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Brent Snook, Kirk Luther, Heather Quinlan and Rebecca Milne
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LET 'EM TALK!

A Field Study of Police Questioning Practices of Suspects and Accused Persons

BRENT SNOOK

KIRK LUTHER

HEATHER QUINLAN

Memorial University, Canada

REBECCA MILNE

University of Portsmouth, UK

The real-life questioning practices of Canadian police officers were examined. Specifically, 80 transcripts of police interviews with suspects and accused persons were coded for the type of questions asked, the length of interviewee response to each question, the proportion of words spoken by interviewer(s) and interviewee, and whether or not a free narrative was requested. Results showed that, on average, less than 1% of the questions asked in an interview were open-ended, and that closed yes–no and probing questions composed approximately 40% and 30% of the questions asked, respectively. The longest interviewee responses were obtained from open-ended questions, followed by multiple and probing question types. A free narrative was requested in approximately 14% of the interviews. The 80–20 talking rule was violated in every interview. The implications of these findings for reforming investigative interviewing of suspects and accused persons are discussed.

Keywords: investigative interviewing; interrogations; police; best practices; training; question types

Investigative interviewing researchers tend to agree, for the most part, on the questioning practices required to conduct professional and ethical information-gathering interviews (e.g., Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Lamb, Hershkowitz, Orbach, & Esplin, 2008; Milne & Bull, 2003; Shepherd, 2007). A common observation made from examinations of real-life witness and suspect interviews, however, is that interviewers use best questioning practices rarely (e.g., Baldwin, 1993; Clarke, Milne, & Bull, 2011; Fisher, Geiselman, & Raymond, 1987; Snook & Keating, 2010; Wright & Alison, 2004). Even more disconcerting is that trained interviewers also struggle to implement best practices (Soukara, Bull, Vrij, Turner, & Cherryman, 2009). The failure to use best practices raises serious concerns about the ability of investigators to obtain complete and accurate information that is needed to conduct criminal investigations successfully and efficiently.

AUTHORS' NOTE: Brent Snook, Kirk Luther, and Heather Quinlan, Department of Psychology, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, NL, Canada; Rebecca Milne, Centre for Forensic Interviewing, Institute of Criminal Justice Studies, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, UK. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Brent Snook, Department of Psychology, Science Building, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, NL, Canada, A1B 3X9, Canada; e-mail: bsnook@mun.ca.

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What constitutes best practices with respect to questioning practices? Granted, the answer to this question can be intricate because of the many components that compose professional questioning skills. However, there are a few core components that most researchers and trained practitioners would likely agree on as being fundamental for conducting thorough, efficient, and professional information-gathering interviews. For instance, most would agree that interviewers should ask as many open-ended questions as possible (see Lamb et al., 2008; Milne & Bull, 2003; Read, Powell, Kebbell, & Milne, 2009). It is also best practice to listen actively (and not to interrupt) once an open-ended question is asked so that central topics can be noted for further exploration within the questioning phases of the interview (Beune, Giebels, Adair, Fennis, & Van Der Zee, 2011). Active listening also helps the interviewer avoid repeating unnecessary questions. It is also pertinent not to violate an 80–20 talking rule (where the interviewer talks for 20% of the interview), thus supporting the “less is more” axiom with respect to investigative interviewing. Inappropriate questions that have the potential to extract short, incomplete, or inaccurate answers, such as closed yes–no, multiple-choice, leading, and forced-choice questions, should be avoided during interviews. Furthermore, interviewers should remain nonjudgmental by, for example, not stating their own opinions or thoughts about the event(s) in question. There are other best questioning practices, but the essence of a professional interview is simple: use practices that allow an interviewee to talk.

Despite practitioners and academics agreeing on what constitutes best practices, field studies of police interviews—especially where the officers have not been afforded training, supervision, or feedback—have shown that most real-life interviews contain many undesirable practices. For instance, research has shown that investigative interviewers tend to ask many more inappropriate rather than appropriate questions (Myklebust & Alison, 2000; Smith & Ellsworth, 1987; Walsh & Milne, 2008). In one of the first field studies exploring witness interviewing practices, Fisher et al. (1987) analyzed 11 video-recorded witness interviews and found that questions consisted mostly of closed yes–no questions—described as being delivered in a staccato style—and only three open-ended questions were asked per interview. On average, only 10% of questions composing an interview consisted of open-ended questions. Similarly, Clifford and George (1996) found that 73% of the questions asked by untrained investigators were closed yes–no questions, and only 2% were open-ended. This inappropriate style of questioning has also been documented routinely since those seminal studies (e.g., Clarke et al., 2011; Griffiths & Milne, 2006; Griffiths, Milne, & Cherryman, 2011; Snook & Keating, 2010; Walsh & Milne, 2008).

Related to the types of questions asked is the requesting of a free narrative at the beginning of an interview. The use of free narratives is encouraged when extracting information from interviewees because the free recall phase of the interview has been shown to procure the most accurate form of remembering with the best quality of detail (e.g., Lipton, 1977). Free recall provides approximately one third to one half of all information extracted during the entire interview (see Milne & Bull, 2003). It is this initial phase that allows the interviewer an insight into the interviewee’s mental representation of the event, which in turn helps the interviewer structure the subsequent questioning of the interview (Milne, Shaw, & Bull, 2007). However, the extent to which a free narrative is used tends to vary dramatically across interviewers. Fisher et al. (1987), for instance, found that only approximately 30% of the witness interviews contained the use of a free narrative. Yet, more

recently, Snook and Keating (2010) observed the use of a free narrative in approximately 70% of the witness interviews they examined. Although free narratives have historically been associated with witness interviewing (presumably because of the perceived cooperativeness of a witness or victim), the requesting of a free narrative is also encouraged for suspect interviews because they also enable investigators to collect information that is checkable and verifiable when searching for the truth (see Shepherd, 2007).

Overtalking on the part of the interviewer is also of concern in investigative interviews. It is generally accepted that interviewers should talk around 20% of the time during interviews (Fisher, 1995; Shepherd, 2007). There is no doubting that the time occupied when the interviewer is talking is time that the interviewee is not providing information. Myklebust and Alison (2000) reported that interviewers spent about as much time talking as the children who were interviewed. In studies of adult witness interviewing practices, Wright and Alison (2004) found that interviewers spoke, on average, 33% of the time, and Snook and Keating (2010) also found that interviewers spoke, on average, 36% of the time. Snook and Keating also reported that the interviewers actually spoke more than the witness in 16% of the interviews analyzed. Talking too much on the part of the interviewer can lead to a reduction in the cognitive effort employed by interviewees, which may reduce the likelihood of their provision of a complete account. Overtalking may also result in the interviewer providing too much guidance or information to the interviewee (Wright & Alison, 2004). Of course, the amount of talking time by the interviewer will need to vary according to the level of cooperativeness exhibited by the interviewee (e.g., when using a conversation management model; see Shepherd, 2007). Officers may need to talk more when interviewing uncooperative than when interviewing cooperative interviewees. Given that the goal of an interview is to extract as much complete and accurate information as possible, and the fact that the interviewer was not present at the offence, it remains imperative—regardless of level of cooperation—that the majority of the talking be done by the interviewee.

Field and self-report studies conducted around the world have provided much knowledge about what occurs inside of interview and interrogation rooms. As reviewed above, studies of witness and victim interviewing practices show that interviewers generally do not use *questioning practices* that maximize the amount of information that can be extracted from an interviewee's memory. Studies of suspect interviewing practices in North America, however, have focused largely on the types of interrogation *tactics* and *techniques* that are used to elicit confessions from offenders, with many showing that officers often engage in accusatorial methods that also sometimes contain coercive and manipulative tactics (for practices relating to youth interrogations, see Feld, 2006; Meyer & Reppucci, 2007; for practices relating to adult interrogations, see Kassin et al., 2007; King & Snook, 2009; Leo, 1996). In addition to the interrogation tactics being employed by officers, field studies in the United Kingdom have shown that the problems surrounding questioning practices observed with witness interviews also exist with suspect interviews (see Baldwin, 1993; Walsh & Bull, 2010), and that training interviewers on best questioning practices does not always lead to the desired improvements (Bull & Soukara, 2010; Soukara et al., 2009).

The limited knowledge about the current questioning practices (which we contrast with interrogation tactics and techniques) being utilized in interrogation rooms in North America provided the impetus for the current study. The goal of the current field study was to add

to this body of knowledge by examining the questioning practices employed by Canadian police officers when interviewing suspects and accused persons. More specifically, our goal was to replicate Wright and Alison's (2004) and Snook and Keating's (2010) research on witness interviewing using a sample of suspect interviews. Given the lack of (and often insufficient) interview training provided to Canadian police officers (see Snook, House, MacDonald, & Eastwood, in press) and knowledge about the questioning practices used by police officers in the United Kingdom, it is expected that best interviewing practices would be observed infrequently.

METHOD

SAMPLE

A convenience sample ($N = 80$) of police interviews with suspects was obtained from a Canadian police organization. The interviews were conducted between 1999 and 2008. The types of crimes the suspects were interviewed about were fraud (20.0%), assault (16.3%), sexual assault (11.3%), robbery (8.8%), theft and break and enter (7.5%), homicide (6.3%), and a range of other crimes (i.e., uttering threats, solicitation, mischief, verbal harassment, attempted murder, possession of stolen property, property damage, breach of security, Internet luring of a child, sexual interference, child abuse, and hit and run all occurred 5.4% or less). In 46 of the interviews (57.5%), there was one interviewer present, with two interviewers present in the remaining interviews. Of the primary interviewers, 64 (79.0%) were men. A total of 37 different primary officers composed the sample; the most interviews any one interviewer did was seven. The mean age of the primary interviewers was 42.09 years ($SD = 5.05$, range = 24–52), and the average years of policing experience for the primary interviewers was 18.96 ($SD = 5.84$, range = 2–28). A total of 76 (95%) primary interviewers held the rank of constable at the time of the interview. The mean age of the suspects was 24.48 ($n = 60$, $SD = 17.59$, range = 18–62), and 71 (88.8%) of the suspects were male.

PROCEDURE

The interviews were transcribed by clerical staff at the participating police organization and provided to the researchers on compact discs. A coding guide and content dictionary were developed. In the current study, we coded the types of questions asked, response length for each question type, whether or not a free narrative was requested, and talking time by interviewer and interviewee. The total number of words spoken by the interviewer(s) and the interviewee, along with the length of response to each question, was determined by using the word count feature in Microsoft Word 2010.

The following nine question types were coded:

Open-ended: These questions encourage interviewees to provide answers from free recall memory. They allow for a wide range of responses, and typically start with “tell,” “explain,” or “describe.” For example, “Tell me about the argument with your wife” would constitute an open-ended question.

Probing: These questions tap into cued recall memory and tend to generate answers that are narrower in scope compared to those provided from open-ended questions. They usually commence

with “who,” “what,” “why,” “where,” “when,” or “how.” An example of a probing question would be, “What part of her body hit the ground first?”

Closed yes–no: These questions tap into cued recall as well, but are typically answered with a “yes” or “no” response. An example of a closed yes–no question would be, “Did he have his face covered?”

Leading: This type of question also taps into cued recall memory but suggests an answer to the interviewee. That is, the desired answer is embedded in the question. For example, the question “You were drunk, right?” constitutes a leading question.

Forced-choice: This type of question only offers the interviewee a limited number of possible responses. “Did you kick or punch the other woman?” would be an example of a forced-choice question.

Opinion/statement: This involves posing an opinion or puts statements to an interviewee. For example, “I think you assaulted Mr. Eastwood” would be classified as an opinion/statement.

Multiple: This question type involves the interviewer asking several questions at once, without giving the interviewee a chance to respond after each question. An example of this would be, “How did you get there? What did you do inside? When did you first decide to steal the car?”

Re-asked: This question type involves the interviewer asking any question that was asked earlier in the interview.

Clarification: These question types involve the interviewer repeating what the interviewee has said but forming it as a question. An example of a clarification question would be as follows: Interviewee: John said he went to a movie. Interviewer: Okay, so John went to a movie? Interviewee: Yes, that’s right.”

The aforementioned question types were coded as they appear frequently in the scientific literature on investigative interviewing (see, e.g., Griffiths & Milne, 2006; Snook & Keating, 2010; Wright & Alison, 2004), thus allowing for consistency in the interpretation of results across studies.

INTERRATER RELIABILITY

The second and third authors coded the transcripts. The coders were provided with a 2-hour-long training session that covered the practical aspects of coding the transcripts, the structure and content of the coding guide, and the content dictionary. The reliability of coding was measured using Cohen’s kappa (Cohen, 1960) and percentage agreement. Reliability was calculated for (a) whether or not a passage of text was a question, (b) the type of question that was used by the interviewer, and (c) the request for a free narrative. The overall kappa and percentage agreement for whether or not a passage of text was a question were .94 and 98.29%, respectively. The kappa and percentage agreement for question type were .86 and 90.35%, respectively. The kappa and percentage agreement for the interviewer requesting a free narrative were 1.00 and 100%, respectively. These values suggest an excellent level of agreement between the coders (Landis & Koch, 1977).

RESULTS

The average number of questions per interview was 96.90 ($SD = 70.94$, 95% CI = 81.11, 112.69). The mean percentage of questions asked and associated 95% confidence intervals for each of the nine question types are shown in Figure 1. On average, 39.98% of all questions asked by interviewing officers were closed yes–no ($SD = 11.81$, CI = 37.35, 42.61) and 29.26% were probing ($SD = 9.95$, CI = 27.05, 31.47). Clarification-based questions

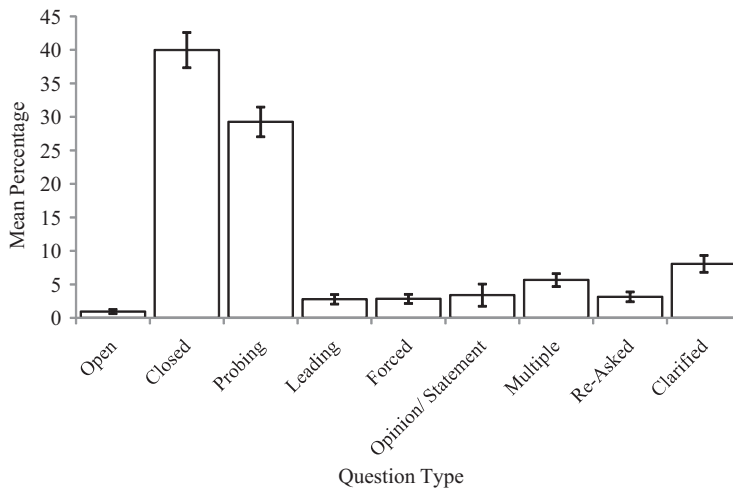


Figure 1: The Mean Percentage of Questions Asked, and Associated 95% Confidence Interval, per Interview

composed 8.07% of all questions asked ($SD = 5.66$, $CI = 6.81, 9.33$). Opinions/statements accounted for 7.40% of all questions asked ($SD = 7.44$, $CI = 5.74, 9.06$). Multiple questions composed 5.65% ($SD = 4.35$, $CI = 4.68, 6.62$), re-asked questions composed 3.15% ($SD = 3.29$, $CI = 2.39, 3.91$), forced-choice questions composed 2.84% ($SD = 3.07$, $CI = 2.16, 3.52$), and leading questions composed 2.78% ($SD = 3.21$, $CI = 2.07, 3.49$) of all questions asked, respectively. Open-ended questions composed 0.95% all questions asked ($SD = 1.40$, $CI = 0.64, 1.26$), and such a question type was never used in 49 (61.25%) of the interviews. In addition, 23 of the 37 (62.16%) interviewers asked open-ended questions. Of the 49 interviews where time of day was reported at the beginning and end of the transcripts, it was determined that the average length of interview was 33.49 minutes ($SD = 25.09$, $CI = 26.28, 40.70$). On average, 3.09 questions were asked each minute ($SD = 1.59$, $CI = 2.63, 3.55$).

The average length of response for each type of question asked is shown in Figure 2. The average length of response for all open-ended questions was 90.98 words ($SD = 190.81$, $CI = 42.70, 139.26$). When free narratives were removed, the average response for open-ended questions was 47.16 words ($SD = 62.58$, $CI = 29.64, 64.68$). The average length of response for multiple questions was 16.18 words ($SD = 29.52$, $CI = 13.58, 18.78$), followed by 15.22 words ($SD = 28.01$, $CI = 14.03, 16.42$) for probing questions. The average response length for closed yes–no questions was 10.24 words ($SD = 20.85$, $CI = 9.43, 11.05$). Average length of response for clarification questions was 10.62 words ($SD = 17.83$, $CI = 9.19, 12.05$), 12.10 words ($SD = 16.59$, $CI = 9.75, 14.46$) for forced-choice questions, 10.14 words ($SD = 26.05$, $CI = 7.06, 13.21$) for leading questions, 11.90 words ($SD = 27.65$, $CI = 9.55, 14.24$) for opinion/statement questions, and 13.98 words ($SD = 17.83$, $CI = 10.67, 17.29$) for re-asked questions.

On average, 55.58% ($CI = 51.76\%, 59.40\%$) of the words spoken in an interview were attributed to the interviewers. The 80–20 talking rule was violated in 100% of the interviews. Moreover, a 70–30 rule was violated in 95% of interviews, and a 60–40 rule was

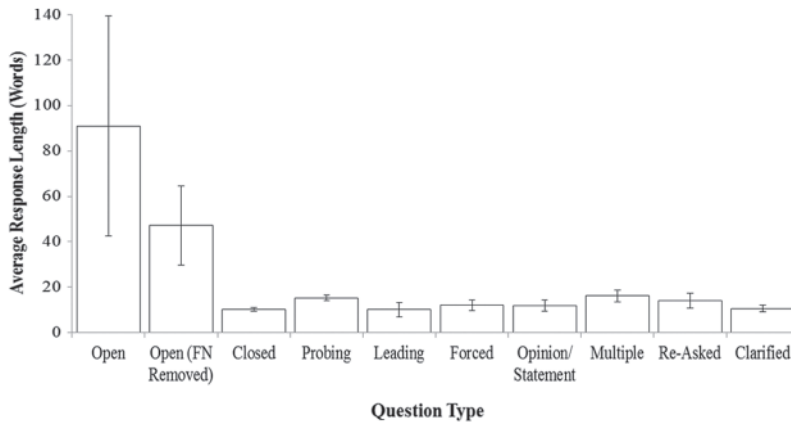


Figure 2: The Average Response Length (in words), and Associated 95% Confidence Interval, as a Function of Question Type. FN = Free Narrative

violated in 75% of interviews. In 47 of the interviews (58.75%), the interviewers spoke more than the interviewee.

A free narrative was requested in 11 interviews (13.8%) by nine different interviewers. From those 11 free narratives, 10 (90.91%) were requested solely at the beginning of the interview. The average length of response for the free narratives was 286.18 words ($SD = 380.39$, $CI = 61.39$, 510.97).

DISCUSSION

Our analysis of questioning practices in a sample of interviews with suspects and accused persons showed that best practices are not being followed often. In general, the overarching finding is that interviewers failed to use practices that allow suspects or accused persons to talk and provide information freely. Rather than using practices to facilitate the extraction of information, interviewers tended to ask many short-answer questions, asked few open-ended questions, dominated the talking time, and requested free narratives infrequently. These findings suggest that there is much room for improvement in how investigators gather information from suspects and accused persons.

Consistent with previous findings, we found that interviewers almost never asked open-ended questions starting with “tell,” “explain,” or “describe” (e.g., Fisher et al., 1987; Griffiths & Milne, 2006; Wright & Alison, 2004). This finding may simply be because of the fact that these words are not a common part of our vernacular used to form questions in everyday life and thus may be difficult to use. It may also be because of the fact that these investigators were never trained to ask open-ended questions according to the way researchers define them. What is somewhat intriguing, however, is the discrepancy between the percentage of open-ended questions in our study and those reported in previous field studies of witness interviews. Specifically, Snook and Keating’s (2010) field study of witness interviews showed that around 6% of all questions asked in an interview were

open-ended, but we found that open-ended questions composed less than 1% of all questions asked to suspects. Such differences in the proportion of open-ended questions asked within witness and suspect interviews may simply be the result of random fluctuations. Nevertheless, such differences raise questions about the mind-set of interviewers when dealing with different types of interviewees.

There is much consensus among investigative interviewing researchers that all interviews—regardless of type of interviewee—should be an exercise in gathering complete and accurate information (Read et al., 2009). Previous studies have shown that open-ended questions elicit the most information from an interviewee (see Milne & Bull, 2003). Our analysis of response lengths from open-ended questions and requests for free narratives also supports this notion. The very infrequent use of open-ended questions may also be the result of a self-fulfilling prophecy where interviewers have a preconceived idea that suspects will be unwilling to provide an account on their own accord, thus they do not ask the questions that would result in a free and extensive account being provided. Some support for this speculation comes from research showing that the types of questions asked vary if there are preexisting expectations (for an example of how preconceptions of guilt lead to the use of confirmation-seeking questions by investigators, see, e.g., Kassir, Goldstein, & Savitsky, 2003).

In contrast to an expectation that suspects will always be unwilling to talk, research with offenders suggests that they may be willing to provide information if they are treated in a humane and ethical manner. In a recent study by Vanderhallen, Vervaeke, and Holmberg (2011), 126 interviewees completed a questionnaire about the perceptions of the interviewer's approach and a measure of working alliance. They found a positive correlation between working alliance and humanitarian interviewing style, empathy, respect, and interview clarity. By contrast, there was a negative correlation between working alliance and a dominating interviewing style and feelings of anxiety (for similar findings, see Beune, Giebels, & Taylor, 2010; Kebbell, Alison, Hurren, & Mazerolle, 2010; O'Connor & Carson, 2005). Future experimental research should examine how the level of responsiveness expected from an interviewee influences the types of questions (e.g., open-ended vs. closed yes–no) that interviewers ask.

In terms of the other types of questions asked, we found, as have other researchers, that nearly half of all questions asked tended to be either closed yes–no or probing (e.g., Griffiths & Milne, 2006; for how such questions may be used intentionally by interviewers to control the interview, also see Griffiths et al., 2011). The use of probing and closed yes–no question types at appropriate points in an interview is acceptable (e.g., after open-ended questions have been used). However, the overuse of and reliance on probing and closed yes–no questions to extract the majority of information is problematic because it is a sign of a controlling interview strategy, and the elicited information is tied to the specific request that often generates shorter responses than those obtained from open-ended questions (Fisher et al., 1987; Griffiths et al., 2011). Our results showed that, on average, open-ended questions (including free narratives) produced 6 times more information as probing questions and 9 times more information as closed yes–no questions. As a consequence, unsolicited information is generated rarely from closed yes–no questions, and the information gathered might ultimately narrow the scope of the investigation and provide little guidance as to whether the suspect is lying and/or is guilty (for how information-gathering interviews are useful for the Strategic Use of Evidence (SUE) technique, see Granhag, Stromwall, & Hartwig, 2007).

Given that none of the interviewers in the current sample had been trained on how to sequence their questions in the recommended open–probing–closed yes–no order (see Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Griffiths & Milne, 2006), we chose not to include it as part of our analyses. Nevertheless, we felt compelled to take a cursory look at the question sequence for each interview. This informal analysis failed to produce a logical pattern in any interview (i.e., no interview followed the open–probing–closed yes–no sequence that is advocated in the scientific literature). In fact, all interviewers were haphazard in their use of questions.

In comparison to studies of witness interviews, the results from the current study showed that the interviewers tended to express their opinions/statements about the events in question relatively frequently. For instance, we found nearly 7 times more opinions/statements being used than what Snook and Keating (2010) reported in their study of witness interviews. We postulate that relatively more opinions and statements were used because of the traditional confession culture in countries, such as Canada and the United States, where accusatorial interviewing approaches are ubiquitous. Interviewers using an accusatorial approach try to convince the interviewees that it is in their best interests to confess their wrongdoing (for a comprehensive account of the link between accusatorial interviews and false confessions, see Lassiter & Meissner, 2010). A natural corollary of the accusatorial methods is the use of opinions and/or statements (e.g., “I have no doubt that you are responsible for the assault”) to persuade an interviewee who is perceived to be uncooperative to become cooperative. It is possible that the use of opinions/statements may cause interviewees to become defensive and uncooperative if the interviewer’s expressed attitudes are factually incorrect, accusatorial, and/or judgmental. Research suggests that suspects and accused persons are more inclined to deny offences and to be uncooperative when they perceive the interviewer to be domineering (see, e.g., Beune et al., 2010; Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Kebbell et al., 2010; O’Connor & Carson, 2005; Vanderhallen et al., 2011). Even if our speculations are wrong, the expression of opinions/statements is not conducive to effective information extraction.

In general, the officers asked relatively few leading, multiple, forced-choice, and re-asked questions. It is important to note that these questions should not be asked at all during an interview because they are not conducive to maximizing the amount of information gathered. Furthermore, misunderstandings and memory contamination, which decrease the reliability of the elicited information, can occur easily. For instance, leading questions suggest an answer to an interviewee, multiple questions make it difficult to ascertain which question the interviewee is meant to answer, and forced-choice questions cause interviewees to guess the answer by selecting one of the options given (which may or may not be the correct answer), thus potentially resulting in incorrect information being brought into an investigation (Milne & Bull, 2003).

Another important finding was that the interviewers talked too much and often talked more than the interviewee. The finding that interviewers talked more than 50% of the time is substantially higher than Wright and Alison’s (2004) and Snook and Keating’s (2010) findings that Canadian interviewers spoke, on average, slightly more than 30% of the time during a witness interview. The domination of talking time may also be related to the confession culture, where the interviewer monopolizes the time to convince suspects of guilt and to minimize the speaking time given to the interviewee to obtain a psychological

advantage over the individual (see Inbau, Reid, & Buckley, 2004). As mentioned above, it may also be the case that the assumption that suspects are not going to talk much leads the interviewer to talk the majority of the interview to persuade the suspects to confess. Alternatively, the overtalking on the part of the interviewer may also be a reaction to the interviewee's perceived unwillingness to talk, whereby the interviewer has made the decision that they will have to engage in extensive conversation to extract the desired information.

Contrary to the observations from witness interviews, free narratives were almost never requested. The 14% of interviews that contained a request for a free narrative is around half of the percentage reported by Fisher et al. (1987) and dramatically lower than the 70% found by Snook and Keating (2010). Again, this finding may be a result of the interviewing officer's belief that suspects will not talk and will likely be uncooperative. These findings are troubling because research by Lipton (1977) showed that more than one third of the information obtained in a witness interview is gathered from the free narrative. It is likely that the amount of information obtained using a free narrative with a suspect will be lower than that obtained with a cooperative witness. However, it is still likely that the use of a free narrative with suspects will lead to the collection of more information than when using other question types. In fact, we found that the average response for the 11 free narratives that were requested was, on average, 24 times longer than that provided for all other question types (excluding open-ended questions). The free narrative also represented approximately 10% of the interviewee's talking time, whereas each of the other question types generated just less than 1% of the interviewee's talking time (i.e., there was an average of 97 questions per interview). Regardless of one's belief about the cooperativeness of an interviewee, every attempt should be made to obtain a free narrative of the events in question.

There are two potential limitations of the current study. One limitation is that a convenience sample of transcripts was used. Although a random sample is always preferable in research, this particular sort of applied research demands that researchers work under the constraints of participating organizations. We are not aware of any field study that has been able to obtain a true random sample of interview transcripts, and our results are very similar to those of other studies (i.e., a convergence of evidence). Another limitation is that the current study examined only transcribed interviews. Reading transcribed interviews eliminates the context provided by many verbal and physical cues. The transcribed interviews prevent the researchers from hearing the intonation of the officer's voice during the interview. For instance, we could not determine if open-ended questions were being shouted, or the amount of time between questions being asked, and whether or not an interviewee's personal space was being invaded. We also were unable to examine interruptions when using transcripts, which is obviously a key variable in suspect-interviewer interactions (Shepherd, 2007). As always, we encourage replication of our research, especially research that is able to examine questioning practices through the use of audio- and video-recorded interviews.

There is no doubting the fact that interviewing suspects is a key aspect of every police investigation and subsequent legal proceedings. The results of this field study showed that, for at least one police organization, best practices for eliciting complete and accurate accounts were not being followed when interviewing suspects and accused persons. In particular, the take-home message from the current findings is that investigators do not engage in interviewing practices that facilitate effective information gathering from suspects

and accused persons. Assuming that our results generalize to other police organizations in Canada (and perhaps the United States as well), and we suspect they do because of the reported lack of training and feedback afforded to Canadian officers (see Snook et al., in press), more effort needs to go into educating officers about the practices that can increase the likelihood of them obtaining complete and accurate accounts.

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Brent Snook is an associate professor of psychology at Memorial University. He conducts research aimed at improving the criminal justice system. Specifically, he studies decision making in legal settings, investigative interviewing, and the effect of pseudoscientific practices on the administration of justice.

Kirk Luther is an MSc candidate at Memorial University of Newfoundland. His research interests include the cognitive processes underlying judgment and decision making, crime linkage systems, and police interviewing methods. His other research interests include distinguishing science and pseudoscience practices in law enforcement.

Heather Quinlan is a PsyD candidate at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Her research interests include police interviewing and interrogation methods and the decision-making processes involved with youth in the criminal justice system. Her other research interests include the psychological variables associated with vulnerable populations, such as youth transitioning out of foster care and homeless youth.

Becky Milne is a reader in forensic psychology at the Centre of Forensic Interviewing, Institute of Criminal Justice Studies, University of Portsmouth. She conducts research examining the most effective ways to attain the best evidence from witnesses, victims, and suspects of crime. She works closely with law enforcement, advising and training.