Lineup Construction Methods:
A National Survey of U.S. Police Investigators

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In the last two decades, identification research has been directed at determining the factors that cause recognition errors. However, virtually all of the research has involved undergraduate and naive lay persons as subjective. There is little known on what police officers do in the course of their investigations. The present research surveys police investigators to determine the procedures that they employ when constructing and presenting lineups to eyewitnesses. Surveys were sent to 500 U.S. police jurisdictions and 220 were returned. On average, the respondents had 12 years experience as police officers and had constructed an average of 329 lineups (89 live, 240 photographs).

Some of the results were consistent with the conclusions of lineup researchers. For example, the police officers report paying most attention to upper face features (e.g., hair) in selecting non-suspect lineup members (foils). Other results indicate that the police use different procedures than those recommended in the research literature. For example, police report using similarity as the major basis for selecting foils, whereas, recent research shows that selection of foils based exclusively on suspect appearance can produce biased lineups. In addition, research has advocated the use of sequential lineups, but few investigators reported that they use this technique. These and other findings provide direction and implications for additional research opportunities. Systematic investigation of police procedures is a more direct approach to the study of eyewitness identification than the more common use of naive research subjects and the results of this "real-world" research might have greater influence on police professional to institute better techniques.