

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

## Pseudoscientific Policing Practices and Beliefs

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Within policing there is widespread promotion and use of questionable psychologically rooted practices as well as the acceptance of erroneous beliefs about police work. For instance, the articles composing this special issue show that dubious practices—hypnotic interviewing, polygraph examination, criminal profiling, critical incident stress debriefing, and detecting of deception solely on the basis of nonverbal cues—are routinely used by police agencies. Similarly, policing is pervaded by erroneous beliefs about confession evidence, eyewitness memory, lineup identification procedures, police behavior, and criminal behavior. The tie that binds these practices and beliefs is their lack of strong scientific support. In fact, these aspects of policing, and numerous others that are not covered in this special issue (e.g., psychic detection, authorship analysis, psychological autopsies), contain many characteristics that are indicative of pseudoscience (Lilienfeld, Lynn, & Lohr, 2003; Shermer, 2002; Stanovich, 2004). This is highly disconcerting because of the potential for severe consequences (e.g., miscarriages of justices) when pseudoscientific practices are employed by the police or when erroneous beliefs guide the consequential decision making that is inherent in police work.

Tavris (2003) noted that there is a growing gap between the reliance on various practices in applied domains (e.g., clinical psychology, medicine, and engineering) and the amount of empirical evidence supporting those practices. Law enforcement does not appear to be immune to this widening scientist–practitioner gap. Concerns about the divide between psychological science and police work ultimately lead to questions about how police agencies, and other institutions within the criminal justice system, fall prey to such spurious practices and what can be done to help reduce their reliance on them. Concern about this schism, and the need to address these fundamental questions, stimulated this special issue.

The specific goals of this special issue are to (a) identify a range of questionable practices and erroneous beliefs within law enforcement, (b) subject those practices and beliefs to incisive scientific scrutiny, (c) explain why law enforcement personnel use those unsubstantiated practices and form erroneous beliefs, (d) enhance the scientific foundation of the police profession, and (e) reduce the scientist–practitioner gap by arming law enforcement officers, police agencies, and other legal professionals with the knowledge required to identify pseudoscientific practices. Accordingly, each of the invited articles in this special issue contributes to the accomplishment of one or more of these goals.

The first article, by Scott Lilienfeld and Kristin Landfield, "Science and Pseudoscience in Law Enforcement: A User-Friendly Primer," provides an overview of pseudoscience and discusses how police work, like many professions, contains a mixture of legitimate and illegitimate claims that require differentiation. This article is an essential read for all consumers of police literature, especially police officers and the agencies they work for, who are interested in protecting themselves from pseudoscientific practices. Lilienfeld and Landfield discuss 10 "warning signs" of pseudoscientific practices (e.g., reliance on anecdotes and evasion of peer review) that are of particular relevance to law enforcement. They conclude that police officers can reduce the risk of errors and improve the quality of their decision making by using these warning signs to evaluate various practices and claims.

Next, "Reducing Misconceptions and False Beliefs in Police and Criminal Psychology," by Michael G. Aamodt, focuses on a variety of myths that pertain to the lives of police officers (e.g., suicide and divorce rates), criminal behavior (e.g., workplace violence and the ethnicity, gender, and IQ of serial killers), and policing practices (e.g., detecting deception and predicting employee success). He provides four major principles to improve critical thinking in the fields of police and criminal psychology. Specifically, he argues that consumers of the police and criminal psychology research should consult primary sources and maintain a degree of skepticism of secondary sources, conduct statistical comparisons between groups that are more similar than dissimilar, be wary of explanations that are overly simplistic, and be informed that intuitive judgments of others are not as accurate as we often believe. Aamodt concludes that considering these four principles will help reduce the spread of misinformation in police and criminal psychology and make people more informed consumers of research in these fields.

In the third article, "Logic and Research Versus Intuition and Past Practice as Guides to Gathering and Evaluating Eyewitness Evidence," John Turtle and Stephen Want focus on eyewitness evidence issues relating to memory and identification procedures. After providing an overview of how psychologists have historically dealt with eyewitness issues, the authors discuss how various eyewitness phenomena border on the pseudoscientific. In particular, they provide a very compelling discussion of the misconceptions related to flashbulb and photographic memories and the myths associated with lineup identification procedures. Turtle and Want conclude that eyewitness evidence procedures must be based on logic and research rather than intuition and tradition.

The article "The Criminal Profiling Illusion: What's Behind the Smoke and Mirrors?" by myself, Richard M. Cullen, Craig Bennell, Paul J. Taylor, and Paul Gendreau attempts to explain why the acceptance of criminal profiling by many police officers, profilers, and the public is at odds with the absence of scientific evidence to substantiate its reliability, validity, and utility. My colleagues and I argue that this unfortunate trend has arisen for two related reasons. The first is that people have developed a biased picture of criminal profiling because they typically hear only about its glowing successes. The second reason involves what we know about cognition and the manner by which people process information, which typically serves to support the credibility of profiling. Because profiling has the potential to mislead criminal investigators, we conclude that it is a practice that must be approached with the utmost caution.

The fifth article, "Hypnosis and the Law: Examining the Stereotypes," by Graham F. Wagstaff, takes a balanced view of hypnosis as it relates to investigative practice. Wagstaff adamantly challenges both the notion that hypnosis can be used to contact the unconscious

mind to recover hidden memories and the belief that hypnotized people lose consciousness, control of their behavior, or their normal moral scruples. He further warns that hypnotic procedures do not improve the accuracy of memories beyond what can be achieved through nonhypnotic conditions and that they encourage witnesses to incorporate misleading information into their accounts and increase false confidence in witnesses' reports. Regardless of these concerns, Wagstaff argues that investigative hypnosis should not be banned outright as an investigative tool. In fact, he encourages experts to be more open-minded about hypnosis, because some of the memory enhancement procedures used in hypnotic interviewing (e.g., relaxation, improved attention, and concentration) might be of benefit to forensic interviewers.

The article by William G. Iacono, "Effective Policing: Understanding How Polygraph Tests Work and Are Used," describes the collection of procedures that compose the control question technique (CQT)—the most routinely used polygraph technique in law enforcement settings. Although he acknowledges that CQT can be used as an interrogation aid in difficult-to-solve cases, he disputes the validity of the CQT on the grounds that it has a weak theoretical underpinning, is inherently biased against the innocent, and has the potential to be manipulated with a range of psychological and physical countermeasures. Iacono concludes his article by arguing that the guilty-knowledge test is a scientifically based alternative that deserves serious consideration as an investigative tool.

The article "Confession Evidence: Commonsense Myths and Misconceptions," by Saul M. Kassin, focuses on five erroneous beliefs about confession evidence that are held widely by legal professionals and, in some instances, the general public. He reviews, and vigorously challenges, the myths that trained interviewers can detect deception and truth accurately; *Miranda* rights protect the accused from interrogation; people do not confess to crimes they did not commit; legal professionals, such as prosecutors and judges, can spot false confessions; and it is possible to determine that a confession error was harmless to the administration of justice. Kassin asserts that the criminal justice system can overcome these myths and misconceptions by actively relying on knowledge gained from psychological science and by increasing the transparency of the interrogation process through the implementation of a mandatory videotaping policy.

In the eighth article, "Nonverbal Dominance Versus Verbal Accuracy in Lie Detection: A Plea to Change Police Practice," Aldert Vrij contends there is an overemphasis on nonverbal cues to deception by police officers and provides a number of convincing explanations as to why such a practice exists. He draws from a wealth of empirical studies to demonstrate that many verbal cues (e.g., quantity of details) are better indicators of deception than nonverbal cues (e.g., gaze aversion and fidgeting). Of immediate consequence for policing practice (and the accused) is Vrij's assertion that paying too much attention to nonverbal cues can result in less accurate detection of truths and lies and a greater tendency by interviewers to assume that someone is lying. He encourages police officers and authors of police training manuals to familiarize themselves with veracity assessment tools that focus on what suspects say during an interview.

The penultimate article, by Katherine M. Newbold, Jeffrey M. Lohr, and Richard Gist, "Apprehended Without Warrant: Issues of Evidentiary Warrant for Critical Incident Services and Related Trauma Interventions in a Federal Law Enforcement Agency," focuses on the gap between mental health practices and the amount of scientific evidence supporting those practices. Newbold and her colleagues demonstrate that the widely promoted Critical Incident

Stress Debriefing/Management (CISD) technique, used to assist those exposed to traumatic events, has many pseudoscientific characteristics (e.g., avoidance of rigorous testing and resistance to skeptical inquiry) and lacks scientific evidence of its efficacy. Their article also provides a persuasive account of how CISD gained a strong foothold within the FBI and the problems that developed because CISD lacks evidence supporting its use. Newbold and her colleagues conclude with suggestions for law enforcement organizations on how to both avoid being seduced by pseudoscientific mental health practices and increase the delivery of evidence-based mental health practices.

The last article, "Sense, Common Sense, and Nonsense," by David Flagel and Paul Gendreau, provides a general commentary on pseudoscience. They argue that the law enforcement area is not alone with respect to its acceptance of "junk" science. Flagel and Gendreau draw from current controversies in the philosophy of science to explain why intelligent and well-meaning people support pseudoscientific beliefs and practices. They end their commentary by providing skeptics with a novel way of distinguishing between commonsense and empirically based phenomena.

I would like to thank all authors in this special issue for contributing such first-class articles and for their patience with me during the reviewing and editing process. I would also like to thank all reviewers for their very perceptive comments and suggestions on ways to improve the quality of the manuscripts. I would especially like to thank my editorial assistant, Jennifer Kavanagh, for her tremendous efforts and Richard M. Cullen, Craig Bennell, John C. House, Jamison C. Mercer, and Paul J. Taylor for their advice on this special issue. Last, I would like to thank the editor, Curt Bartol, for giving me the opportunity to pursue this special issue.

I realize that in challenging people's cherished beliefs, and in many instances, their way of life, one runs the risk of making them more passionate about those beliefs (see Tavis & Aronson, 2007). Regardless, I believe that this special issue is long overdue. Given the devastating consequences that wrongful convictions, wasted time and resources, inappropriate mental health assistance, and the selection of subpar police officers can have on people's lives, police agencies must be careful to ensure that the techniques they employ are credible and scientifically verified. The collection of articles in this special issue provides law enforcement officers, and their agencies, with relevant knowledge required to distinguish between techniques that have scientific support and those that lack such support.

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