Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice Studies
Vol. 2, No. 1, 2024, pp. 73-80 • ISSN: 2583-9918

URL: www.arfjournals.com
https://doi.org/10.47509/JCCJS.2024.v02i01.04

Central and South American Private Investigators' Views on Tactics/Skills when Interviewing Suspects

Ray Bull[1], Hayley M. D. Cleary[2] and Daiel Kuzelj[3]
[1]*Associates Limited*
[2]*Virginia Commonwealth University*
[3]*King's College, London*
Correspondence author Email: ray.h.bull@btinternet.com

To Cite this Article

Ray Bull, Hayley M.D. Cleary & Daiel Kuzelj (2024). Central and South American Private Investigators' views on Tactics/Skills when Interviewing Suspects. *Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice Studies,* 2: 1, pp. 73-80. *https://doi.org/10.47509/JCCJS.2024.v02i01.04*

Abstract: Around the world, a very large number of people conduct 'private investigations' into alleged wrongdoing, yet little is known about their actual views/opinions regarding the tactics/skills for interviewing suspects, especially outside of the English-speaking world. They are offered training by a variety of organisations, some of which have been criticised for not providing training informed by up-to-date, relevant research. In the current study, private investigators from Central and South America completed a questionnaire regarding their extent of agreement with the use of a number of tactics/skills. It was found that respondents disagreed with approaches relating to dominance/control but agreed with tactics/skills relating to humanity/integrity and to rapport.

Keywords: Central/South America, private investigators, suspects, interviewing, opinions.

Introduction

Around the world, a very large number of people conduct 'private investigations' into alleged wrongdoing. For example, Prenzier and King (2002) stated that "The authors estimate that there are about 25,000 private investigators in Australia" (p. 1). Among the major organisations which conduct training of private investigators are (i) John. E. Reid and (ii) Wicklander-Zulawski (that for years promulgated training very similar to Reid). On the 'John E. Reid and Associates' website, it has been stated that this organisation has "…conducted training programs in Bosnia-Herzegovina; the Czech Republic; United Arab Emirates; Singapore; Japan; Mexico; Canada; Belgium; South Korea; Oman; Saudi Arabia; Djibouti; Sudan; Tanzania; Barbados; Hong Kong; Malaysia; Brazil; Italy; England; Norway; India; Philippines; Jamaica, Peru, Israel, Iraq, Kuwait,

Received : 02 January 2024 • **Revised :** 23 January 2024 • **Accepted :** 15 February 2024 • **Published :** 1 March 2024

Amsterdam and Chile." On the W-Z website, it has been stated that "WZ facilitates over 450 programs annually". Such widespread and frequent training makes it clear that the number of private investigators around the world is indeed very substantial, yet with regard to their investigative interviewing, relatively little is known. Certainly, much less than is known about police interviewing.

The training offered by 'John E. Reid & Associates' has been criticised by a number of people - for example, see Kosinski (2018). Partly in light of this criticism (plus an awareness of the evolving, published research on the interviewing/interrogating of suspects), in 2017 Wicklander-Zulawski announced that its training would no longer have a focus on the Reid method/tactics (for the role of the current first author's role in this see Bull, 2024 - IJPSM 25 years special edition).

In a pioneering study of 'private investigation' Gill and Hart (1997) noted that there was a "…lack of regulation…" regarding such things as the behaviours of private investigators (p. 118). Such a lack may well still apply nowadays even though the outcomes/consequences of private investigators' behaviour can be severe (e.g., an employee losing their job or possibly going to prison). In his concise article King (2023) made the point that "Despite the acknowledgement that private investigators conduct interviews for clients in a variety of criminal and civil investigative matters, little detail is known about the interviews they conduct" (p. 111). His study involved as participants 33 corporate and financial investigators. By the use of semi-structured interviews, the participants were asked to define/describe a skilled investigative interviewer and to say which aspects, qualities or skills are most important. King found that planning, maintaining rapport, being open-minded, and using open questions were frequently mentioned. However, he also noted that these "…investigators used tactics to pressure interviewees to admit guilt" (p. 113).

Many readers of the current journal will already be familiar with the available publications regarding the use of tactics to pressure interviewees to admit guilt – therefore, these are not reviewed here (examples are Goodman-Delahunty and Martschuk, 2020; Gudjonsson, 2021). Similarly, readers will likely be familiar with the many publications that have been advocating the replacement of pressurising tactics with non-pressurising, humane tactics/skills (as pioneered by several authors, including Bull, 2013; Bull & Cherryman, 1995; Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Milne & Bull, 1999).

Method

At the beginning of a two-day workshop on the 'Interviewing of suspects' arranged by a training organisation based in Mexico City, the participants were invited to fill in a questionnaire designed for the purpose of finding out their views about a variety of investigative interviewing techniques/tactics/skills in order to inform this training

centre about the prior knowledge/views/opinions of the attendees at the workshop and from this predict such information for future attendees. This was done as part of the training organisation's ongoing activities. The attendees were 'private investigators' from a variety of countries in Central and South America, including Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Peru. The questionnaire was largely based on the one used by Cleary and Bull (2019) to gather jail inmates' perspectives on police interrogation. In the current study, it involved 26 questions that can be associated with four categories/dimensions of interviewer behaviour – (i) dominance/control, (ii) perspective-taking, (iii) humanity/integrity, and (iv) rapport (as in Cleary & Bull, 2019).

Results

Ten (of the 100) participants were excluded from the analyses because they did not reply to more than 50% of the questionnaire items, resulting in a final sample size of 90. Table 1 presents the responses to each item (on the five-point scale), the mean scores, and the standard deviations. (The non-response rate per item was an average of one person.) The four items in the rapport subscale were negatively worded; thus, their composite mean scores were reversed to aid interpretation (i.e., a higher score indicates greater endorsement of the use of rapport).

Table 1: Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and Participant Responses for Each Item

Items	*Mean*	*Standard Deviation*	*Strongly Disagree (%)*	*Disagree (%)*	*Neutral (%)*	*Agree (%)*	*Strongly Agree (%)*
Dominance/Control (8 items)							
A police interviewer should tell the suspect he has evidence that the suspect is guilty, even if he doesn't actually have any evidence.	2.06	1.22	42.2	27.8	14.4	6.7	6.7
A police interviewer should be able to yell at a suspect if he wants to.	1.40	0.93	75.6	15.6	3.3	0.0	4.4
A police interviewer should be aggressive toward the suspect during an interview.	1.52	0.97	68.9	18.9	3.3	5.6	2.2
A police interviewer should say that he is 100% sure the suspect is guilty.	1.80	1.01	50.0	30.0	12.2	5.6	2.2
A police interviewer should tell the suspect that they will feel worse if they don't confess.	2.08	1.24	43.3	28.9	10.0	12.2	5.6

A police interviewer should be able to interrupt the suspect if he wants to.	2.24	1.14	28.9	37.8	17.8	8.9	5.6
A police interviewer should tell the suspect that they will feel better if they confess.	2.85	1.22	20.0	14.4	31.1	26.7	6.7
A police officer should suggest to the suspect that other factors such as drugs, alcohol, or stress really led to the crime.	2.20	1.15	33.3	30.0	18.9	12.2	3.3
Perspective-taking (7 items)							
A police interviewer should point out that the victim was partly to blame for what happened.	1.89	0.94	41.1	36.7	15.6	5.6	1.1
A police interviewer should tell the suspect that although the crime was wrong, other people have done worse.	2.27	1.10	26.7	37.8	18.9	12.2	3.3
A police interviewer should point out how serious the crime was in order to convince the suspect to confess.	2.32	1.18	28.9	32.2	17.8	14.4	4.4
A police interviewer should show sympathy toward a suspect.	3.64	1.10	4.4	11.1	21.1	37.8	22.2
A police interviewer should point out that just because the suspect committed a crime doesn't mean they are a bad person.	3.15	1.27	13.3	18.9	20.0	33.3	13.3
A police interviewer should try to understand how a suspect is feeling.	3.85	0.92	2.2	5.6	20.0	47.8	23.3
A police interviewer should show a positive attitude toward a suspect.	3.97	1.00	2.2	7.8	14.4	42.2	33.3
Humanity/Integrity (7 items)							
A police interviewer should appear to be neutral.	4.29	1.01	4.4	2.2	6.7	33.3	53.3
A police interviewer should be patient.	4.62	0.73	2.2	0.0	1.1	26.7	70.0
A police interviewer should remain calm throughout the interview.	4.61	0.69	1.1	1.1	1.1	28.9	66.7
A police interviewer should treat suspects with respect, no matter what.	4.74	0.65	1.1	1.1	1.1	15.6	78.9

A police interviewer should not insult the suspect during the interview.	4.09	1.50	15.6	3.3	3.3	12.2	65.6
A police interviewer should be interested in finding out the truth, not just getting a confession from a suspect.	4.52	0.93	4.4	1.1	0.0	25.6	66.7
A police interviewer should give suspects a chance to tell their side of the story.	4.48	0.88	3.3	1.1	2.2	30.0	62.2
Rapport (4 items, the mean of these four items is reverse scored)							
A police interviewer should not bother getting to know the suspect before starting the interview.	2.45	1.55	41.1	18.9	5.6	16.7	15.6
A police interviewer does not need to be cooperative with the suspect during an interview.	2.15	1.05	28.9	40.0	17.8	7.8	3.3
A police interviewer should not let the suspect try to claim their innocence.	1.92	1.05	41.1	36.7	10.0	6.7	3.3
A police interviewer should rush the interview and not allow the suspect time for reflection.	1.67	0.91	52.2	35.6	3.3	6.7	1.1

Across all twenty-six items, the one most agreed with, (as well as the one with the greatest consensus (i.e., lowest standard deviation), was "A police interviewer should treat suspects with respect, no matter what" ($M = 4.74$, $SD = .65$). Seventy-eight per cent strongly agreed with this statement. Participants also strongly endorsed the notions that a police interviewer should be patient ($M = 4.62$, $SD = .73$) and should remain calm throughout the interview ($M = 4.61$, $SD = .69$). The interview practices that the respondents most disagreed with pertained to dominance,with the most disagreed item being "A police interviewer should be able to yell at a suspect if he wants to." ($M = 1.40$, $SD = .93$); three quarters reported that they strongly disagreed with this statement. The items for which there was lower consensus (i.e., higher standard deviations) were "A police interviewer should not bother getting to know the suspect before starting the interview" ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.55$) and "A police interviewer should not insult the suspect during the interview" ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.50$).

When the mean scores for the question within a category/dimension were combined, this indicated that respondents disagreed with interview approaches relating to Dominance/Control ($M = 2.02$, $SD = .64$), but agreed with interview tactics relating to Humanity/Integrity ($M = 4.47$, $SD = .58$) and Rapport ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .77$). Regarding the category/dimension of Perspective-taking ($M = 3.01$, $SD = .58$) the participants

largely agreed with three of the seven items but disagreed with the other four.

To examine whether there are significant differences in officers' endorsement of investigative interview tactics across the four different dimensions, a repeated measures ANOVA was performed. Mauchly's test of sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated ($X^2_{(5)} = 74.738$, $p = .001$); a Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied. The ANOVA result with the Greenhouse-Geisser correction revealed a significant difference across these four interview dimensions ($F_{(1.97, 89)} = 246.953$, $p = <.001$).

Table 2: Post-hoc tests on Mean Differences between Each Interview Dimension

Subscales		*Mean Difference*	*SE*	*t*	*Cohen's d*	*pHolm*
Humanity	Rapport	0.53	0.084	6.31	0.82	<.001
	Perspective taking	1.46	0.089	16.50	2.26	<.001
	Dominance	2.45	0.110	-22.38	-3.79	<.001
Rapport	Perspective taking	0.93	0.104	8.96	1.45	<.001
	Dominance	1.92	0.124	-15.55	-2.97	<.001
Perspective taking	Dominance	0.99	0.059	-16.68	-1.52	<.001

In order to further clarify the nature of the difference, post hoc pairwise comparisons using the Holm-Bonferroni method were conducted (see Table 2). The pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences ($p = < .001$) between the means across all subscales. Participants most strongly agreed with 'Humanity'. The second highest endorsed interviewing dimension is 'Rapport', followed by 'Perspective-taking'. 'Dominance' is the least endorsed interviewing dimension.

Discussion

The current study seems to be the first to obtain the views of private investigators in Central and South America regarding the investigative interviewing of suspects. Most of the published studies on this topic have involved participants whose first language is English, whereas, in the present study, their first language and the language typically used in their interviews was Spanish. In Spain, Schell-Leugers et al. (2022) gathered information from a large sample of police officers about their self-reported frequency of use of a variety of interviewing tactics and found that the highest frequencies were for 'rapport/respect/being patient'. The lowest frequencies were for 'anger/intimidating'. Their findings for investigative interviewers speaking Spanish are similar (i) to other studies in several countries/languages involving self-reported usage (e.g., Bull, 2013)

and (ii) to the present study.

Williams (2005) noted regarding private versus public policing of economic crime that "…there may be very real limits to the generalizability of insights from the more traditional terrain of policing…to other spheres…" (p. 336). Importantly, the findings of the current study do permit such generalizability. For example, in the current study, the finding of extensive support for and consensus regarding 'humanity' is similar to that found in various policing studies conducted outside of central/south America, especially the groundbreaking Swedish study by Holmberg and Christianson (2202) in which the authors found that a 'humane' style of interviewing was associated with suspects confessing.

In relation to the current study's findings about private investigators' extent of agreement with the use of rapport tactics/skills, Hoekstra and Verhoeven (2021) found in The Netherlands that in recorded interviews with suspects conducted by Criminal Investigation Service officers of the Dutch Ministry of Finance there was with information provision by suspects a positive association for interviewers' use of rapport tactics/skills but a negative association for interviewer 'authoritative display', 'challenging posture', and 'confrontation with evidence'. This positive finding in Europe for rapport, also found in non-police interviews of suspects in a study by Walsh and Bull, (2012) (for an overview of the topic of rapport within investigative interviews, see Gabbert et al., 2021), supports the views on rapport of the private investigators in the present study who are not from Europe.

Limitations

It was not possible to obtain information about the participants (e.g., their years of relevant experience). They had, of course, chosen to attend the workshop and thus are likely to be interested in the topic of interviewing suspects.

References

Bull, R. (In press). Is the interrogating/interviewing of crime perpetrators no longer suspect? A personal commentary on 25 years of progress. *International Journal of Police Science and Management.*

Bull, R., & Cherryman, J. (1995). *Helping to identify skills gaps in specialist investigative interviewing.* London: Home Office Police Department.

Cleary, H., & Bull, R. (2019). Jail inmates' perspectives on police interrogation. *Psychology, Crime and Law,* 25, 157-170.

Gabbert, F., Hope, L., Luther, K., Wright, G., Ng, M., & Oxburgh, G. (2021). Exploring the use of rapport in professional information-gathering contexts by systematically mapping the evidence base. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, *35*, 329-341.

Gill, M., & Hart, J. (1997). Exploring investigative policing: A study of private detectives in Britain. *British Journal of Criminology*, *37*, 549-567.

Goodman-Delahunty, J., & Martschuk, N. (2020). Securing reliable information in investigative interviews: Coercive and noncoercive strategies preceding turning points. *Police Practice and Research*, *21*, 152-171.

Gudjonsson, G. H. (2021). The science-based pathways to understanding false confessions and wrongful convictions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 633936.

Hoekstra, M. R., & Verhoeven, W. J. (2021). Investigative interviewing of high-status fraud suspects. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, *18*, 185-200.

King, M. (2023). A study of interviewing practices by Australian corporate and financial investigators. *Investigative Interviewing: Research and Practice, 13*, 111-114.

Kozinski, W. (2018). The Reid interrogation technique and false confessions: A time for change. *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, *16*, 10.

Schell-Leugers, J. M., Masip, J., González, J. L., Vanderhallen, M., & Kassin, S. M. (2023). Police interviewing in Spain: A self-report survey of police practices and beliefs. *Anuario de Psicología Jurídica*, *33*, 27-40.

Walsh, D., & Bull, R. (2012). Examining rapport in investigative interviews with suspects: Does its building and maintenance work? *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, *27*, 73-84.

Williams, J. W. (2005). Reflections on the private versus public policing of economic crime. *British Journal of Criminology*, *45*, 316-339.