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The CSI Effect

The CSI Effect, as described in the article, is a phenomenon resulting from people viewing forensic and crime television shows. This phenomenon influences jurors to have unrealistic expectations of forensic science and causes them to incorrectly weigh the presence or absence of forensic evidence. This problem could lead to the wrongful conviction of someone or lead to a guilty person walking free.

Previous research suggested that the CSI Effect had a pro-defense bias, as jurors who watched more television were less confident with a guilty verdict the lower the amount of DNA evidence. The study did not show support for a pro-prosecution bias, people that watched crime shows regularly were not likely to convict without DNA evidence. More research was done to see if people knew of the CSI Effect, and if so, whether knowing about it influenced their beliefs in forensic evidence. According to the artice, 70% of people surveyed did not know what the CSI Effect was, though most watched crime shows regularly.

Though the CSI Effect seems to have a pro-defense bias, it effects how the criminal justice system operates. As said in the article, studies have shown that attorneys and others working in the criminal justice system operate as if this phenomenon is reality, causing unnecessary work.

In the article, they suggest showing potential jurors a multi-media type presentation, teaching them the CSI Effect and how to interpret evidence, especially forensic evidence. This type of learning is proven to register in the brain more successfully than oral learning. A second option suggested during the voir dire process is eliminating any juror that shows a bias based on the CSI effect. I believe perhaps these two solutions are possible, it would be beneficial to the criminal justice system that its jurors understand the actual reality of forensic evidence, and how to operate as a juror.

Assuming the CSI effect is real, attorneys could use the voir dire process to eliminate jurors, but I also feel too many people may watch crime television shows and be influenced by the effect. Prosecutors, or all attorneys for this matter, and the whole criminal justice system, can best benefit from teaching potential jurors learning about the CSI effect and more importantly, their duties as a juror.

The CSI Effect and Its Potential on Juror Decisions - Alldredge 2015.pdf