Criminal Justice and
Behavior

Book Review: Police Interrogations and False Confessions: Current Research, Practice, and Policy Recommendations

Kirk Luther and Brent Snook

The online version of this article can be found at:

Published by:

On behalf of:

International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology

Additional services and information for *Criminal Justice and Behavior* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://cjb.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://cjb.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

>> Version of Record - Apr 16, 2012

What is This?

BOOK REVIEW

Police Interrogations and False Confessions: Current Research, Practice, and Policy Recommendations. G. D. Lassiter and C. A. Meissner (Eds.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010. 249 pp. ISBN 1433807432.

The miscarriage of justice, namely wrongful convictions, is of paramount concern for both academics and practitioners. One of the leading contributors to wrongful convictions is the elicitation of confessions from innocent individuals. In their book *Police Interrogations and False Confessions: Current Research, Practice, and Policy Recommendations*, editors Daniel Lassiter and Christian Meissner cover a wide range of topics within the realm of police-induced false confessions. Specifically, the book is divided into three thematic groups that examine the complex and multifaceted nature of false confessions, with each chapter authored by a world-renowned expert (or experts) on the topic. The first thematic grouping (chaps. 1–5) deals with the issues surrounding police-induced false confessions, with a particular emphasis on the situational and dispositional factors related to why people confess to crimes they did not commit. The second thematic grouping (chaps. 6–9) pertains to the scientific research programs that are exploring ways of reducing false confessions. The last thematic grouping (chaps. 10–13) focuses on *Miranda* comprehension research and the ways to ensure the original intentions of the warnings are being met effectively.

The first chapter in the thematic grouping about police-induced false confessions, by Richard Leo and Steve Drizin, contains an insightful review of three fundamental errors that explain how various dubious police practices contribute to false confessions. The authors also discuss the need to train officers about these errors as a key first step in reducing wrongful convictions. The second chapter focuses on estimating the instances of false confessions, along with the static and dynamic risk factors associated with false confessions. Gisli Gudjonsson shows that false confessions are a global concern and suggests that there are individual differences in the propensity to confess falsely. In chapter 3, Allison Redlich highlights the similarities and differences between false confessions and false guilty pleas. She argues that there is a major dearth of empirical studies on false guilty pleas and makes a very convincing argument that this is an issue that deserves much more attention from the scientific community. The discussion in chapter 4 revolves around the interrogation of juveniles. In this chapter, N. Dickon Reppucci, Jessica Meyer, and Jessica Kostelnik make a strong case for law enforcement officers to be trained on how to interrogate youths properly. In chapter 5, Ray Bull and Stavroula Soukara discuss the results of rarely obtained data regarding what is actually happening inside British interviewing rooms. The four studies they discuss demonstrate that there is still a mixture of appropriate and inappropriate interviewing behaviors in British interviews—but that much progress has been made to improve interrogation practices and beliefs since the implementation of evidence-based practices (i.e., the PEACE model of interviewing).

Chapter 6, written by Aldert Vrij, Ronald Fisher, Samantha Mann, and Sharon Leal, is the first chapter in the second thematic grouping regarding scientific programs aimed at reducing false confessions. The authors examine the pitfalls and opportunities associated with lie

detection. Specifically, they present compelling evidence that a cognitive-based approach (as opposed to an approach examining nonverbal cues) is a relatively more promising technique for detecting lies. In chapter 7, Christian Meissner, Melissa Russano, and Fadia Narchet review the research on false confessions, provide a review of the theoretical models of confessions, and present laboratory research on the social and cognitive processes involved in interrogator–suspect interactions. The authors, like others in the book, show that false confessions emerge because of the use of psychologically coercive strategies and suspect vulnerabilities. They also suggest that information-gathering approaches have the potential to reduce false confessions and increase true confessions. In chapter 8, Thomas Sullivan, a defense lawyer, makes the case that the most effective way for officers to protect themselves from the questioning process of lawyers about what happened inside the interrogation room is simple—video-record the session! The author reviews the reasons why the law enforcement community has been hesitant to video-record custodial interrogations, summarizes the endless benefits of recording interrogations, shows the support available for recording them, and discusses some fallacious objections to the practice. Chapter 9, written by Daniel Lassiter, Lezzlee Ware, Matthew Lindberg, and Jennifer Ratcliff, follows up on the arguments in chapter 8 by outlining a range of important issues that must be considered when policies around video-recording custodial interviews are being designed. The authors show that opinions on statement voluntariness, guilt, and sentencing recommendations vary dramatically as a function of the camera perspective used to record the interrogation.

Chapter 10 is the first chapter in the third thematic grouping about the comprehension of *Miranda* warnings. Lawrence Wrightsman provides a thorough overview of historical context and policy goals of the *Miranda* decision. In addition, Wrightsman reviews case law that is pertinent to police interrogations and *Miranda* rights and shows the fragility of the warning as it has been interpreted by the courts. In chapter 11, Gregory DeClue introduces a checklist that psychologists can use to assess the extent to which *Miranda* rights were administered properly during police interviews and whether or not the interviewee was likely to comprehend his or her constitutional rights. He also provides an exemplar *Miranda* warning that can be delivered orally (but warns that it ought to be validated before being used). Chapter 12, written by Bruce Frumkin, discusses how psychologists ought to conduct evaluations regarding the competency to waive *Miranda* rights. He also discusses the pitfalls associated with a number of psychometric scales. In the final chapter, Solomon Fulero reviews the relevant decisions from federal and state courts on expert testimony that pertain to interrogations and confessions. The author also raises five arguments that experts can expect to be made against their contributions and the responses that refute those arguments.

In the conclusion, the editors provide sound recommendations for policy changes and recommendations for the courtroom to minimize the occurrence of false confessions. Finally, in the afterword Saul Kassin ends the book as it began, with an anecdote of a false confession. He also provides a synopsis of the book while providing a concise argument about the relevance and importance of the topic.

This book was a pleasure to read and review and serves as an excellent reference to the current research regarding police-induced false confessions. This book is a useful tool for academics, clinicians, and other professionals who are involved with trying to improve this particular aspect of the administration of justice.

—KIRK LUTHER AND BRENT SNOOK
Memorial University of Newfoundland