

**Autism Within the Investigative Interview: The Effect of Prior-Interview
Procedural Information on Strategy Use**

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Abstract

Investigative interviews are conducted daily, to gather credible information from victims, witnesses and suspects. While the behaviour, mannerisms and ways of thinking of autistic individuals is often different compared to neurotypicals, standard interviewing methods may not be optimal for eliciting accurate information from autistic interviewees. For autistic individuals it is beneficial if they have accurate expectations of the situation that they will walk into. This however, is not provided in the standard interviewing method.

This study explores if and how procedural information given alongside legal rights before the investigative interview can affect the strategy that interviewees create before the investigative interview. A 2 (Procedural information vs No Procedural information) x 2 (Autistic vs Non-Autistic) between participants design was used. All participants are confronted with a border control interview. A total of 42 participants took part. Pre-interview procedural information was provided next to the standard provided information to 21 participants, the remaining participants merely received the standard information.

The results gained from this dataset through a thematic content analysis indicates that whether or not providing procedural information affects strategizing in innocent participants. The results of this study are in line with previous research on how innocent individuals strategise. It is likely that innocence versus being guilty is more determining than autism or prior interview procedural information in creating a strategy for the interview.

Autism Within the Investigative Interview: The Effect of Prior-Interview Procedural Information on Strategy Use

Rocking your body, avoiding eye contact and sitting in unusual positions. These are signs that can cause suspicion to investigative interviewers, but they are also mannerisms that people with autism often exhibit (Young & Brewer, 2019). Individuals on the autism spectrum might experience difficulties in communicating or social interaction, due to the fact that their behaviour often differs from neurotypicals (Prelock & Nelson, 2012). The mannerisms exhibited by individuals with autism can be increased in a stressful or unknown situation (Zauderer, 2023). This enhanced stress can increase the chances of emotional stress and false confessions. These mannerisms can be interpreted as suspicious by the interviewers, which might lead to unfair classification of individuals. It can be difficult for individuals with autism to show that they are not guilty and to make themselves look less suspicious during investigative interviews (Young & Brewer, 2019). This study aims at exploring whether providing pre-interview procedural information changes the way in which individuals with autism prepare for an interview and if it supports them. Besides that, the goal is to utilise the gathered information for creating more inclusive interviewing methods.

Investigative interviews are executed a lot daily mostly by police or border control. These interviews are conducted to gather credible information from victims, witnesses and suspects, which is of great significance for further investigation. A substantial amount of offences take place daily, leading to officers wanting to gather as much credible information as quickly as possible. The police officers use approximately the same procedure for each investigative interview (van Beek & Bull, 2023). The used procedure is taught during the training of the police officers and it provides guidance for them in interviews. This standard procedure does include the suspects legal rights and it does not include presenting individual's procedural information before the interview. Procedural information can include

multiple things, such as the length of the interview, the nature of the interview and simplifying the rights that the interviewee has. Specifically in border control interviews this additional information is often left out because those interviews are set up on short-notice and are often exploratory. Providing the interviewee with procedural information could be beneficial for vulnerable individuals, such as those on the autism spectrum, so that the expectations are clearer.

Individuals with autism are facing more difficulties within investigative interviews compared to neurotypical individuals. It is important to explore why this is the case to make changes to the standard interviewing protocol to make it a fairer process for everyone involved. In order to understand why individuals with autism are facing more difficulties within the investigative interviews it is important to explore what makes it difficult for these individuals. Not knowing what will happen often leads to heightened distress and anxiety in individuals with autism (Jenkinson et al., 2020), which can lead to individuals with autism showing characteristics that differ from the norm. Officers might interpret this behaviour as suspicious. These characteristics can include avoiding eye contact or having trouble recalling certain information of an event (Maras & Bowler, 2010). Autistic people often experience difficulty retaining episodic memories. They experience more trouble retrieving specific and detailed memories compared to neurotypicals (Hope et al., 1990; Norris & Maras, 2021).

Accurate memory retrieval is needed for the suspect to get credible information from the interview. The stress-increasing situation, that such an investigative interview is, might make it more difficult for an autistic individual to be able to provide the necessary information (Bagnall et al. 2023). Therefore, it is key to take into account with who an interviewer is dealing.

Another aspect that influences memory recall in individuals with autism is the executive functioning. Autistic individuals often experience impaired executive functioning. Executive functioning includes self-regulation, working memory, and flexible thinking (Corbett et al., 2009). Meaning that these individuals often experience sensory and communication problems. Difficulties with episodic memory retrieval and lower communication skills can lead to the interviewee's behaviour being interpreted as deceptive. Individuals that show heightened stress, being tense, fidgeting and providing less detailed information are often seen as suspicious by interviewers (DePaulo et al., 2003). By providing the individuals with procedural information the amount of stress that is perceived can be decreased leading to the individual being able to think about a strategy on how to best address the questions asked instead of incriminating themselves as well as showing less behaviour that can be interpreted as deceptive.

The procedural information explains what an investigative interview is and everything that will happen before and during the interview. While providing interviewees with merely their legal rights might not be an obstacle for everyone, for some people, such as individuals with autism, it creates a clear disadvantage. Interviewing methods are developed based on neurotypicals, which means that these are not necessarily fitting for neurodivergent individuals, such as those with autism (Maras & Bowler, 2010).

To understand how procedural information might result in more interviewees being able to adopt a strategy and with that help make the interviews fairer it is important to first understand how individuals prepare for interviews. Taking into account the differences between how guilty and innocent individuals prepare as well as individuals with autism. In essence, it is all about information control, which is a method of obtaining self-regulation. For both innocent and guilty individuals there is a threat, they want to be believed in order to not be incriminated. However, the nature of this threat is different. Innocent people are less

inclined to adopt a complete strategy and usually tend to opt for merely staying truthful about what happened (Hartwig et al. 2007; Strömwall et al., 2006). They do not have anything to keep from the interviewer and therefore do not have to be careful in providing details. Therefore, answers from innocent individuals are often more detailed and contain high amounts of information compared to the answers of guilty individuals who tend to keep their answers short and vague (Oleszkiewicz & Watson, 2020). This is to ensure that they do not accidentally provide unknown information for the interviewer on the event. Guilty individuals are more inclined to create an actual strategy compared to innocent individuals, this is expected to be because they think it makes them appear more truthful (Hartwig et al., 2007). Lastly, the behaviour that guilty individuals are falsely believed to often exhibit includes mannerisms like avoiding eye-contact, and a higher amount of fidgeting (DePaulo et al., 2003; Maras & Bowler, 2010). This behaviour is similar to the mannerisms that individuals with autism often exhibit (Maras & Bowler, 2010; National Health Service UK, 2024). Therefore, this false-belief may incorrectly incriminate autistic individuals. Besides the mannerisms, individuals with autism give short and literal answers without much background information, which is similar to how guilty individuals answer questions. These behaviours are enhanced in stressful and/or unknown situations. This may hinder their ability to recall events, leading to less use of details in the description about what happened (Bagnall et al. 2023). This means that these autistic individuals might accidentally look more guilty than they are. By providing pre-interview procedural information the individuals, especially those with autism, get more insight into the situation.

Pre-interview procedural information can aid in obtaining information control by providing the individual with information on what to expect. This can include the length of the interview, what the interview will look like, the type of room where the interview is conducted, how many people and what type of people will be present, and the rights of the

interviewee written out. This procedural information is written out so that the individual has more time to take in the information compared to merely listening to someone explaining it to them. By providing this information there is less uncertainty and the interview becomes more predictable, which lowers the anxiety and stress experienced by the individuals with autism (Riedelbauch et al., 2023). The information does not include the content of the questions or any other information that is relevant to the investigation. The goal is to help autistics present themselves and the truth, without compromising the investigative integrity.

A similar approach to providing pre-interview procedural information is the model statement approach for witness interviews. In essence, a model statement helps the witness by providing them with an example of what a statement should look like. It shows the interviewee an example of a statement, which allows them to provide a more detailed description of the events that took place (Brackmann et al., 2017; Leal et al., 2013). These model statements might help interviewees with recalling of the event. A model statement gives the interviewee a direction on what to expect and what to include in their statements without providing any information on the event that is under investigation, which is similar to what the procedural information does. It guides the interviewee in understanding what is expected of them. Model statements aim at enhancing the accuracy of the statements that the interviewees provide. It is expected that this will happen as well by providing pre-interview procedural information.

This current study focuses on exploring how individuals, specifically individuals with autism, strategise for interviews and compare this to neurotypical individuals. Additionally, it will be explored whether procedural information given alongside legal rights before the investigative interview has an affect on the creation of a strategy and the type of strategy that interviewees create before the investigative interview. Besides that, the goal of the study is to provide new information to make the investigative interviews more inclusive.

I expect that providing procedural information alongside legal rights will make interviewees strategise more for their interview compared to interviewees who do not receive procedural information, but merely their legal rights. Additionally, I believe that providing procedural information will make a difference for individuals with autism.

Methods

Design

Participants were asked to participate in a lab experiment on investigative interviews. The participants are asked to imagine themselves on a vacation with a border control interview. The study used a 2 (Procedural information vs No Procedural information) x 2 (Autistic vs Non-Autistic) between participants design. All participants are randomly assigned to one of these groups. Every participant is innocent in this experiment. In all groups, the participants are confronted with a border control interview. However, the participants in the Procedural information group receive pre-interview procedural information on what will happen before and during the interview and how long it will take. The participants in the No Procedural Information group will receive a distracting task to spend approximately the same amount of time on.

This research is part of a wider study, the measures performed consist of strategy coding, a rapport scale for interviews by Duke et al. (2018), a stress measure by Cohen et al. (1994), and the Autism Spectrum Quotient by Baron-Cohen et al. (2021). All these measures are included in a Qualtrics questionnaire (Appendix B), which is also used for gaining insight on demographics such as, age, gender, and country of origin. However, only the strategy coding scheme and the demographics questionnaire were included in the analysis.

Participants

The participants for this study are reached through the University of Twente credit system SONA, where students at the University of Twente can help each other by

participating in studies. Additionally, participants were reached through word-of-mouth and social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Discord and Instagram. Besides that, to reach a greater amount of individuals with autism, multiple clinics/help centres specialised in autism in the region of Twente have been contacted to ask for interested clients. Participants are required to be aged 18 or older. We were looking for both neurotypical participants as well as autistic participants. For these individuals with autism there were no additional criteria. We did not exclude multiple diagnoses or only focus on a specific form of autism. Participation of 43 participants have been recruited through convenience sampling and snowball sampling. One participant was excluded from the dataset as it was clear from the answers given that they did not take the experiment seriously. This means that the final sample that was analysed includes 42 participants. The mean age of the participants is 21.81 years old with a SD of 2.50, minimum age being 18 and a maximum age of 29. Gender is not completely equally distributed with 30 females (71.43%) and 12 males (28.57%). There are a total of five (11.90%) individuals diagnosed with autism. The sample consisted of 16 nationalities. Where 12 (28.57%) participants are from the Netherlands, 15 (35.71%) from Germany and 15 (35.71%) from other countries. The procedural information condition included 21 participants, two of which created a strategy. The no procedural information condition included 21 participants, and six of these developed a strategy.

This study is approved by the Ethical Committee from the Department of Behavioural Management and Social Sciences of the University of Twente. Approval number 240141.

Materials

Case Vignette

The participants are shown the case vignette (Appendix C) that explains a short vacation with a friend. The participants will be asked to imagine they have been on this vacation. This case vignette can help them visualise the situation as well as make the

interview more realistic. Brieger (2022) created this case vignette, that explains/shows a scenario to the participant about a holiday that they need to imagine having been on. This case vignette includes the location of the vacation, who they spend the vacation with, and what they have done on this trip. This scenario makes the information used in the interview the same for all participants. After reading this information the participants were asked to pack a bag. Besides the information in the case vignette, the participants were also asked to imagine that this bag and its contents were theirs. The physical items used are a backpack, a t-shirt, a towel, flip flops, a book, sunscreen and sunglasses. These items are used to let the participants pack a bag (Appendix I) so that they have the actual experience and genuine memories of packing the bag during the interview.

Procedural information and Distracting task

Lastly, depending on the condition the participant was in they received either procedural information or a distracting task. The procedural information (Appendix D) explains what a voluntary police interview is and everything that will happen before and during the interview. This includes information on what a voluntary police interview is, that it aims at gathering as much information as possible, that it will be recorded, the legal rights, and the participants rights during and after the interview. Besides that, it will be explained what kind of information the interviewer will ask questions about. There is specific information included about the topics that are likely to be addressed and with that allows autistic individuals to think through their activities ahead of time, without giving them an advantage.

The distracting task (Appendix E) is given to the participants so that both groups spend some time between reading the case and packing of the bag until the actual start of the interview, so that the other conditions are as similar as possible to ensure accurate measurement of the wanted variable. In this case that variable is whether or not the

participant gets procedural information. This distracting task shows some text about a book as well as some other books on the side.

Measures

The main measure of this study is strategy, which is a post-interview measure. Strategy was measured with the use of one yes/no question followed-up by 2 open questions (Appendix B). The yes/no question simply asked “Did you have a plan or a strategy going into the interview?”. When answered with yes participants were asked to explain their strategy and why they used one. When the question was answered with no, participants were asked why they decided to go into the interview without a strategy and after that, if the strategy changed during the interview.

These questions are useful for obtaining an answer to the research question. The research question asks if procedural information given alongside legal rights will result in interviewees strategize more for their interview compared to interviewees who merely receive their legal rights. Therefore, by asking whether participants use a strategy we could get insight in if there are differences between the conditions for strategizing. The open questions could help in understanding what type of strategy people use and the reasoning behind the participants choices.

Lastly, the participants that indicate to not have an official autism diagnosis will be directed to the Autism Spectrum Quotient by Baron-Cohen et al. (2001). This questionnaire uses a 4-point Likert scale that ranges from 1) “Strongly Disagree” to 4) “Strongly Agree”. It includes 50 statements about the daily life.

Procedure

Before making an appointment for the experiment, participants receive some information on the experiment (Appendix G). They are informed on the general overview of the experiment without saying anything about the four conditions that they could be in. It is

explained to the potential participants that they will be receiving some information on a vacation as well as that they pack their bags and might be checked by the police officer. Besides that, they are informed about having to fill in questionnaires and the length of the experiment.

After sign-up, but before starting the experiment, participants will be asked to read and fill in an informed consent form (Appendix A). After that, participants are asked to share demographic information and they fill in the pre-interview questionnaires. These pre-interview questionnaires include a stress, an anxiety and a rapport questionnaire. Then they will receive a case vignette (Appendix C) that explains a short vacation with a friend. The participants will be asked to imagine they have been on this vacation. After thoroughly reading through the case vignette every participant will pack their bags and head to the "airport". This is where there will be an actual difference between the two groups. Half of the participants will verbally receive their legal rights and the written distracting task (Appendix E), and the other half will verbally receive their legal rights and written procedural information (Appendix D). After that participants go through an investigative interview with a "border control officer" for being a suspect of having illegal items in their bags. This interview aims at establishing an understanding on whether or not the interviewee has taken anything illegal in their luggage. The interviewees are all innocent of which they are aware, due to them having packed their bag themselves. Lastly, every participant fills in a questionnaire about their strategy, stress, anxiety and rapport after the interview as well as the ASD questionnaire. This ASD questionnaire is filled in by the participants who indicate not having an official Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis. This questionnaire is used to establish whether there are participants that might not have an official diagnosis yet, but regardless of that might have autism.

Data analysis

To analyse the collected qualitative data on the participants' strategy during the investigative interview a codebook thematic analysis will be conducted (Finlay, 2021). This aims at exploring reasons for using a strategy for the interview or not and whether or not this decision is influenced by the provided procedural information and/or by autism. For this study the obtained written answers were analysed in Atlas.ti with a thematic analysis. Through this analysis, themes have been constructed in the answers given by the participants. These themes are formed to answer the question if procedural information given alongside legal rights affects the strategy that interviewees create before the investigative interview. This thematic analysis is done through an inductive approach. The obtained results are used to gain more insight into the possible differences or similarities between the several conditions.

First, all the answers were read through, to get an insight into the information provided by participants. After that, the answers were separated by condition that the participants were in and whether or not they used a strategy. Lastly, the texts were coded by focusing on the type of strategy, if one was used, and reasoning for using a strategy or not. The initial codes were generated and after that the information was grouped into the four different themes on the basis of mutual characteristics.

Results

The results of a total of 42 participants are taken into account in this results section. Of the 42 participants 8 (19.05%) reported developing a strategy prior to the interview. Out of these eight participants, two were in the procedural information condition and six were in the no procedural information group. One participant with a strategy was in the procedural information condition and has diagnosed autism. Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants over the different conditions and whether or not they had a strategy.

Table 1

Participant distribution over the conditions

	Procedural Information		No Procedural Information		Total
	Strategy	No Strategy	Strategy	No Strategy	
# of	2	19	6	15	42
participants	(4.76%)	(45.24%)	(14.29%)	(35.71%)	

Due to the short answers that were received, it was difficult to do a complete Thematic Analysis. A thematic analysis is more about understanding the deeper meaning behind the reasoning for the actions or thoughts of the interviewee, which is difficult to perform with data that does not include very rich information. The answers given by the participants did not include enough detail to properly understand the background reasoning behind their decision on using a strategy or not. Therefore, a slightly adjusted Thematic Content Analysis is used. The final analysis is less focused on a deep understanding than was previously planned. Performing the Thematic Content Analysis led to a total of four themes. One of these is related to the expectations that the participants have before the interview and what this leads them to do. The second theme is related to the presumption of being innocent. The third theme relates to reasons for not preparing. This includes whether they usually prepare and how to believe strategizing makes them look. Lastly, the participants who did make use of a strategy for the interview will be explored. This means why they decided to strategize and what this strategy entails.

All the situations and codes will be explored with the use of what group the participants were in and to see whether or not there is a difference between these groups.

Knowing what to expect

This code includes the explanations given by the participants for not strategizing based on them still feeling that they had insufficient information to effectively develop a

strategy. It differs from being unfamiliar with the interviews to not knowing how many questions will be asked.

Eleven participants out of 42 described being unaware of what to expect for what would happen. Six out of these 11 were in the procedural information condition, and the remaining five were in the no procedural information group. This means that 30% of the participants in the procedural information group felt unaware of what to expect and in the no procedural information condition 22.73% of the participants. Two out of eleven were individuals with autism, one of these participants was in the procedural information condition and the other one was in the no procedural information condition. All 11 participants stated that they did not know what to expect or what would be asked. All eleven participants went into the interview without a strategy.

The participants in the procedural information condition stated different reasons for being unaware of what would happen. One of them stated, "I am not familiar with such interviews.". Besides that, 4 participants in this condition stated that they were not sure what to expect and therefore did not go into the interview with a strategy. One of these three was an individual with autism. The last two stated that they did not know what they would be asked: "I didn't know how many questions or what questions would be asked.". Even though the amount of questions was unknown, the procedural information (Appendix D) did give some insight into the type of questions that would be asked. While these comments were made by the participants in the procedural information condition it can be questioned whether the provided information was taken into account completely or if it might not be understandable enough. Regardless of the information that they received there is still a lot of uncertainty for the interviewees.

The five participants in the no procedural information condition also stated that they were unaware of what to expect from the interview. One stated, "I have never been in such a

confrontational situation and did not know what I had to expect.”. Another stated: “I did not know what was waiting for me.”. In this condition, there seems to be uncertainty in how the interviewer will act as well as what type of questions will be asked.

It seems that the participants did not go into the interview with a strategy not only because they had zero expectations, but also because they had no idea on how to strategize for such an investigative interview. They seem to have no prior experience with these types of interviews, and therefore even if they would want to strategize, they did not know how to do this. One participant in the no procedural information condition without autism stated: “I had nothing to hide but also was not entirely sure what to expect so there was nothing really I could prepare for.”. The participants in the no procedural information condition seem to be uncertain on how to handle the interview as they do not know what the interviews entail.

The effect of the presumption of being innocent

This code includes participants who do not strategize and describe the reason for that to be that they simply feel like they do not need a strategy either just because they are not stressed or because they have nothing to hide.

There are 21 participants that described feeling that there was no need to go into the interview on the basis of not needing a strategy. They described not feeling stressed and simply wanting to wait and see what would happen. Besides that, the participants described that as far as they are aware they did not do anything illegal and therefore did not feel like they need a strategy.

12 of these participants were in the procedural information condition, 2 of these are diagnosed with autism. One of these participants with autism stated: “I was not stressed before the interview and did not feel the need to have any strategy.”. One participant in this condition stated: “Because I did not feel like it was necessary since I did not think I had anything illegal with me.”.

Another participant with autism that felt there was no need to have a strategy in the procedural information group that stated: “As far as I knew I also didn't do anything wrong, so I expected I could just answer some questions and it would be OK.”. In the no procedural information group, a participant stated something similar: “I did not feel that I had to convince them or hid something from them.”.

These statements show that participants in all different conditions described not feeling the need to strategize because they were not aware of doing anything illegal and they could just answer truthfully. The participants describe not being bothered to strategize as they are innocent.

Reasons for (not) preparing

This theme includes quotes that describe the way that the participants feel about preparing for an interview or any new situation. Besides that, preparation behaviour can also be influenced by fear of incriminating oneself. Three participants stated that they do not prepare and they added a more thorough reason for not doing so.

Not the type to strategize

There was one participant that explained that they do not prepare for new situations. This participant stated: “I usually go unprepared into new situations. I do not think ahead.”, this participant was in the no procedural information condition and has no autism.

Planning might make me look suspicious

The procedural information condition contained two participants that described being afraid to incriminate oneself by strategizing.

One of these participants has an autism diagnosis and said the following about strategizing: “In my opinion during border control it's better to go with the flow than to plan the conversation as planning it makes it look like I'm lying.”. Lastly, there was one participant in the procedural information condition that stated: “Because I think going into

the interview without a plan is more authentic and because of the fact that I did not have anything illegal with me I do not need any strategy to hide anything.”. These two quotes show that these participants did not want to make themselves look suspicious by overly thinking about the situation happening. However, especially the last quote shows how this participant also thinks about whether or not they did something illegal.

These three participants specifically stated that they do not prepare and added an elaborate reason for it. However, this reasoning does differ between people. This shows that while for some people it might be their usual behaviour to not prepare for any new situations, for others the reason can be to not incriminate oneself.

The strategies used in the interviews

This code entails the quotes that explain the strategies used by the participants that did go into the interview with a strategy. There are eight participants that went into the interview with a strategy. Six out of these were in the no procedural information condition, and two out of these eight participants were in the procedural information condition.

For the participants in the no procedural information condition the strategy was either to memorise what was packed or to answer the questions truthfully without incriminating themselves. One of the participants stated: “I did try to remember what I packed because I already thought that the bag might be checked.”. This participant expected there to be consequences to the actions previously exhibited and tried to act accordingly to that. Another participant stated: “While reading about *my journey* I tried to remember as much as possible. I did this by repeating/going through every step before adding a new one. I did a similar thing while packing the bag. During the interview I just went through the list again.” These two participants aimed at remembering as much information as possible from the case to give the most accurate responses. Both of them did not receive any prior procedural information, they

were only aware that there would be an interview. They did not have any additional content information. They believed that accuracy could show that they were being truthful.

Then there were two participants that stated their strategy was to truthfully answer the questions. “I decided to be nice and answer things they could know.” and “So my strategy was that I tried to tell the officer honestly about my items. I tried to speak confidentially. For sure, I was a little nervous in the beginning because the officer was confident but I also tried to stay calm because it was just a control and I knew my items in my backpack.”. Both these participants tried to be as honest as they could be and to give the officer as much information as possible. To make it easier for the officer and to not incriminate themselves.

A participant in the no procedural information condition also described a strategy used with the reason to not incriminate themselves. This participant stated: “Be careful to not say suspicious things that could get me in trouble.”. The strategy for the last participant in the no procedural information condition was to make it clear that if something would be found that it was not done intentionally.

In the procedural information condition there were two participants with a strategy. One of these participants was an individual with autism and they stated that their strategy was: “Listen to the question carefully, take time to think and answer and always try to answer the questions as best as I can.”. This participant had a strategy of being honest and truthfully answering the questions, which is similar to two of the participants in the no procedural information condition. The other participant in the procedural information condition had a different strategy: “Ask for a lawyer immediately. If asked about my whereabouts be as vague as possible, only mention recent events where I met with people I can easily contact. If asked about something I am not 100% able to answer remain silent and wait. Do not try to be agonistic towards the police officers and try to remain as calm and serene as possible.” This participant tried to truthfully answer the questions, but also to be vague in order not to

incriminate themselves and to be careful what to share. This participant also stated: “I tried my best to stick to my original plan and created a small timeline in my head to stick to make sure there were no discrepancies in my speech.”. This specific participant is an example of someone who carefully planned the entirety of their strategy, even though this was rare in this studies dataset. It also indicates that one does not necessarily have to be guilty to prepare in a very detailed way for an interview.

Overall

In this dataset there is no clear difference in whether or not the participants constructed a strategy based on the condition they are in. Meaning that there seems to be no difference between the autism vs. Non-autism groups, as well as between the procedural information vs. No procedural information group. The only theme where there was a difference was in the theme The strategies used in the interviews 6 out of 8 participants in this group were part of the no procedural information group.

Discussion

While the aim of investigative interviews is to gather credible information from victims, witnesses and suspects, it is important for the interview process to be as effective as possible. Interview techniques are in general designed with neurotypicals in mind. Meaning that they are often not inclusive for neurodivergent individuals and more specifically those on the autism spectrum. This study aimed at exploring how individuals, specifically individuals with autism, strategise for interviews and compare this to neurotypical individuals.

Additionally, it was explored testing if and how procedural information given alongside legal rights before the investigative interview can affect the strategy that interviewees create before the investigative interview. The results gained from the dataset through a thematic content analysis show no clear difference in whether or not the participants constructed a strategy based on the condition they are in. People tended to not strategise, which is in line with prior

research on innocent suspect behaviour. The innocent suspects do mention that they believe planning makes them look guilty. And even the participants that received procedural information felt like they did not have enough information to prepare an actual strategy. This suggests that general information on the type of information that the police will ask about might be insufficient to help think through the answers given.

Due to the substantially lower amount of individuals with autism compared to the amount of neurotypical individuals in the sample, it is not possible to say whether or not there is a difference in how they view the interview and if this has an influence on the results. These results however, show no enhanced inclination for using a strategy for individuals with autism compared to neurotypicals. The individuals with autism do not show any difference in their reasoning for not strategising compared to the neurotypicals.

Participants in the *knowing what to expect* group stated to be unsure what to expect and therefore did not go into the interview with a strategy. However, it would be expected that they would try and gain more certainty through the information that they received based on their need for certainty (Latinus et al., 2019). This could indicate that the information that was provided was insufficient in informing participants on how to prepare.

In the theme of *The effect of the presumption of being innocent* participants stated that they did not do anything illegal or were not aware of doing anything illegal, so therefore they did not strategise. They stated to assume that they would be fine because there was nothing they did wrong. Meaning that there was a low stress and high certainty environment, might have made it to be that there is a lack of differences between the autistic individuals and the neurotypicals (Maras & Bowler, 2010). Besides that, they have more cognitive capacity to think about the events that took place and with that feel like they can speak the truth. This means their behaviour is similar to the behaviour of neurotypical innocent individuals and

therefore they might also not feel the need to strategise and go into the interview with merely the decision to stay truthful and present their innocence (Hartwig et al., 2007).

There was 1 participant with autism in the *Reasons for preparing* group that was part of the procedural information condition. This participant stated to not strategise because they believe it is better to go with the flow in a border control interview to not incriminate oneself. While this is not really a strategy on its own, it is a way of dealing with the situation and a set mindset on how to behave during such an event like in the experiment.

Additionally, all participants in this study were innocent. While innocent individuals are less inclined to adopt a strategy and more likely to tell the truth, the results cohere with previous studies (Hartwig et al., 2007; Strömwall et al., 2006) that stated that innocent individuals do not need to be careful with answering questions as they do not have anything to hide. Therefore, it is understandable that most participants of this study also did not adopt a strategy. The results suggest that pre-interview procedural information is not an indication for whether or not the participants strategise for an interview for the participants of this study. This could be, because there were no participants who were guilty in this study. That might indicate why there was also a low number of participants who felt the need to strategise to protect themselves and appear more truthful which is in line with the results of Hartwig et al (2007).

Additionally, it could be that due to the low-stakes nature of this experiment the participants felt less need for a strategy as the anxiety and stress levels were lower than they might have been in a real investigative interview. The study of Oleszkiewicz et al. (2023) shows criticism on the applicability of laboratory studies to the real-life situations. It needs to be considered how and where the experiment differ from real-life and how to overcome these differences to gather an accurate understanding that can be applied to actual investigative interviews.

Lastly, numerous participants stated that they did not prepare for the interview with a strategy because they were afraid to incriminate themselves. This is in line with former research saying that guilty people are more likely to apply a strategy to make them look innocent. Meanwhile innocent people are more likely to just tell the truth as it happened. This adds to the previous research done by Hartwig et al. (2007) as it shows that a similar result has been achieved in a different population with distinct methods used.

This study population included 8 participants that did strategise for their interview. While most participants stated to memorise the information they received, both in the procedural information condition and in the no procedural information condition, there was 1 participant who had a more notable strategy. This was a very prepared individual who created an extremely detailed strategy, which in general is more in line with how guilty individuals prepare as can be found in the study of Hartwig et al. (2007). An innocent individual wanting to be as vague as possible might have to do with trust in the police officers. While generally withholding information and keeping answers short and vague is seen as guilty or suspicious behaviour, this could also be an indication of mistrust in the situation or people involved.

The other strategies used by the participants included memorising as much information as possible and answering truthfully. Although these are strategies, they are still in line with the previous research by Hartwig et al. (2007) and Strömwall et al. (2006) who found that innocent people will simply tell the truth. The memorising in this case might have to do with the fact that the participants did not really experience all the events of the vacation that they were supposedly on, and therefore they need to take some more time to memorise what has occurred.

Strengths, Limitations, and future research

This study is performed in a laboratory setting, allowing for more control over the different variables that potentially play a role in the experiment. However, this does take

away some of the real-life variables that might have an influence on the individuals (Falk & Heckman, 2009; Levitt & List, 2006). This experiment was low on ecological validity. The stakes for the participants were low compared to an actual interview, therefore the stress that the participants experience is possibly lower than it would be in a real investigative interview. Low stress makes it that individuals are less likely to plan and therefore it is coherent with the results of Hartwig et al. (2007) that the number of participants that went into the interview without a strategy is quite low. Creating a study set-up more similar to real investigative interviews could enhance the results. This could be done by increasing the length of the interviews. For our study, each interview was scheduled for approximately 20 minutes, which is considerably different from the length of real-life investigative interviews.

The data was not rich enough to analyse it with merely a thematic analysis. Thematic analyses explore patterns in the data (Finlay, 2021). When the data is inadequately rich, as the data from this sample, it is difficult to perform a thematic analysis while the patterns to explore are scarce. Therefore, a slightly adjusted thematic content analysis was used. A thematic analysis would be preferred because it provides a deeper understanding of the experiences of the client. The open textboxes might make it more difficult to get a lot of meaningful information from the participants. However, they are preferred over closed questions because those more often steer participants to a certain answer. Therefore, due to the size of this experiment open textboxes seemed the best option. A nice addition to the open textboxes could be to have an additional interview on these answers where follow-up questions can be asked. This could aid in gathering more in-depth information on why people strategize or not and how they did it. Additional questions that might be valuable are: "Could you elaborate on why you decided to go into the interview with/without a strategy?" This question could provide an increased amount of understanding on why the participants behaved in the way they did. Even though it was asked why they decided the course of action

that the participants took, the answers were often not very clear or detailed which made it difficult to understand the actual reasoning behind the actions. Besides asking for more elaboration on the reasons, asking whether or not the participant would behave the same way if they would be in this situation another time could be an adequate way of testing whether the individuals believe that their course of action was beneficial for the situation.

Conclusion

This study indicates that providing pre-interview procedural information in this sample is not an indication for whether or not the participants strategize for the interview. There were no differences between the different conditions on the amount or types of strategies used. Between the autistic and non-autistic individuals as well as between the procedural information and the no procedural information condition there was no clear difference in the way that the innocent individuals behave.

People tended to not strategise, which is in line with prior research on innocent suspect behaviour. The innocent suspects do mention that they believe planning makes them look guilty. And even the participants that received procedural information felt like they did not have enough information to prepare an actual strategy. This suggests that general information on the type of information that the police will ask about might be insufficient to help think through the answers given.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Purpose

This research aims to explore human behavior in situations involving information exchange and communication dynamics at border control. By studying these interactions, we hope to gain insight into how individuals respond and feel about certain prompts.

Procedure

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to imagine you have been on a short holiday with a friend. You pack your bags and head back to the airport. At the airport a police officer might have a look at your bags. After you pass security, we ask you to fill in a questionnaire about your experience. At any point during the experiment, there will be a researcher present should you have questions or remarks. If you decide to enrol in this study, your involvement will take between 20 and 30 minutes and you will receive SONA credits for your participation, if you are eligible.

Confidentiality

To ensure confidentiality, your responses will be fully anonymous: we will not collect any personally identifying information from you, and your responses will not be traceable back to you. The anonymous raw data might be made publicly available for other researchers. The anonymous research material must be stored for up to 10 years before it is deleted, in line with data management policy designed to ensure the accountability of scientific research.

Risks or Discomforts

We foresee no risk with participating in this study.

Participant Rights

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without any consequences. You will receive full compensation, also if you stop participating. To withdraw participation later, please email the principal investigator within 10 days of your participation. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, wish to obtain information, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Secretary of the Ethics Committee, ethicscommittee@bms.utwente.nl. For further information about this study, contact the researcher Yasmin Saciri, y.saciri@student.utwente.nl.

Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your consent indicates that:

- I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles, publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but that my data will not be identifiable.
- I agree to take part in the study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation, without explaining.

Appendix B

Questionnaire Strategy

Did you have a plan or a strategy going into the interview?

Yes

No

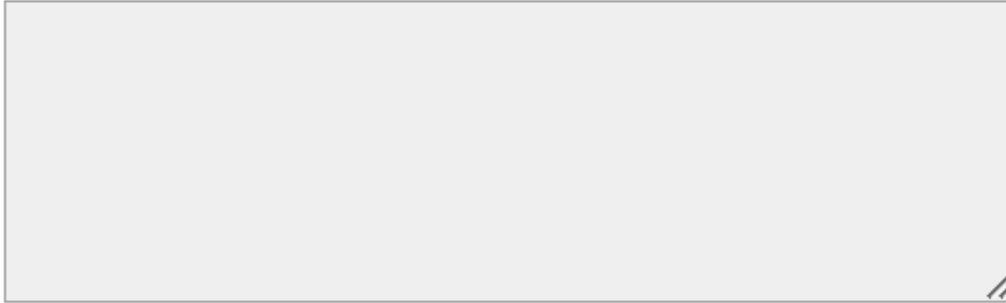
If yes:

Please describe briefly your strategy for the interview:

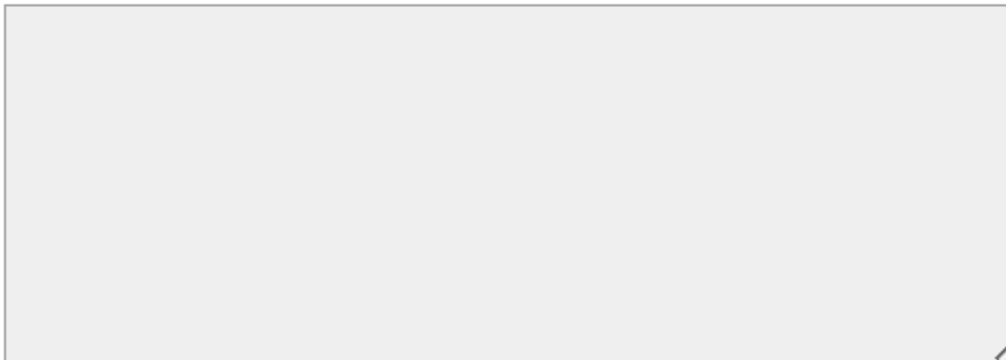
Did your strategy change during the interview, and if so, could you please explain how?

If no:

Would you please explain why you decided to go into the interview without a strategy?



Did your strategy change during the interview, and if so, could you please explain how?



Appendix C

Case Vignette

Your task today...

Please wait for the experimenter before you start! You have the opportunity to ask questions!



Please imagine yourself in the following situation...



You were traveling with your close friend, Anne Hastings (20), to Spain.

You were staying in a Hostel in Madrid and enjoyed 4 days together.

You spend most of your days in Madrid sightseeing...



Plaza de Cibeles



Puerta del Sol



Gran Vía



Prado Museum

... and trying
local food
and bars.



... and trying local food and bars.



Now you are on
your way back,
alone, as Anne
took an earlier
flight to Tenerife,
Canary Islands,
yesterday to visit
her grandparents
who are there on
an 8 weeks winter
break.



Your last day in Madrid, you spent alone wandering through town and visiting the local markets.

You stop at your favourite pastry shop for a treat.



Back in the hostel, you meet Christian, Marco and Sofie, who you made friends with over the last couple of days.

They are on their way to an Escape Room and ask you if you would like to join.

Together you go to "Fox In A Box".



After dinner, you pack your bag because next morning you are flying back to Enschede via Schiphol Airport.



Appendix D

Prior procedural information

Voluntary Police Interview

What You Need to Know

You have been asked to attend a voluntary interview with the police or another law enforcement agency: This flyer will provide you with information about the voluntary police interview including what you can expect, and what your rights are.

What is a voluntary police interview?

A voluntary police interview or interview under caution is a formal conversation with police.

The interview aims to gather as much information about a specific incident as possible.

You do not have to attend, and you can leave at any time once the interview has begun.

While a voluntary interview might be conducted in a less formal way than an interview under arrest, the **conversation will still be recorded** and anything you say can potentially be used against you in any subsequent criminal proceedings.

The Interview

Before the interview, you are formally cautioned. Your legal rights are:

- Right to hire your own lawyer
- If you do not have a lawyer, you can apply for a free lawyer, we will provide you with a phone number
- Right to remain silent (you do not have to answer questions if you do not want to)
- Everything you say can be used against you in front of a court of law

At the start of the interview, your interviewer will tell you:

- The names of all people in attendance
- The purpose of the interview – including the incident under investigation
- That you can choose to end the interview at any time
- That you do not have to say anything
- That anything you do say can be used against you in a court of law


During the interview, the police officer will ask you questions which can cover issues such as:





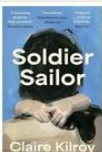
- Your whereabouts at certain times
- Whether you know certain people
- Your knowledge of specific events

You have the right to breaks (normally 15 minutes every two hours) if the interview goes on for this long.

Appendix E

Distracting task



	<p>»» If I Survive You Jonathan Escoffery</p> <h3>Dazzling debut of racial identity</h3>
 <p>Biography The Marriage Question Clare Carlisle</p>	<p>»» The second-person point of view risks being contrived, distracting, presumptuous, scratchy, puerile and self-conscious. Just don't do it, writing instructors warn. Unless you're Escoffery, a young American in whose hands the second person is arresting, intimate, adventurous, attuned, sophisticated and, yes, still self-conscious.</p>
 <p>History Uproar! Alice Loxton</p>	<p>»» Booker-shortlisted If I Survive You is a stylish debut of eight linked short stories set mostly in Miami during a recession. It advances in short, impressionistic scenes, and much like viewing a Seurat, you're lured in by the dazzling surface before needing to step back for relief. For the most part, the collection follows Trelawny, a racially ambiguous Black man, who is constantly served the question: "What are you?" His economic and romantic prospects are dim. He has no stable friendships. His family is a case study in marital estrangement, parental favouritism and sibling rivalry.</p>
 <p>Fiction Nothing Special Nicole Flattery</p>	<p>»» Obviously, the second person brokers empathy between reader and character - you put yourself in Trelawny's shoes. Less obviously, because you essentially stands in for I, it confirms the estrangement Trelawny feels from himself. He cannot convincingly narrate from the I position because that would presume that he inhabits a self. It's a genius move, when you consider it. Escoffery could have been content to tell these stories in a straightforward way - they're weighty enough to hold our attention - but his exaggerated stylishness takes us beyond wan empathy to identification.</p>
 <p>Fiction Soldier Sailor Claire Kilroy</p>	<p>»» Ian Williams</p>

Appendix F

Interview Guide

1. you have the right to remain silent, anything you say can and will be used against you in the courts of law.
2. you have the right to an attorney; if you cannot afford one, one will be appointed. **INTERVIEW** 3. did you understand everything?

Before the interview to prepare participant for the interruption:

Experimenter:

"We will shortly begin the interview. Before we start I want you to know that we might need to interrupt the interview for a short while as my interviewer expects an important call. I apologies for this but I assure you this will not keep you longer with us than necessary. We just take a quick break, and then continue the interview."

"Engage and Explain"	"Accusatory"
Hello, I want to talk to you about your luggage.	
I need to establish whether you brought any illegal items to the Netherlands. This could have severe consequences such as a fine or even imprisonment depending on the item. But, let's talk first.	
Before we start I just want to go over some ground rules for today.	
For your protection and for mine I will record this so we get a full account of what was said today.	
The main purpose here is to get as much information as possible. So, it is important that you tell me everything in as much detail as possible without leaving things out. This is important because I wasn't there, so I don't know what happened.	
Do you have any questions so far?	
OK, so we'll begin the interview now.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where did you travel from into the NL? ▪ What where you traveling for? ▪ Whom did you spend your holiday? ▪ Where is she now? 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Where do you live in the NL? <p>[Pointing at the bag.]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is this your bag? ▪ How many pieces of luggage do you have to be checked-in? ▪ Did you pack your luggage yourself or did somebody help you? ▪ Did you, at any point, leave your baggage unattended? ▪ Did anybody ask you to carry anything for them? ▪
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Please tell me everything that you did since you packed your bag. ▪ Please tell me in as much detail as possible what you packed. ▪ Please tell me if there are any goods, you need to declare. ▪ What else can you tell me? ▪ Would it be okay for you if we check your bag? <p>Thank you that is all I need to know for now.</p>

Appendix G

Information prior to sign up

15:38 📶 🌐 23	
🔒 utwente.sona-systems.com	
Location	Cubicus (Room will be updated)
Eligibility Requirements	Participants need to be over 18 years old and have a good understanding of the English language.
Brief Description	This research aims to explore human behavior in situations involving information exchange and communication dynamics at border control. By studying these interactions, we hope to gain insight into how individuals respond and feel about certain prompts.
Detailed Description	As a participant in this study, you will be asked to imagine you have been on a short holiday with a friend. You pack your bags and head back to the airport. At the airport a police officer might have a look at your bags. After you pass security, we ask you to fill in a questionnaire about your experience. At any point during the experiment, there will be a researcher present should you have questions or remarks. If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will take between 20 and 30 minutes and you will receive SONA credits for your participation, if you are

Appendix H

Debrief

Debrief

Study objective

Contact with law enforcement can be a stressful and anxiety-inducing process, especially for people on the spectrum. Therefore, we want to compare how autistic people in comparison to neurotypicals behave and react at border control: What are the differences in stress and anxiety levels; how does rapport differ between the police officer and participant; and finally, what strategies do participants use to appear innocent? Further, we want to test whether giving participants procedural information previous to the interaction with the police officer can reduce uncertainty and therefore, limit stress and anxiety. Our goal is to find strategies that can aid autistic people without harming the investigative process.

How did it work?

As a participant in this study, you received the case vignette and were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. One of these conditions received procedural information, i.e. what to expect during an interaction at border control, and the other condition does not. Both conditions got their legal rights read. The procedural information includes information about interview settings, such as time needed for the interview, who will be there and the aim of the interview. After the interview everyone received the same survey with which we want to measure if anxiety, stress rapport, and strategy for the interview differ between the two conditions.

Why is this important?

This research aims to develop a better understanding of how procedural information can counteract the challenges individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) experience during investigative interviews. Increasing the fairness and efficacy of investigative interviews is paramount in ensuring justice and equality for all individuals, including those with autism spectrum disorder.

Withdrawing Policy

If you decide that you want to withdraw from this research, please contact us (researchers) within 10 days and quote your participation number to allow us to locate your data and withdraw it. Your participation number is:

Contact

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, wish to obtain information, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Secretary of the Ethics Committee:
ethicscommittee@bms@utwente.nl

For further information about this study, contact the principal investigators Lynn Weiher, Ph.D. at L.weiher@utwente.nl or Yasmin Saciri, y.saciri@utwente.nl

Many thanks for taking the time to participate in our research!

Appendix I

Materials for the bag packing task

