

Suggestibility

The impact of interrogation stress on compliance and suggestibility in U.S. military special operations personnel

L'impact du stress de l'interrogation sur la conformité et la suggestibilité du personnel des opérations spéciales militaires des États-Unis

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Ethics, Medicine and Public Health, Volume 14, July–September 2020

Abstract:

The present study was performed to test whether acute stress exposure would significantly increase human compliance and suggestibility. One hundred active-duty military participants enrolled in military survival school training were randomized to receive the Gudjonsson Compliance and Suggestibility Scales (GCS and GSS) prior to, during or after exposure to interrogation stress. All participants were also assessed prior to, and after stress exposure for symptoms of dissociation. Stress exposure significantly increased compliance in individuals who exhibited a pre-stress propensity to dissociation; stress exposure significantly increased suggestibility. These data support the view that some individuals are more likely than others to experiencing an increase in compliance and in suggestibility if exposed to interrogation stress. These data also suggest that individuals who are vulnerable to stress induced increases in suggestibility and compliance can be identified using psychological measures of dissociation.

Compliance in an interrogative situation: A new scale.

Gudjonsson, Gisli H.

Personality and Individual Differences, Vol 10(5), 1989. pp. 535-540.

Abstract:

Describes the development of a compliance questionnaire intended to complement the author's previous work (G. H. Gudjonsson, 1984) on interrogative suggestibility. The questionnaire consists of 20 true–false statements that have applications to interrogative situations involving retracted confession statements. The questionnaire has satisfactory internal consistency and test–retest reliability, based on data from 9 groups of Ss, ranging from criminal suspects, convicted offenders, soldiers, and nurses to college students and university academic staff. Data are presented to support the concurrent and construct validity of the questionnaire.

One hundred alleged false confession cases: Some normative data.

Gudjonsson, Gisli H.

British Journal of Clinical Psychology, Vol 29(2), May, 1990. pp. 249-250.

Abstract:

Examined the psychological characteristics of individuals who retract self-incriminating admissions made during police interviewing by comparing 100 alleged false confessors with 104 other forensic referrals on 4 psychological variables. Measures used included the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) and the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale. The 2 groups differed significantly on tests of intelligence, suggestibility, compliance, and acquiescence. Normative data are provided.

The dependent personality: Developmental, social, and clinical perspectives.

Bornstein, Robert F.. Gettysburg Coll, PA, US

Psychological Bulletin, Vol 112(1), Jul, 1992. pp. 3-23.

Abstract:

Developmental, social, and clinical studies of dependency have produced remarkably consistent results. A review and integration of these findings allow strong conclusions to be drawn regarding the etiology and dynamics of dependency. The etiology of dependency appears to lie in overprotective, authoritarian parenting. In social settings, dependency is associated with suggestibility, conformity, compliance, interpersonal yielding, affiliative behavior, and sensitivity to interpersonal cues. Dependency predicts the onset of certain psychological disorders and follows the onset of others. It seems that the fundamental motivation of the dependent person, from which the behaviors that are exhibited in different situations are derived, is a strong desire to obtain and maintain nurturant supportive relationships. Implications of these findings for different theoretical models of dependency are discussed.

Authors:

Talmdage, Stephen A.

Military Psychology, Vol 13(4), 2001. pp. 235-241.

Abstract:

Presents a case study wherein a psychologist analyzes a defendant and his legal case. The evaluation in this case study included a clinical interview and an administration and interpretation of the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-III test, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 test, the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale and Compliance Scale, and the Self-Monitoring Scale. Results of the defendant's interrogation and his psychological testing profiles are presented, which suggest a situation that was not extremely coercive but in which a cooperative defendant may have confessed because of tacit pressure. In the end the accused was acquitted. Audiotaping or videotaping and more research on this subject are recommended.

Effects of personality, interrogation techniques and plausibility in an experimental false confession paradigm.

Klaver, Jessica R. and Rose, V. Gordon.

Legal and Criminological Psychology, Vol 13(1), Feb, 2008. pp. 71-88.

Abstract:

Purpose: The goal of the present study was to investigate the effects of personality variables, interrogation techniques and the plausibility level of an alleged transgression on the experimental elicitation of false confessions. Methods: Two hundred and nineteen undergraduate students assessed on measures of compliance, self-esteem, locus of control and interrogative suggestibility participated in the Kassin and Kiechel (1996) paradigm. Experimental manipulations included minimization and maximization interrogation techniques and high and low plausibility of the alleged typing mistake to examine rates of false confession and internalization. Results: The overall false confession and internalization rates across all conditions were 43 and 10%, respectively. An increased likelihood of false confession behaviour was associated with higher Shift scores on the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale, the use of minimization interrogation techniques and an increase in the plausibility of the allegation. Females were more likely to falsely confess than males in the high plausibility condition, whereas Caucasian and Asian participants were equally likely to falsely confess. Personality variables, such as compliance, most influenced the behaviour of males and Asians. Conclusions: The results of this study offer insight into false confession behaviour, suggesting that individuals who have a tendency to change their responses in the face of negative feedback may be more prone to false confession behaviour. The findings also serve to highlight the dangers of using

minimization interrogation techniques and elucidate the limited generalizability of the paradigm to situations in which the alleged transgression is less plausible.

The role of suggestibility in determinations of Miranda abilities: A study of the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scales.

Rogers, Richard, et.al.

Law and Human Behavior, Vol 34(1), Feb, 2010. pp. 66-78.

Abstract:

Traditionally, high levels of suggestibility have been widely assumed to be linked with diminished Miranda abilities, especially in relationship to the voluntariness of waivers. The current investigation examined suggestibility on the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scales in a multisite study of pretrial defendants. One important finding was the inapplicability of British norms to American jurisdictions. Moreover, suggestibility appeared unrelated to Miranda comprehension, reasoning, and detainees' perceptions of police coercion. In testing rival hypotheses, defendants with high compliance had significantly lower Miranda comprehension and ability to reason about exercising Miranda rights than their counterparts with low compliance. Implications of these findings to forensic practice are examined.

Personality and deception. Are suggestibility, compliance and acquiescence related to socially desirable responding?

Gudjonsson, Gisli H., et.al.

Personality and Individual Differences, Vol 50(2), Jan, 2011. pp. 192-195.

Abstract:

The concepts and measurement of suggestibility, compliance and acquiescence are important to the forensic assessment of victims, witnesses and suspects in relation to the 'reliability of testimony'. In this paper the relationship of these three measures to socially desirable responding is investigated. 102 participants completed the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI), the Gudjonsson Suggestibility (GSS 2) and Compliance (GCS) Scales, a test of acquiescence, and a measure of 'impression management' (IM) and 'self deception enhancement' (SDE) using the Paulhus Deception Scales. As predicted, neither IM nor SDE correlated significantly with suggestibility, compliance, acquiescence, or IQ. Factor analysis showed that the two deception measures loaded on a separate factor to the other measures. A significant relationship was found between compliance and acquiescence, but multiple regression analysis showed that this was largely mediated by IQ. The findings show that neither GSS 2 nor the GCS are significantly related to socially desirable responding, either in terms of 'impression management' or 'self deception enhancement'.

Memory conformity and suggestibility.

Thorley, Craig.

Psychology, Crime & Law, Vol 19(7), Aug, 2013. pp. 565-575.

Abstract:

The present study examined whether the degree to which participants engage in memory conformity, which occurs when a person alters their memory report of an event to be consistent with another person, can be predicted by their levels of interrogative suggestibility (IS), which is the degree to which people are susceptible to altering their memory reports during questioning. Memory conformity was introduced by having participant and confederate pairs study words and then complete a social recognition test where they took turns to make judgements to the same items. When the participants responded after the confederate, they tended to conform to confederate's judgements.

regardless of whether the confederate had made a correct or incorrect response. IS was measured using the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale 2. This scale allows separate measures of Yield, which is a measure of how susceptible people are to altering their memory reports of events as a result of leading questions, and Shift, which is a measure of how susceptible people are to changing responses to questions when placed under pressure to do so. Only Yield was a significant predictor of memory conformity (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2016 APA, all rights reserved)

Interrogative suggestibility: Was it just compliance or a genuine false memory?

Mastroberardino, Serena and Marucci, Francesco S.

Legal and Criminological Psychology, Vol 18(2), Sep, 2013. pp. 274-286.

Abstract:

Purpose: Interrogative suggestibility, as measured by the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scales (GSS), is an independent form of suggestibility arising in the forensic/legal context. So far, an unresolved issue that may have different implications when measuring suggestibility is to what extent the scales measure internalization of suggested materials or just compliance with the interrogator. Methods: Internalization of suggested materials and compliance were here measured using a source identification task. In Experiment 1, participants were administered the GSS2 and immediately afterwards asked to perform the source identification task on the items presented in the scale. In Experiment 2, half of the participants were administered the source identification task immediately and half after a 24-hr delay. Results: In both experiments a higher proportion of compliant responses were found. Participants internalized more suggested information after questioning (Yield 1) and made more compliant responses after negative feedback (Shift). In Experiment 2, participants in the delayed condition internalized less material than those in the immediate condition. Conclusions: Different processes appear to underlie Yield 1 and Shift scores in the GSS2. The former may include both internalization of suggested materials and compliance, while the second appears to be mostly due to compliance with the interrogator. When administering the GSS2 in a forensic/legal context as vulnerability predictor for making false confessions, or proneness to develop false memories through the internalization of suggested material, including a source identification task may provide additional information on the type of coping style and memory characteristics of the examinee.

The role of memory distrust in cases of internalised false confession.

Gudjonsson, Gisli Hannes, et.al.

Applied Cognitive Psychology, Vol 28(3), May-Jun, 2014. pp. 336-348.

Abstract:

This paper reviews the literature on the role of ‘memory distrust’ in cases of internalised false confessions and provides a heuristic model for understanding the antecedents and mechanism involved. It also provides an in-depth analysis of two real life cases of ‘suspected’ murders involving six convicted persons, five of whom showed evidence of profound memory distrust regarding the alleged offences. The key factors were coercive interviewing, lengthy solitary confinement, contamination, psychological vulnerabilities (both state and trait) and lack of independent support during questioning. The vulnerabilities in such cases typically involve a combination of cognitive (memory flaws, lack of confidence in memory and failure to invoke distinctiveness heuristic), personality (suggestibility and compliance), health problems and motivational (desire and willingness to assist the police) factors. The two cases suggest that the process of internalised false

confessions may be conceptualised in terms of five sequential steps: a trigger, plausibility, acceptance, reconstruction and resolution.

Investigating predictors of true and false guilty pleas.

Henderson, Kelsey S. and Levett, Lora M.

Law and Human Behavior, Vol 42(5), Oct, 2018. pp. 427-441.

Abstract (English):

An estimated 90% to 95% of convictions are obtained via guilty pleas, and roughly 11% of individuals exonerated with the help of the Innocence Project falsely pleaded guilty (innocenceproject.org). Despite the prevalence of guilty pleas (and the existence of false guilty pleas), relatively little scholarship has examined what influences a defendant to plead guilty (Redlich, 2010). In this study, we investigated factors that affected whether guilty and innocent students who were accused of cheating pleaded guilty or took their case before the Student Conduct Committee in a hearing (analogous to a trial). Using social psychological literature on social influence (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004), we manipulated two legally and theoretically relevant factors: the attorney's recommendation and the guilt of the defendant. Overall, guilty individuals were more likely to accept a guilty plea than innocent individuals. Advocate recommendation affected innocent and guilty participants' plea decisions; however, the effect was stronger for innocent individuals. Innocent participants advised to go to trial were less likely to falsely plead guilty ($M = 4\%$) compared with those without an advocate ($M = 35\%$), those who were given educational information ($M = 47\%$), or those who were advised to plead guilty ($M = 58\%$). Overall, findings suggest that innocent individuals may be more vulnerable to the effects of social influence when considering advice from an advocate compared with guilty individuals.

Police tactics and guilt status uniquely influence suspects' physiologic reactivity and resistance to confess.

Normile, Christopher J. and Scherr, Kyle C.

Law and Human Behavior, Vol 42(6), Dec, 2018. pp. 497-506.

Abstract (English):

Research has identified numerous factors that influence suspects during police interrogations. However, the dynamics between individuals' physiologic reactivity and their confession decision making is in its infancy. This research sought to advance the interrogation literature by examining the relationships among different interrogation tactics, suspects' resistance to confess, and their physiologic reactivity during a mock interrogation. After manipulating innocence and guilt, participants ($N = 154$) were accused and interrogated using either a minimization or false evidence tactic. Participants' physiologic reactivity was operationalized using their systolic blood pressure, and confession resistance was quantified as the number of times participants refused to confess. Results demonstrated that participants exhibited more physiologic reactivity after being confronted with false evidence ploys than minimization. Furthermore, innocent participants resisted confessing more than guilty participants, but innocents confronted with false evidence resisted confessing to a greater extent than innocents confronted with minimization. Moreover, a moderated-mediation analysis indicated that although innocents resisted confessing more when confronted with false evidence than those confronted with minimization, these innocents sustained a significantly higher level of physiologic reactivity. The results of the conditional indirect relationship suggest that innocents who are confronted with false evidence may resist the most but at a cost—their greater resistance may exhaust them and undermine subsequent decision making. These results offer support

for reforms aimed at reducing the length of interrogations and the use of interrogation tactics that unnecessarily increase false confession rates.

Impact Statement:

Public Significance Statement—Innocent people resist falsely confessing more when they are misled to believe there is incriminating evidence against them compared to when they are misled to believe their wrongdoing is trivial. However, the continued resistance among innocents who were misled results in sustained high levels of stress that could potentially increase the likelihood they will eventually falsely confess. It seems advisable to reform interrogation policies to limit the practice of telling suspects their wrongdoing is trivial, lying to suspects, and long interrogations in order to minimize innocents' risk of falsely confessing.

Mobilization and resistance in response to interrogation threat.

Guyll, Max, et al.

Law and Human Behavior, Vol 43(4), Aug, 2019. pp. 307-318.

Abstract (English):

This research tested whether the perception of threat during a police interrogation mobilizes suspects to cope with interrogation demands and bolsters their resistance to self-incrimination pressures. Experimental procedures led university undergraduates (N = 296) to engage in misconduct or not, thereby making them guilty or innocent. An experimenter then accused all participants of misconduct in either a threatening or nonthreatening way. High threat produced a broad pattern of mobilization entailing physiologic, cognitive, and behavioral components. Specifically, in comparison to the low threat accusation, the high threat accusation produced greater cardiovascular reactions, increased attentional bias and memory for accusation-relevant information, and strengthened resistance to self-incrimination. Furthermore, with the exception of physiologic reactions, these effects were similar for both guilty and innocent participants. Consistent with the phenomenology of innocence wherein the innocent perceive less threat from interrogation than do the guilty, the innocent evidenced smaller cardiovascular responses to high threat than did the guilty. Results suggest that the more threat that suspects experience, the more they will be mobilized to cope with interrogation demands and resist interpersonal pressure to self-incriminate, at least initially.

Impact Statement:

Public Significance Statement—Our research demonstrates that the stress that arises from the threat of an interrogation can broadly activate suspects by increasing their physiologic activity, making them more attentive, improving their memory, and motivating them to defend their innocence. These effects could help suspects manage the demands of an interrogation, at least during the early phases of police questioning.

The immediate and delayed suggestibility examined by the online version of the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale 2.

Wachi, Taeko, et.al.

Personality and Individual Differences, Vol 146, Aug 1, 2019. pp. 20-25.

Abstract:

This study examined immediate and delayed suggestibility using the Japanese online version of the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale 2. The results demonstrated that as many as 20% of the 218 participants incorporated misleading information into their memories of events (indicating delayed suggestibility) two days after listening to a story. Those with

delayed suggestibility were more likely to have high scores for Yield 1, Yield 2, Shift, and Total suggestibility (i.e., immediate suggestibility), indicating an association between immediate and delayed suggestibility. These participants were also deemed to have the same levels of self-esteem and compliance as those without delayed suggestibility. However, they were more likely to exhibit source monitoring errors than their counterparts, suggesting that such errors (rather than psychosocial factors) may cause delayed suggestibility.

Why suspects confess: The power of outcome certainty.

Yang, Yueran, et al.

Law and Human Behavior, Vol 43(5), Oct, 2019. pp. 468-476.

Abstract (English):

Objective: In custodial interrogations, suspects tend to give disproportionate weight to immediate outcomes relative to future outcomes when deciding whether to confess or deny guilt. The current research examined whether the perceived (un)certainly of an immediate outcome influences suspects' short-sighted confession decisions. Hypotheses: We hypothesized that suspects are more likely to make short-sighted confession decisions when an immediate punishment is certain versus uncertain and that the effects of a certain immediate punishment become stronger the longer suspects are interrogated. Method: Using the repetitive question paradigm, college student participants (N = 164, 57% women, 87% Caucasian, M age 18.9 years) admitted or denied 20 illegal and unethical behaviors in an interview. Participants' admissions and denials received either an immediate punishment (answering repetitive questions) or a future punishment (meeting with a police officer in several weeks to discuss their misconduct). In addition, we manipulated participants' perceptions of the immediate punishment to be either certain or uncertain. Results: Participants showed greater short-sightedness in their admission decisions when they perceived the immediate punishment to be certain versus uncertain. Moreover, the influence of the certain immediate punishment on participants' admission decisions tended to increase over time. Conclusions: These findings provide empirical evidence that the certainty of immediate outcomes may contribute to suspects' shorted-sighted confession decisions.

Contextual factors predict self-reported confession decision-making: A field study of suspects' actual police interrogation experiences.

Cleary, Hayley M. D., and Bull, Ray

Law and Human Behavior, Vol 45(4), Aug, 2021. pp. 310-323.

Abstract (English):

Objective: This study examined incarcerated persons' self-reported interrogation experiences and confession decision-making by investigating which sociodemographic, criminological, and contextual factors were associated with their decisions to deny the allegations, partially admit wrongdoing, or fully confess to the crime. Hypotheses: We expected that respondents in this field study would report a wide range of interrogation experiences. Given mixed prior findings, we did not formulate hypotheses for sociodemographic or criminological factors, but based on contextual variable research, we predicted that suspects who perceived the evidence against them as strong and who had already decided to confess prior to their interrogation would be more likely to confess. Method: Participants were 249 individuals (86% male; M age = 34.8 years; 49% Black, 41% White, 10% other racial identities) incarcerated in local jails in the United States who completed a questionnaire about their most recent interrogation. Respondents described their interrogation experiences (e.g., location, duration, custody), perceptions of police

evidence against them, and thoughts about confession prior to the interrogation. We examined group differences according to confession decision and used multinomial logistic regression to examine how sociodemographic, criminological, and contextual factors relate to suspects' self-reported confession decisions. Results: Suspects' interrogation experiences varied considerably, as did their perceptions of custody, beliefs about incriminating evidence, and preinterrogation intent to confess or deny. Sociodemographic characteristics and criminological factors were unrelated to self-reported confession decision-making, but several contextual factors predicted confession outcome. Signing away one's Miranda rights and already planning to confess predicted suspects' self-reported confessions, whereas being physically restrained, believing that police had no evidence of one's guilt, and intending in advance to deny the allegations predicted suspects' self-reported denials. Suspects who were undecided about confession prior to interrogation were about as likely to eventually confess as deny. Conclusions: Most suspects followed through with their initial intention to confess or deny, and suspects' perceptions about evidence predicted their self-reported confession. These findings complement existing work focused on interrogation techniques and inform both police interrogation training and practice.

The detrimental impact of alcohol intoxication on facets of Miranda comprehension.

Mindthoff, Amelia, et al.

Law and Human Behavior, Vol 46(4), Aug, 2022. pp. 264-276.

Abstract (English):

Objective: Law enforcement officers often encounter alcohol-intoxicated suspects, suggesting that many suspects are presented with the challenge of grasping the meaning and significance of their Miranda rights while intoxicated. Such comprehension is crucial, given that Miranda is intended to minimize the likelihood of coercive interrogations resulting in self-incrimination and protect suspects' constitutional rights. Yet, the effects of alcohol on individuals' ability to understand and appreciate their Miranda rights remain unknown—a gap that the present study sought to address. Hypotheses: Informed by alcohol myopia theory (AMT), we predicted that intoxicated individuals would demonstrate impaired Miranda comprehension compared to sober individuals and those who believed they were intoxicated (but were in fact not; i.e., placebo participants). Method: After health screenings, participants completed the Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence–Second Edition verbal subtests, rendering a Verbal Comprehension Index (VCI) score. We randomly assigned participants to consume alcohol ($n = 51$; mean breath alcohol concentration [BrAC] = 0.07%), a placebo condition ($n = 44$; BrAC = 0.00%), or a sober control condition ($n = 41$; BrAC = 0.00%). All participants ($N = 136$) completed the Miranda Rights Comprehension Instruments (MRCI), which measured participants' understanding of the Miranda warnings, recognition of the warnings, appreciation of their rights in interrogation and court settings, and understanding of Miranda-related vocabulary. Results: We found a significant effect of intoxication condition on participants' understanding of Miranda warnings ($\eta^2p = .14$) and Miranda-related vocabulary ($\eta^2p = .05$) when controlling for VCI scores. Specifically, intoxicated participants received lower scores for understanding of warnings compared to sober and placebo participants, and lower scores for understanding of Miranda vocabulary compared to sober participants. Alcohol did not significantly impact Miranda rights recognition or appreciation. Conclusions: Alcohol intoxication may detrimentally impact some facets of Miranda comprehension. Thus, it is important that law enforcement consider refraining from questioning intoxicated suspects.