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Introduction to the Special Issue on Interrogations and Confessions

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This material is excerpted, with the kind permission of the publisher, from a forthcoming special issue of [The Journal of Psychiatry & Law](#) that was guest edited by Gregory DeClue and overseen by *JP&L* Editor-in-Chief Philip Witt.

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The “first ever Conference on Interrogations and Confessions” was held at the University of Texas at El Paso in September 2007 (Meissner & Lassiter, 2007).¹ The event was supported by a Conferences Grant Award from the American Psychological Association Science Directorate to the co-organizers, G. Daniel Lassiter (Ohio University) and Christian A. Meissner (University of Texas at El Paso). Over 200 academics, law-enforcement personnel, prosecutors, public defenders, judges, clinical practitioners, and legislators attended the two-and-a-half-day conference, representing over 15 states in the U.S., as well as Canada, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Japan, and Australia. At the conference, social scientists, legal scholars, and practitioners critically examined the state of research underlying the psychology of interrogations and confessions, and explored possible policy recommendations. The organizers identified 21 of the most prominent researchers and practitioners in the areas of social psychology, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, criminology, personality and individual differences, clinical-forensic psychology, and legal scholarship who had developed well-recognized programs of research on the topics of interrogative interviewing, false confessions, the detection of deception in forensic interviews, individual differences, and clinical-forensic evaluations.

The conference program included individual research presentations and panel discussions that provided a forum for debating future directions in research and approaches for influencing public policy based upon best-practice models. The event provided an important opportunity for researchers and practitioners to consolidate their knowledge and to prepare for the future of research and policy reform in this area. An edited volume featuring many of the conference presenters has been prepared (Lassiter and Meissner, in press).

The special issue of the *Journal of Psychiatry and Law* continues the process, with original articles by many of the same prominent researchers and practitioners. The articles describe continuing developments in the psychology of interrogations and confessions. These excerpts at OAJFP provide the reader a first glimpse of these recent developments.

Leo and Davis examine seven psychological processes linking false confession to wrongful conviction and failures of post-conviction relief. Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, and Sigfusdotir investigate the relationship between false confessions during custodial interrogation and group bullying. Vrij, Granhag, and Mann tap deception theory, people's views about how liars respond, impression-formation theory, and persuasion theory to identify 18 attributes that may be present in a good liar. Walsh and Bull examine investigative interviews in investigations regarding benefit fraud.

Sullivan demonstrates that electronic recording of interrogations is increasingly used – and appreciated – by law-enforcement agencies across the United States. Lassiter and Lindberg describe implications from psychological science for *how* interrogations should be recorded. Fulero examines emerging case law regarding admissibility of testimony based on some forensic-assessment tools used in confession cases.

Evans, Meissner, Brandon, Russano, and Kleinman examine similarities and differences between interrogations in criminal and human-intelligence settings and discuss the extent to which the current empirical literature can be applied to criminal and/or human-intelligence interrogations. DeClue presents three recommendations for law-enforcement, military, and intelligence investigators.

Each of these articles provides valuable, current information regarding interrogations and confessions. Together, we continue the process from the 2007 El Paso conference. Social scientists, legal scholars, and practitioners critically examine aspects of the psychology of interrogations and confessions. These articles should be relevant to academics, law-enforcement personnel, military and intelligence investigators, prosecutors, public defenders, judges, clinical practitioners, policymakers, and lawmakers.

References

- Lassiter, G. D., & Meissner, C. A. (in press). *Interrogations and confessions: Research, practice, and policy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Meissner, C. A., & Lassiter, D. L. (2007). Conference on interrogations and confessions. *Psychological Science Agenda*, 21, 9. Retrieved 7/16/09 from <http://www.apa.org/science/psa/oct07conf.html>.

¹ These first two paragraphs are excerpted almost verbatim from the conference summary. Note that although the special issue was inspired by the conference and subsequent discussions, these are original articles, not contained in the conference proceedings or the subsequent APA book.