

Introduction to Commentaries on the Illinois Pilot Study of Lineup Reforms

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Between 2000 and 2002, the Illinois Commission on Capital Punishment, appointed by then-Governor George Ryan, reviewed the justice procedures that lead to capital punishment with the objective of identifying reforms that enhance the system's fairness and accuracy. The Commission issued its report in 2002. In recognition of the potential role of mistaken identification in erroneous conviction, this report included six recommendations concerning eyewitness identification procedures, several of which have since become law (see Mecklenburg 2006 for details).

Following this report, the Illinois legislature mandated a study of the effects of double-blind and sequential lineup procedures (two of the six recommendations of the Commission) and provided guidance for the study protocol. In 2004, the Illinois State Police appointed Sheri Mecklenburg (who would later become Chief Counsel to the Chicago Police Department and is now Assistant United States Attorney) as Director of the field study. The study was carried out in three Illinois districts. Data were collected in 2004 and 2005 and were analyzed by Drs. Roy Malpass and Ebbe Ebbesen (independently). Details of the study and findings appeared in the Report to the Illinois Legislature ("Illinois Pilot Report;" Mecklenburg 2006).

Since its publication, the Illinois field study has received a great deal of attention among eyewitness researchers, law enforcement, and attorneys. The Illinois Pilot Report has

been the subject of attention at several conferences and multiple publications on the web and in print. Indeed, the report has generated sufficient attention that Dr. Margaret Bull Kovera, Associate Editor, and I decided to devote a portion of LHB journal space to a forum for commentaries about the Illinois field study and Illinois Pilot Report (Mecklenburg 2006).

This section begins with a commentary (Schacter et al. this issue) co-authored by seven distinguished psychologists convened by the Center for Modern Forensic Practice of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Their commentary focuses on the methodology of the study with particular reference to a confound between double-blind (versus single-blind) and sequential (versus simultaneous) presentation that was present in the study. Sequential presentation was always double-blind, and simultaneous presentation was always single-blind. They conclude that this design has "devastating consequences for assessing the real-world implications of this particular study" and they explain the reasoning behind their conclusion.

In a spirited defense of the Illinois field study, Sheri Mecklenburg et al. (this issue), re-iterate and defend the rationale for the study design, observe that laboratory studies have confounds that resemble the confound in the Illinois study, suggest that data from the study can be evaluated independently of the confound by comparing results to existing studies, argue against the alternative (and more pessimistic) interpretations of the study results, and ultimately conclude that "we cannot dismiss the value of a field study such as the Illinois Pilot Program, which has great potential to add to the body of knowledge on eyewitness identification."

All five commentaries conclude that additional field research on lineup procedures are necessary and that the timing is right to move forward with these field studies.

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Three of the commentaries focus at least in part on how future field studies should be designed in order to provide informative data about lineup procedures and address the relation between research and policy change. Nancy Steblay (this issue) comments upon the challenges of conducting meaningful field studies on eyewitness identification and on the challenges of making policy recommendations based on an incomplete knowledge base. Gary Wells (this issue) discusses the types of control conditions that are needed in field studies in order to generate data that will enhance our understanding of how lineup techniques operate in actual criminal investigations. Stephen Ross and Roy Malpass (this issue) discuss the limitations of the Illinois study and the broader question of when it is justifiable to advocate for policy change based on scientific findings. They also give specific recommendations for improving future field studies of lineup techniques.

As the editors of this special section, we wish to offer several observations about the Illinois study and commentaries. First, we appreciate that scholars may disagree on the importance of the Illinois study's contribution to our understanding of the relative merits of double-blind (versus single-blind) and sequential (versus simultaneous) lineups. In part, this disagreement may be the result of different perceptions of what the main findings of the Illinois study are. One may reach some understanding of the study results from the Illinois Pilot Report and subsequent commentaries but that is no substitute for the product that typically results from the peer-review process. Ideally, a report of the study would be subjected to peer-review for publication in a scientific journal. Through the peer-review process, the study would be judged against contemporary standards for eyewitness research. If published, the manuscript would likely benefit from the constructive aspect of peer-review, as do most published articles. If the study survived this process and was published, we would have a better understanding of what precisely we are arguing about. In a previous era, one might claim that the peer-review process unnecessarily slows down the dissemination of research findings but given modern technology and publication practices, it is now possible to go from submission to publication in 4 months (more time is typically needed if revisions are required). The time invested for peer-review seems a small price to pay given the benefits to all parties who have interests in the research.

Second, although the *results* of the Illinois field study may be unclear to us, other contributions of the study are clear. The Illinois field study and Illinois Pilot Report have highlighted the need for additional field studies. The study and report have led to fruitful discussions and collaborations among eyewitness researchers and law enforcement professionals about field research and practices generally.

These discussions and collaborations may have evolved independently of the Illinois study but the Illinois study made them happen more quickly. Although these consequences may be perceived as beneficial effects of the Illinois study, there have been undesirable consequences as well, including the needless and baseless disparaging of the reputations of individuals involved in the research and those involved in critiquing it. Such activity is detrimental to the scientific enterprise, serves to punish rather than reinforce well-intentioned scientific efforts, and can have devastating effects on individuals' professional reputations and personal well-being. It also sends a discouraging message to future eyewitness researchers. Let us move forward with the high levels of enthusiasm, integrity, collegiality, and transparency that had typically characterized the field of eyewitness research for the past 30 years.

Last, we should explain the editorial process used for these commentaries. The Schacter et al. (this issue) manuscript was submitted to LHB, reviewed by an Associate Editor (Kovera) and the Editor (Cutler), and accepted for publication under the condition that the editors would invite responding commentaries (to which Schacter et al. agreed). Authors of the other four commentaries were sent the Schacter et al. (this issue) article and invited to submit responding commentaries with the understanding that brief submissions would undergo "in-house" review, whereas lengthy commentaries would be submitted to external reviewers for evaluation. All four commentaries were brief, were subjected to in-house review by Kovera and Cutler, and were accepted for publication by Cutler. Readers who find fault with the content of the commentaries, therefore, are encouraged to blame the Editor rather than LHB's outstanding peer-review process.

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