

Examining the Adaptability of Guilty Suspects in Interrogations

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Abstract

This study examined adaptability of guilty suspects in interrogations. Students ($N=55$) committed a mock crime and were then interviewed by a researcher, presenting him- or herself as a police officer, shortly after. The participants' task was to come up with a strategy to convince the interviewer of their innocence. Their behavioral adjustments during the interview were the main focus of this study. More specifically, we examined whether they were adaptable during the interview.

This study was implemented in the framework of a between subject design. In sum, the set-up showed ambiguous results in capturing adaptability. While a connection between self-perception of adaptability and the ability to make adjustments has been supported, this is not the case for connecting adaptability to either admissions or statement-evidence inconsistencies. Moreover, the participants took their role seriously, but reported to not be able to adjust when new pieces of incriminating evidence were presented to them. Therefore, no significant results for adaptable behavior in guilty suspects were found.

Examining the Adaptability of Guilty Suspects in Interrogations

Recently, a new research area in the field of deception and its detection in interrogation settings focuses on strategic ways to interview suspects. For the suspect, such an interrogation can be stressful because he or she might be accused of doing something they have not done or facing the possibility of being found guilty. The point is that a guilty suspect who wants to come across as innocent needs to be able to react appropriately to every question the interrogator asks. For example, the suspect may need to keep track of what has already been said as well as predict what questions might be asked next. That is, to succeed in coming across as innocent, the guilty suspect would need to adapt their behavior in an unexpected situation.

The current study aims at studying adaptability in a behavioral context. To capture this concept, we have developed an experimental set-up inspired by a novel (police) interrogation technique, called the Strategic Use of Evidence (SUE) technique. This study is focusing on the behavior of guilty suspects in an attempt to examine their adaptive counter-interview strategies. To elicit and study adaptive suspect behavior, the ways in which the interviewer disclosed evidence during a suspect interview has been manipulated. The purpose was to affect the suspect's perception of the amount of evidence held by the interviewer and consequentially, to influence the suspect to release more forthcoming statements about their connection to the mock crime.

An important reason to study adaptability of guilty suspects in interrogations is to understand their behavior. When strategies of guilty suspects can be identified, the interrogation process will benefit from it. Interviewing techniques can be tailored to the suspect's strategy, which makes it more likely to get useful or incriminating information out of the suspect. What this study does not aim at is to give criminals strategies for how to come across as innocent. Rather, it can give guidance to police officers or interrogators in general, so they have a useful technique in their repertoire to use against criminals.

The Strategic Use of Evidence technique

The SUE technique is a rather new evidence-based approach to interviewing criminal suspects (Granhag & Hartwig, 2015). Since then, the technique has been taught to law enforcement and security practitioners in several countries around the world (Granhag & Hartwig, 2015). However, SUE hosts several different approaches that include different ways in which an interviewer can disclose evidence strategically. Before outlining the technique that was used in this study in more detail, it needs to be distinguished from other approaches.

The most noteworthy here are the early disclosure and late disclosure techniques. Late disclosure, a basic form of strategically using evidence, starts with open questions to which the suspects can provide a free recall of events (Hartwig, Granhag, & Luke, 2014). Late disclosure has shown to increase the number of inconsistencies between the suspect's statement and the existing evidence and is therefore considered more useful than early disclosure (Dando & Bull, 2011), because disclosing evidence early gives suspects the opportunity to immediately adjust their statement to fit the existing evidence. As a result, early disclosure leads to less evidence contradictions by lying suspects, because it allows lying suspects to behave more like a truth-telling suspect (Granhag, Hartwig, Mac Giolla, & Clemens, 2014).

When applying the improved form of SUE, referred to as the shift of strategy approach (Granhag & Luke, 2018), researchers aim at finding cues to whether a suspect of crime is lying or telling the truth (e.g. Granhag & Hartwig, 2015; Hartwig, Granhag, & Luke, 2014). It is an advancement of late disclosure, as it provides the interviewer with a technique that aims to shift the suspect's strategy. Again, the interviewer starts with open questions. Stepwise, they are disclosing evidence to the suspect and thereby try to detect inconsistencies in the suspect's statements or other indicators, like the suspect's strategy, for detecting lies. When applying the shift of strategy approach, a shift from the suspect withholding information to be more forthcoming with information is aspired.

While generally, innocent people tend to apply a forthcoming strategy, guilty suspects tend to withhold crucial information (Hartwig, Granhag, & Strömwall, 2007; Strömwall, Hartwig, & Granhag, 2006). Knowing this can be of advantage because the interrogator can elicit lies with the use of well-timed evidence disclosure. If this is done strategically, a guilty suspect might provide statements that are not in line with the evidence held by the police. The so-called statement-evidence inconsistencies are cues that help the interviewer make better assessments for whether the suspect is actually the culprit (Tekin et al., 2015).

These inconsistencies can be evoked by applying the SUE technique. (Granhag, 2010). Relevant tactics are to be derived from the following principles. First, the suspect's perception of the evidence held by the interrogator needs to be considered. This will secondly, affect his or her counter-interrogation strategies that thirdly, affect the suspect's verbal responses. The fourth principle to be considered is the perspective-taking ability of the interrogator (Granhag, 2010). Principles one to three are connected to the suspect while the fourth is interviewer related.

The theory behind the suspect's perception of the evidence is that suspects will form a hypothesis about the probable evidence held by the interviewer (Granhag & Hartwig, 2015). Especially the guilty ones are said to do this. Beneficial for interviewers, those perceptions can be changed or once known, included into the interviewing strategy. Moreover, it happens that the suspect over- or underestimates the amount of information the interviewer holds, which again can be influenced through the style of interviewing.

The second principle will be scrutinized in detail throughout the next section. However, some things of importance can already be identified here. In opposition to innocent suspects, the guilty are likely to enter the interview with a plan or strategy for what information to reveal and what information to withhold (Granhag & Hartwig, 2015). Also, they face several risks when trying to conceal information. They might come up with a good alternative story, which however could be counterproductive if the interviewer were to hold evidence speaking against it. So, the suspect needs to balance between keeping his credibility through telling the truth and concealing incriminating information.

Thirdly, the suspect's verbal responses need to be considered during an interview situation. They are seen as the basis for finding cues to truth or deception and new information gathered during the interrogation (Granhag & Hartwig, 2015). It needs to be noted that different tactics result in different cues to deception. One of these cues is called statement-evidence inconsistency. They apply when contradictions between a suspect's statement and the evidence arise. Another one is within-statement inconsistencies, stating that a suspect continually changes his or her statements. In the end, his information from the beginning contradict statements given at a later time.

The fourth principle, the interviewer's perspective taking ability, builds upon the first three ones (Granhag & Hartwig, 2015). An interrogator with a good perspective-taking ability should be able to predict and consider other people's reactions and behavior (Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, & White, 2008). More specifically, the interviewer should ideally understand the suspect's perception of the evidence, their counter-interrogation strategies and predict likely

verbal responses. In the following section, the counter-interrogation strategies applied by suspects will be further scrutinized.

Counter-Interrogation Strategies

Of specific interest for this study are the counter-interrogation strategies applied by suspects. The ultimate goal for a guilty suspect is to (falsely) appear as truthful, or as Clemens, Granhag and Strömwall (2013) define it, to successfully withstand an interrogation. As already mentioned above, innocent and guilty suspects act differently in interrogations (Hartwig, Granhag, & Strömwall, 2007; Strömwall, Hartwig, & Granhag, 2006). The premise behind this is that specific counter-interrogation strategies are applied, which are a way of convincing the interrogator of their own innocence (Granhag & Hartwig, 2008).

Both guilty and innocent suspects apply these, albeit different strategies. Because guilty suspects tend to withhold crucial information that might pose a risk to their credibility, they often apply avoidance strategies. If this, however, is not possible, they need to find alternative explanations for questions about their whereabouts or similar (Granhag & Hartwig, 2015), while this is not the case for innocent suspects. They primarily use counter-interrogation strategies in a forthcoming verbal style (Kassin, 2005). This style is characterized by willingly offering details about one's whereabouts or connections to parts of the case.

As Granhag et al. (2014) already identified as foundation for strategic and successful interviewing, an understanding of how suspects behave is a necessary precondition. Both guilty and innocent suspects use counter-interrogation strategies. Hence, counter-interrogation strategies for coming across as innocent are different for suspects that are guilty and lying and suspects that are innocent and telling the truth. Once such discrepancies can be identified and utilized, the interviewer can develop a suitable interview protocol.

In the light of social cognitive processes, counter-interrogation strategies can be understood with the use of self-regulation theory. According to Carver and Scheier (2012) people adjust their behavior in order to reach their desired goal or also, to direct themselves away from an undesirable outcome. Furthermore, Carver and Scheier (2004) define self-regulation as a purposive process which comes into action once it is needed. This need arises when a person risks to deviate from a goal and, as he or she regulates, finds other ways to reach it.

In the case of suspects, this goal-oriented attitude functions as motivation to appear innocent. Hence, suspects are motivated to convince interrogators that their statements are true, although they are false, and this is where suspects need to adapt in order to reach their goal.

Adaptability

Adaptability is most extensively defined as “an individual’s capacity to constructively regulate psycho-behavioral functions in response to new, changing, and/or uncertain circumstances, conditions and situations” (Martin et al., 2012). However, initially the construct of adaptability has been examined from different points of view. It has been researched in many fields, including academic achievement (Martin, Nejad, Colmar, & Liem, 2013), the work place (Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000), teaching (Collie, & Martin, 2016), selling strategies (Spiro, & Weitz, 1990), ‘normal’ situations (Martin, Nejad, Colmar, & Liem, 2012) and in social-ecological systems (Walker et al., 2004). As will later be elaborated on, this study aims at examining suspect’s adaptive behavior during interrogations.

To go into detail about the definition of what adaptability is and also what it is not, it needs to be distinguished from related mechanisms and processes like resilience, buoyancy and coping. Although adaptability can be a response to an event of negative origin (Collie & Martin, 2016), these events are no act of adversity. These occasional events of adversity are rather acute and might pose a threat to the person and therefore require resilience (Howard & Johnson, 2000; Walker et al., 2004; Martin et al., 2012). Similar to resilience is buoyancy, more popular under the term of “everyday resilience” (Martin et al., 2013). Hence, it is more important for daily life situations connected to negative aspects or setbacks, such as having exam or deadline pressure and receiving a poor grade (Martin & Marsh, 2009, Martin et al., 2013). In addition, situations perceived as being out of one’s abilities, although they are later dealt with, can be part of a process called coping (Martin et al., 2013).

In comparison to resilience, which focuses on stabilizing or de-escalating a critical situation, coping refers to, for instance, asserting changes. What these three have in common distinguishes them from adaptability. That is, while resilience, buoyancy and coping are mechanisms to address difficulties and adversities, adaptability is about events of uncertainty and novelty that rarely include negative aspects (Martin et al., 2013). And while the goal of adaptable behavior lies in positive and beneficial outcomes, resilience, buoyancy and coping are more about ‘getting by’ (Martin et al., 2012).

When there is an event in a person's life that may pose a risk to their credibility, as in the case of being suspected of a crime, a solution needs to be found to withdraw from this situation in an effective manner. Or as Collie and Martin (2016) state, people that adapt have the ability of adjusting their actions or thoughts as a reaction to events and other circumstances. Most importantly, they do so effectively, thereby reaching their initial goal. The adjustment of thought or action are possible through a modification of behavior, affect or cognition. Furthermore, such events that need adaptation may be novel, changing or uncertain as well as positive or negative in their origin.

Counter-Interrogation Strategies and Adaptability

There are several connections that can be made between applying counter-interrogation strategies and adaptable behavior. First, both behaviors follow a goal and mainly serve the purpose of reaching it. However, if the planned behavior to this goal cannot be carried out anymore and the goal is at risk, alternative routes of behavior are found. This applies both to adaptability and counter-interrogation strategies.

Goal orientation: In general, when people act, they do so to reach a certain goal in their life. For adaptability, the goal-orientation can be general and concern many different situations, whereas a suspect uses adaptability to convince an interviewer of his or her innocence, referred to as counter-interrogation strategies (Tekin et al., 2015). One could say that counter-interrogation strategies are just one of the different sides to adaptability, for they have another central similarity.

Behavioral adjustments: Once the initial goal is at risk, a person has to find alternative routes of behavior. Again, for adaptability this can apply to many situations. For instance, a person needs information but faces problems to obtain them. As a result, he or she acts in a different way to still get the information. An example for counter-interrogation strategies is to change the way the suspect's answer questions. As has already been mentioned, guilty suspects often start with an avoidance strategy to prevent that their deception is unmasked (Hartwig, Granhag, Strömwall, & Doering, 2010). However, once avoidance is no option anymore, the guilty suspects likely turn to a denial strategy. Here again, the self-regulation theory can be applied (Carver & Sheier, 2004). People regulate their behavior once their goal is at risk and they need an alternative. However, adjustments can be of beneficial or contra productive nature for a suspect. Therefore, a suspect should select the best route for improving the situation.

Adjustments that improve the outcome: For the average adaptable person to realize that a change in behavior is needed, he or she needs to understand that the goal is at risk. Due to boundaries or newly gathered information, the person may expect the outcome of his or her behavior to be changed. As a result, an adjusted form of behavior with a better outcome expectancy needs to be applied. This is similar to an interview situation. Once the suspect thinks that the interviewer holds an amount of incriminating information, he or she is likely to be more forthcoming (Granhag, Strömwall, Willén, & Hartwig, 2012).

For a shift of strategy interview situation, this has the following advantage: The interviewer can create an expectancy about the information he holds in the suspect, who in turn adjusts the strategy to minimize the risk of contradicting evidence. If this is done successfully, it might improve the interview outcome for the suspect. If not, it makes it easier for the interviewer to get statement-evidence inconsistencies out of the suspect (Granhag et al., 2014). In sum, adjustments that improve the outcome are a result of goal-orientation and the arising need to make adjustments, which result in effectively reaching the initial goal.

Noteworthy, adaptability is defined by the novel or uncertain situational changes, less so for negative events. Even if an interview follows every rule, this can still be experienced as an act of adversity, although it actually is not. That leaves the question whether counter-interrogation strategies are truly an act of adaptability because they are no real threat, or if they cannot be called adaptable due to the suspect's perception. As long as the suspect believes that he or she has a chance to achieve their goal of coming across as innocent, their adjustments can be considered adaptable. However, once they realize their goal is not achievable anymore, they may turn to resilience. Situations like this might arise when the evidence against a suspect is too strong and incriminating that he or she cannot escape a confession. In sum, however, behavior during an interview is defined by a suspect's adjustments to the presented information. Moreover, the suspect alternates between withholding and revealing information. Therefore, those actions largely demand adaptability rather than resilience.

Attempting to Measure Adaptability in Suspect Interviewing

For measuring adaptability, this study focused on capturing the main similarities between counter-interrogation strategies and adaptability: goal-orientation, behavioral adjustments and adjustment that improve the outcome. First, to measure whether the suspects applied goal-oriented behavior, they valued their motivation for both the mock crime and interview at the beginning of the questionnaire.

Secondly, general behavioral adjustments are measured with asking whether the participants could develop a new way of dealing with the situation after the evidence had been disclosed to them. This was done for every piece of evidence held by the interviewer, in total six. As mentioned above, the shift of strategy technique aims at getting the suspect to change his or her strategy. However, developing a new way is only a means for measuring whether the suspects adjusted, but not whether this was done successfully.

Thus, thirdly, adaptability is measured. As adaptability is defined by withdrawing effectively from an unwanted outcome, this effectiveness is measured in terms of statement-evidence inconsistencies and admissions. The better the suspects adapted, the more substantiated their statements would be, which results in less statement-evidence inconsistencies. Also, when they adapted, the lesser their admissions would be. As Collie and Martin (2016) defined adaptability as adjustments of behavior, cognition and affect, the scale by Martin et al. (2012) has been included in this study. The statements were reformulated from present form to past form to fit the interview done prior to the questionnaire. Cognitive adjustments are defined by a change in thinking to deal with the new situation (“I was able to think through a number of possible options to assist me in a new situation”). Behavioral adjustments include the attempt at new behaviors or adjusting the current behavior (“To assist me in a new situation, I was able to change the way I do things if necessary”). Lastly, affective adjustments propose a change in how emotions are expressed (“When uncertainty arose, I was able to minimize frustration or irritation so I could deal with it best”).

This Study

This study aims at examining suspect’s adaptability in the interrogative context. While other studies have examined which counter-interview strategies can be adopted by suspects, this study aims to examine the adjustments of such strategies. Another novelty of this study lies in the complexity of studying adaptability in a behavioral context. However, this is a unique contribution as it captures the main features of adaptive behavior.

The current study specifically focuses on whether guilty suspects adapt during an interrogation. Prior to that, it is a precondition to know if we can rely on the outcomes of our analysis. From this, the first manipulation-check question can be drawn: How motivated were the participants to finish their mission successfully? This includes both the motivation to complete their role and to convince the interviewer of their innocence. The second question is

connected to whether evidence disclosure led to a change in the strategy and if participants were able to deal with the situation in a new way.

Manipulation check 1: *How motivated were the participants to finish their mission successfully?*

Manipulation check 2: *When incriminating evidence was presented, were the participants able to develop a new way of dealing with the situation?*

When these manipulation checks show a positive result, main predictions can be made for the three hypotheses. We are examining whether participants that rate themselves as adaptable, also are adaptable during the interview condition. Therefore, three hypotheses arise. The first correlates self-perception to the reported adjustments made during the interview. It is predicted that the perception of adaptable behavior is positively correlated to the ability to make adjustments throughout the interview.

Hypothesis 1: *There is a positive correlation between self-perception of adaptability and the ability to make adjustments during the interview.*

Secondly, participants who felt they could adjust more easily are expected to also show less statement-evidence inconsistencies. Connecting it to the definition of adaptability, this might predict whether they were able to regulate themselves and adjust their behavior, so that they could reach their initial goal. A negative correlation is expected, because less inconsistencies support better adjustments.

Hypothesis 2: *There is a negative correlation between the ability to make adjustments and the number of statement-evidence inconsistencies.*

Lastly, a negative correlation is expected between adjustments and the admissions made by the suspects during the interview. Similar to statement-evidence inconsistencies, a higher ability to make adjustments accompanies less admissions.

Hypothesis 3: *There is a negative correlation between the ability to make adjustments and the number of admissions.*

Method

Design

An experimental between-subject design with two interview conditions was employed. However, to analyze adaptability, a correlational study has been applied rather than a between-subject design. The participants took the role of an animal rights activist and had the task to collect incriminating evidence against a professor accused of unethical animal experiments. These tasks were a means to make them guilty of a mock crime, so they were in a guilty position during the interview that followed. However, their task was to come up with a strategy to convince the interviewer of their innocence. Their behavioral adjustments during the interview were the main focus of this study. While strategically presenting them with critical evidence, the researchers attempted to achieve an adjustment in their strategy. In the shift of strategy condition, which will later be explained in detail, the interviewer directly pointed out to the participant if a statement did not fit the evidence, followed by a presentation of the held evidence. Then, the participant had to respond to those pieces of evidence in an effective way. At these points in the study, the effectiveness of those adjustments was recorded counting the statement-evidence inconsistencies and admissions during the interview.

Participants

The study was completed by $N=55$ participants (32 women, 23 men) who were all students of the University of Twente [UT]. The participants ages ranged from 19 to 28 ($M= 22.43$, $SD = 1.67$), and their nationalities were Dutch (4%), German (87%) and others (9%). The participants were recruited through SONA Systems, an online platform for undergraduate Psychology Students of the University of Twente. Moreover, students in the library or on campus could sign up for the study. All participants completed a behavioral simulation of a number of illegal activities. They were then interviewed as a suspect, and finally they filled in a post-interview questionnaire. Every participant received a monetary compensation of 5 Euro for participation and, if eligible, received additional Course Credits (SONA Points). Participants who took part in the pilot study ($n=1$), did not complete the questionnaire ($n=1$) or did not follow their instructions ($n=3$) were excluded from further analyses. Hence, 50 participants were used for the analysis. Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis. In order to ensure this, they had to agree to the informed consent. To conduct the study, every participant needed WhatsApp.

Procedure

Before starting their mission, the participant was informed about the purpose of the study. The full debriefing took place after the questionnaire was finished. In order to save the authenticity of the study, the participants were also asked to not share any information about the study. Lastly, they were thanked for participating in this study.

At the point of their arrival, the participants were asked to sign the informed consent, thereby agreeing to participate and to be audio-recorded during the study (Appendix A). Then, they received background information about their role as an animal rights activist (Appendix B) and all of their instructions (Appendix C). Before starting their mission, they received detailed information (Appendix D), as explained in the next paragraph.

The detailed information was sent to the participants via WhatsApp. They were given a locker number and a numeric code with which to open it. In the locker, participants found a USB-Stick. As they could extract from their instructions sheet, they should head to the room of the professor who was accused of unethical animal experiments and copied his ‘Experiments’ file from a laptop onto the provided USB-Stick. In order to operate the laptop, the participants needed to remove an appointment sheet from the keypad. When this was completed, they went to the second room, in which a “secure” laptop had been placed. Also, folders with printed papers in it were provided evincing some experiment documents. The laptop was used to send the digitally copied files to the email address (KalleBlomNews@gmail.com) of the contact person. Kalle Bloom was presented as a journalist who wanted to publish the story of unethical animal experiments at the University. The printed files were photographed by the participant and sent back to the initial WhatsApp number. Lastly, they were instructed to hide the USB-stick inside one of the printed files.

When the participants entered the third room, another instruction sheet (Appendix E), stating that they should prepare for a police interview, was placed on the table. On it, some instructions about their behavior during the interview were written. Specifically, they were motivated to make their best attempts at convincing the interviewer of their innocence (“it is important for you to give an innocent appearance”), otherwise they would not be able to complete their mission (“all your work would be for nothing”).

After about five minutes of preparation, one of the researchers entered the room playing the role of a police interviewer. Either the shift of strategy or late disclosure technique were applied and audio-recorded, as explained in detail below. Consistency was controlled by standardized interview protocols that the assistants had to follow word-by-word (Appendix F).

Moreover, to be consistent the researchers conducted nearly the same number of interviews (example: researcher 1 conducted 11 interviews while researcher 2 conducted 12). It was also assured that the distribution was equal for both interview conditions. In total, 26 shift of strategy interviews and 27 control interviews were conducted.

Both interview protocols started in the same manner. At first, the participant was greeted, and a short introduction of the interviewer was given. Then, the circumstances of this interview were explained, also mentioning why the participant was a suspect. After that, the participants were asked whether they “confess or deny having engaged in any criminal activity”. Followed by a request to explain how their day at the university began (“You can start by freely telling me how you arrived at the university today and what you did there”). The interviewer then invited the suspect to answer more specific questions (example: “Have you been around the study area on the ground floor of the Cubicus building today?”).

Starting with the control interview, it can be described as mainly consisting out of open questions, like the examples given above. Just close to the end of the interview, the interviewer confronts the suspect with collected evidence (“... a witness saw you pick up an envelope from one of the lockers...”) once, or twice if the suspect does not respond. Followed by a request to explain those activities.

The difference between the shift of strategy and late disclosure conditions were that the interviewer could react to statement-evidence inconsistencies in the former condition. While in the late disclosure, the interviewer did not initially react, he or she could do so in the shift of strategy condition, which presents an advancement in manipulation. The questions were the same as in the control interview and the suspects could openly respond to them. However, when the statement did not fit the evidence held by the interviewer, participants were encouraged to explain these discrepancies. If needed, this was done directly after every open question response in the shift of strategy interview.

At the end of the shift of strategy interview, three questions without an evidence-based background were posed. After creating the expectation that the interviewer knows almost everything, these questions were posed to change the suspect’s strategy into a more forthcoming one with the aim of getting a confession. On the contrary, at the end of the late disclosure condition five pieces of evidence were presented and the participants were asked to respond to them and to provide information voluntarily. At the end of both interviews, the suspects were again asked whether they engaged in any criminal activities and lastly, thanked for their time.

Materials

After the interview, the participants filled in an online questionnaire on Qualtrics. As soon as the interview was conducted, the participants were handed a tablet with this questionnaire. In total, it consisted of 70 questions, in addition to four demographic questions. After answering all demographic questions, the participants answered a variety of open and dichotomous (yes/no) questions, as well as three-point, five-point and seven-point Likert scale questions.

In order to test for the first manipulation check, two questions were included which offered answer possibilities on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1="Not at all" to 5="Extremely". This was where the participants had to rate how motivated they were to both fulfill their role-playing task and to convince the interviewer of their innocence. To check for the second manipulation, six questions on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1="Not at all" to 5="Absolutely", were analyzed. For each piece of presented evidence, participants could rate whether they were able to develop a new way of dealing with the situation. After conducting a factor analysis, one factor has been extracted. As a measure of scale reliability, Cronbach's alpha supports a relatively high internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$) of all included items.

For examining the first hypothesis, two scales have been compared. The first included 9 questions about the participant's perception of adaptability during the interview. On a 7-point Likert scale, they could rate in how far they showed behavioral, cognitive and affective adaptability, ranging from 1="Strongly disagree" to 7="Strongly agree". A reliability analysis was carried out that showed the items to reach acceptable reliability, $\alpha = .87$. One factor was extracted from the factor analysis. Although a second factor could have been extracted, its eigenvalue was hardly above 1 and therefore found to not be suitable. The second measure consisted of 6 five-point Likert scales from 1="Not at all" to 5="Absolutely", which are the same questions as for manipulation check question 2.

The scale of being able to make adjustments will again be used for hypothesis two, and furthermore be correlated with the statement-evidence inconsistencies made by the suspects. The inconsistencies were counted by the researchers after the interviews had been finished. For this, they listened to the audio-recordings and took note of every inconsistency.

Lastly, the third hypothesis has been examined. Similar to the second hypothesis, the 6 five-point Likert scale questions were used to investigate whether the participants felt that they could develop a new way of dealing with the situation, leading to adjustments in behavior. The scale ranged from 1="Not at all" to 5="Absolutely" and was correlated with the total number of admissions made by the participant.

Results

Table 1 will be used for the second manipulation-check question, while Table 2 is relevant for the first hypothesis.

Goal-Orientation

To analyze whether the participants applied goal-oriented behavior, it is important to take a look at how seriously they took their role, and in how far they were motivated to convince the interviewer of their innocence. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare motivation for their role in the shift of strategy and late disclosure interview conditions. There was no significant difference in the scores for the shift of strategy ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.79$) and late disclosure ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.6$) conditions; $t(48) = -1.19$, $p = .240$. Cohen's d was estimated at 0.34, which is a low effect based on Cohen's guidelines (Cohen, 1992), as it is closer to an effect size of 0.2 than 0.5. The results support a high motivation to take the role seriously and no difference across interview conditions.

To compare the motivation to convince the interviewer of their innocence across the two interview conditions, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. With $t(48) = -0.78$ and $p = .440$, no significant difference between the shift of strategy ($M=3.87$, $SD=0.82$) and late disclosure ($M = 4.04$; $SD = 0.71$) conditions were found. The results suggest high scores on motivation to finish their mission successfully and no difference across the interview conditions. A small effect was calculated with Cohen's d at 0.22.

Behavioral Adjustments

Whether participants could develop a new way of dealing with the situation once the evidence had been presented, was measured in order to test for the second manipulation check question. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the ability to develop a new way of dealing with the situation across the two conditions. There was no significant difference in the scores for the shift of strategy ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.01$) and late disclosure ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.03$) conditions; $t(48) = 0.69$, $p = .491$. Cohen's d was calculated at 0.20, which is a low effect size (Cohen, 1992). The detailed means and standard deviations for each item and condition can be found in Table 1.

Table 1.

Means and SD of motivation.

Condition	Evidence 1 M(SD)	Evidence 2 M(SD)	Evidence 3 M(SD)	Evidence 4 M(SD)	Evidence 5 M(SD)	Evidence 6 M(SD)	Factor M(SD)
Shift of Strategy	3.04 (1.43)	2.91 (1.35)	2.96 (1.46)	2.57 (1.16)	2.39 (1.2)	2.22 (1.13)	2.68 (1.01)
Control	2.59 (1.31)	2.48 (1.4)	2.78 (1.16)	2.37 (1.28)	2.48 (1.31)	2.19 (1.24)	2.48 (1.03)

Measuring Adjustments that Improve the Outcome

Testing for Hypothesis 1, perception of adaptability and adjustments were correlated. A positive relation was predicted. The Pearson correlation between self-perception of adaptability and the ability to make adjustments during the interview showed a positive relationship $r=.68, p < .01$. Hence, Hypothesis 1 was confirmed. A factor analysis on the items for adjustments was performed using a rotated factor solution on 6 items. The selected factor explains 62.69% of variance on the ability to adjust during the interview with eigenvalue 3.76. These item loadings cannot be displayed, as only one factor with eigenvalue higher than 1 was extracted.

As for perception of adaptability, one factor was extracted from nine items using a rotated factor solution. The factor accounts for 49.96% of variance with an eigenvalue of 4.50. The item loadings on this factor can be found in Table 2. All items of the two factors appear to be worthy of retention, resulting in a decrease in alpha if deleted from the respective factor.

Table 2.

Item loadings on factor 2: self-perception of adaptability.

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Loading on Factor 2	.80	.89	.89	.82	.65	.60	.12	.17	.23

Hypothesis two predicted a negative correlation between the ability to make adjustments and the number of statement-evidence inconsistencies. As the relevant numbers for adjustments have already been mentioned, they will not be recalled. Instead, the data for statement-evidence inconsistencies will be presented. On the lower end of inconsistencies, 4% of participants were

found to have made 2 during the interview. 40% made as much as 5 inconsistencies, which equals 20 participants. No relationship was found between adjustments and statement-evidence inconsistencies, $r = -.06$, $p = .67$. Hence, Hypothesis 2 was rejected.

As for the number of admissions, they ranged from 0 (18%) to a maximum of 15 (2%) admissions throughout the whole interview. Moreover, one admission was made by 18% percent, and both 2 and 3 admissions were made by 10%, respectively. This, being already more than half of the participants, is representative for a Mean of 3.52 with SD 3.28. No relationship was found between adjustments and admissions, $r = 0.07$, $p = .63$. Hence, Hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the adaptability of guilty suspects in interrogations. Therefore, different aspects of adaptability were investigated. Analyses were made on the participant's perception of their own adaptability, whether they could adjust their strategy after being presented with incriminating evidence and lastly, whether their new way of dealing with the situation was successful. This was measured using the numbers on statement-evidence inconsistencies and admissions.

In the following, the quality of the study will be evaluated by referring to the manipulations of the study. The findings show ambiguous results. While the suspects were highly motivated to play their role and convince the interviewer of their innocence, their assessment of whether they could develop a new way and adjust was below average. Moreover, support was found for the assumption that self-perception of adaptability and adjustments are positively correlated.

Manipulations of the study

The above-average scores on motivation support the first manipulation-check question. Regardless of the conditions, the means centered around the fourth point of the five-point Likert scale. Although the means have no significant difference, a tendency can be identified. The control group rated their motivation slightly higher than the shift of strategy group. Possible explanations include the set-up of the two different interview conditions. While the control group merely responded to the questions, the shift of strategy participants were confronted with their statement-evidence inconsistencies. Perhaps because this type of interview is more difficult and exhausting for a suspect, their motivation decreased with it.

In regard to the second question, the results do not support the research question. Besides the first piece of evidence, where the shift of strategy participants rated their adjustment ability with a 3 on average, all other values are below the average. However, again a tendency can be suspected. Until item 5, the first four means are slightly higher for the shift of strategy than control group. This can mean that the shift of strategy interview technique made it easier for the participants to adjust their statement, at least regarding the first pieces of evidence. However, the differences are too small to be of high validity.

Main Findings

It had been examined whether suspects guilty of a mock crime show adaptability in an interrogation. Adaptability is characterized by reacting to novel circumstances with adjustments in actions or thought (Collie & Martin, 2016). When these adjustments result in effectively reaching the initial goal, the process can be called adaptability. For adaptability in interrogations, it was expected that the participants would be able to find a new way to reach their goal of convincing the interviewer of their innocence once they were presented with critical evidence. The results partly support this assumption.

Concluding from the data, there is a connection between experiencing oneself as adaptable and being able to adjust during the interview. This means the first aspect of adaptability, adjusting one's actions, was captured in this study. For the second aspect, effectively reaching the initial goal, no significant results had been found. Both correlation coefficients are too close to zero to be of use for further interpretation. Moreover, neither an indirect nor a direct effect of adaptability perception on admissions could be found. The same applies to adaptability perception and statement-evidence inconsistencies.

However, this leaves room for interpretations and speculations. First of all, one could say that there is a difference between reporting adaptability and actually adapting one's behavior. Even if the participants felt like they adapted, this does not mean they did it during the interview. Discussion on this aspect can be found in the section on future research.

The findings suggest that the perception of being adaptable has no effect on improving the outcome for a suspect. That might be due to the shift-of strategy interview approach. Perhaps the strategy of repeatedly confronting the suspect with statement-evidence inconsistencies left hardly any opportunity for the suspects to adapt. It could be concluded that the strategy overpowers adaptable behavior intentions. As mentioned in the Introduction, adjustments can be called adaptable as long as the suspects believe to have a chance of convincing the interviewer of their innocence. But when the evidence is too incriminating, or, to add from the results of this study, the strategy too overpowering, the suspect might not be able to effectively adapt to the situation.

Limitations

This study contains some limitations that are mention-worthy and need to be considered when evaluating the results. First of all, as is typical for a complex study that was conducted in the framework of a bachelor's thesis, there was not enough time to conduct the study properly. Moreover, the implementation of the study was aggravated due to limits of the available rooms. This led not only to new planning each day, but to different conditions for the participants. Not only rooms varied, but often they had to go to another building to continue the study. On that part, consistency could not be assured. Specifically, there is a bias that cannot be accounted for. Nearly every participant had different experiences that could not only influence how they experienced the study but how they behaved during the study. As an example, some interview rooms were surrounded by opaque walls while others had at least 2 transparent glass walls. Some might have felt safer and secure while others could have feared exposure and observation.

Regarding the analysis, it is important to highlight that only one factor was used for adaptability perception, although two could have been used. The decision was made based on the low eigenvalue of the second factor, which was barely above 1. Forming the scale items into one global factor is acceptable (Martin et al., 2012). However, a second factor might have been useful to differentiate between cognitive/behavioral adjustments (items 1-6) and affective adjustments (items 7-9). Still, due to the modification of the scale and the accompanied change in reliability, it was decided to force all of the items into one factor. Also, this study does not differentiate between affective, cognitive and behavioral adjustments. Either way, a factor with such a low eigenvalue is barely of use for this kind of analyses.

Mention worthy, most of the participants were fellow students and a great part can be defined as friends. Even though friends of one of the researchers were instructed and interviewed by the other researchers, many were known due to shared lectures and tutorials. Further, it means that many of the participants were 3rd year Psychology students with an adequate knowledge of psychological processes. It is not exactly clear in how far this influenced the replicability of results, but nevertheless can a random sample be more valid and reliable.

A great limitation of this study is that only self-reports of adaptability were administered, and no objective measure of adaptability was included. As already mentioned in the main findings, there is a difference between self-reports and actual acts of adaptability.

Future research

Based on the limitations of this research, suggestions for the possibilities of a more comprehensive study can be made. A similar but more developed study with greater resources and time would aim at finding out whether adaptability is a trait or a state. This would clarify whether someone is born with it or perhaps can be taught how to be adaptable. In this study, items to correlate adaptability and personality were missing, which would discuss adaptability as a trait. It further did not examine whether adaptability is a state and could perhaps be learned in a longitudinal study. Future research might be interested in focusing on this.

Although there might be other areas of interest like police undercover training that benefit from this, interrogators could also make use of it. Once signs of adaptability are so clearly defined that a good eye could observe them in another person, or in this case in the suspect, processes or strategies might be identified and taken advantage of. This might in turn enable a well-tailored interrogation, leading to earlier lie detection or even confessions from suspects. Hence, future research might benefit from studying adaptability of guilty suspects in interrogations by handing improved guidelines to interrogators and supporting the law enforcement system.

Furthermore, once adaptability can be identified as a trait or state, specific measures for testing adaptability could be designed. As already hinted at in the main findings, there is a difference between self-reports and actual behavior. However, this difference cannot clearly be defined as adaptability is difficult to identify in another person. That is especially applicable to differentiating it from the related constructs of resilience or buoyancy, because a person's motives are hardly visible from the outside.

Concluding from the limitations, more consistency should be assured. This includes fixed rooms that do not vary from one participant to the other, and an objective relationship to the participants.

Conclusion

The current study aimed at investigating the concept of adaptability in guilty suspects. In order to see whether the participants were adaptable during the interview, they committed a mock crime as the foundation of their guilt. Thereafter, they were interviewed by a researcher, applying either the shift of strategy technique or late disclosure technique as a control condition. As adaptability is proposed as “an individual’s capacity to constructively regulate psycho-behavioral functions in response to new, changing, and/or uncertain circumstances, conditions and situations” (Martin et al., 2012), this study tried to capture it in an interrogation setting. Therefore, goal orientation, behavioral adjustments and the effectiveness of those adjustments were measured.

In sum, it can be said that the experimental outline was not successful in measuring adaptability at large. However, it had been designed in such a way that that the participants were motivated to play their role during the mock crime and to convince the interviewer of their innocence (goal orientation). Furthermore, it is presumed that the shift of strategy interviewing technique limited the suspect’s adaptability so that they hardly had good opportunities to effectively adjust to new pieces of evidence. Although this is contra productive for adaptability, it supports the effectiveness of the shift of strategy approach. Also, from conversations after implementing the study, the participants reported to have enjoyed the study. The study design seems to be attractive, but methodologically not sophisticated enough to capture adaptable behavior.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent

Purpose

This study is about criminal behavior. An important feature of a criminal investigation is to understand the behavior of suspects of crime. The current study will examine your perceptions and behaviors as a suspect who commits a mock crime.

More detailed information regarding the theoretical background, such as underlying concepts or frameworks, cannot be disclosed at the present moment to ensure that you behave as normal and natural as you would in reality. Any detailed information will be provided upon request after the experiment is done.

Procedure

As a participant in this study, you will be instructed to perform some criminal activities and afterwards you will be interviewed about it and fill in a questionnaire about your perceptions of your experiences. The interview will be audio recorded.

Once you have filled in the questionnaire the study is completed. Because it is important to protect the validity of psychological experiments (i.e., that you behave as normal and natural as possible during the operation), we cannot tell you everything about the study at this time. After the study is complete you will be fully debriefed and we will answer any questions that you may have about the study. If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will last for up to 60 minutes and you will receive 1 SONA credit for your participation. To ensure confidentiality, your responses will be anonymous (i.e., personal identifying information cannot be matched with your answers) and we only analyze group averages (i.e., individual performances will not be analyzed). The recorded data is treated confidentially and only available to the research team. In case of publication, it is obligatory to store the material for up to 10 years.

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 consequences. Also, the audio recordings will be destroyed immediately at your request. You will receive the full compensation also if you stop participating. For further information about this study, contact the principal investigator Simon Oleszkiewicz, Ph.D. at s.oleszkiewicz@utwente.nl

Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in **Criminal Decision Making**, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered.

Name

Signature

I consent to participate in the study on criminal behavior

Name

Signature

I consent to be audio recorded during the interview

Appendix B: Background information

Imagine that you are a person who was raised in a house full of love for pets, especially cats and dogs. Having been around animals all your life you have developed a very special bond to them. Simply put, you love cats and dogs.

You are currently studying at the UT and from your fellow students, you just heard some rumors that made your bones chill to the core: There is a professor at the University who does animal testing on dogs. You found out that this professor is doing his research on animals illegally, and that he violates the strict ethical procedures for animal handling. However, it seems as if the university is turning a blind eye. Because of your love for animals, you decided that this was too much: There is no way such cruel treatment of animals can be justified, you had to do something to make it stop!

Since your gruesome discovery, you have made several attempts to put an end to this horror. You have emailed the professor directly, you have arranged demonstrations, talked with the heads of several faculties, the HR department, study advisors, you name it. However, this has only resulted in straight out denials – nobody acknowledges any unethical animal treatment. At this point in time, your hard work and efforts have not paid off at all, and you conclude that only one option remains: To collect evidence about the unethical behavior and forward it to an investigative journalist that will publish a story about it in the news.

To collect the evidence you need help, so you contacted the organization *Rights for Animals*. However, this organization is currently under investigation for other crimes. Therefore, they cannot play any major role in gathering evidence, but they are willing to help you work out the necessary activities to secure the necessary evidence.

What you are going to do

You're planning to collect evidence that the UT is involved in illegal and cruel treatment of animals. The organization *Rights for Animals* supports you. Soon, they will get into contact with you and help you with your mission. The collected evidence will then be forwarded to an employee at *Rights for Animals*.

Briefly put, to complete your mission you have to (specific instructions will follow later):

- (1) gain access to the office
- (2) collect evidence in the office
- (3) provide the evidence to your accomplice

You will next receive detailed instructions for what you have to do to collect and forward the evidence. Read the instructions carefully so you know it by heart. You will be allowed to take these instructions with you, so you do not need to memorize every word. Feel free to check this paper if you get insecure or can't remember what to do next.

Appendix C: Instructions

These instructions will be performed in consecutive order. Meaning that once you have ticked of a box, you move to the next box directly under it. Do not jump between boxes; you have to follow the order from top to bottom.

- received text message from your contact person from the animal rights organization (mission starts) → WhatsApp message
- collect envelope at the given location established by the text message
- go into the office where you find information regarding the animal experiments (room XXX)
- start the computer and plug in the USB stick to collect the necessary evidence
- search the file 'experiments' and copy it on the USB stick (located on Desktop)
- take the USB stick and the envelope and leave the office
- go to room XXX (there you can find a secure computer)
- use the computer to log into your email- account
- send the files of the USB stick to KalleBlomNews@gmail.com (a journalist who belongs to *Rights for Animals* who wants to publish your story)
- next to the computer, search for the folder 'contracts' and take a picture of the Documents which you find inside. They serve as additional evidence.
- send it via WhatsApp to this number (Kalle Blom):
- put the USB stick back into the envelope and place it into the folder 'private' (your accomplice will collect it)
- return to room XXX

Appendix D: Detailed Information

You can find everything you need in the locker number 14, in the entrance area of the Cubicus. To open it press c and then 1100 and then the key-symbol. Further, the code you need for the computer is 1100. Be careful and good luck!

Appendix E: Instructions before the interview

In 5 minutes, you will be interviewed by a police officer. You are instructed to interact with the police, so please try to imagine how you would answer possible questions in reality. Please imagine that you have already concluded that it is important for you to give an innocent appearance and that this will best be done by speaking with the police. Hence, you concluded that using your right to remain silent will only make you seem more suspicious. In addition, during the interview you will be asked whether you want to have a lawyer present. Please imagine that you have already considered this option and decided it was best to not invite a lawyer, because in this way you look more innocent. Hence, you are instructed to answer this question with a 'No'.

Don't forget: You are an activist for animal rights. While getting your information about the cruel researcher, you were, however, committing a crime. In order to complete your mission, you should try to convince the interviewer of your innocence. Otherwise, *Rights for Animals* won't be able to publish your findings as their work will be linked to your criminal activity; all your work would be for nothing. Please imagine that this is very important for you: If you don't come across as innocent during the interview you will fail to save the animals.

Please note that it is the interviewer who will end the interview. The interviewer will then tell you what you need to do after the interview is over.

Appendix F: Interview Protocols

1. Control interview protocol

“Hello, my Name is XXX. I am part of the team investigating a crime that was committed here at the University today. Someone broke into the University’s facilities and stole confidential data. There is reasonable suspicion that you have committed this crime, and I will therefore ask you some questions about your behavior and your observations around the University today. Because of the suspicion against you, you do have the right to have a lawyer present during this interview. Would you like to consult one?

I also want to mention that you have the right to remain silent and that you do not have to answer any of my questions.

#Response of Suspect

Do you confess or deny having engaged in any criminal activities?

#Response of Suspect

You can start by freely telling me how you arrived at the university today and what you did there.

#Response of Suspect

Thank you. I have a few more specific questions.

Have you been around/ You mentioned being at **the study area on the ground floor of the Cubicus building** today?

#Response of Suspect

if suspect remains silent or only answers with a ‘yes’ after the first question of each evidence theme, prompt once by saying: Please tell me about that

Have you been around/you mentioned you were around **the office of one of the professors** after being at the study area?

#Response of Suspect

Have you recently entered/ you mentioned that you entered the office of a professor?

#Response of Suspect

Have you entered/you mentioned that you entered **another room** after you left the office?

#Response of Suspect

Is there anything you would like to add at this point?

#Response of Suspect

Okay, thank you. We have collected some evidence that I would like you to address. Our tech team intercepted the text message you received today, shortly thereafter a witness saw you pick up an envelope from one of the lockers in the Cubicus building. Later on, another witness saw you near the office of the professor. We have also found your fingerprints inside the office, and a webcam has shown that you used the computer in room XXX. Before we conclude this interview, would you mind explaining all these activities.

#Response of Suspect

Alternative Deceptive: I would like to point out that you're better off, the more information you provide voluntarily. I'll give you one last chance to cooperate by answering my questions.

#Response of Suspect

If suspect remains silent

So, do you have anything to add?

If suspect objects or complains, simply read out the evidence again

Okay, to conclude this interview I will ask the same question I started with: Do you confess or do you deny having engaged in any criminal activities?

Okay, thank you for your time. If we find something in need for further clarification, we will ask you to come back at a later time. Have a good day.
(Investigator opens the door for participant)

2. SUE interview protocol

“Hello, my Name is XXX. I am part of the team investigating a crime that was committed here at the University today. Someone broke into the University’s facilities and stole confidential data. There is reasonable suspicion that you have committed this crime, and I will therefore ask you some questions about your behavior and your observations around the University today. Because of the suspicion against you, you do have the right to have a lawyer present during this interview. Would you like to consult one?
I also want to mention that you have the right to remain silent and that you do not have to answer any of my questions.

#Response of Suspect

Do you confess or deny having engaged in any criminal activities?

#Response of Suspect

You can start by freely telling me how you arrived at the university today and what you did there.

#Response of Suspect

Thank you. I have a few more specific questions.

Evidence 2: Seen at study area in the Cubicus building

Have you been around/ You mentioned being at the study area on the ground floor of the Cubicus building today?

if suspect remains silent after the first question of each evidence theme, prompt once by saying: Please tell me about that

Discredit: What you say doesn’t fit the evidence we have. A witness has seen you picking up an envelope from one of the lockers there. Would you like to respond to that statement?

#Response of Suspect

Go to the next question

Accept: What you say fits the evidence we hold, as a witness has seen you picking up an envelope from one of the lockers there.

Go to the next question

Evidence 3: Proximity to the office

Have you been around/you mentioned you were around the office of one of the professors after being at the study area?

Discredit: What you say does not fit the evidence, as an employee has seen you there today. Can you explain what you did there?

#Response of Suspect

Go to next question

Accept: Okay, very good. We have evidence that supports your answer. An employee saw you there today at that time.

***Go to next question ***

Evidence 4: Fingerprints on object

Have you recently entered/ you mentioned that you entered the office of a professor?

#Response of Suspect

Discredit: What you say does not fit the evidence. We found “an object” inside the office with your fingerprints on it. Would you mind explaining how they got there?

#Response of Suspect

Go to next question

Accept: Thanks for clarifying this. We did find your fingerprints on “an object” inside the office.

***Go to next question ***

Evidence 5: Webcam footage of Computer

Have you entered/you mentioned that you entered another room after you left the office?

Discredit: What you say does not fit the evidence we hold. Our technical team accessed the webcam of a computer in room XXX and it shows clear footage of you. Would you mind explaining what you did on the computer?

#Response of Suspect

Go to next question

Accept: Thank you for working with me here. Our technical team accessed the webcam of the computer in room XXX and the footage clearly shows you at the computer.

***Go to next question ***

The three questions:

Okay, I have three additional questions I need you to address before we end this interview. I need you to explain the text message you received just before going to the lockers in the study area; you have to clarify what you did on the computer in the office; and I need you to describe exactly what you did in room XXX.

#Response of Suspect

Alternative Deceptive: I would like to point out that you're better off, the more information you provide voluntarily. I'll give you one last chance to cooperate by answering my questions.

If suspect remains silent

So, do you have anything to add?

Okay, before we end this interview, I will ask the same question I started with:
Do you confess or deny having engaged in any criminal activities?

Ending:

Okay, thank you for your time. If we find something in need for further clarification, we will ask you to come back at a later time. Have a good day.
(Investigator opens the door for participant)