Determining how UK policing should construct identification parades: Using diagnostic-feature-detection theory to maximise eyewitness identification accuracy

ESRC DTP Collaborative Studentship

The University of Birmingham and the National VIPER® Bureau

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The University of Birmingham as part of Midlands Graduate School is now inviting applications for an ESRC Doctoral Studentship in association with our collaborative partner the National VIPER® Bureau commencing October 2020.

Identification parades are routinely administered by police forces globally to determine whether a witness identifies the police suspect as the perpetrator of a crime. During a parade, a witness views images of the suspect and others who resemble the suspect, called fillers. Worldwide, legal guidance on constructing parades uses the same central principle—the fillers should be plausible alternatives so that the parade is fair to the suspect (e.g., UK Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, Code D, 2017). Yet, even when constructing legally 'fair' parades, fillers can vary in similarity to the suspect. Currently, there is no evidence-based direction for identification officers on optimal filler similarity.

The research aims to determine how identification officers in the UK and internationally should select fillers, so that the parade is fair to the suspect (i.e., the suspect does not unduly stand out from the fillers), and maximises witness accuracy. It will do this by testing the newest psychological theory that makes predictions about the effect of filler similarity on witness accuracy—the diagnostic-feature-detection theory (Wixted & Mickes, 2014)—and by collaborating with the National VIPER® Bureau, the UK's leading video identification service owned and managed by The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire.

The project incorporates expert input from VIPER® and their subscribers (police forces) to test real-world procedures and collect real-world data on parade similarity. The research will answer important theoretical and practical questions, and has been co-developed with the Director of VIPER®, Mr Wayne Collins.

Application Process

To be considered for this PhD, please complete the Collaborative Studentship application form available online here along with a cover letter and a CV and email this to pg-psychology-admissions@contacts.bham.ac.uk. Shortlisted applicants will also be required to provide two

references. The successful candidate will be subject to personal and financial vetting checks prior to appointment in order to be able to conduct the research. Applicants should be aware that it is not always possible to carry out adequate vetting checks on persons who have not been resident within the UK for the last three years. Therefore, where this applies, applicants may be refused on the grounds that it was not possible to vet them to the appropriate standard.

Application deadline: Friday 6 March 2020

Midlands Graduate School ESRC DTP

Our ESRC studentships cover fees and maintenance stipend and extensive support for research training, as well as research activity support grants. Support is available only to successful applicants who fulfil eligibility criteria. To check your eligibility, visit: www.mgsdtp.ac.uk/studentships/eligibility/

Informal enquiries about the research or the School of Psychology at the University of Birmingham prior to application can be directed to Dr Melissa Colloff by email at M.Colloff@bham.ac.uk.