Concerns in the Interrogation Room: The Effects of Lengthy Questioning on Suggestibility

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Overview

• Background
• The Present Study
• Discussion and Concluding Remarks
What makes a suspect willing to (falsely) confess?

Source: Yelp.com
Previous Research

- The Innocence Project
  - 16%% of DNA exonerations involve false confessions
  - More?
- Cognitive loads and lying (Vrij, 2008)
- Suggestibility
  - Psychological vulnerability (Gudjonsson et al., 2008)
Current Research

• What is the relationship between self-regulatory capacity and suggestibility?

• Hypothesis

  • Individuals who experience the depletion of their self-regulatory capacity through the answering of repetitive questions will be more suggestible to leading questions than individuals without the depletion.

  • (Lengthy questioning will increase suggestibility)
Methods

• Participants
  • University undergraduates
  • N=115
    • 58.9% female
    • 89.4% Caucasian, 5% multiethnic, 3.5% African-American, 1.4% Latino/a, and .7% Asian
  • Recruited via SONA
Methods

- Criminal Behavior Survey (McCoy et al., 2006)
  - Participants answered 20 questions about their past criminal behaviors
- Depleted condition
- Not depleted condition
- Answered questions again at end of study
## Methods

### Criminal Behavior Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>If yes…</th>
<th>If no…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depleted</td>
<td>Have you ever drank, bought, or tried to buy alcohol before you were 21?</td>
<td>Experimenter circles “yes” and continues</td>
<td>Experimenter circles “no” and starts additional questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not depleted</td>
<td>Have you ever drank, bought, or tried to buy alcohol before you were 21?</td>
<td>Experimenter circles “yes” and continues</td>
<td>Experimenter circles “no” and continues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedures

- Criminal behavior survey
- Suggestibility Scale (Gudjonsson, 1984)
  - Participants listened to a story
  - Initial query about story
  - Second query about story
    - Suggestibility measured by changes or “Shift” in participant’s answers
Interpersonal Suggestibility

Shift Score

Depleted | Not depleted

Condition

$t(179) = .361, p = .719$
Condition*lie interaction: $F(1, 107) = 4.410, p = .038$
Simple main effect for yellow: $t = -.756, p = .451$
Simple main effect for blue: $t = 2.564, p = .012$
Discussion & Conclusion

- Lengthy questioning did not increase suggestibility
- Voluntary
- What does this mean
  - Mixed results
  - Denials, lying, and the depletion condition
    - What about non-depletion?
- Limitations?
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