Extra-Legal Information Transfer during Eyewitness Identification

Andrew J. Evelo

The Graduate Center, City University New York

Adviser: Margaret Bull Kovera
Abstract

Researchers recommend that eyewitness lineups be conducted by administrators who do not know which lineup member is the suspect (i.e., that lineups be administered in a double-blind manner). Research on the effects of administrator knowledge generally support the idea that single-blind lineups damage the integrity of the lineup procedure and can lead to increases in the false identification of innocent suspects (Kovera & Evelo, 2017). This body of research has either explicitly stated or implicitly assumed that these negative effects are the result of leakage—that is, administrators are conveying information to witnesses about which lineup member to pick. Borrowing from dual-process models in social psychology, we used two studies to test an administrator-eyewitness interaction model in which information is passed from the single-blind administrator to the eyewitness if and only if there is motivation and ability to do so. Study 1 (the Cue Transmission Study) failed to replicate administrator influence effects and was unable to test their moderation. The results of Study 2 (the Cue Reception Study), however, indicated that a witness’s ability and motivation were crucial to the interpretation of cueing information from an administrator. The later results support the use of social dual-process models in understanding lineup interactions, signify the importance of understanding witness variables—not just administrator behavior—in lineups, and continue to support the recommendation that lineups be conducted in a double-blind manner (Wells et al., 2020).