



## Adults and Youth Do Not Understand All Components of Youth Interrogation Rights When Presented in Multimedia Format

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In a previous issue of *Crime Scene*, we published a short article that reviewed the literature on the comprehension of youth interrogation rights and outlined our case for the need to explore a novel way to present these rights at the outset of a police interrogation (Lively & Snook, 2020). In particular, we reasoned that it would be interesting to explore the applicability of the *multimedia effect* (i.e., that individuals learn best from materials using words and graphics rather than words alone; e.g., principles of multimedia learning; see Mayer, 2009) when trying to improve comprehension, and outlined some of our research. The purpose of this article is to provide an update on this research.

As legislated by the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (2002), young people who are arrested and questioned by police are afforded specific rights. For example, youth do not have to talk to the police (Right to Silence). Youth can also talk to a lawyer right away (whether it be their own lawyer or a free one) or have the telephone number to call a readily available lawyer (Right to Legal Counsel). Youth are also able to talk to an adult right away (whether it be their parents, a relative, or another appropriate adult; Right to Consult an Appropriate Adult). If the youth does choose to talk with either a lawyer or adult (or both), then they also have the choice of having the lawyer and/or adult present with them during police questioning (Right to Have a Person Present). In addition to these rights, youth also need to be notified that anything they say or do

can be used as evidence against them in court. These legislative changes offer enhanced protections for youth who interact with the criminal justice system.

In particular, the change to allow youth the opportunity to consult with, and have the support of, an appropriate adult (usually their parent/caregiver) prior to and during a police interrogation would likely be judged by most to be a positive change – and we do not disagree. However, two inherent assumptions with this change are that an appropriate adult has the youths' best interests in mind and *understands* the rights that are afforded to youth. Unfortunately, available data to date are not very promising on the second assumption that adults understand youth interrogation rights. A few studies have shown, for example, that adults understand less than 50% of youth interrogation rights (Cavanagh & Cauffman, 2017; Cleary & Warner, 2017; Woolard et al., 2008).

In attempt to explore a novel solution for this problem, we created multimedia presentations that outlined the rights afforded to youth (see Appendix A) and tested the comprehensibility of these presentations using samples of Canadian adults (i.e., Experiment 1) and Canadian youth (i.e., Experiment 2). Participants in both experiments were randomly assigned to view one of the eight multimedia presentation outlining youth interrogation rights. For our manipulation however, we were interested in which multime-



dia elements – or combination thereof – rendered the greatest level of understanding (hence, to explore the applicability of the multimedia effect). Specifically, we manipulated two-levels (i.e., present vs. absent) of three multimedia elements; namely, Animation (i.e., watching characters act out the youth interrogation rights), Audio (i.e., hearing a narration of the youth interrogation rights explained), and Caption (i.e., reading the narrated words of the youth interrogation rights along the bottom of the presentation). To be clear, our conditions were as follows:

1. **Animation + Audio + Caption** (i.e., all multimedia elements present)
2. **Animation + Audio** (i.e., Caption absent)
3. **Animation + Caption** (i.e., Audio absent)
4. **Animation** (i.e., Audio and Caption absent)
5. **Audio + Caption** (i.e., Animation absent)
6. **Audio** (i.e., Animation and Caption absent)
7. **Caption** (i.e., Animation and Audio absent)
8. **No multimedia** (i.e., all multimedia elements absent)

We collected open-ended responses to assess participants' understanding of the youth interrogation rights content presented in the presentation and coded for the presence or absence of youth interrogation rights components (see Appendix A).

### How Did the Adults Perform?

The use of Animation + Caption produced a comprehension score of nearly 67% - the highest comprehension scores for adults, which was followed by Caption (66%), and Audio + Caption (64%). A closer inspection of the open-ended responses revealed that most adults understood that youth did not have to talk to a police officer, could talk to a lawyer, and could have an adult present with them. Most adult participants also recalled that youth could have a lawyer present, and that anything the youth says to police could be used as evidence against the youth in court. However, many adults misunderstood that youth could contact a variety of different types of adults (e.g., parent, relative, and another adult), that youth could have the telephone number for

a lawyer provided to them, and that any action done by the youth could be used as evidence in court against the youth.

### How Did the Youth Perform?

Similarly, the presentations that produced the highest comprehension scores were presentations that contained Animation + Caption (50%), Audio + Caption (48%), and Caption (47%). Most youth recalled that they did not have to talk to a police officer and could talk to a lawyer. Many of the youth also recalled that they could talk to an adult and could have an adult present with them. However, a high portion of the youth participants were unable to remember other important components of their interrogation rights. Specifically, almost one-third of the youth failed to recall that they could contact a free lawyer. Approximately one-quarter failed to mention that any action done by them during the police interaction could be used as evidence in court against them. One in every five youth did not recall that they could speak with their own/personal lawyer, while one in every six failed to recall that the adult could be any other appropriate adult. Very few of the youths recalled that they could have the telephone number for a free lawyer.

### What Have We Learned Thus Far?

Consistent across our experimental samples, the multimedia presentation that led to the highest comprehension score was one containing Animations and Captions. This observation supports a couple of tenets of the multimedia effect as outlined by Mayer (2009); however, the level of comprehension achieved by this presentation in both samples is still concerningly low. As always, replication of this work is necessary and called for in order to test if comprehension in this (or other) conditions could be increased further. Perhaps one way of doing this is to incorporate some additional principles of multimedia learning into the multimedia presentation (e.g., the segmenting principle, or the idea that people learn better when a multimedia message is presented in user-paced segments rather than as a continuous unit; Mayer, 2009).



While more work is still needed to be done, presenting youth interrogation rights as a multimedia presentation has the potential to formulate a standardized approach. For instance, McCardle and colleagues (2020) recently found that police officers did not deliver interrogation rights in their entirety to youth in nearly 75% of the interrogations, and that officers checked for understanding rarely. In fact, the researchers found that youth were asked to explain the rights in their own words (after having them read to them) in less than 10% of the interrogations. Therefore, showing a multimedia presentation (or equivalent) of some kind that presents all components of youth rights in their entirety – and in an understandable way – would help address this problem.

Canada appears to recognize that more protections for justice-involved youth are needed, as evidenced by changes in legislation (e.g., *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, 2002) to incorporate the option of allowing a youth to be accompanied by an appropriate adult during a police interview. Yet, despite these political changes being a step in the right direction, the ability of these appropriate adults to truly serve as additional safeguards for youth are only as protective to the degree in which appropriate adults *understand* the youth interrogation rights; without this appropriate adult support, youth detainees are left alone to navigate a complex social interaction with an authority figure and risk not being fully protected.

We are grateful for the support of this work from the Canadian Psychological Association and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Our attempt at trying to pioneer a new line of research involving learning technologies to help facilitate increased comprehension only scratches the surface in this area. We hope others see the need for this important work, and join with us in dedicating research efforts toward helping to ensure that youth interrogation rights render the safeguards and protections that they are meant to have.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>In our previous article, we proposed a third experiment as part of our research program; however, this third experiment has not been conducted as of yet and is not discussed any further in this article.

<sup>2</sup>The mean age of participants was 33.86 years ( $SD = 11.26$ , Range = 18-67) from Experiment 1 ( $N = 207$  adults), and 14.81 years ( $SD = 1.65$ , Range = 12-17) from Experiment 2 ( $N = 193$  youth). Inter-rater reliability for our coding was  $\kappa = .93$  (Experiment 1) and  $\kappa = .90$  (Experiment 2), suggesting excellent agreement between raters; Cohen, 1960; Landis & Koch, 1977). See Table 1 for all participants' demographic information across experiments.

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Youth Criminal Justice Act. (2002). SC 2002, c. 1.

## Appendix A

Interrogation rights Instructional Video Script (Adapted from Eastwood et al., 2016)

You are here today because a police officer wants to talk to you.

Before this happens, I want to tell you five important points you need to know.

These points are called your rights.

Number one. You do not have to talk to the police officer. This means that you can choose to talk to the police officer, or choose not to talk to the police officer.

Number two. You can talk to your lawyer right now. Or, you can have the telephone number to call a free lawyer. This means you can get help from your own lawyer, or a free lawyer, before the police officer asks you any questions.

Number three. You can talk to an adult right now. This adult can be a parent, relative, or another adult you choose. This means that you can talk to an adult before the police officer asks you any questions.

Number four. If you do talk to a lawyer or adult, you can decide if you want one or both of them here with you when the police officer asks you questions. This means that it is your choice to have a lawyer, adult, or both of them with you when the police officer asks you questions.

Number five. Anything that you say or do can be used as evidence against you in court. This means that what you say or do can be used later to show that you did the crime.

Please let the police officer know if you have any questions.



**Table 1**

*A Summary of Demographic Variables for Participants in Experiments 1 (Adults) and 2 (Youth)*

Demographic Variable	Percentage	
	<i>Experiment 1</i>	<i>Experiment 2</i>
	<i>Adults</i> ( <i>N</i> = 207)	<i>Youth</i> ( <i>N</i> = 193)
<b>Gender</b>		
<i>Female</i>	50.7%	42.0%
<i>Male</i>	48.8%	58.0%
<i>Other</i>	0.5%	0.0%
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
<i>Asian</i>	17.9%	14.5%
<i>Black/African</i>	2.4%	6.7%
<i>Hispanic/Latino</i>	1.0%	1.6%
<i>Indigenous/Aboriginal</i>	1.0%	0.5%
<i>Middle Eastern</i>	0.5%	2.6%
<i>Pacific Islander</i>	0.0%	0.5%
<i>White/Caucasian</i>	74.4%	69.4%
<i>Other</i>	2.9%	3.6%
<i>Not Reported</i>	0.0%	0.5%
<b>Province/Territory of Residence</b>		
<i>Alberta</i>	12.1%	15.5%
<i>British Columbia</i>	14.0%	11.4%
<i>Manitoba</i>	4.8%	4.1%
<i>New Brunswick</i>	2.4%	2.6%
<i>Newfoundland and Labrador</i>	3.4%	4.7%
<i>Nova Scotia</i>	5.3%	10.9%
<i>Northwest Territories</i>	0.0%	0.0%



<i>Nunavut</i>	0.0%	0.0%
<i>Ontario</i>	45.4%	39.9%
<i>Prince Edward Island</i>	0.5%	0.0%
<i>Quebec</i>	2.4%	5.7%
<i>Saskatchewan</i>	3.9%	3.6%
<i>Yukon</i>	0.5%	0.5%
<i>Does not currently reside in Canada</i>	5.3%	1.0%

#### Highest Level of Education

<i>Grade 4</i>	-	0.5%
<i>Grade 5</i>	-	1.6%
<i>Grade 6</i>	-	7.3%
<i>Grade 7</i>	-	9.3%
<i>Grade 8</i>	-	16.1%
<i>Grade 9</i>	-	15.0%
<i>Grade 10</i>	-	20.7%
<i>Grade 11</i>	-	20.2%
<i>Grade 12</i>	-	7.3%
<i>First-year University/College</i>	-	1.6%
<i>No High School</i>	0.5%	-
<i>Some High School</i>	1.0%	-
<i>High School Graduate</i>	12.6%	-
<i>Diploma/Certificate</i>	13.0%	-
<i>Some University</i>	15.5%	-
<i>Bachelor's Degree (e.g., BA, BSc)</i>	40.6%	-
<i>Graduate Degree (e.g., MSc)</i>	13.0%	-
<i>Doctoral Degree (e.g., PhD)</i>	1.9%	-
<i>Other</i>	1.4%	-
<i>Not Reported</i>	0.5%	0.5%

*Note.* For the section pertaining to Highest Level of Education, a dash (-) indicates that the demographic variable option was not presented to participants (e.g., adults in Experiment 1 did not have 'Grade 4' as a response option to this question; likewise, youth participants in Experiment 2 did not have 'Doctoral Degree' as a response option to this question).