

Police Strategies and Suspect Responses

Police Strategies and Suspect Responses in Real-life Serious Crime Interviews

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Abstract

This research focuses exclusively on real-life taped interviews with serious crime suspects and examines the strategies used and types of questions asked by police, and suspects' responses to these. The information source was audio-tape recorded interviews with 56 suspects. These recordings were obtained from eleven Police Services across England and Wales and were analysed using a specially designed coding frame. It was found that interviewers employed a range of strategies with *presentation of evidence* and *challenge* the most frequently observed. *Closed questions* were by far the most frequently used and *open questions*, although less frequent, were found to occur more during the opening phases of the interviews. The frequency of *ineffective question* types (e.g. *negative*, *repetitive*, *multiple*) was low. A number of significant associations were observed between interviewer strategies and suspect responses. *Rapport/empathy* and *open type questions* were associated with an increased likelihood of suspects admitting the offence whilst *describing trauma* and *negative questions* were associated with a decreased likelihood.

Keywords: police interviewing; suspects; strategies; questioning; serious crime.

Introduction

Over 25 years ago, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (1984) (PACE) introduced in England and Wales legislation governing, among other things, the interviewing of suspects. PACE had been the result of the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure that arose in response to false confessions obtained from youths in a murder and arson case (Fisher, 1977, cited in Milne & Bull, 1999). PACE Code C (Home Office, 2008, p. 38) consequently stated that “no interviewer may try to obtain answers or elicit a statement by the use of oppression”.

A significant development arising from PACE was the introduction in the mid-1980s of a statutory requirement to provide audio-recordings of all interviews with persons suspected of being involved in a criminal offence (Home Office, 2010). What really went on in the interview room was finally (possibly) open to wider scrutiny and something which a limited number of researchers were able to take advantage of. As Cherryman (1999) commented, “an interest in the topic of investigative interviewing had been sparked” (p. 16) and research commenced relatively quickly after implementation of the new laws and procedures.

Despite the advances of PACE, oppressive interviewing and false confessions still persisted (e.g. ‘The Birmingham Six’) to an extent. This led to another Royal Commission in 1991 (on Criminal Justice) that was charged with examining the effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System in securing the convictions of the guilty and the acquittal of the innocent. A new code of practice published in the following year set out the new ‘Principles of Investigative Interviewing’ (Home Office, 1992), which included that:

- the role of the police is to obtain accurate information from suspects;
- interviews should be approached with an open mind;

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- information obtained from the person who is being interviewed should always be tested against what the investigator already knows (this implying that suspects should not be told at the beginning about all of the relevant information);
- the interviewing officer need not accept the first answer given; and
- even when the suspect exercises the right to silence, the interviewer still has a right to ask questions in order to try and establish the truth (so long as the questions are relevant and not repetitive).

Williamson (1993) described this as the start of attempts to promote confidence in the concept of ‘investigative interviewing’, the purpose of which was, “to obtain accurate and reliable information from suspects, witness or victims to discover the truth about matters under police investigation” (p. 98). This ethos is in marked contrast to the previous over-reliance on confessions.

The principles of investigative interviewing described in the Home Office circular of 1992 were developed into a standardised framework for ethical interviewing known as PEACE (Shawyer, Milne, & Bull, 2009) and endorsed by a later Home Office circular in 1993. PEACE describes the five key stages of an investigative interview: planning and preparation, engage and explain, account, closure, and evaluate, and was informed by psychological principles and theories and by effective police practice (Milne & Bull, 1999). Two booklets were issued to all police officers (n = 127,000) describing the new model, followed by a national training effort where all police officers in England and Wales were subsequently trained in the model over a number of years. The essential principles of PEACE are related to fairness and openness, encouraging interviewers to avoid assumptions of guilt, to keep an open mind, and to seek the truth (Shawyer et al., 2009). The model encourages effective planning prior to the interview, and using open questions, active listening, and rapport building.

The ‘tactics’ or strategies encouraged by the PEACE model are in contrast to those of the ‘Reid Technique’ (Buckley, 2006) – a popular interviewing technique used extensively in the USA (Leo, 1996). The Reid Technique originated when Inbau and Reid published a manual that described a set of tactics to be used by interviewers (or interrogators as they called them) with suspects whose guilt interrogators believed to be certain. It comprises a two-stage process involving: (i) an interview to (try to) determine if suspects were lying; and (ii) if the interviewer decided that the suspect was lying then a nine-step interrogation was undertaken.

Although the use of many elements advocated in the Reid Technique appears to be fairly widespread in the USA (Kassin, Leo, Meissner, Richman, Colwell, Leach & La Fon., 2007; Reppucci, Meyer, & Kostelnik, 2010), the model (and others like it) have been widely criticised by both academics and practitioners in the United Kingdom, as well as by those in North America (Zimbardo, 1967; Meissner, Russano, & Narchet, 2010; Yeschke, 2003). For example, Snook, Eastwood, Stinson, Tedeschini, and House (2010) summarised three key concerns with the Reid Technique: first, that police officers do not have the ability to detect deception at greater than chance levels and, in any case, tend to be more biased towards a judgement of guilt than non-police officers; second, they pointed out the lack of empirical research evidence to support claims of effectiveness; and, thirdly, many of the techniques advocated in the model are overly coercive in nature, and risk persuading people “both innocent and guilty, to provide information that they would not normally give freely” (p. 219).

Kassin and McNall (1991) suggested that the approaches recommended by Inbau and colleagues could be distinguished into two main types, maximisation and minimisation, both of which, they hypothesised, might well lead to innocent people confessing to crimes they did not commit. They described maximisation as where the interviewer tries to frighten the

suspect into a confession by exaggerating the strength of the evidence, the magnitude of the charges, and the likely negative consequences of the case going to a full trial; and minimisation as where the interviewer lulls the suspect into a false sense of security by mitigating the crime, making excuses for the suspect, or blaming the victim. As a consequence of PACE and with the introduction of PEACE, at least in the UK, the drive for achieving a confession has been replaced with a search for the truth, and later studies post-PAACE have found little evidence of such manipulative or coercive 'Reid-like' tactics, (Baldwin, 1992; Moston & Engelberg, 1993) a finding reinforced by more recent studies by Bull and Soukara (2010), and Soukara, Bull, Vrij, Turner, and Cherryman (2009).

In contrast to the kind of tactics endorsed in techniques like the Reid model, PEACE focuses instead on developing officers' abilities to employ a number of specific skills including: engaging a suspect in conversation by introducing all those present and explaining the purpose and format of the interview; appropriate use of questions; obtaining an initial account for subsequent exploration in a structured manner; and closing the interview (Clarke, Milne, & Bull, 2011). As explained above, since PACE there have been a number of studies examining the usage, effectiveness, and impact of the techniques and strategies used by police interviewers, including those included within the PEACE model (e.g. Clarke & Milne, 2001; Soukara, Bull & Vrij, 2002; and Griffiths & Milne, 2006).

For example, the importance of developing rapport (during the 'engage and explain' phase of PEACE) was emphasised in the National Crime Faculty's (1996) document on investigative interviewing. This warned police officers against using stereotypical information such as culture, clothing and speech in responding to the interviewee; it recommended instead that empathy should be used where appropriate and an interest in the individual's circumstances should be shown in order to provide an environment in which the suspect would feel free to talk. Although McGurk, Carr, and McGurk (1993) found that

interviewing officers rated rapport building as the fourth most important interviewer skill, Moston and Engelberg (1993) found that it was rare to find evidence of rapport building at the beginning of interviews, a finding echoed by Clarke and Milne in 2001. Milne and Bull (1999) suggest that this might be due to the fact that since PACE, some legal advisors challenge the relevance of such “chat” (p. 162). However, Walsh and Bull (2012) found good use of rapport to be associated with substantial information gain from suspects.

With regards to the issue of empathy, Oxburgh and Ost (2011) argued that the national guidance on using empathy was unclear and incomplete. They highlight, for example, that the Achieving Best Evidence Guidelines (Ministry of Justice, 2011) associates sympathy with empathy but this guidance does not explain what empathy is (and how it differs from sympathy) and nor does it explain how to communicate empathy. Oxburgh, Ost, and Cherryman (2010) examined the use of empathy in transcripts of 20 real-life interviews with suspected child sex offenders and found that empathy was not widely present.

A central feature of PEACE is that suspects should initially be given the opportunity to provide a full account of what happened. In a preliminary study of around 400 audio-taped suspect interviews (carried out with the Metropolitan Police), Moston and Engelberg (1993) identified that most interviewers typically began an interview by adopting an information gathering (inquisitorial) strategy and few a confession (accusatorial) strategy. In a related study, Stephenson and Moston (1994) examined over 1000 audio-recorded suspect interviews and reported that, in contrast to 1993 study, in many cases the suspect was confronted with the accusation against them at the very outset of questioning with no attempt to establish rapport or invite the suspect to give an alternative version of events. Similar findings were observed by Leo (1996) who sat in on 122 interviews (involving 45 detectives) in one police department in the USA and watched video recordings of a further 60 interviews conducted by two other police organisations. He found that detectives usually began by confronting the

suspects with evidence suggesting their guilt, using true evidence (observed in 85% of interviews) and also, more worryingly, false evidence (observed in 30% of interviews).

It should be emphasised that both of these two UK based studies (Moston & Engelberg, and Stephenson & Moston) analysed interviews conducted in the late 1980s, after PACE but before PEACE had been launched. A later evaluation of PEACE by Clarke and Milne (2001) found that although officers' interviewing skills seemed to have improved by that time, a number of problems still persisted. They rated 14 separate behaviours during the account phase and found that 'encouraging an account', 'keep to relevant topic', 'deals with difficulty' and 'structure and sequence' were rated at above the median level (deemed as showing adequate skill). However, a number of skills were found to be less than adequate, namely: 'exploring account'; 'topic development'; 'using summaries and links; and a technique called 'conversation management'. Whilst this suggests an improvement in the account phase of the interview over that observed by Moston and Engelberg, skill levels were still less than ideal.

PEACE advocates that the suspect is invited to provide a full and uninterrupted account (which might include introducing evidence) before any challenges are made. Dando and Bull (2011) tested an alternative information gathering technique which involved revealing information (both incriminating and otherwise) at appropriate times throughout the questioning stage, as opposed to revealing all of the evidence at the beginning or end of an interview. Results revealed that the gradual release of information at opportune moments during the interview enhanced the ability to detect those suspects who were telling the truth and those who were lying (also see Dando, Bull, Ormerod, & Sandham, 2015).

The presentation of evidence as a means of challenge has intuitive appeal, but few studies have looked in any depth at the different ways in which interviewers challenge

suspects. Although a study by Alison, Kebbell, and Leung (2008) found that Hong Kong officers rated 'pointing out inconsistencies' as the most important interviewing tactic in serious crime interviews, Hakkanen, Ask, Kebbell, Alison, and Granhag (2009) claim that most previous research has shown that investigators often fail to challenge suspects at all. They cited Baldwin (1993) who found that no challenge was made by the interviewers in almost 40% of the late 1980s cases and Moston et al. (1992) who also found an inability of officers to effectively challenge suspects. A later study by Pearse and Gudjonsson (1996) did examine use of challenges and found that challenging a lie or an inconsistency was present in around a fifth of cases but that other challenges occurred less frequently. More recently, a study by Soukara et al. (2009) examined the use of challenge in police interviews with suspects and found that 'emphasising contradictions', 'challenging the suspect's account', and 'positive confrontation' were found in at least half of the 80 suspect interviews they analysed, with 'emphasising contradictions' and 'challenging the suspects account' being among the most common tactics used in confession interviews. Further analysis revealed, however, that these two types of challenge were actually used more in interviews where there was *less* of a shift from denial to admission. They reflected that this finding should not have been entirely unexpected as interviewers may well persist in the use of tactics with suspects who continue to deny (rather than with those who confess).

Oxburgh, Myklebust, and Grant (2010) state that the key principle underpinning the numerous interviewing guidance documents is "for interviewers to gain as much detailed information as possible from the interviewee using effective, non-coercive questioning techniques" (p.45). Oxburgh et al. (2010) presented a thorough review of the psychological and linguistic literature on question types, as they apply to police interviews. They found that open information-seeking questions are the most productive in terms of gaining detailed responses from the interviewee. The notion that poor questioning can lead to distorted

responses and potentially false confessions is well documented (Milne & Bull, 1999; Gudjonsson, 2003; Kassin, 1997) and inappropriate or unproductive question types have been defined as including: forced-choice, leading and multiple questions (Milne & Bull, 1999), complex questions (Shawyer & Walsh, 2007), and opinion or statement questions (Griffiths & Milne, 2006).

Beyond the type of questions asked, a growing amount of research has focused on the potential influence of different interviewer strategies or tactics on the suspect's likelihood of confession. For example, Bull and Soukara (2010) in 2003 identified 40 interviews from their sample of 200 in which a confession occurred, although not at the start of the interview, and analysed the occurrence and timing of 17 interviewer tactics relative to the timing of the shift to admission/confession. Bull and Soukara found that seven out of the 17 interviewer tactics under observation were used in the minutes prior to a shift, and that the tactics of minimisation and maximisation were never used at any point. They suggested that confessing might be considered to be influenced by the tactics used in the preceding 15 minutes, and found the following tactics to be the most frequently used during this time (in order of highest to lowest frequency): disclosure of evidence, open questions, repetitive questions, followed by leading questions, handling suspect's mood, pointing out contradictions, and positive contradictions. Bull and Soukara suggest that the tactics of disclosure of evidence, open questions, and repetitive questions *may* to some extent influence the suspects' decision to confess, however the authors make clear that as these tactics also occur in several different time slots during the interview (not just in the time preceding the confession), this timing may have been coincidental.

Kelly, Miller, and Redlich (2015) analysed 29 suspect interviews in which the suspect initially denied their guilt or complicity, comparing tactics used in those interviews that ended with a confession and those that did not. They found that *rappport and relationship building*

was more commonly observed at the outset of the interview, decreasing towards the middle, and increasing by the end. In contrast, *emotion provocation* and *presentation of evidence* increased from the beginning of the interview to the middle and then decreased again. They also observed a slight linear increase in the use of *confrontation/competition* throughout the stages of the interview. When comparing those interviews with suspects who denied against those who offered full or partial confessions, Kelly et al. found that the levels of *rappport and relationship building* were similar across both samples. They observed low levels of *confrontation/competition* in the confession sample, in contrast to the increasing emphasis of this found in the denial sample. *Presentation of evidence* in the denial sample was observed more frequently at each stage of the interview in comparison to the equivalent stages in the confession sample. The authors suggest that the more subtle *presentation of evidence* evident in the confession sample (in contrast to the almost immediate presentation of evidence in the denial sample) may be a more effective tactic in eliciting confessions.

Walsh and Bull (2010) compared both the quality and frequency of tactics used and whether the suspect confessed or not. Their findings suggested it was not only the frequency of tactics that were related to whether a suspect confessed but also how well those tactics were used. For example, they found that disclosure of evidence and regular summarising (when used well and often) were linked with a shift from denial to admission. The authors concluded that it is insufficient just to consider what interviewers do in an interview, but that what is important is how *skilfully* and *regularly* they undertake certain tactics.

Although many studies focus on the link between tactic use and confessions, a study by Leo (1996) looked beyond whether the suspect confessed or not, to include whether the suspect provided incriminating information during the interview. He found that in around two-thirds of the interviews, suspects revealed some kind of incriminating evidence (which included unintentional provision of information as well as a partial or full confession). The

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only factors that he found to be associated with such revelations was interview length and the number of tactics used; this led him to conclude, “that the effort and energy expended by officers is one of the most important factors in explaining successful interrogation outcomes” (p. 262). Leo also explored whether different tactics were linked to the suspect providing incriminating information and found significant associations for: identifying contradictions (91% of the interrogations in which this tactic was used); offering the suspect a moral justification or psychological excuse (90%); praise/flattery (91%); and, appealing to the suspect’s conscience (97%).

From the overview of the literature presented above it is clear that in the UK substantial attempts have been made to modernise the interviewing of suspects via guidance and training. However, rather few studies have yet been published on the extent to which interviewers are able to put such guidance/training into practice, especially in serious cases like murders. Equally, much of the research literature that has examined particular interviewing strategies, have tended to focus solely on the association of these strategies with whether the suspect confessed or not. Specifically, the present study examines: (i) the association between the strategies and questions used by police interviewers and the suspects’ response; and (ii) how serious crime suspects respond during a police interview.

Method

Data were obtained from recordings of real-life serious crime suspect interviews (along with associated case details). Due to the nature of the required sample and the associated difficulties with gaining access to the information, a truly randomised sample selection process (or other form of probability sampling) was not considered feasible. Instead, a mix of purposive (homogenous) and convenience sampling methods were adopted.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO, now called the National Police Chief's Council) was/is an independent, professionally-led strategic body which, in partnership with the Government and other public bodies, leads and coordinates the direction and development of the police service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The ACPO Homicide Working Group and ACPO Investigative Interviewing Working Group were at the time of this research made up predominantly of senior level police personnel along with some government and academic membership. The first author was a research representative for the Home Office (the government department responsible for policing) on both groups. Initial contact was subsequently made with both groups to request participation from police forces. Each participating force was asked for:

- audio copies of interviews with serious crime suspects from closed cases (these are considered solved by the police although this does not necessarily mean a conviction has been achieved) that had occurred in the last five years (which at the time of data collection included interviews from 2000 onwards);
- written plans or strategies prepared for the interviews; and
- brief case details.

Before moving on to describe how the information was obtained it is important to set out the definition of an *interview* used in the present study. In serious crime cases it is very unlikely that a suspect is interviewed on only a single occasion. In part this is dictated by the complexity of such cases: even where the suspect might admit the offence, the police still need to gather a vast amount of information to support any prosecution. Suspects also have certain rights including entitlements to breaks and rest periods. Additionally, interviewers themselves might purposefully plan to break an interview after certain topics have been covered to allow further enquiries to be made.

Most interviews of serious crime suspects therefore run over several days (and in some cases even months). Identifying though where one interview started and another ended was not straightforward. This was in a large part due to the practice of analogue audio-taping, which means that a period of questioning *has* to come to an end after 45 minutes (the maximum tape length). Within this 45-minute period however a number of different scenarios can emerge:

- questioning can be concluded early (say 20 minutes in to the taping period) as all the relevant topics have been covered;
- questioning could be suspended at the request of the legal advisor or suspect;
- questioning may run to the end of the tape, new tapes are then inserted and the questioning is continued immediately; and
- questioning may continue for the full 45 minutes at which point it is decided to use the tape change as a natural break point, even though more questions on a similar topic may need to be asked later.

Due to the range of different potential scenarios, it was not possible to definitively say when one interview of a suspect started and another with him/her ended. For these reasons, the present study defines a single *interview* as a single audio-tape, which in some instances might be only five minutes long or alternatively the full 45 minutes.

It is acknowledged that whilst there may be some inherent limitations in defining a single interview in this way, the practical reality of how police interviews are conducted within the UK offer some mitigation to these limitations. First, PACE dictates that a number of activities must occur at the start of each interview (e.g. introduction of persons present, date and time, caution given, right to legal advice etc.). In the current sample of interviews, it was found that the caution, introductions, and the time, date and location of the interview were provided in the vast majority of interviews, that is, at the start of each individual taped interview. Consequently, even if the interview carried on immediately after the end of the previous 45-minute interview, the formalities required at the beginning of the next tape thereby arguably providing some 'distinctiveness' to each interview.

Furthermore, due to the analogue tape recording procedure used in the current sample, interviews could not last longer than around 45 minutes. In fact the mean duration ($N = 407$) in the present sample was 30 minutes indicating that the majority of interviews were deliberately brought to a close before the end of the 45-minute tape. This finding is not unexpected as PEACE and advanced interviewing techniques place great emphasis on the planning and preparation stage of the interviewing process (Soukara, Bull & Vrij, 2002). A key feature of this planning phase is to identify discrete topics of questioning and to deploy gradual disclosure of evidence and information (Dando & Bull, 2011). Interviewing officers may therefore deliberately want to put a connected series of questions to the interviewee and then break, whilst further investigations are made and/or so the interviewing strategy can be reviewed and refreshed depending on the information provided.

Also, given the nature of the interviews in the present sample – serious crimes – the total interviewing time is considerably longer than found in other studies (Baldwin, 1993; Bull & Cherryman, 1996). So, although the mean duration of single interviews in the present study was 30 minutes, when the total time each suspect was interviewed was calculated the mean duration was three hours and 44 minutes. The shortest total length of interviewing for an individual suspect was 35 minutes and the longest was 15 hours and 12 minutes. Inevitably therefore, interviews in the present sample did not always occur on the same day, in fact in some cases the interviewing took place over several weeks. Consequently, many interviews in this sample could not be considered ‘continuous’ in a chronological sense.

The practical reality of the interviewing presented above, together with the mean duration of interviews in the present sample, led to the decision that each individual interview could reasonably, methodologically speaking, be treated as ‘independent’ of other interviews with the same suspect. Whilst, the issue of independence should not affect the validity of the majority of the findings presented in this paper, it is nevertheless acknowledged that this might be more problematic when comparing strategies and question type across time segments. Readers are therefore reminded that the comparisons across time segments refer to *individual tapes* (which in the majority of cases in the present sample would be one of many interviews conducted with a single suspect but often on different topics). Consequently, readers are asked to be cautious when interpreting these results, as the findings may not be replicated if all interviews of the same suspect were analysed as a continuous ‘single’ interview.

Sample characteristics

A total of 407 such tape recordings were obtained from ten forces across England (representing a mix of urban and rural forces) and one force from Wales (including a mix of

rural and urban areas). All interviews took place between 1999¹ and 2006, with the majority (76%, $n = 309$) occurring between 2004 and 2006 inclusive. In these a total of 56 different suspects were interviewed representing 45 different cases. Of these 45 cases, 41 involved a single victim (91%), three involved two victims (seven percent), and one case involved four victims (two percent).

The majority of suspects were interviewed for the offence of murder (82%, $n = 46$), with a further three suspects for attempted murder. Three suspects were interviewed for a serious sexual offence and four for a serious assault. The majority of interviewers were male: 82% of both primary ($n = 333$) and secondary interviewers² ($n = 335$). Similarly, the majority of suspects were also male (95%, $n = 53$). The mean age of suspects was 32 years ($n = 55$), with the youngest person interviewed age 16 and the oldest 67.

Analysing the interviews

To enable the systematic capture of the required information, it was decided that content analysis would be employed. Content analysis was used to measure a number of pre-defined characteristics of suspect interviews which were broken down into five-minute time segments. A coding frame was then developed in two stages. First, an initial coding frame was created that drew upon previous research involving the analysis of police interviews (Baldwin, 1992; McGurk, Carr, & McGurk, 1993; Moston & Engelberg, 1993; Cherryman, unpublished thesis, 1999; Pearse & Gudjonson, 1999; Clarke & Milne, 2001; Griffiths & Milne, 2006; Oxburgh et al., 2010). In addition, the relevant literature on discourse and conversation analysis was also considered (e.g. Schegloff, 2000; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Heydon, 2011). The coding frame used in the present study therefore drew on the coding

¹ Although the original request to forces was for interviews after 2000, it was decided that the interviews occurring in 1999 were close enough to the rest of the sample to permit inclusion.

² Primary interviewers were defined as those who opened the interview and who (usually) took the predominant role in questioning. Secondary interviewers were those who (usually) took less of a role in questioning, and who initially spoke after the primary interviewer.

frames used in previous research, although it did not replicate any single one in its entirety. For example, the coding frame used by Moston and Engelberg (1993), whilst lacking in detail in terms of how the interviews were assessed, some of the strategies, like direct accusations or evidence strategy, were adapted for use in the present coding frame. Pearse and Gudjonsson's (1999) study examined real-life interview data from 18 serious criminal cases and the study identified 39 interviewing tactics, the majority of which were included in the initial stages of the development of the coding frame in the present study. In particular, following Pearse and Gudjonsson, interviews were also broken down into five-minute time segments. The rating scale used by Clarke and Milne (2001) did not include an examination of the suspect response and since its focus was on assessing the *overall* quality of interviewer behaviour rather than on analysing the minutiae of *individual* exchanges between suspect and interviewer, the rating scale approach was not adopted in the present study. However, a large number of the criteria used in their rating scale (e.g. elements in the engage and explain section, interviewer characteristics and so on) were adopted for use.

The subsequent coding frame that was developed was then tested against a large sample of interview tapes (n = 100) and further refined. The coding frame went through a number of iterations during this stage and the final list of codes included is shown in Table 1. The approach to coding was to mark the presence or absence of each code (making no judgement on quality) within each five minute segment.

Table 1: Coding Frame³

Theme	Code
Question Style	Closed
	Open
	Closed with element of open
	Closed-Open
	Negative (open or closed)
	Multiple choice/option (open, closed, negative, repeated or statement)
	Statement
	Repetitive (open, closed, negative or statement)
Ineffective	
Strategy	Building rapport/showing empathy
	Use of silence
	Suspect's interest to talk
	Situational futility
	Interviewer explicitly asks suspect to tell truth / give their account of what happened
	Emphasising seriousness of offence
	Special warning (or similar) provided
	Showing the suspect photographs of the crime scene/victim
	Describing victim's trauma and/or the family's trauma or emphasising severity of injuries
	Minimisation
	Maximisation
Describing evidence and what has happened	
Challenging the suspect	
Conversation Characteristics	Interruptions by the interviewer
	Interruptions by the suspect
	Overlapping talk
Suspect response (Only one of these codes could be selected during a single exchange)	Relevant
	No comment
	Silent
	Challenging
	Unclear/complex

³ For a copy of the coding frame with detailed definitions of each code please contact the first author.

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Suspect behaviour	Suspect sounds upset
	Suspect interrupted
(A single exchange could have any of these features)	Suspect sounds frustrated
	Suspect laughed

Suspect admission	Full admission
	Partial admission
	Denial
(Only one of these codes could be selected during a single exchange)	

Once the coding frame was established the second stage involved carrying out inter-rater and intra-rater reliability checks on 50 taped interviews. Both percentage agreement and Cohen's Kappa were applied to the data. As might be expected, generally stronger agreement was found for intra-rater reliability than inter-rater reliability across all codes. Following Banerjee's (1999, cited in Neuendorf, 2002) guidelines, the majority of codes show acceptable levels of agreement, beyond that would have been expected by chance. The exception was the code *explains routine*, which showed poor inter-rater agreement; findings concerning this code should therefore be treated with caution. There were a number of codes (*explains grounds for arrest, explains purpose of interview, open question, closed question with open elements, statement question, overlapping talk, and building rapport/showing empathy*) which had higher but nevertheless still moderate results (under 0.75) and again some caution is recommended when interpreting the findings associated with these codes.

Results

Suspect Response

How serious crime suspects responded during these interviews was categorised as either a *relevant response, silence, no comment, challenging response* or *unclear/complex response*. Analysis of all the interview tapes revealed that *relevant responses* were found to be the most frequent suspect response (a mean frequency of 76 occurrences per interview tape) with *no comment* the second most frequent, occurring on average 21 times per interview. On average, *relevant responses* were significantly more frequent ($M = 76.18$, $Mdn = 67.00$) than *no comment* ($M = 21.00$, $Mdn = 0.00$), $Z = -10.98$, $p < .001$. It was rare for the suspect to *challenge* the interviewer or for the suspect to answer in an *unclear or irrelevant manner*. *Complete silence* was also quite rare with a mean frequency of six occurrences per interview.

It was also recorded whether the suspect admitted or denied the offence ($N = 56$). It was far more common for suspects to deny the offence (64% of suspects) than admit to it (23% of suspects made some kind of admission, with only seven percent of these making a full admission). Only a small proportion (13%) of suspects neither admitted nor denied, which in practice reflected either no comment or silence in response to accusations. It should be noted that a denial also included those interviews where the suspect stayed silent or made no comment but made denials via a prepared statement in interview (which either they or their legal advisor read out). It is important to highlight that *none* of the 56 suspects included in the present study changed their position from denial to admission. Nevertheless, 49 suspects were subsequently convicted (for the remaining seven it was not possible to determine the outcome).

The Pattern of Strategies and Question Types

In terms of the analysing the pattern of strategies and questions used by police interviewers, a total of 15 different strategies and nine question types were coded for.

Strategy Use. This revealed that *presentation of evidence* was the most frequent strategy, by a considerable margin, occurring on average 21 times during each tape ($M = 21.41$, $SD = 16.28$). *Challenge* was the second most frequent, occurring on average around five times per tape ($M = 21.41$, $SD = 16.28$), with *explicitly asks for an account*, being the third most frequently used strategy ($M = 0.83$, $SD = 1.51$).

Although evidence of rapport building was, overall, quite rare, further analysis revealed that *rapport/empathy* was significantly more frequent in the initial stages of the interview tape (the first 15 minutes) ($M = 0.37$) compared to the next 15 minutes (i.e. the middle of the interview tape) ($M = 0.26$), $Z = 2.94$, $p < 0.01$. *Minimisation* and *maximisation* were

extremely rare, with only one incidence of maximisation (and none of minimisation) being observed across all interview tapes.

The mean frequency of strategy use across time segments was explored for two of the more frequent strategies: *presentation of evidence* and *challenge*. For *presentation of evidence* there was a broadly consistent frequency across time segments, demonstrating a gradual presentation. The pattern for the strategy of *challenge* was different, with the mean frequency of challenges increasing as the interview progressed, peaking in time segments seven and eight, and then falling again in the final time segment of the interview tape. The difference in *challenges* between time segment seven ($M = 1.16$) and one ($M = 0.23$) was significant ($Z = -6.41, p < 0.001$).

Correlations between different strategies. Bivariate (two-tailed) non-parametric correlations (Kendall's Tau) were performed between the frequencies with which different strategies were used (excluding *maximisation* and *minimisation* due to the observed frequency being one or less for these codes) and the results are shown in Table 2. A number of significant (weak) correlations were found, including: *rapport/empathy* was positively correlated with *requests attention* ($\tau = .09, p < .05$) but negatively correlated with *challenge* ($\tau = -.20, p < .01$); *use of silence* was positively correlated with *situational futility* ($\tau = .26, p < .01$), *explicitly asks for account* ($\tau = .20, p < .01$), *describes trauma* ($\tau = .13, p < .01$), *presentation of evidence* ($\tau = .12, p < .01$), and *challenge* ($\tau = .21, p < .01$); *suspect's interest to talk* was positively correlated with *situational futility* ($\tau = .14, p < .01$), *explicitly asks for account/truth* ($\tau = .35, p < .01$), *describes trauma* ($\tau = .11, p < .05$), *emphasises seriousness* ($\tau = .22, p < .01$), *caution reiterated* ($\tau = .20, p < .01$), *presentation of evidence* ($\tau = .13, p < .01$), and *challenge* ($\tau = .10, p < .05$).

Table 2: Significant Kendall's tau correlation coefficients between different strategies used by interviewers

Police Strategies and Suspect Responses

Strategy		Attention	Situational futility	Tell truth	Serious- ness	Caution	Trauma	Evidence	Challenge
Rapport	Correlation	.09*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.20**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.04	-	-	-	-	-	-	.06
Silence	Correlation	-	.26**	.20**	-	-	.13**	.12**	.21**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	-	.001	.001	-	-	.01	.003	.001
Interest to talk	Correlation	-	.14**	.35**	.22**	.20**	.11*	.13**	.10*
	Sig. (2- tailed)	-	.005	.001	.001	.001	.002	.002	.03

*p < .05, **p < .01

Question Types. *Closed* questions were by far the most frequent type of question observed ($M = 63$, $SD = 46.80$). The second most frequent was *statement* questions ($M = 16.52$, $SD = 16.61$). *Open* questions were not particularly common: on average only one open question was asked per interview tape ($M = 1.02$, $SD = 1.88$). Questions categorised as *closed with element of open* also occurred infrequently ($M = 0.27$, $SD = 0.89$). Consequently, the total observations of *open* and *closed with element of open* questions were combined into a single category, *open type*, for further analysis.

The non-parametric Friedman test was selected to compare the use of *open type* questions across three categories of time: (i) the initial three time segments of an interview tape (each of five minutes); (ii) the middle three time segments; and (iii) the final two time segments⁴. A significant effect was found, ($\chi^2 = 16.67$, $p < .001$) meaning that there was a difference identified in the frequency of *open type* questions across the three time segments. Three paired samples Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests were then used to make post-hoc comparisons between conditions. A first test indicated that there was a significant difference in the scores between the initial time segments ($M = 0.81$) and the middle time segments ($M = 0.56$), $Z = -3.3528$, $p = .001$. A second test indicated that there was a significant difference in the scores between the initial time segments ($M = 0.81$) and the final time segments ($M = 0.38$), $Z = -4.09$, $p = .000$. A third test indicated that there was also (although not as strong) significant difference in the scores between the middle time segments and the final time segments, $Z = -2.75$, $p = .006$. Essentially, this suggests that there was significantly more *open type* questions used in the initial time segment compared to the second and third time segments.

⁴ The final time segment was not included in this analysis as no open type questions occurred in this time segment.

The Association between Suspect Response with Strategies and Question Type

To permit further analysis of strategy use and question type with suspect response a number of decisions were made with regard to which variables were included in the analysis: due to the small frequencies of *unclear and challenging responses*, these were excluded from further statistical analysis; and *silence* and *no comment responses* were considered sufficiently similar in function to warrant combining into a single category, referred to as *no response*. Consequently, suspect response became a dichotomous variable: a *relevant response* versus a *no response* (combining *silence* and *no-comment responses*).

Strategy use and suspect response. Linear regression was employed to examine if particular strategies were associated with *suspects responding relevantly* (in comparison to *not responding*). All strategies (except *minimisation* and *maximisation* due to low frequencies) were included in the model. The overall model fit was $R^2 = .31$ ($p < .001$). Six strategies were identified as significant predictors of *suspects responding relevantly* (in comparison to *not responding*). In summary: *requests attention* ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$), *rappport/empathy* ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$) and *presentation of evidence* ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$) were all significant predictors of *suspects responding relevantly*. In other words, the greater use of these strategies was associated with more *relevant responses*, than if fewer of these strategies were used. In contrast, *explicitly asks for an account* ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$), *emphasises seriousness of offence* ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .01$), *special warning* ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .01$) and *caution reiterated* ($\beta = -.14$, $p < .01$) were all negatively associated with *suspects responding relevantly*. This means that less frequent use of these strategies was associated with more relevant responses (than if more of these strategies were used). No significant associations were found between *suspect response* and the following strategies: *challenge*; *suspect's interest to talk*; *use of silence*; *describes injuries*; and *describe trauma*.

Multinomial logistic regression was also undertaken to explore the relationships between strategy use and whether the suspect *admitted*, *denied* or *made no response* (i.e. neither admitted nor denied). For this analysis, strategies were coded as either present or absent (rather than counts). Some strategies, due to low frequencies or lack of variation, were also excluded. The strategies subsequently included in the regression model were: *requests attention*, *rappport/empathy*, *use of silence*, *explicitly asks for account*, *describes trauma*, and *challenge*. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 54.60$, $p < .001$. This analysis revealed some significant associations with *suspects either admitting or denying an offence*, in comparison to *not responding* these being, *requests attention* ($\beta = 1.63$, $p < .05$) and *rappport/empathy* ($\beta = 1.56$, $p < .01$) associated with an increased likelihood of *suspects admitting the offence* rather than *not responding*; *requests attention* ($\beta = 1.73$, $p < .05$) was also associated with an increased likelihood of *suspects denying the offence* in comparison to not responding; and, use of *describing trauma* ($\beta = -1.67$, $p < .05$) was associated with a decreased likelihood of *suspects admitting an offence*, in comparison to not responding.

Strategy use and suspect interruptions. On average, an *interviewer interrupted the suspect* between once and twice per tape, which was significantly fewer ($M = 1.69$, $Mdn = 0.00$) than *suspect interruptions* ($M = 6.54$, $Mdn = 3.00$), $Z = -12.98$, $p < .001$. A bivariate (two-tailed) Kendall's tau correlation was conducted between number of *suspect interruptions* and number of *interviewer interruptions* and a significant correlation (across interviews) was found between the number of interviewer and suspect interruptions, $\tau = .53$, p (two-tailed) $< .01$. That is, more *suspect interruptions* occurred in the interviews that had more *interviewer interruptions*. Negative binomial regression was also undertaken to explore associations between suspect interruptions and the presence (or absence) of strategies. The key findings are: the presence of *requests attention* ($\beta = 1.05$, $p < .001$), *explicitly asks for*

account ($\beta = .28, p < .05$), *presentation of evidence* ($\beta = 2.01, p < .05$) and *challenge* ($\beta = .39, p < .01$) are significantly associated with increased *suspect interruptions*; and the presence of *suspect's interest to talk* ($\beta = -.51, p < .05$), *situational futility* ($\beta = -.49, p < .05$), special warning ($\beta = -1.87, p < .001$) and *reiterates caution* ($\beta = -.74, p < .01$) are all significantly associated with fewer *suspect interruptions*. The model was significant, $\chi^2 = 126.43 (p < .001)$.

Question types and suspect response. Linear regression was carried out to explore the associations between question type and the suspect's likelihood to respond relevantly (or not). Greater use of *statement* ($\beta = .80, p < .001$) and *open-type questions* ($\beta = .80, p < .05$) were significantly associated with suspects responding *relevantly* (compared to *not responding*); and fewer *closed questions* ($\beta = -.23, p < .001$) was significantly associated with *suspects responding relevantly* (compared to *not responding*). The overall model fit was $R^2 = .62$.

Multinomial logistic regression was also carried out to see whether question types might be associated with whether the suspect was likely to admit (either fully or in part), deny or not respond. Not all question types could be included in the analysis because of low frequencies or lack of variation (i.e. closed questions). The question types (whether present or absent) added in to the model were: *open-type*, *negative*, and *repetitive* question types. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 19.99 (p < .01)$. Two significant associations were identified: the presence of *open-type* questions ($\beta = 1.12, p < .05$) was associated with an increased likelihood of *suspects admitting the offence* (in comparison to not responding); and the presence of *negative* questions ($\beta = 1.23, p < .01$) was associated with an increased likelihood of *suspects denying the offence* (in comparison to *not responding*).

Discussion

The research presented here is distinctive in that it draws on a relatively large sample of real-life serious crime interviews and describes in detail the exchange between police interviewers and serious crime suspects. Few studies have examined suspect response beyond whether a confession was made or not; this study therefore makes an important contribution by exploring suspect response in greater detail and also by examining the associations between suspect response and the strategies and questions used by police interviewers. This research therefore provides a fresh insight into police interviewing of serious crime suspects (in England and Wales).

Strategies

Analysis of these real-life serious case interviews demonstrated that a range of strategies were employed by interviewers. ‘Appropriate’ strategies of *presentation of evidence*, *challenge* and *rappport/empathy* were amongst the most common strategies employed in the present sample of interviews. That *presentation of evidence* was the most frequently observed strategy is in line with other research (Bull & Soukara, 2010; Pearse & Gudjonsson, 1996; Soukara et al., 2002). Interviewers were however more challenging to suspects in the present study than has been observed in other earlier studies (Hakkanen et al., 2009; Baldwin, 1992) (although methodological differences between studies should be noted).

The frequency of these strategies is also in line with the ethos of investigative interviewing. For example, *explicitly asks for an account*, being the third most frequent strategy used, is a key feature of PEACE (i.e. that the suspect should be asked for a full account of what happened). The finding that the frequency of *challenges* increased as the interview tape progressed is also in line with PEACE, that challenges should occur after an

initial account from the suspect is obtained. However, PEACE also recommends building rapport as an important element of an effective interview, and evidence of *rapport* in the present study was, overall, quite rare (e.g. Moston & Engleberg, 1993; Oxburgh et al. 2010). It is however worth highlighting that *rapport/empathy* was significantly more frequent in the initial stages of the interview tape (the first 15 minutes) compared to the next 15 minutes (i.e. the middle of the interview tape). So, whilst it is encouraging that the use of rapport appears to more frequently observed in the earlier stages, the fact that overall it's usage was rare, aligns with the finding by Walsh and Bull (2012), that many interviewers failed to maintain rapport. The ability to develop and maintain rapport with suspects therefore might be a subject worthy of further attention during the training of serious crime interviewers.

Reassuringly, there were no observations of the controversial strategies of *minimisation* and only one instance of *maximisation*, across all interviews. This is clearly encouraging, is in line with the PEACE ethos of ethical interviewing, and reinforces the findings from other UK based studies (e.g. Soukara et al. 2009), that also found these techniques were rarely, if ever, used. With the exception of *minimisation* and *maximisation*, explicit judgements of the appropriateness (or otherwise) of the different strategies were not made in the present research. Nevertheless, the strategies that were most commonly used (*presentation of evidence, challenge, and rapport/empathy*) are unlikely to generate much controversy, and would on the whole be considered appropriate. Others (e.g. *situational futility, emphasising seriousness*) might be perceived as problematic with certain (more vulnerable) individuals. However, the authors' view is that the actual practice of these strategies in the present sample of interviews is unlikely to cause concern to many. For example, the cases under examination in this study were all extremely serious crimes – either murder or rape - and to remind suspects of that, on occasion, felt perfectly reasonable in the author's opinion. Instead, the issue is one of degree, and infrequently used strategies, used

within an appropriate context, may be cause for little concern. However, there were a handful of occasions during interviews where the *clustering* of strategies bordered on verbal aggression, tending to be towards the end of interviews where interviewers perhaps became more desperate or frustrated in their interactions with suspects. In these cases, the suspect tended to deny involvement or not respond, and their stated position never altered. In these interviews a legal advisor was always present, and in two instances, the legal advisor raised their concerns over the questioning becoming oppressive.

A number of significant associations were observed between different strategies and how suspects responded and behaved. For example, *rappport/empathy* was associated with an increased likelihood of suspects admitting the offence. However, the fact that no suspect in this large sample changed their position from denial to admission, and that most suspects who did admit, did so early on in the questioning, possibly points to the opposite: in other words, that more *rappport/empathy* was used because the suspect was admitting. A similar point can be made with regards to the strategy of *describes trauma* which was associated with a decreased likelihood of suspects admitting an offence. *Describing the trauma of a victim* is arguably a more confrontational strategy and might only be employed because the suspect is denying the offence (if the suspect was admitting the offence, then there would be no call to use it).

Question style

In line with previous research (Read, Powell, Kebbell, Milne & Steinberg, 2013; Snook, Luther, Quinlan & Milne, 2012; Griffiths & Milne, 2006), *closed* questions were by far the most frequently noted type of questions used which contrasts with relevant guidance/training. Although *closed-open type* questions were much less frequent than *closed* questions, further analysis revealed that open questions occurred more during the initial phase

of each interview tape, which is in line with PEACE and aligns with Griffiths and Milne's study of serious crime interviewing in 2006.

Statement questions were the second most frequent type of question asked, which appears to be a higher frequency to that found by Snook et al. (2012) and Read et al. (2013). (It should be noted that the different methods adopted to measure question type frequency might mean the results are not wholly comparable). Whilst some studies of police interviewing identify *statement* questions as unproductive (Oxburgh et al., 2010), a different position was adopted in the present research. During the early stages of testing the coding frame (which initially did not include a code for statement questions), clear adjacency pairs were evident although they could not, in lexical terms, be categorised as one of the existing question types. For example:

Interviewer: John Smith said you were there that night. Were you at the Ship Inn public house that night?

Suspect: No, I wasn't there then. I was there earlier that day but left at 4pm.

Interviewer: So, you're saying that John is incorrect in thinking that he saw you there that evening.

Using the example above ("So, you're saying that John was incorrect..."), one option might be to make an inference as to the type of question it was intended to be. However, since these types of questions were relatively frequent, it was decided that a separate code (*statement* questions) should be used to capture these. It should be emphasised therefore that in the present research, *statement* questions per se, are not considered an inappropriate question type.

Statement questions, as defined in this study, might therefore benefit from further qualitative analysis of their construction and purpose. For example, *statement* questions were characterised by interviewers echoing or rephrasing something suspects had recently said, with the purpose of prompting the suspect to continue talking. As a result some *statement* questions might be more closely aligned to how *closed-open type* questions were categorised in this research, rather than closed. The finding that *statement* questions and *open-type* questions were significantly associated with *suspects responding relevantly* (compared to not responding) lends credence to this view. This type of issue emphasises the importance of using audio-recordings as opposed to written transcripts; the intonation of a phrase (and therefore the intended function of that question) may only be noted using audio-recordings as opposed to written transcripts. Although *open-type* questions are associated with suspects responding relevantly as well as an increased likelihood of suspects admitting the offence, the use of these question types might be a *consequence* of suspects responding or admitting (and not a *cause* of it).

Similarly, *negative* questions were associated with an increased likelihood of suspects denying the offence. Again, using *negative* questions with suspects that are denying offences suggests that attempts are being made to persuade the suspect of an alternative position, for example “The evidence suggests that you were there that night, don’t you agree with that?” Whilst the use of *negative* questions is likely to receive less attention (or criticism) in cases with suspects who persist in denials (and do not change their position), there are potentially more damaging implications if suspects did change from denial to admission. However, the fact that *negative* questions are present at all may well be a cause for concern and something to be addressed in police training of interviewers.

While the potentially negative consequences of certain question types are well understood, it should be emphasised that the overall frequency of *negative, repetitive,*

multiple and *ineffective* questions was low in comparison to all of the other types of questions asked. This is in contrast to some studies (e.g. Soukara, 2004 found repetitive questions occurred in the vast majority of interviews) but consistent with others (e.g. Bull & Cherryman, 1996, found the use of long or overly complex questions were rare). It is also worth highlighting that analysis of simple frequencies of questions might be misleading. For example, we saw above that *repetitive* questions might well be appropriate if suspects continually interrupt or evade answering a pertinent question. Similarly, whilst *open* questions are universally considered as an appropriate question type, they might not always be effective. For example, in one case, a legal advisor specifically asked the interviewer to avoid open questions as the (young) suspect would find it easier to respond to closed, specific questions.

There were also instances when, in the authors' opinion, open questions could have been asked and were not, or where open questions were asked and very quickly suspects' replies were interrupted with a closed question (a finding consistent with that of Read et al. 2013). This suggests that there may still be some room for improvement in police use of open questions, particularly in allowing suspects the opportunity to fully respond to an open question.

One of the principles of effective questioning advocated in PEACE is to allow suspects the opportunity to provide an uninterrupted account. The pattern of interruptions and overtalking during real-life police-suspect interviews has not been well documented to date. In the present study, it was encouraging that interviewer interruptions appear therefore, at least on average, to be quite rare, and appear broadly consistent with effective practice recommendations described earlier. Also, it is worth highlighting that interviewers interrupted suspects far less than suspects interrupted interviewers.

The results showed that the presence of *negative, multiple, statement* and *repetitive* questions were all associated with increased suspect interruptions. Many of these question types are considered to be unproductive and their correlation with increased interruptions is noteworthy. Alone, this might indicate that interviewers who use unproductive questioning techniques also interrupt more, pointing to an overall lack of questioning skill. However, when one also looks at suspect interruptions, which were significantly more prevalent than interviewer interruptions, we can see that more suspect interruptions were also significantly correlated with these unproductive type questions. This might explain why more *repetitive* questions, for example, are correlated with increased suspect interruptions: questions may have to be repeated because suspects are interrupting.

Returning to the overall frequencies of these question types found in the present study, *repetitive* questions, *ineffective*, and *negative* questions were actually quite rare. Also, *statement* questions, for reasons described above, whilst more frequent, were not, in the present study, necessarily considered unproductive. The associations identified between certain infrequently used question types, and interviewer and suspect interruptions, might therefore point to a more complex interaction of factors.

Consequently, and in line with recommendations by Oxburgh et al (2010), it is advocated that the context in which questions are asked should be integral when evaluating police questioning. For example, although negative type questions are unlikely to ever be effective or appropriate, the same may not always be true for others (i.e. *repetitive* questions). Equally, whilst *open* questions are universally considered an appropriate form of question, they might not necessarily be effective for all suspects. Similarly, *statement* questions, one of the most frequent types of questions observed in the present sample of interviews, may actually have been intended (and potentially successful) as a strategy to encourage further information from the suspect. Finally, whilst interrupting suspects might in theory always be

considered ineffective practice, the suspect behaviour evident in the present sample at times arguably necessitated reasonable interruptions. For instance, interviewers might interrupt suspects who were very aggressive or who appeared to be deliberately avoiding answering the question asked.

Conclusion

This innovative research presented here progresses our understanding of how suspects respond in interviews by moving away from focusing solely on whether suspects admit or deny offences to include how suspects actually respond during interviews.

There are a number of issues with the present research that necessarily limit the findings. First, interviews were not randomly selected. Consequently, this limits the ability to generalise the findings to the wider population of serious crime suspect interviews. Nevertheless, the research did obtain interviews from a wide range of forces and so goes some way towards minimising this problem. It would therefore be useful to explore whether the findings identified here could be replicated in a larger and randomly selected sample of interviews.

Overall, the intention of this research was to enhance understanding of the actual police interviewing of serious crime suspects. As such, it focused on breadth of exploration, rather than in-depth analysis of specific issues. Consequently, further detailed (and possibly qualitative) analysis is likely to have merit. Identifying real (but anonymised) examples of good (and poor) practice might be of particular value for police training. Finally, the issue of treating each interview tape as a discrete interview has been dealt with earlier in this paper but readers are reminded that this may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalised.

Whilst questions remain over the efficacy (and appropriateness) of some strategies, the range of strategies observed here suggests that interviewing officers were not deterred from actively encouraging even the most reluctant suspects to talk or from allowing cooperative suspects full opportunity to provide a detailed account. It is important to emphasise that the finding that strategies do not appear to be particularly effective in encouraging reluctant suspects to speak does not necessarily mean that these strategies should be discounted completely. The persistence of interviewing officers in providing suspects with every opportunity and encouragement to provide their side of the story may in itself be an effective strategy for jurors to consider and in minimising the possibility of suspects devising credible but false defences later on in the criminal justice process.

This paper also provides further evidence that police questioning practice in the UK is adhering to many of the elements of skilled questioning laid down in national guidelines. However, there continues to be room for improvement. Although relatively infrequent, inappropriate question types like negative and multiple questions may leave interviewing officers open to criticism, both during and after the interview process. Although the topic of question types does feature in advanced interview training, it is possible that refresher training might be helpful especially on better use of open questions. It is also recommended that research that seeks to guide such improvements must consider the context within which a question is asked or a particular strategy is used.

In conclusion, only a handful of studies have explored the relationship between suspect response and the strategies and questions used by interviewers. In turn, only a small proportion of these have drawn on real-life data. None have specifically examined serious crime suspects. The present research is the first to address these gaps and, despite its limitations, it is hoped that the insights provided here will be of interest and use to researchers and practitioners alike.

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