



Introduction: What works in investigative psychology?

Pär Anders Granhag^{1*} and Aldert Vrij²

¹University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

²University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, Hampshire, UK

This is an introduction to the special issue entitled 'What works in investigative psychology?', guest edited by Pär Anders Granhag and Aldert Vrij. This special issue focuses on eight research themes and aims to discuss how psychological research can help solve concrete problems that occur in investigative contexts.

What do we want to achieve with this special issue?

Investigative psychology 'covers all aspects of psychology that are relevant to the conduct of criminal and civil investigations' (Canter, 2000, p. 1091). Although 'investigative psychology' is a term that recently emerged within the broader field of 'legal psychology', several research themes found under the investigative psychology umbrella are not new. For example, research on eyewitness testimony and deception detection dates far back in the history of legal psychology (e.g. Sporer, 2008). Yet, during the last decade the many research themes of investigative psychology have attracted increased interest at major scientific conferences on 'psychology and law', such as the *European Association of Psychology and Law* and the *American Psychology-Law Society* conferences. Further evidence for the popularity of investigative psychology can be found in a recent journal overview where it was concluded that the proportion of papers relevant to investigative psychology published in five major 'psychology and law' journals (*Behavioural Sciences and the Law*, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *Law and Human Behavior*, *Psychology, Crime & Law*, and *Legal and Criminological Psychology*) has increased steadily over the last three decades (Snook, Doan, Cullen, Kavanagh, & Eastwood, 2009).

In this special issue, the focus is on eight research themes within investigative psychology; most of which have occupied researchers for a long period of time (e.g. how best to interview witnesses), but a few of the themes have not until recently caught the attention of psycho-legal researchers (e.g. offender profiling and malingering

*Correspondence should be addressed to Pär Anders Granhag, Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, PO Box 500, SE 405 30, Gothenburg, Sweden (e-mail: pag@psy.gu.se).

amnesia). The overarching aim of this special issue is to discuss how psychological research can help solve concrete problems that occur in investigative contexts. Put differently, the papers in this volume will not only discuss the research questions that have driven the research agendas within each research theme, but also make clear how utilizing scientific knowledge can help practitioners with the problems they encounter in their daily work.

To achieve this ambitious goal, we asked a number of world-leading scholars to take a fresh look at their topic of expertise and to answer two basic questions: (i) 'What are the main problems to be identified within your particular research area of investigative psychology?' and (ii) 'Which solutions can psycho-legal research provide in order to solve these problems?'. In brief, we asked these experts to outline 'what works' in their domain of expertise.

Content and structure of the special issue

Investigative work is full of problems which generate specific questions that need to be addressed. A frequent and very difficult question to answer is how best to interview children and other vulnerable witnesses. We therefore asked Professor Ray Bull (UK) to open this special issue by providing some answers to this question. Professor Bull's paper shows that research has indeed taken us far, but that we still have some way to go to satisfy all needs of those practitioners who interview children and vulnerable witnesses. A related question is how to achieve the most informative and accurate recall from adult witnesses in interviews. We could not think of a person more qualified to answer this question than Professor Ron Fisher (USA). His paper offers a rich illustration of scientifically based memory-enhancing methods and cues that help witnesses to remember the event they have been asked to recall.

Next, we asked Professor Saul Kassin (USA), a leading authority on confessions and interrogations, to summarize what research tells us how to interview suspects in an effective yet ethical manner. Professor Kassin's paper (co-authored with Sara Appleby and Jennifer Perillo) makes clear that the situation is serious; researchers must work hard to develop scientifically based interview protocols and to affect policy makers so that these protocols will be implemented. It is a small step from the theme interviewing suspects to the theme deception detection and we asked Professor Steve Porter (Canada) to discuss what psycho-legal research tells us on how best to detect deception. He, together with Leanne ten Brinke, presents an interesting review that not only informs us how to avoid pitfalls when trying to detect deception, but also tells us how to become a better lie detector.

Professor Neil Brewer (Australia) is a world-leading expert on eyewitness identification and it was therefore logical to invite him to write a paper on how to conduct fair line ups that lead to accurate identifications. He, together with Matthew Palmer, offers innovative suggestions on how to help witnesses to give an optimal performance without compromising the value of the evidence. It is not uncommon for investigators to suspect that a suspect's claimed amnesia is feigned. Professor Harald Merckelbach (The Netherlands) is a widely recognized expert in this field of research and he delivers (together with Kim van Oorsouw) a take home message that cannot be misunderstood: psycho-legal research offers different methods that work much better than clinical (intuitive) judgments with respect to differentiating between real and simulated amnesia.

Behavioural investigative advice (including offender profiling) is at the very core of investigative psychology, and we therefore asked Professor Laurence Alison (UK), one of the most prominent researchers in this area, to unravel the sense from the nonsense in this field of research. Furthermore, Professor Alison's paper (together with Alasdair Goodwill, Louise Almond, Claudia van den Heuvel, and Jan Winter) makes clear in what way psychological knowledge can contribute to more effective and successful offender profiling. In the closing paper of this special issue, the leading authority Professor Steve Penrod (USA), together with Tarika Daftary-Kapur, and Rafaele Dumas, identify some of the most common and powerful extra-legal factors that may influence jurors' decision making, and - most importantly - discuss remedies to counteract such influences.

Concluding remarks

We believe that this special issue contains a highly impressive collection of papers, and think that the high quality of the papers shows that the time was indeed ripe to publish a 'what works' in investigative psychology issue. We also believe that each paper offers important impetus to guide future research in investigative psychology: many of the answers (solutions) offered today will be refined and revised by the research of tomorrow, and some of the many problems not yet answered today will be addressed in future research.

We would like to thank all contributing authors for taking the challenging writing tasks that we imposed on them so seriously and constructively.

References

- Canter, D. (2000). Investigative psychology. In J. A. Siegel, P. J. Saukko, & G. C. Knupfer (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of forensic sciences* (Vol. 3. G-Z, pp. 1091-1097). New York: Academic Press.
- Snook, B., Doan, B., Cullen, R. M., Kavanagh, J. M., & Eastwood, J. (2009). Publication and research trends in police psychology: A review of five forensic psychology journals. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 24, 45-50.
- Sporer, S. L. (2008). Lessons from the origins of eyewitness testimony research in Europe. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 22, 737-757.

Received 21 September 2009; revised version received 21 September 2009

Copyright of Legal & Criminological Psychology is the property of British Psychological Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.