

Evaluating Eyewitness Identification: Best Practices For Forensic Mental Health



Evaluating Eyewitness Identification (Best Practices for Forensic Mental Health Assessments) by Margaret Bull Kovera

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

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Eyewitness identification is a critical component of many criminal investigations. However, it is also a notoriously unreliable source of evidence. In fact, studies have shown that eyewitness testimony is often inaccurate and can lead to wrongful convictions.

The unreliability of eyewitness testimony is due to a number of factors, including:

- **Memory distortion:** Eyewitnesses are often unable to accurately recall events that they have witnessed. This is because memory is a reconstructive process, and it is subject to a variety of biases and distortions.

- **Contextual bias:** Eyewitnesses are also influenced by the context in which they view an event. This includes factors such as the lighting, the presence of other people, and the emotions that they are experiencing.
- **Weapon focus:** Eyewitnesses often focus on the weapon that is used in a crime, and they may not be able to accurately identify the perpetrator.

Given the unreliability of eyewitness testimony, it is important to carefully evaluate the accuracy of this type of evidence before using it to make a decision about a person's guilt or innocence.

Best Practices for Evaluating Eyewitness Identification

There are a number of best practices that can be used to evaluate the accuracy of eyewitness identification. These include:

- **Conducting a thorough interview:** The first step in evaluating eyewitness identification is to conduct a thorough interview with the eyewitness. This interview should include questions about the circumstances of the event, the details of the perpetrator's appearance, and the witness's level of confidence in their identification.
- **Using a lineup:** A lineup is a procedure in which the eyewitness is shown a group of individuals and asked to identify the perpetrator. Lineups can be either sequential or simultaneous. In a sequential lineup, the witness is shown the individuals one at a time, while in a simultaneous lineup, the witness is shown all of the individuals at once.

- **Evaluating the witness's confidence:** The witness's level of confidence in their identification is an important factor to consider when evaluating the accuracy of the identification. A witness who is very confident in their identification is more likely to be accurate than a witness who is less confident.
- **Considering other factors:** In addition to the factors listed above, there are a number of other factors that can be considered when evaluating the accuracy of eyewitness identification. These factors include the witness's age, their level of education, and their familiarity with the perpetrator.

Eyewitness identification is a critical component of many criminal investigations, but it is also a notoriously unreliable source of evidence. By following the best practices for evaluating eyewitness identification, it is possible to reduce the risk of wrongful convictions based on this type of evidence.



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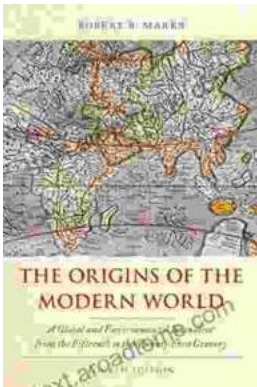
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