

Running head: SEX OFFENDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE INTERVIEWING

How do sex offenders think the police should interview to elicit confessions from sex offenders?

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore sex offenders' perceptions of how the police should interview suspected sex offenders to facilitate confessions, and to investigate whether there is a relationship between sex offenders' perceptions of how the police interviewed them and their decisions to confess or deny. Forty-three convicted sex offenders were interviewed using two 35-item questionnaires that contained five questions on each of seven interviewing strategies. An additional 20 violent offenders were included for comparison purposes. The strategies were evidence presenting strategies, ethical interviewing, displays of humanity, displays of dominance, use of minimization and maximization techniques, and demonstrating an understanding of sex offenders' cognitive distortions. One questionnaire concerned how the police should interview sex offenders and the other concerned how they perceived the police who interviewed them. Generally speaking, evidence presenting strategies, ethical interviewing, and displays of humanity were perceived to increase the likelihood of a confession. Interviewer dominance was perceived to be associated with a reduction in the likelihood of a confession.

Sex offences are difficult to prove because prosecutions typically rely on the victim's word against that of the offender and, unlike many other offences, sex offences most often occur within personal settings with few corroborating witnesses (Greenfield, 1997). Consequently, confession evidence can prove invaluable because the likelihood of securing a conviction is greatly increased (Kassin & Neumann, 1997; but see also Gudjonsson, 2003, for a discussion of the problems associated with false confessions). Further, confessions reduce the likelihood of the victim having to give evidence in court, thereby countering the potentially negative impact on the victim of testifying (Epstein, Saunders, & Kilpatrick, 1997; Mackey et al., 1992).

A critical feature in choosing to confess or deny for all offenders is often the strength or paucity of the evidence. For example, Gudjonsson and Petursson (1991) surveyed 74 Icelandic prisoners who had confessed to the police. Whilst offenders typically reported confessing for a number of reasons, the most frequent appeared to be because they thought the police could eventually prove what they had done (see also, Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 1999; 2000). A field study conducted by Moston, Stephenson, and Williamson (1992) in England provides additional support for the importance of evidence. They investigated confession rates for 1067 suspects who had been interviewed by detectives, the majority of cases concerned non-sexual offences. The results showed that when the researchers rated the evidence against the suspect as weak, confessions occurred less than 10% of the time, and denials occurred 77% of the time. When the evidence was rated as strong, confessions were frequent (occurring in 67% of cases), while denials were infrequent (occurring in 16% of cases).

However, if strong evidence indicating the culpability of a suspect is not available then officers must rely more on suspects' accounts. In these cases, what has been termed an "ethical" approach has been suggested (Milne & Bull, 1999). This can be conceptualized as an open-minded approach to determining the 'truth' - because the interviewer cannot be sure of the suspect's guilt - and is likely to be particularly relevant for sex crimes for the evidential reasons mentioned previously. Clearly, not all people who are suspected of committing sex offences are guilty. For example, some victims identify the wrong person as an offender (Connors, Lundregan, Miller, & McEwan, 1996) and, although specific figures are difficult to come by, it is also clear that some individuals make malicious allegations (see for example, Oates, et al., 2000). Importantly, Kassin, Goldstein, and Savitsky (2003) demonstrated that mock-interrogators were significantly more likely to see suspects in incriminating terms if it had been suggested to them that a mock-suspect was guilty. The interrogators' behavior then made the suspects behave in what seemed to be a guilty manner by independent observers. Consequently, interviewing with a more open-minded, ethical approach may be particularly helpful for innocent suspects (for a discussion of open-minded approaches see Kassin, Meissner, & Norwick, 2005).

Research suggests that other factors may also influence an offenders' decision to admit or deny their offences (Gudjonsson, 2003; Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004; Leo, 1996). Of importance in choosing to confess might be displays of humanity, minimization and maximization; whilst the choice to deny appears to be influenced by a dominant approach. In addition, because sex offenders often engage in cognitive distortions about their offences, for example, arguing that the victim was

responsible for seducing them (Swaffer, Hollin, Beech, Beckett, & Fisher, 1999; Ward, Hudson, Johnston, & Marshall, 1997), these factors may influence the choice of strategy to be adopted by the interviewer. We now focus our attention on humanity, minimization, maximization, and cognitive distortions in turn.

The importance of a humane interviewing approach has been highlighted by Holmberg and Christianson (2002) in their survey of 83 men convicted of murder or sex offences. They asked each participant to rate how the police officer interviewed them across a number of items, for example, one item asked the participant to rate the extent the “interviewer expressed a positive attitude towards you as a human being” (p.35). They found that friendliness, feeling acknowledged and respected by the interviewer and perceiving cooperation, were significantly, positively, associated with the likelihood of a confession. This combination of features they termed ‘humanity’. Conversely, aggression, hostility, and insulting and condemning behavior, which they labeled ‘dominance’, significantly reduced the likelihood of a confession. This reinforces the previously identified experience-based benefits of a more humane approach (Williamson, 1993; Moston & Engelberg, 1993).

Minimization occurs when the interviewer minimizes the consequence of the crime and of confessing. For example, stating that the suspect probably “didn’t mean” for an attack to be quite so violent gives the suspect a psychological way of reducing the seriousness of the offence. In what is, to our knowledge, the only experimental study to assess the effectiveness of minimization, Russano, Meissner, Narchet, and Kassin (2005) used a confederate to ask participants to help “cheat” in an experimental task. Most did so and were later accused of cheating by the experimenter. In condition one, labeled the

“minimization” condition, the interrogator was instructed to say that what happened “I’m sure you didn’t realize what a big deal it was” (p. 483). In the minimization condition 81% of participants confessed compared with 46% in the condition where no tactics were used. Similarly, Leo’s (1996) evaluation of 182 police interviews suggested that minimization was effective in 81% of cases although maximization was rarely used. Maximization occurs when the consequences of the crime and of not confessing are emphasized (Kassin & McNall, 1991; Inbau, Reid, Buckley, & Jayne, 2001). An example might include, “you will feel worse if you don’t confess”. To our knowledge the effectiveness of maximization has not been tested.

Some sex offenders engage in cognitive distortions that appear to perpetuate a cycle of offending (Swaffer et al., 1999; Ward, Hudson, Johnston, & Marshall, 1997). This is particularly marked in offences against children, where offenders show more agreement with statements such as, ‘Having sex with a child is a good way for an adult to teach the child about sex’, ‘a child who doesn’t physically resist an adult’s sexual advances, really wants to have sex with the adult’, and ‘when a young child walks in front of me with no or only a few clothes on, she is trying to arouse me’ (Abel et al., 1989; Bumby, 1996). Importantly though, while sex offenders may have distorted ways of thinking about their offending that justify or minimize the severity of their offences, they are nevertheless usually aware that most members of the community do not share these views and hold negative attitudes about sex offenders (Beech, Oliver, Fisher & Beckett, 2005; Bumby, 1996). Consequently, displaying an understanding of cognitive distortions might facilitate confessions by demonstrating understanding of the suspected

sex offender, and if done in a non-aggressive manner may indicate to the sex offender that the interviewer will not become aggressive if the offender confesses.

To date, there has been no systematic research with sex offenders concerning how they think the police should interview suspected sex offenders to maximize the likelihood of a guilty offender confessing. Potentially this is a useful approach because this methodology removes some inherent confounds associated with many field and survey approaches, and some of the ethical limitations of laboratory work. For example, in the Holmberg and Christianson (2002) study interviewers might have displayed more humanity towards offenders who were confessing and humanity might have been an effect rather than a cause. Similarly, Leo's (1996) fieldwork, whilst important, is difficult to interpret because many of the documented interview techniques co-varied and were confounded potentially with interview length. Whilst laboratory simulations are high in control and allow causality to be inferred, it would be clearly unethical to try to model being accused of committing serious sex crimes in an ecological manner.

For these reasons we devised questionnaires concerning sex offenders' experiences of being interviewed by the police and how they believed an ideal interview should be conducted to elicit a confession from a guilty offender. Based on the extant literature we hypothesized that evidence presenting strategies, ethical interviewing, humanity, minimization, maximization, and demonstrating an understanding of sex offenders' cognitive distortions would be associated with increases in the perceived likelihood of a guilty suspected sex offender confessing. We hypothesized that dominance would be associated with reduced perceived likelihood of a guilty suspected sex offender confessing. Of course, these strategies may not only be endorsed by sex

offenders, so a comparison group of violent offenders was included to see whether sex offenders' perceptions of an ideal interview corresponded with those of violent offenders. Finally, we hypothesized that in their own interviews sex offenders who perceived the police to have used more evidence presenting strategies, more ethical interviewing, humanity, minimization, maximization, and displays of an understanding of sex offenders' cognitive distortions, as well as lower levels of dominance, were more likely to have confessed.

## Method

### *Participants*

Forty-four convicted sex offenders and 20 violent offenders in two Australian State Correctional Centres were contacted by letter or in person and agreed to participate in the study. Due to safety concerns one man was excluded from the research, and so the final sample consisted of 43 sex offenders and 20 violent offenders. Mean participant age was 45.54 years ( $SD=12.62$ ), with a range of 23 to 79. The specific sexual offence for which test group participants had been convicted varied widely from 'Indecent dealings with a child under 16 years' to 'Sodomy' and 'Rape' of adult women. Of the sex offenders, seventeen had been convicted of offences against adult women and 26 had been convicted of offences against children. The offences for which violent offenders had been convicted were 'serious' resulting in a sentence of at least five years imprisonment and included the seven instances of murder, one case of manslaughter, and the remainder were serious assaults. The mean time between interview and completing the survey was 3.33 years ( $SD=2.32$ ).

*Materials*

Research packages included a basic sheet concerning whether participants confessed or denied to the police, and two related questionnaires concerning participants' perceptions of their own interview and an ideal interview.

*Questionnaires.* Two related 35-item questionnaires were developed. The first concerned participants' perceptions of how their 'own police interview' was conducted by the interviewing officer for their most recent sex offence. The second concerned how participants believed an 'ideal' police interview should be conducted by the police to elicit a confession from a guilty offender. The interviewing strategies under examination were, 'strength of evidence', 'ethical interviewing', 'humanity', 'dominance', 'minimization', 'maximization', and, 'cognitive distortions'. Five statements were given in each of the seven categories, and were randomly distributed through the questionnaire. Participants were required to rate each statement on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree. The full questionnaire is shown in Appendix A.

Statements concerning evidence-presenting strategies were influenced by the concept of perception of proof used by Gudjonsson and Sigurdsson (1999). For example, for their own interview a statement was, 'My police interviewer emphasized the strength of the evidence against me' and for the ideal interview, 'A police interviewer should emphasize the strength of the evidence against the suspect'. Ethical interviewing statements concerned basic principles of ethicality, including, for example, allowing time for the suspect to comment and being interested in seeking the truth (Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Milne & Bull, 1999). For example, a statement for their own

interview was, 'My police interviewer gave me time to comment', and for the ideal interview, 'A police interviewer should give a suspect time to comment'. Humanity and dominance were based on the measures used by Holmberg and Christianson (2002). The five statements from their questionnaire with the highest loading onto the respective factors were chosen. For example, the statement, 'My police interviewer showed a positive attitude towards me', was adapted from their item "Interviewer expressed positive attitude to subject" (p.39). The ideal interview version was, 'A police interviewer should show a positive attitude towards a suspect.' For dominance, an example of a statement concerning their own interview is, 'My police interviewer was aggressive towards me', and for the ideal interview, 'A police interviewer should be aggressive towards the suspect'.

Items concerning minimization and maximization were derived from the training manual of Inbau, et al. (2001), and were designed to be consistent with the definitions of minimization and maximization provided in the paper by Kassin and McNall (1991) but were also constructed so that they had a reasonable likelihood of a confession still being legally admissible if a confession were elicited in this manner. That is to say extreme minimizations were not used, for example, 'she was asking for it going out dressed like that' (Gudjonsson, 2003). An example of a statement concerning their own interview was, 'My police interviewer said that although the crime was wrong, other people have done worse than me', and for the ideal interview, 'A police interviewer should say that although the crime was wrong, other people have done worse than the suspect'.

Statements concerning cognitive distortions were developed from items on the Bumby Cognitive Distortions Scale (Bumby, 1996) and again were adapted to be

applicable to a variety of crimes and to be potentially legal. An example for their own interview is, 'My police interviewer pointed out that I may have believed that if the victim did not want the sexual offence to occur, they could have done more to prevent it', and for the ideal interview equivalent, 'A police interviewer should point out that the suspect may have believed that if the victim did not want the sexual offence to occur, they could have done more to prevent it'. These statements were modified for the questionnaires of the violent offenders by removing the reference to sex, an example of this is, 'A police interviewer should point out that the suspect may have believed that if the victim did not want the offence to occur, they could have done more to prevent it'.

Alphas for the question categories were as follows: strength of evidence .73; ethical interviewing .56; humanity .69; dominance .61; minimization, .62; maximization .73; cognitive distortions .68. Although some of these were lower than one might wish, we felt that because of the validity demonstrated by some of the question categories, or analogous versions, elsewhere (e.g., Brumby, 1996; Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 1999; Holmberg & Christianson, 2002), and for the purpose of this preliminary research these values were adequate (see George & Mallery, 2003 and the discussion section).

### *Procedure*

Participants were tested individually in private interviewing rooms. At the start, a clear statement was provided to the participants assuring them that the interviewers were not employees of Corrective Services or the Police, and that participation or non-participation would not influence their treatment whilst in the Correctional Center. Participants undertook the tasks using written materials. Because of potential problems

with literacy, participants were given the option of reading and responding to the materials themselves or having materials read to them and responding orally. Six participants decided to respond in the latter manner. Regardless of mode of participation, the instructions for each section of the questionnaire were read aloud to ensure consistency, and understanding. Order of presentation was randomized to control for order effects. Therefore half of the participants received the 'ideal police interview' questionnaire first, and the 'own police interview' last, whilst for the remainder, this order was reversed. A short vignette filler task separated the two questionnaires. For the ideal police interview, participants were read the following instructions,

The following questions refer to how you believe a police officer should act in an interview with a suspected sexual offender, in order to make them *more likely to confess*. (words in italics were emphasized by the researcher)

For the own police interview questionnaire the following instructions were given,

The following questions refer to your most recent offence and your interview with police prior to your first appearance in court. This is the interview in which police questioned you about your offence/s.

We did not have direct information concerning the interviewing officers' training. However, all officers would have received some training in interviewing as a probationary constable. The specific training varies from year to year but would as a minimum include lectures, examinations concerning legal procedure and monitoring and mentoring of field interviews. Some of the officers had much more training, particularly those working in sex crimes that had been trained in interviewing children.

## Results

*Offenders' perceptions of how the police should interview to elicit a confession.*

Sex offenders' own ratings of their experience of being interviewed by police officers and their perceptions of how an ideal police interview should be conducted were analyzed with a repeated-measures 2 X 7 ANOVA (own interview / ideal interview X evidence/ ethical / humanity / dominance / minimization / maximization / cognitive distortions). No comparisons were made with violent offenders for actual interviews because the high levels of evidence typically available against violent offenders (see Santtila & Pakkanen, 2007) compared with the low levels of evidence present in sex offences means that the critical factor of evidence would act as an unavoidable confound.

A significant main effect was found between sex offenders' perception of how they were interviewed and how they felt the police should interview to facilitate a confession,  $F(1, 222) = 230.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = .86$ , and a significant main effect was also found for the different question strategies,  $F(6,222) = 20.20, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35$ . The interaction was also significant,  $F(6,222) = 38.72, p < .05, \eta^2 = .45$ . These means and standard deviations are displayed in Table 1.

As the main focus of the research was to look at how offenders' perceived an ideal interview should be conducted, and for practical reasons the difference between how offenders perceived they were interviewed and how they believe an ideal interview should be conducted is of importance, we chose to conduct particular follow-up tests. Specifically, we were interested in whether participants' perceptions of their interview differed from how they believed an interview should be conducted for each of the seven strategies. These results were explored with a series of within-participants  $F$ -tests with a

Bonferroni correction comparing the average score for each technique meaning a significance of  $p < .007$  was required.

Participants rated an officer in an ideal interview as using significantly more evidence presenting strategies ( $M=4.01$ ,  $SD=0.57$ ) than they believed were used in their own interview ( $M=2.51$ ,  $SD=0.84$ ) and similarly, they rated an ideal interview as having a significantly more ethical approach ( $M=4.39$ ,  $SD=0.41$ ) than in their own interview ( $M=2.77$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ). Participants rated an officer in an ideal interview as displaying significantly more humanity ( $M=3.69$ ,  $SD=0.48$ ) than in their own interview ( $M=2.49$ ,  $SD=0.94$ ) but they rated an officer in an ideal interview as displaying significantly less dominance in an ideal interview ( $M=1.90$ ,  $SD=0.45$ ) than in their own interview ( $M=3.25$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ). Participants also rated an officer in an ideal interview as displaying a significantly greater number of cognitive distortion strategies ( $M=2.86$ ,  $SD=0.63$ ) than in their own interview ( $M=2.24$ ,  $SD=0.57$ ). There were no significant differences between their own and the ideal interview for minimizations and maximizations.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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These differences between 'own' and 'ideal' interview scores are illustrated in Figure 1 and can be summarized as follows. Evidence, ethical, humanity, and, dominance all shared similar magnitudes of difference, which were greater than for cognitive distortions. Finally, to determine if respondents were consistent in their ratings' of how an ideal interview should be conducted a Kendall's correlation of concordance was performed on respondents' answers to each question. This was significant,  $W(38)=.53$ ,  $p < .001$ .

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*Comparisons between sex offenders and violent offenders.*

Sex offenders and violent offenders were compared on their perceptions of how an ideal police interview should be conducted. A mixed 2 X 7 ANOVA (sex offenders / violent offenders X evidence/ ethical / humanity / dominance / minimization / maximization / cognitive distortions) with repeated measures on the second factor was conducted which indicated no significant main effect of offender type,  $F(1, 56)=1.61$ ,  $p>.05$ ,  $\eta^2=.03$  but a significant main effect for the different question strategies,  $F(6,336)=28.18$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.34$  and the interaction was also significant,  $F(6,336)=10.13$ ,  $p>.01$ ,  $\eta^2=.15$ . The interaction was explored with a series of between-participants  $F$ -tests comparing the two categories of offenders for each strategy, again a Bonferroni correction was applied meaning a significance of  $p<.007$  was required for significance.

Sex offenders felt that officers should use a more humane approach in an ideal interview ( $M=4.01$ ,  $SD=0.57$ ) than did violent offenders ( $M=2.91$ ,  $SD=0.57$ ) and they also rated ethical approaches as more important ( $M=4.39$ ,  $SD=0.41$ ) than did violent offenders ( $M=2.95$ ,  $SD=0.65$ ). Conversely, violent offenders rated dominance as more effective ( $M=2.47$ ,  $SD=0.63$ ) than did sex offenders ( $M=1.90$ ,  $SD=0.45$ ) although neither group endorsed an overly dominant approach overall.

*Confessors and deniers perceptions' of how they were interviewed.*

For sex offenders who participated and completed all sections, 25 confessed and 14 denied (one participant stated that he was suffering from a mental breakdown when he was interviewed and did not know whether he confessed or denied) and the remainder missed some questions. Confessors and deniers were compared on their ratings of evidence, ethical interviewing, humanity, dominance, minimization, maximization, evidence, and cognitive distortions concerning their ratings of their own experience of being interviewed by police officers with a MANOVA. There was a significant difference between the two groups,  $F(7,31)=3.92$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $\eta^2=0.49$ . Again, we used a Bonferroni correction meaning that a significance level of  $p<.007$  was required for significance. Arguably the MANOVA reduces the likelihood of a Type I error meaning a correction factor is not necessary, however, given the small sample size, we wished to adopt a conservative approach.

Confessors were significantly more likely to perceive their interview as being ethical ( $M=1.97$ ,  $SD=0.82$ ) than those who denied ( $M=3.14$ ,  $SD=0.93$ ). Confessors were also more likely to perceive that they were treated with humanity by their police interviewer ( $M=1.85$ ,  $SD=0.85$ ) than those who denied ( $M=2.80$ ,  $SD=0.87$ ), and, deniers were more likely to perceive their interview as being dominant ( $M=3.97$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ) than those who confessed ( $M=2.98$ ,  $SD=0.99$ ). There were no other significant differences at the  $p<.007$  level.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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## Discussion

ADD BIT ABOUT CONFESSION NOT BEING NECESSARILY QUALITY  
IMPORTNACE OF DEMONSTRATABLE FALSEHOODS

To recap, we explored sex offenders' and violent offenders' perceptions of how the police should interview to facilitate confessions, and to investigate whether there is a relationship between sex offenders' perceptions of how the police interviewed them and their decisions to confess or deny. Evidence presenting strategies had an impact in this study, with participants suggesting that confessions would be more likely if more evidence presenting strategies were used by the police compared with their own experience. This is consistent with the field (Moston, Stephenson, & Williamson, 1992) and offender self-report literature (Gudjonsson & Petursson, 1991; Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 1999). Importantly, many of the questionnaire statements were designed to be generic so that they would be relevant to most offenders and most sex crimes, for example the statements, 'My police interviewer told me that the evidence showed that the truth would eventually come out', and 'My police interviewer emphasized the strength of the evidence against me', could be used regardless of the amount of actual evidence presented.

Indeed, some training manuals (e.g., Inbau et al., 2001) suggest emphasizing the strength of the evidence whilst not giving away information concerning what the evidence is. This may be an effective strategy when the investigator does not have much information because the suspect may believe the investigator has more evidence than they do. Also, recent experimental studies with mock-suspects (Hartwig, Granhag, Strömwall, & Kronkvist, in press; Vrij, 2006; and see also, Davis, Markus, Walters, Vorus, &

Connors, 2005) suggest that committing a mock-suspect to a false account, and then presenting contradictory evidence, improves investigators' ability to detect deception compared with presenting all the evidence at the beginning. However, these studies do not involve a direct consideration of confessions and, potentially, an absence of initial evidence might encourage an initial denial because the suspect believes that the police do not have much evidence. Once committed to a denial suspects seem to rarely change to an admission (Baldwin, 1993) CHANGE CONSIDER ETHICS

Further, the interpersonal nature of sex offences means that the victim will usually be able to provide witness evidence and research shows that officers have considerable influence over the accuracy and detail of evidence they elicit. Specifically, techniques such as the 'Cognitive Interview' can dramatically increase the amount of information witnesses provide (e.g., see Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Kohnken, Milne, Memon, & Bull, 1999). Unfortunately though, research also indicates that police officers rarely interview witnesses effectively even if trained to do so (see for example, Powell, 2002) and are relatively poor at remembering what they have elicited (Kohnken, Thurer, & Zoberbier, 1994). Thus, a critical component of suspect interviewing is likely to be effective victim interviewing and familiarization with the evidence. This may also reduce the need to obtain a confession in the first place, and in turn, potentially facilitate a more ethical and humane approach because the interviewer feels less of a need to get the suspect to confess.

Large, positive, effects were found concerning ethical interviewing as it is defined here, that is to say, a fair and neutral approach to finding out the truth (Milne & Bull, 1999; see also, Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2005; Leo, 1996). Participants suggested that

confessions would be more likely if more ethical strategies were used by the police compared with their own experience, and confessors perceived their interviewers to have used more ethical approaches than deniers. This strategy might be helpful for facilitating truth telling in guilty suspects, as well as making the interview less unpleasant for innocent suspects, because offenders may wish to give their own account of the crime. Furthermore, by not pressurizing the suspect so that they feel they are being coerced into an account, reactance is likely to be limited (Brehm, 1966; Miller & Rollnick, 1991) and this in turn may facilitate confessions in the guilty.

Similarly, participants rated a sex offender as being more likely to confess to a crime they had committed if the interviewer displayed more humanity and less dominance than occurred in their police interview. In addition, and consistent with the findings of Holmberg and Christianson (2002), confessing sex offenders were more likely to perceive that their interviewer displayed higher humanity than those who denied. Conversely, those who perceived the interviewer to be more dominant were more likely to deny. Taken as a whole these findings suggest the importance of using humanity rather than dominance, and the fact that there was a greater discrepancy between own and ideal interviews suggests that police interviewers have some room to improve in this area. Potentially, humanity and dominance are likely to have a particular impact on suspected sex offenders' decisions to confess or deny because of the stigma associated with sex crimes (McGrath, 1990; Quinn, Forsyth, & Mullen-Quinn, 2004).

Recent research with police officers in the U.K. (Oxburgh, Williamson, & Ost, 2006) suggests that displays of negative affect, such as disgust or anger, are a problem as they occur in many police interviews with suspected child sex offenders and it is

interesting to speculate on the frequency and intensity of dominance required to discourage a suspect from confessing. Potentially the suspect might require many displays of humanity before feeling comfortable with confessing while comparatively minor displays of dominance may be enough to deter confessions. Thus, encouraging police officers to display higher levels of humanity and lower levels of dominance appears to be necessary to facilitate more genuine confessions.

Offenders suggested that increasing displays of an understanding of cognitive distortions would increase the likelihood of a guilty suspect confessing. As previously mentioned this might be because an officer displaying this understanding of sex offending without becoming aggressive may make them feel understood and also indicates that the officer is not likely to become aggressive if the offender confesses. Importantly, if officers are aware of offenders' cognitive distortions and how sex offenders commit offences this may mean they show less negative emotion - that may manifest itself in dominance - if a suspect starts to confess. Similarly, a greater understanding of sex offenders may also help interviewers to have a more balanced and less stigmatized view of the offender (whilst still recognizing the seriousness of his offending). This may help improve the officer's ability to behave with humanity rather than dominance.

Concerning minimization and maximization, sex offenders did not suggest that a confession would be more likely if more minimization and maximization strategies were used by police interviewers. Further, there was no significant difference between confessors and deniers concerning their perceptions of whether minimization or maximization strategies were used during their police interviews. However, what may be

critical is how minimization and maximization are operationalized. For example, some forms can appear understanding whilst others are more coercive. . A minimization can be relatively innocuous, such as an interviewer saying in the case of a violent sexual assault, 'Perhaps you didn't mean to hurt her that much', or far more extreme, for example, 'She shouldn't have been out at that time of night dressed like that'. Similarly maximization could include statements such as, 'If you don't confess you'll go to jail for a long time for not being honest' a statement that could be considered an illegal threat or much less extreme and legal 'Many people find they feel worse if they don't get things off their chest'. We have favored the latter approach in this study because confessions elicited in this manner are likely to be admissible but this is an area where more research is required to refine definitions and implications, particularly with regards to distinguishing between empathy and minimization. Importantly, it should be acknowledged that Kassin and McNall (1991) are critical of using minimization because their laboratory research suggests that the technique may cause suspects to erroneously believe the crime they committed would not incur severe penalties and minimization is likely to be particularly unethical if it is used to suggest that what the offender did, if criminal, was not a crime. Nevertheless, minimization does seem to work in the field (Leo, 1996) and the laboratory (Russano, et al., 2005) and so seems worthy of further attention.

Sex offenders felt that officers should use more humane approaches in an ideal interview than did violent offenders and they also rated ethical approaches as more important than did violent offenders. Conversely, violent offenders rated dominance as more effective than did sex offenders although neither group endorsed an overly dominant approach overall. Taken together this pattern of results indicates that violent

offenders appear to be less sensitive to the approach taken by the interviewer and is likely to reflect the considerable stigma associated with sex offending (McGrath, 1990; Quinn, Forsyth, & Mullen-Quinn, 2004). This suggests that interviewing styles should be modified to take into account the nature of the offence and offender.

The principal limitation of this study is that we have to rely on offenders' perceptions of how they believe effective interviews should be conducted and how they believe they should be interviewed. Clearly, discrepancies may exist between reality and perception of reality and this warrants further research although in practice this is likely to be difficult to do, for example, interviewers' initial encounter with suspects are not recorded even when interviews themselves are. Nevertheless, the significant differences between the sex offenders and the violent offenders on the importance of humanity, dominance and ethical approaches do indicate that the results are not simply a case of all offenders saying they want to be treated the same way. However, this approach with regards an ideal interview removes many of the confounding variables associated with the actual interview process. For example, type of offence, amount of evidence against the suspect, interviewer demeanor and many other factors all might have an impact on the actual interview but are to some extent controlled for in the concept of an 'ideal' interview.

The current research indicates that police officers may be able to use a number of different techniques to facilitate truth telling with offenders, and importantly asking sex offenders' concerning their perceptions of how the police should interview to elicit confessions does get around the problem of confounding variables ever present in field studies and the ethical problems of modeling sex offender interviews in the laboratory.

Whilst we focused on decisions to confess or deny it is important to bear in mind the possibility of false confessions (for a comprehensive discussion see Gudjonsson, 2003) and also that for the purposes of proving guilt lies that can be demonstrated to be false can be almost as useful as admissions. However, this was not the focus of the present study.

The present study has important implications for increasing the likelihood of a guilty offender, particularly sex offenders, confessing; evidence must be conscientiously collected, familiarized, and how it is presented to the suspect is likely to be critical and worthy of future research. Police officers should approach suspects adopting a fair, professional, compassionate, understanding, non-aggressive, and honest approach, that is, using an ethical approach high in humanity and low in dominance. The use of minimization, maximization, and displays of cognitive distortions seemed to be least effective and seem to have the greatest potential to produce false confessions which are a very real problem generally and indeed mean that it is unwise to rely on uncorroborated confession evidence (Gudjonsson, 2003; Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004). Oppressive interviewing with dominance may simply increase the dangers of false confessions, whilst reducing the likelihood of eliciting genuine confessions. The results support the conclusion that an ethical and humane way of interviewing seems not only to be the right way to interview both guilty and innocent suspects but also the most effective way.

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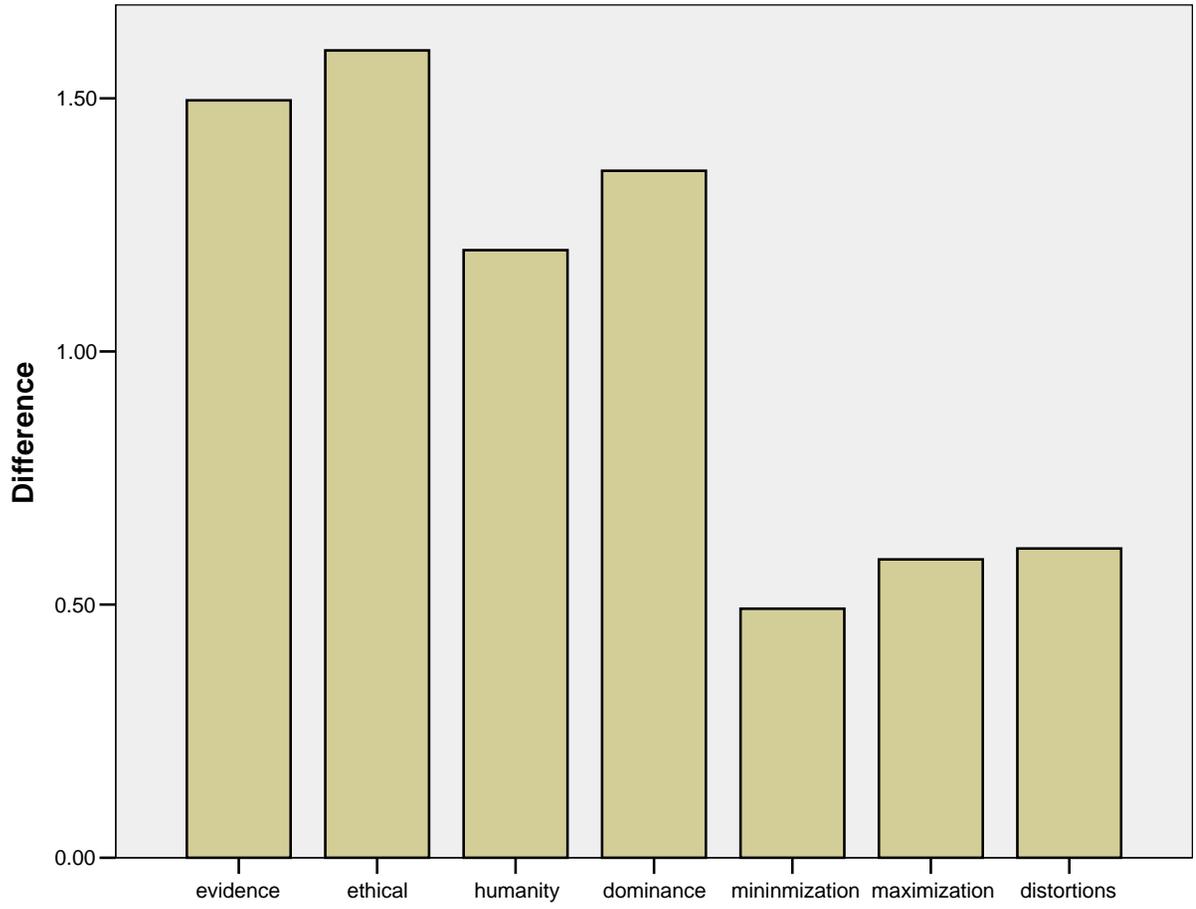
Table 1.

*Means and standard deviations for sex offenders' ratings of their own interview experience, and their ratings of how the police should ideally interview in order to obtain confessions from guilty suspects. Violent offenders' ratings for how the police should interview are included in brackets.*

	Own interview		Ideal interview	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Strength of Evidence	2.51	0.84	4.01 (2.91)	0.57 (1.00)
Ethical	2.77	1.04	4.39 (2.95)	0.41 (0.65)
Humanity	2.49	0.94	3.69 (3.32)	0.48 (1.04)
Dominance	3.25	1.06	1.90 (2.47)	0.45 (0.63)
Minimization	2.24	0.64	2.74 (3.29)	0.66 (0.87)
Maximization	2.56	0.93	3.15 (3.02)	0.70 (0.79)
Cognitive Distortions	2.24	0.57	2.84 (3.26)	0.63 (1.24)

Figure Caption

*Figure 1.* Mean differences between sex offenders' perceptions of how an ideal interview should be conducted to facilitate a confession with a guilty sex offender and their perception of their own interview (dominance differences are reversed)



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Table 2

*Means and standard deviations for sex offenders' perceptions of police interviewing strategies during their own interview broken down into those who confessed or denied.*

	Deniers		Confessors	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Strength of Evidence	2.12	0.84	2.68	0.62
Ethical	1.97	0.82	3.14	0.93
Humanity	1.85	0.87	2.80	0.85
Dominance	3.97	1.01	2.98	0.99
Minimization	2.12	0.81	2.35	0.58
Maximization	2.42	1.34	2.66	0.70
Cognitive Distortions	1.97	0.71	2.37	0.45

Appendix A

*Questions and Means and standard deviations for the “own” and “ideal” police interview questionnaires*

Questionnaire variables and items

Ethical interviewing – Own police interview

1. My police interviewer gave me time to comment
2. My police interviewer rushed the interview, and did not allow me time for reflection\*
3. My police interviewer appeared to be neutral
4. My police interviewer appeared to be interested in seeking the truth
5. My police interviewer was interested in getting the other side of the story during my interview

Ethical interviewing – Ideal police interview

1. A police interviewer should give a suspect time to comment
2. A police interviewer should rush the interview, and not allow the suspect time for reflection\*
3. A police interviewer should appear to be neutral
4. A police interviewer should appear to be interested in seeking the truth
5. A police interviewer should be interested in getting the other side of the story during the interview

Humanity – Own police interview

1. My police interviewer got to know me before starting the interview
2. My police interviewer showed sympathy towards me
3. My police interviewer tried to understand how I was feeling
4. My police interviewer showed a positive attitude towards me
5. My police interviewer was cooperative with me during the interview

Humanity – Ideal police interview

1. A police interviewer should get to know the suspect before starting the interview
2. A police interviewer should show sympathy towards a suspect
3. A police interviewer should try to understand how a suspect is feeling
4. A police interviewer should show a positive attitude towards a suspect
5. A police interviewer should be cooperative with the suspect during the interview

Dominance – Own police interview

1. My police interviewer was calm\*
2. My police interviewer was aggressive towards me
3. My police interviewer was friendly\*
4. My police interviewer was patient\*
5. My police interviewer took a supportive approach with me during the interview\*

Dominance – Ideal police interview

1. A police interviewer should be calm\*
2. A police interviewer should be aggressive towards the suspect
3. A police interviewer should be friendly\*
4. A police interviewer should be patient\*
5. A police interviewer should take a supportive approach with the suspect during the interview\*

Minimization – Own police interview

1. My police interviewer told me I would feel better if I confessed
2. My police interviewer said that although the crime was wrong, other people have done worse than me
3. My police interviewer suggested to me that the victim may have exaggerated about the harm

caused to them by the offence

4. My police interviewer suggested to me, that other factors such as alcohol, drugs and stress caused the offence

5. My police interviewer said during the interview, that just because I committed a sexual offence, doesn't mean I am a bad person

#### Minimization – Ideal police interview

1. A police interviewer should say that the suspect will feel better if they confess

2. A police interviewer should say that although the crime was wrong, other people have done worse than the suspect

3. A police interviewer should suggest to the suspect that the victim may have exaggerated about the harm caused to them by the offence

4. A police interviewer should suggest to the suspect, that other factors such as alcohol, drugs and stress caused the offence

5. A police interviewer should say during the interview, that just because the suspect has committed a sexual offence, doesn't mean they are a bad person

#### Maximisation – Own police interview

1. My police interviewer emphasised the impact the crime had on the victim

2. My police interviewer emphasised that the crime would seem worse if I did not give my own account of what happened

3. My police interviewer said that I would feel worse if I did not confess

4. My police interviewer told me that it would be worse for the victim if I did not confess

5. My police interviewer indicated to me, that if others (friends, family) found out that I lied, I would lose their respect

Maximisation – Ideal police interview

1. A police interviewer should emphasise the impact the crime has had on the victim
2. A police interviewer should emphasise that the crime will seem worse if the suspect does not give their account of what happened
3. A police interviewer should say that the suspect will feel worse if they do not confess
4. A police interviewer should tell the suspect that it will be worse for the victim if they do not confess
5. A police interviewer should indicate to the suspect, that if others (friends, family) found out that they lied, the suspect would lose their respect

Evidence – Own police interview

1. My police interviewer told me that the evidence showed that the truth would eventually come out
2. My police interviewer had as much evidence as possible to show me during the interview
3. My police interviewer emphasised the strength of the evidence against me
4. My police interviewer had a very detailed account from my accuser, to read to me during the interview
5. My police interviewer did not collect all the evidence before interviewing me\*

Evidence – Ideal police interview

1. A police interviewer should tell the suspect that the evidence shows that the truth will eventually come out
2. A police interviewer should have as much evidence as possible to show the suspect during the interview
3. A police interviewer should emphasise the strength of the evidence against the suspect

4. A police interviewer should have a very detailed account from the accuser, to read to the suspect during the interview
5. A police interviewer does not need to collect all the evidence before interviewing a suspect\*

Cognitive Distortions – Own police interview

1. My police interviewer suggested to me, that I may have believed the victim encouraged me to commit the offence
2. My police interviewer showed an understanding of how people who commit sexual offences think
3. My police interviewer suggested that I may have believed that the victim may have enjoyed, or not have been particularly upset by the offence
4. My police interviewer pointed out that I may have believed that if the victim did not want the sexual offence to occur, they could have done more to prevent it
5. My police interviewer pointed out during the interview, that I may have believed that society makes a much bigger deal out of sexual offences than they really are

Cognitive Distortions – Ideal police interview

1. A police interviewer should suggest to the suspect, that the suspect may have believed the victim encouraged them to commit the offence
2. A police interviewer should have an understanding of how people who commit sexual offences think
3. A police interviewer should suggest that the suspect may have believed the victim may have enjoyed, or was not particularly upset by the offence
4. A police interviewer should point out that the suspect may have believed that if the victim did not want the sexual offence to occur, they could have done more to prevent it

5. A police interviewer should point out during the interview, that the suspect may believe that society makes a much bigger deal out of sexual offences than they really are

*Note.* Items marked with an '\*' are reverse coded