own memory. Loftus and Palmer found that leading questions can alter people's memory of an event with their study into estimated crash speeds when asked with different verbs. Therefore due to children's suggestible nature, extra care should be taken to avoid such examples. It was found that older people can generally remember more information with suggestibility at much lower rates. This shows that eye witness testimony from older people is much more reliable than younger people since the information is much less likely to be altered.

Children are also subject to conformity and might change their answer to please the interviewer. This can cause reliability issues and steps should be taken to reduce this scenario by not giving praise or criticism. This ensures the child won't change their answer to what they think the interviewer wants.

In summary, children can provide a reliable eye witness testimony as long as precautions to protect their memory are put in place.