

Running head: SEX OFFENDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE INTERVIEW

VIGNETTES

Sex offenders' perceptions of the effectiveness and fairness of humanity, dominance, and displaying an understanding of cognitive distortions in police interviews: A vignette study.

Key words: Suspect interviewing; confessions; police; sex-offenders.

Abstract

Forty-three convicted sex offenders read each of four different offence vignettes that involved a man forcing a female victim into sex and the offenders' subsequent police interview. The experimental manipulation involved giving participants each of four different scenarios concerning how the police interviewed the offender. These were interviews characterized by humanity, dominance, displaying an understanding of sex offenders' cognitive distortions, or a neutral, control interview. Participants were required to rate the interviews on a variety of dimensions, such as the offenders' likelihood of confessing, and the fairness of the interview. Where participants were told the man had been interviewed with humanity and compassion, they rated the offender as more likely to confess and rated the interview as fairer than the other conditions. In contrast, participants rated the offender interviewed with a dominant approach as less likely to confess, and for this procedure to be less fair than the other conditions. Displaying an understanding of sex offenders' cognitive distortions appeared to have had no influence on perceived likelihood of confessions but was perceived to make the crime appear less serious.

Sex offences are difficult to prove because prosecutions typically rely on the word of the victim against that of the offender (Greenfield, 1997). Consequently, confession evidence is extremely important in such allegations because the likelihood of securing a conviction is greatly increased where a suspect is prepared to admit the offence (Kassin & Neumann, 1997). The police interviewing of suspected sexual offenders is potentially different to the interviewing of other offenders for a variety of reasons including the fact that police officers appear to hold more negative attitudes towards sex offenders than towards other offenders (Hogue, 1993; Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Lea, Auburn, & Kibblewhite, 1999) and may interview aggressively as a consequence (Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Oxburgh, Williamson, & Ost, 2006).

An emerging literature on suspect interviewing suggests that displaying humanity, rather than aggression, can facilitate authentic confessions (that is a confession where the suspect has committed the offence and makes a full or partial confession). In contrast, aggressive or dominant approaches may reduce the likelihood of a confession (Gudjonsson, 2003; Leo, 1996). Holmberg and Christianson's (2002) survey of 83 men convicted of murder or a sex offence is a key example of the power of a humane approach. They asked each participant to rate the police officer who interviewed them for their most recent offence across a number of items on a seven-point Likert scale from 'not at all' (1) to 'very much so' (7). A factor analysis on responses to these items revealed two factors which Holmberg and Christianson labeled 'humanity' and 'dominance'. Interviews that were rated as high in humanity were characterized by stronger endorsements of questions such as, "Was your interviewer co-operative?" and, "Did your interviewer show sympathy and empathy?" Interviews that were rated as high

in dominance were characterized by stronger endorsements of questions such as, “Was your interviewer aggressive” and, “Was your interviewer impatient?” When dominance was controlled for, offenders interviewed with a humane approach were more likely to confess. These findings appear to lend further support for the previously identified experience-based benefits of a more humane approach (see for example, Bull & Milne, 2004; Milne & Bull, 1999; Moston and Engelberg, 1993; Williamson, 1993).

Police interviewers may not be aware of the cognitive distortions that sex-offenders engage in (Gannon & Polaschek, 2006; Swaffer, Hollin, Beech, Beckett, & Fisher, 1999; Ward, Hudson, Johnston, & Marshall, 1997). Acknowledging these factors in interview may also be critical in facilitating authentic confessions because they may reinforce the interviewee to express authentic (albeit distorted) justifications as explanations of the offence. For example, some sex offenders are thought to engage in cognitive distortions that perpetuate a cycle of offending (Swaffer et al., 1999; Ward, Hudson, Johnston, & Marshall, 1997). This is particularly marked in offences against children, where offenders might be less likely to strongly disagree 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; Gannon & Polascek, 2006).

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 these views do not represent the wider societal view

(McGrath, 1990; Quinn, Forsyth, & Mullen-Quinn, 2004). Consequently, police officers displaying an understanding of cognitive distortions might facilitate confessions by demonstrating an understanding and reducing the associated stigma. This may signal to the offender that the interviewer will not become aggressive or pass hostile judgment on the individual if he chooses to confess

In this paper we seek to examine the influence of humane and dominant approaches, as well as to examine the potential benefits of interviewers' acknowledging cognitive distortions for interviewing suspected sex offenders. A major impediment for research in suspect interviewing involves the potential influence of confounding variables. Field studies and offenders' self-report surveys into suspect interviewing are always likely to be hampered by the possibility of confounding variables, particularly the variation in evidence, which, exerts a very powerful impact on the decision to confess (see Gudjonsson & Petursson, 1991; Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 1999; Kebbell, Hurren, & Roberts, 2006; Moston, Stephenson, & Williamson, 1992). For instance, one cannot firmly conclude that there is a direct causal relationship between humanity and confessions, and between dominance and denials from Holmberg and Christianson's (2002) paper because variations in strength of evidence represents a third, and critical confounding variable. Specifically, Officers who had been able to collect more convincing and detailed evidence might have interviewed in a more humane manner because they felt less pressure to elicit a confession or because the suspect immediately complied with their wishes by confessing straightaway. Many other factors may also potentially influence suspect interviews - from characteristics of the suspect, the

evidence, the nature of the crime, and the officer. This frustrates efforts to disentangle causal relationships between confession and reasons to confess.

Experimental work using students as mock-suspects has added considerably to our knowledge of suspect interviewing (for a review see Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004). However, to our knowledge, there have been no experimental methods developed to test convicted sex-offenders' perceptions' of the effectiveness of different interview strategies. For this reason, for the purposes of testing the relationships between decision to confess, humanity, dominance and acknowledgment of cognitive distortions, we devised four sex-crime vignettes and four interview scenarios all concerning the interview of a guilty sex offender. The interview strategies involved an interviewer showing humanity, dominance or an understanding of sex offenders' cognitive distortions (all set against a neutral control interview). We hypothesized that humanity and displays of an understanding of cognitive distortions would be associated with increases in offenders' perceptions that a guilty suspect would confess. We hypothesized that dominance would be associated with decreases in offenders' perceptions that the guilty suspect would confess.

Method

Participants

Forty-four convicted sex offenders in two State Correctional Centers who had been contacted by letter or in person 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. Details of these offenders are summarized in Table 1. Mean participant age was 45.5 years ($SD=12.6$), with a range of 23 to 79 with a median of 48 years. 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. The mean length of sentence was 6.5 years ($SD=3.3$), ranging from one to 20 years with a median of six years. Mean number of victims was 1.8 ($SD=1.2$), ranging from one to seven with a median of one. Twenty-eight of the participants reported that they confessed to the police whilst 15 reported that they denied. We were prevented from sampling non-sex offenders because of concerns raised by the Ethics panel about non-sex offenders' reaction to the materials given the stigma and dangers associated with being thought of as a sex offender in prison.

Design

In this experiment a within-participants design is utilized. Sex offenders read each of four different offence vignettes that involved a man forcing a female victim into sex. Each offence vignette was followed by one scenario of a police interview with the offender. Participants received each of four different scenarios concerning how the police officer interviewed the offender. These were interviews characterized by humanity, dominance, displaying an understanding of sex offenders' cognitive distortions, or a neutral, control interview. Offence vignette and interview order were both randomized independently to prevent order effects or differences in offence vignettes influencing responses. Thus, the pairing of sex vignette and interview scenario was randomized as were the order of presentation of the interview scenarios. Participants were required to rate the interviews on a variety of dimensions, such as the offenders' likelihood of confessing, and the fairness of the interview to produce the dependent variables.

Materials

Four similar offence vignettes were developed. All involved a description of a female victim being forced, unwillingly, into sex. All four vignettes were designed to be similar and to include two possible reasons why offender *may have believed* the victim encouraged the offence, although this would have been a distortion on the part of the offender. For example, in the below example, Alice said ‘yes’ to watching television with John, and did not say anything when he started to play with her hair. Each vignette was also designed to include two clear instances where the victim states that she does not want the offender’s behavior to continue. For example, Alice says ‘get off’ to John when he tries to kiss her, and later becomes upset and tells John to stop and that she wanted to go home. In each vignette it is clear that non-consensual sex occurs. We were deliberately vague about defining ‘sex’.

Each crime vignette was 188 words long to control for length and the victim’s age was alternated between being a 12 year-old-girl and a 25 year-old-woman (shown in brackets below). Case One is below and the remaining cases are given in Appendix 1.

John, a 30 year old man, asked his next door neighbor if she would like to watch television with him. She said, “yes”. His next-door neighbour, Alice, was a twelve year old girl (25 year old woman) and her mother had lived next door to John for about three months. John and Alice had always gotten along very well. John often took Alice to see movies, while her mother was out or at work. During the evening, John had been drinking beer and watching television with Alice. After drinking six bottles of beer, John started to stroke Alice’s hair. She did not say anything. Later on, he tried to kiss her. Alice said “get off”. John grabbed her and lifted up her skirt and pulled down her knickers. Alice became upset and told John

to stop and that she wanted to go home. John did not stop, and had sex with her.

Alice told her mother what had happened and they reported what had happened to the police. The police asked Alice where John lived and she told them. The police arrested John and he was interviewed by the police.

After each offence vignette a description of a police interview with the offender was provided. Four categories of interview were used: control, humanity, dominance, and displaying an understanding of sex offenders' cognitive distortions. Each interview in the experimental conditions included five statements relevant to the category of interview. The humanity and dominance interviews were based on the five statements from Holmberg and Christianson's (2002) questionnaire with the highest loading on each of the respective factors. For example, the humanity vignette includes the following statement, "The police officer also seemed to be trying to understand just how John was feeling". This statement was derived from Holmberg and Christianson's item, "Did your interviewer show sympathy and empathy" (p.45). Similarly, the dominance vignette included the following statement, "The police officer was also aggressive towards John", derived from Holmberg and Christianson's item, "Was your interviewer aggressive?" (p.45).

The five statements concerning cognitive distortions were developed from items on the Bumby Cognitive Distortions Scale (Bumby, 1996) and were adapted to be applicable to a variety of sex crimes, including crimes against children and adults. Caution was taken to ensure that the statements would be admissible in court. An example is, "The police officer suggested that John may have believed that Alice had encouraged him to commit the offence". This was developed from the item, "Victims of

rape are usually a little bit to blame for what happens” on the Rape Scale, and, “Sometimes victims initiate sexual activity”, on the Molest Scale. Importantly, the officer never stated that he or she believed these cognitive distortions.

The interview vignettes were also created to have identical word length (124 words). This was to eliminate the potential confound that a more lengthy interview scenario might be perceived as being, for example, more oppressive or lengthy, and so participants may rate the offender as being more likely to confess. Thus, where applicable, additional information was designed to be innocuous, for example, “The room was a pleasant temperature, neither being too hot nor too cold”. The interview vignettes that relate to the previous offence scenario are presented below.

Control interview. The interview room at the police station was fairly plain. It contained some furniture and there was also a clock with a white face and black hands hanging on the wall. The room was a pleasant temperature, neither being too hot nor too cold. There was a ceiling light in the room and a light switch by the door. The police officer wore a long sleeved shirt that buttoned up at the front and at the wrists. He also wore long gray trousers, a pair of gray socks, and simple black lace-up shoes. He also had a standard silver watch on his left wrist. The police officer outlined the evidence against John. The police officer said that Alice had identified John as the offender.

Humanity interview. The interview room was plain. The police officer wore a long sleeved shirt that buttoned up at the front and at the wrists. He also wore gray trousers, a pair of gray socks, and black lace-up shoes. He also had a standard silver watch on his left wrist. The police officer took time to get to know John

before starting the interview. The police officer also seemed to be trying to understand just how John was feeling. The police officer outlined the evidence against John. The police officer said that Alice had identified John as the offender. The police officer showed sympathy towards John, and seemed to show a positive attitude towards him. The police officer was also co-operative with John throughout the interview.

Dominance interview. The interview room at the police station was fairly plain. The room was a pleasant temperature. The police officer wore a long sleeved shirt that buttoned up at the front and at the wrists. He also wore gray trousers, a pair of gray socks, and black lace-up shoes. He also had a standard silver watch on his left wrist. After starting the interview, the police officer showed some agitation towards John. The police officer was also aggressive towards John. The police officer outlined the evidence against John. The police officer said that Alice had identified John as the offender. The police officer was impatient towards John. The police officer was unfriendly towards John. The police officer was also unsupportive towards John during the interview.

Cognitive distortions. The police officer outlined the evidence against John. The police officer said that Alice had identified John as the offender. The police officer suggested that John may have believed that Alice had encouraged him to commit the offence. The police officer showed an understanding of how people who commit sexual offences think. The police officer suggested that maybe John believed that Alice had enjoyed, or may not have been particularly upset by the offence. The police officer suggested that John may believe that society makes a

much bigger deal out of sexual offences than they really are. The police officer suggested that John may believe that if Alice did not want the sexual offence to occur, she could have done more to prevent it.

A short questionnaire followed each scenario. In order to inhibit any potential biasing effects from subsequent questions, we presented participants with the following question first, “Based on the story, how likely would John be to confess to the police by the end of the interview?” A Likert scale was provided, where responses ranged from 1 = ‘not at all likely to confess’ to 10 = ‘extremely likely to confess’. Next, eight statements were provided with Likert scales where responses could range from 1 = ‘very strongly disagree’ to 10 = ‘very strongly agree’. The statements were: ‘The police interviewer was fair to John’; ‘The police interviewer understood how John was thinking about his sexual offending’; ‘The police interviewer made John’s crime seem *more* serious than it was’; ‘The police interviewer was aggressive towards John’; ‘The police interviewer showed humanity towards John’; ‘The police officer made John’s crime seem *less* serious than it was’; ‘The evidence against John was strong’; ‘The police interview was well conducted’. The final item on the questionnaire was the question, “How serious was the crime that John committed?” A Likert scale was provided where responses ranged from 1 = not at all serious, to 10 = extremely serious.

Procedure

Participants were tested individually in private interviewing rooms. At the start, a clear statement was provided to the participants assuring them that the researchers were not employees of Corrective Services or the Police, and that participation or non-participation would not influence their treatment whilst in the Correctional Centre.

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. Crime, interview, and age of victim were randomized across presentations. Each participant received each crime and interview condition. Participants were asked if they had confessed to their crimes to the police, this information was corroborated where possible by referring to their case files.

Results

Manipulation checks. A series of one-way within-subjects ANOVAs (control interview/humanity/dominance/cognitive distortions) were conducted on participants' ratings of the interview as manipulation checks. These questions were designed relate to each interview condition to determine if the manipulation of the interview independent variable was effective. These means are displayed in Table 2. For ratings of humanity the ANOVA was significant $F(3,99)=34.94, p<.001, \eta^2=.76$. Follow-up t -tests ($p<.05$) indicated that the humanity interview was perceived as showing far more humanity than the other interviews. The dominant interview was perceived as showing significantly less humanity than all the other interviews, while the control and cognitive distortion interviews did not differ from one-another in participants' ratings. For aggression the ANOVA again showed a significant effect of interview technique $F(3,102)=66.01, p<.001, \eta^2=.80$. Follow-up t -tests indicated that the dominant interview was seen as being far more aggressive than the other interviews, which did not differ from one-another.

Concerning participants' perceptions of the officers' understanding of the offenders' thinking about his sexual offending an ANOVA showed a significant effect of

interview technique $F(3,99)=35.11, p<.001, \eta^2=.77$. Follow-up t -tests ($p<.05$) indicated that participants felt that the ‘humanity’ interviewing officer condition had the best understanding of the offender, significantly more so than in the control, cognitive distortion, and dominance conditions. Participants rated the offender as being significantly less understood in the dominance condition compared with the control, humanity and cognitive distortion condition. Finally, to ensure there was no confounding effect of evidence a one-way ANOVA was conducted concerning participants’ perceptions of the strength of the evidence. This was not significant, $F(3,114)=0.22, p>.05, \eta^2=.01$.

Likelihood of confessing. A 2 X 4 ANOVA (confessors/deniers X control interview/humanity/dominance/cognitive distortions) with repeated measures on the second factor was conducted on participants’ ratings of the likelihood of the suspect confessing. Participants were assigned to the category of confessor or denier depending on whether they had confessed or denied in their own police interview concerning the sex offence for which they were most recently convicted. This factor was included to determine if some individuals were simply more likely to suggest offenders would confess or deny based on their own behaviour. Means and standard deviations are displayed in Table 3. There was no significant difference between confessors and deniers on their ratings of the likelihood of the offender confessing across the different interview styles, $F(1,40)= 0.25, p=n/s, \eta^2=.01$ but there was a significant difference between the interview conditions, $F(3,120)= 11.05, p<.001, \eta^2=.22$, and the interaction was also significant, $F(3,120)= 3.36, p<.05, \eta^2=.08$. Follow-up t -tests showed participants rated the likelihood of a confession as being significantly greater in the humanity condition

than in the control, dominant, or cognitive distortion conditions. Participants rated the likelihood of a confession as being less likely in the dominant condition compared with the control, humanity, and cognitive distortion conditions. There was no difference between the control condition and the cognitive distortion condition in terms of rated likelihood of a confession. The interaction was due to confessors rating the offender as being more likely to confess in the control interview than the deniers.

Perceptions of fairness and how well the police interviewed. Two one-way within-subjects ANOVAs (control interview/humanity/dominance/cognitive distortions) were conducted on participants' ratings of the fairness and how well conducted the interviews were. For both fairness and how well the police interviewed the ANOVAs were significant, $F(3,117)=71.26, p<.001, \eta^2=.65$, and $F(3,99)=49.28, p<.001, \eta^2=.55$, respectively. Follow-up *t*-tests showed a similar pattern for both dependent variables, with the humanity interview being perceived as more fair and better conducted than the control and cognitive distortion interviews. Both of the latter two conditions were perceived as more fair and better conducted than the dominance interview.

Perceptions of seriousness of the crime. Two one-way within-subjects ANOVAs (control interview /humanity /dominance /cognitive distortions) were conducted on participants' ratings of whether the police officer made the crime seem more or less serious. There was no significant effect concerning making the crime seem *more* serious, $F(3,114) = 2.66, p>.05, \eta^2=.07$ but there was a significant effect of interview condition on participants' perceptions of whether the police officer made the crime seem *less* serious, $F(3,117) = 5.57, p<.001, \eta^2=.13$. Follow-up *t*-tests indicated that the cognitive distortions interview was perceived as significantly more likely to make the crime appear

less serious than all the other conditions. A final one-way within-subjects ANOVA (control interview/ humanity/ dominance/ cognitive distortions) was conducted on participants' perceptions of the seriousness of the crime. No significant difference was found, $F(3,123) = 0.86, p > .05, \eta^2 = .03$.

Discussion

The sex offenders who participated in this vignette study rated suspects as being more likely to confess if they were treated with humanity than with any of the other strategies, and less likely if the suspect was treated in a dominant and aggressive fashion. This is consistent with Holmberg and Christianson's survey study (2002), as well as the various field studies that have hinted at the importance of empathy, humanity and a non-judgmental approach (Bull & Milne, 2004; Milne & Bull, 1999; Moston and Engelberg, 1993; Williamson, 1993). Our study lends additional support to this previously conducted work and has the advantage of factoring out the potential confounds of the methods employed previously. Doubtless, there are several limitations to this vignette approach, including potential for impression management on the part of the offenders and the perennial problems of ecological validity, but the fact that our study supports the field and survey research demonstrates the advantage of testing the previous claims experimentally and the potential for this methodology. With such a paucity of research on suspect interviewing and methods for facilitating authentic confessions, adopting a multi method approach lends credibility to the claim that humanity and expressions of empathy are more effective than dominance and aggression. But this raises the question of what might account for our findings?

Holmberg and Christianson have speculated that the reason for this lies in offenders' perception of feeling more comfortable disclosing details of their offences where they are afforded respect by the interviewer and where interviews do not impose the general societal stigma associated with sex offending (McGrath, 1990; Quinn, Forsyth, & Mullen-Quinn, 2004). A potentially critical factor in gaining a confession where a suspect is in fact guilty may, therefore, lie in the way in which the interviewing officer is able to present an image of him or herself and a perspective on the offence that is distinct and different from the commonly accepted societal view, which tends to be extremely negative and punitive.

For example, previous UK research by Alison and Furnham (1994) explored Police Officers', offenders' and members of the general public's attitudes towards criminality, pre-trial juror bias and punishment. They established that offenders tended to view criminals as being the victims of circumstance. Specifically, offenders believed that criminals are not morally culpable for their actions because prevailing societal conditions are the root cause of deviance (a 'conflict' view of crime, c.f. Hollin, 1989; Turk, 1969; Vold, 1953). In contrast, police officers tended to consider criminal behaviour as an individual trait, where offenders made a deliberate and premeditated choice to commit an offence (a 'consensus' view of crime). Perhaps unsurprisingly, they also advocated the use of harsher punishments – particularly in sex offence cases. Participants from the general public fell between these extremes. One possible explanation for our results may, therefore, lie in the notion that where offenders perceive that the interviewing officer shares the same, or at least a similar, view of the offence and where that officer is perceived as making greater efforts to explore the possible reasons that the offence

occurred, offenders are less anxious about being judged and more ready to give a frank and candid account.

Moreover, the positive effects of the 'humanity' interview were not limited to increasing the perceived likelihood of a confession. Participants believed the police officer conducted a better interview, was fairer, and had a greater understanding of how the offender was thinking about his sex offending. As well as being important from a legal point of view (in therapeutic jurisprudence fair treatment is likely to have a positive impact on psychological well-being and subsequent response to treatment, Slobogin, 1996), the fact that these interviews were perceived as fair may support the argument that the effectiveness lies in a social exchange perspective, where individuals disclosure of the actual details of the offence may emerge from reciprocity and social exchange (Cosmides, 1989; Cialdini and Goldstein, 2003). This theory postulates that mutual co-operation is a fundamental drive in successful social adaptation (see also Kiyonari, & Yamagishi, 2004). Thus, the humanity, compassion and perceived authenticity of the interviewer's presentation as helpful, empathic and willing to listen fosters a strong motivation to respond reciprocally and give a true account of what happened. The ('unnatural') alternative is to reject this social adaptation and lie. Thus, the effectiveness of the humanity approach may lie in the extent to which it makes it more difficult for the suspect to break otherwise effective social adaptations. Needless to say, an additional positive benefit of humane conduct is the fact that such interviews are likely to have a less negative effect on innocent suspects. For example, it is also clear that some individuals make malicious allegations or exaggerate sex offences (see, Oates, et al.,

2000) and interviewing with humanity is likely to make the interview less unpleasant for individuals falsely accused.

Interviews characterized by dominance had a negative effect on sex offenders' perceptions of the likelihood of a confession. Participants also believed the police officer conducted a worse interview, was less fair, and had less of an understanding of how the offender was thinking about his sex offending. One possible explanation for the dominant style faring far worse than humanity lies in principles of 'reactance', where individuals may feel that they are being coerced into a confession by someone who is not liked by the suspect (Brehm, 1966; Miller & Rollnick, 1991). Unfortunately, the literature on interviewing suspected sex offenders indicates that a dominant approach is often used (Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Oxburgh, Williamson & Ost, 2006). As the results of this study suggest this likely, not only have a negative impact on the psychological well-being of the suspect, but also is unlikely to be effective in terms of eliciting confessions from guilty offenders whilst, simultaneously, potentially increasing the likelihood of a false confession (see, for example, Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004).

Displaying an understanding of offenders' cognitive distortions did not have a positive impact on the perceived likelihood of confessing compared with the control interview. There might be a number of explanations for this, for instance, perhaps sex offenders are more concerned about being condemned than understood. However, another explanation could be that sex offenders' cognitive distortions may be too idiosyncratic and heterogeneous, or simply not sufficiently important, for us to pick up with this methodology (Gannon & Polaschek, 2006). Importantly though, if officers are aware of offenders' cognitive distortions and how they commit offences this might have a

distal albeit important indirect effect on their interviewing, enabling them to display less negative emotion, including dominance, if a suspect starts to confess and making them more capable of interviewing with humanity. Nevertheless, participants did rate the police officer in the interview displaying an understanding of cognitive distortions as making the crime seem less serious than it was, perhaps because this became a form of minimization. Indeed, 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 was not a crime. The other conditions had no influence on whether participants felt the officer was making the crime appear less serious than it was.

There was no difference between ratings of likelihood of confessing for those offenders who made confessions in their own interviews and those who denied except for the control condition where those who confessed rated the likelihood of a confession as higher. This suggests that those who confessed to the police and those who denied did not differ entirely on their likelihood of confessing. However, it does suggest that for those who denied, officers might need to make more of an effort to interview with humanity in order to facilitate truth-telling, again implicating the importance of such an approach.

xxxxHowever, there are limitations to the experimental approach adopted here. The principal limitation is that we have to rely on offenders' perceptions of how they believe offenders would respond if they were interviewed with different styles. Clearly, discrepancies may exist between what offenders expect will happen and what does

happen in reality and this warrants further attention. Also, some of our interview scenarios (e.g., the dominance interview) may have been more vivid and stereotypical of police interviews, and participants' own experiences, than the others meaning they had a greater impact than might be expected. Nevertheless, using this methodology eliminates potential confounds allowing causal relationships to be explored. For example, in this study we deliberately kept the strength of evidence constant because it seems to be the most influential factor on suspects' decisions to confess or deny (see for example, Gudjonsson & Petursson, 1991; Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 1999; Hartwig, Granhag, & Vrij, 2005; Kebbell, Hurren, & Roberts, 2006; Moston, Stephenson, & Williamson, 1992). In this study the evidence was simply the victim's word against the offender as is common in most sex offence investigations (c.f., Greenfield, 1997). Given the importance of evidence future research would be worthwhile to investigate what influences' sex offenders' perceptions of the strength of evidence against them, they may be less likely to confess if victim was thought to be potentially less credible, for example, if they had an intellectual disability or were intoxicated. Indeed, Häkkänen et al. (2007) found in a simulation study that police officers rated more tactics, both dominant and humane, as important if the evidence against a suspect was weak compared with strong evidence.

The use of different methods and a process of triangulation means it is possible to be more certain of our conclusions. Previous field studies (e.g., Soukara, Bull, & Vrij, 2006), surveys (e.g., Gudjonsson & Petursson, 1991; Holmberg & Christianson, 2002), and experience (e.g., Moston and Engelberg, 1993; Williamson, 1993), and the present experimental study are producing converging findings that interviewing with humanity seems to be the most effective approach. In conclusion, the present study indicates that

interviewing with humanity is not only likely to be the most effective way of interviewing suspects it is also likely to be perceived as a fairer way of interviewing. Dominant approaches are not only likely to be perceived as less fair, and risk producing false confessions but also appear less likely to elicit confessions.

References

- Abel, G. G., Gore, D. K., Holland, C. L., Camp, N., Becker, J. V., & Rathner, J. (1989). The measurement of the cognitive distortions of child molesters. *Annals of Sex Research, 2*, 135-153.
- Alison, L. J., & Furnham, A. (1994). Theories of Crime, Attitudes to Punishment and Juror Bias amongst Police, Offenders and the General Public. *Personality and Individual Differences, 17* (1), 35-48.
- Bull, R. & Milne, R. (2004). Attempts to improve the police interviewing of suspects. In G. D. Lassiter (Ed.), *Interrogation, Confessions and Entrapment*. New York: Kluwer/Plenum.
- Brehm, J.W. (1966). *A Theory of Psychological Reactance*. New York: Academic Press.
- Bumby, K.M. (1996). Assessing the cognitive distortions of child molesters and rapists: Developing and validation of the MOLEST and RAPE scales. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 8*, 37-54.
- Cialdini, R.B. & Goldstein, N.J. (2003). Social Influence: Compliance and Conformity. *Annual Review of Psychology, 55*, 591-621.
- Cosmides, L. (1989). The Logic of Social Exchange: Has Natural Selection Shaped How Humans Reason? Studies with the Wason Selection Task. *Cognition, 31*, 187-276.
- Epstein, J.N., Saunders, B.E., & Kilpatrick, D.G. (1997). Predicting PTSD in women with a history of childhood rape. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 10*, 573-588.
- Gannon, T.A. & Polaschek, D.L.L. (2006). Cognitive distortions in child molesters: A re-examination of key theories and research. *Clinical Psychology Review, 26*, 1000-1019.

- Greenfield, L.A. (1997). *Sex Offences and Offenders: An Analysis of Data on Rape and Sexual Assault*. Washington: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Gudjonsson, G.H. (2003). *The Psychology of Interrogations, Confessions and Testimony: A Handbook*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Gudjonsson, G.H. & Petursson, H. (1991). Custodial interrogation: why do suspects confess and how does it relate to their crime, attitude and personality. *Personality and Individual Differences, 12*, 295-306.
- Gudjonsson, G.H. & Sigurdsson, J.F. (1999). The Gudjonsson Confession Questionnaire-Revised (GCQ-R): factor structure and its relationship with personality. *Personality and Individual Differences, 27*, 953-968.
- Gudjonsson, G.H. & Sigurdsson, J.F. (2000). Differences and similarities between violent offenders and sexual offenders. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 24*, 363-372.
- Häkkinen, H., Ask, K., Keibell, M., Alison, L., & Granhag, P.A. (2007). Police officers' views of effective interview tactics with suspects: The effects of weight of case evidence and discomfort with ambiguity. Unpublished manuscript, National Bureau of Investigation, Vantaa, Finland.
- Hartwig, M., Granhag, P.A., & Vrij, A. (2005). Police interrogation from a social psychology perspective. *Policing and Society, 15*, 379-399.
- Holmberg, U. & Christianson, S. (2002). Murderers' and sexual offenders' experience of police interviews and their inclination to admit or deny crimes. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 20*, 31-45.

- Hogue, T.E. (1993). Attitudes towards prisoners and sexual offenders. In N.K.Clark & G.M. Stephenson, (Eds.), *Sexual Offenders: Context Assessment and Treatment* (pp. 19-26). Leicester: BPS.
- Kiyonari, T. & Yamagishi, T. (2004). *Ingroup cooperation and the social exchange heuristic*. In Suleiman, R., Budescu, D. V., Fischer, I., & Messick, D. (Eds.), *Contemporary Psychological Research on Social Dilemmas*. (pp. 269-286). UK: Cambridge University Press
- Kassin, S.M. & Gudjonsson, G.H. (2004). The psychology of confessions: A review of the literature and issues. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 5, 33-67.
- Kassin, S.M. & McNall, K. (1991). Police interrogations and confessions: Communicating promises and threats by pragmatic implication. *Law and Human Behavior*, 15, 233-251.
- Kassin, S.M., & Neumann, K. (1997). On the power of confession evidence: An experimental test of the fundamental difference hypothesis. *Law & Human Behavior*, 21, 469-484.
- Kebbell, M.R., Hurren, E.J., & Roberts, S. (2006). Mock suspects' decisions to confess: Accuracy of eyewitness evidence is crucial. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 20, 477-486.
- Lea, S., Auburn, T., & Kibblewhite, K. (1999). Working with sex offenders: The perceptions and experiences of professionals and paraprofessionals. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 43, 103-119.
- Leo, R.A. (1996). Inside the interrogation room. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 86, 266-303.

- Mackey, T., Sereika, S.M., Weissfeld, L.A., Hacker, S.S., Zender, J.F., & Heard, S.L. (1992). Factors associated with long-term depressive symptoms of sexual assault victims. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 6, 10-25.
- McGrath, R.J. (1990). Assessment of sexual aggressors: Practical clinical interviewing strategies. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 5, 507-519.
- Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (1991). *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People to Change Addictive Behavior*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Milne, R. and Bull, R. (1999). *Investigative interviewing: Psychology and practice*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Moston, S. & Engelberg, T. (1993). Police questioning techniques in tape recorded interviews with criminal suspects. *Policing and Society*, 3, 223-237.
- Moston, S., Stephenson, G.M., & Williamson, T.M. (1992). The effects of case characteristics on suspect behaviour during questioning. *British Journal of Criminology*, 32, 23-40.
- Milne, R. and Bull, R. (1999). *Investigative interviewing: Psychology and practice*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Oates R.K., Jones D.P.H., Denson D., Sirotnak A., Gary N., & Krugman R.D. (2000). Erroneous concerns about child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 24, 149-157.
- Oxburgh, G., Williamson, T. & Ost, J. (2006). Police officers' use of emotional language during child sexual abuse investigations. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling*, 3, 35-45.

- Quinn, J.F., Forsyth, C.J., & Mullen-Quinn, C. (2004). Societal reaction to sex offenders: A review of the origins and results of the myths surrounding their crimes and treatment amenability. *Deviant Behavior, 25*, 215-232.
- Slobogin, C. (1996). Therapeutic Jurisprudence: five dilemmas to ponder. In D.B Wexler and Winick B.J.(Eds.) *Law in a Therapeutic Key* (pp 763-793). Carolina Academic Press: Durham, N.C.
- Soukara, S., Bull, R., & Vrij, A. (2006). Investigative interviewing of suspects: Piecing the picture. Paper presented to the 2nd International Investigative Interviewing Conference, Portsmouth, UK
- Swaffer, T., Hollin, C., Beech, A., Beckett, R., & Fisher, D. (1999). An exploration of Child Sexual Abusers Cognitive Distortions with Special Reference to the Role of Anger. *The Journal of Sexual Aggression, 4*, 31-44.
- Ward, T., Hudson, S.M., Johnson, L. & Marshall, W.L. (1997). Cognitive distortions in sex offenders: An integrative review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 17*, 479-507.
- Williamson, T.M. (1993). From interrogation to investigative interviewing: strategic trends in police questioning. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 3*, 89-99.

Table 1.

A summary of participants' most recent offence and offending histories.

Most recent conviction	N	Average sentence length	Average number of victims	Number offending against females	Number offending against males	Number with no previous convictions	Number with previous convictions for sex offences	Number with previous convictions for non-sex offences
Rape and serious sexual assault	17	8.2	1.7	16	1	5	4	12
Intra-familial sex offences against children	13	6.5	1.9	11	2	4	3	8
Extra-familial sex offences against children	9	4.0	1.3	6	4	6	3	3
Intra and extra familial sex offences against children	4	5.0	3.0	5	0	0	3	3

Table 2

Means and standard deviations (in brackets) of participants' responses to questions according to vignette condition (1 = very strongly disagree to 10 = very strongly agree).

	Vignette Condition			
	Control	Humanity	Dominance	Cognitive Distortions
The police interviewer showed humanity towards the suspect***	5.41 (2.19)	8.12 (1.90)	2.97 (2.14)	6.18 (2.48)
The police interviewer was aggressive towards the suspect***	3.50 (2.19)	2.34 (1.73)	8.09 (2.51)	2.66 (1.43)
The police interviewer understood how the suspect was thinking about his sexual offending***	4.82 (2.49)	7.26 (2.08)	2.71 (2.13)	5.97 (2.34)
The evidence against the suspect was strong	7.90 (2.02)	8.13 (1.97)	8.10 (1.62)	8.03 (1.98)
The police officer was fair to the suspect***	6.95 (2.10)	8.42 (1.41)	3.20 (2.04)	7.03 (2.02)
The police interview was well conducted***	6.95 (2.10)	8.67 (1.33)	3.19 (2.27)	6.58 (2.57)
The police officer made the suspect's crime seem <i>more</i> serious than it was.	4.26 (2.61)	3.75 (1.94)	4.85 (2.79)	3.92 (2.42)
The police officer made the suspect's crime seem <i>less</i> serious than it was***	4.13 (2.61)	4.94 (2.40)	3.68 (2.59)	5.76 (2.45)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Means and standard deviations (in brackets) of participants' responses to questions according to vignette condition (1 = not at all likely to confess, and 10 = extremely likely to confess).

Question	Condition				
	Control	Humanity	Dominance	Cognitive Distortions	Combined
How likely would the suspect be to confess to the police by the end of the interview?					
Confessors (N=28)	6.64 (2.16)	7.11 (2.04)	4.15 (1.54)	6.79 (1.57)	6.16 (1.02)
Deniers (N=15)	5.13 (1.85)	7.47 (1.68)	5.27 (3.53)	6.00 (2.36)	5.97 (1.46)
Combined (N=43)	6.07 (2.16)	7.23 (1.89)	4.51 (2.44)	6.52 (1.87)	6.07 (1.17)

Appendix 1.

Crime scenarios for Case 2, 3 & 4.

Case 2

Mary, a 25 year old woman (12 year old girl) living in an apartment with her mother, was asleep in her single bed. At 2.30am in the morning, a man, Tom, climbed into her apartment through a window that she had left open. The 30 year old man awakened Mary by placing his hand over her mouth. Tom said to Mary, “Don’t scream and don’t make any noise. If you stay quiet and do exactly as I say, then I won’t hurt you”. Mary was scared and said “Go away”, but Tom did not go away. After that, Mary did not say anything. Mary was sleeping without any clothes on, so Tom did not have to ask her to take her clothes off. Tom had sex with her. Afterwards he put the bathroom light on and washed himself. As he was leaving her home, Tom told Mary he thought she was a beautiful woman (girl). Mary told her mother what had happened and they reported what had happened to the police. Mary picked out Tom from photographs that the police showed her. The police arrested Tom and he was interviewed by the police.

Case 3

Jenny, a 25 year old woman, (12 year old girl) was walking through a park on her own. She saw a 30 year old man, Brian, with a small black dog on a lead. She knew Brian, as he lived near to her. Brian was sitting on a park bench. Brian said the dog is very friendly,

and asked Jenny if she would like to pat him. Jenny said “yes, please” and sat next to Brian. Brian and Jenny talked about how much they liked the park and how it was so quiet. Brian put his hand on Jenny’s leg and rubbed her thigh. Jenny said, “Please stop doing that” but Brian didn’t take his hand away, or stop rubbing her leg. He took Jenny’s hand and pulled her into some bushes. He made her take off her trousers. He then had sex with her behind the bushes, a little way from the path. Jenny told her mother what had happened and they reported what had happened to the police. The police asked Jenny where Brian lived and she told them. The police arrested Brian and he was interviewed by the police.

Case 4

Each morning, Kate, a 25 year old woman (12 year old girl), would go and fetch the mail from the post-box at the end of the garden at the house where she lived. She would usually wear a dressing gown. Sometimes the cord tying the dressing gown together would come loose, leaving her dressing gown open. This would embarrass Kate. Jake, a 30 year old man, would often walk by and tell Kate what a pretty woman (girl) she was. Kate would smile and laugh at Jake’s comments. One day, Kate went to pick up the mail, and Jake was waiting outside in his car playing music on his stereo. Jake said “You’re looking very pretty today, would you like to come for a drive in my car?” Kate said, “No thank you”. Jake grabbed Kate’s arm and forced her into the car. He took her to a car park where he had sex with her. Kate told her mother what had happened and they reported

what had happened to the police. Kate described the car that Jake was driving and identified him. The police arrested Jake and he was interviewed by the police.

Acknowledgements

Mark Kebbell and Emily Hurren are at Griffith University, and Laurence Alison is at the University of Liverpool. This project was supported by a Grant from the Criminology Research Council and the Crime and Misconduct Commission to the first author. The views expressed are the responsibility of the authors and are not necessarily those of the funding bodies. The assistance of the Queensland Department of Corrective Services is gratefully acknowledged. Further information is available from the first author who can be contacted at m.kebbell@griffith.edu.au