

Getting to the Truth on Interrogation



ON TELEVISION...

The subject of an interrogation is almost always guilty of a crime or has direct knowledge of issues pertinent to the interrogator.



IN REALITY...

The primary task of an interrogation is accurately assessing an individual's level of knowledge or involvement in a crime or specific activity. It remains unclear whether any one person has information of value.

The subject's memory is reliable and complete. Denials, claims of innocence or changes in the story are dismissed as resistance or deception.

Memory is fragile and more unreliable than widely believed. The ability to recall information can be undermined by personal and environmental factors. Similarly, truth-tellers unknowingly modify details with each successive recitation of a story, while fabricators commonly repeat the same story almost verbatim.

Physical indicators of deceit manifest during interrogation—gaze aversion, gestures, speech impairments, shifts in body posture, and changes in skin tone—that may be used to detect lies.

These alleged indicators of deception employed by many interrogators are often anecdotal and not scientific.

Interrogation involves psychological and physical force to gain a subject's cooperation or compliance.

By definition, interrogation involves the systematic questioning of an individual who is objectively assessed as possessing information of intelligence and/or law enforcement value. Using psychological and physical force is not always necessary, and can be counterproductive.

Threats of harsh treatment or serious consequences expedite the process of gaining a subject's cooperation or compliance.

Fear and anxiety produced by threats of harsh treatment have markedly negative effects on recall ability. Stress has been shown to increase false memories.

After psychological or emotional pressure applied by a threatening interrogator, subjects decide to cooperate, especially when presented with a more understanding interrogator.

The well-known "good cop/bad cop" strategy, which produces a 'fear then relief' situation, can create a cognitive deficit, undermining the ability of the detainee to reliably recall names, places and events.



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