

Police Interviewing and Interrogation of Juvenile Suspects: A Descriptive Examination of Actual Cases

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Although empirical attention to police interrogation has gained traction in recent years, comparatively few studies have examined interrogation of juvenile suspects, and virtually none have examined actual interrogations. Despite a growing literature on youths' interrogation-related capacities, we still know very little about what actually transpires when police question youth. The present study examines electronically recorded police interviews with juveniles to describe the characteristics, processes, and outcomes that occur in actual juvenile interrogations, including interview duration, individuals present, and confessions. Fifty-seven electronic recordings from 17 police departments were analyzed using observational research software. The median juvenile interrogation lasted 46 min, though the range was extensive (6 min to nearly 5 hr). Youth frequently submitted to questioning without a parent or advocate present, and disruptions to the interview process were common. Interrogation outcomes varied and included full confessions, partially incriminating admissions, and denials of guilt. Results from this study provide context for interrogation research using other methods and suggest that youth may frequently consent to interrogation in the absence of important legal protections.

Keywords: police interrogation, juveniles, confession, observational methods

Police interrogation has captured the attention of the public, the media, and the legal and research communities alike. Recent interrogation research has focused on key elements of the interrogation process, including the capacities and behaviors of adult suspects, confessions and false confessions, and capacities and behaviors of the officers themselves. Research has examined, for example, the role of various interrogation techniques (Leo, 1996), camera angles (Lassiter, 2010), and deception in police interrogation (Mann & Vrij, 2006; Vrij, 2008). Perhaps the largest body of work on police interrogations pertains to confession evidence, including its causes and correlates (see Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004), courtroom impact (Kassin & Neumann, 1997; Lassiter, 2002), and factors related to false confessions (Leo & Drizin, 2004; Kassin et al., 2010).

Comparatively few interrogation studies focus specifically on juvenile suspects. Most existing work on juvenile interrogations

has examined youths' interrogation-related psychosocial capacities, such as compliance with authority figures, comprehension of *Miranda* rights, and hypothetical interrogation decision making. For example, Grisso and colleagues (2003) presented a vignette scenario to over 1,300 youth and young adults in which the vignette character was interrogated by police. Participants were asked their opinions about the "best choice" for the vignette character (among confessing to the offense, denying the offense, and refusing to speak); approximately half of the 11–13 year olds chose confession as the best choice, and the proportion of respondents choosing confession decreased significantly with age (Grisso et al., 2003). The study also reported that youth under 15 exhibited greater propensity to comply with requests from legal authority figures in general (i.e., police, defense attorneys, prosecutors). This large-scale study suggests that juvenile confession rates may be quite high in actual interrogations; however, virtually no studies have investigated the outcomes of actual interrogations to examine whether similar decision-making patterns hold true in real police contexts (see Viljoen, Klaver, & Roesch, 2005 for an exception that used youths' self-report). The notion that significant age-based differences were found in a presumably nonthreatening vignette situation raises questions about how such developmentally driven decision making may manifest in a real interrogation setting, which "carries its own badge of intimidation" (*Miranda v. Arizona*, 1966, p. 457).

Existing work has utilized archival, interview, and experimental methods to explore youths' interrogation-related capacities and behavior. Grisso and Pomicter (1977) examined 707 felony referrals to the juvenile court in St. Louis County, Missouri and discovered that according to police records, approximately 90% of youth consented to questioning, including almost every youth under age 15 in the sample. Other studies interviewed youth directly about hypothetical interrogation decision making or as-

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sessed interrogation-related capacities in person, often in a secure detention facility. For example, at least four studies have examined youths' comprehension of *Miranda* rights by administering clinical instruments to youth (Goldstein, Condie, Kalbeitzer, Osman, & Geier, 2003; Grisso, 1981; Viljoen et al., 2005; Woolard, Cleary, Harvell, & Chen, 2008); results generally suggested that younger youth demonstrate more impairment than older youth and/or adults. The large-scale study described above (Grisso et al., 2003) included interviews with both youth in detention and youth in the community, and reported that the percentage of youth choosing *confession* as the "best choice" for the vignette character decreased with age, whereas the percentage choosing *remain silent* increased with age. Woolard and colleagues (2008) assessed family knowledge of interrogation procedures by conducting semistructured interviews with youth and their parents and reported that parents may not themselves have requisite knowledge and abilities to compensate for youths' impairments. Finally, in an experimental study of juvenile false confessions, Redlich and Goodman (2003) employed the "alt-key" paradigm (Kassin & Kiechel, 1996), a laboratory-based experimental model in which participants are falsely accused of causing a computer crash, to explore youths' propensity for false confessions. They reported that younger youth were more likely to falsely confess to an act than older youth, and that 15–16 year olds were significantly more likely to sign a confession statement when presented with false evidence of their guilt (Redlich & Goodman, 2003). Taken together, these studies demonstrate the value in triangulation of methods for understanding the social, developmental, and procedural complexities of police encounters with youth.

The strengths of experimental and self-report methods are well known and have contributed greatly to our understanding of juvenile interrogations. Research using these methods has revealed a great deal about the developmentally based vulnerabilities that juveniles may bring into the interrogation room. However, much more research is needed that examines the actual interrogation context itself. Laboratory-based and interview methods simply cannot approximate the true interrogation experience, with its attendant pressures and potentially wide range of emotions, such as anxiety, fear, confusion, or fatigue. Police interrogation is a unique social and legal context, particularly for youthful suspects, in which the role of *suspect* subjugated to the police officer's role of *interrogator* is conflated with the developmental role of *youth* subjugated to the officer's role of *adult*. Moreover, it has been suggested that youths' decision making, particularly decisions involving risk, is highly context-specific (Steinberg, 2004). While adolescents are equally capable as adults of making rational choices about risk under highly controlled laboratory conditions (Steinberg, 2004), in real-world scenarios, "much depends on the particular situation in which a decision is made . . . on the spur of the moment, in unfamiliar situations, when trading off risks and benefits favors bad long-term outcomes, and when behavioral inhibition is required for good outcomes, adolescents are likely to reason more poorly than adults do" (Reyna & Farley, 2006, p. 1). These situational circumstances are precisely the sort that juvenile suspects may face during interrogation, and it is essential that researchers explore the people, processes, and outcomes that characterize *actual* interrogations in an effort to understand the "particular situation" juvenile suspects may face in the interrogation room.

Learning more about the circumstances surrounding juvenile interrogations is also important because such research could have significant real-world impact. The opinions in several recent Supreme Court cases involving youth, including *Roper v. Simmons* (2005), *Graham v. Florida* (2010), and *J. D. B. v. North Carolina* (2011), relied on developmental research to support their arguments that youth are fundamentally different from adults and should therefore be treated differently by the justice system. In *Roper*, for example, the Court discussed research demonstrating youths' developmental immaturity, susceptibility to peer influence, and unformed character as evidence that the death penalty constitutes cruel and unusual punishment for juvenile offenders. In *J. D. B.*, the Court ruled that a suspect's age should be considered an "objective circumstance" when determining whether the suspect is in police custody for the purposes of *Miranda* warnings. In noting the importance of objective circumstances for defining the parameters of appropriate interrogations, Justice Sotomayor stated, "Just as police officers are competent to account for other objective circumstances that are a matter of degree such as the length of questioning or the number of officers present, so too are they competent to evaluate the effect of relative age" (*J. D. B. v. North Carolina*, 2011, p. 16). The present study documents objective interrogation circumstances such as age, length of questioning, and number of officers present that the Court has deemed relevant to custody determinations.

Despite the proliferation of interrogation research in recent years and the significant legal and policy impact such research may have, we still know remarkably little about what actually occurs in real police interrogations. Addressing this question requires observational methods, which are notoriously difficult to execute due to the "innate secrecy of such proceedings," particularly with respect to interrogation (*Miranda v. Arizona*, 1966, p. 532). Though challenging, observational studies can reveal much that laboratory and self-report methods cannot. Leo's (1996) study of adult interrogation in California and Feld's (2006a, 2006b, 2013) studies of juvenile interrogations in Minnesota are the most well-known observational studies of actual police interrogations that have been conducted in the United States. Observational studies are more common in other countries, particularly in the United Kingdom, likely because recording requirements are more common. For example, in 1984, England and Wales enacted the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, which required all police interviews to be recorded. U.K. studies are not discussed here, however, due to presumably substantial differences in interviewing strategies (see Leo, 2008).

Leo's (1996) study of live and video-recorded interrogations of adult suspects in California was among the first to document characteristics of actual interrogations. This seminal study documented important characteristics of the interrogation process and context as well as officer and suspect characteristics. Approximately 71% of these interrogations concluded in under 1 hr and resulted in an array of outcomes, including full confessions (24%), partial admissions (18%), incriminating statements (23%), and no incriminating statements (36%; Leo, 1996). Despite its remarkable contribution to the interrogation literature, a live observation approach carries several disadvantages, including limitations associated with extemporaneous judgments of highly complex social interactions. Nonetheless, though now more than 15 years old, the study's observational approach remains distinct among the inter-

rogation literature, which is populated largely by experimental and self-report studies.

Feld's (2006a, 2006b) study of 66 juvenile interrogation videos and transcripts from one Minnesota district represents the first modern observational study of juvenile interrogations. The author obtained materials from all felony cases involving 16–17-year-old suspects in Ramsey County that included interrogation videos or transcripts. A second study (Feld, 2013) employed a much larger sample of 307 cases from four Minnesota counties. In addition to numerous variables that Leo (1996) examined, these studies also coded interrogators' strategies to predispose youth to waive *Miranda*, as well as youths' positive or negative responses to such interrogations (Feld, 2006a, 2006b, 2013). These works have made an extraordinary contribution to the juvenile interrogation literature, including new information about individuals present, questioning strategies used, and interview location and duration. At the same time, their single-state samples raise concerns about generalizability to other jurisdictions that may differ along numerous dimensions; much more research is needed to examine whether their conclusions hold true in other jurisdictions that may have different state laws or local agency regulations governing interrogation practices.

Though we have learned a great deal about the capacities and goals that both youth and police *bring into* the interrogation room, social science lacks even basic descriptive data about the context itself. It is imperative that we first answer some of the fundamental questions about what transpires when police question youth. For example, how long does the typical juvenile interrogation last? Data on interrogation duration could greatly inform the debate about the extent to which prolonged questioning periods may increase the likelihood of false confessions, as some have suggested (Leo & Drizin, 2004; Feld, 2006b; Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004). Second, who is present during the typical juvenile interrogation? Multiple interrogators questioning a single youth may raise concerns about coercion, given youths' developmentally based proclivity to comply with authority figures, whereas the presence of defense counsel and/or youth advocates may quell such concerns. In addition, Najdowski (2011) argued that stereotype threat may play a central role in criminal interrogations, suggesting suspect race and same-race versus different-race interrogator–suspect pairs may be important to document. Third, how frequently do juvenile suspects confess to crimes of which they are accused during interrogation? Very few studies have been able to document actual (as opposed to laboratory- or vignette-based) confession rates among juveniles (see Feld, 2013; Ruback & Vardaman, 1997 for exceptions), yet this information is critical to addressing juvenile due process concerns, particularly if research indicates that confessions commonly occur outside the presence or advice of legal counsel.

Observational data on juvenile interrogations can also address questions about characteristics of the interrogation environment and the nuanced interactions between officers and suspects. For example, Lassiter and colleagues (e.g., Lassiter, Ware, Ratcliff, & Irvin, 2009; Snyder, Lassiter, Lindberg, & Pinegar, 2009) have established the importance of camera angles in jurors' perceptions of suspect guilt, yet the actual camera angles used by real police stations in practice remains unknown. Because actual interrogation recordings are what jurors see and evaluate, such information has important real-world relevance. Similarly, it is also important to

assess the extent to which strategies advocated by popular police-training manuals are actually implemented. For example, the widely known Reid technique of interviewing and interrogation instructs interrogators to begin by seating himself approximately 4–5 feet from the suspect and, if the suspect “psychologically withdraws” from the conversation, then gradually move closer into the suspect's physical space. Observing real interrogations enables researchers to examine whether the often-maligned practices in such training programs are actually used by detectives in their investigations.

The present study aimed to document actual behavior, decision making, and context characteristics in police interrogations of youth suspects. Access to juvenile records is an enormous barrier to this type of research, and Feld's (2006a, 2006b, 2013) reports are the only existing observational study of this kind. The present study replicates key elements of those works using electronically recorded interrogations of juvenile suspects. It also expands upon the number and type of variables measured, including a characterization of the flow of individuals in and out of the interrogation room, context characteristics such as suspect position and proximity of interrogator, and several variables pertaining to parent behavior. It is also the first observational study of juvenile interrogation to employ a diverse multijurisdictional sample of electronic recordings. Such diversity is important because jurisdictions likely differ substantially in key interrogation-related domains, both measured and unmeasured, including police-officer characteristics (e.g., background, training), crime trends (e.g., prevalence of various offense types; urban vs. suburban locality), and law-enforcement agency characteristics (e.g., policies regarding *Mirandizing* juvenile suspects; notifying parents when questioning minors).

Method

Participants

The author partnered with researchers at the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Behavioral Science Unit to conduct this study. The first step involved identifying states, jurisdictions, and local departments that presumably record juvenile interviews as required by state law or voluntary department policy. At the time of data collection, seven states (Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, and the District of Columbia) had enacted legislation requiring police departments to record custodial interrogations, and another six states (Alaska, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and New Jersey) received recording mandates from state supreme court decisions (NACDL, 2009). Additionally, Sullivan (Sullivan, 2004) identified 238 individual law-enforcement agencies in 38 states that record interrogations, most of which do so voluntarily. A total of 3,230 police departments were identified for potential participation.

The first phase of recruitment consisted of letters via postal mail informing the agencies ($n = 3,230$) of the study and requesting voluntary participation. The letter informed agencies that any materials submitted would become and remain property of the FBI. The Phase-I response rate was extremely low (less than 1%), so Phase II was implemented to increase participation. Phase II consisted of follow-up phone calls to approximately 22% of randomly selected agencies that received the initial letter ($n = 714$).

Nineteen police agencies and one county prosecutors' office contributed a total of 85 electronically recorded interrogations to the project. Data came from agencies in all four U.S. Census Bureau geographic regions: Northeast (two agencies), South (twelve), Midwest (one), and West (five; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Table 1 shows the range of city populations served by participating police agencies for both the original sample and the final sample (after data exclusions). More than half of participating agencies came from small communities with fewer than 50,000 residents. Two interrogations were excluded because the disks contained only audio files, 16 due to technological difficulties, and 10 because the interviewee was presumed or confirmed to be 18 years or older, yielding a final $N = 57$ interviews. Two juveniles were interviewed simultaneously during one interrogation, so demographic data are reported for 58 juvenile interviewees.

Materials and Procedure

The eligibility criteria for submitted recordings were as follows: (a) adjudication of the case was closed and no appeals were pending regarding the charge discussed on the recording, (b) the recording was relative to a felony or other serious charge, (c) the recording involved questioning of a suspect or person of interest (i.e., not a victim or witness), and (d) the person questioned was a juvenile (defined as under age 18). Agencies were invited to submit as many recordings as they wished that met eligibility criteria, and no additional restrictions were imposed. Recordings were submitted to the project in VHS, DVD, and digital formats. All recordings were converted to digital format for use with Noldus Observer (2009), a software program designed for coding and analyzing observational data. Once digitized, the faces of all individuals on the recording were pixelated to prevent visual identification.

Coding Scheme

Individual characteristics. This section of the coding scheme captured important descriptive information about individuals present during each interrogation. Select demographic variables included race and gender for all persons present and the suspect's age. Race/ethnicity was coded only when race was stated explicitly

(e.g., during routine booking questions) or could reasonably be deduced by observation. I acknowledge the challenges of determining race/ethnicity based on visual observation and the biases inherent within such judgments. Although skin color is not necessarily an indicator of racial identity, this proxy was used in cases in which self-report data were not available. In an effort to be as conservative as possible, I defaulted to the "cannot be determined" code whenever race/ethnicity (as operationalized by skin color) was even remotely unclear. Also coded were the suspect's custody status at the time of the interrogation (i.e., whether she or he had just been arrested or was not under arrest at the time of questioning) and the alleged offense for which he or she was being questioned. Because case records were not available, these and all variables were coded based on conversations captured on video (e.g., officer tells youth he is not under arrest; officer reviews paperwork with youth that includes official charge). This section also captured not only *whether* any third parties were present (e.g., parents, attorneys, codefendants), but also *for how long* they were present. Traditional coding methods typically permit a dichotomous present/not present variable to capture third party presence; Noldus Observer, by contrast, is able to record the duration of each individual's presence and layer those data to present a more complete picture of the interrogation.

Contextual factors. This section captured key elements of the interrogation process from beginning to end, including interview duration, interview location, and the camera angle from which the interrogation was filmed. It captured whether the suspect was physically restrained throughout the interview, whether there was any indication that the suspect and officer conversed before the camera was turned on, physical characteristics of the interrogation environment, parent behavior, and the eventual outcome of the interrogation (i.e., denial, partial admission of wrongdoing, full confession, or no resolution). These variables truly showcase the advantages of both observational research in general and digital video coding in particular when examining the topic of juvenile interrogations. By observing interrogations in real time instead of coding transcripts, one can characterize the global interrogation context in a way that complements traditional experimental or self-report data.

Table 1
Geographic Region and Approximate City Size of Participating Agencies

Geographic statistic	Number of agencies		Number of recordings	
	Total sample ($n = 20$)	Final sample ($n = 17$)	Total sample ($n = 85$)	Final sample ($n = 57$)
City population				
0–50,000	11	9	57	37
50–100,000	3	2	6	3
100–250,000	2	2	8	6
250–500,000	1	1	2	2
500,000–1 million	2	2	9	7
1 million +	1	1	3	2
Geographic region				
South	12	9	52	30
West	5	5	22	17
Northeast	2	2	6	5
Midwest	1	1	5	5

Training and Reliability

Two coders were trained on the coding protocol. Reliability analyses were executed by hand using a confusion matrix that compared each coder's log to the reliability code log. Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960) between each coder and the reliability codes were calculated (a) for each recording and (b) for the training recordings overall. Each coder's overall kappa value was required to meet the 0.7 level, an acceptable standard given the data's exploratory nature and Cohen's kappa's general conservativeness as a measure of intercoder reliability (Hsu & Field, 2003). Both coders achieved the required kappa value after one round of training.

To ensure continued reliability throughout data collection, every fourth interview was double coded for reliability purposes (14 interviews, or approximately 25% of the total sample). Due to the small number of behaviors assigned to each coder, behaviors were collapsed across all 14 reliability recordings, and a single overall kappa (Cohen, 1960) was calculated for each coder. Intercoder reliability ratings for Coder 1 ($\kappa = .77$) and Coder 2 ($\kappa = .87$) met the required threshold.

Results

Individual Characteristics

Results show a pattern of individual characteristics consistent with previous reports of justice-involved youth (Feld, 2006a; Viljoen, et al., 2005; see Table 2). Of the 58 juvenile interviewees, 52 (90%) were male. The average age was about 15 and a half years old ($M = 15.44$, $SD = 1.14$) for the 41 juvenile interviewees for

which age could be determined. The youngest interviewees were 13 (two youth) and the oldest were 17 (eight youth). Nine of the 57 recordings came from states whose upper jurisdictional age is 16 instead of 17. Although the precise chronological age was not available for every youth, other cues in the electronic recording indicated that all 57 youth were legal minors in their jurisdiction. For example, the officer might state "you have to sign this special form because you're a juvenile" or "the court may cut you a break because you're not 18 yet." If these kinds of age cues were not present in the video, the video was excluded from analysis. Of the 58 juvenile interviewees, 41.4% were White, 41.4% were Black, and 5.2% were Latino/a. Race could not be definitively determined for seven interviewees (12.1%). The majority of youth were questioned in connection with crimes against persons (e.g., murder, sexual assault; see Table 2). Only one interviewee was not fluent in English; for this interview, a secondary interrogator bilingual in English and Spanish translated for the primary interrogator. Because very few codes were dependent on juvenile suspects' vocalizations, it is presumed that this youth's lack of English fluency did not affect coding. The majority of the codes involved observing situational characteristics and interrogators' vocalizations.

Youths' custody status at the time of the interview was coded when possible. Of the 35 (60%) interrogations for which custody status could be determined, 16 juveniles had just been arrested, 18 were not under arrest, and one was brought to the interrogation room from detention. Most (93%) of the interrogations involved serious and/or violent offenses; 41 juveniles were interrogated in regard to person crimes and 12 in regard to property crimes.

Law-enforcement officials' involvement in interrogations occurs in several forms. All interrogations must involve at minimum one primary interrogator (PI; $n = 57$). Most of the primary interrogators were White males (84%). The remaining interrogation recordings contained a Black male primary interrogator (one recording), White female primary interrogator (four recordings), and four PIs whose race could not be determined (one woman, three men). Secondary interrogators (SIs), according to the coding criteria, are police officers who participate in an interrogation by asking questions but are involved to a lesser degree than PIs. Secondary interrogators were present in 21 interrogations (36.8%). As with PIs, the majority (71.4%) of SIs were White males. Three SIs were White females and two were males of an undetermined race. Finally, noninterviewing officers (NIOs) are police officers who are present for some or all of an interrogation but do not participate in questioning. For example, they may enter the room to handcuff/uncuff the juvenile suspect, deliver paperwork to the PI, or supervise the juvenile suspect when the PI leaves the room. NIOs were present in five of the 57 interrogations (8.8%). Four NIOs were White males and one was a White female.

Participation in juvenile interrogations is not limited to adolescent suspects and police. Third parties may be present and active in the interrogation process, either voluntarily or because state law or department policy requires a parent or interested adult to be present. The most common third party present in this sample was a parent (12 interrogations, or 21.1%). Eight of these were mothers and four were fathers. A second parent (the father, in all cases) was present in three interrogations (5.3%). Three recordings, all from the same police department, contained an interested adult—a White female who worked for social services. Finally, one recording contained an adult relative and another two contained repre-

Table 2
Characteristics of Juvenile Suspects

Demographic	<i>N</i>	Percent
Sex		
Male	52	89.7
Female	6	10.3
Age ($M = 15.44$, $SD = 1.14$)		
13	2	3.4
14	7	12.1
15	11	19.0
16	13	22.4
17	8	13.8
Unknown	17	29.3
Race		
White	24	41.4
Black	24	41.4
Latino/a	3	5.2
Unknown	7	12.1
Charge category		
Person	42	72.4
Property	12	20.7
Status	1	1.7
Public order/public safety	3	5.2
Custody status		
Brought from secure custody	1	1.7
Just arrested	16	27.6
Not under arrest	18	31.0
Unknown	23	39.7

sentatives from the district attorney's office. An attorney was not present on behalf of the juvenile in any of the 57 interrogations.

Contextual Factors

These variables were intended to describe characteristics of the juvenile interrogation process and environment. The primary goal was to characterize observable characteristics of the interrogation context that might have influenced youths' subjective experiences of the process as well as their interrogation decision-making and judgments.

The electronic recordings in the sample with known interrogation dates occurred between 1995 and 2008, though date was determined for less than half of the sample ($n = 25$). Over half the sample of 57 interrogations (36 cases, or 63.2%) occurred at the police station. Location could not be determined for 20 cases, and the remaining one interrogation occurred in the office of the school resource officer at the juvenile's school. Fifty-one of the 57 interrogations (89%) were filmed from a suspect-focus camera angle. Five interrogations used an equal-focus perspective and one used a combination of camera angles within the same interrogation recording. Time of day could be determined in only about 30% of cases, so those data have not been included here.

Also coded were several contextual variables intended to capture the physical environment of the interrogation room. The interrogation room door was closed in 100% of cases for which door position could be coded (54 of 57 cases). In precisely one third (19 of 57) of cases, a table was situated between the interrogator and suspect, in another third of cases a table sat beside the interrogator and suspect, and no table was present in the remaining third of cases. In the majority (59.6%) of cases, the suspect was seated in the corner of the (usually very small) room (see Table 3). Also in most cases, the interrogating officer was situated physically between the juvenile suspect and the door (59.6%) or equidistant with the suspect to the door (33.3%).

Because some research has suggested that physical appearance may trigger authority cues and even influence children's decision making (e.g., Lowenstein, Blank, & Sauer, 2010), the interrogator's dress and weaponry were also coded. "Full uniform" was defined as an official department-issue police uniform, usually black in color and including various patches and/or insignia, and was worn by officers in nearly one fifth of cases (see Table 3). "Partial uniform" was defined as some form of shirt that designated law enforcement status (e.g., a department-issue polo shirt with the department name and logo or a SWAT-style t-shirt with "POLICE" in large letters). Interrogators were partially uniformed in approximately one fifth of cases. The remainder of interrogators wore dress plain clothes (e.g., slacks and tie) or, somewhat more commonly, casual plain clothes (e.g., khaki pants or shorts, plain polo shirt or t-shirt). The interrogating officer was armed with a visible weapon in just over half (54.4%) of the cases.

In this sample, less than one fifth of the interrogators (17.5%) positioned themselves in the suspect's immediate physical space, defined as within arm's reach, or close enough to touch the suspect with an extended arm. One-third of the interrogators seated themselves just outside of physical touching range. Another approximately 18% began at this distance but moved into the suspect's immediate physical space at some point during the interview. The remaining one third of interrogators seated themselves and re-

Table 3
Characteristics of Interrogation Environment and Participants

Interrogation context characteristic	N	Percent
Suspect position		
In a corner	34	59.6
Against a wall (not in corner)	8	14.0
Middle of the room	11	19.3
On a couch	4	7.0
Interrogator position		
Between suspect and door	34	59.6
Equidistant with suspect to door	19	33.3
Further from door than suspect	2	3.5
Unable to discern	2	3.5
Table		
Table between suspect and interrogator	19	33.3
Table to the side of suspect and interrogator	19	33.3
No table in room	19	33.3
Interrogator proximity		
Arm's length	10	17.5
Just outside arm's length	19	33.3
Body length's distance or more	18	31.6
Began just outside arm's length; moved closer	10	17.5
Interrogator armed		
Armed	31	54.4
Not armed	12	21.1
Unable to discern	14	24.6
Interrogator dress		
Full uniform	11	19.3
Partial uniform	12	21.1
Plain clothes—dress	10	17.5
Plain clothes—casual	17	29.8
One partial, one plainclothes	2	3.5
One dress, one casual	3	5.3
Unable to discern	2	3.5

Note. Interrogator position and interrogator dress could not be discerned in a few cases due to poor video quality. Whether the interrogator was armed could not be discerned in more cases because the officer's hip holster was obscured by a jacket or not visible from the given camera angle.

maintained at a "comfortable" distance from the suspect, defined as body length's distance or further.

Additional contextual variables included interrogation duration and whether the juvenile suspect was physically restrained during this time. Interrogation duration was recorded as the moment when questioning began until the moment when conversation concluded and/or the individuals left the room or the video recording was turned off. The median interrogation lasted 46 min ($M = 65.6$ min, $SD = 59.0$ min), though the range of interrogation lengths was quite extensive. The shortest interrogation lasted only 6 min and the longest was 4 hr and 48 min. Overall, 68% percent of interrogations concluded in less than 1 hr and 84% in less than 2 hr. Nine juvenile suspects (15.5%) were physically restrained in handcuffs or leg shackles during the interrogation.

Results indicate that interrogation outcomes varied. In this sample of 58 juvenile suspects, 21 youth (36.2%) fully confessed to the offenses in question. Eighteen of them (31.0%) made incriminating admissions (i.e., they admitted only partial involvement in the offense or admitted to some charges but not others). Another 15 juvenile suspects (25.8%) denied culpability completely. Finally, four youths' interrogations (6.9%) were not resolved, either because the suspect invoked his *Miranda* rights or because the recording ended before the interview concluded.

Cross-tabular analyses comparing interrogation duration (split at the median duration of 46 min) with interrogation outcome indicated no apparent overall relationship between these variables. Juvenile suspects who fully confessed to their interrogators were distributed approximately equally among shorter and longer interrogations (10 confessors from interrogations shorter than 46 min; 11 confessors from interrogations longer than 46 min). Juvenile suspects who denied the allegations were approximately equally distributed (6 from shorter interrogations; 8 from longer interrogations). However, twice as many (12) juvenile suspects made incriminating admissions in shorter interrogations than youth in longer interrogations (6). Chi-square analyses were not conducted due to the small number of youth in the *no resolution* cell of interrogation outcome.

Cross-tabular analyses comparing combinations of PI and suspect race with interrogation outcome show few differences, though few comparisons were possible due to the large proportion of White interrogators. Same-race PI–suspect pairs were compared with different-race PI–suspect pairs, excluding individuals whose race was not determined, for the four different interrogation-outcome categories (see Table 4). The outcomes *full confession* and *partial admission of guilt* were collapsed into a single *incrimination* category. Incriminations occurred in 76.0% of different-race pairs, compared with 58.3% of same-race pairs. All of the PIs and juvenile suspects in the same-race pairs were White. For all of the different-race pairs except one, the PI was White and the juvenile suspect was non-White.

Finally, a substantial portion of the contextual analyses examined the movement or “flow” of people in and out of the room during interrogations. Given that little is known about the tempo of routine police interrogations, the frequency and duration of entrances and exits for interrogating officers and any third parties present were examined. The goal was to characterize the interrogation process as youth experience it and report any objective process characteristics (e.g., disruptions, time spent alone) that may impact youths’ subjective experiences.

Forty-four percent of interrogations involved a single PI and juvenile suspect, and another 30% involved both a PI and an SI questioning the juvenile suspect. The remainder of interrogations displayed various combinations of parents, relatives, interested adults, and/or prosecutors (see Table 5). The number of individuals present during an interrogation ranged from two (PI and juvenile suspect only; 29 cases) to six (PI, SI, parent, relative, NIO, and juvenile suspect; one case). Note that these figures indicate whether an officer or third party was *ever* present during the interrogation; continuous presence is not implied.

In fact, results indicate that juvenile interrogations infrequently occur in a single continuous sitting; interrogators and third parties commonly come and go while an interrogation is underway. In only one fourth (26.3%) of cases did all individuals present at the start of the interrogation remain present throughout the entire event. Examining primary interrogators first, PIs ($n = 57$) entered and then exited (or exited then entered) the room on average 2.7 times ($SD = 2.9$) during an ongoing interrogation. One PI came and went as many as 19 times during the interrogation. When all individuals present in any given interrogation were included, participants (not including the juvenile suspect) came and went on average 3.7 times ($SD = 3.8$) with the number of disruptions ranging from zero to 24. This is a conservative estimate of disruptions because disruptions were only counted when an individual came *and* went during an ongoing interrogation. In other words, if a parent entered halfway through the interrogation and remained until its conclusion, the parent’s “disruption” score for that observation was coded zero.

Analyses indicate that when parents are present during their children’s interrogations, they are not necessarily present for the entire session. A parent was present for the entire duration in half of the 12 interrogations involving parents. For the remaining six interrogations, a parent was present in the room for approximately 41% of the questioning period, on average. Inconsistent parental presence typically resulted from a juvenile’s or interrogator’s request. For example, one PI asked a juvenile whether he would

Table 4
Primary Interrogator and Juvenile Suspect Race by Interrogation Outcome

Race	Interrogation Outcome				Total
	Full confession ($n = 21$)	Incriminating admission ($n = 18$)	Denial ($n = 15$)	No resolution ($n = 4$)	
PI race					
White	19	16	14	3	52
Black	1	0	0	0	1
Not determined	1	2	0	1	4
Suspect race					
White	9	5	8	2	24
Black	6	13	4	1	24
Latino/a	2	0	1	0	3
Not determined	4	0	2	1	7
PI and suspect pairs					
Same race	9	5	8	2	24
Different race	8	11	5	1	25
Not determined	4	2	2	1	9

Note. PI race totals ($n = 57$) and suspect race totals ($n = 58$) are different because one recording contained two suspects interviewed together. For all same-race PI–suspect pairs, the PI and juvenile suspects were White. For all PI–suspect pairs of different races except one pair, the juvenile suspect was non-White and the PI was White.

Table 5
Combinations of Persons Present in Juvenile Interrogations

Persons present	<i>N</i>	Percent
PI only	25	43.9
PI and SI	17	29.8
PI and Parent 1	6	10.5
PI, SI, Parent 1, and Parent 2	2	3.5
PI and IA	2	3.5
PI and DA	2	3.5
PI, SI, and IA	1	1.8
PI, Parent 1, Parent 2	1	1.8
PI, SI, Parent 1, Relative	1	1.8

Note. Presence was defined as visible inside the interrogation room for at least 60 s. All interrogations included a single juvenile suspect except one interrogation, which included two juvenile suspects questioned simultaneously. PI = primary interrogator; SI = secondary interrogator; Parent 1 = juvenile suspect's parent; if two parents were present, the parent most involved in the interrogations was designated as Parent 1 and the other as Parent 2. IA = interested adult; DA = representative from district attorney's office; noninterviewing officers' presence was not included due to their noninvolvement, by our definition, in interrogations.

like his father to stay with him during questioning, and another interrogator asked one mother's permission to speak with the juvenile alone for a while. The cases involving parents did not differ from cases not involving parents; parental presence was distributed among youth of various ages, races, custody statuses, and offense types.

When parents were present, their location and behavior varied so substantially that a single picture of parental involvement did not emerge. In five of the 12 cases involving parents, the parent was seated next to the juvenile suspect (e.g., at a table). In two cases, the parent was equidistant to the interrogator and suspect (e.g., in a triangle formation), in four cases, the parent was further away from the youth than the interrogator, and in the remaining case, the parent was not present during any actual questioning, only during a break.

Parents in eight of the 12 cases were considered compliant with interrogators' requests; examples ranged from quietly answering questions and signing paperwork to actively participating in questioning. However, only three parents were active or vocal participants, one in defense of her child and two in disparagement of their children. Instead, parents were typically silent for most or all of the interview. Parents in four cases asked procedural questions of the investigators (e.g., "What happens next?" or "Will this go on his record?"). Five parents spoke up on at least one occasion each to clarify the youths' answers to the interrogators' questions, providing additional details for the officer.

Sometimes parents would "take sides" with their children. In five cases, parents asserted their children's limited or noninvolvement or provided exculpatory explanations (e.g., "He was with me the whole time"). Three parents made excuses for their children, such as telling the investigator that their children took antidepressants or claiming that the youths' behavior resulted from prior negative experiences with law enforcement. In two cases, parents made excuses for themselves (e.g., "I work a lot" or "I've been in the hospital recently"). Parents would occasionally become defensive of their parenting skills or choices with assertions that they keep up with their children's friends and whereabouts (two cases).

Three parents attempted to reassure or comfort their children during the interrogation.

In other instances parents would seemingly side with the interrogator. Two parents implicated their own children in the alleged crimes, or even confessed on behalf of the youth (e.g., "He told me the whole story"). Five parents even assumed the role of interrogator, asking questions and demanding answers of their children. Five parents chastised or lectured their children at least once during the interview. Two parents used the interrogation as "teachable moments," talking with or at their children about the broader implications of his or her behavior or offering practical or moral advice for future behavior. It is important to note that parent behavior was not always consistent throughout a single interview. For example, one mother actively defended her son from robbery accusations until the interrogator disclosed that a gun was involved, at which point she began berating the youth.

One result of frequent disruptions and inconsistent parental presence was that juvenile suspects were often alone in the interrogation room, sometimes for extended periods of time. Youth in the present sample spent on average just over 13 min alone in the interrogation room in total ($M = 13.2$, $SD = 27.2$), or 15.2% of the total interrogation duration on average, though again the range was quite extensive (0 to 131 min). When the one fourth of uninterrupted interrogations were excluded such that analyses examined only those youth who were left unaccompanied at least once ($n = 34$), these youth spent just over 22 min alone ($M = 22.1$, $SD = 32.4$), or 25.5% of the total interrogation duration on average. Whereas a few youth paced the room or peered out of the holding room window, most youth simply sat in their chairs, rested their heads on the table, or slept when left alone. Two youth wept quietly and another exhibited extreme distress, sobbing loudly, striking his head against a wall and audibly chastising himself. Finally, officers in the interrogation that involved two juvenile suspects left the suspects alone for a while, during which time the suspects discussed the incident in question and joked with one another.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to provide fundamental descriptive data about the participants and contexts of police interrogation of juvenile suspects. These data paint a portrait of White or Black middle-adolescent males accused of serious person or property crimes. These youth were typically questioned by one or two White male interrogators in a session lasting about an hr on average, though the range of interview durations could be quite extensive. Disruptions to the interrogation session were common, and interrogation outcomes varied.

Individual Characteristics

Consistent with previous reports of justice-involved youth (e.g., Grisso, 1981; Goldstein et al., 2003), the present sample was predominantly male. Given minority groups' well-known overrepresentation in all facets of the justice system (Piquero, 2008), this sample contained more White youth and fewer Latino youth than a truly representative sample may have contained. The sample contained equal numbers of White and Black youth most likely because more than half of our recordings came from small towns

and cities (under 50,000 residents) as opposed to larger urban areas. Moreover, the fact that race could not be coded for seven juvenile suspects certainly affected the sample's racial composition.

The mean age (15.4 years) and range of the juvenile suspects suggest that older youth may be more likely to find themselves in the interrogation room. Whether this is because older youth commit more serious crimes or because police interrogate older and younger youth at different rates is unknown. In 2008, the FBI's annual Uniform Crime Report attributed 11.9% of all arrests for violent crimes to 15–17 year olds compared with 4.3% of arrests for youth under 15 (FBI, 2009). Feld (2006a), whose study had access to all case records from the sample jurisdiction, noted that charges in his interrogation cases were more serious than the jurisdiction's typical juvenile felony cases. Over 90% of the sample was interrogated in connection to a person crime or serious property crime, and only nine of the 58 juvenile suspects were known to be under age 15 at the time of the interrogation. The overall sample was younger than Feld's (2006a, 2013) samples because his studies intentionally restricted cases to 16- and 17-year-old interviewees. However, it should be noted that precise chronological age was not confirmed for nearly 30% of the sample, so caution is warranted in drawing conclusions about age-based differences.

One noteworthy finding pertaining to police custody is that nearly a third of the present study's juvenile suspects were not actually under arrest at the time of questioning. This casts doubt on the notion that youth, innocent or guilty, would resist police questioning given the choice and also raises concerns that youth may misunderstand their constitutional rights to silence, counsel, and protection against self-incrimination. In this sample, 28% of the youth not under arrest fully confessed to their interrogators and another 28% made incriminating admissions; all of these youth had already waived their *Miranda* rights. When considering the reasons why youth who are not in police custody nonetheless consent to interrogation and even admit guilt, several interpretations are plausible. Perhaps these youth have no desire to conceal their criminal involvement and simply wish to tell the truth. This explanation seems quite untenable, however, since no juvenile in our sample admitted guilt immediately upon questioning; if guilty suspects readily intended to disclose their crimes then interrogation would hardly be necessary. Instead, perhaps youth either (a) do not fully understand their right to decline police questioning when not in custody, (b) do not yet possess the wherewithal, due to transient developmental features, to assert themselves when asked to consent to questioning, or (c) deliberately change their minds in favor of confession during the course of police interrogation.

As for the adults in the recordings, like two previous observational interrogation studies (Feld, 2006a; Leo, 1996), most primary and secondary interrogators were White males. These data are consistent with national data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Hickman & Reaves, 2006) reporting that approximately 88% of sworn officers are male, 76% are White and 21% are Black or Latino. More than a third of our recordings involved a secondary interrogator, either concurrently or sequentially.

This study also recorded all other individuals present and their role or relationship with the juvenile suspect. Interested adults, adult relatives, and prosecutors were less frequently present but did

occasionally appear in the recordings. Perhaps most importantly, none of the interrogations contained a defense attorney present on the juvenile suspect's behalf. Though attorney presence is not required during interrogation, this suggests the widespread occurrence that juvenile suspects are making interrogation decisions without the knowledge or advice of counsel. Although all suspects are constitutionally entitled to waive that right, the notion that juvenile suspects so frequently decline legal representation during police questioning raises concerns about their lack of understanding of the protection attorneys provide in that context.

Unlike Feld's (2006a) sample, in which a parent was present in only one of 66 interrogations, over one fifth of the present sample involved at least one parent, usually a mother. The difference is likely due to state and local policy variations requiring or permitting parental presence in minors' interrogations. This finding is a departure from previous research and suggests that parental presence may be more common than previously assumed. Addressing the question of whether parents are at least in the interrogation room is a critical first step in addressing the broader question of the extent to which parents are involved and whether their involvement serves or diserves the youth's legal best interest.

Contextual Factors

Most of the electronically recorded interrogations took place at a police station, while one occurred at the youth's school and location of the remaining was undetermined. Though it cannot necessarily be inferred that most interrogations generally occur at a police station because the proportion of interrogations conducted off-site and off-camera is unknown, these data do allow observation of the cadence of juvenile interrogations that take place in a controlled environment. The goal was to report observable process characteristics that may impact juvenile suspects' subjective experiences in this context.

This study was the first to report data on juvenile interrogation length derived from actual interrogations (see Feld, 2013 for data derived from a combination of recorded interrogations and police estimates of length). The median interrogation was 46 min and mean interrogation length was approximately 66 min. Just over two thirds concluded in less than 1 hr and 84% fewer than 2 hr. This is relatively consistent with what little previous observational research exists on interrogation lengths; Feld (2013) reported that 90% of his juvenile sample concluded in under 30 min, and the longest interview was approximately 90 min. Leo (1996) reported that 71% of his adult sample concluded in under 1 hr and 92% in under 2 hr. In addition, two studies asked police officers to estimate mean interrogation lengths. Cassell and Hayman (1996) asked investigators to estimate length for 86 specific interrogations and reported that the vast majority lasted fewer than 30 min. However, the present findings are inconsistent with their conclusion that "extended incommunicado questioning is exceedingly rare, if it exists at all" (p. 892) as nearly one fifth of the youth in this sample were interrogated for between 2 and 5 hr. Kassin and colleagues' (2007) police-generated estimates were for interrogations in general "based on their own experience" (p. 392) and not for any particular interrogation; these 601 officers estimated mean interrogation length to be 1.6 hr.

Another goal of this study was to characterize the "flow" of routine juvenile interrogations, including the types of persons

present and whether and how frequently they came and went when the interrogation was underway. Three fourths of interrogations involved only the juvenile suspect and a primary interrogator or PI/SI, and the remaining one fourth contained a combination of various parents, relatives, prosecutors, and interested adults and involved as many as six individuals at one time. This suggests that juvenile suspects are likely to be interrogated alone, particularly those youth living in police jurisdictions without parental notification or access policies. A recent statute and case-law examination has suggested that states vary widely in their parent-directed expansions of *Miranda*; Cruise, Pitchal, and Weiss (2008) reported that 10 states afford parents some rights to interrogation access and 12 actually require parental presence (five states for all youth, seven for youth of certain ages). Overall, states are trending toward recognizing youths' vulnerabilities in the interrogation context by attempting to involve parents or interested adults, though implementation may lag behind policy decisions.

The majority of juvenile interrogations did not occur in a single continuous sitting; disruptions by both interrogators and third parties were frequent. Interrogators exited and reentered (or entered then exited) the room 2.68 times per interrogation on average, and total disruptions (including all persons present) occurred 3.74 times per interrogation on average. Whether and how these disruptions impact juvenile suspects is unknown. Perhaps frequent disruptions heighten youths' fear and anxiety, interfere with their cognitive ability to process legal information, and/or influence their perceptions of situational control. Disruptions may also pose benefits to youthful suspects, such as alleviating perceived pressure or providing a break from the cognitive or social demands of the situation. To my knowledge, these possibilities have never been directly examined in the interrogation context. Scherr and Madon (2012) reported that stress interfered with participants' ability to comprehend *Miranda* rights, but the study examined college students, not youth. Owen-Kostelnik, Reppucci, and Meyer (2006) argued that stress can disproportionately disadvantage youthful suspects by interfering with their already-compromised judgment capacities. While it remains unclear what role stress plays in interrogation decision making, the present study describes objective characteristics that occur in actual interrogation settings; future studies could manipulate these characteristics using experimental methods to further examine the role of stress in interrogation decision making. Interaction effects by third party role may also be possible; for example, a parent entering or leaving may have differential effects on youth versus an interrogator.

This study's results suggest that parental presence, though more prevalent than expected, was not consistent. From a practical standpoint, when a parent is present for only 41% of the interrogation period (as was the case in 50% of our interrogations involving parents), he or she by definition misses out on a portion of the conversation between child and officer. Any conversations, negotiations, or decisions between parent and child may be impacted by the information available to each individual. Moreover, the small number of parents present in the current sample nonetheless displayed a wide variety of behaviors, from defending and attempting to exculpate their child to lecturing and interrogating the child themselves. Woolard and colleagues (2008) and Farber (2004) have discussed the multiple, often conflicting roles that parents may feel compelled to assume when their child is being accused of a crime; though preliminary, the data on parent behav-

ior in the present study suggests that these multiple roles may in fact play out in the interrogation room.

Finally, perhaps this study's most important descriptive research question about juvenile interrogations involved the distribution of various interrogation outcomes. This study grouped interrogation outcomes into four categories, based primarily on existing literature: full confession, incriminating admission, denial, and no resolution. In this sample of 58 youth, 37% of them fully confessed to the allegations, 31% made incriminating admissions, 24% denied the charges, and 7% were not resolved. It is difficult to compare confession rates across studies because of the sample size and methodological limitations associated with actual confessions research. Feld (2006b) reported a 17% confession rate in his sample of 66 Ramsey County, Minnesota cases, but then a 57% confession rate in the larger (2013) study of multiple Minnesota jurisdictions. Viljoen and colleagues (2005) reported a 55% self-reported confession rate among their sample of detained youth, but did not differentiate full confessions versus incriminating admissions. It is also important to note that this study's confession rate may be impacted by agencies' self-selection of submitted recordings; self-selection could result in a bias toward higher confession rates (e.g., agencies intentionally submitting "successful" interrogations) or possibly lower confession rates (e.g., officers showcasing a wider range of techniques when suspects do not readily confess).

Limitations

Because this study employed a nonprobability sample, sampling and selection bias may therefore limit the generalizability of study results. Certainly the comparatively small sample size warrants caution in generalizing the study's findings. In addition, it was impossible to randomly select potential participants from a known universe of agencies that record interviews because no such universe exists. Even for states that require electronic recording at a statewide level, recording policies may not be universally observed because of technological limitations, insufficient resources, or insufficient need. Particular caution is warranted when examining variables with substantial missing data, such as suspect age and custody status. Also, because the date of the interrogation was unknown for more than half the sample, it is unclear whether agencies' interrogation practices may have changed since the time of the recordings.

The sample was subject to selection bias in several ways. First, the data collection targeted states and jurisdictions that were presumed to follow electronic recording procedures resulting from case law or legislation. Aside from the voluntarily recording agencies listed in the Sullivan report that we contacted, our data collection could not capture other jurisdictions nationwide that may also voluntarily record interviews. Sullivan's (2004) report is now nearly a decade old; it is likely that additional jurisdictions have adopted recording policies in the years since its publication. Second, among the agencies contacted, those that chose to participate may have differed in important ways, both measurable and immeasurable, from the agencies that declined. For example, participating agencies may have had more human resources to devote to identifying, selecting, duplicating, and submitting interview recordings. Perhaps they were positively oriented toward research,

had a preexisting relationship with the FBI, or had a personal interest in developing successful interview strategies.

Finally, selection bias may also have existed at the recording level. During recruitment, agencies were asked for as many recordings as they were able and willing to submit. The number of interrogations received from a single agency ranged from one to 15; it is unlikely that these figures represented a given department's entire collection of interrogation recordings. Even after considering the project's eligibility criteria, agencies presumably selected only a portion of eligible interrogations to submit. The decision criteria they applied are unknown, and it is possible that chosen interviews differed from those not chosen. For example, even though recruiters did not request any specific type of case (e.g., murder, robbery), it is possible that agencies selected interrogations from more serious or atypical cases, interrogations in which officers used particular interrogation strategies, all interrogations conducted by a particular officer, or the most recent interrogations on file.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Descriptive data drawn from actual juvenile interrogations are critical to understanding the circumstances in which police question juvenile suspects. Leo (1996) observed that "it is not only surprising but also disturbing to note just how little we know about everyday police interrogation practices in America" (p. 267). Though we must exercise caution in generalizing these results to other youth in other jurisdictions, this study provides context for current interrogation research using other methods. It also lends some ecological validity to self-report and case studies suggesting that juvenile interrogations can be quite protracted and that youth often provide incriminating information during interrogations without the advice of counsel. These data also illuminate areas for further investigation, including the extent to which external factors induce suspect stress, actual (as opposed to training-based) questioning techniques utilized by police, and *Miranda* waivers in juvenile interrogations. In a rapidly evolving legal landscape for interrogation, such research holds tremendous potential to shape public policy pertaining to juvenile interrogations and to inform the development of evidence-based interviewing strategies that achieve law-enforcement goals while simultaneously protecting the rights of youthful suspects.

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