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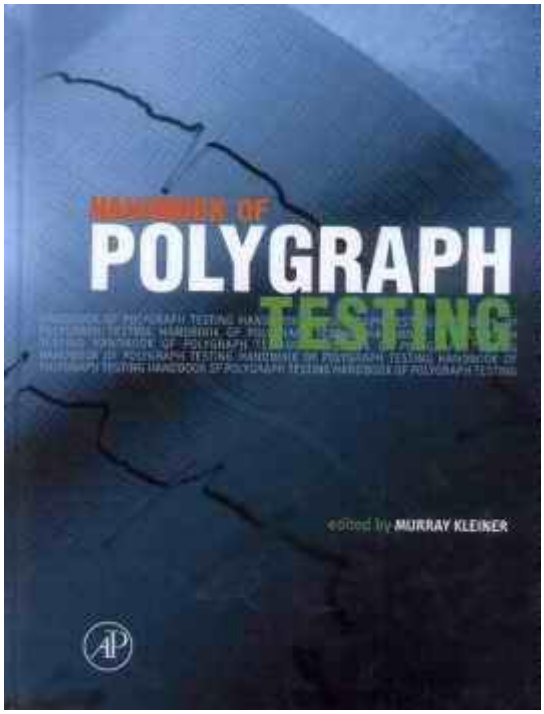
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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

...AN EXTREMELY GOOD JOB ...it is a brave attempt at explaining a topic that is too difficult and technical to be taught in a book, that too a handbook. And we must say that the authors have done an extremely good job and are fully successful in their attempt. Hats off to them...

Handbook of Polygraph Testing, 1st Edition, *edited by* Murray Kleiner. Hardcover. Dimensions (in inches): 10.00 x 7.50.
Academic Press, Harcourt Place, 32 Jamestown Road, London NW1 7BY, UK. Date of publication 2002. xii+354 pages, ISBN 0-12-413740-7. Price £46.95

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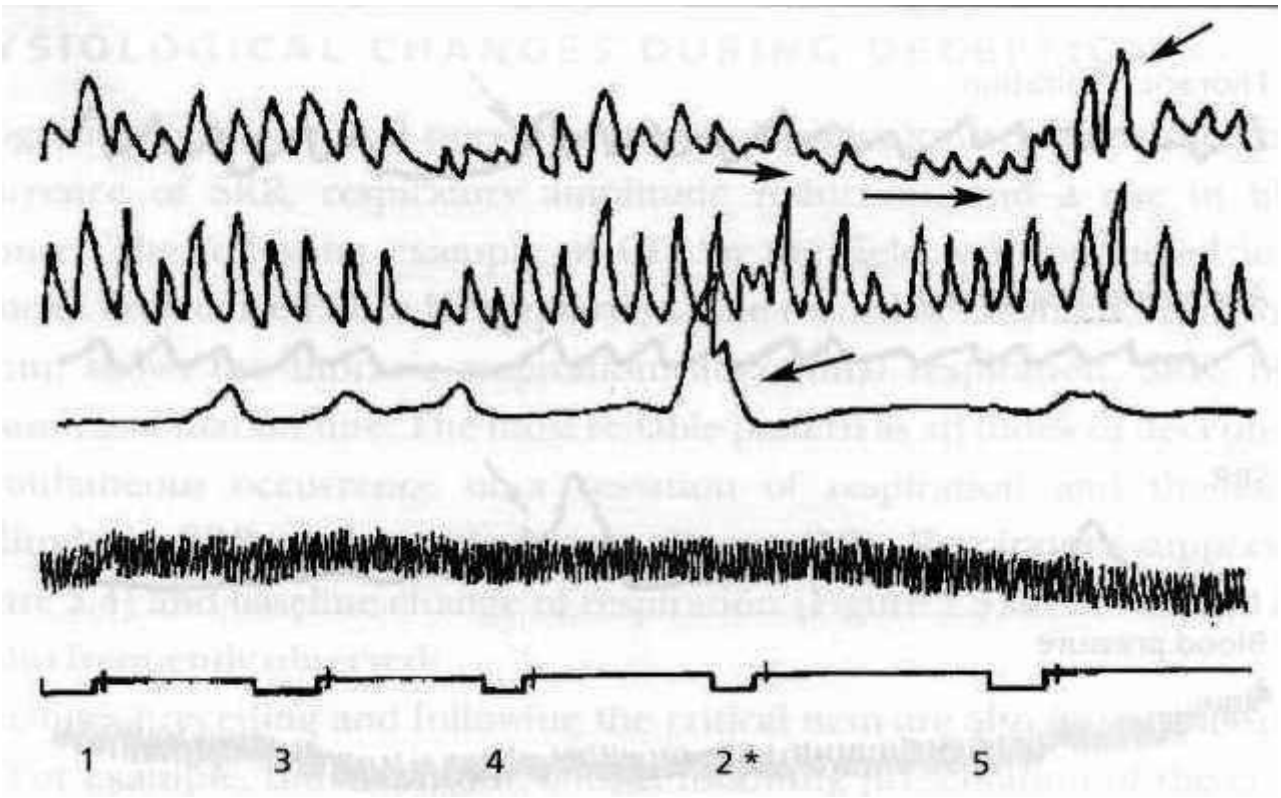
The first picture that comes to mind upon hearing the words "lie detector test" is that of Sharon Stone sitting on a chair, her all too sexy legs crossed, a cigarette in her hand, answering all the questions posed to her so very efficiently and confidently. We don't think we have to tell which movie we are talking about. But for the uninitiated let us mention that we are talking about the movie "Basic Instinct". That both she and later Michael Douglas passed the test, in the movie of course, is something that we must leave for the director to explain. Here we are not going to discuss

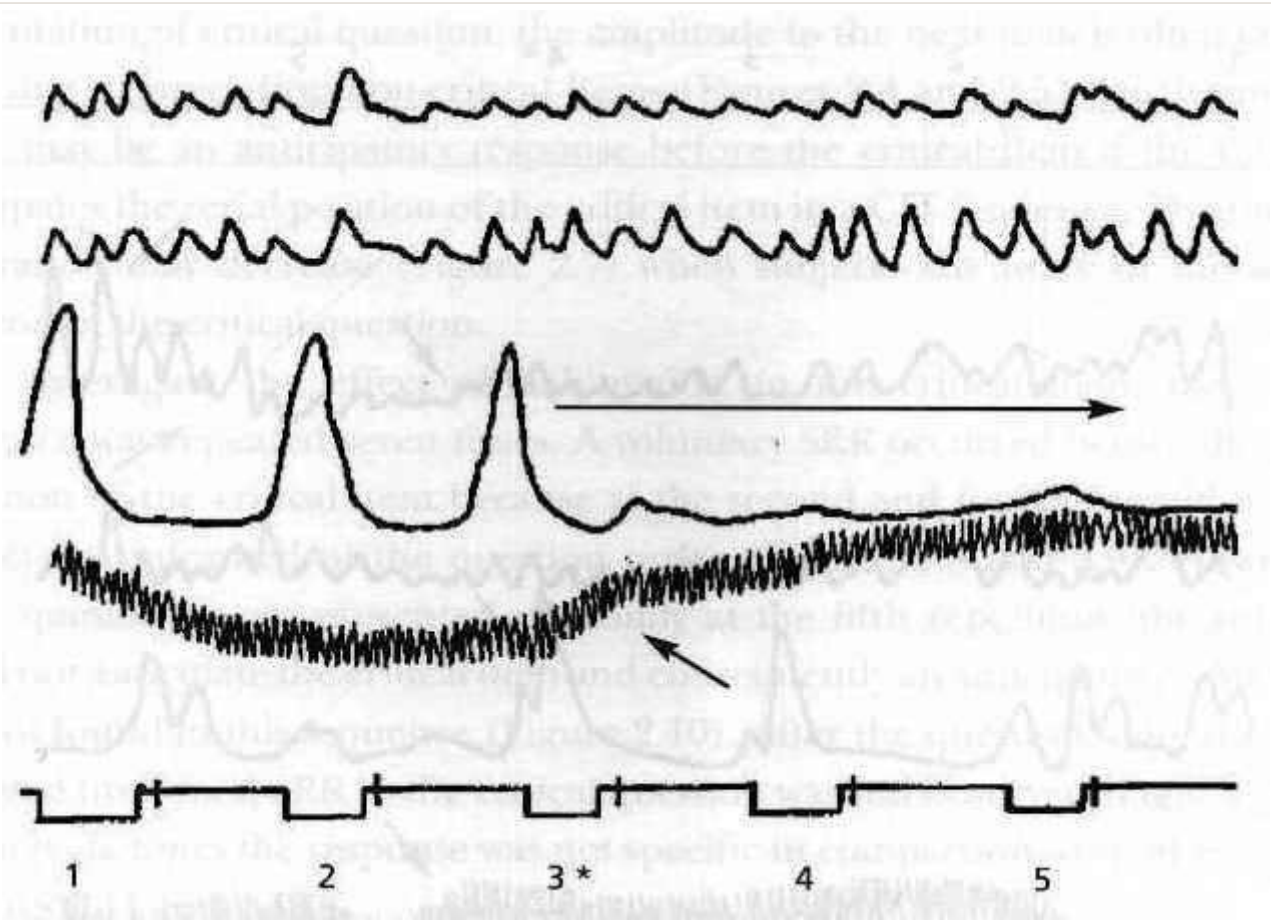
the movie or the merits and demerits of lie detector test but the merits and demerits of the book that describes this test.

The authors start off the book by describing the first test that was described i.e. the relevant - irrelevant test (RIT). After describing the various advantages and disadvantages of this test the authors go on to describe the other tests that have been developed since then in the order of their development. The description of all these tests has been quite outstanding. The book describes all the tests that are used in the present times. Of special mention is the Concealed Information Test (CIT) that is used in Japan. This test is different from the other tests that are used in the western world especially USA. Its inclusion in the book is very relevant as it gives a sort of comparison between the two types of tests depicting the difference between the two basic philosophies on which they are based.

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The book is well illustrated with items such as these. These two are the records of CIT (Concealed Information Test), which appear on page 68 of this book. The top picture is a record of CIT (Concealed Information Test) for a 57 year-old male suspected of committing a homicide. Both newspaper and TV news did not report where the corpse was found. The subject was asked whether the corpse was disposed at (1) city A, (2) city B, (3) city C, (4) city D, or (5) city E. The critical question was 2 on the chart. The thoracic respiration amplitude was suppressed and the baseline of the tracing fell slightly.
The bottom picture shows a record of CIT for a 34 year-old female suspected of committing a theft. The subject was asked what was stolen using photographs. The critical question was 3. The SRR (Skin Resistance Response) tracing for questions 1 to 3 remained equal but the amplitude suddenly disappeared at the fourth question. It was thought to be the result of a reduction of tension after the critical item. Although the baseline blood pressure rose rapidly during the critical item, the rise or fall of this tracing was not frequently observed in CIT. [Click both pictures to enlarge]





In the chapter "a critical review of the control question test" the authors have explained the shortcomings of CQT (Comparison Questions Test). This proves the falsity of the myth that lie detector test is infallible. It also tells that too much importance should not be given to this test. Another thing that it explains is that in the movie "basic instinct" the director was not totally wrong

and it is possible to pass the lie detector test even if one is lying. In the same breadth we would also like to mention about the chapter on "countermeasures" which also describes the same thing. It goes on to describe the ways in which the test can be passed in more detail.

The inclusion of chapters like 'the polygraph in personal screening', 'post conviction sex offender testing and American polygraph association', 'event related potentials in the detection of deception, malingering, and false memories' etc. have shown that lie detector test is not used for criminal cases only. There are other uses of this test that have been very beautifully described in these chapters. They also tell that the technology once developed can be put to various uses provided the user wants to use them.

A shortcoming of the book, probably the only one and which is more of technical nature is the way the chapters have been arranged. Maybe the editors are right in keeping them in this way but we felt that they did require some rearrangement. Chapters dealing with shortcomings of the test might have been better placed if they had all been put together. Similar with the chapters dealing with uses other than criminal uses. These may appear small things but they do have an impact on the reader and the resultant incoherence might annoy some if not all of them.

All in all we would say that it is a brave attempt at explaining a topic that is too difficult and technical to be taught in a book, that too a handbook. And we must say that the authors have done an extremely good job and are fully successful in their attempt. Hats off to them.

-Puneet Setia and Avneesh Gupta



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Dr. Avneesh Gupta qualified as a forensic pathologist from India with honors and is now working as a fellow of forensic pathology in Wayne County, Detroit. He has to his credit a number of publications in leading journals around the world. His landmark thesis on "Cranial Cerebral Damage In Fatal Road Traffic Accidents With Special Reference to Circle Of Willis" can be accessed by clicking here. He is associated with Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology as a journal associate, writer and book reviewer. He can be contacted at avneeshgupta2000@yahoo.com. During his spare time, he enjoys meeting friends and traveling.

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