



B169 Resolving Latent Conflict: What Happens When Latent Print Examiners Enter the Cage?

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be better informed regarding consultation and conflict resolution methods used during the verification phase of the Analysis, Comparison, Evaluation-Verification (ACE-V) process at the Houston Forensic Science Center (HFSC). Attendees will also be advised of trends observed when this process is utilized via the study of approximately 2,000 completed latent print examination cases. The goal of this presentation is to use these results to inform policies regarding conflict resolution and case processing for other forensic disciplines.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by fostering better understanding of consultation and conflict between examiners of different experience, training, and employment backgrounds. This study focuses on data gathered from two years and approximately 2,000 latent fingerprint examination cases completed at HFSC. The results will shed light on assessing the types of conflicts that arise and will more predictably and accurately resolve those disagreements.

Verification, which provides scientific validity and scrutiny to a reported conclusion, is the final stage of the latent print analytical process. Despite standard operating procedures and quality controls designed, in part, to mitigate differences, latent print processing and analysis inherently lends itself to conflict. This conflict arises when two latent print examiners, analyzing and comparing the same friction ridge impression, do not use or interpret the same points of data when formulating their conclusions.

In order to preemptively moderate potential conflict, HFSC's Latent Print Section has implemented a standard indicating the number of minutia required before a latent impression is deemed suitable for comparison. Despite this standard, differing levels of experience and training remain and the ability to identify minutia presence and type signals from competing factors, such as pressure and distortion effects, background interference, and processing technique, may create differences of opinion regarding the comparison conclusions. As a result, latent print examiners may consult with each other regarding the impression and the corresponding area(s) of an exemplar, noting both similarities and/or differences used to formulate their respective conclusions. From this point, a consensus agreement regarding the conclusion of the comparison may be reached; however, if the two examiners cannot agree amongst themselves, the conflict is escalated until either a supervisor or the collective decision of the examiners in the section determines the reported conclusion.

While studies have scrutinized latent fingerprint comparisons, past research has not thoroughly examined the verification stage of the process in a casework setting. This study presents an analysis of approximately 2,000 cases completed by HFSC latent print examiners. This analysis focuses on overall occurrence of consultation and conflict resolution over a two-year period with an emphasis on rate and trends of occurrence and outcomes in



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relation to examiner demographics, such as experience level. Inferences for policies to reduce trends in intra- and inter-experience-level conflict occurrences will be made.

Latents, Verification, Consultation