

Abstract

The current research built a comprehensive database that includes over 1,000 facial identification studies published in the last five decades. Using this database, two research questions, which are crucial for better understanding facial identification performance, were examined. The questions are 1) how variables influence facial identification performance, and 2) whether findings from facial identification research can be generalized across study types. Topically focused effect-size analyses and study characteristic analyses demonstrated that, among the 38 variables investigated in the current meta-analysis, stimulus alteration and participants' age were the most powerful factors influencing identification performance. Results from aggregated effect-size analyses supported the generalizability of facial identification research—differences in findings between basic and applied facial identification studies were systematically accounted for by research methodological variables. Finally, the current meta-analysis demonstrated that the manner in which variables affect identification performance varies with the variable types, and that eyewitness identification researchers have contributed to the improvement of the criminal justice system by increasingly focusing on system variables and false alarms.