

Differential Effects of Confirming Post-Identification Feedback on Eyewitness
Testimony-Relevant Judgments

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Abstract

Many studies have found that while the majority of eyewitnesses' testimony-relevant judgments (e.g., certainty, attention, view) were vulnerable to the confirming post-identification feedback effect, time-in-view and distance judgments appeared to be immune to this effect (see meta-analysis by Steblay, Wells, & Douglass, 2014). To date, there has not been any explanation as to why these two judgments were not affected by confirming feedback while the rest of the judgments were. The main aim of this thesis was to investigate this issue.

Experiments 1 and 2 tested two possible reasons for these differential feedback effects. First, time-in-view and distance judgments might be protected from the influence of confirming feedback due to strong internal cues (i.e., the accessibility hypothesis). Second, confirming feedback might only be useful for informing judgments that focus on the target person's face or the identification decision (e.g., certainty, attention, view), and hence irrelevant to estimations of actual time and distance. Two variables were manipulated between-participants: feedback type (confirming feedback, confirming-specific feedback, no feedback) and retention interval (immediate, delay between viewing an event and making judgments). The confirming-specific feedback was made relevant to the judgments by pairing confirming feedback alongside specific information associating time and distance with a correct identification decision. This feedback was found to affect time-in-view (Experiments 1 and 2) and distance judgments (Experiment 2) in the immediate condition, while confirming feedback by itself did not affect these judgments even in the delay conditions when internal cues were weaker. These results suggested that weak internal cues alone were not enough for judgments to be

affected by feedback; the relevance of feedback information to the judgments also played an important role in determining whether or not judgments would be affected.

Experiment 3 further investigated the effects of confirming-specific feedback on time-in-view and distance judgments by modifying the wording of the specific feedback. The results indicated that confirming-specific feedback affected time-in-view and distance judgments in Experiments 1 and 2 because the specific feedback provided a reference point for these two judgments. When this reference point was removed in Experiment 3, the specific feedback (that associated viewing time and distance with a correct identification) no longer affected time-in-view and distance judgments. These results suggested that people might not infer their viewing time and distance from a correct identification decision.

Factor analysis was then conducted to investigate the factor structure of testimony-relevant judgments and found that time-in-view and distance judgments fell into a factor independent from the rest of the factors that were related to the identification process. Findings from basic research on time and distance estimations were then reviewed, with these suggesting that eyewitnesses' sources of internal cues for making time-in-view and distance judgments might be different than those of other judgments. Finally, the thesis also investigated the relative accuracy of witnesses' time-in-view and distance judgments. This research made a contribution to the development of the current theoretical framework of the post-identification feedback effects and the practical use of time-in-view and distance judgments in the legal system.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution in my name and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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