Abstract

IMPROVING INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWS: FACILITATING DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION THROUGH IMPLICIT MEANS

by

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Investigative interviews are essential to intelligence collection. However, eliciting information from subjects is challenging when they are not motivated to cooperate. Psychological research has examined social influence tactics that may influence an interviewee’s forthcomingness, however, there has been no focus on implicit methods despite their prominence in the basic social cognitive literature. Research on implicit cognition has found that activating mental concepts can lead people to behave in ways that are semantically related to or metaphorically consistent with the activated concept. In the present research, I sought to examine the concept of disclosure and test the effects of its activation on interviewees’ behavior. In a pilot study, I tested the effects of priming attachment security on the accessibility of disclosure-related concepts and found that disclosure entails concepts of communication, trust, and openness. Subsequently, I tested whether activating disclosure concepts by priming attachment security would influence people's forthcomingness with information about a mock terrorism conspiracy. In a laboratory experiment, participants delivered a flash drive to a confederate who exposed them to details of a mock eco terrorism conspiracy, which they were subsequently interviewed about. Prior to being interviewed, half of the participants were primed; the other half were not. Results showed that primed participants disclosed more information than those who were not
primed. Using the mock conspiracy and interviewing paradigm, I then tested the effects of activating disclosure concepts through an interview setting consistent with concepts of openness. Results converged: concepts of disclosure and openness overlap and can be contextually activated to promote information disclosure. The findings highlight the need for further research on basic nonconscious processes in investigative interviews, as such influences can affect the outcome of the interview. The operation of nonconscious influences in such contexts has implications for practitioners, who may be able to utilize priming to facilitate disclosure.