

The Processes and Consequences Associated with False Confessions: From Risk Factors through Contamination

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Bio

Kyle Scherr, PhD is a Professor of Psychology at Central Michigan University. He is a fellow of the American Psychological Association and Division 41-the American Psychology-Law Society. He is past Associate Editor of Law and Human Behavior, the flagship journal of the American Psychology-Law Society. His programs of research focus on legal advisement decision-making, confession decision-making, and the processes and consequences associated with wrongful conviction and exoneration. His research has been externally funded by places such as the National Science Foundation and the Forensic Justice Project. He has had appointments at the National Registry of Exonerations and the University of Michigan Innocence Clinic. He is a co-author of the recently published Scientific Review Paper on Police Induced Confessions that was endorsed by the American Psychology-Law Society.

Narrative

Innocent people confess to crimes they did not commit or that never happened. The presentation will draw from discovered cases of wrongful conviction, research literatures across a variety of disciplines, and empirical findings derived from multiple methodologies (e.g., surveys, archival analyses, field and laboratory experiments) that collected data from both experts (e.g., law enforcement, judges, clinicians) and non-experts. The presentation will highlight how the known situational and personal risk factors increase the chances that innocent suspects confess to wrongdoing. The presentation will then move to discuss other factors that are involved in the processes that result in false confessions, such as contaminating the statements of innocent suspects. The presentation will end with a discussion illustrating the enduring consequences that follow people who falsely confess after they leave the interrogation room, some short-term (e.g., increased likelihood of conviction) and others long-term (e.g., remaining stigma even post-release and post-exoneration).

Learning Objectives

- Identify three situational risk-factors associated with innocent suspects' willingness to confess
- Identify two personal risk-factors associated with innocent suspects' willingness to confess
- Describe three indicators of contamination
- Describe three instances that are characterized by a high risk of false confession from innocent suspects
- Assess two facets in which a confession influenced downstream decisions related to the outcome of the case