

The influence of cultural differences in investigative interviews

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(PhysOrg.com) -- In her youth psychologist Karlijn Beune devoured crime stories. Now the world of crime is her field of expertise. She studied how the behaviour of detectives during investigative interviews influences suspects from different cultural backgrounds.

For a detective, the art of investigative interviewing is to get the tone right. His or her behaviour often directly determines the suspect's willingness to give information. In her research Karlijn Beune distinguishes ten behaviours such as 'intimidation', 'being nice' and 'rational persuasion' which were specially defined for situations in which police interact with citizens. 'Being nice' and 'rational persuasion' turn out to be the most important behaviours used by detectives during

investigative interviews. Beune's research shows that 'rational persuasion' is effective when interviewing non-ethnic suspects, while 'being nice' worked mainly in interviews with ethnic suspects. These results emerge from three studies carried out by Beune.

In the first study school pupils were asked to steal money from a 'biologist' for whom they were completing a questionnaire. Afterwards, they were interviewed by an experienced detective. The behaviour of both the suspect and the detective was analysed. This study showed that 'being nice' and 'rational persuasion' are much-used strategies and that their effectiveness depends on the suspect's cultural background.

The second study consisted of two experiments in which school pupils were asked to chat live with a detective of the Police Academy. What the pupils did not know was that the chat session was being simulated and that they were actually chatting with a computer. After several questions, the chat programme pretended to get stuck, so that Beune was able to look at the effect of different strategic combinations. In line with the first study, Beune was able to conclude that a combination of 'being nice' or 'rational persuasion' with robust behaviour is most effective when robust behaviour is followed by behaviour that resonates with the suspect's cultural background. When 'being nice' and 'rational persuasion' are combined, detectives can best start with being nice to the suspects and then get to the heart of the matter by means of rational persuasion.

The final study consisted of an analysis of video footage of real-life investigative interviews. In this study Beune looked at the direct relationships between 'being nice' and 'rational persuasion' and the suspect's willingness or unwillingness to give information in the interview. In addition, she studied two different types of 'intimidation': intimidating behaviour aimed at the individual and intimidating behaviour aimed at the suspect's environment, such as friends or family.

In line with the earlier studies, Beune thinks that suspects respond more quickly with information-related behaviour when the strategy resonates with their cultural origin.

Insofar as known this is the first research to demonstrate that cultural differences most definitely play a role in investigative interviews. By adapting their [behaviour](#) to the suspect's cultural background, detectives can get better results: more confessions, more detailed information, a greater willingness to answer questions and a better relationship between the suspect and the detective.

Crime stories

Research in this field would appear to be right up Beune's street. Before the subject came her way, Beune had always been interested in the world of [crime](#). As a little girl and growing up, she devoured the books of the Famous Five, Baantjer and Agatha Christie. "So doing research in this world is a dream come true."

During her first year studying Psychology in Groningen, Beune had already heard about projects at the Police Academy. "I thought everybody would want to do that, so I never gave myself much chance. But four years later, I was suddenly allowed to take part in what struck me as the most brilliant assignment imaginable!" This was the first study Beune carried out for her doctorate, where school pupils were asked to steal money from a biologist (where Beune herself acted as the biologist). "Seeing the pupils' reactions was really amusing, some were sweating like mad, others were trying to get me out of the way with all sorts of pretexts," says Beune. Working with the children added a dimension of fun to her work.

Meanwhile Beune has started on a post-doc project, this time in cooperation with the KLPD (National Police Services Agency). So she

hopes to continue doing research in the murky world of crime for some time yet.

Provided by University of Twente ([news](#) : [web](#))

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