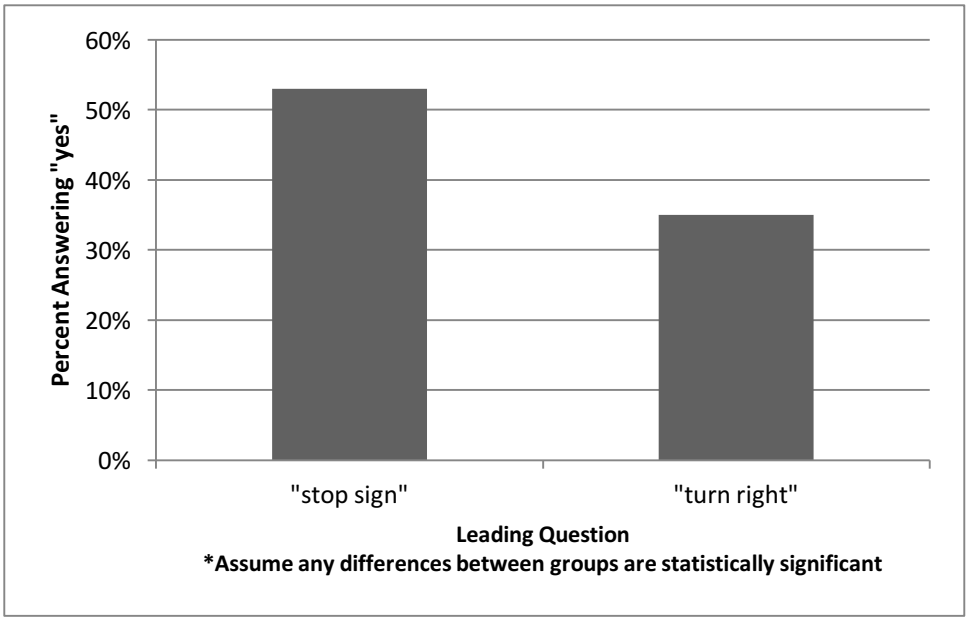
Leading Questions and the Eyewitness Report – Part I

The memories of eyewitness reporters are essential to court proceedings, however these memories might not be as reliable as they seem. Memories can be modified by questions asked after an incident or crime. In the present study, two experiments were conducted to examine *how* questioning can modify memories of an event. In Experiment 1, participants were shown a film of a multiple-car accident which was caused by a car turning right and not stopping at a stop sign. Participants were then given a questionnaire about the incident, in which they were either asked "How fast was Car A going when it ran the stop sign?" or "How fast was Car A going when it turned right?" All participants were then asked "Did you see a stop sign for Car A?" Figure 1 summarizes the results of Experiment 1.

Figure 1- Percentage of participants who reported seeing a stop sign



1. Based on the data in Figure 1, describe the pattern of results from Experiment 1.

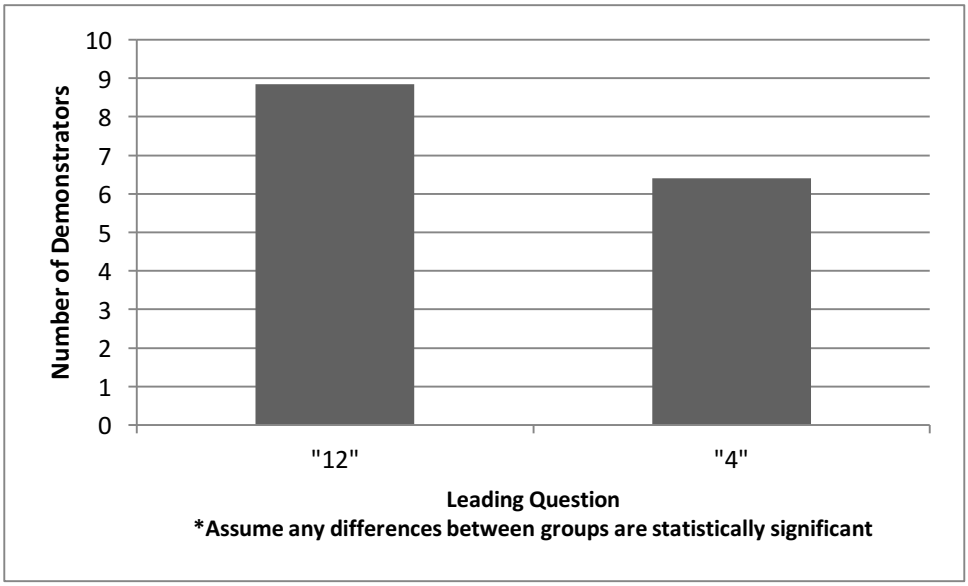
2. What can you conclude from this data? What are two possible conclusions about how memory was influenced?

3. How could an experiment be designed to distinguish between the two possible conclusions identified in the previous question? Outline a possible experiment, specifying your dependent variable (DV) and independent variable (IV)

Leading Questions and the Eyewitness Report – Part II

In a second experiment, the authors changed the study design. In Experiment 2, participants were shown a video of *eight* demonstrators disrupting a classroom, with a male leading the demonstration. Participants were then asked "Was the leader of the *four* demonstrators a male?" or "Was the leader of the *twelve* demonstrators a male?" All participants were then asked "How many demonstrators did you see entering the classroom?" Figure 2 summarizes the results of Experiment 2.

Figure 2- Average number of reported demonstrators



1. What has changed about the methods from Experiment 1 to Experiment 2? Why might this change be meaningful?

2. Based on the graph, describe the pattern of results from Experiment 2.

3. What can you conclude from these data? Are there other possible explanations?

4. In considering both studies together, what conclusions can you draw that you could not have in considering only one or the other?

5. How does your proposed experiment from Part I compare to Experiment 2 in terms of the ability of the study to come to a single conclusion? What are the advantages and disadvantages to your experimental design compared to this one done by the experimenters?