



Coercive Interrogation and False Confessions

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- Article by Ian Leslie...
- ...on research by Professor Laurence Alison, Chair of Forensic Psychology, Institute of Psychology, Health & Society, University of Liverpool
- Based on analysis of recordings of over 1,000 hours of police interviews
- Conclusion: Coercive Interrogation is counter-productive – it destroys the trust on which an interview depends

Prof Alison's Research...

- ...is convincing but...
- Has it 'quietly revolutionised the study and practice of interrogation'?
- Another claim would be from Prof Gísli Guðjónsson of the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London
- 'The Psychology of Interrogations, Confessions and Testimony' (1992)





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Police Interviewing

(My appreciation)

- No systematic interview training before 1990
- Detectives learnt from their colleagues
- Most common style: coercive and manipulative
- No UK manual before 1987
- US Manual (Inbau & Reid, 1962) proposed coercive methods
- First UK manual (Walkley, 1987) proposed methods in breach of Police & Criminal Evidence Act, 1984

Guðjónsson's Research

- Devised a theoretical model with *suggestibility* as a central component
- Viewed false confessions as a major negative outcome of using coercive techniques
- Saw differing personality traits as leading to differing susceptibility to negative effects of interviewing style – ie different interviewees react differently to different techniques
- Interviewers often are unaware of these factors

Guðjónsson's Research

- Suggestibility has a long history in psychology
 - Cattell (1895), Binet (1900)
- Interrogative suggestibility (ie suggestibility while being questioned) has special characteristics
- Guðjónsson has devised two psychometric scales to investigate the nature of interrogative suggestibility
- He has also devised a measure of compliance
- He has used these to investigate susceptibility to false confession – and followed this up with interviews

Difficulties in Research

What is a 'false confession'?

- A 'confession' from someone who is totally innocent?
- An overstatement of involvement from someone who was involved?
- How does a false confession differ from a retracted confession?
 - All this leads to inconsistency

Guðjónsson's Categories

- Voluntary False Confessions
- Coerced-compliant Confessions
- Coerced-internalised Confessions



Voluntary False Confessions

- Morbid desire for notoriety
- Unconscious desire to expiate for guilt (specific or generalised)
- Inability to distinguish reality from fantasy
- Intention to protect the real culprit



Coerced-compliant Confessions

- Confesses in reaction to the pressures of being interrogated
- Because they are innocent, they feel that ‘it will all be sorted out later’

Coerced-internalised Confessions

- Suspects come to believe during interrogation that they have committed the offence, despite having no memory of it
 - No memory – amnesia, alcohol-induced
 - Distrust their recollections because of manipulative techniques used by the interviewer

Case Study 1 – Judith Ward

- 4th February 1974: Coach bombed on M62 in Yorkshire
- 12 deaths, 38 injured
- Outrage in parliament and the media
- Ports watched; Judith Ward arrested boarding ferry at Liverpool
- Had been observed at Sinn Fein marches
- Working as stable girl, had been a soldier
- Questioned for 2½ days...

Case Study 1 – Judith Ward

- Confessed to M62 bombing + explosions at Euston Station and the Defence College at Latimer
- Also claimed to have been married to two IRA members and to have had a baby with one of them
- *Greiss Test* showed she had been handling explosives
- Found guilty, sentenced to life
- Problem: All the above was untrue
- At the time she was in the Blue Boar, Chipping Norton
- After 18 years, Appeal Court found her not guilty

Case Study 2 – The Guildford Four

- 8.50pm, 5th Oct 1974, explosion at Horse & Groom Guildford
- 9.25pm, explosion at Seven Stars
- 5 killed, 57 injured
- 28th Nov Paul Hill arrested in Southampton
- Within 24 hours, had made a written confession implicating Gerry Conlon
- Further arrests: Paddy Armstrong, Carole Richardson

Case Study 2 – The Guildford Four

- Prosecution relied on confessions + *Greiss Test*
- Defence: Confessions made under stress, alibi statements withheld, over 140 inconsistencies
- Unanimous verdict of guilty
- Life sentences started October 1975, quashed by Court of Appeal October 1989
- Carole Richardson's confession: coercive-compliant
- She later mistrusted her memory

Case Study 3 – The Birmingham Six

- 21st November 1974, Explosions at the Mulberry Bush and at the Tavern in the Town, Birmingham
- 21 killed, 182 injured
- Four men arrested boarding a ferry – Gerry Hunter, Richard McIlkenny, William Power, John Walker
- In interview, they named Patrick Hill, who was already on the ferry. He and Hugh Callaghan were also arrested.
- All were interviewed under extreme pressure.
- Power & Hill were found positive on the *Greiss Test*.



Case Study 3 – The Birmingham Six

- Power made a 6-page written confession
- Three others made written confessions
- The police alleged that Power & Hill made verbal confessions
- In October 1985, *World in Action* demolished the forensic evidence
- In 1997, Tom Clarke, a retired police officer who was on night duty while the interviewing took place, reported abuse of the interviewees
- In the autumn of 1997 the Court of Appeal upheld the convictions

Case Study 3 – The Birmingham Six

- In 1990, *World in Action* identified the real bombers
- In August 1990, the Home Secretary referred the case back to the Court of Appeal
- On 14th March 1991, the Court of Appeal quashed the convictions

Conclusions

- Judith Ward made a voluntary false confession
- All the Guildford Four made coerced-compliant confessions but Carole Richardson later became coerced-internalised – she believed she did it
- All the Birmingham Six made coerced-compliant confessions but the two who did not make written confessions scored significantly lower on the GSS



Conclusions

- PACE – the 1984 Police & Criminal Evidence Act – has reduced the extent of false confessions but not removed them
- Forensic evidence – especially DNA evidence – has reduced dependence on confessions for conviction
- There are lessons to be learnt for interviewing in a broader sense