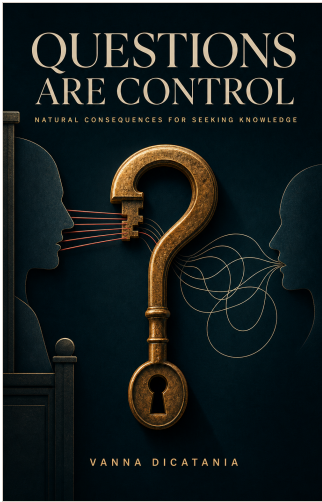




ESSAY

Questions Are Control

Natural Consequences for Seeking Knowledge

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An inquiry into how questions redistribute power, why people sometimes punish or avoid them, and what changes once an answer is known.

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Names and identifying details in personal passages are changed or omitted out of respect for other people's autonomy. These passages describe my experience; they are not population evidence or a verdict on another person's motives.

A question is an intervention disguised as punctuation.

Where were you?

What do you need?

Why didn't you say something?

What would change your mind?

Each sentence reaches into uncertainty and tries to rearrange it. Each also changes the position of the person being asked. A question that solicits an answer selects a subject and creates an expectation about the next turn. Even silence becomes newly legible. It can look evasive, defensive, resistant, ashamed, or simply rude.

Questions organize what happens next.

They can also be how the asker recovers agency. When events are confusing, rules are hidden, or another person knows something consequential, a question can be a way out of dependence. *What happened? What am I agreeing to? Who benefits? What are you not telling me?* Knowledge can widen the set of actions available to the seeker.

Those movements often coexist. A question can free the asker by placing pressure on the answerer. It can challenge one hierarchy while creating a smaller hierarchy inside the conversation. It can be an act of care, a demand for accountability, a request for help, a trap, an accusation, or a form of surveillance. The grammar does not decide.

The pressure in a question is not always domination. Inquiry can widen one person's agency while asking something of another. That is the movement I want to understand:

Questions move control.

They redistribute uncertainty, attention, obligation, and the right to define what is happening. Whether that movement is liberating or coercive depends on who may ask, who must answer, whether refusal is safe, what assumptions the question contains, and what happens once the answer is known.

Questions that invite an answer can direct attention and make a response relevant. Some also alter later behavior or what a person reports remembering. That interactional force is not automatically moral harm. A question can change a room without wronging anyone. It can even change the room for the better.

The useful contrast is therefore not neutral versus controlling. It is control that preserves or expands agency versus control that narrows agency without adequate justification.

Seeking knowledge can have consequences. Some come from what is learned. Others come from social arrangements that make curiosity costly and then present that cost as inevitable.

A Question Changes the Room

Conversation is full of small obligations that rarely have to be announced. A greeting invites a greeting. An accusation invites a defense. A question makes an answer relevant.

Conversation researchers describe this as a feature of sequence: an initiating action puts the other person under normative pressure either to produce the expected response or become accountable for not producing it. Questions do not compel in the legal or physical sense, but they make nonresponse noticeable. The person who asks has altered the terms of the next moment.¹

That pressure is easy to overlook when the question is welcome.

Do you want some tea? creates an answer-shaped space, but it is usually a gentle one. *Are you happy here?* asks for more. *Why were you texting them at midnight?* may arrive with a theory already inside it.

The words alone still do not tell us what is happening. The meaning of a question depends partly on what each person is entitled to know. Conversation analyst John Heritage calls these “territories of knowledge”: the uneven rights and responsibilities people have to know, describe, and evaluate different parts of life. I am presumed to know more about my own pain, plans, and private experience than a stranger does. A physician may know more about a test result while I retain greater authority over what a symptom feels like. A manager may know the budget while an employee knows what the process does to the people inside it.²

Those territories are not fixed. They are negotiated, challenged, and sometimes stolen.

“Don’t you think you’re overreacting?” has interrogative grammar, but it may function as an assertion wearing a question’s clothes. “What happened?” can be an invitation to speak or a warning to produce the approved version. “Do you know what time it is?” can be a rebuke rather than a request for the hour.

The question mark is not a moral category. It is a delivery system.

Rarely Neutral, Not Always Harmful

There is a measurable sense in which questions do more than collect information.

Researchers call one example the *question–behavior effect*: asking people about intentions or past behavior can change what they later do. An updated systematic review of randomized trials examined 43 studies comparing measurement with no measurement across health-related behaviors. Across about 104,000 participants, the overall effect was statistically detectable but small: a standardized mean difference of 0.06, with a 95 percent confidence interval from 0.02 to 0.09. The studies were heterogeneous, and the review found evidence of publication bias.³

The result is narrower than a claim that every question changes behavior: a question can be part of the causal environment it appears merely to observe. The survey, intake form, risk assessment, or reflective prompt may also be an intervention.

Question wording can shape the answer more directly. In Elizabeth Loftus and John Palmer's 1974 experiments, students watched traffic-accident films and estimated vehicle speed. Changing one verb changed the mean estimate: *smashed* produced 40.8 mph, while *hit* produced 34.0 and *contacted* 31.8. In a second experiment, one week after seeing a film with no broken glass, 32 percent of participants previously asked about cars that "smashed" reported seeing glass, compared with 14 percent asked about cars that "hit" and 12 percent in a no-speed-question control.⁴

The study is old, laboratory-bound, and built around uncertain eyewitness memory. It should not become a slogan that wording manufactures any belief on command. Its durable lesson is smaller and more important: a question may supply information while seeming to request it.

So "rarely neutral" needs two guardrails.

First, the claim is about effects, not intentions. A well-meant question can increase salience, pressure, cognitive effort, or vulnerability. A hostile question can accidentally disclose useful information or give the answerer a chance to challenge the frame.

Second, an effect is not automatically an injury. *Would you like tea?* still directs attention and requests a choice. That does not make it coercive. Control is present at the level of sequence; its moral significance depends on purpose, proportionality, alternatives, and consequence.

The Questioner Inside the Theory

I came to this question partly because I am a questioner.

After a conversation with high emotional input, what lingers for me is often another set of questions: *What did I miss? What cues were present before I recognized them? What was happening inside the other person? What was I doing while it happened?* I reread messages not primarily to prove my account, but to re-enter the exchange with more attention available—to feel parts of it I could not inhabit while I was busy being myself.

That habit can become empathy. It can also become control.

When someone I love does not freely offer their inner experience—or does not have the language, energy, or desire to offer it—I can keep searching for a route inside. In an earlier personal interview, I described the desire to relate becoming consuming. The effort can burn through so much energy that I eventually have less empathy available, not more.

The correction I named then was difficult: sometimes I am not invited into that part of another person's experience. I can remain open to connection without making my understanding the price of holding it.

My long-term partner once described my empathy as something she can feel almost firsthand, close enough that she has to work not to absorb my feelings. She was describing our connection, not evaluating my questions. The distinction matters. So does the warning: inquiry from me may not arrive as an empty request for information when my own emotional intensity is already perceptible.

A private longitudinal review of my messages made the opposite failure visible. I appeared to ask fewer questions in my closest relationship than in other one-to-one conversations. That finding is not publicly auditable or generalizable; the archive overrepresents emotionally significant exchanges. I use it here only as a mirror.

The mirror showed familiarity hardening into certainty. In one recent conflict, I named my long-term partner's internal state as though I knew it. When she corrected me, I could hear the correction as evidence for the state I had already assigned. The question—*What state are you actually in?*—had disappeared before I reached the question mark. I was no longer testing a model. I was responding to it.

Years earlier, after an affectionate goodnight, I asked whether she was upset and then caught myself: I might be reading something into an ordinary departure that was not there. The difference between those moments was not that I had become more analytical. In the earlier one, the question left my interpretation falsifiable.

This is a third way questions move control. Asking can impose on another person. Refusing to ask can also take something from them: the authority to correct the version of them I have built.

Control Moves in Both Directions

Power is often described only as domination: power *over*. But there is also power *to*—the capacity to act, understand, decide, resist, or change a situation. Questions can participate in both.

The person who controls the questions may control the agenda. Courtroom discourse makes the structure unusually visible. The examiner chooses the topic, the order of turns, and often the permitted shape and length of the response. A sequence of closed questions can reduce a complicated story to a series of small agreements that support an argument the witness did not choose. Tatiana Tkačuková's case study of cross-examination shows how institutional authority and question design work together to restrict the answerer's options.⁵

Everyday conversation is not a courtroom. The comparison matters because the courtroom exaggerates a mechanism that also exists elsewhere: selecting the question can select the frame.

"Why did you let this happen?" presupposes that you had the power to stop it.

"Which one of you made the mistake?" presupposes that the cause is a person rather than a system.

"When are you going to settle down?" converts one vision of a life into a deadline.

An answerer can reject the premise, but doing so requires additional work. Before answering, they must reopen the frame the question tried to close.

The asker may be trying to reopen something, too.

One small experiment from 1981 offers unusually direct support for the connection between lost control and information seeking. Researchers first exposed some participants to uncontrollable outcomes on a problem-solving task, then gave them an opportunity to learn about a person they expected to interview. Participants who had experienced the loss of control selected more diagnostic information and more diagnostic questions.⁶

That result is intriguing, not definitive. The study involved only 61 female undergraduates at one U.S. university, used an artificial task, and is more than four decades old. It cannot establish that people generally ask questions to compensate for powerlessness. It does, however, demonstrate the proposed mechanism under one controlled set of conditions: when control was taken away in one domain, people sought useful social knowledge in another.

Questions can therefore be both a bid for agency and an imposition. The asker's need to know does not automatically create the answerer's duty to disclose. The answerer's right to privacy does not automatically dissolve the asker's legitimate need to understand a situation that affects them.

The conflict is not between curiosity and control. Curiosity is already inside the contest over control.

Who Is Allowed to Ask?

The formal invitation to ask questions is not the same as permission.

A meeting can end with "Any questions?" while everyone understands which questions would be taken as intelligent, disloyal, premature, embarrassing, political, negative, or career-limiting. The penalty does not have to be written down. People learn rules from stories, expressions, interrupted careers, and the memory of what happened the last time someone made a powerful person uncomfortable.

James Detert and Amy Edmondson call some of these learned rules "implicit voice theories." Across four studies, they identified recurring beliefs such as not embarrassing the boss in public, not bypassing authority, not speaking without complete data or a ready solution, and not challenging a decision once it has been made. Their measures predicted workplace silence beyond a broad set of individual and organizational factors.⁷

This research is about employee voice, not question asking alone. Speaking up with a concern or proposal is a larger category. Still, questions are one common form of voice, especially when a person lacks the authority to make a declaration.

Can we verify that assumption?

What happens to the customer if this fails?

Why is this exception acceptable here?

The grammatical modesty can hide the social challenge. A question may be punished not because it is hostile, but because it reveals that agreement was not complete.

Context matters in healthcare workplaces. A systematic narrative review of 34 studies found that efforts to increase speaking up were repeatedly shaped by hierarchy, interdisciplinary relationships, workplace culture, and psychological safety. Most intervention findings were inconclusive, and the authors warned against a single universal fix.⁸

Silence alone is not proof of threat, and a difficult question is not certain to be punished. The practical finding is that the cost of inquiry is not carried by the sentence alone. It is produced by a relationship and a system.

The junior employee and the chief executive can ask the same words in the same room and perform different acts. One may be requesting permission to doubt. The other may be requiring an explanation.

This is why questioning authority and being questioned *by* authority should not be treated as mirror images.

When authority asks downward, it usually controls the record, the time, and the consequences. When a question travels upward, the asker may be trying to make authority explain itself, expose a risk, or acknowledge knowledge held below. The question's grammatical form may be polite while its social action is a challenge to rank.

That challenge may be heard as more than a request for information. It can expose a disagreement about who is entitled to doubt, whose experience counts, or whether an established decision may be reopened. Those are possible dynamics of the hierarchy, not a measured response to every upward question.

The self-censorship and healthcare studies make the asymmetry visible within their limits: an institution can invite information while leaving people uncertain about the cost of supplying it. They do not tell us how frequently a particular question will be punished, and workplace voice includes more than questions.⁷⁸

Whistleblowing is the extreme edge, not the model for every difficult question. A 2026 U.S. Government Accountability Office report found that tips and disclosures are important to enforcement agencies while workers who report possible wrongdoing risk employer reprisals and may be constrained or confused by nondisclosure agreements. The report documents protection mechanisms and stakeholder evidence; it is not an estimate of how often questioners are punished.⁹

The scale matters. Asking a manager to explain a decision is not the same as reporting fraud to a regulator. But both reveal that the "natural consequence" of questioning authority is often made by authority. A raised concern becomes dangerous when a person with power decides that the loss of deference matters more than the value of the information.

Questioning authority is therefore not automatically brave, accurate, or prosocial. Questions can grandstand, insinuate, overwhelm a process, or demand proof from people already carrying the burden of harm. The ethical advantage of an upward question is not that lower-status people are always right. It is that a system capable of correction must make room for information that does not flatter it.

The Costs We Imagine

If some environments punish inquiry, it is tempting to assume that asking is socially dangerous everywhere. The evidence does not support that conclusion.

In experiments involving live conversations, Karen Huang and colleagues found that asking more questions, especially follow-up questions, increased partner liking in the tested settings. Perceived responsiveness—listening, understanding, validation, and care—was associated with the benefit. Their observational speed-dating analysis later drew a methodological critique and reply; the critique itself required a correction. That disputed analysis should be kept separate from the conversational experiments.¹⁰

Question asking can also improve how competence is perceived. Across several studies, Alison Wood Brooks and colleagues found that asking for advice often made the seeker appear *more* competent, particularly when the task was difficult and the person being asked had relevant expertise. The effect reversed under some conditions, including asking an obvious nonexpert.¹¹

A favorable average response in an experiment does not grant permission to ignore privacy, power, context, or consent. A request for advice is different from a threat, repeated monitoring, or disclosure demanded under dependency.

The distinction is useful: people may overestimate the social costs of asking in some supportive interactions, while real hierarchies can make inquiry costly. I can imagine fear learned in one setting following someone into another, or confidence from a safe setting being carried somewhere that does not deserve it. That transfer is an interpretation, not a result these studies directly measured.

“Just ask” is therefore not a sufficient ethic. Neither is “questions have consequences.”

The relevant question is: *which consequences are supported by this relationship, and which are being imagined, inherited, or strategically manufactured?*

Questions That Create Depth

The positive case for questions is stronger than “people may like the asker.”

A genuine question can give another person control over what becomes knowable. It selects a doorway but does not dictate what must come through it. Follow-up questions can demonstrate that the first answer changed the listener. The next question is then not an extraction step but evidence of attention.

The best-known laboratory illustration is Arthur Aron and colleagues' 1997 closeness procedure. Pairs of strangers spent 45 minutes completing reciprocal tasks that gradually increased in personal disclosure. In the first study, pairs in the closeness condition reported greater post-interaction closeness than pairs completing structured small talk; the reported standardized difference was large. The authors were careful about what they had produced: a temporary feeling of closeness, not an ongoing relationship and certainly not guaranteed love.¹²

The popular retelling often makes the list of questions sound magical. The study points elsewhere. The procedure was gradual, reciprocal, time-bounded, and voluntary. Both people answered. Depth was scaffolded rather than seized.

Later research helps explain why. Jean-Philippe Laurenceau, Lisa Feldman Barrett, and Paula Pietromonaco used interaction diaries across one or two weeks. Self-disclosure and partner disclosure were both associated with experienced intimacy, while perceived partner responsiveness partially mediated those relationships. Emotional disclosure mattered more than merely reporting facts.¹³

The distinction is crucial. A person can answer twenty intimate questions and feel exposed rather than close. Disclosure is not intimacy by itself. Intimacy depends partly on whether the response communicates understanding, acceptance, and care.

People may also avoid depth because they miscalculate it. Across a program of experiments, Michael Kardas, Amit Kumar, and Nicholas Epley found that conversations between strangers felt less awkward and created more connection and happiness than participants expected. Participants especially overestimated the awkwardness of deep relative to shallow conversation, and after experiencing both, they felt more connected to deep-conversation partners. The miscalibration was linked to underestimating how much strangers would care about their disclosures; predictions were more accurate with close friends, family, or partners.¹⁴

Reluctance can still be rational. The experiments studied bounded, researcher-arranged conversations. They did not test coercive disclosure under dependence involving housing, employment, healthcare, immigration status, or intimate safety. Real people often have good reasons to protect themselves.

That is why I would not define genuine questioning by the asker's sincerity alone. I propose more demanding relational signs:

- the answer can be partial, delayed, redirected, or refused;
- the depth is reciprocal enough that one person is not permanently exposed while the other remains protected;
- follow-up questions respond to what was actually said rather than advancing a hidden script;
- the asker accepts correction when the premise is wrong;
- the answer changes the asker, even if only by revising what they ask next.

Under those conditions, a question exercises control by building a container. It gives uncertainty a shape in which another person may safely author more of themselves.

That is positive control: not the absence of structure, but structure in service of agency.

The People Who Ask, and the People Who Do Not

It is tempting to divide people into questioners and non-questioners, then quietly turn that difference into a moral ranking.

Questioners can experience inquiry as attention: *I want to know you well enough to update my picture of you.* When the other person rarely asks, the absence may land as disinterest, certainty, or a refusal to do the work of knowing. Non-questioners may experience the same exchange differently. They may expect important information to be offered rather than solicited. They may show attention through reflection, memory, practical action, self-disclosure, silence, or by leaving room. They may also be tired, afraid of intruding, unsure what is permitted, or genuinely disengaged.

Question frequency cannot decide among those explanations.

One of the most supportive moments in my closest relationship involved almost no questioning. After someone else told me that she loved me, I brought my uncertainty to my long-term partner. I did not experience her as pushing me toward the new connection, warning me away, telling me what my emotions meant, or rescuing me from not knowing. She acknowledged what I was feeling and left enough room for me to discover it. Her restraint did not feel like incuriosity. It returned authorship to me.

A research review on high-quality listening makes the same point from another direction. Follow-up questions can signal attention, but they are one behavior among several. Reflections, paraphrasing, undivided attention, appropriate nonverbal response, and later action can also communicate understanding, validation, and care. The important construct is not question count by itself; it is whether the speaker experiences the other person as responsive.¹⁵

This protects the non-questioner from a false accusation: care does not have only one conversational grammar. It also protects the questioner from a false reassurance. Quiet is not automatically spacious. If it is paired with topic changes, inattention, incuriosity, or no evidence that the disclosure altered anything, the speaker may reasonably experience it as absence.

Conflict makes the distinction harder. One person may ask because uncertainty feels intolerable and repair requires engagement. The other may experience the sequence as pressure and withdraw to reduce escalation. The withdrawal increases uncertainty; the questions intensify; each person's attempt to regain control becomes evidence of danger to the other.

Relationship research calls a broader version of this the *demand–withdraw pattern*: one partner pressures for discussion or change through demands, criticism, or complaints while the other retreats through defensiveness, silence, or inaction. A meta-analysis of 74 studies representing 14,255 participants found a moderate overall association between demand–withdraw patterns and the individual, relational, and communication outcomes examined. Associations were stronger for relational and communication outcomes than for demographic or wellbeing outcomes.¹⁶

That evidence does **not** establish that asking questions is demanding or that declining to answer is withdrawal. Most of the studies were correlational, the measures varied, and “demand” included more than questions. Its contribution here is the interactional unit: the damaging object can be the loop rather than either person’s conversational identity. The meta-analysis also found similar associations regardless of which gender occupied which role, and its authors argued that interaction history, conflict topic, and goals may explain more than fixed personality differences.

The questioner’s work is therefore not simply to ask less. It is to keep inquiry distinguishable from pressure: name why the answer matters, ask one usable question, permit delay or refusal, and let correction revise the model.

The non-questioner’s work is not simply to ask more. It is to make attention legible in a form the other person can receive: reflect what changed, volunteer relevant inner experience, return later when processing is complete, or explain that silence means care rather than disappearance.

Neither style is neutral once two people depend on it. Both can expand agency. Both can narrow it. The relationship has to negotiate an interface rather than crown a winner.

The Question Is Not the Same Interface for Every Mind

Any claim about what questions “feel like” becomes unreliable if it treats neurotypical and neurodivergent people as two uniform populations.

Neurodivergent includes people with different neurodevelopmental and cognitive profiles, different combinations of disability and strength, and different histories of accommodation, stigma, masking, trauma, and support. Most of the question-specific comparative evidence located for this draft concerns autistic adults. The evidence concerning attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is smaller and answers different questions. Evidence about many other neurodivergent groups is missing.

The studies differ in whose communication they can accommodate. Many rely on brief laboratory interactions, speech, writing, or surveys. The healthcare study discussed below deliberately included varied communication modes, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), and supporters of adults unable to participate alone. That inclusion matters, but it does not make the evidence representative of nonspeaking people, people with intellectual disabilities, or every level of support need.

Still, the autism research reveals a foundational error in ordinary advice: an open question is not automatically a freeing question.

In a community-based qualitative study, Christina Nicolaidis and colleagues interviewed 39 autistic adults and 16 supporters about healthcare. Participants described slow processing, difficulties with spoken communication and body awareness, sensory demands, and the importance of written alternatives and accessible language. One concrete recommendation was to avoid questions that are so open-ended or vague that the task of selecting what counts as relevant becomes part of the burden.¹⁷

Accessible structure is not a case for closed, leading questions; those can suppress detail or install an answer. The design problem lies between two hazards: a prompt can be too constraining to preserve authorship or too unbounded to be usable.

Katie Maras and colleagues tested one solution with 33 autistic and 30 allistic adults recalling videos of criminal events. Their Witness-Aimed First Account procedure let participants generate discrete event topics and then freely recall within each self-generated boundary. It produced more detailed and accurate accounts for both autistic and allistic witnesses while remaining non-leading.¹⁸

The result complicates the simple neurotypical/neurodivergent contrast. Supportive structure benefited both groups. The difference was not that one group deserved freedom and the other required control. A better interface redistributed cognitive control toward the witness.

Communication differences also arise *between* people, not only inside one person. In a diffusion-chain experiment with 72 adults, Catherine Crompton and colleagues found that story details degraded more quickly in mixed autistic–allistic chains than in autistic-only or allistic-only chains; the mixed chains also reported lower rapport. Autistic chains did not significantly differ from allistic chains in detail retention.¹⁹ A companion paper analyzed rapport in the same 72-person interaction sample, then added 80 observers rating clips of a subset of those interactions. Mixed interactions received lower rapport ratings than matched interactions.²⁰ These are related analyses, not two independent samples of interacting adults.

These modest studies of short, structured interactions cannot establish that neurotype matching guarantees connection or that mixed-neurotype relationships are inherently poor. They support a relational interpretation: misunderstanding can be produced by a mismatch in communication styles. The burden of repair should not automatically be assigned to the autistic person.

The ADHD literature adds another dimension: prior social history can change the emotional meaning of a question. In an open-text study of 162 adults with diagnosed ADHD or high ADHD traits, participants commonly described criticism of inattention and organization, negative effects on self-worth and wellbeing, and coping through avoidance or altered responses.²¹ The study did not test questions. It cannot establish that an adult with ADHD will hear any particular prompt as criticism. It does make a narrower inference plausible: “Why haven’t you done this?” may arrive carrying a long history of being interpreted as careless, lazy, or inconsiderate.

Direct comparative evidence can also resist stereotypes. Katie Maras and Dermot Bowler found no significant autistic–nonautistic difference on a standardized interrogative-suggestibility task. Only 20 autistic and 19 comparison participants completed that task, and the study also found no significant difference on its separate self-reported compliance measure.²² Those small, selected samples do not establish equivalence or the absence of vulnerability. They do give us reason to measure suggestibility, compliance, and recall separately rather than treating neurodivergence as one generalized deficit. An autism finding does not settle the same question for ADHD.

The relational story was not only negative. In nine focus groups with 43 young adults diagnosed with ADHD, participants often described difficulty communicating with neurotypical people, masking, and being perceived as “too much.” They also described easier connection with other people with ADHD and benefits from communities that supplied shared language for experiences they had struggled to name.²³ The sample was 84 percent female, 72 percent White, highly educated, and already engaged with ADHD communities; it does not represent all adults with ADHD. It does suggest that recognition and communication fit can redistribute control just as they can in autistic interaction.

The practical comparison is therefore not:

Do neurodivergent people like questions less than neurotypical people?

It is:

What work does this question require from this person, in this form, at this speed, in this sensory and power context?

For one person, a broad invitation may feel spacious. For another, it may create an exhausting search across every possible answer. One person may need time before speech; another may think through interruption and dialogue. Written alternatives helped some participants in the autism healthcare study. Whether writing helps or burdens a particular person with ADHD remains a question to negotiate; the retained ADHD studies did not test that format comparison. A direct question may feel refreshingly clear or abruptly accusatory depending on the listener, the relationship, and the history.

The ethical response is not a diagnostic script. It is negotiated access: one question at a time when useful, concrete scope without leading, processing time, permission to answer in writing, and explicit permission to say that the question does not work.

Answers Create Their Own Demands

Seeking knowledge has a second kind of consequence. Sometimes the social risk lies not in the asking but in becoming a person who knows.

Before the answer, uncertainty can preserve options. Afterward, a person may have to decide, disclose, intervene, leave, apologize, protect someone, change a practice, or admit that continuing as before is now a choice.

This is one reason people avoid information even when it is useful and free. Russell Golman, David Hagmann, and George Loewenstein's review of the information-avoidance literature documents active avoidance across health, finance, politics, organizations, and personal life. People may avoid bad news, threats to identity, unwanted emotion, cognitive demands, or information that would interfere with a preferred action.²⁴

Knowledge is not always beneficial. A person may reasonably decline some predictive medical information, protect themselves from an overwhelming news cycle, or refuse details that are irrelevant to a decision and likely to cause harm. Avoidance can preserve hope, attention, or psychological stability. An unlimited duty to know would become its own form of domination.

But ignorance can also be instrumental.

A 2023 meta-analysis by Linh Vu and colleagues examined 33,603 decisions made by 6,531 participants across 56 experimental effects involving information about the consequences of one's choices for other people. Forty percent of participants avoided easily available information. When ignorance was available, altruistic choices fell by 15.6 percentage points compared with conditions where the information was provided.²⁵

The authors found evidence consistent with "moral wiggle room": not knowing can let a person choose self-interest without confronting the same threat to their moral self-image. The experiments represent a defined class of decisions, not all knowledge seeking, and the results were heterogeneous. Still, the mechanism matters.

Sometimes the feared "consequence of seeking knowledge" is conscience.

The answer takes away a story we were using to remain innocent. I think this offers one possible explanation for anger before a question is answered, although these studies did not test that response. The seeker is not merely requesting a fact. They may be threatening the arrangement by which everyone else has avoided responsibility.

Did we know this was happening?

Who was harmed?

What did we do after we found out?

These questions do not create the underlying harm. They can create a new inability to pretend the harm was unknowable.

When a Question Becomes Surveillance

If questions can restore agency, it is important not to romanticize the seeker.

"Where are you?" can be ordinary coordination. Repeated as a demand, paired with suspicion, checked against location data, and punished when the answer is delayed, it becomes part of something else.

Research on coercive control is careful about pattern. The Australian Institute of Family Studies' 2023 literature review describes coercive control as ongoing, repetitive, and cumulative tactics that limit autonomy and agency. Common behaviors include monitoring, surveillance, isolation, intimidation, and technology-facilitated abuse. The report explicitly warns against reducing coercive control to isolated incidents.²⁶

A psychometric study of an Experiences of Coercive Control scale found two broad components in its sample: control through aggression and "spying behaviors." The items included monitoring a partner's activities, checking a phone, and insisting on knowing a partner's whereabouts. The authors also noted an important distinction: mutual knowledge of each other's whereabouts is not the same as one partner constantly insisting on that knowledge. The study used a convenience sample in Iran, added culturally selected items, and does not define coercive control for every population.²⁷

The implication is not that asking where a partner is constitutes abuse. It is that an ordinary sentence can become one instrument in a coercive system.

The system is visible in the answers to five questions:

- Is the information reasonably connected to a shared decision or the asker's legitimate safety?
- Can the other person decline, delay, or limit the answer without retaliation?
- Is the question reciprocal, or does one person claim permanent access while remaining opaque?
- Is the answer used to understand and coordinate, or to audit, accuse, isolate, and restrict?
- Is this one inquiry, or part of a repeated pattern that erodes autonomy?

No individual answer is a diagnostic instrument. Together, they locate the moral issue where it belongs: not in the punctuation, but in the structure around it.

What "Natural" Hides

The phrase *natural consequences* is attractive because it sounds morally clean. It suggests that actions generate outcomes without anyone having to choose them.

Touch fire; get burned. Ask forbidden questions; lose your place.

But a demotion is not gravity. Ridicule is not weather. Withholding information, marking curiosity as incompetence, demanding disclosure, or punishing refusal are social actions. Calling them natural can conceal the people and institutions that maintain them.

Some consequences are intrinsic to knowledge. An answer can eliminate uncertainty. It can make a contradiction visible. It can narrow the range of beliefs a person can honestly hold. These are close to natural consequences because they follow from the informational change

itself.

Other consequences are contingent. A workplace may reward the employee who catches an error or punish the employee who interrupts a superior. A family may treat questions as interest or disobedience. A partner may receive a boundary as information or as defiance. None of those responses is dictated by the question.

Then there are consequences that are strategic: reactions designed to make future inquiry less likely. Mock the question. Attack the tone. Demand impossible proof. Reframe curiosity as accusation. Treat the questioner's uncertainty as incompetence and their certainty as arrogance. Require that they solve the problem before they are allowed to name it.

The consequence teaches the rule.

Not every negative reaction is suppression. Questions can be invasive, lazy, leading, repetitive, or cruel. A person is not obligated to admire an inquiry merely because it seeks knowledge. "I'm just asking questions" can be a way to avoid responsibility for insinuation. A demand for evidence can be fair. A refusal can be a boundary rather than a cover-up.

The distinction is not between brave askers and defensive answerers. It is between arrangements that preserve agency and arrangements that consume it.

What People Commonly Experience

The research does not provide one population-wide frequency table for the felt effects of questions. The studies define different question types, populations, and outcomes. Treating them as one survey would manufacture precision.

Across the evidence, however, a recurring impact map appears.

For the asker, questions can bring curiosity, hope, relief, competence, social risk, embarrassment, or a recovered sense of agency. They can also create responsibility. Once an answer becomes available, the asker may lose both uncertainty and deniability.

For the answerer, a question can feel like interest, recognition, permission to speak, and help organizing an experience. It can also feel like evaluation, intrusion, accusation, disbelief, or a demand to perform memory on command. Processing time, ambiguity, sensory load, previous criticism, and the safety of refusal change the balance.

For the relationship, responsive follow-up can communicate that the first answer mattered. Reciprocal depth can produce closeness. Asymmetric depth can produce exposure. Repeated checking can convert coordination into surveillance. A question that accepts "no" can strengthen trust; one that treats refusal as guilt can teach concealment.

For an institution, questions can surface local knowledge, interrupt error, and make authority answerable. They can also create a record against the questioner. If challenging information is welcomed only when it arrives in flattering language, the institution has invited performance rather than inquiry.

For knowledge itself, the question selects a frame. It can improve recall by supplying usable structure, distort recall by supplying a presupposition, and alter future behavior by making an intention or inconsistency salient. Questions do not simply reveal a preexisting world. They participate in which parts of it become reportable.

These effects are positive and negative, often at once. They are rarely neutral in the interactional sense because attention, obligation, or possibility has moved. They can remain morally ordinary when that movement is slight, proportionate, and easy to refuse.

A Better Test

The pressure a question creates does not tell us whether it is justified. We need to examine what it asks of each person and what room remains for refusal, correction, and change.

I propose six practical tests. They are an ethical framework informed by this evidence, not a validated scale.

Entitlement

What gives the asker a legitimate interest in the answer?

Curiosity is a reason to ask, not an automatic claim on another person's private information. Shared consequences strengthen the claim. Voyeurism weakens it. Institutional roles may create legitimate authority, but authority can exceed its purpose.

Refusal

Can the answerer say no?

A question directed to someone for an answer can create pressure to respond. The ethical difference often appears in what happens to refusal. A question remains closer to invitation when "I don't want to answer that" is treated as information. It becomes closer to coercion when refusal triggers punishment, repeated demands, accusation, or surveillance.

Framing

What has the question already decided?

Questions can smuggle conclusions into the record. "Why are you so difficult?" does not investigate whether the person is difficult. "What am I missing?" leaves more of the world open. Wording can carry assumptions, and some forms make those assumptions easier to challenge.

Accessibility

Can this person use the question as delivered?

An answer may depend on processing time, specificity, sensory conditions, memory retrieval, communication medium, and whether several questions have been bundled together. Accessibility does not mean making every question closed. It means offering enough structure to make the prompt usable without prescribing the answer.

Reciprocity and responsiveness

Does the exchange allow both people to be changed?

Connection grows when disclosure is met with understanding, validation, care, and follow-up that responds to what was actually said. Reciprocity need not require equal disclosure in every role—a clinician and patient have different responsibilities—but persistent one-way exposure deserves justification. A questioner seeking depth should be willing to reveal their purpose, accept correction, and revise their own understanding.

Consequence

What will the asker do with the answer?

Will they revise a belief, coordinate action, offer care, enforce a rule, distribute blame, or accumulate leverage? Knowledge seeking becomes harder to evaluate when the answer is separated from its use. A person who demands disclosure while refusing responsibility for the consequences is not merely curious.

These tests apply in both directions. They protect the answerer from compelled exposure and the asker from enforced ignorance. They recognize a right not to disclose and a right to understand conditions that materially shape one's own life.

They also reveal why the same question can change moral character across settings. Power is not a property of syntax. It is a relationship among access, dependency, accessibility, alternatives, responsiveness, and consequences.

Questions Move Control

Questions change what people can know, withhold, challenge, and do next.

They can narrow a conversational frame, make silence accountable, expose an upward challenge, become an instrument of monitoring, open a route out of dependence, support closeness, make recall more usable, or make denial harder. None of those effects decides the question's moral character by itself.

That judgment depends on who may ask, who must answer, whether refusal is safe, whether the premise can be corrected, whether the form is accessible, and what the asker will do with the answer. A defensible question preserves room for both people to author what happens next.

So I do not want to end with “ask every question.” Some answers are not ours to demand. Some uncertainty is humane. Some refusal is necessary. Some questions do damage through the premise they install or the access they presume.

I want to end with a more demanding permission:

Ask what you have reason to ask. Notice the pressure your question creates. Defend the other person's ability to refuse. Examine the frame you are offering. Make the question usable without making the answer predetermined. Let the answer alter you. Be prepared to become

responsible for what you learn.

Before asking, or deciding not to, I want to keep one question close:

What changes if I ask, and does this question invite everyone to shape what happens next?

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Appendix A: Scope, Method, and Claim Boundaries

Working research question

Is there an empirical and theoretical basis for the claim that questions are a form of control and that seeking knowledge produces consequences?

Scope

This essay examines eight overlapping literatures:

- conversation analysis and institutional questioning;
- question wording, memory, and measurement reactivity;
- control motivation, curiosity, and information seeking;
- psychological safety, employee voice, and self-censorship;
- question asking, reciprocal disclosure, responsiveness, and interpersonal closeness;
- high-quality listening and demand–withdraw conflict patterns in close relationships;
- autistic communication, neurotype matching, accessible interviewing, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) lived experience;
- information avoidance, moral consequences of knowledge, and coercive monitoring.

The review prioritizes peer-reviewed research, meta-analyses, systematic or narrative reviews, official research reports, exact digital object identifier (DOI) records, and publicly inspectable full text.

Claim boundaries

- *Question* includes information-seeking questions, confirmation requests, challenges, advice seeking, and some question-shaped assertions. These are not interchangeable.
- *Control* is separated into power-over—constraining another person's options—and power-to—the capacity to understand or act.
- *Consequences* includes interactional obligations, social evaluation, institutional response, changes in agency, and moral demands that follow from knowledge.
- *Natural consequences* is treated as a hypothesis under examination. Most penalties for asking are socially produced, not inevitable features of inquiry.
- *Rarely neutral* means rarely interactionally inert. It does not mean every question has a positive or negative moral valence.
- Workplace voice research is relevant but does not directly measure every kind of question asking.
- *Genuine questioning* is evaluated through voluntary participation, responsiveness, reciprocity, premise correction, and whether the answer can alter the asker. Sincerity alone is insufficient.
- *Neurodivergent* is not treated as a single comparative population. Autism and ADHD findings are separated, within-group variation is assumed, and missing evidence for other neurodivergent groups is recorded.
- Neurotype-matching studies concern rapport and information transfer in particular short interactions. They do not establish that matched-neurotype relationships are always better.
- Coercive-control research applies to patterns of domination. It must not be used to label an isolated, ordinary question as abuse.
- Demand-withdraw research concerns a reciprocal conflict pattern involving pressure and retreat. It does not establish that question asking is demand or that privacy, processing time, or a bounded refusal is withdrawal.
- Private conversation records are used only to recover and test first-person observations. They are selection-biased, not publicly accessible, and cannot support population claims or conclusions about another person's motives.
- Names and identifying details in personal passages are changed or omitted. The essay reports the author's behavior and experience rather than diagnosing the other people involved.

Verification labels

- **Verified:** The full source or a sufficiently complete official/public research report was directly inspected.
- **Limited Verification: Abstract Only:** The publisher's abstract and preview were inspected, but a public full text was not located.
- **Limited Verification: Publisher Preview:** A detailed publisher preview and/or institutional record was inspected, but a complete public text was not located.
- **Context Only:** A source helps define or locate the issue but does not directly establish the essay's central claim.

Appendix B: Claim Audit

Claim 1: Questions can create normative pressure to answer

Status: Supported.

Conversation-analysis scholarship describes initiating actions as making particular responses relevant and making an absent response accountable. This is social pressure, not literal compulsion.

Claim 2: Questions are inherently domination

Status: Rejected.

The same interaction literature distinguishes power-over from power-to and repeatedly shows that form alone is not decisive. Questions can support another person's goal, express care, or expand agency.

Claim 3: Control deprivation can increase information seeking

Status: Suggestive, narrow evidence.

Swann, Stephenson, and Pittman experimentally observed more diagnostic information seeking after a control-deprivation manipulation. The sample was small, demographically narrow, artificial, and old. The study supports a mechanism, not a population law.

Claim 4: People are punished for asking questions

Status: Context-dependent.

Inspected organizational research supports anticipated costs of speaking up, and the GAO report documents reprisals against some whistleblowers. These are not measured penalties for every question. Inspected question-asking experiments also find benefits in liking and perceived competence within particular settings. Neither penalty nor reward is universal; the leader-humility source remains an unverified research lead.

Claim 5: Seeking knowledge has unavoidable moral consequences

Status: Partially supported and philosophically extended.

Information-avoidance research shows that people sometimes avoid facts that could threaten preferred choices or self-image. The further claim that knowledge creates an obligation to act is normative, not established by the behavioral data alone.

Claim 6: Demanding information can become coercive control

Status: Supported at the pattern level.

Coercive-control research includes monitoring, surveillance, and insistence on access to a partner's activities or whereabouts. The evidence supports analysis of repeated patterns, retaliation, and erosion of autonomy—not diagnosis from an isolated question.

Claim 7: The consequences of asking are natural

Status: Mostly rejected.

Some informational consequences follow directly from learning: uncertainty changes, contradictions become visible, and some beliefs become harder to maintain. Social penalties and rewards are contingent responses produced by relationships and institutions.

Claim 8: Questions are rarely neutral

Status: Supported only after narrowing.

Conversation analysis supports the claim that questions alter sequential expectations. Question-behavior research finds a small average effect in a defined health-behavior literature, and eyewitness experiments show that wording can change immediate answers and later reports. These findings support “rarely interactionally inert,” not “always morally positive or negative.”

Claim 9: Genuine questions can deepen connection

Status: Supported with conditions.

Question asking, escalating reciprocal disclosure, perceived responsiveness, and deeper conversation are associated with liking, temporary closeness, intimacy, and greater-than-expected connection. The evidence does not support depth through one-way extraction. Voluntariness, reciprocity, and experienced responsiveness are central boundary conditions.

Claim 10: Neurotypical and neurodivergent people experience questions differently

Status: Plausible but too broad as stated.

Autistic adults report question-relevant communication needs, including processing time, accessible language, written options, and difficulty with vague prompts. Experimental work shows benefits from bounded non-leading recall structure and lower rapport or information

transfer in some mixed-neurotype interactions. The fully inspected ADHD studies document participants' histories of criticism and experiences in relationships and communities. The formal-questioning comparison remains preview-only and supplies no independently verified result here. There is no basis for one universal neurotypical-versus-neurodivergent effect.

Claim 11: Open questions are inherently more autonomy-preserving

Status: Rejected.

Open prompts can preserve narrative control but impose high retrieval and relevance-selection demands. Closed or leading questions can overconstrain the answer. Evidence from Witness-Aimed First Account interviews supports a third option: the answerer helps define bounded topics and retains free recall inside them.

Claim 12: Neurodivergent adults are generally more suggestible

Status: Rejected.

Maras and Bowler (2012), added to the source library in September, found no significant group difference in the measured suggestibility or compliance outcomes in a small autistic comparison study. The retained ADHD comparison remains preview-only and is not used to establish an independently verified null. Specific vulnerabilities must be measured rather than presumed; neither finding justifies a universal claim or an equivalence conclusion.

Claim 13: People who do not ask questions care less

Status: Rejected.

Question asking, particularly responsive follow-up, can communicate interest and care. High-quality listening research identifies several other possible signals, including reflection, paraphrasing, attention, nonverbal response, and behavior that demonstrates understanding. Persistent non-engagement can still be experienced as unresponsiveness, but question absence alone does not establish motive or care.

Claim 14: Demand–withdraw is a question-asking pattern

Status: Rejected.

Demand–withdraw research measures a broader reciprocal conflict pattern: pressure through demands, criticism, or complaints paired with defensiveness, silence, avoidance, or inaction. Questions may occur within the pattern, but the evidence does not classify questioners as demanders or answer refusal as withdrawal. Its relevance is interactional: each person's control-seeking response can intensify the other's.

Appendix C: Source Library

Ekström and Stevanovic (2023)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Peer-reviewed hypothesis-and-theory article synthesizing conversation-analysis research on power.

Contribution: Connects agenda control, sequential constraints, accountability for nonresponse, authority, power-over, and power-to.

Limit: The article develops theory from conversation-analysis literature; it is not an experiment estimating the frequency or size of question effects.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1196672>) and public full text (<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sociology/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1196672/pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: PDF pp. 3–5, especially Capacities to act in social interaction. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Heritage (2012)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Peer-reviewed conversation-analysis article.

Contribution: Shows how relative knowledge, rights to know, and epistemic status shape whether an utterance functions as a request, assertion, challenge, or confirmation.

Limit: The evidence is qualitative and interactional; it does not classify questions as ethical or unethical.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1080/08351813.2012.646684>) and the 29-page public author copy (<https://drive.google.com/uc?export=download&id=0ByMVBPMfrNJBnld40Ekz0Dd5ajQ>), recovered through the UCLA author index and inspected September 10, 2026. The August access failure is historical.

September 2026 inspection: pp. 4–6 on epistemic status, rights and territories; pp. 16–25 on mismatches between form and action. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Tkačuková (2010)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Peer-reviewed linguistic case study of courtroom discourse.

Contribution: Demonstrates how institutional questioners control topic, turn type, response length, and the narrative made available to an audience.

Limit: Courtroom cross-examination is a highly asymmetrical setting and cannot stand in for ordinary conversation.

Access: Public full text (<https://journals.muni.cz/discourse-and-interaction/article/download/6958/8501>).

September 2026 inspection: pp. 49–51, 54–60, especially section 7 Conclusions. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Swann, Stephenson, and Pittman (1981)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Laboratory experiment.

Sample: 61 female undergraduates at the University of Texas at Austin.

Contribution: Participants exposed to uncontrollable outcomes later selected more diagnostic social information and diagnostic questions.

Limit: Small, narrow, dated sample and artificial manipulation; the design does not establish a broad causal law about everyday questioning.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.40.4.635>) and public author copy (<https://labs.la.utexas.edu/swann/files/2016/03/ssp81.pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: pp. 637–639, Method and Results; experimental procedures and diagnosticity measures. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Detert and Edmondson (2011)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Four-study organizational research program using interviews and surveys.

Contribution: Identifies learned beliefs that make speaking up to authority feel risky or inappropriate and links them to workplace silence.

Limit: Voice includes suggestions, concerns, challenges, and other speech acts; it is not a direct measure of question asking alone. Later studies used modest samples.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.61967925>) and public full-text record (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280298144_Implicit_Voice_Theories_Taken-for-Granted_Rules_of_Self-Censorship_at_Work).

September 2026 inspection: Full author-uploaded article: Studies 1–4; Study 4 methods/results, Table 4, pp. 477–481. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Frazier et al. (2017)

Verification: Limited as of September 10, 2026; full methods/results were not inspected. Retained as a research lead, excluded from the narrative's empirical support.

Type: Meta-analysis.

Coverage: 136 independent samples, more than 22,000 individuals, and nearly 5,000 groups.

Abstract/preview report, not independently verified evidence: Establishes a broad empirical relationship between psychological safety and learning, information sharing, task performance, and related outcomes.

Limit: Most included research is correlational, measures vary, and psychological safety is broader than the safety of asking a particular question.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12183>), public full text (https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=management_fac_pubs), and institutional repository record (https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/management_fac_pubs/13/).

Citation retained as research lead: M. Lance Frazier et al., "Psychological Safety: A Meta-Analytic Review and Extension," *Personnel Psychology* 70, no. 1 (2017): 113–165, doi:10.1111/peps.12183 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12183>). Public full text (https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=management_fac_pubs) and institutional repository record (https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/management_fac_pubs/13/).

September 2026 inspection: Publisher abstract and institutional repository metadata only. Only the visible material is corroborated; historical full-text access is not presumed.

Jones et al. (2021)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Systematic narrative review of workplace speaking-up interventions in healthcare.

Coverage: 34 included studies.

Contribution: Finds recurring importance of hierarchy, interdisciplinary and cultural relationships, and psychological safety.

Limit: Most intervention findings were inconclusive; healthcare workplaces have distinctive stakes and professional structures.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthpol.2020.12.016>) and public repository record and full text (https://pure-oai.bham.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/177028090/Jones_et_al_2021_Spk_Up_interventions_Health_Policy.pdf).

September 2026 inspection: Publisher pp. 377–382: section 3, intervention synthesis, section 4.3. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Huang et al. (2017)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Three reported study settings using live dyadic conversation, experiments, and an observational speed-dating field dataset.

Contribution: More questions, particularly follow-up questions, were associated with greater liking through perceived responsiveness.

Limit: The work focuses on get-to-know-you interactions and does not test coercive, accusatory, or institutionally compelled questions.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000097>) and public author copy (https://www.mikeyeomans.info/papers/question_asking.pdf).

September 2026 inspection: Studies 1–3, especially Study 2B and Study 3; 2019 author reply pp. 1139–1142. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Methodological exchange: The observational speed-dating analysis was debated by Kluger and Malloy (2019) and Yeomans et al. (2019). The critique itself was corrected after confusing second dates offered with second dates received; the correction affected tables, a figure, and conclusions. The corrected critique, official correction, and author reply must be read together. This exchange does not retract the original paper or erase its separate experimental evidence. See the additional source records below.

Brooks, Gino, and Schweitzer (2015)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Multi-study experimental research on advice seeking.

Contribution: Advice seekers were often seen as more competent, especially for difficult tasks and when asking someone with relevant expertise.

Limit: Advice seeking is a cooperative and relatively narrow type of question. The effect can reverse when the chosen advisor is clearly not an expert.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2014.2054>) and public author copy (https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/Advice%20Seeking_59ad2c42-54d6-4b32-8517-a99eeae0a45c.pdf).

September 2026 inspection: pp. 1424–1432; Studies 1–5, especially Study 5 sections 10.2–10.3. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Reproducibility limitation: The author-completed Many Coauthors study-68 record reports gaps in original/raw or reproduction data. This limits independent reproduction; it is not a finding of fraud, invalidity, or retraction. The reported expert/nonexpert boundary was checked in the full article. See the provenance record below.

Cojuharencu and Karelaia (2020)

Verification: Limited as of September 10, 2026; full methods/results were not inspected. Retained as a research lead, excluded from the narrative's empirical support.

Type: Four experiments plus a study of management practitioners' beliefs.

Abstract/preview report, not independently verified evidence: Finds context-dependent competence penalties and more pervasive humility premiums when leaders ask genuine questions, with positive downstream effects on trust and helping.

Limit: The studies focus on leaders, scenario-based judgments, and humble information-seeking questions; strategic or manipulative questions may operate differently.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.12.001>) and public author copy (<https://www.insead.edu/sites/insead/files/assets/faculty-personal-site/natalia-karelaia/documents/Asking%20questions%20Cojuharencu%20Karelaia%20OBHDP%202020.pdf>).

Citation retained as research lead: Irina Cojuharencu and Natalia Karelaia, "When Leaders Ask Questions: Can Humility Premiums Buffer the Effects of Competence Penalties?" *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 156 (2020): 113–134, doi:10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.12.001 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2019.12.001>). Public author copy (<https://www.insead.edu/sites/insead/files/assets/faculty-personal-site/natalia-karelaia/documents/Asking%20questions%20Cojuharencu%20Karelaia%20OBHDP%202020.pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: Publisher abstract, extended preview and conclusion; author PDF identified but body retrieval failed. Only the visible material is corroborated; historical full-text access is not presumed.

Hart, VanEpps, and Schweitzer (2021)

Verification: Limited as of September 10, 2026; full methods/results were not inspected. Retained as a research lead, excluded from the narrative's empirical support.

Type: Five experiments.

Coverage: 1,427 participants.

Abstract/preview report, not independently verified evidence: Askers overestimated the discomfort and negative impressions produced by sensitive questions across several conversational settings.

Limit: Full text was not publicly located for this review. The findings do not license questioning where refusal is unsafe or privacy is being overridden.

Access: Publisher abstract and preview

(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749597820304003>) and DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2020.10.014>).

Citation retained as research lead: Einav Hart, Eric M. VanEpps, and Maurice E. Schweitzer, "The (Better Than Expected) Consequences of Asking Sensitive Questions," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 162 (2021): 136–154,

doi:10.1016/j.obhdp.2020.10.014 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2020.10.014>).

Limited verification: the publisher's detailed abstract and preview were inspected; a public full text was not located.

September 2026 inspection: Final publisher abstract/preview; an earlier 2019 four-study preprint also identified. Only the visible material is corroborated; historical full-text access is not presumed.

Golman, Hagmann, and Loewenstein (2017)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Interdisciplinary review in economics and psychology.

Contribution: Synthesizes evidence that people actively avoid available information for hedonic, identity-protective, attentional, and strategic reasons.

Limit: The review spans heterogeneous domains and mechanisms. Avoidance is not always irrational or unethical.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.20151245>) and public author copy (<https://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/sds/docs/loewenstein/InfoAvoidance.pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: pp. 96–103 defining active avoidance; pp. 110–118 on motives, identity, dissonance and moral wiggle room; pp. 123–129 on implications. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Vu et al. (2023)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Meta-analysis of a specific experimental paradigm involving willful ignorance about effects on others.

Coverage: 33,603 decisions, 6,531 participants, and 56 treatment effects.

Contribution: Estimates that 40 percent avoided available consequence information and that ignorance availability reduced altruistic choice by 15.6 percentage points compared with provided-information conditions.

Limit: The treatment effects were heterogeneous, and the paradigm does not represent all reasons for declining information.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000398>) and public author copy (<https://www.joelvanderweele.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/bul-bul0000398.pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: pp. 619–625, especially main results p. 622 and Table 4 p. 624. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Beckwith et al. (2023)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Australian government research institute literature review.

Contribution: Synthesizes coercive control as a cumulative pattern involving reduced autonomy, monitoring, surveillance, intimidation, isolation, and other tactics.

Limit: The search prioritized recent Australian domestic-and-family-violence research and supplemented gaps with international and grey literature. The report explicitly notes measurement and prevalence limitations.

Access: Public report (<https://aifs.gov.au/all-research/research-reports/coercive-control-literature-review>).

September 2026 inspection: Full AIFS report: Executive Summary/Definitions, Review methodology, tactics and technology-facilitated abuse sections. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Malekpour et al. (2023)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Cross-sectional psychometric study.

Contribution: Identifies aggression and spying/monitoring as two components in the tested coercive-control scale and helps distinguish mutual information sharing from constant insistence.

Limit: Convenience sample, female-heavy participation, one national context, and author-added items limit generalizability.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.5812/ijpbs-119016>) and public full text (<https://brieflands.com/articles/ijpbs-119016.pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: Methods, Results/Table 1 and Discussion of scale components and whereabouts. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Source consistency: The original paper contains inconsistent tabulated denominators. Its conceptual/scale contribution is retained, but those totals are not silently reconciled or used as population estimates.

Miles et al. (2020)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Updated systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized trials.

Coverage: 43 measurement-versus-no-measurement studies with about 104,000 participants. The abstract gives 104,388, while Results 3.1 gives 104,096 for that comparison set; the exact count remains unresolved.

Contribution: Finds a small average question–behavior effect for health-related outcomes, showing that measurement questions can sometimes alter the behavior they appear only to record.

Limit: The reported standardized mean difference is .06, 95% CI [.02,.09], with substantial heterogeneity and evidence of publication bias. The conflicting participant totals are preserved rather than silently reconciled. The result concerns defined health-behavior measurement contexts, not all questions.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2020.03.014>) and public full text (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7308800/>).

September 2026 inspection: PMC abstract; Results sections 3.1 and main meta-analysis; forest plot and publication-bias discussion. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Loftus and Palmer (1974)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Two laboratory experiments on question wording and eyewitness reports.

Coverage: 45 students in Experiment 1 and 150 in Experiment 2.

Contribution: Demonstrates that changing a verb in a speed question changed estimates and was associated one week later with reports of broken glass that had not appeared.

Limit: Old student samples, artificial film-viewing tasks, uncertain numerical judgments, and a narrow memory context. It does not show that questions can implant arbitrary beliefs.

Access: DOI record ([https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-5371\(74\)80011-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-5371(74)80011-3)) and public full text (<https://gwern.net/doc/psychology/cognitive-bias/1974-loftus.pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: pp. 585–587: Experiment 1/Table 1 and Experiment 2/Table 2. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Burris (2012)

Verification: Limited as of September 10, 2026; full methods/results were not inspected. Retained as a research lead, excluded from the narrative's empirical support.

Type: One field study and two experiments on challenging versus supportive employee voice.

Abstract/preview report, not independently verified evidence: Reports that managers judged challenging voicers as worse performers and endorsed their ideas less, with threat and loyalty perceptions mediating responses.

Limit: Full text was not publicly located. Employee voice is broader than questioning, and managerial judgments in workplace studies do not estimate retaliation in the general population.

Access: Publisher abstract (<https://journals.aom.org/doi/10.5465/amj.2010.0562>) and DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0562>).

Citation retained as research lead: Ethan R. Burris, "The Risks and Rewards of Speaking Up: Managerial Responses to Employee Voice," *Academy of Management Journal* 55, no. 4 (2012): 851–875, doi:10.5465/amj.2010.0562 (<https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0562>). Limited verification: the publisher's abstract and study summary were inspected; a public full text was not located.

September 2026 inspection: Publisher abstract only after author/repository searches. Only the visible material is corroborated; historical full-text access is not presumed.

Morrison (2023)

Verification: Limited as of September 10, 2026; full methods/results were not inspected. Retained as a research lead, excluded from the narrative's empirical support.

Type: Integrative review of employee voice and silence research published during the decade after a 2014 review.

Coverage: The prior source record reports 158 selected papers spanning 2014–2021, but that count and screen were not visible in the abstract and could not be confirmed from full text in September. Treat them as historical unverified extraction, not an established audit result.

Abstract/preview report, not independently verified evidence: Frames upward voice as discretionary, improvement-oriented communication that can benefit organizations while challenging higher-status actors or the status quo.

Limit: The organizational-behavior literature uses varied measures, is frequently correlational, and does not isolate grammatical questions as a speech act.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-054654>) and public full text (<https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-054654>).

Citation retained as research lead: Elizabeth Wolfe Morrison, "Employee Voice and Silence: Taking Stock a Decade Later," *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 10 (2023): 79–107, doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-054654 (<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-054654>). Public full text (<https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-054654>).

September 2026 inspection: Publisher abstract and references; full-text panel failed to load. Only the visible material is corroborated; historical full-text access is not presumed.

U.S. Government Accountability Office (2026)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Official report based on documents and testimonial information from selected federal agencies and organizations.

Contribution: Documents the public value of disclosures, employer-reprisal risk, uncertainty around nondisclosure agreements, and mechanisms used to protect or incentivize people who report potential wrongdoing.

Limit: This is a selected-agency policy report, not a prevalence survey and not research on ordinary interpersonal questioning.

Access: Public report (<https://files.gao.gov/reports/GAO-26-107650/index.html>) and report highlights (<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-107650-highlights.pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: GAO-26-107650 full report, What GAO Found; agency protection actions; stakeholder NDA issues; Scope and Methodology. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Aron et al. (1997)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Three laboratory studies developing a closeness-generating procedure.

Contribution: Study 1 found that gradual, reciprocal, personal self-disclosure produced greater temporary closeness than structured small talk. The procedure supplies a model of questions as supportive scaffolding.

Limit: College classroom samples and a temporary subjective outcome. The method was not intended to create an ongoing relationship, and later manipulations of attitude matching, expected liking, and an explicit closeness goal did not add significant effects.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167297234003>) and public full text (<https://pdf.stafforini.com/aron-1997-experimental-generation-interpersonal.pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: pp. 365–367: Study 1 method and results; General Discussion. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett, and Pietromonaco (1998)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Two event-contingent interaction-diary studies conducted across one or two weeks.

Contribution: Supports intimacy as a process involving self-disclosure, partner disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness; emotional disclosure had a stronger relationship with intimacy than factual disclosure.

Limit: Observational diary associations do not establish that asking deeper questions causes intimacy, and the samples were college students.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.5.1238>) and public author copy (<https://affective-science.org/pubs/1998/LaurenFBPL1998.pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: Studies 1 and 2 Methods/Results; disclosure and perceived responsiveness models. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Kardas, Kumar, and Epley (2022)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Multi-experiment research program comparing expected with experienced deep conversation.

Contribution: Finds that strangers' conversations were less awkward and more connecting than expected; participants especially overpredicted the relative awkwardness of deep conversation and underestimated others' care.

Limit: The studies used bounded, consented conversations and operationalized depth through personal disclosure. They do not establish safety in coercive, dependent, or high-stakes relationships.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000281>) and public author copy (<https://michaelkardas.com/assets/pdfs/Kardas%2C%20Kumar%2C%20%26%20Epley%20%282022%29%20Overly%20shallow%20Miscalibrated%20expectations%20create%20a%20barrier%20to%20deeper%20conversation.pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: Overview; Experiments 1a–7b; Experiment 5 pp. 380–384 and General Discussion. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Itzchakov, Reis, and Weinstein (2022)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Peer-reviewed integrative review and theoretical model linking high-quality listening with perceived partner responsiveness.

Contribution: Identifies follow-up questions as one of several observable listening behaviors that can communicate attention, understanding, validation, and care. The model also includes reflection, paraphrasing, nonverbal attention, and later reciprocal listening, preventing question frequency from becoming a complete measure of responsiveness.

Limit: The article synthesizes and links two research traditions; it does not experimentally compare “questioners” with “non-questioners” as stable conversational types. Some proposed pathways remain research questions.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12648>) and public author copy (https://assets-global.website-files.com/63f7b57cd262df24d969df5b/640caf9e760bf31bf577595e_Itzchakov%20Reis%20%26%20Weinstein%202021.pdf).

September 2026 inspection: Sections 2–4 on perceived responsiveness/listening behaviors; discussion and future research. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Schrodt, Witt, and Shimkowski (2014)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Meta-analysis of demand–withdraw interaction research.

Coverage: 74 studies representing 14,255 participants.

Contribution: Finds a moderate overall association between demand–withdraw behavior and the outcomes examined ($r = .360$), with larger average associations for relational ($r = .423$) and communicative ($r = .418$) outcomes. Similar overall associations appeared regardless of which gender occupied the demand or withdraw role. The review foregrounds the interaction pattern rather than assigning the problem to a fixed kind of person.

Limit: Most included relationships were heterosexual marriages, measures and outcome categories varied, most associations were reciprocal or correlational rather than causal, and some studies analyzed individuals rather than dyads. Demand includes criticism and complaints as well as pressure for discussion; it is not a synonym for asking questions.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2013.813632>) and public author-uploaded full text (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263347858_A_Meta-Analytical_Review_of_the_DemandWithdraw_Pattern_of_Interaction_and_its_Associations_with_Individual_Relational_and_Communicative_Outcomes).

September 2026 inspection: Full author-uploaded article: Methods; results/Table 3; Discussion, pp. 42–49. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Nicolaidis et al. (2015)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Community-based participatory qualitative research.

Coverage: Semi-structured interviews with 39 autistic adults and 16 supporters.

Contribution: Documents question-relevant healthcare needs including processing time, written communication, accessible language, avoidance of vague or overly open prompts, and providers' willingness to accommodate individual communication.

Limit: Healthcare is high-stakes and institutionally asymmetric. Participants were adults able to participate in an interview study, and their recommendations should not be treated as a universal autistic profile.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361315576221>) and public author manuscript (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4841263/>).

September 2026 inspection: PMC Methods/recruitment and accommodations; Tables 1–2; Results/Recommendations; Discussion limitations. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Maras et al. (2020)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Experimental mock-witness study of an accessible, non-leading interview procedure.

Coverage: 33 autistic and 30 allistic adults.

Contribution: The Witness-Aimed First Account procedure let witnesses generate bounded event topics and then recall freely within them, improving detail and accuracy in both groups.

Limit: Participants recalled videos under research conditions rather than experiencing real police pressure. Benefits to both groups do not erase possible group differences in other interview tasks.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320908986>) and public full text (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7376626/>).

September 2026 inspection: Methods/Participants and Design; Results Table 2; Discussion. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Crompton et al. (2020), information transfer

Verification: Verified.

Type: Between-groups diffusion-chain experiment.

Coverage: 72 adults allocated across autistic, allistic, and mixed-neurotype chains.

Contribution: Detail retention declined more steeply and rapport was lower in mixed chains, while autistic and allistic matched chains did not significantly differ in detail retention.

Limit: A story-retelling chain is not a full model of everyday conversation, and the sample was modest. The study supports a mismatch account in this task, not neurotype separatism.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320919286>) and public full text (<https://www.pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/149282333/1362361320919286.pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: Methods pp. 1706–1708; Tables 1–2 and Results. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Sample independence: The same interacting participants are analyzed in the companion rapport paper. No detected autistic/allistic difference is not a formal equivalence finding.

Crompton et al. (2020), rapport

Verification: Verified.

Type: Two studies of self-rated and observer-rated rapport.

Coverage: Study 1 uses the same 72 adults and interaction procedure as the information-transfer paper. Study 2 adds 80 autistic/allistic observers who rate clips of 18 of those interacting participants; it is not an independent replication of the interaction sample.

Contribution: Autistic pairs rated rapport higher than mixed pairs, and both autistic and allistic observers rated mixed interactions lower than matched interactions.

Limit: Allistic pairs reported the highest self-rated rapport, interactions were brief and semi-structured, and matching does not determine the quality of any individual relationship.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.586171>) and public full text (<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.586171/pdf>).

September 2026 inspection: Study 1 Participants/Materials pp. 3–5; Study 2 pp. 6–8; Tables 1–3. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Beaton, Sirois, and Milne (2022)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Qualitative thematic analysis of open-text responses.

Coverage: 162 adults: 96 self-reporting an ADHD diagnosis and 66 with high ADHD traits on a screening measure.

Contribution: Participants reported recurring criticism of inattention, organization, and impulsive social behavior, with perceived effects on self-worth and wellbeing.

Limit: Self-selected online sample, many participants identified through traits rather than a verified diagnosis, no non-ADHD comparison group, and no direct experiment on question framing.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263366>) and public full text (<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0263366>).

September 2026 inspection: Methods/Participants, Procedure and Analysis; Results themes; Discussion limitations. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Gudjonsson, Young, and Bramham (2007)

Verification: Limited as of September 10, 2026; full methods/results were not inspected. Retained as a research lead, excluded from the narrative's empirical support.

Type: Comparative study using a standardized measure of interrogative suggestibility.

Coverage: 36 adults diagnosed with ADHD and 36 general-population controls.

Abstract/preview report, not independently verified evidence: Reports no significant group difference in yielding to misleading questions or shifting answers after negative feedback. The ADHD group showed lower recall and more "don't know" responses.

Limit: Small sample, formal experimental questioning, dated diagnostic context, and incomplete public access. It cannot settle how adults with ADHD experience ordinary questions.

Access: Publisher preview (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S019188690700044X>), institutional record (<https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/interrogative-suggestibility-in-adults-diagnosed-with-attention-d/>), and DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.j.paid.2007.01.014>).

Citation retained as research lead: Gísli H. Gudjonsson, Susan Young, and Jessica Bramham, "Interrogative Suggestibility in Adults Diagnosed with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): A Potential Vulnerability During Police Questioning," *Personality and Individual Differences* 43, no. 4 (2007): 737–745, doi:10.1016/j.j.paid.2007.01.014 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.j.paid.2007.01.014>). Limited verification: the publisher's detailed preview and an institutional record were inspected; a public full text was not located.

September 2026 inspection: Publisher detailed preview and King's College institutional record. Only the visible material is corroborated; historical full-text access is not presumed.

Ginapp et al. (2023)

Verification: Verified.

Type: Nine semi-structured online focus groups using interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Coverage: 43 adults aged 18–35 reported clinical ADHD diagnosis and met the screening threshold. For 27, the researchers obtained provider/diagnostic documentation or used stimulant-prescription monitoring records as a diagnostic proxy; this does not mean 27 independently verified diagnoses through one uniform method.

Contribution: Participants described feeling different from neurotypical people, masking, communication difficulty, being perceived as “too much,” easier connection with some ADHD peers, and benefits and risks of ADHD online communities.

Limit: Self-selected, 84 percent female, 72 percent White, highly educated, predominantly North American, and mostly recruited from online ADHD communities. The study does not directly compare observed conversations by neurotype.

Access: DOI record (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmqr.2023.100223>) and public full text (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10399076/>).

September 2026 inspection: Methods sections 2.1–2.2; demographic table; Results relationship and community themes. Relevant full-source body inspected; no raw-data replication claimed.

Maras and Bowler (2012), suggestibility and compliance

Verification: Relevant full accepted manuscript inspected September 10, 2026: Methods 2.1–2.2, Results, Discussion, and Table 2.

Citation: Katie L. Maras and Dermot M. Bowler, “Brief Report: Suggestibility, Compliance and Psychological Traits in High-Functioning Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder,” *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders* 6, no.3 (2012): 1168–1175.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2012.03.013>.

Coverage: 32 autistic and 30 nonautistic adults participated overall. Instrument-specific samples were smaller: interrogative-suggestibility task, 20 autistic/19 comparison; self-reported compliance, 28/26. Recruitment and analysis totals are distinct.

Contribution: No significant group differences in yielding, answer shifting, total suggestibility, recall, or self-reported compliance were detected. These are separate outcomes. The study supplies the previously missing direct autism comparison, rather than relying on an eyewitness-recall-format study to answer a suggestibility question.

Limit: Small, selected adult sample; outcome-specific participation and self-report limits. Nonsignificance does not establish equivalence, remove individual vulnerabilities, or generalize to all autistic people, intellectual disabilities, or ADHD. Confidence: medium for the bounded reported result.

Access: Public accepted manuscript

(<https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/4729/1/Brief%20report%20-%20suggestibility.pdf>) and repository record
(<https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/4729/>).

Huang methodological exchange — additional source records

Critique: Avraham N. Kluger and Thomas E. Malloy, “Question-Asking as a Dyadic Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 117, no.6 (2019): 1127–1138, doi:10.1037/pspi0000156 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000156>), public manuscript (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326368599_Question_asking_as_a_dyadic_behavior). Inspected September 10, 2026. Role: methodological counterargument concerning the observational speed-dating analysis. It does not test the conversational experiments. The linked manuscript may predate the correction and must be read with the official notice; a separately corrected full manuscript was not verified here.

Official correction: Correction to Kluger and Malloy, doi:10.1037/pspi0000355 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000355>), *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 119, no.6 (2020): 1477, inspected in full September 10, 2026 in the final page of this public journal PDF (https://www.researchgate.net/journal/Journal-of-Personality-and-Social-Psychology-1939-1315/publication/336078619_The_Link_Between_Self-Esteem_and_Social_Relationships_A_Meta-Analysis_of_Longitudinal_Studies/links/6501c1f49763a22fa3df6b07/The-Link-Between-Self-Esteem-and-Social-Relationships-A-Meta-Analysis-of-Longitudinal-Studies.pdf). The notice identifies the offered-versus-received date outcome error and affected results. It corrects the critique, not Huang et al.; an uncorrected reanalysis is not reliable evidence of refutation.

Author reply: Michael Yeomans, Alison Wood Brooks, Karen Huang, Julia Minson, and Francesca Gino, “It Helps to Ask: The Cumulative Benefits of Asking Follow-Up Questions,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 117, no.6 (2019): 1139–1144, doi:10.1037/pspi0000220 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000220>), public full text (<https://www.mikeyeomans.info/papers/cumulative.pdf>). Full six-page reply inspected September 10, 2026. Role: response to the reanalysis, preserving experimental and observational distinctions. It is the original authors' argument, not an independent replication.

Assessment: The dispute and correction qualify the speed-dating inference. The essay retains bounded experimental liking findings, does not claim retraction, and does not independently reproduce the dyadic analyses. Confidence is high in the existence and stated scope of the exchange; resolving all model-dependent conclusions would require reanalysis.

Author-reported data provenance — additional source records

Brooks study record: Many Coauthors, study 68 (<https://manycoauthors.org/gino/68>), author-completed data-provenance report, inspected September 10, 2026. Brooks and Schweitzer report gaps in original/raw or reproduction data. Role: reproducibility limitation; this is neither an independent replication nor a misconduct adjudication.

Huang study record: Many Coauthors, study 45 (<https://manycoauthors.org/gino/45>), author-completed data-provenance report, inspected September 10, 2026. The record states that Gino did not collect the data. This separate record prevents transferring conclusions from a coauthor's other studies by association. Role: provenance context, not proof that every result is correct.

Appendix D: Counterevidence and Pruned Claims

Pruned: Questions are inherently coercive

This collapsed sequence pressure, care, learning, advice seeking, accountability, and surveillance into one moral category. The draft now argues that questions redistribute control and evaluates the surrounding conditions.

Pruned: Seeking knowledge naturally leads to punishment

The organizational literature supports real and anticipated penalties in some hierarchies. Inspected experiments also find that question asking can increase liking or competence judgments in specific settings. The leader-humility and sensitive-question studies are retained as limited-access research leads, not independently verified narrative evidence. "Natural" now identifies an open problem rather than a settled mechanism.

Pruned: Silence proves concealment

Nonresponse can reflect privacy, uncertainty, fear, fatigue, resistance to a false premise, or a healthy boundary. A question makes silence socially noticeable; it does not make one interpretation true.

Pruned: Knowledge always increases agency

Information can widen action, but it can also overwhelm, expose, constrain, or become another person's instrument of control. The information-avoidance literature includes rational and protective reasons not to know.

Pruned: Refusal to answer is evidence of guilt

This is unsupported and incompatible with the essay's distinction between legitimate inquiry and compelled disclosure.

Pruned: Questions are never neutral

The evidence supports sequence effects, framing, salience, and small average behavioral effects in some domains. It does not support assigning every question a positive or negative moral valence. The draft now distinguishes “rarely inert” from “never morally neutral.”

Pruned: Open questions always maximize agency

Very open prompts can preserve narrative freedom while creating high retrieval and relevance-selection demands. Bounded, answerer-directed structure can improve access without becoming leading.

Pruned: Neurodivergent communication is deficient communication

Matched-neurotype studies show effective autistic peer-to-peer information transfer and higher rapport than in mixed interactions. The draft treats at least some difficulty as relational mismatch rather than locating the entire failure in one person.

Pruned: Neurodivergent adults are generally more vulnerable to suggestion

The fully inspected Maras and Bowler autism comparison found no significant group difference in its measured suggestibility outcomes. It does not establish equivalence or generalize to all autistic adults. The ADHD comparison remains a disclosed research lead pending full text. Suggestibility, compliance, recall, processing, and response style remain distinct.

Counterevidence retained in the narrative

- follow-up questions can increase liking;
- advice seeking can increase perceived competence;
- deep conversations can feel less awkward and more connecting than participants predict;
- structured, reciprocal disclosure can generate temporary closeness;
- supportive question structure can improve recall for both autistic and allistic adults;
- no significant detail-retention difference was detected between autistic and allistic matched chains; this was not a formal equivalence test;
- some adults with ADHD report easier connection and recognition with ADHD peers;
- a small inspected autism comparison did not detect increased interrogative suggestibility; the ADHD source remains limited and does not establish a verified cross-diagnostic conclusion;
- high-quality listening can communicate responsiveness through questions, reflections, paraphrasing, attention, and other behaviors;

- demand–withdraw evidence locates harm in a reciprocal pressure-and-retreat pattern rather than in one gender or a fixed conversational identity;
- not all information avoidance is irrational, selfish, or harmful.

Appendix E: Resolution Record

Resolved for the base draft

- The thesis has been narrowed from “questions are control” to “questions move control.”
- “Rarely neutral” has been narrowed to “rarely interactionally inert,” with moral valence evaluated separately.
- The subtitle is retained as the proposition the essay tests rather than a conclusion it assumes; the opening and ending make clear that many consequences presented as natural are socially chosen.
- Repeated summaries and evidence disclaimers were consolidated or rewritten when they did not add pressure, precision, or a new boundary; deliberate recurrence of the central claim remains.
- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is introduced before abbreviation in both the primary narrative and the independently readable scope appendix, then abbreviated consistently.
- Power-over and power-to are separated.
- Social consequences are distinguished from consequences intrinsic to learning.
- Question effects are mapped across asker, answerer, relationship, institution, and knowledge.
- Questioning authority is distinguished from being questioned by authority.
- Genuine connection is modeled as voluntary reciprocal disclosure plus experienced responsiveness, not question quantity alone.
- Autism and ADHD evidence is separated; neurodivergence is not treated as one population trait.
- Accessibility and reciprocity/responsiveness have been added to the final evaluative test.
- Direct evidence, adjacent evidence, and normative inference are labeled separately.
- Counterevidence appears in the main narrative rather than only in supporting material.
- Coercive-control evidence is limited to patterns, retaliation, surveillance, and loss of autonomy.

- Documented personal scenes now test both sides of the thesis: inquiry as an attempt to understand, and certainty as a way of taking away another person's authority to correct the model.
- Asking and non-asking are no longer treated as moral personality types; perceived responsiveness and conflict loops provide the stronger unit of analysis.

Reviewed, non-blocking extensions

- Whether a later draft should more fully distinguish asking another person from asking a system, archive, institution, or oneself.
- Whether the moral-obligation section needs a dedicated philosophy source in addition to behavioral information-avoidance research.
- Whether experiences specific to dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome, intellectual disability, traumatic brain injury, and other neurodivergent groups can be supported with question-specific research rather than generalized accommodation guidance.
- Whether the six-part test—entitlement, refusal, framing, accessibility, reciprocity/responsiveness, and consequence—should become the essay's final organizing structure.

Appendix F: Historical Publication Review — August 2026

The statements below record the August review and release. They are preserved as history, not current verification or authorization. September corrections and access findings supersede them where they conflict; the current narrative requires a new exact-hash authorization.

Publication Review Report

- **Draft:** Questions Are Control
- **Review date:** August 3, 2026
- **Final status:** Publish.
- **Release state at that review:** Published on the canonical Dicatania site on August 4, 2026; that historical narrative was bound to the listed hash.

Source audit

- **Complete:** Yes.
- **Inventory:** Twenty-nine sources directly inspected; three sources retained with limited verification.
- **Issues:** No unsupported central claim was identified. The limited-access sources remain explicitly labeled and do not carry the argument alone.

Citation verification

- **Exact URLs or stable identifiers present:** Yes.
- **Public accessibility checked:** Yes, August 3, 2026.
- **Direct source inspection confirmed:** Yes.
- **Issues:** The stale Frazier full-text link was replaced with the current institutional full text. Heritage's stable DOI remains, but its previously public author copy is no longer available; that access limitation is disclosed in the note and source record.

Claim traceability

- **Complete:** Yes.
- **Unsupported claims:** None identified. First-person observations remain labeled as private, selection-biased, and nongeneralizable.

Contradictions and uncertainty

- **Contradictory evidence covered:** Yes.
- **Unresolved uncertainty disclosed:** Yes.
- **Confidence impact:** The essay rejects the strongest thesis, limits "rarely neutral" to interactional force, separates autism and ADHD evidence, and records missing evidence for other neurodivergent groups.

Readability

- **Audience fit:** General readers comfortable with a long evidence-led personal essay.
- **Terms to define:** None outstanding; specialized concepts are defined when introduced.
- **Repetition pass:** Approved through author override after pruning repeated source-access disclosures from the narrative.
- **Acronym pass:** Complete; unfamiliar acronyms are introduced before abbreviation and used consistently afterward.
- **Academic fog to remove:** None that warrants changing the candidate narrative.
- **Primary narrative readable without appendices:** Yes.
- **Supporting materials independently verify significant claims:** Yes.
- **Chicago Notes and Bibliography ready:** Yes.

Voice authorization

- **Voice profile:** v2, approved.
- **Primary narrative SHA-256:**
sha256:28c3e1903cd642133856432383256c7b11c1754d04ab87d0c5649e4174be784f.
- **Review record:** content/editorial/voice-reviews/questions-are-control.md.
The superseded v1 record is preserved at content/editorial/voice-reviews/archive/questions-are-control-v1.md.

- **Authorization basis:** Author override following explicit acceptance and lock of the final candidate; independent editorial review is not claimed.
- **Authorization matched the August narrative:** Yes; it does not authorize the revised September narrative.
- **Detector scores used:** No.
- **Issues:** None.

Release assets and controls

- **Cover:** Approved and linked in front matter (cover-v2.png).
- **Social card:** Approved, linked in front matter (social-card-v2.png), and matched to the cover at 1200 × 630 pixels.
- **Personal narrative:** Names and identifying details remain omitted; private records support first-person reflection only.
- **Audio:** The existing Ava system-voice narration is not approved for publication and has been removed from deployable paths. A public audiobook requires a separately licensed voice and documented commercial rights.

Required changes

- **Primary narrative or evidence:** None.
- **Release completed:** On August 4, 2026, draft was changed to false and status to published without altering the hash-bound primary narrative. The final strict build and canonical deployment completed the release.
- **If the primary narrative changes:** Compute a new hash and repeat independent voice review before release.

September 10, 2026 Correction and Verification Addendum

Corrected the reversed social-risk synthesis, qualified universal and speculative mechanisms, distinguished bounded experiments from coercive disclosure, acknowledged the inclusive healthcare sample, and identified the Crompton papers' shared participants. Ginapp's diagnostic-documentation and prescription-proxy routes are now distinguished. Miles' inconsistent participant totals remain explicit, with the published effect and confidence interval retained.

Of the original 32 source records, 26 received full relevant-source inspection in this audit. Six remain limited: Frazier; Cojuharencu and Karelaia; Hart; Burris; Morrison; and Gudjonsson, Young, and Bramham. They remain in the library as disclosed research leads, with their citation metadata preserved, and no longer supply the narrative's empirical claims. This is a verification limitation, not evidence that those papers are false.

Added one fully inspected autism comparison, the three records in the Huang critique/correction/reply exchange, and two author-completed provenance records. The new autism evidence does not generalize to ADHD. The methodological exchange does not erase

the original experimental findings; data availability gaps do not establish misconduct or invalidity.

The dated September record supersedes the historical August readiness statements. Personal observations remain private and nongeneralizable; the six practical tests remain an ethical proposal rather than a validated instrument. Original participant-level analyses and meta-analyses were not reproduced, and targeted correction/retraction checks are not exhaustive clearance.

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