

Examining the Influence of Question Phrasing in Police Interviews on Suspects' Inferences Regarding Interviewer's Prior Knowledge

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Abstract : The aim of this study was to understand how the phrasing of questions influences guilty suspects' inferences regarding prior information held by the interviewer about the suspect's crime-related activities. Three phrasing factors were explored namely specificity (crime-related details within questions), stressor (emphasis on the importance of the information in the question) and phase presentation (whether a specific activity was questioned about). 370 participants were recruited and randomly assigned into 6 different question-phrasing groups. Participants assumed the role of a suspect, read a crime narrative and an interview transcript based on the suspect's activities. Participants responded to scales that measured their perception of interviewer's knowledge (PIK) based on the questions posed by the interviewer in the interview transcripts. The researchers found that there is an effect of specific details revealed in the questions on the suspect's perception of interviewer knowledge. Questioning about a specific activity also increased their perception of interviewer's prior knowledge. However, the individual hypotheses were only partially supported. The study allowed the researchers to explore a psycholinguistic approach to investigate the underlying mechanisms of inferences drawn by suspects from the phrasing of investigative questions.

Keywords : police interviewing, question framing effects on suspects, suspect inferences from questions, suspect interviews

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