



Developing Diagnostic, Evidence-Based Approaches to Interrogation[☆]



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While research on interrogation has traditionally focused on problematic practices that lead to false confessions, more recent research has addressed the need to develop scientifically validated techniques that lead to accurate information from both suspects and sources. In the present review, we summarize this recent research on building and maintaining rapport, eliciting information, presenting evidence, and assessing credibility. Research is described in the context of accusatorial (guilt-presumptive and psychologically manipulative) versus information-gathering (cooperative and evidence based) approaches to interviewing and interrogation. We also suggest future directions for research to continue to improve the efficacy of interviews and interrogations.

Keywords: Interrogation, Interview, Confession, Rapport, Evidence, Information-gathering

Each month in the United States, dozens of interrogation training courses are offered to local, state, and federal law enforcement by companies such as John E. Reid and Associates, Wicklander-Zulawski, and Kinesic. Federal law enforcement, military, and intelligence training agencies also regularly provide basic and advanced interrogation training to their personnel. Important issues to consider relate to whether the methods trained in such contexts are evidence-based and yield accurate and reliable evidence or intelligence that effectively furthers an investigation. Unfortunately, companies that offer such training have not generated or provided a scientific basis upon which to assess the efficacy of their approaches. Instead, these methods have been primarily based upon *customary knowledge*—practices that have developed over time through experience, that are handed-down through observation and story-telling, and that are ultimately codified in manuals, policies, and regulations. Over the past several decades, scholars have begun to assess the validity of the methods trained and used by interrogation professionals, with the goal of applying *scientific knowledge*—a perspective drawn from independent observation, that is theory driven and empirically derived,

and is founded upon the principles of replication and peer review. In this review, we distinguish between two prominent models—accusatorial and information-gathering approaches to interrogation—and offer a scientific perspective on techniques that can influence the likelihood of eliciting true and false information.

Why Do People Confess?

A number of theories have been proposed to explain when and why people confess (see Gudjonsson, 2003). While these theories highlight the role of internal (e.g., Reik, 1959) and external mechanisms (e.g., Gudjonsson, 2003; Hilgendorf & Irving, 1981) that may lead one to confess, they generally fail to distinguish factors that may lead to true versus false confessions. For example, the internal accountability model of confessions posits that internal feelings such as guilt or remorse that result from transgressions or violations of social mores, will lead a person to confess in order to alleviate these negative feelings (Reik, 1959). Other accounts highlight the role of anxiety and social pressure in an interrogation. According to such theories, a suspect

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experiences anxiety whenever they are being deceptive (Jayne, 1986), and social pressure can be placed upon an individual to facilitate a confession and alleviate anxiety. Decision-making models of confession have also been proposed, suggesting that suspects will weigh the potential costs (e.g., prison sentence, fees, dishonor) against the potential benefits (e.g., end the interrogation, relief from social pressure) of confessing. Such decision-making models often incorporate suspects' perception of the evidence or proof against them, which has been shown to be a powerful predictor of confession likelihood (see Houston, Meissner, & Evans, 2014).

Recent empirical research involving both field surveys (Redlich, Kulish, & Steadman, 2011; Sigurdsson & Gudjonsson, 1996) and experimental studies (Houston et al., 2014) have validated the influence of such factors in predicting. A recent meta-analysis of the experimental literature has also assessed the influence of psychological processes across true versus false confession (Houston et al., 2014). Consistent with previous research, false confessions appear to be primarily based upon perceived external social pressures to confess that stem from the interrogation approaches employed; the persistent accusations, disbelief, and requests for compliance from the interrogator; or the interrogation context itself. In contrast, true confessions appear to derive from internal feelings of guilt, remorse, and accountability for the misdeed, as well as the perceived strength of the evidence against them. These findings provide a framework for understanding the influence of accusatorial and information-gathering approaches, as described below.

Accusatorial Approach

An accusatorial approach (typically used in North America and many Asian nations; Costanzo & Redlich, 2010; Leo, 2008; Ma, 2007; Smith, Stinson, & Patry, 2009) is generally characterized by the goal of eliciting a confession. Such techniques typically involve an assumption of the suspect's guilt whereby interrogators seek to control the interaction and use confirmatory and closed-ended questions to elicit an admission (Meissner et al., 2014). In addition, an accusatorial approach typically introduces psychologically manipulative tactics that involve the development of themes designed to maximize a suspect's perception of guilt through the use of (often exaggerated or even fabricated) evidence presentation, and then to minimize a suspect's evaluation of personal responsibility and the consequences of self-incrimination. Minimization and maximization techniques in conjunction with a small, isolating interrogation room, can yield a powerful influence on a suspect that leads to increased confession rates in field studies (Meissner et al., 2014). But is it possible that these techniques might yield increased social pressure and therein produce non-diagnostic outcomes?

Advocates of the accusatorial approach frequently claim that the methods are only applied on suspects determined to be guilty (Inbau, Reid, & Buckley, 2011), a claim that remains unfounded (Meissner & Kassin, 2002; Narchet, Meissner, & Russano, 2011). Researchers have examined the various techniques encompassed in the accusatorial model of interrogation, and most importantly their influence on true and false confession

rates under controlled, experimental conditions. For example, the use of minimization tactics that either diminish responsibility for the act or lessen the potential consequences associated with the act have been shown to increase both true confessions by the guilty and false confessions by the innocent (Horgan, Russano, Meissner, & Evans, 2012; Klaver, Lee, & Rose, 2008; Narchet et al., 2011; Russano, Meissner, Narchet, & Kassin, 2005), consistent with the psychological process model described above. Similarly, the presentation of false or exaggerated evidence (Horselenberg, Merckelbach, & Josephs, 2003; Horselenberg et al., 2006; Kassin & Kiechel, 1996; Klaver et al., 2008; Nash & Wade, 2009; Redlich & Goodman, 2003; Wright, Wade, & Watson, 2013) and the use of "bluff" techniques that allude to the strength of evidence that is yet to be processed (Perillo & Kassin, 2011) have been shown to reduce the diagnostic value of confession evidence by increasing the likelihood of a false confession. Overall, while accusatorial approaches may lead to information (confessions) obtained from the person being questioned, they significantly increase the likelihood of obtaining false information and thereby reduce the diagnostic value of the confession evidence obtained (Kassin et al., 2010; Meissner et al., 2014). This information appears to be due to increased social pressure and the manipulation of perceived consequences, which have been demonstrated to predict false confessions (Houston et al., 2014).

Information-Gathering Approach

By contrast, an information-gathering approach (developed as the PEACE model in the United Kingdom and later adopted by Norway, New Zealand, and Australia because of the problematic nature of accusatorial approaches and wrongful convictions; Bull & Soukara, 2010; Clarke & Milne, 2001) is characterized by the goal of eliciting information (rather than a confession, per se) whereby interrogators establish rapport, use exploratory and open-ended questions, and address contradictions via the strategic presentation of evidence (Meissner et al., 2014). Over the past decade, researchers have begun to focus on developing an empirical understanding of the effectiveness of the information-gathering approach, with the goal of offering an evidence-based alternative to law enforcement, military, and intelligence personnel (Meissner, Hartwig, & Russano, 2010). The extant literature (from both laboratory and field studies) indicates that an information-gathering approach can provide an effective method for eliciting more diagnostic information from both cooperative and reluctant subjects. Specifically, information-gathering has been shown to increase the likelihood of truthful confessions and decrease the likelihood of false confessions when compared to an accusatorial approach utilizing minimization and maximization under controlled laboratory conditions (Meissner, Russano, & Narchet, 2010; Narchet et al., 2011). Additionally, an information-gathering approach can lead to more admissions from guilty subjects and critical information in a non-cooperative intelligence collection context (Evans et al., 2013a).

Over the past decade, key aspects of an information-gathering approach have been developed and assessed empirically.

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