



B206 We're Not as Good as We Think, But We're Not as Bad as They Say: The Need for an Objective Look at the Challenges and Perceived Issues Within Forensic Sciences

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have an appreciation for both sides of the debate over the validity of the forensic sciences and its role in investigative and legal proceedings.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting and addressing the divide that exists between forensic practices and the view of those practices from critical outside perspectives.

The forensic sciences are currently facing unprecedented challenges. Over the past several years, a series of high-profile missteps have exacerbated the perception that forensic scientists operate in a culture devoid of science. Stoked by a series of DNA exonerations, high-profile fingerprint misidentifications, newsworthy accreditation issues, and a litany of rogue scientists falsifying results, some of our most outspoken critics have generalized the entire forensic field as something that is unworthy of participation in our judicial process. On the opposite side of the debate, there are some among forensic scientists who have dug in their heels and taken the position that such claims are entirely false, everything is fine, and there is no reason to change anything that is currently being conducted.

As with any other scientific endeavor, forensic science is not perfect and is in serious need of improvements in a wide range of areas. To think that it will be fine to proceed in a “business as usual manner” is naive at best. Practices are not as good as some would believe and critics do raise some valid points that need to be seriously considered. Fortunately, rational scientific thought is winning out and a great deal of effort is being expended to make improvements throughout the forensic field. Unfortunately, our critics do not seem to be impressed with many of these efforts. Potentially tainted by environments that only highlight the negative, many of the critics appear unwilling to step outside of their spheres to take an objective look at the efforts toward change that are being put forth.

It is the objective of this presentation to demonstrate that both points of view, each heavily influenced by their own forms of confirmation bias, are incorrect. The opposite extremes of each group select only the information that supports their position yielding a two-way unwillingness to objectively evaluate the merits of each other's position. We may not be as good as we think, but we are certainly not as bad as they say.

Forensic Malpractice, Confirmation Bias, Forensic Validity