



The Fontana PD Case & The Yogurt Shop Murders

Presenters: Vern Pierson, Maria Hartwig



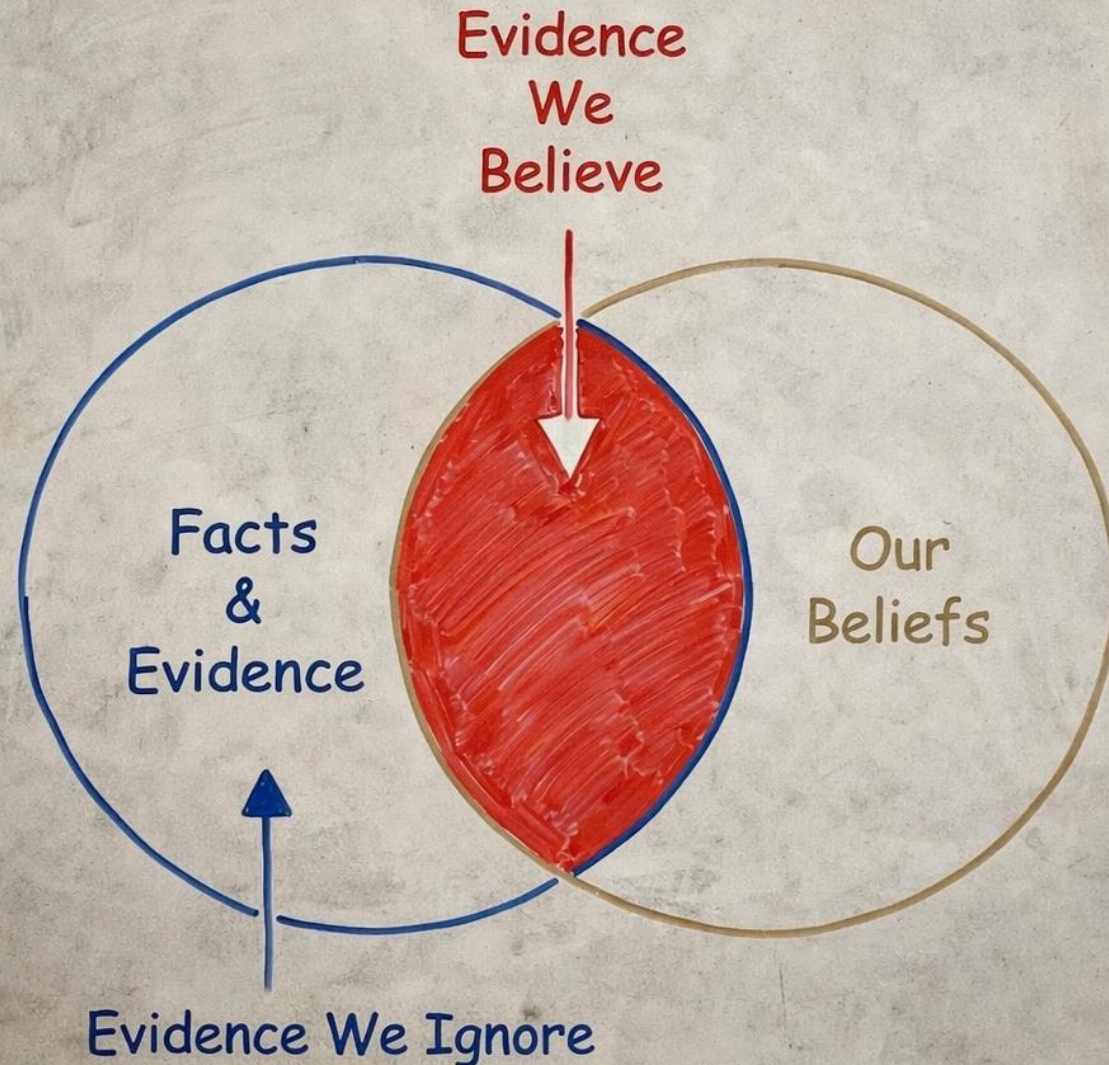
PARIS
IN THE
THE SPRING

ONCE
IN A
A LIFETIME

BIRD
IN THE
THE HAND



CONFIRMATION BIAS



Confirmation Bias+ Legacy Interview Training

A report released by the Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy at University of California Berkeley and the Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice at the University of Pennsylvania showed that wrongful convictions cost California taxpayers at least **\$221 million** from 1989 through 2012.





THE 1-IN-3 PROBLEM

1 IN 3



About one-third of all exonerations proven by DNA evidence involve a false confession from the wrongly convicted person.

CONFESSING TO
A CRIME YOU
DIDN'T COMMIT

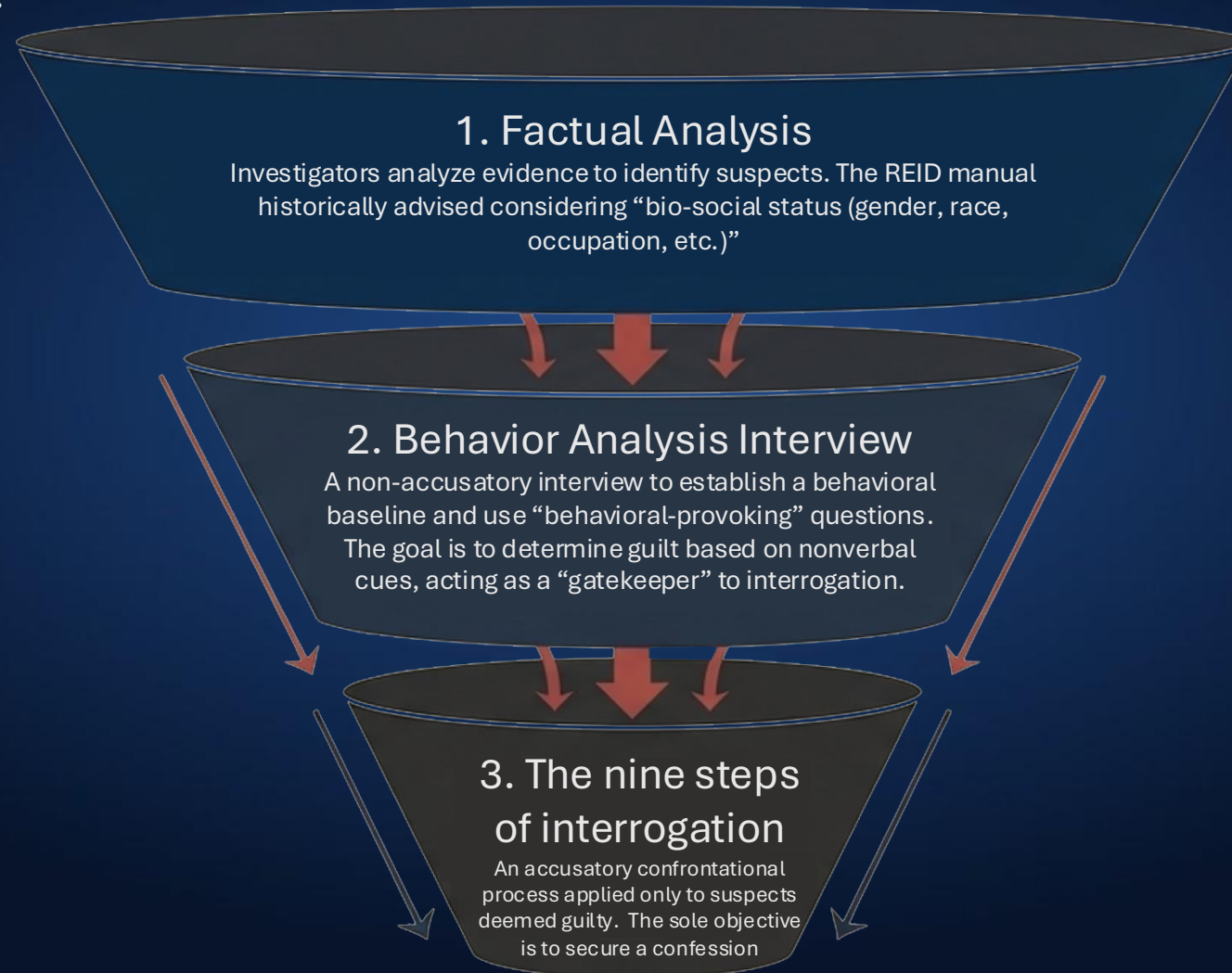
False confessions
under pressure
lead to wrongful
convictions.

Among 311 people exonerated through post-conviction DNA testing, **33%** involve cases where a false confession was obtained.

The Method Behind the Paradox: Understanding the Reid Technique



Developed in the 1940's – 1950's by John Reid as a “psychological” alternative to the physically abusive “third degree.” It quickly became the dominant interrogation training in North American law enforcement.

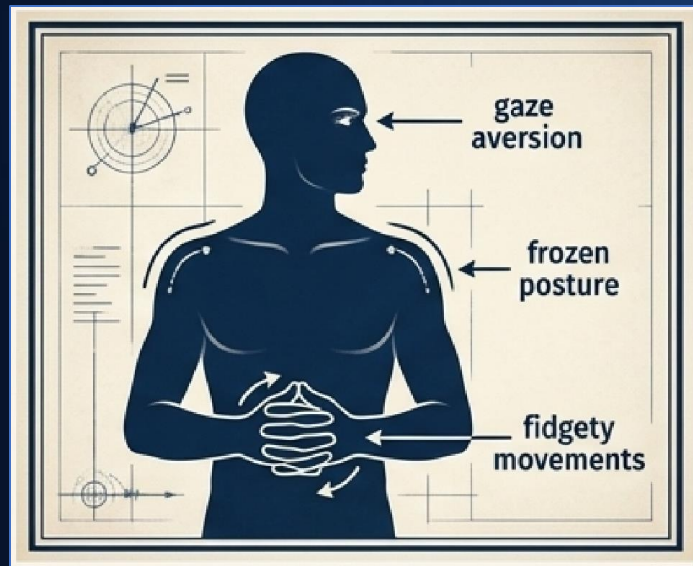




Under Scrutiny: The Myth of “Behavioral Symptom Analysis”

The Reid Premise

The Behavioral Analysis Interview rests on the assumption that investigators can reliably detect deception by observing nonverbal cues like gaze aversion, posture, and fidgeting. Reid and associates claims its method achieved high accuracy .



The Scientific Reality

This premise has been overwhelmingly debunked.

“There is no single behavior indicative of deception, not one. We need to stop associating behaviors indicative of psychological discomfort with deception and acknowledge them purely for what they are: signs of stress, anxiety, apprehension... but not deception.”

— Joe Navarro, M.A., former FBI Counterintelligence Agent

Decades of research show that humans, including trained professionals, are “no better than chance at detecting deception” - a coin toss.



Conclusion: This flawed “gatekeeper” process (termed ‘misclassification error’ by critics) leads to innocent individuals being subjected to intense, guilt-presumptive interrogation.

Under Scrutiny: The Architecture of Psychological Coercion



Maximization

Confronting the suspect with the strength of evidence (real or fabricated), exaggerating the severity of the situation, and refusing to accept denials.



Designed to increase despair and a sense of hopelessness

Minimization

Offering moral justifications or face-saving excuses for the crime (blaming the victim, an accomplice, or outside pressures).



Designed to imply leniency and make confession seem like a more palatable choice.

Perhaps most significantly, the "theme" pushed by the interviewer need not be true. **In fact, most training is that it should not be true.**

Studies show that in high-stress interrogations, suspects become short-sighted, admitting wrongdoing simply to alleviate the immediate pressure.


This process is proven to produce coerced-compliant (confessing to escape) and coerced-internalized (coming to believe one's own guilt) false confessions.



HBO[®]
ORIGINAL





 CLOSURE

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 Back to Case

Summarize All Files

Yogurt shop murder case

 Vern Pierson 4/7/2026 - 5:45:33 PM

please analyze all files in light of the Reid interrogation technique specifically noted theme building (in particular theme building with known false information) minimization and maximization and statements by law enforcement implying leniency

 4/7/2026 - 5:45:33 PM 



 Completed 1m 39s



The interrogation of Michael Scott and Rob Springsteen appears to exhibit multiple hallmarks of Reid-technique tactics, including theme building with known false information, minimization and maximization, and statements that could be interpreted as implying leniency. Below is a systematic breakdown across all three categories, drawn from both the interview transcripts and the 2007 Court of Criminal Appeals opinion.



Evidence

Search for files in investigation...

Case Files

✓	Michael Scott 9-10-99 Interview.pdf	327.6 KB	4/1/2026
✓	Michael Scott 9-12-99 0943.pdf	92.3 KB	4/1/2026
✓	Michael Scott 9-12-99 feet up.pdf	156.1 KB	4/1/2026
✓	Michael Scott 9-13-99 1410.pdf	83.8 KB	4/1/2026
✓	Michael Scott 9-13-99 1425.pdf	127.2 KB	4/1/2026
✓	Michael Scott 9-9-99 tape #1.pdf	607.7 KB	4/1/2026
✓	Michael Scott 9-9-99 tape #2.pdf	427.1 KB	4/1/2026
✓	Michael Scott 9-9-99 tape number 3.pdf	182.9 KB	4/1/2026
✓	Rob Springsteen 9-15-99.pdf	491.9 KB	4/1/2026
✓	Scott v State PD-0862-05.pdf	226.9 KB	4/6/2026

Scott v State PD-0862-05.pdf
226.9 KB

Summary Analyze

< 32 / 35 > Auto Zoom +

[19] During the course of the appellant's interviews, he frequently complained to the detectives that he did not know whether what he was telling them constituted accurate memory or just his best guess as to what they wanted him to say.

[20] The next morning when the interrogation continued, the appellant claimed to remember that Springsteen had shown him a .38 caliber automatic with a round handle.

[21] One of the detectives immediately asked, "All the way open?" The appellant replied, "All the way open. And that's what decided it. They would go in the front. We would meet them out back with the car." Later the appellant changed his story, insisting the door was open, but "[n]ot real far." "I thought it was propped all the way open. But that doesn't make sense." He could not remember what it was propped open with, or even if it was propped open at all.

[22] "Michael, do you see what you are doing? You're still minimizing your involvement in this thing. Why are you doing that? It's just going to fuck you."



1. Theme Building with Known False Information

- **"Revivification" / false memory technique:** Detectives described a process they called "revivification," telling Scott his mind is like a VCR and "you have the ability to bring that stuff back if you think about it hard enough." [Scott v...](#) A defense expert told the jury this is not how memory works and that this tactic is "as likely to trigger false as it is accurate recall" and "can even create false memories." [Scott v...](#)
- **False claim that co-suspects blamed Scott:** Officers told Scott that "Springsteen and Pierce had shifted blame onto appellant," which appears to have been a ruse. [Scott v...](#) Scott reacted emotionally, calling them liars and saying Pierce would "do anything to save his own ass," suggesting the theme successfully provoked a response. [Scott v...](#)
- **False assurance about guns:** Detectives "falsely assured the appellant that they knew 'all about' 'those two guns.'" [Scott v...](#)
- **False claim about "new technology":** Officers "indicated that 'new technology' had shed additional light on the crime," an assertion designed to suggest stronger evidence than apparently existed. [Scott v...](#)
- **Erroneous detective comment about caliber:** A new detective who had not previously been present erroneously told Scott, "You've been saying 22 all along, from what I understand," which appears to have been inaccurate. [Scott v...](#)
- **Asserting eye witnesses placed Springsteen at the shop:** During Springsteen's interview, an officer stated they had "certain eye witnesses" placing him at the Yogurt Shop and that "they know that's not true" when he denied being there. [Rob Sp...](#)
- **Polygraph examiner's claims about mind-reading ability:** The examiner told Scott, "Not only am I a polygraph examiner, I'm a certified forensic hypnotist, and I know how the mind works," using his credentials as a pressure theme. [Michae...](#)
- **"The machine ain't going to lie":** An officer pressured Scott with the assertion that the polygraph would catch any deception. [Michae...](#)



2. Maximization Tactics

- **Threats of diminishing opportunity:** When Scott hesitated, a detective warned, "the next phase is coming really quick. Real quick. And your opportunities are slowly diminishing." [Scott v...](#)
- **Grand jury / perjury threats:** Detectives "threatened to 'just take him to the Grand Jury and—he don't want to talk about it no more,'" [Scott v...](#) and separately told Scott that appearing before the grand jury and being deceptive "is a crime. You will. You'll go to jail for that." [Michae...](#)
- **Legal obligation claims:** Officers told Scott "you're obligated by law to tell us. And if you don't, you're in violation of the law." [Michae...](#)
- **Accusation of shooting all four victims:** A detective "began to accuse the appellant of having shot all four of the girls." Scott responded, "You all are telling me that I did." [Scott v...](#)
- **Aggressive pressure to remember:** When Scott could not recall details, detectives said, "You're starting to go off in this other tangent and bullshit with us again." [Scott v...](#) In another exchange, when pressed about where they went, the detective said, "Try harder." [Michae...](#)
- **Confrontation about minimizing:** A detective told Scott, "Michael, do you see what you are doing? You're still minimizing your involvement in this thing. Why are you doing that? It's just going to fuck you." [Scott v...](#)
- **Insistence that Scott's account was real:** When Scott said "I don't know if this is real or not," a detective interrupted to assure him, "Michael, it's real." [Scott v...](#)
- **"You were in the building":** A detective told Scott, "You're remembering what happened. Because you were inside there," overriding his denial. [Michae...](#)
- **Assurance detectives had no doubt:** On September 10, the detective "assured the appellant that they had no doubt he was in the yogurt shop, and that he 'pulled the trigger' while there." [Scott v...](#)



3. Minimization Tactics

- **"I do not think you shot any four of these girls"**: An officer explicitly told Scott he was not believed to be the shooter, while simultaneously insisting he knew more — a classic minimization frame positioning Scott as a lesser participant. [Michae...](#)
- **Blaming co-defendants**: Detectives suggested that Pierce and Springsteen had "made him do 'something else' to the girls," framing Scott as acting under duress rather than as a principal. [Scott v...](#)
- **"Did either Maurice or Robert make you shoot those two girls?"**: This phrasing offered Scott a narrative in which he was forced to act, and he responded, "I think so." [Scott v...](#)
- **"We're going to help you get through this"**: During a pressure-filled session, an officer told Scott, "You're not going to make us mad, Michael. We're going to help you get through this. Close your eyes, Michael. Just listen to my voice." [Michae...](#)
- **Emotional appeals about victims**: Officers "discussed the fact that the victims would never get to go to graduations, dances, and barbecues," a tactic that appears designed to build moral pressure while implicitly offering a path to redemption through confession. [Scott v...](#)
- **Contrast with co-defendants' character**: A detective told Scott, "None of these guys have done any — these guys are still scum," while emphasizing Scott's wife, child, and continuing education — implicitly suggesting cooperation would preserve Scott's comparatively positive life trajectory. [Michae...](#)



4. Statements Potentially Implying Leniency

- **Freedom-to-leave assurances as implied safety:** Officers repeatedly told Scott he was not under arrest, could leave at any time, and was "here of [his] own free will." [Scott v...](#) He was allowed to go home after the first day and returned voluntarily, [Scott v...](#) which, while not a direct promise of leniency, may have created an impression that cooperation carried no immediate legal risk. [Scott v...](#)
- **"You can tell us anything you want to today. There's not a lot we can do":** This phrasing appears to suggest that disclosures made in that setting would carry limited consequences. [Michae...](#)
- **Framing cooperation as the path to avoiding worse outcomes:** The recurring theme that Scott's "opportunities are slowly diminishing" [Scott v...](#) combined with the assertion that non-cooperation would lead to a grand jury and perjury charges [Scott v...](#) appears to create an implicit carrot-and-stick dynamic where talking now is positioned as the less harmful option.
- **Positioning Scott as someone who was "made" to act:** By repeatedly offering a narrative in which Pierce and Springsteen forced Scott to participate, [Scott v...](#) detectives may have implicitly communicated that admitting to a lesser role would result in lesser consequences, even if no explicit promise was made. [Scott v...](#)



5. Court Opinion's Assessment of These Tactics

- **Majority opinion:** The Court of Criminal Appeals acknowledged the aggressive interrogation and noted that many corroborative details cited by the lower court "were either suggested to the appellant to varying degrees by the interrogating officers, or were already available to some portion of the public." [Scott v...](#) The majority found that the court of appeals erred in finding the constitutional error harmless, and reversed the conviction. [Scott v...](#) The court noted that "faulty memory-enhancing techniques used by the police" could have produced unreliable statements. [Scott v...](#)
- **Dissenting opinion:** The dissent characterized the tactics as "dogged and skillful interrogation" designed "to elicit a truthful confession by exploiting appellant's own guilty knowledge." [Scott v...](#) The dissent acknowledged that "police questioning did become more aggressive" and officers "did sometimes mislead appellant," but argued this was permissible and that Scott "could have just walked out." [Scott v...](#) The dissent also contended that leading questions should not "so massively corrupt appellant's memory as to make him believe he was involved in a crime that he was not in fact involved in." [Scott v...](#)
- **False confessions context:** The court noted that police had already obtained at least two known false confessions from other individuals in this case, and that a false confessor had also asserted a .38 caliber weapon was used — raising questions about whether the details Scott provided were genuinely from memory or from circulating information. [Scott v...](#)

2020

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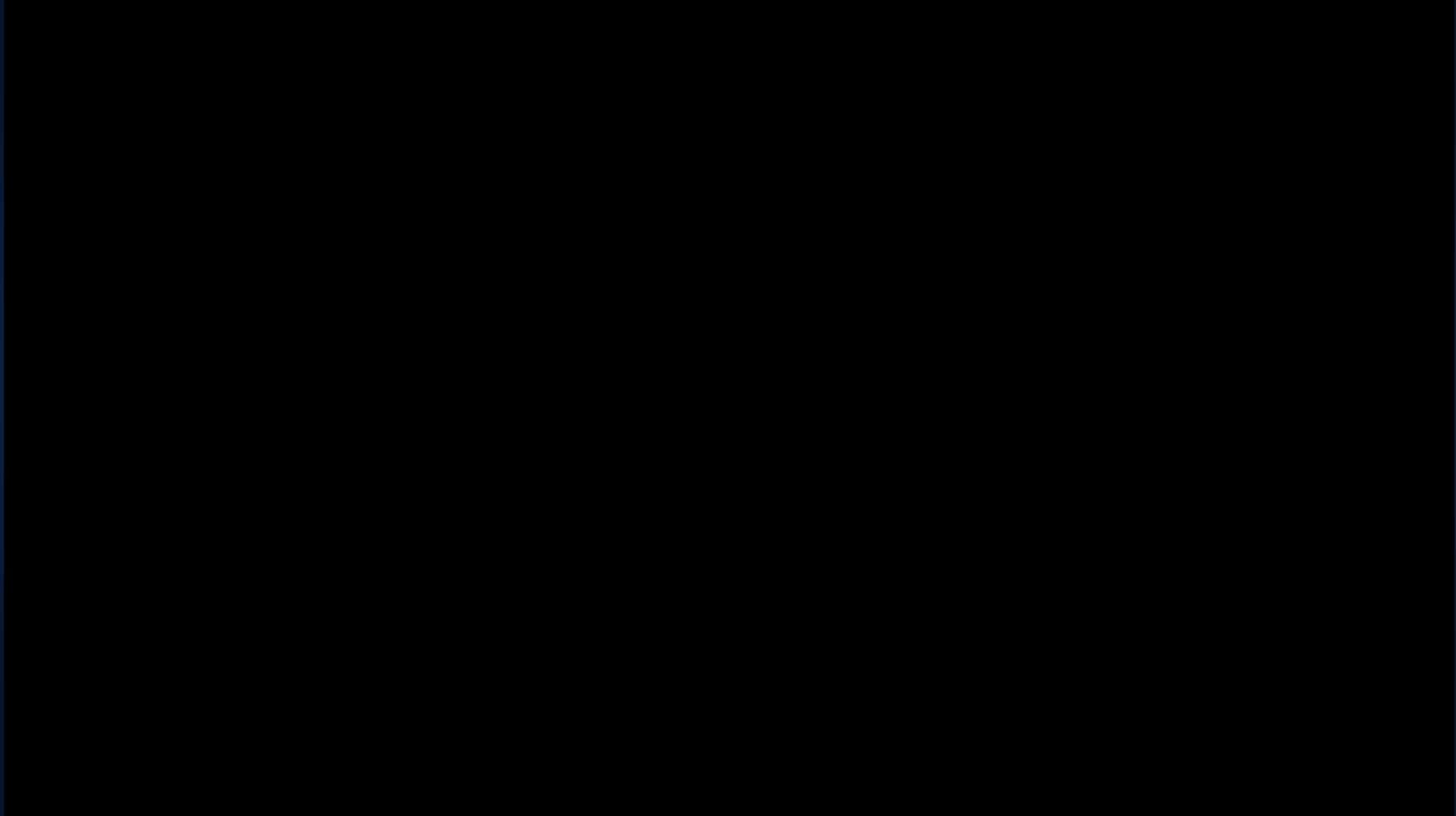
“EVIL WAS ABOUT TO WALK IN THAT DOOR”





Men wrongly accused of
yogurt shop murders reach
\$35 million settlement with
city

abcnews.com



PLANNING & ANALYSIS



FACTS (verified)

INFORMATION (unverified)

INFERENCES (What we think about it)

What we definitely know.

Examples:

Physical Evidence

DNA

Video

Biographical information

**What do we have that isn't
verified yet?**

Examples:

Witness Statements

Informants

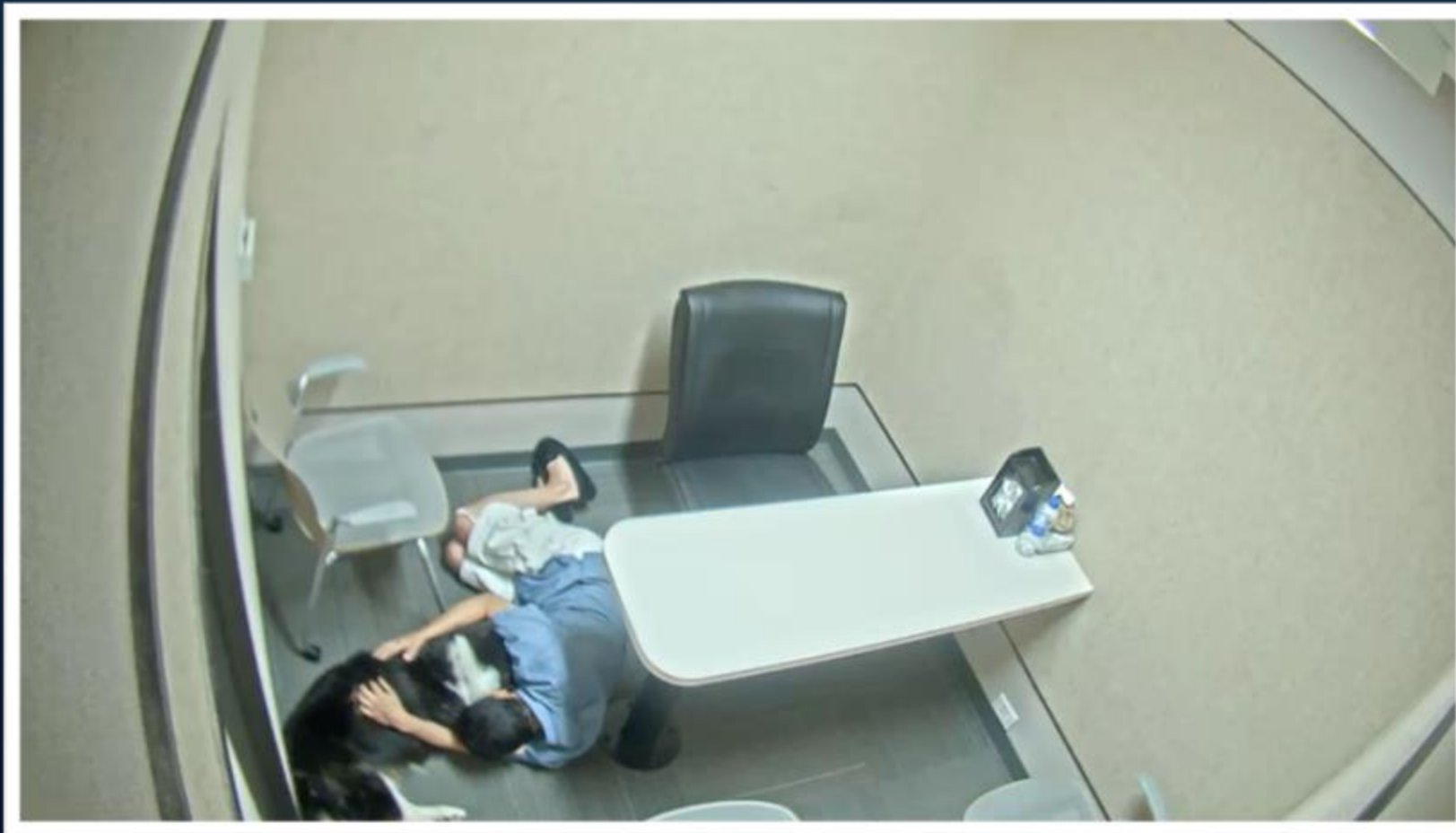
**Assumptions about case
AND subject?**

- ALL reasonable conclusions based off facts and information
- Bias Check
- Alternate/Competing inferences

OBJECTIVES:

(What gaps do we have? What do we need to know?)

Fontana Police



Fontana Police





THE RUSE

DATELINE



#DATELINE