



Investigative Interviewing: Research and Practice

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Laura Oxburgh

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Book Review of Ridley, A., Gabbert, F., & La Rooy, D. (2012). *Suggestibility in Legal Contexts: Psychological Research and Forensic Implications*

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Introduction

The book highlighted very early on that its purpose was to “review the evidence for suggestibility in legal contexts” (p.15) – to some extent this is met. The first chapter starts with a history of, and introduction to suggestibility in legal contexts. The distinction between interrogative suggestibility and investigative suggestibility was particularly useful and well-written, especially as the latter highlights how individuals may be suggestible because of questioning type (e.g., leading questions) in an otherwise supportive interview. Overall, the issue of suggestibility is very well explored with clear links explored between the older research base concerning suggestibility and the relationship to interrogative suggestibility, as well as links made by the author between memory and the use of leading questions. In addition, there is a clear introduction to theory in relation to why some individuals may be less suggestible than others – this is refreshing to read, particularly as some literature within legal contexts, a somewhat applied area of research, can lack the inclusion of psychological theory.

On first reading, the chapter on the misinformation effect (chapter 2) seemed more suited to a textbook on eyewitness memory – however, the link to investigative suggestibility grounds this chapter within the current context, and the theoretical accounts put forward to explain this effect are well explored. The following chapter (chapter 3) on interrogative suggestibility and compliance is a useful inclusion within the book and includes witness, victims *and* suspects. The evaluation of the development of the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale (GSS) 1 and GSS 2 is very informative and accessible as is the introduction of the Gudjonsson Compliance Scale (GCS). However, the discussion on the links between poor memory and suggestibility do not include mental disorder, which is argued to be a shortfall of the book, particularly as memory impairment is prominent in some mental disorders – although mental health factors are acknowledged within the brief discussion regarding the dynamic process that is the police interview. Nevertheless, this chapter still provides an interesting insight into modified versions of the GSS including a suggestibility scale for very young children (aged 3-5 years) and the key differences between suggestibility and compliance.

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The next chapter concerns the topics of suggestibility and memory conformity (chapter 4) - two inter-linked processes. Although this chapter is focused upon witnesses, the chapter provides an interesting discussion and an application to real-life events. An exploration of the different methodological approaches to memory conformity followed by the theoretical accounts as to why this occurs completes the chapter. Although subsequent chapters 5 and 7 both discuss suggestibility and individual differences, albeit in minimally different contexts, they are separated by a chapter exploring recovered memories and suggestibility. While chapter 6 provides an excellent explanation of recovered memories, there are only slight intimations of how recovered memories link to suggestibility. To the reader who is more familiar with the subject, such links can easily be made, however, this may not be so obvious to those who are not. Furthermore, the inclusion of this chapter between those of 5 and 7 somewhat fragments the flow of the book.

Chapter 5 begins by providing a definition of 'individual differences' before exploring the reasoning behind why research into individual differences and suggestibility is important. However, the authors appear to suggest that little is known about the vulnerabilities of witnesses' prior to interview as opposed to the vulnerabilities of suspects. However, some readers may find this misleading, and it may be argued that even less is known about suspect vulnerabilities prior to interview, particularly when one considers the dearth of literature base in this area.

Chapter 7 adds to the discussion on suggestibility and individual differences by focusing on typically developing as well as intellectually disabled children. A thorough exploration of research studies in the extant literature adds depth to the chapter, as does the inclusion of theory of mind within suggestibility. Information relating to the theory of mind further includes application to the context of a forensic interview. One would have expected the topic of theory of mind to appear in the subsequent chapter, which focuses on vulnerable groups including autism spectrum disorder – a disorder where individuals display a marked impairment in theory of mind.

The final chapters examine issues of interrogation and the forces that influence such a process as well as discussion of the cognitive interview and NICHD protocol. Then follows a review of what we currently know about suggestibility in legal contexts, which, in the final chapter, completes the book.

Overall, the book devotes itself not only to evidence of suggestibility, but to the history and theory of such a concept, as well as considering suggestibility in various contexts with various individuals at different stages of the legal process. However, my hope of reading a full chapter addressing the issue of suggestibility within mentally disordered suspects soon diminished when I discovered there does not appear to be a chapter specifically focused on this cohort or the impact of mental disorder on suggestibility – an omission which is unfortunate as this area is very under-researched, yet very relevant. Individuals with mental disorder after all, are considered to be more suggestible when compared to the general population. Furthermore, it is unfortunate that a book entitled 'Suggestibility in Legal Contexts' only very briefly touches on the issue of suggestibility of suspects in very few chapters, despite such an issue being of significant importance and relevance. This is especially so when one discovers the number of miscarriages of justice that have occurred during the past 20 years and have been portrayed both within this book and in other literature. What does seem apparent however, is that this book focuses predominantly upon witnesses and victims, either with or without intellectual disabilities, and Autism Spectrum Disorder, which somewhat limits the scope of the book.

That said, the book is highly relevant to the issues faced within various legal contexts, not only by the police officers, but also by victims, witnesses and suspects. For any academic researcher, practitioner or student exploring the legal process and the complex interactions that occur within legal contexts, this book is both thought provoking and an excellent opportunity for the reader to develop greater familiarity with this particular form of vulnerability.