

Undergraduate Research Symposium 2012

HARRIET L. WILKES HONORS COLLEGE

“Guilty” Untill Proven Innocent: Interrogation Tactics and False Confessions

Meridith Wailes

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mark Tunick

In 1956 Darrel Parker was convicted of murdering his wife, with no evidence of his guilt except his own confession. Like Parker, some individuals confess to crimes that they did not commit. These confessions are generally made without a lawyer present when police use deception or coercion. While deception is constitutional and a permitted police tactic, coercion is not. This paper distinguishes between the two and provides a philosophical framework for determining when deception becomes coercive. While non-coercive deception can lead to false confessions, I do not argue that deception should be banned, as it is a useful tool for police in catching criminals. Instead, I argue that police may deceive suspects, but prosecutors and judges should provide a check by using a three pronged test to ensure that individuals are not convicted of crimes they did not commit.