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A REVISED QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE IN LIE-DETECTION TESTS*

John E. Reid

(The author of this article, a member of the staff of the Chicago Police Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory, has had extensive experience in lie-detection examination of criminal suspects and witnesses. He has made two noteworthy contributions to the field of scientific lie detection, the first of which was described in a previous number of this Journal. See "Simulated Blood Pressure Responses in Lie-Detection Tests and a Method for Their Detection," 36 (3):201 (1945). The present paper describes Mr. Reid's second and equally important contribution.—EDITOR.)

The customary lie-detector questioning technique involves asking a number of pertinent questions along with several which are irrelevant to the matter under investigation but which are asked for the purpose of determining the nature of the subject's reactions to the test situation alone. A supplementary "card-control" test is often used in order to have available a known lie reaction (i.e., when the subject lies about his chosen card) for assistance in evaluating the subject's records when questioned about the matter under investigation. Except for the "card-control test" or an occasional "peak of tension" test which may be employed under certain exceptional conditions and circumstances, the conventional test questions are not shown to the subject in advance of the test, although he is told, of course, of the general nature of these questions.¹

A revised questioning technique, which has been the subject of experimentation by the writer and his colleagues at the Chicago Police Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory contains, in addition to certain well selected irrelevant questions, two types of control questions inherently different from the aforementioned control questions employed in the usual lie-detector

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¹ The conventional questioning technique referred to by the writer is actually the "Relevant-Irrelevant Question Test" introduced by Leonarde Keeler, who also devised the invaluable "Peak of Tension Test." Keeler is also noted for instituting the procedural technique commonly used in administering lie-detection tests.

For a complete discussion regarding the "experimental card control" test procedure generally, see Inbau, F. E., *Lie Detection and Criminal Interrogation* (1942).

test. All the pertinent and control questions are read to and discussed with the subject in advance of the test itself.

In the revised questioning technique, the examination is prefaced by a detailed explanation of the importance of the lie-detector test in the case, stressing the fact that if the subject is telling the truth he will willingly cooperate and the instrument will show that he is telling the truth. The subject is also advised that if he is lying the machine will disclose that fact, and then he will be so informed and asked for an explanation. At this point the examiner states, "That's fair enough, isn't it?" and then he continues as follows: "Now I'll ask you a set of questions which you are to answer truthfully by 'yes' or 'no.' Here is a list of the important questions which I'll read to you before I ask them on the test."

Each of the irrelevant questions in the revised technique deals with a known fact and not with a situation based upon a probability which the examiner assumes to be true. For instance, in dealing with an ex-convict murder suspect who is presented to the examiner as John "Red" Brown, the possibility must be borne in mind that Brown may have several aliases, for which reason it is better to use an irrelevant question, such as, "Have you ever been called 'Red?'" in place of the conventional test irrelevant question, "Is your first name John?" or "Is your last name Brown?" Likewise, instead of the usual third irrelevant question, "Did you have something to eat today?" it is advisable to use, "Did you ever smoke?" where the examiner has actually seen the subject smoking. These recommendations are based upon experiences which demonstrate that some subjects test the efficacy of the lie-detector by deliberately lying on irrelevant questions calling for answers not definitely known by the examiner. If they are not called to task about such a lie (which may well be so, since the irrelevant questions are used for the limited purpose of establishing a "norm"), the examiner will encounter much greater difficulties in obtaining an admission based upon the examiner's accusation of lying regarding the crime itself.

In contrast to the conventional type test, the third and pertinent question (e.g., "Do you know who shot John Jones?") is followed by another irrelevant question in the revised questioning technique. Since Question 3 is the first relevant crime question to be asked, the response, especially in blood pressure, occasionally carries over into what would normally be the Question 4 response when that question is pertinent to the crime in issue. By asking an irrelevant question at 4, a norm can be re-established so as to identify more clearly the responses to Questions 3 and 5.

The essential difference between the two types of tests is the

use of the "comparative response" question and the "guilt complex" question, which are inserted in the revised test technique as Questions 6 and 8, respectively.

THE "COMPARATIVE RESPONSE" QUESTION

Special consideration must be given to the selection of Question 6, the "comparative response" question, because the magnitude of the response to that question is to be compared with responses to questions pertaining to the actual crime, and it may therefore serve to include or exclude definitely the subject as a suspect in the crime under investigation. If the examiner is fortunate enough to have in his possession certain information concerning a situation or offense involving the subject (but of less importance than the actual crime being investigated) which the examiner knows or feels reasonably sure the subject will lie about, a question based upon such information and actually lied to will serve very well to indicate the subject's responsiveness when lying. Such a question thereby affords a basis for evaluating the nature of the response to the questions pertinent to the offense under investigation. For instance, when it is a known fact as indicated in the police records that the subject had been previously arrested but he denies ever having been arrested, a question should be framed about the prior arrest, such as, "Have you ever been arrested before?" When, however, a known lie control question is lacking, as is usually the case, a short preliminary interrogation of the subject regarding other crimes or happenings should precede the preparation of the "comparative response" question in order to ascertain the specific question to be used which may offer the best possibility of a deception response. For example, if John "Red" Brown in the foregoing case illustration is a known burglar and now suspected of the murder of John Jones, he may be asked, as a "comparative response" question, "Since you got out of the penitentiary have you committed any burglaries?" A response to that question which is greater than whatever response may be present at the point where the murder questions were asked, offers a reliable indication that the subject is innocent of the murder. As an alternative "comparative response" question for subjects such as John "Red" Brown, who have probably committed perjury in some of their previous trials, they may be asked, "Have you ever lied on the witness stand?" If the subject is a suspected first offender any one of several types of questions may be asked for comparative response purposes: for example, "Have you ever stolen anything?" "Have you ever cheated on your income tax returns?" "Have you ever committed adultery?" If the subject upon preliminary interrogation

states that he once stole five dollars, the question must be re-phrased and asked, "Besides that five dollars you told me about, have you stolen any other money?"

The examiner must feel reasonably sure, as the result of his preliminary interrogation, that the subject will answer "no" to any of the above suggested questions used for "comparative response" purposes. The examiner must also convey the impression in his pre-test interview with the subject that the "comparative response" questions are of real significance and importance.

THE "GUILT COMPLEX" QUESTION

The "guilt complex" question is based upon an entirely fictitious crime of the same type as the actual crime under investigation, but one which is made to appear very realistic to the subject. For instance, if the subject is being examined regarding an actual murder at 222 Superior Street on December 1, 1945, he may also be asked, as a "guilt complex" question about an entirely fictitious killing on March 17, 1945, at 1121 State Street, an address familiar to the examiner and at which he definitely knows no murder was committed. The subject is questioned before the test and during the test about the fictitious "murder" on State Street in the same serious manner in which inquiry is made of the actual murder on Superior Street. The purpose of the "guilt complex" or fictitious crime question is to determine if the subject, although innocent, is unduly apprehensive because of the fact that he is suspected and interrogated about the crime under investigation. A reaction to the fictitious crime question which is greater than or about the same as that to the actual crime question would be indicative of truth-telling and innocence respecting the real offense. On the other hand, however, a response to the actual crime questions, coupled with the absence of a response to the fictitious crime question, or by one considerably less than that to the actual crime questions, would be strongly indicative of lying regarding the offense under investigation. In other words, the reaction to the one question based upon the actual crime must be accounted for by guilty knowledge or responsibility rather than by nervousness or other factors, for otherwise the fictitious crime question should provoke a similar type of reaction.

In further explanation of the differences between the conventional questioning technique and the revised technique, let us compare side by side the respective test questions in a case involving John "Red" Brown, an ex-convict burglar, who is now suspected of murdering John Jones during the perpetration of a burglary:

(Note: Relevant questions in bold type face; irrelevant questions in regular type face, and control questions in italics. All questions to be answered by "yes" or "no" without explanatory remarks. Time interval between questions approximately 15 seconds.)

CONVENTIONAL QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE	REVISED QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE
1. Is your first name John?	1. Have you ever been called "Red?"
2. Do you live in Chicago?	2. Did you stay in Chicago last night?
3. Do you know who shot John Jones?	3. Do you know who shot John Jones?
4. Did you kill John Jones last Saturday night?	4. Did you ever smoke?
5. Did you have something to eat today?	5. Did you kill John Jones last Saturday night?
6. Did you fire a .38 cal. revolver last Saturday night?	6. <i>Since you got out of the penitentiary have you committed any burglaries?²</i>
7. Were you present when John Jones was shot?	7. Were you ever arrested before?
8. Did you go to school?	8. <i>About two months ago did you kill a man during a burglary at 1121 State Street?</i>
9. Did you take a diamond ring from John Jones' room Saturday night?	9. Did you steal a diamond ring from John Jones' room last Saturday night?
10. Did you shoot John Jones?	10. Were you present when John Jones was shot Saturday night?
11. Have you lied on any of these questions?	11. Have you lied on any of these questions?

² Where a known lie question is available, it, of course, should be used in preference to the question here given as number 6.

CONCLUSION

The experience of the writer and his colleagues at the Chicago Police Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory has pointed to several distinct advantages of the revised questioning technique over the technique generally employed. The "comparative response" question method affords a far better criterion of a subject's responsiveness than the usual experimental card control test. Furthermore, the "comparative response" question, which

is used in place of the "card control test," is incorporated in the same test with the actual crime questions. This arrangement eliminates the conventional test possibility of a subject's reactions changing from one test to another, and it also offers a closer means of comparison.³

The "guilt complex" question determines the subject's apprehensive reactions to a crime situation generally, which is of considerable assistance in evaluating his reactions to questions regarding the case under investigation.

The procedure of reading and discussing the pertinent and control questions to the subject in advance of the test, with an explanation that the test will be confined only to the questions discussed, eliminates the element of surprise which sometimes is present when the subject hears the questions for the first time during the actual test. The preliminary comment regarding the effectiveness of the instrument in determining the truthfulness of the subject's replies and the use of carefully selected irrelevant questions to which the true answers are definitely known are additional advantages offered to the examiner in the revised questioning technique.

³ If a card control test is used at all, it should be administered as the first test given the subject, in order to impress upon the subject the efficacy of the instrument and technique in revealing lies. When using the revised questioning technique, if the "comparative response" question does not accomplish its desired purpose, the examiner as a last resort may refer to the "card control test" to determine the emotional reactivity of the subject.