

# Decision Processes Colloquia

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**Monday, September 23, 2013**

*Where:* JMHH 255

*When:* 12:00 noon to 1:20 PM

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## **The Empirical and Theoretical Evolution of Eyewitness Identification Reform**

*ABSTRACT:* False eyewitness identification is a primary cause of false convictions in the United States. Thirty years of social science research have provided an empirical and theoretical foundation for procedural reforms designed to reduce the risk of false identifications that can lead to false convictions. These reforms have now been adopted by many state and local law enforcement jurisdictions. This reform movement has put social science to service in a noble cause. However, it has been driven in part by a false premise that the recommended procedures reduce the risk of false identifications with little or no loss of correct identifications, thus producing a net gain in accuracy. This increased accuracy with no cost view is both an empirical claim about the patterns of results that are obtained as well as a theoretical claim about the patterns of results that should be obtained. More broadly, it may be viewed as an instance of the Right (capital R, morally right) is right (lower-case r, for practical outcomes) assumption. The present research examines the origin, evolution, and 30 year persistence of these widely-held but incorrect empirical and theoretical claims. Based on a review of the eyewitness identification research literature I argue that the “no cost” view was driven by a compelling but underdeveloped theory and maintained by a host of data analytic choices, misinterpretations, and publication biases. The implications for psychological science and public policy are discussed, with a look toward the future of research on eyewitness memory.