

Brain-based fact or interrogator's fiction?

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By Michael Rosenberg . . . I want to first say that I am tired of watching the registered citizens in my sex offender class pay for the privilege of being interrogated. Tired even more of having to watch as their truthfulness and willingness to honestly participate are questioned. Those guys are my favorites, and one day, the truth about this horrid process will be known, understood, and admitted. Until then, we live in a dark age of pseudo-science which at its best is expensive nonsense; at its worst, a direct route back to jail.

If we can all agree that the autonomic nervous system does in all likelihood exist and that we *can measure* outputs correlated with that system such as breath rate, blood pressure, and sweat duct activity, then we are ready to discuss the polygraph, the test that is purported to distinguish between fact and fiction.

But is this test all that its adherents—those in positions to

benefit financially or legally from it—would like for it to be? Or is this hack engineering employed on human beings to stress them out in order to force confessions?

Interrogation is a craft aimed at eliciting answers from subjects who would prefer to maintain their privacy. While police still may be tempted to beat the truth from suspects in general and registered citizens specifically, the practice has its legal drawbacks.

The Scientists who developed the polygraph

Tricked you. They weren't scientists after all, but a series of variously-typed interrogators, from actual police interrogators to the type who ask questions to help you get to know yourself better, lawyers and science-fiction writers; some were a combination.

Enter William Marston, creator of *Wonder Woman* and the Harvard attorney/psychologist who first began playing with blood pressure to detect nervousness. Marston was unable to effectively experiment, hold down his two other careers, and write super-hero characters into life apparently, as he did not obtain a patent for creating the 'lie-detector test'.

Then comes John Augustus Larson, a physiology Ph.D. at Berkeley. Larson was an avid observer of police interrogations. Larson wanted to create a machine that would take the guess-work out of interrogations and make it scientific. Trouble was, the experiments that went in to creating the polygraph were anything but science, and even Larson was not the one to win a patent.

Leonard Keeler worked under Larson in Berkeley, and was also a fan of the police department. Keeler won a patent for his 'emotograph' (the variety of science being practiced is easy to envision with a name like that) in 1931 after a six year wait for the patent office.

Based on CQT

CQT is the acronym for 'Control Question Test' and it is all about a two highly subjective terms: 'normal', which is controlled for in *each test differently* by the examiner; and 'variance', which would be statistical-speak for distance from what is normal (see above and below).

The tester's job is to create an environment in which the subject feels that their truthfulness is being observed, even while the once aptly-termed emotograph depends on the set-up questions. Any claims to scientific objectivity don't hold water mainly due to the fact that the examiner is responsible for designing the control questions in order to best compare any variance between what is a likely lie and what is being tested for. The idea is that the examiner will review the subject's vital signs for blood pressure and other spikes during control questions, those questions which most people will make up a little white-lie for. Or so the theory goes. These statistics will be compared to those of the relevant questions, asked with the understanding that the machine and tester can see if the subject is lying. Or so they tell you. This is all printed out and compared using more statistical analysis.

In their day, the holy inquisition, shock treatment, eugenics, and witch trials were seen the way the polygraph is now.

Science, beware; you are on shaky ground if you are going to let the emotograph use you this way.