



A study in the relationship between interrogative suggestibility, compliance and social desirability in institutionalised adolescents

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Abstract

This study is the first to investigate the relationship between interrogative suggestibility, compliance and social desirability in a British adolescent forensic sample. Fifty one institutionalised adolescents completed the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale (GSS1), the Gudjonsson Compliance Scale (GCS), and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire—Junior (EPQ-J). Their suggestible and compliant behaviours were rated by two residential staff who had daily contact with the adolescents. No correlations were found between Suggestibility scores and ratings of suggestible behaviour. A significant positive correlation was found between Gudjonsson Compliance Scale scores and ratings of compliant behaviour within the institution. This provides criterion-related validity for the GCS. The pattern of correlations between Compliance Scale scores and Suggestibility Scale scores indicated that adolescents who score more highly on compliance are vulnerable to leading questions (Yield 1) rather than interrogative pressure (Shift). Social desirability as measured by the Lie Scale of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Junior was found to correlate with suggestibility (Yield 1) and with self-reported compliance (GCS).

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1. Introduction

Gudjonsson and Clark (1986) defined interrogative suggestibility as the extent to which individuals accept messages communicated during the closed social interaction of a formal police interview, and subsequently provided a behavioural response to the suggestion either by explicitly

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accepting or resisting it. Two types of suggestibility are distinguished; a) a susceptibility to accepting leading questions (yield) and b) a susceptibility to critical feedback from the interrogator (shift) (Gudjonsson, 1984). Consequently, some individuals may be vulnerable to giving unreliable statements because they are easily misled by suggestive questions, while others may be vulnerable to interrogative pressure in the form of negative or critical feedback from the interrogator (Gudjonsson, 1992). Gudjonsson (1984) developed a psychometric measure, the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale (GSS), of the tendency to accept misleading information (Yield score), the tendency to change an account due to negative feedback from the interrogator (Shift score), and the overall level of suggestibility (Total score).

Several studies have investigated interrogative suggestibility in normal and forensic adolescent populations (Gudjonsson & Singh, 1984a, 1984b; Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 1996; Singh & Gudjonsson, 1992; Richardson & Kelly, 1995; Richardson, Gudjonsson & Kelly, 1995). Richardson et al. (1995) found that adolescents when compared with adults are no more likely to yield to leading questions but are significantly more likely to give in to interrogative pressure when it takes the form of negative feedback.

Gudjonsson has also identified the construct of compliance and has proposed that the primary theoretical difference between the concepts of suggestibility and compliance relates to the personal acceptance of the suggested information. Compliance does not depend on the individual believing the suggested proposition whereas suggestibility does (Gudjonsson, 1989). Gudjonsson has defined compliance as the tendency to go along with propositions, requests, or instructions for some immediate instrumental gain. Gudjonsson (1989) developed a self-report compliance questionnaire (Gudjonsson Compliance Scale) which is made up of two components a) an eagerness to please other people, and b) avoidance of conflict and confrontation with people, particularly those perceived as being in a position of authority. Not surprisingly, a degree of overlap between suggestibility and compliance has been reported. Gudjonsson (1990a) found that Yield, Shift, and Total Suggestibility scores correlated significantly with Compliance scores.

Gudjonsson and Sigurdsson (1996) investigated compliance in a sample of Icelandic juvenile offenders with a mean age of 18 years. The mean GCS score was 8.9 (Standard Deviation = 3.2) with a range 2–16. This mean score was almost identical to the mean found in a sample of adults in the general population (Gudjonsson, 1997). Gudjonsson (1997) indicates that the 90th percentile scores were 13 for the sample of Icelandic juvenile offenders and 14 for a normal adult group. These reflect abnormally high Compliance Scale scores.

Gudjonsson and Singh (1984a) found in a sample of delinquent adolescent boys that interrogative suggestibility as measured by the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale (GSS. 1) positively correlated with a 7-item behavioural rating scale of suggestibility which was constructed for the study (Suggestibility Rating Form-SRF). This rating form comprised behaviours considered to be directly relevant to interrogative suggestibility and was completed by residential care staff. Inter-rater reliability for the Suggestibility Rating Form was satisfactory. Staff ratings of suggestibility correlated highly with Shift scores ($r=0.62$, $p<0.001$), but not with Yield scores. These results provided some criterion-related validity for the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale.

Gudjonsson (1983) proposed that people who have a strong need to present themselves in a socially favourable light, as indicated by high scores on the Lie Scale of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-EPQ (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975), are more open to suggestion. He found a modest correlation between total suggestibility and EPQ Lie Scale scores. Haraldsson (1985) also found

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