IMPROVING INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

by

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I am the author of the thesis entitled

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submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Currently, many police and other criminal justice professionals across Australia use a narrative-based interview protocol to interview all children. This interview procedure is based on a large body of international research into children’s cognitive processes that has found various techniques to enhance a child’s ability to recall events and relay accurate and detailed information. While ample evidence supports the use of best-practice interview protocols with children in general, prior research into the communication styles of Australian Aboriginal peoples suggests that there may be more appropriate ways to interview Aboriginal children. Despite the heterogeneity of Aboriginal peoples, certain styles of relating are shared, and are markedly different to the communication styles of non-Aboriginal peoples. This thesis aimed to examine the investigative interviewing of Australian Aboriginal children, and clarify the suitability of best-practice interview procedure with this population. The objective was to yield information concerning how forensic interviews are conducted with Aboriginal children (in the context of sexual abuse investigation), with the ultimate goal of improving interview protocols to better suit their communication styles.

Four original and multi-method studies are presented in this thesis. The first study aimed to qualitatively evaluate the applicability of an investigative interview protocol to Aboriginal children and examine how it could be modified to better suit the communication styles in many Aboriginal communities. A diverse group of 28 participants who had expertise in Aboriginal language and culture, as well as an understanding of the child investigative interview process, each partook in an in-depth semi-structured interview where they were prompted to reflect on Aboriginal language and culture with reference to a current interview protocol. Thematic
analysis revealed overall support for the narrative based structure of the interview protocol when eliciting information from Aboriginal children. A number of concerns were also identified and these largely related to the syntax and vocabulary within the protocol, as well as the methods of questioning and building rapport with the child.

Based on some of the themes from the first study, the second study tested the effectiveness of practice narratives on the memory reports of 64 Aboriginal children (6 to 15 years) from three remote Australian communities. Children participated in a staged 30-minute innocuous event and were then interviewed one-to-two days later by experienced interviewers (half with a practice narrative and half without). Logistic and multiple linear regressions demonstrated that practice narratives did not predict the accuracy or informativeness of Aboriginal children’s subsequent accounts. Correlational analyses, however, demonstrated that verbosity during the practice narrative was strongly associated with the production of more information during the substantive phase of the interview. Results also revealed that girls produced more words and target details, as well as less confabulations, compared to the boys. The study indicated that the overall interview procedure used was not necessarily inappropriate with Aboriginal children, but that there was room for improvement.

The third study of this thesis inspected interview components and Aboriginal children’s accounts in the field. Study 3 examined the effectiveness of ground rules, practice narratives and questioning in 70 de-identified interviews with Aboriginal children regarding suspected sexual abuse. Analysis of transcripts revealed that the overall delivery and practice of ground rules at the beginning of the interview was positively associated with the spontaneous usage of rules in children’s narratives of abuse. When specifically examining the “don’t know” rule, however, only practice
had an effect of children’s usage of the rule (as opposed to simple delivery or no delivery at all). Children spoke more and interviewers used more open-ended prompts during the substantive phase when the interviews contained a practice narrative. Lastly, children most often disclosed sexual abuse in response to an open-ended prompt; however, they provided the most information in response to suggestive prompts.

The fourth and final study of this thesis expanded upon the third study to include an examination of verbal shame expressions in 70 forensic interviews with Aboriginal children regarding suspected sexual abuse. Shame is a prevalent concept in Aboriginal culture, and warranted attention in a thesis about the investigative interviewing of Aboriginal children in cases of abuse. Transcripts were analysed to determine how children articulated shame, how frequently verbal shame responses occurred, how interviewers reacted to these responses and how shame related to children’s accounts. Examination of frequencies revealed that verbal shame responses occurred in just over one-quarter of the interviews. One-way analyses of variance indicated that children who expressed shame within the interview spoke the same amount as children who did not express shame; however, they required more interviewer prompts before a disclosure was made. Interviews where children expressed shame also included a greater number of interviewer reminders (e.g., “You don’t need to feel shame”) compared to interviews without shame responses. Results indicated the importance of interviewer awareness, reassurance, patience and persistence with narrative prompting when interviewing children who express shame during discussions of sexual abuse.

Overall, four chief recommendations can be drawn from the thesis findings: (i) interviewers should relay ground rules to Aboriginal children, and practise them
with simple adjustments in phraseology; (ii) interviewers should conduct a practice
narrative with Aboriginal children before moving to the substantive phase of the
interview; (iii) interviewers should predominantly ask Aboriginal children cued
open-ended prompts and avoid direct questions where possible; and (iv) interviewers
should be aware of shame in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children and
consider using supportive reminders to aid the disclosure and discussion of sexual
abuse. Essentially, this thesis demonstrates that the core phases of best-practice
interview protocols are suitable with Australian Aboriginal children. It also suggests
that slight modifications (e.g., changes to syntax, vocabulary, and questioning
methods) could be made to best-practice protocols to tailor them to this population.
A revised interview protocol is offered and discussed, along with directions for
future research and implications for interviewers and Aboriginal children.
Child abuse affects millions of children worldwide (Stoltenborgh, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Alink, & van Ijzendoorn, 2014). Unfortunately, as with many other minority groups across the globe, Australian Aboriginal1 children are overrepresented in the statistics summarising the proportion of child abuse cases in the national population (Hunter, 2008). Between 2013 and 2014, Indigenous children were seven times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be the subjects of substantiated reports of harm (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare [AIHW], 2015a). Conviction rates are lower for Indigenous child victims (Bailey & Powell, 2015), and child abuse is significantly under-reported in Aboriginal communities (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002; New South Wales Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce [NSWACSAT], 2006; Wild & Anderson, 2007), suggesting that the aforementioned figures underestimate the actual prevalence of such offences.

One of the essential parts of every investigation of child abuse is the investigative interview with the child, which can be videotaped and used as the child’s evidence-in-chief should the matter proceed to court (Office of Director of Public Prosecutions [ACT] & Australian Federal Police, 2005). The completeness and accuracy of children’s reports in an interview are therefore crucial, especially in child sexual abuse cases where there is rarely physical or corroborating evidence to support the allegations (Lamb & Brown, 2006; Shead, 2014). Obtaining an accurate

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1 It is recognised that Aboriginal peoples prefer terms that better reflect their cultural identity (e.g., Koori, Nunga, Murri, Yolngu etc.) (National Health & Medical Research Council Values & Ethics, 2003). Wherever possible, this thesis has used the term Aboriginal peoples as an attempt to encapsulate this diversity. The term Indigenous is used when statistics incorporate both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, or when referring to the original inhabitants of other nations.
and informative account from an Aboriginal child may be challenging, as there are a range of social and linguistic factors that may prevent the interviewer from assisting them to disclose abuse and effectively engage in investigative interviews. A non-exhaustive overview of these barriers is as follows: (i) a mistrust of authority agencies, (ii) shame and cultural taboos that prevent open dialogue about private and sexual matters, (iii) fear of retaliation from offenders in small communities; (iv) loyalty to family and a belief that disclosing abuse is a betrayal of community and culture; (v) geographical remoteness from support services and informative resources concerning child abuse; and (vi) differences in language and communication styles between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples (Eades, 2013; Hunter, 2008; NSWACSAT, 2006; Powell, 2000; Stanley, Tomison, & Pocock, 2003; Wild & Anderson, 2007).

Over the past decade the literature has clearly identified and articulated the barriers, which has allowed a more comprehensive understanding of the context in which Aboriginal children report abuse and the aftermath of their reports. Recently, there has been a shift to more constructive initiatives for how these barriers can be overcome (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011; Ombudsman New South Wales, 2012). For example, in 2009 a multi-agency proactive community engagement initiative called Operation RESET was designed to tackle the under-reporting of child abuse in Western Australian Aboriginal communities (Mace & Powell, 2012). RESET involved a mobile team of detectives and social workers collaborating with communities to educate and empower its people to respond to and prevent child abuse. Data from communities revealed that in the 18 months of operation RESET’s trial period, there was an 80 percent increase in reporting of child abuse (Mace & Powell, 2012). Arrests increased by over 100 percent, and within the mid-west
Gascoyne region of Western Australia all charged cases that proceeded to court were convicted (Bailey & Powell, 2015). A qualitative evaluation of the initiative also revealed strong support from 64 community stakeholders (Mace, Powell, & Benson, 2015).

With the clear rise in reports of child abuse, it is now critical to determine whether Aboriginal children are interviewed according to the best possible and most appropriate techniques. Some literature has considered the investigative interviewing of Aboriginal peoples (Powell, 2000; R v. Anunga, 1976). For example, in 1976, Mr. Justice Forster outlined nine rules (Anunga guidelines) as an attempt to ensure that police interrogation of Aboriginal peoples was just. Some of these rules include the need for an interpreter or a prisoner’s friend to be present during the interrogation, as well as a clear and careful administration of the caution to ensure the Aboriginal person understands his or her legal rights. Powell (2000) extended these guidelines by positing five fundamental components of an investigative interview with an Aboriginal person. These components include considerations regarding planning, rapport, interpretative assistance, attitudes, and strategies for eliciting free narrative accounts. While these works were valuable and pioneering, they have spoken more broadly about the general framework for interviewing and issues to do with ethics, integrity, and fairness. There is a lack of literature that addresses the specifics of interviewing Aboriginal children, especially in cases of suspected abuse.

Currently, police and other criminal justice professionals across Australia use the same narrative-based interview protocol to interview all children. This interview procedure is based on a large body of international research into children’s cognitive processes that has found various techniques to enhance a child’s ability to recall
events and relay accurate and detailed information, irrespective of their spoken language or country of origin (Cederborg, Orbach, Sternberg, & Lamb, 2000; Cyr & Lamb, 2009; Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Lamb et al., 2009; Naka, 2012; Orbach et al., 2000; Sternberg, Lamb, Orbach, Esplin, & Mitchell, 2001). While ample evidence supports the use of best-practice interview protocols with children in general, research into the communication styles of Australian Aboriginal peoples, paired with anecdotal evidence, suggests that there may be more appropriate ways to interview Aboriginal children. Despite the heterogeneity of Aboriginal peoples, certain styles of relating are shared, and are markedly different to the communication styles of non-Aboriginal peoples (Cooke, 1996; Eades, 1992, 1996, 2013, 2015; Fryer-Smith, 2008; Walsh, 1991, 1994). These differences (discussed in Chapter 4) may affect the suitability of current interview protocols with Aboriginal children.

My aim in this thesis was to elucidate how current best-practice interview procedure applied to Aboriginal children, with the ultimate goal of improving interview protocols to better suit their communication styles. Four new studies that focused on the investigative interviewing of Aboriginal children were conducted. In the first study, I sought to qualitatively evaluate the applicability of an investigative interview protocol to Aboriginal children and examine how it could be modified to better suit the communication styles in many Aboriginal communities. Interviews with professionals who had expertise in Aboriginal language and culture, as well as an understanding of the child investigative interview process were thematically analysed. Based on concerns from the initial study, in the second study I tested the effects of an interview technique known as the “practice narrative”. A laboratory study was conducted where Aboriginal children viewed an innocuous event and were then interviewed with or without a practice narrative. In studies 3 and 4, I enhanced
the ecological validity of the current thesis by examining field interview transcripts with Aboriginal children in cases of suspected sexual abuse. In the third study I concentrated on the effectiveness of interview components with Aboriginal children, while in the fourth study, I focused on the socio-emotional aspect of shame (which is a highly relevant concept in Aboriginal culture).

The current thesis is structured in the following order: In Chapter 2, I outline the components of a prominent interview protocol and discuss the rationale and research behind each component. It is necessary to understand why each component of the protocol exists before we can consider how to better apply it to Aboriginal children. Chapter 3 includes an overview of the contextual factors relevant to Aboriginal peoples and their participation in the criminal justice system. A review of historical, cultural, socio-emotional, socio-economic and health issues faced by Aboriginal peoples is provided in this chapter. It is important to recognise these broader issues so that we can understand how they impact Aboriginal peoples during an investigative interview. In Chapter 4, I review literature regarding Aboriginal language and communication styles. This chapter allows the reader to establish a better understanding of the way Aboriginal peoples typically relate and how this may affect their participation in an investigative interview. It also highlights communication differences with non-Aboriginal society and indicates why research should examine the appropriateness of current interview techniques with an Aboriginal population. Chapters 5 to 8 present the four original studies of the current thesis. Finally, in Chapter 9, I provide an overall discussion of the thesis’ main findings; conclusions and recommendations regarding the investigative interviewing of Aboriginal children are presented.
CHAPTER 2: PRESENTING THE STANDARD INTERVIEW METHOD 
AND THE SUPPORTING RESEARCH

As mentioned in the introduction, extensive research into children’s memory and verbal processes has found various techniques that can enhance a child’s ability to recall events and relay accurate and detailed information, irrespective of their country of origin (Brown et al., 2013; Cederborg et al., 2000; Cyr & Lamb, 2009; Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Hershkowitz, Lamb, Katz, & Malloy, 2015; Lamb et al., 2009; Orbach et al., 2000; Sternberg et al., 2001). Subsequently, there is now international consensus regarding what constitutes best-practice child interviewing in cases of alleged abuse and most prominent interview protocols consist of several semi-structured phases (e.g., Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin, & Horowitz, 2007b). This chapter outlines the components of an interview protocol referred to as the Standard Interview Method (SIM), which is currently used by police and child protection organisations in many jurisdictions across Australia. The SIM has the same origins as the NICHD protocol (Lamb et al., 2007b: www.nichdprotocol.com), but has been adapted to suit the needs of Australian jurisdictions and current research findings.

The structured protocol consists of seven components: (i) introduction; (ii) ground rules; (iii) practice narrative; (iv) the substantive phase; (v) the break; (vi) further questioning; (vii) closure and neutral topic. Within this chapter, Figures 1-8 depict the different components of the SIM protocol. One of my core aims in the current thesis is to investigate how the SIM can be modified to facilitate an investigative interview with an Aboriginal child. It is necessary to understand why each component of the protocol exists and its utility before we can consider how to better apply it to Aboriginal children. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to
outline each component of the SIM and examine the research supporting its effectiveness.

2.1 Introduction and Ground Rules

Figure 1 presents the introduction and ground rules components of the SIM.

**Introduction** (Adapted from Lamb, La Rooy, Malloy, & Katz, 2011)

(In formal voice, not directed at child).

The date is …………………………… and the time is ………………………………. I’m sitting with …………….. (interviewee’s full name and also state preferred name if this is different from interviewee’s full name), who is …… years old and whose date of birth is on ………………

My name is ……………………………………… (Only introduce your monitor if present in the interview room). (If an interpreter is present please have them introduce themselves for the camera).

We are at the …………………………………. (state location of interview).

Thanks for coming to talk to me. My job is to talk to children [people] about things that have happened, so they can tell the truth. Will you tell me the truth?

**Ground Rules** (Adapted from Lamb et al., 2007b)

I have a few things to tell you before we start.

You may take a break when you need to.

You may use any words you want.

I will write things when you talk. It helps me remember what you say.

If I ask a question that you don’t understand, just say “I don’t understand.”

[pause]

If I ask a question and you don’t know the answer just say “I don’t know.”

[pause]

And if I say things that are wrong, you should tell me, because I don’t know what’s happened.
So if I said you were a boy (girl), what would you say?
If child doesn’t respond verbally, say: Are you a boy (girl)?
If child denies but does not correct, say: Right, you’re not a boy, so you say
“{Name of interviewer}, No, I’m a girl.”
If child corrects, say: That’s good, you told me the truth. You’re not a boy, you’re a girl.

Figure 1. The Standard Interview Method: Introduction and Ground Rules.

Initially, interviewers are advised to introduce themselves and briefly explain the details of the interview (e.g., date, time, location, people present in the interview). Clarifying such details allows the interview to be used as the child’s evidence-in-chief should the matter proceed to court. Interviewers are also instructed to obtain a verbal agreement from the child that they intend to tell the truth throughout the interview. Although there is no legal requirement to do this, many guidelines suggest that it is helpful for the court to know that the child was made aware of the importance of telling the truth (Ministry of Justice, 2011; Poole & Lamb, 1998). Further, research has shown that having children and adolescents promise to tell the truth can significantly increase their honesty (Evans & Lee, 2010; Lyon, 2011; Lyon & Dorado, 2008; Talwar, Lee, Bala, & Lindsay, 2002). In a study by Evans and Lee (2010), 8- to 16-year-olds were instructed not to peek at the answers after being informed that they would receive money if they achieved full marks on a test. Results revealed that participants who made a promise to tell the truth were significantly more likely to be honest about their peeking transgression compared to those who only discussed the concept of truth and lies.

The next phase in the protocol involves the explanation of the conversational or “ground rules” of the investigative interview to the child (See Brubacher, Poole, &
Dickinson, 2015, for a review). Explaining the ground rules to children is important for several reasons. Firstly, the investigative interview is an unfamiliar experience that involves different interactional rules compared to everyday communications (Poole & Lamb, 1998). In ordinary interactions, children are not usually required to explain events with highly specific details, nor are they usually permitted to use rude words or correct adults. It is also highly unlikely that children will understand what level of information is required to prosecute offences (Powell, Garry, & Brewer, 2013). Providing clear ground rules can help children to understand how the interview differs from everyday interactions and therefore potentially increase the likelihood that their answers will be more relevant, detailed, and accurate (Powell et al., 2013; Wilson & Powell, 2001).

Secondly, children often have a strong desire to please interviewers (Bruck & Ceci, 1999) and as a result, they are prone to acquiesce to interviewer’s questions or guess and fabricate answers (Milne & Bull, 2006). In a study by Poole and White (1991), children speculated answers when a question assumed knowledge (e.g., “What is the man’s job?”) more so than when it verified knowledge (e.g., “Do you know what the man’s job is?”). An aim of relaying ground rules is to reduce the child’s tendency to engage in these types of behaviours. Thirdly, explaining ground rules such as, “you should tell me because I don’t know what happened,” can empower the child and emphasise that he or she is a valued informant who is the expert in the interview (Orbach et al., 2000; Sternberg et al., 1997).

Although most prominent interview guidelines include ground rules, the research literature is not unanimous in finding benefits of the rules on children’s reports. For example, some research has indicated that the provision of ground rules can improve the informativeness and/or accuracy of children’s accounts (Cordón,
In a study by Cordón et al. (2005), young children were taught a set of social conversational rules or cautions before being interviewed about an innocuous event. Analyses revealed that children who were exposed to all three ground rules provided a smaller proportion of incorrect responses than children who received fewer or no conversational rules. Moreover, Teoh and Lamb (2010) analysed 75 investigative interview transcripts of alleged victims of sexual abuse. Conversational rules, purpose of the interview, and the children’s roles as informants were explained to children prior to investigative questioning. Results indicated that the explanation of these ground rules had a positive correlation with the proportion of informative responses given by children.

Alternatively, other studies have suggested that explaining simple ground rules to children has little effect on their narratives (Beusche & Roebers, 2005; Ellis et al., 2003; Moston, 1987; Saywitz & Snyder, 1996). Some research has also found that ground rules could actually have a negative impact on the informativeness of children’s accounts (Gee, Gregory, & Pipe, 1999; Saywitz & Moan-Hardie, 1994). Gee et al. (1999) interviewed 9- to 13-year-old children about an innocuous event. Half of the children received ground rules to discourage acquiescence and guessing. While the research indicated that children who received the ground rules became more resistant to misleading questions, they also found that children who received the ground rules became overcautious and gave less informative answers (Experiment 1). The children who received the ground rules were less confident in their answers and increasingly relied on the response of “I don’t know” to answer questions rather than giving detailed accounts. This finding is in contrast to Waterman and Blades’ (2011) study where they found that pre-interview instructions
increased children’s accurate use of “don’t know” responses to unanswerable questions without compromising accurate responses to answerable questions.

While there is disagreement about the utility of ground rules, most experts agree that in order to make the delivery of ground rules effective, interviewers must practise these with children (Brubacher et al., 2015; Danby, Brubacher, Sharman, & Powell, 2015; Ellis et al., 2003; Righarts, O’Neill, & Zajac, 2013; Saywitz & Moan-Hardie, 1994). For example, in a pilot study by Righarts et al. (2013), simply relaying pre-interview instructions to five- to ten-year-old children did not promote cross-examination accuracy. In the main experiment, however, children practised pre-interview instructions and were given feedback on their responses. Results demonstrated that this detailed pre-interview preparation did indeed increase accuracy levels compared to children who received no preparation.

The SIM incorporates the practice of one ground rule: “If I said you were a boy (or girl if that is the opposite gender), what would you say?” The reasons for including this ground rule are twofold. Firstly, research has indicated that the concept of gender is easy for children to understand and even young toddlers can label themselves as boys or girls (Newman & Newman, 2012). Secondly, extensive ground rule practice could consume valuable time and risk fatiguing children before the discussion of substantive issues (Powell et al., 2013). By including the practice of one ground rule, the SIM achieves a balance of the benefits and potential detriments of practising ground rules.

Overall, while the SIM includes a ground rules phase at the outset of the interview, researchers have indicated the importance of reminding children about the ground rules throughout the interview as the need arises (Powell et al., 2013; Russell, 2006). For example, if the child is being brief and vague with their responses, the
interviewer could remind the child that they were not present at the event and need to hear a more detailed account (Powell et al., 2013). Interviewers should also acknowledge and endorse the spontaneous usage of ground rules by the child during the interview (e.g., “Thank you for telling me you don’t understand; if I ask you something else you don’t understand, please tell me like you just did”) (Russell, 2006). Such a method is likely to positively reinforce the use of ground rules throughout the remainder of the interview.

2.2 Practice Narrative

Figure 2 refers to the practice narrative component of the SIM.

**Practice Narrative**

*Aim for about 3-5 minutes in practice.*

If the child discloses abuse early (prior to termination of practice), listen to what child has to say and don’t interrupt, acknowledge what (s)he has said, and then say: **Thank you for telling me that, that’s what we’re here to talk about today, but first I’d just like to spend a few minutes getting to know you better.**

Begin by saying: **Let’s get started. First I’d like to get to know you better.**

3a. Choosing an Event

**Tell me something fun you’ve done recently.**

If the child does not respond: **Tell me something you like to do.**

If child still does not respond again, and you have an event provided by the caregiver (e.g., you know the child attends swimming lessons) try to elicit it non-suggestively (E.g., Do you play any sports? or Do you have any hobbies?).

If you cannot find an event to discuss, you may ask the child what (s)he did yesterday or today (e.g., **Tell me everything you did today, from the time you woke up this morning until the time you arrived here today**) but be aware that information related to the allegation may arise earlier than desired.
Do not ask children to recount the plots of books, movies or videogames.

3b. Prompting details about a specific occurrence

**Have you (done/gone to) X one time or more than one time?**

(If repeated event) **Tell me all about the last time you did [EVENT].**

If the child referred to a specific occurrence of event (e.g., I did ballet last Tuesday), go with that occurrence, as opposed to “the last time”.

(If single event) **Tell me all about when you did [EVENT].**

*Figure 2. The Standard Interview Method: Practice Narrative.*

The practice narrative component of the SIM protocol involves questioning the child about an event that they have experienced recently (unrelated to the abuse allegation). This phase serves three main purposes. Firstly, it enables the interviewer to build rapport with children by showing an interest in their lives (Roberts, Brubacher, Powell, & Price, 2011). Building trust and rapport in investigative interviews is vital as it can encourage children to initially disclose abuse (Hershkowitz, Lamb, & Katz, 2014) and reduce their reluctance to discuss abuse (Hershkowitz et al., 2015). If children feel at ease with an interviewer, they are more likely to engage in the interview and willingly share sensitive experiences without fearing judgment or disapproval. Indeed, recent research has revealed that alleged adolescent victims of sexual abuse felt pressured, rushed, and uncomfortable when the police officer taking their report immediately delved into questioning about the assault rather than spending some time talking about non-assault related topics (Greeson, Campbell, & Fehler-Cabral, 2014). Similar results have also been found with victims of sexual assault in Australia (15 to 54 years), who reported that being
heard and treated as a valued informant by police was paramount, seemingly more so than the outcome of the case (Powell & Cauchi, 2013).

As well as rapport building, practice narratives allow children an opportunity to practice retrieving and reporting episodic memories about neutral or pleasant events before discussing the topic of concern later on in the interview (Roberts et al., 2011). As such, a practice phase establishes the conversational pattern between the child and interviewer, and signals that the child will be doing most of the talking during the interview (Davies et al., 1996). Encouraging the child to talk in the introductory phase can instill a sense of control and value, which in turn is likely to empower and motivate the child to provide more information in their subsequent accounts of alleged abuse (Hershkowitz, 2009; Roberts et al., 2011).

Practice narratives can also prepare children for the types of questions that will be asked during the principal topic of concern (Lamb, Hershkowitz, Orbach, & Esplin, 2008). The most desirable question types are those that are open-ended; they are general in focus and encourage elaborate responses (e.g., “Tell me all about that”) (Powell & Snow, 2007a). Both field and experimental studies have demonstrated that when an interviewer uses open-ended prompts during the introductory phase of the interview the accuracy and/or informativeness of children’s subsequent accounts are enhanced (Anderson, Anderson, & Gilgun, 2014; Hershkowitz, 2009; Price, Roberts, & Collins, 2013; Roberts, Lamb, & Sternberg, 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997; Whiting, 2013). For example, in a laboratory study, children (aged 3 to 9 years) interacted with a photographer and were interviewed either one week or one month later (Roberts et al., 2004). Children whose introductory phase consisted of open-ended questions (e.g., “Tell me about yourself”) reported significantly more accurate information in their subsequent
accounts of the event compared to children who were allocated to the specific-questions introductory phase (e.g., “How old are you?”). Moreover, in a field study by Price et al. (2013), children ($M = 10.10, SD = 3.12$ years) provided more details in response to open-ended prompts during the substantive phase when their interviews included an open-ended practice narrative compared to no practice narrative. Thus, it is evident that there are benefits to the inclusion of open-ended practice narratives in investigative interviews with children in general.

2.2.1 Timing and Prompting for Details about the Event

The standard interview method specifies that practice narratives should occur for about three to five minutes. While some research has found that longer introductory phases (10 minutes) can have positive associations with the subsequent detail of children’s accounts (Brown et al., 2013), other research has found that extended introductory phases (lasting over eight minutes) can be cognitively taxing on children and reduce their ability to provide information in the substantive phase of the interview (Davies, Westcott, & Horan, 2000; Hershkowitz, 2009; Roberts et al., 2004). This is especially true for younger children (five- to seven-year-olds) (Teoh & Lamb, 2010). Thus, the practice phase of the SIM allows sufficient time for children to practise reporting events in detail without risking exhaustion before the discussion of substantive issues. It is also important to note that this five-minute limit does not include the time spent on the provision of ground rules (which is often included in the timing of introductory phases in other studies), therefore, the overall time indication appears to be within the eight minute time-frame that has consistently been associated with positive effects of preparatory phases (Davies et al., 2000; Hershkowitz, 2009; Sternberg et al., 1997).
The prompts in the practice phase of the SIM protocol (Figure 2: section 3b) have been carefully formulated to ensure that the child recalls a specific incident of an event rather than a generic report of a frequently experienced event. When an event is repeated, children’s reports are often general in terms of what usually happens (e.g., “He always does it like this”) (Powell, Roberts, & Guadagno, 2007). From a legal perspective, however, children need to provide details of different occasions of an abusive event in order to lay particular charges (Guadagno, Powell, & Wright, 2006; Powell et al., 2007). Therefore, it is important to prime the child in the practice phase to recall details regarding an isolated occurrence of an event.

Some research has indicated that allowing children to report details regarding one episode of a repeated event in the practice phase can be beneficial to the child’s subsequent recall of an unrelated repeated event (Brubacher, Roberts, & Powell, 2011). In this study, children (aged five to eight years) participated in either a single activity or series of activities involving interactive tasks (e.g., completing a puzzle). One week after the last/only session, children practised recalling experiences that were unrelated to the activities. There were three between-subjects practice conditions: (i) asking children to recall a one-time experienced event; (ii) generic prompting, where children were asked to describe what usually happens during a repeated activity in their everyday lives (e.g., weekly swimming lessons); and (iii) episodic prompting, where children were asked to recall one time they remembered best, as well as one other occasion of a repeated event in their everyday lives. Children were then interviewed in an open-ended non-leading manner about the activities. Results revealed that younger children (aged five to six years) who had been exposed to the recall practice with episodic prompting provided more details in their subsequent recall of the series of activities than children who were exposed to
the recall practice with generic prompting or prompting about a one-time experienced novel event. Thus, these findings lend support to the prompts contained in the practice phase of the SIM, particularly with younger children.

2.2.2 Eliciting a Free Narrative

Figure 3 depicts the component of the SIM that outlines useful prompts for interviewers to ask during both the practice and substantive phases of the interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Useful Prompts for Practice and for Probing Episodes in the Substantive Phase:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What happened then?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What happened next?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What happened after that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me more about …?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What else happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• And then what happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me everything that happened from the time (portion of event)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What happened when…?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me more about the part where…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You said X. Tell me more about X.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Encourage the child to report what happened, as opposed to descriptive information.

*Figure 3. The Standard Interview Method: Useful Prompts for Practice and for Probing Episodes in the Substantive Phase.*

The information presented in this section applies to both the practice and substantive phase of the SIM protocol (which is discussed in the following section). The SIM involves the use of open-ended questions to prompt children to provide detailed information and exhaust their free narrative accounts. A free narrative
account is defined as a story that organises one’s experiences about an event in such a way that a person who was not present at the event can clearly comprehend what happened (Powell & Snow, 2007a). A free narrative account is obtained when an interviewee reports what information they remember, in their own words, without interruption (Milne & Bull, 2006; Poole & Lamb, 1998; Wilson & Powell, 2001). It is consistently documented that free narrative accounts are most often elicited via the use of non-leading open-ended questions and other prompts that stimulate detailed responses (Powell & Snow, 2007a). In line with these definitions, open-ended prompts are defined as those that encourage elaborate responses and allow the interviewee to report what information they remember, without dictating what specific information is required to be reported (Lamb et al., 1996; Poole & Lamb, 1998; Powell et al., 2013).

Research has indicated that the majority of initial sexual abuse disclosures from children occur in response to open-ended prompts (Lamb et al., 2007b). It is also a robust finding that children offer more detailed and accurate information in response to open-ended as opposed to specific prompts (e.g., “Where did that happen?”; “Do you remember his name?”) (Lamb et al., 1996; Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz, & Abbott, 2007a). This is because specific prompts can be distracting for children; they redirect the child’s attention from internal memory to focusing externally on the interviewer’s questions. Specific questions can encourage children to falsely recognise details contained in the question and child witnesses may cooperate by guessing or providing answers without reflection (Bull, 2010; Hershkowitz, 2009; Wright & Powell, 2006).

While the benefits of open-ended prompts are evident, it is also important to recognise the effectiveness of different types of open-ended prompts. Indeed, a
recent study with adult witnesses demonstrated that open-ended presumptive
questions (e.g., “Tell me all about the logo?” [when no logo present]) were actually
some of the most damaging question types in terms of the accuracy of witnesses’
accounts (Sharman & Powell, 2012). A guideline developed by Powell and Snow
(2007a) has indicated that an effective open-ended question contains four main
elements, summarised by the acronym S.A.F.E: (i) simple language, (ii) absence of
specific detail, (iii) flexibility in allowing the child to choose what to report, and (iv)
encourages an elaborate response. Additionally, research by Feltis, Powell, Snow,
and Hughes-Scholes (2010) has considered which open-ended questions elicit the
most story grammar (i.e., the elements of a story that make it easy to comprehend).
The researchers examined 34 police interviews whereby children (aged 5 to 15 years)
disclosed abuse. They found the open-ended prompts that encouraged a broad
response (e.g., “Tell me everything…”) or an elaborated response (e.g., “Tell me
more about…”) were the most effective at eliciting story grammar. All open-ended
prompts included in the SIM protocol are strongly based on these findings.

2.3 The Substantive Phase

Figure 4 presents the substantive phase of the SIM, where the interviewer
attempts to elicit a disclosure from the child.

Substantive Phase
Thank you for telling me all about [EVENT]. Now let’s talk about why you’re here today. Tell me what you’ve come to talk about.
Step 1. Establish the interviewee's understanding of the purpose of the interview.

**Interviewer:** “Tell me what you’ve come to talk to me about today.”

**Child:** “to tell you what I told mum about Uncle Jo.”

Interviewer: ask open-ended questions.

**Child:** “I don’t know.”

Step 2. Provide some information that led to the concern.

**Interviewer:** “Your mum told me that you told her that somebody hurt you.”

Step 3. Seek acknowledgment from the child about whether the interviewers information is true.

**Interviewer:** “Did you tell your mum that somebody hurt you?”

**Child:** “no.”

*Option 1. Provide more specific information about the case (if appropriate).*

*Option 2. Progress to Step 4.*

**Child:** “yes.”

State role in the interview

**Interviewer:** “Well I’m here to find out what that person did to you.”

Step 4. Techniques to elicit a disclosure of abuse.

Ask a series of questions about family members, routines, good/bad touching or secrets. Use as a last resort only.

---

**Figure 4.** The Standard Interview Method: Substantive Phase.

After the practice narrative is complete, the interviewer is instructed to transition into the substantive phase of the interview and elicit a disclosure of abuse from the child where appropriate. Obtaining a disclosure of abuse can be a challenging task for interviewers. Many children do not disclose abuse during an
interview and may delay reports or withhold them permanently (Hershkowitz, 2006; Pipe, Lamb, Orbach, & Cederborg, 2013). Delayed disclosures have been associated with a number of factors: feelings of shame (Bonanno et al., 2002), expected negative consequences to the child or a non-offending family member (Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2011), expectations about not being believed (Malloy, Brubacher, & Lamb, 2013), increased age (Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003), lack of maternal support (Elliott & Briere, 1994) and a familiar relationship to the offender (Olafson & Lederman, 2006; Paine & Hansen, 2002).

Despite an array of obstacles, research has found interviewing strategies that are conducive to eliciting disclosures from children. For example, in a guide to interviewers, Powell and Snow (2007b) recommend that the topic of concern be introduced by asking a broad non-leading, open-ended prompt (e.g., “Tell me what you’ve come to talk about?”). Some researchers have found that asking children why they are present during the interview is an effective means of obtaining a disclosure (e.g., “Tell me why you came to talk to me?”) (Sternberg et al., 2001). However, Powell and Snow (2007b) have contended that asking “why” questions can be confusing for children as they require complex reasoning abilities. Children may interpret such questions in a concrete sense and explain how they arrived at the interview (e.g., “Because dad drove me here”; “You said I had to come here”). Moreover, “why” questions might sound accusatory and imply that the child has something to feel guilty about (Bull, 1995). Concentrating on “what” questions at the beginning of the substantive phase is likely to avoid these difficulties and encourage information that is relevant to the topic of interest (Powell & Snow, 2007b). Interviewers must also be careful not to phrase the initial open-ended
prompt in a closed manner (e.g., “Do you know what you’ve come to talk about?”). Children typically provide a yes/no response to such questions (Powell & Snow, 2007b), and research has demonstrated that disclosure rates are significantly lower when such prompts are phrased in a closed as opposed to an open-ended manner (Hughes-Scholes & Powell, 2013).

In the event that the child does not initially disclose abuse, the interviewer is advised to prompt the child with increasingly leading information that gave rise to the report (See Figure 4). Introducing leading information can be risky as it may distort children’s memories and lead to confabulated accounts (Hughes-Scholes & Powell, 2008). It is therefore essential that interviewers verify any leading information with the child before moving to a free narrative account (e.g., “I was told you went to Peter’s house; did you go to Peter’s house?”) (Powell, 2003; Powell & Snow, 2007b). If the child remains naïve or unresponsive and there is substantial reason to believe abuse occurred (such as medical evidence), interviewers are instructed to explore general topics that might prompt a disclosure (e.g., relationship to family members). Such an approach can be time-consuming, however, and may result in irrelevant investigative leads; therefore, it should only be used as a last resort (Powell, 2003). Throughout the interview, it is wise for interviewers to ask open-ended prompts and offer supportive comments to children for their efforts, but not the content of what they say. Research has highlighted that non-suggestive support during the outset of the substantive phase is more prevalent in field interviews where children allege abuse compared to interviews where no allegation is made (and there is supporting evidence to strongly suggest abuse occurred) (Hershkowitz, Orbach, Lamb, Sternberg, & Horowitz, 2006).
2.3.1 Establishing the Frequency of the Abuse

Figure 5 refers to the component of the SIM where the interviewer needs to ascertain the frequency of the abuse.

**Identifying Multiple Incidents**

Once child has produced an abuse-related utterance, ask:

**Did X** [abuse as disclosed by the child in his/her words] **happen one time or more than one time?**

(‘Did that happen…’ may be appropriate in circumstances where a child’s initial disclosure has been very complex and using the child’s words would produce a very lengthy and awkward prompt).

**Eliciting information about specific episodes**

i. **Tell me about the last time.** [use open-ended prompts to exhaust recall for the last time]. Once the child cannot report any more narrative information:

ii. **Tell me about the first time.** [use open-ended prompts to exhaust recall for the first time]. Once the child cannot report any more narrative information:

iii. **You’ve told me about the first time and the last time. Can you tell me about another time?**

[** If the child says no, but has spontaneously mentioned another time, use the prompt, Earlier you said there was a time X (e.g., in the basement). Tell me about the time X. [if yes] Tell me about (that/X) time.**

Continue to use open-ended prompts to elicit narrative detail about this time until recall has been exhausted. Then say:

iv. **Can you tell me about another time?** [If yes, repeat steps above. If no, move to the Break].

*Figure 5. The Standard Interview Method: Identifying Multiple Incidents and Eliciting Information about Specific Episodes.*
After the child has initially disclosed an abusive event, it is important for the interviewer to establish whether the abuse is a single or repeated event. A simple forced-choice question (e.g., “Did [X] happen one time or more than one time?”) is widely endorsed by investigative interviewing experts and is a standard feature in prominent child forensic interview protocols (Brubacher, Powell, & Roberts, 2014; Lamb et al., 2007b; Lamb et al., 2008; Orbach et al., 2000; Wilson & Powell, 2001). It is vital that interviewers do not ask for numerical frequencies (e.g., “How many times did that happen?”) (Saywitz, Lyon, & Goodman, 2011). Research has indicated that while children are capable of judging qualitative frequency (e.g., it has happened once/more than once/lots/a few times), they are less skilled in judging numerical frequencies and will often provide inaccurate estimates (Roberts et al., 2015; Sharman, Powell, & Roberts, 2011).

When discussing the frequency of the event, it is also important that the interviewer uses the child’s own words for describing the abuse (e.g., “Did he play special show-and-tell with you one time or more than one time?”). Adopting children’s terminology is likely to reduce confusion and make it easier for children to recall information and distinguish between multiple occurrences (Brubacher et al., 2014). If the child’s descriptions are too lengthy to repeat or there is risk that the interviewer might create misleading information by forgetting or altering the child’s exact words, the interviewer can use an alternative option and ask whether that happened one time or more than one time. That, however, can be ambiguous and confusing for children to understand and it is unsupported by research. Therefore, it should only be employed when using children’s terminology is unfeasible.

When abuse is repeated it can be highly challenging for children to recall details of different episodes. Young children are especially likely to make errors
when distinguishing between occurrences, as details from other incidents often merge into the incident being recalled (Powell & Thomson, 1993, 1996). In order to make it clearer and easier for children to discriminate between different episodes, the SIM protocol instructs interviewers to ask about the last time, the first time and potentially another time that the abuse occurred (see Figure 5). The reasons for such a strategy are discussed in turn.

Firstly, research has indicated that children as young as three years old have the ability to correctly use and understand the terms *first* and *last* (French & Nelson, 1985; Friedman & Seely, 1976). Secondly, the primacy and recency effect (i.e., the trend that humans most saliently remember information that is presented first and last) is evident in young children (Brown, Brown, & Caci, 1981; Powell, Thomson, & Ceci, 2003a; Roberts et al., 2015). In research by Powell et al. (2003a) and Roberts et al. (2015), 6- to 8-year-old children showed stronger memories for the first and last items in a series of events compared to the middle items. Thus it is likely that the first and last episodes of abuse will be the most easily recalled compared to other episodes. Finally, first and last are the least suggestive and harmful terms that can be used when questioning about an event that has happened more than once. These generic terms do not present any previously undisclosed information by the child and therefore avoid misleading the child to recall and report inaccurate information. If children cannot recall the first or last episode of abuse, the SIM also provides an alternative question: “Can you tell me about another time?” This question is phrased as a yes-no question in case there are no other times available for discussion.

There is some contention in the literature regarding how promptly interviewers should elicit information about specific occurrences. On the one hand,
eliciting episodic information early can clarify which particular incident the child is recalling, rather than eliciting generic information about what usually happens (Powell et al., 2007). Further, as children have limited attention spans, beginning by recounting specific episodes could save time rather than reporting specific details after an initial generic account (Powell et al., 2007). On the other hand, recent research has advised that children should be permitted to provide generic accounts before being prompted about specific episodes (Brubacher et al., 2014; Brubacher, Roberts, & Powell, 2012; Connolly & Gordon, 2014). In research by Brubacher et al. (2012), 4- to 8-year-old children who were allowed to initially report a generic account before being prompted about a specific episode provided more information compared to children who initially accounted a specific episode. Moreover, no detrimental effects of such an approach were found (although it is important to note that these conditions have not yet been compared in the field). Overall, while there is some disagreement about the timing to elicit episodic information, there is consensus that such a phase is vital in investigative interview protocols, especially since a high proportion of child abuse cases involve multiple incidents (Connolly & Read, 2006).

2.4 The Break

Figure 6 refers to the break component of the SIM.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Break</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breaks may be initiated at any point throughout the interview upon the child’s request. This break refers to the formal break, prior to commencement of follow-up questioning. \n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I won’t be long. It’s important not to talk to anyone about what we have been talking about in here.

If you anticipate being out of the room for more than a few minutes, allow the child to return to their carer in the waiting room. Emphasise to the caregiver that they should not discuss the details of the interview with the child.

State the time and turn the camera off (do not finalise the recording).

Once the child is ready to resume the interview, turn the camera on and again state the time and date.

Ask the child if he/she spoke to anyone outside of the interview room about the event that you are interviewing him/her about.

If the child says no, you may resume the interview.

If the child says yes, you must ask what was said and to whom it was said.

Figure 6. The Standard Interview Method: Break.

Following the exhaustion of the child’s free narrative, the SIM protocol instructs the interviewer to instigate a break. Allowing a break during the interview has several benefits for both the child and the interviewer. It enables the interviewer to reflect on the information provided by the child and consult with a second investigator (who is likely to have been monitoring the interview from another room through audio and visual equipment). The two investigators can briefly discuss and decide which (if any) forensically important details need further clarification (Hamilton, 2012; Lamb et al., 2008). The interviewer can then return from the break to ask more focused questions to seek such details. Research into prosecutor’s perceptions of investigative interviews with children has highlighted that prosecutors recognise the importance of separating children’s free narrative accounts from more focused questions (Burrows & Powell, 2013). Further, instigating a break can allow the child to have a rest. Throughout the interview, the child is required to listen and
understand questions, retrieve memories and verbally provide accounts (Roberts et al., 2011). Therefore, the cognitive skills and mental effort required can be wearing on children’s attention spans. Having a break from questioning can allow the child to relax and refresh.

2.5 Further Questioning

Figure 7 depicts the further questioning component of the SIM.

**Further Questioning**

If some central details of the allegation are still missing or unclear after exhausting the open-ended questions, further questioning is needed. If certain information is missing it may be necessary to ask specific questions. Where possible, specific questions should be S.A.F.E. (simple language, absence of specific details or coercive techniques, flexibility on the part of the interviewee to choose which details will be reported, and encouragement of an elaborate response, Powell & Snow, 2007a).

First focus the child's attention on the detail mentioned and the specific occurrence you are referring to, and then ask the focused question. Discuss the occurrences in the same order as during open questioning and exhaust each before moving on. Clarify any matters if needed and ensure all elements of the offence(s) have been elicited from the child.

*General Format of Specific Questions:*

You said [person/object/activity] [occurrence], [completion of the focused question], [Child response] [Open-ended prompt].

*Table of examples:*

The table below provides a list of examples of questions that you may need to ask at this stage of the interview. The number of these questions required will depend on what the child has reported in their free narrative, your jurisdiction, and your skills as an interviewer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What to follow up on</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To confirm location of event</td>
<td>You said you were at the farm last time. On the farm, where were you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Wait for response] What happened at the farm?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To confirm people present at an event</td>
<td>Earlier you said that a friend was there the time it happened in the shed. What is her/his name? [Wait for response]. Tell me about the part where X (person’s name) was there the time it happened in the shed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To confirm where touching occurred</td>
<td>You said that he touched you the last time. Did he touch you over your clothes or under your clothes? [Wait for answer]. Tell me what happened when he touched you over/under your clothes the last time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To confirm body part identification</td>
<td>Do you have another name for [child’s term]? Where is your [child’s term]? What is your [child’s term] used for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To confirm details of prior disclosure</td>
<td>Someone said you talked to X at [time/place]. Did you talk to X at [time/place]? [Wait for response]. Tell me everything that happened when you talked to X at [time/place].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To confirm medical evidence of physical abuse</td>
<td>I see/heard that you have [marks/bruises] on your [body part]. [If you have not seen the marks Do you have marks/bruises on your [body part]?] Do you remember how you got those marks/bruises? [Wait for response]. Tell me about how you got those marks/bruises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To confirm spoken words</td>
<td>Did [offender] say anything? What did [offender] say?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7. The Standard Interview Method: Further Questioning.
The further questioning component of the SIM involves the use of follow-up questions. As previously mentioned, it is not ideal to use specific questions with children as these can often lead to less informative and accurate answers compared to open-ended questions (Lamb et al., 1996; Lamb et al., 2007a). However, the SIM recognises that for the purposes of courtroom evidence, it may be necessary to elicit specific details that the child has not otherwise reported in their free narrative account. When specific questions are necessitated, most guidelines advise that they should be followed by an open-ended question that allows the child to elaborate more freely in his or her own words (Saywitz et al., 2011; Sternberg, Lamb, Esplin, Orbach, & Hershkowitz, 2002). Such a formula can maximise the informativeness of the answer and clarify the child’s response (see Figure 7 of SIM for examples).

The SIM protocol also includes some examples of what specific details interviewers could follow up on. These details will depend on each case and what information the child has already provided in their narrative account. Some qualitative research with 19 Australian prosecutors has gleaned perceptions regarding the importance of information for child abuse cases in the legal system (Burrows & Powell, 2013). Prosecutors largely emphasised that interviewers should concentrate their questioning on the legal elements of the offence. These elements refer to the components of the offence that case law and legislation explicitly state must be proven for the offence to be established (Burrows & Powell, 2013). Elements of an offence may differ between jurisdictions but usually focus on similar features. In Victoria, for example, the law defines the elements of sexual penetration of a child as (1) a person, (2) who takes part in an act of sexual penetration, (3) with a child under the age of 16 (Crimes Act, 1958). Thus, prosecution would need to demonstrate who the offender is, and that the offender sexually penetrated the child.
who was under 16. It is therefore essential that interviewers have a sound knowledge of the legal requirements of an offence in order to know which details to pursue in the further questioning phase of the interview.

In Burrows and Powell’s (2013) study, prosecutors raised the concern that interviewers often seek highly specific information that is peripheral or irrelevant for the purposes of prosecution. For example, it was a common concern that interviewers frequently seek information regarding specific dates and timeframes of events. These types of details are not only unnecessary to obtain, they also open the child’s account up to intense scrutiny by defence during cross-examination. Asking for minutiae can provide defence with more ammunition to cast doubt on the child’s account if they later cannot recall details or if inconsistencies arise. To counteract these effects, the SIM protocol has attempted to avoid including questions that seek highly precise information. Nonetheless, the onus will always rest on the interviewer or interviewing team to determine which details are relevant in each case.

In a similar and more recent study by Burrows and Powell (2014), a focus group was held with nine Australian prosecutors, whereby participants provided suggestions for pursuing details about children’s terms for genitalia. There was consensus that if a child uses a non-anatomical colloquial term for genitalia that a layperson would comprehend, the term does not need to be clarified. If the term is not immediately obvious to a layperson, the interviewer should decide whether an alternative person (e.g., non-suspect guardian) could explain the child’s meaning for the term. Finally, if the term cannot be clarified through any other means, the child should be asked one of the questions presented in the SIM protocol (see Figure 7 to confirm body part identification) (Burrows & Powell, 2014).
2.6 Closure and Neutral Event

Figure 8 presents the closure components of the SIM.

**Closure**

You have told me lots of things today. Thank you for talking to me today, you have been very helpful in answering my questions.

Is there anything else I should know? [wait for an answer]

Is there anything you want to tell me right now? [wait for an answer]

Are there any questions you want to ask me? [wait for an answer]

If you want to talk to me again, you can call me at this phone number. [Hand the child a card with your name and phone number.]

**Neutral Topic**

Close on a neutral topic – perhaps something the child or guardian mentioned they would do afterwards, or the rapport-building event – for a minute or two.

*Figure 8. The Standard Interview Method: Closure and Neutral Topic.*

In the closure phase of the SIM protocol, the interviewer is instructed to ask the child whether they have anything further to add. While such questions in Figure 8 are closed in nature, they open up the possibility of unearthing further investigative leads or forensically relevant information. Finally, interviewers are instructed to end the interview by discussing a neutral topic with the child. The purpose of ending on a neutral topic is simply to shift the child’s thoughts onto something more positive after discussing the abusive event (Lamb et al., 2007b; Milne & Bull, 2006).

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the research underpinning the seven phases of the Standard Interview Method: (i) introduction; (ii) ground rules; (iii) practice narrative;
(iv) the substantive phase; (v) the break; (vi) further questioning; (vii) closure and neutral topic. While interview protocols are still developing, the large body of national and international research on investigative interviewing with non-Aboriginal children provides a good foundation upon which to evaluate interview procedures with Aboriginal children.
CHAPTER 3: OVERVIEW OF CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AFFECTING
ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

This chapter provides an overview of the contextual factors that commonly
affect Aboriginal peoples, and how these may impact the disclosure of child abuse in
Aboriginal communities. Exploring these factors will equip the reader with a more
comprehensive understanding of the broader issues faced by Aboriginal peoples and
how these may influence Aboriginal children during an investigative interview. This
chapter begins by examining the historical factors relevant to Aboriginal peoples and
how these may impact current views on government organisations. Next, it turns to a
brief overview of several interrelated factors (cultural, socio-emotional, socio-
economic, and health) specific to Aboriginal peoples and how these could affect the
investigative interview process.

3.1 Historical Factors

It is frequently reported that many Aboriginal peoples have a deep mistrust of
government organisations due to a history of colonisation, oppressive laws and the
forceful removal of children from their families—commonly referred to as the stolen
generations (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 1997;
Hunter, 2008). Beginning in 1860, a series of legislations were enacted to forcibly
remove Aboriginal peoples from their families into missions or settlements.
Assimilation was adopted as a national policy, where the aim was to absorb or breed
out the “Aboriginality” of Aboriginal peoples who were not of “full blood” (i.e.,
mixed-race individuals with Aboriginal origins). It was not until the 1970s that the
forceful removal of Aboriginal children was thought to have finally ceased, yet the
psychological damage of the removals is long lasting and devastating (HREOC,
An inquiry into the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse has highlighted that due to the long history of oppressive legislation, many Aboriginal peoples are reluctant to report abuse because they fear that their child may be removed from the community (Wild & Anderson, 2007).

Between 1987 and 1991, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody has drawn attention to the treatment of Aboriginal peoples in the criminal justice system. The Royal Commission pointed out that Aboriginal peoples were (and still are) over-represented in the prison population (Cuneen, 2008; Weatherburn & Holmes, 2010). The inquiry was set up after widespread public concern that a disproportionate number of Aboriginal peoples were dying in jail after being arrested by police. The Royal Commission concluded that the deaths were not due to police violence. Commentators have pointed out, however, that because of the high number of Aboriginal deaths in custody, some Aboriginal peoples feel the need to protect perpetrators and refrain from disclosing child abuse (Stanley et al., 2003).

It is evident that the long history of racism and discrimination against Aboriginal peoples has created fear about, and a lack of trust in police and criminal justice systems. The New South Wales Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce [NSWACSAT] (2006) have highlighted that once abuse is reported, Aboriginal children are often faced with the task of disclosing intimate and embarrassing details, in intimidating and unfamiliar surroundings, with strangers who have a reputation for betraying their cultural group. Therefore, it is no surprise that fear and mistrust can deter the reporting of abuse and make it challenging for interviewers to elicit information from Aboriginal witnesses.
3.2 Cultural Factors

Ethnographic research by Eades (1982, 2013), has found that Aboriginal communities are often made up of extended family groups and kinship networks. They are usually small and insular, with most people being known to each other or interconnected in some way. A strong sense of loyalty and reciprocity is typically felt between family members and community life is usually group-centered with an emphasis on a collective identity (Eades, 1992). While these aspects of Aboriginal community life usually signify positive implications, they can also inhibit the reporting of abuse. Government reports have highlighted how some Aboriginal peoples may believe that disclosing abuse is a betrayal of community and culture (NSWACSAT, 2006), and a trend of community silence and denial can occur (Gordon et al., 2002). As there is a high probability that offenders will be related or known to the victim, there can be social or cultural pressure from other members of the family or community to conceal abuse. Feelings of fear that the perpetrator will retaliate against the individual and their family may also contribute to the suppression of abuse (Stanley et al., 2003).

Another aspect of Aboriginal culture that is relevant to the disclosure of abuse is cultural taboos. Secret men’s and women’s business is a widespread cultural value where topics of gender differences, personal and sexual matters are often discouraged or prohibited from being openly discussed, especially with members of the opposite sex (Criminal Justice Commission, 1996; Eades, 1992; Sheldon, 2001). Interestingly, even when English terms for genitals are known, many Aboriginal peoples will be highly reluctant to use English terminology and will instead use their own Aboriginal language when the need to speak about genitals arises (Eades, 1992). Another common taboo in Aboriginal culture is refraining
from using the name of a recently deceased person or even a name or word that sounds similar to the deceased person’s name (Criminal Justice Commission, 1996; Eades, 1992). Therefore, it is important for interviewers to be aware of such restraints, as they may affect the way Aboriginal interviewees can converse about the alleged offence (e.g., naming the offender or other people involved in the offence).

3.3 Socio-Emotional Factors

A major socio-emotional feature in Aboriginal communities that could impact the investigative interview process is the concept of *shame*. For many Aboriginal peoples, shame is a complex matter that is notably different to the Western version of feeling ashamed (Harkins, 1990, 1994; Sharifian, 2005). In a semantic analysis on the Aboriginal English use of the term shame, Harkins (1990) notes that Aboriginal peoples often report feeling shame in situations where non-Aboriginal peoples would not speak of being ashamed. For example, shame may be felt when one is the centre of attention, when receiving praise, when meeting strangers, in the presence of close relatives, when passing near a forbidden place, or when exposed to secret ceremony information. Most commonly, shame in Aboriginal culture includes a fear of negative consequences arising from a perceived wrongdoing, a fear of disapproval and a strong desire to escape the unpleasant situation (Harkins, 1990).

Similar conceptualisations of shame have also been found in ethnographic research by Sharifian (2005). In his study, 30 Aboriginal and 30 non-Aboriginal children from Western Australian primary schools were exposed to a list of words, one of which included the term shame. Results indicated that different worldviews or “cultural schemas” were related to the word shame. For non-Aboriginal children,
the word shame was associated with guilt or misdemeanours. For Aboriginal children, however, the term shame prompted schemas related to praise, respect, punishment, unfamiliarity, or being spotlighted in a group. Interestingly, both sets of research also found that the syntax of shame differed between the two cultures: whereas non-Aboriginal peoples may speak of “feeling ashamed,” Aboriginal peoples are more likely to speak of “getting” or “being” shame (e.g., “I’ve got shame”; “big shame”; “that’s a shame job”) (Harkins, 1990; Sharifian, 2005).

Shame can inhibit or delay the disclosure of sexual abuse by both Aboriginal (Gordon et al., 2002; NSWACSAT, 2006; Robertson, 2000) and non-Aboriginal children (Bonanno et al., 2002; Furniss, 1991; Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Hershkowitz, Lanes, & Lamb, 2007; Hunter, 2011). In research conducted for the *Breaking the Silence Report*, consultations with over 300 people from 29 Aboriginal communities in NSW revealed that shame was a common consequence of child sexual assault and that it often prevented children from reporting sexual abuse to authorities. It was explained that Aboriginal victims may feel responsible for “letting the abuse happen” and their feelings of shame are often compounded by taboos regarding the open discussion of sexual issues, a lack of understanding regarding sexual assault, a mistrust of authority agencies, and a fear or past experience of retaliation or of not being believed (Coorey, 2001; NSWACSAT, 2006).

3.4 Socio-Economic Factors

It is also important to consider how socio-economic factors can affect Aboriginal people’s disclosure of abuse. Many Aboriginal peoples, especially in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, live in geographically remote areas.
In 2011, almost 40% of households in remote areas were overcrowded and almost 50% had structural troubles (AIHW, 2015b). Further, many Aboriginal families typically live off little financial income to support themselves. Between 2012 and 2013, almost one-quarter of Indigenous households reported running out of food and being unable to afford more. In these same years, there also appears to be a clear disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples when it comes to employment rates (48% and 77%, respectively) (AIHW, 2015b). These economic factors paired with geographical remoteness means that Aboriginal peoples are often isolated from support services. Limited access to telephones and transport can subsequently confine an Aboriginal victim’s ability to report abuse (Gordon et al., 2002; Stanley et al., 2003). Further, it is likely that living in locations distant from support services means that child abuse interviews will be conducted on a fly-in-fly-out basis, thus impacting on the interviewer’s ability to build a regular and familiar relationship with the interviewees or their community.

Another relevant factor to the investigative interview process is education and the distribution of information to Aboriginal peoples. Accurate data on school attendance and retention rates are limited, however, there is clear evidence that school retention rates for Aboriginal students are improving. For example, year 7-12 retention rates for Aboriginal students increased from 35% in 1999 to 45% in 2009 (Purdie & Buckley, 2010). While these education rates are hopeful, there exists a dearth of education services and informative resources concerning child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. Government reports have highlighted that child sexual abuse is not well understood in many Aboriginal communities and some Aboriginal peoples are not aware of what child abuse actually constitutes (NSWACSAT, 2006). Further, many are unaware of their legal rights and services that can assist them in
cases of sexual assault (McCalman et al., 2014; Wild & Anderson, 2007). According to the NSWACSAT (2006), information flowing in and out of many Aboriginal communities is often restricted and may be controlled or monitored by community leaders, some who may also be perpetrators. Therefore, it is important for interviewers to recognise that some Aboriginal children may be naïve to the negative nature of abuse or unaware of support services to contact in circumstances of abuse.

3.5 Health Factors

A further pertinent factor to understanding Aboriginal peoples and the investigative interview process is the health of Aboriginal peoples. An abundance of research has established that, in general, the health of Aboriginal peoples is poor compared to non-Aboriginal peoples (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2008). According to the Commonwealth of Australia (2011), there is a life expectancy inequality gap of approximately 10.75 years when comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Some of the biggest killers of Aboriginal peoples are chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Excessive alcohol consumption is also associated with 7% of all deaths and 6% of diseases in Aboriginal peoples (AHRC, 2008). For Aboriginal children, issues of malnutrition are prevalent, with approximately 26% of young children (< 5) in the Northern Territory being underweight or having stunted growth (Gracey & King, 2009). Moreover, a common childhood disease that affects a high incidence of Aboriginal children is Otitis Media. This disease affects the inner ear and if left untreated can lead to hearing loss and even deafness (AHRC, 2008).

Hearing loss is an important health concern to recognise when interacting with Aboriginal peoples in legal settings. An inquiry into the hearing health of
Australia found that hearing loss among Aboriginal peoples has a strong association with Aboriginal peoples’ ability to engage in the criminal justice system (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2010). For example, a failure to respond to questions in a courtroom may result from the Aboriginal witness not having adequately heard the question rather than evasion or a lack of comprehension (Criminal Justice Commission, 1996). Subsequently, guidelines have been created which require hearing assessments to be conducted on any Aboriginal person who is having communication difficulties in a police interview, regardless of whether police consider the communication difficulty to be a result of language or cross-cultural issues (Bartels, 2011).

3.6 Chapter Summary

The investigative interviewing of Aboriginal children and the findings of the current thesis cannot be understood unless they are viewed in light of broad past and present contextual factors (Stanley et al., 2003). While these factors may not be exhaustive, they provide the reader with a better understanding of what Aboriginal children may be experiencing and what issues may be influencing their behaviour or responses during investigative interviews. This chapter demonstrates that these factors can have an affect both on Aboriginal peoples’ ability to initially report abuse as well as the clarity of their disclosures once they have decided to report.
CHAPTER 4: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION STYLES

This chapter provides a review of the literature on the way Aboriginal peoples typically communicate. Despite the heterogeneity of Aboriginal peoples, certain styles of relating are shared, and are markedly different to the communication styles of non-Aboriginal peoples (Eades, 2013). It is important to acknowledge these differences and establish a better understanding of Aboriginal language and communication, as this is likely to impact the investigative interview process. While there is a lack of literature that examines the investigative interviewing of Australian Aboriginal children, there is a considerable amount of literature that examines the common interactional styles of Aboriginal peoples (Cooke, 1996, 1998; Eades, 1982, 1992, 2012, 2013, 2015; Fryer-Smith, 2008; Gardner, 2010; Malcolm & Sharifian, 2002; Sharifian, 2001; Walsh, 1991; 1994). These works are largely based in the fields of anthropology, socio-linguistics and speech pathology, and tend to consider Aboriginal language and communications styles in courtroom and classroom contexts.

In the current chapter, I review these works and consider their relevance to the investigative interview process. The structure of this chapter is as follows. Firstly, I provide a brief overview of Aboriginal language and interpreter use. Next, I review literature that examines information seeking and narrative telling by Aboriginal peoples, and finally I turn to an overview of common interactional styles of Aboriginal peoples and how these may relate to the investigative interview process.
4.1 Aboriginal Language and Interpreter Use

Many Aboriginal peoples speak a traditional language, a variety of Aboriginal English, or one of the English-lexified creoles (e.g., Kriol) as their home language (AIHW, 2015b; Eades, 2013, 2015). Moreover, most Aboriginal peoples typically speak a creole or a variety of Aboriginal English in their dealings with the law (Eades, 2004). The limited availability and infrequent use of interpreters, however, means that the majority of interviews conducted with Aboriginal peoples continue to be completed in standard Australian English (Cooke, 2004; Dixon & Travis, 2007; Gibbons, 2003). While some Aboriginal languages may sound similar to standard English, there can be crucial differences in the use of words that can have significant consequences (McKay, 1985). For example, the word *kill* in various forms of Aboriginal English can mean hit or strike rather than exterminate (Walsh, 2008), or the word *guilty* can mean shy or embarrassed rather than a legal concept (McKay, 1985).

There appears to be some disparity between professionals’ views on the use of interpreters with Aboriginal peoples in the criminal justice system. Some police, lawyers, and judges may perceive that an interpreter can interfere with the criminal justice process and may be unnecessary if most Aboriginal people can speak conversational Australian English (Cooke, 2002). In a recent survey of 413 Australian police officers, factors such as cost, added length of interviews, and a lack of training for police were identified as possible disincentives for engaging interpreting services (Wakefield, Kebbell, Moston, & Westera, 2014). This survey also found, however, that police perceptions of interpreting services were largely positive. Others have also contended that an interpreter is essential in order to give the respondent the best chance possible of relaying detailed information (Cooke,
2002; Powell & Bartholomew, 2003). Despite this incongruence, most commentators agree that criminal justice workers need to be trained to competently assess the need for an interpreter and use them effectively (Cooke, 2002; Powell, 2000; Wakefield et al., 2014). While interpreters may facilitate the communication process, the onus still rests on the interviewer to conduct the interview according to best-practice guidelines (e.g., clear open-ended questions that can be translated with ease). Indeed, in high quality interviews the interviewer often does very little speaking, which reduces the need for ambiguous translation of interview questions.

4.2 Seeking and Relaying Information in Aboriginal Communities

Indirectness is a central characteristic of Aboriginal communicative styles compared to the direct Western question-and-answer approach in everyday conversation (Cooke, 1996; Eades, 1982, 1992, 2013, 2015; Walsh, 1994). While questions may be used in Aboriginal interactions to seek background orientation information, they are rarely used to obtain substantive personal information, and their formats often remain indirect. For example, ethnographic field research in South-East Queensland Aboriginal communities has indicated that speakers might elicit information from their counterparts by hinting information and waiting patiently for a response (e.g., “I’m wondering about…”) (Eades, 1982). Questions might be formed as utterances with rising intonations (e.g., “You saw him eh?”) or by offering information for confirmation or denial, followed by silence (e.g., “Maybe this happened…”) (Eades, 1982, 2013). Such questioning styles are in conflict with best-practice investigative interview procedure, however, where the avoidance of leading questions is strongly discouraged (Bruck & Ceci, 1999). Analysis of courtroom cross-examinations has also indicated that Aboriginal witnesses who are
not bicultural can be highly suggestible in response to leading questioning (Cooke, 1995; Eades, 2008b, 2013).

Recent linguistic research has examined question-and-answer sequences by Aboriginal peoples in northern Australia (Gardner, 2010). In a conversation analytic study with 62 manuscripts of conversation, results demonstrated that, in general, the Aboriginal interlocutors expected responses when asking questions of each other. Importantly, it was common for long pauses to exist between the speaker’s question and the listener’s response. Findings were explained by the idea that Aboriginal peoples who spend much time together in communities can often develop a conversation over a relaxed timeframe. Conversely, conversations in western societies are often temporally restricted and therefore require faster and focused responses. These findings were also similar to Eades (1982) almost 30 years earlier, which also found that long silences commonly followed the posing of a prompt.

Another conversational aspect that has been identified in the literature is minimal discourse: a prevalent communication feature whereby Aboriginal speakers provide brief or unelaborated responses (Malcolm, 1982; Sharifian, 2001). Sharifian (2001) explains that minimal discourse may occur because speakers assume that they have shared schemas with the listener, therefore it is unnecessary to complete or elaborate upon a sentence because it is believed that the listener already understands what the speaker is saying. This can lead to communication difficulties when the speaker and listener share different cultural schemas. Analysis of Aboriginal English texts has revealed that minimal discourse is a common conversational feature, especially when an Aboriginal English-speaking person is speaking to a non-Aboriginal English-speaking person (Sharifian, 2001; Sharifian, Rochecouste, & Malcolm, 2004). This pattern is one of which investigative interviewers need to be
aware. Research is needed to examine whether particular interview techniques can override minimal discourse and encourage Aboriginal children to provide informative responses.

A familiar style of relaying information in Aboriginal culture is through the use of narratives (Cooke, 1996; Eades, 1982; Klapproth, 2004). For thousands of years, Aboriginal peoples relied heavily on orally imparting information. Storytelling or “yarning” is a strong aspect of Aboriginal tradition and remains central to the Aboriginal, personal, and community identity (Fordham, 1994; Klapproth, 2004; Kral, 2009). Research has also indicated that Aboriginal peoples can significantly benefit from relaying information via narratives rather than a sequence of questions (consistent with current interviewing guidelines that encourage open-ended prompting: Lamb et al., 2007b). In a case study by Cooke (1996), prosecution replaced a charge of willful murder with manslaughter after an Aboriginal woman was permitted to talk freely in narrative form rather than the original question-and-answer police interview. A narrative enabled the defendant to fully explain her story, which allowed for new details to emerge and clarify her defence. Commonwealth legislation permits a witness to give evidence wholly or partially in narrative form (Evidence Act, 1995); this section of statute seems highly appropriate for Aboriginal witnesses.

4.3 Organisation and Interpretation of Aboriginal Narratives

While the importance of a narrative approach to eliciting information cannot be underestimated, it is also important to acknowledge that there are considerable differences between the way Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples comprehend, organise, and relay narratives. Some empirical studies have examined oral narratives
produced by Aboriginal peoples, with a particular focus on the worldviews or “schemas” that influence their narrative telling (Malcolm & Rochecouste, 2001; Sharifian, 2002; Sharifian & Department of Education WA, 2012; Sharifian, Malcolm, Rochecouste, Königsberg, & Collard, 2005; Sharifian et al., 2004). All studies have found features of narratives that are common and unique to Aboriginal peoples. For example, in a study by Malcolm and Rochecouste (2000), forty oral narratives produced by young Aboriginal peoples were analysed and interpreted by a cross-cultural research team. Results revealed that the majority of narratives were strongly associated with worldviews that were derived from familiar Aboriginal experiences with travelling, hunting, and spirituality. People and place were of key importance in the narratives, and events within the stories tended to focus on movement from place to place.

Similarly, work by Sharifian (2002) has also found features of narratives that are common and unique to Aboriginal peoples. After observing and analysing Aboriginal English narratives, Sharifian found that Aboriginal English speakers tended to put less emphasis on the linear sequencing of events. Instead, events were ordered according to their salience in the speaker’s mind. Further, the Aboriginal-English narratives did not refer to clock or calendar times to establish the temporal context in the narrative. This is consistent with other findings that Aboriginal peoples do not often use expressions of quantifiable specification (Eades, 2013). Items, people and places are frequently listed or named rather than counted, and Aboriginal peoples typically describe timeframes qualitatively, in terms of physical, social, geographical and climatic events. For example, “when did it happen?” may be responded to by saying “before the flood” rather than referencing a clock or
calendar time. Showing the length of something may be used rather than estimating the length in meters (Eades, 1992; Forrest & Sherwood, 1988).

Differences between the way Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples interpret narratives have been exhibited in a few studies. In one study, six non-Aboriginal educators and four Aboriginal educators were required to listen to eight narratives produced by Aboriginal children and immediately recall and relay the narratives (Sharifian et al., 2005). Researchers then analysed the recollections and found distinct patterns emerging from the data. For example, when recalling a narrative about the hunting of a kangaroo, non-Aboriginal educators tended to rely heavily on their own worldviews to comprehend, organise, and relay the narrative, leading them to describe the hunters as being in a cave when no such cave had been mentioned in the original narrative. Alternatively, Aboriginal educators tended to have greater familiarity with the worldviews that informed the original narrative and therefore provided information in their re-telling of the narrative that was consistent with the original narrative.

Other interesting findings from Sharifian’s (2005) study were that non-Aboriginal educators generally used a bottom-up approach when recalling narratives, whereby they recalled the minimal features first to rebuild the whole narrative. Conversely, Aboriginal educators used a holistic top-down approach to re-building the recall of the narrative, whereby they recalled the broader elements of the narrative first before working their way down to the smaller details. The overriding conclusions of this study were that differences in cultural worldviews often lead to miscommunications between non-Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal students. While this study involved differences in communication styles in an educational setting, the findings may have relevance to the investigative interview situation
where a non-Aboriginal adult often interviews an Aboriginal child. Keeping the limited sample size in mind, these findings indicate that educators (and potentially interviewers) need to be aware of their own worldviews when attempting to comprehend an Aboriginal child’s narrative.

Research has also examined the differences in worldviews and narrative telling between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. In a study by Sharifian and the Department of Education Western Australia (WA) (2012), 44 Aboriginal and 20 non-Aboriginal students (aged 9 to 11 years) were required to listen to five stories with different cultural underpinnings and then participate in an informal one-to-one interview where they had to recall the stories with no visual cues. Results showed that Aboriginal students produced both subtle and major alternatives to the original stories, which suggested that different schemas or worldviews were used to comprehend and recall the stories. The study also found that Aboriginal students tended to provide shorter narratives than non-Aboriginal students, and reserve information that was only revealed when teachers prompted them during the post-recall questioning. Further, it was evident in interviews where the teacher asked a high rate of unidirectional questions that Aboriginal students were confused by which question to answer. The teacher did not allow sufficient time to answer questions and students were subsequently (albeit unintentionally) prevented from responding. These findings could have significant implications for the investigative interview where an essential aim is to increase the amount of relevant information obtained (Orbach et al., 2000).

Research into Aboriginal narrative telling has also considered Aboriginal children’s capabilities when comprehending and relaying narratives in Aboriginal English. In one fairly recent study, six Australian Aboriginal children (aged six to
nine) from a school in urban North Queensland were read a story and asked to re-tell the story using a wordless picture book as a visual aid (Pearce & Stockings, 2011). Researchers analysed the microstructure (linguistic form and content) and macrostructure (construction and sequence of main story elements: setting, problem, problem-solving and resolution) of the narratives. Results were compared to a large database; they revealed that the majority of students performed above or within average limits. Most participants did well with introduction, character development and conclusion components of the narratives. While this study has a limited sample size and uses an American database for comparison, it sheds some light on the narrative capabilities of Australian Aboriginal children. It highlights that Aboriginal children, using Aboriginal English, are competent in structuring, developing and relaying narratives with relevant substance according to American normative standards. From an investigative interview perspective, this suggests that while Aboriginal children may be capable storytellers, the onus rests on investigative interviewers to use the most effective strategies to encourage Aboriginal children to tell their stories.

4.4 Aboriginal Interaction Styles

Over several decades, a wealth of literature has explored the common and unique interactional styles of Aboriginal peoples (Criminal Justice Commission, 1996; Eades, 1982, 1992, 2012, 2013, 2015; Fordham, 1994; Forrest & Sherwood, 1988; Fryer-Smith, 2002, 2008; Karlsson, 2004; Mushin & Gardner, 2009; VonSturmer, 1981; Walsh, 1994). Several distinct features consistently emerge from the literature and these relate to silence, eye contact, non-verbal gestures, and gratuitous concurrence. Each are discussed in turn.
Research has highlighted that silence forms a central part of interactions in many Aboriginal communities. In a conversation analytic study with three Aboriginal women in a remote northern Australian community, Mushin and Gardner (2009) found that silences over one second were highly frequent in conversations, with some silences lasting up to 13 seconds. Importantly, these silences did not indicate communication difficulties, as the women listening to the speaker remained silent and did not attempt to fill the gaps of conversation. These findings are consistent with previous work, which has indicated that silence is frequently used by Aboriginal peoples in a positive sense to contemplate and get comfortable with social situations (Eades, 2007, 2013). This is in stark contrast to Western societies, where silence is often interpreted as awkwardness or a communication breakdown. In legal settings, silence can also be interpreted as an avoidance of the question and therefore guilt (Eades, 2013). From an investigative interview perspective, it has been noted that because silence is an important part of Aboriginal discourse, Aboriginal peoples usually take longer to respond to questions compared to non-Aboriginal peoples (Powell, 2000). In a handbook for lawyers, Eades (1992) has cautioned that during interviews of a legal nature, silence should not be interpreted negatively, and professionals need to be aware of the different uses of silence between the two cultures.

Another distinct interactional feature in many Aboriginal communities is the avoidance of eye contact. In Aboriginal interactions, direct eye contact can be interpreted as rude or intimidating (Eades, 1992), and some Aboriginal peoples will evade eye contact, especially in the presence of authority figures where it is intended to signify politeness and respect (Fryer-Smith, 2002). This is again in contrast to Western societies where the avoidance of eye contact is often interpreted as
impoliteness, dishonesty, or guilt. Eades (1992) has reminded professionals not to judge an Aboriginal person’s credibility by their use of eye contact and not to force direct eye contact when interviewing Aboriginal peoples.

An additional non-verbal feature that can be common in Aboriginal interactions is the use of sign language and non-verbal gestures. Sign language is a traditional aspect of Aboriginal culture that is especially important during hunting and mourning practices. It is also commonly used among urban Aboriginal people in modern times (Eades, 1992; Forrest & Sherwood, 1988; Fryer-Smith, 2002). Subtle movements of the eyes, head, and lips may be used to indicate direction of motion, or the location of a person or of an event being discussed (Eades, 1992). Anecdotal evidence also suggests that particular facial movements can indicate positive or negative responses, or whether a child feels comfortable discussing particular information. If these non-verbal gestures go unnoticed, the risk of miscommunication is enhanced. Therefore, it would seem pertinent for interviewers to gain knowledge regarding the meaning of such gestures and pay close attention to their use by Aboriginal children during an interview.

Another well-known interactional feature of Aboriginal conversations is *gratuitous concurrence* (Eades, 2015; Liberman, 1981, 1985; Walsh, 2008). The term refers to a propensity to agree to questions regardless of either an understanding of the question or a belief about the truth or falsity of the proposition. This strategy is used to signify cooperativeness and agreeableness. It is particularly common where a considerable amount of yes/no questions are being asked and unfortunately can lead to a heightened susceptibility to leading questions. Eades (1995, 2004, 2012) reviewed the Pinkenba case where gratuitous concurrence was apparent in the cross-examination of three young Aboriginal boys (*Crawford v. Venardos & Ors*,
Defence counsel asked questions such as, “that’s correct, isn’t it?” and “you knew, didn’t you?” Affirmative responses were given and in a couple of instances, one witness changed negative responses to affirmative responses. This case highlights the importance of avoiding yes/no and leading questions, and verifying what Aboriginal peoples actually mean by their responses.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has highlighted a number of important aspects regarding how Aboriginal peoples typically relate. It firstly considered the language use of Aboriginal peoples, before moving to an examination of the information-seeking and narrative styles of Aboriginal peoples. Finally, it ended on an overview of common interactional styles of Aboriginal peoples. The abundance of unique and common Aboriginal communication styles that differ from mainstream Australia, and other Western cultures upon which the majority of child interviewing research has been based, suggest that current methods of interviewing Aboriginal children may not be appropriate or effective, and there may be potential to modify interview procedure. It is these differences that ultimately led to the development of the first study of this thesis.
CHAPTER 5: PROFESSIONALS’ PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE
SUITABILITY OF INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS TO
ABORIGINAL CHILDREN (STUDY 1)\(^2\)

This chapter presents the first study of this thesis, which sought to qualitatively evaluate the applicability of an investigative interview protocol to Australian Aboriginal children and examine how (if at all) it could be modified to better suit the communication styles in many Aboriginal communities. In Chapter 2, it was evident that ample evidence supports the use of best-practice interview protocols (Cyr & Lamb, 2009, Lamb et al., 2009; Orbach et al., 2001; Sternberg et al., 2001). In a review in Chapter 4, however, it was clear that there are many unique communication styles in Aboriginal culture that are markedly different to those in non-Aboriginal culture (Cooke, 1996; Eades, 1992, 1996, 2013; Fryer-Smith, 2008; Walsh, 1991, 1994). It was these differences that raised questions regarding the suitability of current interview protocols with Aboriginal children.

Current interview protocols widely recommend that interviewers build rapport with children in order to facilitate the establishment of trust and ease discomfort prior to discussing intimate information (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Hershkowitz, 2011; Lamb et al., 2007b). Rapport can be developed in part through conducting a practice narrative where the child is required to discuss a neutral or positive event in response to open-ended questions prior to substantive topics (Roberts et al., 2011). While building rapport is crucial with any interviewee, it may be particularly important for Aboriginal children who may have numerous

\(^2\) This study has been accepted for publication: Hamilton, G., Powell, M. B., & Brubacher, S. P. (in press). Professionals’ perception regarding the suitability of investigative interview protocols to Aboriginal children. *Australian Psychologist.*
reservations about disclosing personal information to unfamiliar interviewers in an
unfamiliar environment. Feelings of shame and mistrust of authority agencies may
significantly impede an Aboriginal child’s ability to disclose abuse. As it stands, a
brief rapport-building phase where a practice narrative is conducted may not be
sufficient to overcome these reservations before broaching topics of sexual abuse.

Interview protocols also advise that interviewers explain the purpose and
conversational rules of the interview process to the child (e.g., “If I say something
wrong, you should tell me I made a mistake”; “If I ask a question that you don’t
understand, just say you don’t understand”). While the provision of such rules has
been found to increase the informativeness and decrease the inaccuracy of children’s
accounts (Cordón et al., 2005; Endres et al., 1999; Mulder & Vrij, 1996; Saywitz &
Moan-Hardie, 1994), such techniques may not be effective with children from
Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal children may be reluctant to correct
interviewers or voice confusion and uncertainty, regardless of whether such rules are
relayed (i.e., gratuitous concurrence: an interactional feature in Aboriginal
communities whereby the recipient may agree with the questioner, irrespective of a
belief or understanding of the proposition: Eades, 1992; Liberman, 1985). The
maintenance of harmonious social relations is a strong Aboriginal cultural value,
therefore, the rules phase of current interview protocols may be ineffective in
ensuring that Aboriginal children confront and correct interviewers if inaccurate
information arises during the interview, or if information is unknown or not
understood.

Finally, most prominent interview protocols advocate an approach to
questioning whereby the interviewer should begin broadly (e.g., “Tell me what you
have come to talk about”) and invite the child to provide an account of their
experience in their own words, increasing the specificity of their questions if needed to elicit a disclosure (e.g., “I heard you saw [professional]—Tell me what you talked about”; Lamb et al., 2007b; Wilson & Powell, 2001). Throughout the interview, open-ended questions (e.g., “Tell me more about that”) should be asked, as it is a robust finding that children offer more detailed and accurate information in response to open-ended as opposed to specific questions (e.g., “What colour was it?”; Lamb et al., 1996; Lamb et al., 2007a). While these questioning strategies are well established with non-Aboriginal children, it is unclear how they may apply to Aboriginal children who have distinct information-seeking styles. For example, questions are not usually used to seek substantial information in Aboriginal culture; if necessary, indirect methods are used such as hinting at information, exchanging knowledge and pausing for long periods of time (Eades, 2013b). Therefore, these differences point to the need to assess current questioning techniques with Aboriginal children.

Given that this is the first known study to examine the suitability of an investigative interview protocol to Aboriginal children, it was determined that an exploratory approach was appropriate and no specific hypotheses were made. Qualitative interviews were conducted with professionals who had expertise in Aboriginal language and culture, as well as an appreciation of the child investigative interview process; professionals were prompted to reflect on Aboriginal language and culture with reference to the SIM protocol (see Chapter 2). As prior work regarding Aboriginal peoples and the criminal justice system has extensively covered the barriers faced by many Aboriginal peoples (Anderson & Wild, 2007; Eades, 2008a; Powell, 2000), the current study also aimed to adopt a constructive approach
and generate recommendations for the modification of the interview protocol to better suit Aboriginal children.

Method

Participants

A diverse sample of 28 participants (9 males, 19 females) was recruited across several Australian jurisdictions (Northern Territory, Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria). Participants were invited via e-mail to take part in the study if they had expertise in Aboriginal language and culture, and an appreciation of the child investigative interviewing process. Knowledge of participants’ expertise and contact details were obtained via research on public websites for relevant organisations (e.g., police, universities). Recruitment of professionals ceased when it was determined that data saturation had been reached (i.e., when no new issues or themes were appearing in the interviews: Sim & Wright, 2000).

The sample included: nine police detectives (area of child abuse investigation), five senior Aboriginal community workers (area of child protection), five child protection workers (with extensive experience working in Aboriginal communities), four academics (area of linguistics and cross-cultural communication), one psychologist (with extensive experience working with Aboriginal children as clients), one speech pathologist (with a background in research with Aboriginal children), one Senior Crown Prosecutor (with extensive experience prosecuting child abuse cases—especially those involving Aboriginal children), one witness assistance service officer (who regularly assists Aboriginal child witnesses) and one manager at an organisation for child protection (with experience conducting research in
Aboriginal communities and interviewing children). Of the total sample, eight participants identified as Aboriginal peoples and twenty identified as non-Aboriginal peoples. To protect the anonymity of participants, no further demographics are provided and any identifying information has been removed from quotes that illustrate participants’ views. A few quotations have been subject to minor editing to enable readability for an international audience.

**Procedure**

Prior to the commencement of the study, a reference group including various Aboriginal elders and peoples from across Australia was consulted to discuss the potential benefits and disadvantages of the research to Aboriginal peoples. The main purpose of the consultation was to ensure that the proposed aims and methods of the research were culturally appropriate and consistent with the values of many Aboriginal peoples. Once satisfaction with the research aims and methods was expressed, ethics approval was sought and granted by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee and the research process commenced. All research was carried out according to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies’ code of ethics for working with Indigenous Australians.

A few days before being interviewed, participants were given a copy of the SIM investigative interview protocol (see Chapter 2) to ensure adequate familiarity with current interview procedure. They then engaged in one in-depth, semi-structured interview that ranged in duration from 32 to 107 (\(M = 60.5, SD = 18\)) minutes. I conducted 16 of the interviews and my principal supervisor conducted the remaining 12 interviews. The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants in convenient and private locations. Four interviews were
conducted over the phone due to the distance between researchers and the participants. Each interview commenced with a broad open-ended question, inviting each participant to discuss their current role and prior professional experience (where applicable) in investigative interviewing and engagement with Aboriginal communities. Subsequently, participants were prompted to reflect on Aboriginal language and culture with reference to the protocol. Further open-ended inquiry related to the general applicability of the interview protocol to Aboriginal children and how the interviewing of Aboriginal children (in the context of sexual assault investigation) could be conducted in a way that was consistent with best-practice interview procedure while also considering the child’s cultural background and needs. Participants were encouraged to present their views on the issue and provide examples of questioning and interviewing strategies where possible. Participants directed the flow of content and the researchers remained mostly passive in their approach to interviewing, only asking open-ended questions to prompt elaboration and clarification where necessary.

**Data Management and Analysis**

All interviews were audio taped, transcribed verbatim and double-checked for accuracy. In conjunction with my supervisor, I read all interviews and identified and discussed the issues that emerged from participants’ responses. The coding process was inductive (i.e., bottom-up) in nature and involved organising the concerns and ideas in each transcript into tables. These features were systematically collated into potential themes and refined with each transcript until key themes were defined. All themes were grounded within the data (as opposed to being linked to a pre-existing theory) (Braun & Clark, 2006).
Results

Overall, all participants spoke passionately about the investigative interviewing of Aboriginal children. It was widely acknowledged that significant differences in the way that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples typically relate would affect the applicability of investigative interview protocols. Hence, the overriding impression was that certain modifications could be made to render interview protocols more applicable to Aboriginal children. Several key issues were identified and these are discussed in turn under three headings: (i) rapport building and practice narrative, (ii) relaying purpose and rules of the interview process, and (iii) questioning and information gathering.

Rapport Building and Practice Narrative

An overarching concern in the interviews related to the importance of building rapport with Aboriginal children. Overall, there was consensus that establishing a positive relationship with Aboriginal children was essential for eliciting information during an investigative interview; many participants acknowledged, however, that certain elements of rapport-building would be different compared to Western children. Many comments specifically related to the practice narrative, and the utility of the task with Aboriginal children was questioned for three main reasons. Each of these is discussed in turn.

Firstly, it was raised that relationships in Aboriginal communities are often marked by reciprocity; therefore, the process of inquiring solely about the child’s life through a practice narrative could lead to feelings of anxiety and discomfort. Whereas a practice narrative may prepare Western children to feel comfortable discussing events, focusing exclusively on an Aboriginal child during a practice
narrative could inhibit their subsequent accounts about alleged sexual abuse.

Consequently, 12 participants expressed that the application of the practice narrative may need to be altered to better suit the relationship building style that exists in many Aboriginal communities. Numerous suggestions were offered and these tended to focus on the idea of information sharing. For example, interviewers could provide a narrative about their own life before prompting the child for a narrative. There was concurrence that such a strategy could increase feelings of trust and comfort, and improve the likelihood of disclosure from an Aboriginal child.

“I think it’s a concept of sharing—if you’re going to tell me about you then I have to tell you something about me. You have to reciprocate within Aboriginal culture, that’s a huge element of it. You can’t just expect and not give.”

The second issue with the practice narrative related to the idea that relationships in many Aboriginal communities are typically communal rather than dyadic. It was articulated that because Aboriginal children are socialised into a community life that is usually group-centered with emphasis on a collective identity, the process of simply attempting to establish rapport solely with the child through a practice narrative would be insufficient. Instead, six participants spontaneously raised that interviewers need to develop genuine engagement and trust with the child’s family and broader community before the child can willingly participate in the interview process. The practice narrative may only be effective in building rapport with an Aboriginal child if the interviewer has collaborated and invested time with appropriate community leaders and members of the child’s family prior to the investigative interview.

“If you haven’t got the support from the adults, the kids aren’t going to talk, so you need to start with the adults, and be really up front with them. Rapport building isn’t just with the child, it’s with all of those in the family. Don’t just go and target the victim when you want to do the interview—total respect has to come to mum and dad too.”
Thirdly, it was frequently expressed that the practice narrative may lack utility as a memory aid for Aboriginal children. Several participants raised that Aboriginal children may be less forthcoming with large amounts of information regardless of whether a practice narrative is conducted. It was reasoned that language barriers paired with a lack of trust of authority agencies might inhibit an Aboriginal child’s ability or willingness to provide large amounts of personal information to the interviewer. Therefore, while the practice narrative may prime Western children to provide greater detail in their subsequent accounts, the benefits of the task may not be as apparent with Aboriginal children. Indeed, conducting a practice narrative about an innocuous event may consume valuable time and mental resources with Aboriginal children and may add to a child’s sense of inhibition if they begin to disclose abuse but are told to continue with the practice narrative first. Subsequently, 14 participants agreed that the practice narrative might need to be abandoned with Aboriginal children, especially if the child indicates that they are eager to disclose sexual abuse before or during the practice narrative.

“You’ll wear them out, especially 5 year olds, you wear them out in that narrative. If I had an Aboriginal child and they disclosed early, I’d just keep rolling with it. If they’ve just told you something and then you interrupt them and go I’m talking about this they’re probably going to think well you don’t care what happened to me or you don’t want to hear it.”

“My thing was not to stop them if they raise disclosure. You shut them down they won’t open up again. If you say ‘we’ll talk about that in a minute’ they’ll just say ‘but I want to talk, I want to tell you my story’.”

Relaying the Purpose and Rules of the Interview Process

It was widely recognised that explaining the rules would be especially important for Aboriginal children because the format of the interview would be in stark contrast to an Aboriginal child’s usual style of relating. Despite the support for
this part of the interview process, numerous participants proposed that the delivery would need to be altered to better suit Aboriginal children. Several key issues were identified and these largely related to the use of vocabulary and sentence structure. Each of these issues is discussed in turn.

It was frequently raised that the word ‘if’ and the construction of hypotheticals are rarely used in Aboriginal communities and are problematic to translate in some Aboriginal languages. Therefore, any sentences that use the term ‘if’ are likely to be difficult for an Aboriginal child to understand. In order to render interview instructions more appropriate to Aboriginal children, numerous alternatives were offered: “maybe”, “might be” or “I might” in place of “if,” in cases where hypothetical constructions are necessary. Therefore, a sentence structure such as, “I might ask you something and you don’t know the answer—just say I don’t know” may be easier to understand than “if I ask you a question and you don’t know the answer—just say I don’t know.”

Secondly, it was a frequent concern that certain nouns and phrases commonly used in interview protocols might take on different meanings or have different connotations attached to them in Aboriginal communities and may need to be altered to become more conceptually and culturally appropriate. For example, 11 participants highlighted that the term promise in Aboriginal communities is often associated with the idea of “promise wives” and young girls being promised to future husbands. Therefore, a phrase such as “do you promise to tell me truth?” could incite confusion and distraction if an Aboriginal child interprets the word promise in such a way. Subsequently, it was emphasised that interview protocols could avoid the use of the word promise with Aboriginal children and use alternatives such as, “will you tell me the truth?”
“I don’t like the phrase ‘Do you promise to tell the truth?’ A lot of Aboriginal people don’t like promises—there are all sorts of things with promises. A lot of kids are promised to men when they are born and then they become their wives. They just have different sorts of promises.”

Similarly, considerable concern was held around the word truth. It was expressed that the term truth might be intimidating for an Aboriginal child to hear and might imply blame and punishment (i.e., that the child is a liar and guilty of a wrongdoing). As a result, several alternatives were offered. For example, it was suggested that interview protocols could use an expression such as “true story” in place of the word truth. Interestingly, 11 participants articulated that the word story is a highly common expression in Aboriginal communities and would be easily understood by Aboriginal children. It was also contended that the expression “true story” would be interpreted to mean “what really happened.” However, it was also recognised that from a legal perspective, the word truth might be important for a jury to hear. Therefore, most participants agreed that it might be constructive to use both terms in interview protocols with Aboriginal children (e.g., “It’s important that you tell me the truth, will you tell me your true story?”).

“They know they’ve got to tell the truth but it’s saying it in a way that doesn’t sound threatening because sometimes when you talk about truth it’s talking about blame as well. With a police officer saying, “you got to tell the truth”, it could create tension for the kid as well—like okay does this person want to listen to my story? He’s saying tell me the truth, is he a police officer making an arrest or is he going to help me with my story about abuse?”

“Maybe it’s important to use the word truth as well, because I mean the whole process, the whole legal process, is a western process and the truth is absolutely fundamental to it, so it may be important to use both expressions, the true story about what really happened and the truth.”

The final terms that stimulated contemplation were those associated with gender and childhood (e.g., boy, girl, children). Whereas referring to young Western interviewees as children was considered to be ordinary and unproblematic, it was raised that such a term with young Aboriginal interviewees (especially male
adolescents) could create tension. Participants explained that in many Aboriginal communities, young males might participate in “men’s business” initiation process whereby they are officially recognised as men in their culture. Therefore, it is important that interview protocols do not include terms that could offend young Aboriginal interviewees and compromise the relationship between the interviewee and interviewer. An abundance of alternative terms were offered: “male”, “female”, “people”, “young fellas”, or “your mob.” Although there was contention around using certain terms, 12 participants concurred that avoiding terms regarding childhood in interview protocols could increase the likelihood of eliciting information from young Aboriginal interviewees who may be approaching adolescence.

“Because you need to take into consideration like Barkly and Western Desert they all become men at around 12 to 14 years, sometimes even younger. So if you say straight up ‘boy’, you’ve already closed off, because out of respect you wouldn’t call him a boy.”

**Questioning and Information Gathering**

All except one participant agreed that the recommended narrative-based framework for interviewing was suitable for eliciting information from Aboriginal children. Likewise, one of the overriding impressions was that the direct questioning of Aboriginal children should be avoided where possible, as this style of information seeking would be unfamiliar and intrusive in many Aboriginal communities and may increase stress levels and suggestibility.

“I think the protocol itself is good. It’s good in terms of getting the children to tell their story. The use of the open-ended prompts was good, the notion of not interrupting, not asking direct questions to try to get information and allowing the child to speak—those are the very positive aspects that I saw in the protocol that is currently being used.”
“These are highly acculturated people who use English with particular information seeking strategies which are fundamentally different from standard Australian English. Where our way of doing things is to ask direct questions constantly, Aboriginal way of speaking English is not to ask direct questions—it’s almost in your face, putting you on the spot. Direct questions are a real bad move.”

However, despite expressing that the overall narrative structure of current interview protocols was sufficient, many participants recognised that questioning strategies could be slightly altered to better suit Aboriginal children. A few key issues relating to questioning styles were identified and these are discussed in turn.

Firstly, while the importance of open-ended questions was emphasised, 11 participants perceived that the nature of the questions could be tailored to better suit Aboriginal children. It was reasoned that due to language barriers and greater inhibitions, Aboriginal children might be less forthcoming with large amounts of information during an interview. Therefore, broad and complex open-ended questions that cast the net wide (e.g., “Tell me everything that happened from the very beginning to the very end”), may be less effective in eliciting information from Aboriginal children compared to shorter and more guided open-ended questions (e.g., “Tell me more about [previously-disclosed detail]”; “What happened next?”). Consequently, interview protocols with Aboriginal children may need to largely comprise focused open-ended prompts that help to direct the flow of information.

While the use of direct questions with Aboriginal children was discouraged, it was recognised that interview protocols may need to incorporate some direct questions to elicit specific details. Therefore, in order to counter some of the detriments of direct questions, it was frequently raised that any direct questions could be softened to become more indirect. Numerous examples for rephrasing direct questions were provided. Some of these involved rephrasing questions into statements and waiting for a response (e.g., “I need to know where he touched you
Central to softening direct questioning was also the idea of silence; 11 participants acknowledged that silence forms a vital part of interactions in many Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal children may use silence to ruminate and prepare themselves before disclosing information. Subsequently, one participant suggested that interview protocols could incorporate reminders for interviewers to pause for several seconds after asking each question and tolerate longer periods of silence with Aboriginal children. Overall, there was consensus that softening direct questions and incorporating silence into interview protocols could facilitate the information gathering process with Aboriginal children as these methods of communication would be closer to that in many Aboriginal communities.

“I think it’s important that people respect that silence while they’re sitting there at the beginning, before they’ve given the disclosure. You’ll have that big blank of silence—be prepared for that with Aboriginal kids because they’re thinking majority of the consequences of disclosing. I just look at them and nod to let them know that when you’re ready I’m here.”

**Discussion**

The current study, which elicited perceptions regarding the applicability of an interview protocol to Aboriginal children, revealed support for the general structure of the model. The majority of the heterogeneous and highly experienced sample underlined the value of the narrative technique when eliciting information from Aboriginal children. Linguistic research has previously indicated that relaying information via narratives is a more familiar and courteous method of interacting in Aboriginal societies compared to asking a series of direct questions (Cooke, 1996; Eades, 1982, 2013). While the importance of utilising narratives and avoiding direct questions with Aboriginal peoples has been emphasised in other domains, the current
finding affirms the use of a narrative-based interview protocol with Aboriginal children in the context of sexual assault investigation.

This study also revealed a number of concerns about the applicability of the interview protocol to Aboriginal children. These concerns largely related to the methods of building rapport (specifically with respect to the practice narrative) as well as the syntax and vocabulary of prompts. The following sections discuss the chief concerns of the participants as they related to the primary phases of the interview protocol: practice narrative; ground rules; questioning and information gathering.

**Practice Narrative**

Participants reflected extensively on the need to develop rapport, not only with the child victim, but also with the child’s Aboriginal community at large. While it was acknowledged that rapport building is a process that begins before the interview and continues throughout the entire interview, participants largely focused on the concrete elements of the protocol and therefore devoted many comments to the practice narrative component and its rapport building function. Although they had concerns about the practice narrative in its current format to facilitate rapport, they offered suggestions regarding a potentially promising modification. Several participants proposed a bi-directional approach to information-sharing during this phase; that is, the interviewer also shares some personal information. Indeed, this technique is often used in therapy (Bedi, Davis, & Williams, 2005), and is associated with increased rapport in both Aboriginal (Dudgeon & Ugle, 2014; Sheldon, 2010) and non-Aboriginal adults (Collins & Miller, 1994). Vallano and Compo (2011) compared bi-directional, uni-directional (i.e., only the interviewee provides
information) and no-rapport conditions when interviewing 111 college adults about a videotaped mock crime. Both rapport conditions resulted in more accurate reports than the no-rapport condition. There were no differences, however, between the two rapport conditions; that is, bi-directional did not confer additional benefits, but neither did it result in any negative outcomes. As such, a practice phase that includes self-disclosed information from the interviewer merits empirical testing with Aboriginal children.

Aside from its potential rapport-building benefits, participants raised concerns about the cognitive demands of the practice phase for an Aboriginal child whose first language is not English. When a person has to translate languages in addition to other mental processes (e.g., recalling memories), the overall cognitive load is increased (Shreve & Angelone, 2010). Hence, it is possible that the processes of listening, translating and responding to questions in the practice narrative might diminish the child’s mental energy before the interviewer has even begun to question about the alleged abuse. Research in the child investigative interviewing field has also evinced that an extended introductory phase (lasting over eight minutes) can be cognitively taxing on non-Aboriginal children, reducing their ability to provide information in the substantive phase of the interview (Davies et al., 2000; Hershkowitz, 2009).

Overall, it needs to be carefully considered whether the potential negative effects of a practice narrative with Aboriginal children outweigh the benefits. Roberts et al. (2011) have considered the arguments against the inclusion of a practice narrative in an investigative interview, and indeed, many of these mirror those made by the present participants. These authors contended that capturing a child’s eager disclosure early on in the interview without a practice narrative may
leave the child unprepared for the remainder of the interview. While there may be short-term gain in seizing the disclosure, this disclosure is likely to be brief and the child may be left unaware about the level of detail they must provide when discussing the alleged abuse. Research has also indicated that a premature transition into substantive issues may incite non-disclosure or denial of abuse in children; as such, increased efforts should be made in the rapport building phase before broaching the topic of concern (Hershkowitz et al., 2006). Similarly, adolescent alleged victims of sexual abuse reported negative feelings of pressure and being rushed when the police officer taking their report did not spend any time talking with them about topics other than the abuse (Greeson et al., 2014). Furthermore, Roberts et al. (2011) have argued that conducting a practice narrative can actually reduce the cognitive demands of an investigative interview. The process of practising memory retrieval and providing detailed answers in response to open-ended questions about an event that the child is motivated to describe can prepare the child and thus reduce the mental effort needed when discussing the topic of concern.

In summary, both the research on Aboriginal communication styles and the views of participants suggest that the practice phase alone has numerous areas worthy of future empirical research. For example, it could be predicted that a bi-directional approach during practice narratives would be more beneficial than a unidirectional approach to the development of rapport in this sample than in non-Aboriginal children. Yet, answering this question leads to another: Does that enhanced rapport improve the quantity and quality of their reports or are there further variables to take into account (e.g., length of phase, cognitive load)?
Ground Rules

The current sample believed that the establishment of ground rules would be imperative with Aboriginal children because of the alien nature of the interview. Nevertheless, they identified a variety of surface features of the ground rule instructions that merit consideration (e.g., the removal of the word *if*). One particularly interesting concern was the use of the word *promise* and the idea that it may have different connotations in Aboriginal culture that could cause distraction and confusion. It was raised that the term “promise” could be omitted and any oaths could instead read “will you tell me the truth (or, your true story)?” Some researchers have reasoned that the statement “I promise to tell the truth” is a stronger guarantee of performance compared to “I will tell the truth,” as it leaves the responder feeling more obligated to fulfil the future action (i.e., telling the truth) (Lyon, 2000; Lyon & Evans, 2014). Conversely, young American children tend to better understand and have a preference for the term “will” compared to “promise,” and appear to perceive the meaning of both terms as synonymous (Lyon & Evans, 2014). Participants’ concerns, paired with the literature regarding oaths, suggest that “will” may be a suitable replacement to “promise” in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children—although this merits empirical study.

The present participants were also concerned that terms referring to childhood (e.g., boy, girl, children)—often used in the ground rules phase of interview protocols—could offend young Aboriginal interviewees, especially if they have undergone cultural initiation ceremonies into adulthood. Ethnographic research has indicated that there are strong distinctions between “boys” and “men” in some Aboriginal communities, and around puberty children may begin an initiation process that results in the recognition of adulthood (Merlan, 1988). Prior work has
provided guidance on how this cultural feature can be handled in interview settings: interviewers could question whether any sudden silences in interviews are due to ceremonial business, and if so, how the interview should proceed (Sheldon, 2010). The current work adds to such advice by suggesting that interviewers could use generic terms with young Aboriginal interviewees who are nearing adolescence (e.g., male, people, young fellas or your mob).

**Questioning and Information Gathering**

All but one participant felt that the open-ended approach to prompting children for information—strongly endorsed by all best-practice guidelines (e.g., Lamb et al., 2007b; Ministry of Justice, 2011; Powell & Snow, 2007a; Saywitz & Camparo, 2013)—was also appropriate for questioning Aboriginal children (the remaining participant believed a direct questioning approach was satisfactory). Participants opined, however, that broad open-ended questions that request a large amount of information (e.g., “Tell me everything that happened”) may be less effective in eliciting information from Aboriginal children compared to more focused open-ended prompts. This concern is consistent with research that has found cued-invitations (e.g., “You said X. Tell me more about X”) are effective at eliciting informative responses from children when general invitations are unproductive (Lamb et al., 2003). An explanation is that cued-invitations remind children of previously mentioned details in their accounts and therefore trigger the recall of information. They focus children’s attention and increase their ability to remember past events, which allows them to provide further details in their narrative accounts (Lamb et al., 2003). As long as the interviewer does not introduce misleading or previously-undisclosed details that could contaminate the child’s account, cued-
invitations appear to be a beneficial option with Aboriginal children if broad open-ended questions are unsuccessful.

Participants also highlighted the importance of using silence when interviewing Aboriginal children. This idea is consistent with previous research that has indicated many Aboriginal peoples often feel comfortable with long periods of silence and frequently use silences in their conversations, especially when the topic is serious in nature (Eades, 2007; Mushin & Gardner, 2009; Walsh, 1991). Toleration of silence by interviewers is also recommended in best-practice interviewing guidelines with children (Bull, 1995; Powell & Snow, 2007a) and adults (Powell, Fisher, & Wright, 2005) because the interviewee is the one who should be doing most of the speaking. In sum, there appears to be good consensus between best-practice recommendations and the views of the participants with respect to the information-gathering phase of the interview.

Conclusion

Ultimately, future research in laboratory and field settings is needed to test some of the concerns raised in the current study—especially those related to the practice narrative and the modification of ground rule instructions—and how they might impact an Aboriginal child’s ability to provide information in a subsequent narrative. For example, the idea of reciprocity and whether the provision of a brief narrative by the interviewer is an effective strategy to enable rapport and engagement in the interview should be investigated. In the interim, however, the current study can provide some clear recommendations regarding the modification of interview protocols to better suit Aboriginal children. Firstly, the wording of particular nouns, questions and sentence structures in interview protocols can be adjusted to better
accommodate the discourse practices in many Aboriginal communities. Secondly, protocols can incorporate reminders for interviewers to tolerate and use (even) more silence in interviews with Aboriginal children. Finally, while the narrative structure of current interview protocols is encouraged, interviewers can lean towards using cued-invitations whenever possible. These modifications are largely consistent with the research, are harmonious with the speech styles in many Aboriginal communities, and are therefore likely to facilitate communication between interviewers and Aboriginal children.
CHAPTER 6: THE EFFECTS OF PRACTICE NARRATIVES IN INTERVIEWS WITH AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN (STUDY 2)³

This chapter exhibits the second study of this thesis, in which I aimed to examine the effects of a practice narrative on the informativeness and accuracy of Aboriginal children’s accounts of an innocuous event. A practice narrative is a discussion of a neutral or positive event in response to open-ended questions, prior to the introduction of substantive topics (see Roberts et al., 2011, for a review). Practice narratives form part of best-practice interview guidelines because they have been consistently shown to increase the accuracy and informativeness of children’s subsequent accounts (Anderson et al., 2014; Hershkovitz, 2009; Price et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997; Whiting, 2013). However, one of the concerns raised by professionals in the first study of this thesis was that the practice narrative might not be a suitable interview technique with Aboriginal children. In line with professionals’ perceptions, the literature revealed three main reasons why the practice narrative with Aboriginal children warrants empirical investigation. These are discussed in turn.

Firstly, many Aboriginal peoples do not speak standard Australian English in their dealings with the law (Eades, 2004). On the one hand, practice narratives may provide children with the chance to practice their English before discussing substantive issues. It may also give the interviewer an opportunity to assess whether

³ This study has been accepted for publication: Hamilton, G., Brubacher, S. P., & Powell, M. B. (in press). The effects of practice narratives in interviews with Australian Aboriginal children. Investigative Interviewing: Research and Practice (II-RP).
interpretative assistance is required (Davies et al., 1996; Ministry of Justice, 2011). Conversely, the practice narrative may consume valuable time and mental resources that could otherwise be spent on the discussion of substantive issues. When a person has to translate languages in addition to other mental processes (e.g., remember details of events), the overall cognitive load is increased (Shreve & Angelone, 2010). It is possible that the mental processes required in the practice narrative might reduce the child’s mental energy before the interviewer has even begun to question about the alleged abuse. Indeed, research has demonstrated that an extended introductory phases (lasting over eight minutes) may be cognitively taxing on children, even when conducted in the child’s first language (Davies et al., 2000; Hershkowitz, 2009; Roberts et al., 2004; Teoh & Lamb, 2010).

Another aspect that may affect the utility of the practice narrative with Aboriginal children is \textit{minimal discourse}; a prevalent communication feature whereby Aboriginal speakers provide brief or unelaborated responses (Malcolm, 1982; Sharifian, 2001) (see Chapter 4). Sharifian (2001) explains that minimal discourse may occur because speakers assume that they have shared schemas with the listener, therefore it is unnecessary to complete or elaborate upon a sentence because it is believed that the listener already understands what the speaker is saying. This can lead to communication difficulties, however, when the speaker and listener share different cultural schemas. Analysis of Aboriginal English texts has revealed that minimal discourse is a common conversational feature, especially when an Aboriginal English-speaking person is speaking to a non-Aboriginal English-speaking person (Sharifian, 2001; Sharifian et al., 2004). It is therefore important to determine whether Aboriginal children provide brief responses in an interview regardless of whether a practice narrative is conducted, or whether the narrative
training can combat minimal discourse and prepare children to elaborate in the discussion of substantive issues.

Lastly, the relationship-building style in many Aboriginal communities may impact the effectiveness of practice narratives with this population. While establishing rapport is especially recommended in investigative interviews with Aboriginal peoples (Powell, 2000), the methods of achieving rapport are not always clear-cut. Where it is commonplace to ask direct questions upon first introduction in Western societies, such an approach may be considered rude and inappropriate in Aboriginal communities (Eades, 2013). Rather, reciprocity is emphasized in Aboriginal culture, and relationships are usually built over long periods of time by exchanging information as part of a sharing exercise (Eades, 1982, 2013; Dudgeon, Milroy, & Walker, 2014). Ultimately, this relationship-building difference, paired with the above-mentioned communication styles and concerns of professionals in Study 1, led to the development of the second study of this thesis.

It is vital to investigate the effects of practice narratives with Aboriginal children so that this population can be interviewed according to the most appropriate techniques. A laboratory study made it possible to stage an innocuous event and thus measure both the informativeness and accuracy of children’s responses. While the differences in interaction styles between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples raised questions about the utility of the practice narrative with Aboriginal children, ultimately it was thought that the previous research regarding the benefits of practice narratives would reverberate with the present sample of 64 Aboriginal children (aged 6-15 years). Therefore, it was predicted that children who completed a practice narrative in an interview would subsequently produce more words, more details, and more accurate responses, compared to children who did not complete such a task.
(Roberts et al., 2004; Whiting, 2013). As practice narratives are designed to encourage children to practice recalling memories and providing detailed responses to open-ended questions, it was further predicted that children who spoke more during the practice narrative would in turn speak more and provide more accurate and detailed responses in the substantive phase.

Despite the wide age range of participants, it was expected that children of all ages in the sample would benefit from the practice narrative due to the unfamiliar interview environment, minimal discourse, the fact that many children would speak English as a second language, and the absence of any very young children. Gender differences were not predicted, as they have not been found in research with non-Aboriginal children participating in similar events (e.g., Brubacher et al., 2011; Powell, Jones, & Campbell, 2003b; Roberts & Powell, 2007). Gender was retained in analyses, however, because it has been suggested that gender can be a particularly salient feature in dyadic interactions in this population (Eades, 1992; Queensland Government, 2011; Sheldon, 2001) and both interviewers in the current study were female.

Method

Participants

The sample comprised 64 Australian Aboriginal children (30 girls and 34 boys) aged 6 to 15 years ($M = 9.23, SD = 1.93$). The children were recruited from three remote communities in Australia (through schools and community halls). Only children who obtained informed guardian consent, as well as learned and spoke Standard Australian English at school were included in the study (confirmation was sought from parents/guardians/teachers). No compensation was received for participating in the study. All children who met the criteria and who were willing to
take part in the study were eligible to participate, resulting in the broad age range obtained. The children were pseudorandomly allocated to an interview condition (practice narrative or no practice narrative), with the stipulation that gender and age be as balanced as possible between the groups (See Table 1).

Table 1

Features of Interviews With and Without a Practice Narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Practice Narrative (33)</th>
<th>No Practice Narrative (31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td>( M = 9.03 ) ( SD = 1.88 )</td>
<td>( M = 9.45 ) ( SD = 1.98 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female: 17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Community A: 10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Materials

Children completed a brief form that requested basic demographic information such as age, gender and Aboriginal status. They then participated in a single 30-minute event called the Deakin Activities, which was modeled on activities used in previous child witness memory research (Brubacher et al., 2011; Powell & Thomson, 1996, 2003). The event involved 12 target details that occurred within several activities: being introduced to a puppet, exercising, listening to a story, lying down for a rest, getting refreshed, and receiving a prize. The props and delivery of the activities were designed to be novel and memorable. Moreover, I consulted senior Aboriginal community workers to ensure that the event and its delivery were culturally appropriate (e.g., ensuring names in stories were not those of any recently deceased community members).
Procedure

Prior to the commencement of the study, a group of senior Aboriginal community workers from across Australia were consulted to discuss the possible benefits and disadvantages of the research to Aboriginal peoples. Group members were given the opportunity to offer suggestions for the adjustment of the project to better suit the needs of Aboriginal peoples. For example, concern was expressed regarding the inclusion of a non-Aboriginal comparison group (because Aboriginal peoples are tired of being compared to non-Aboriginal peoples and made to feel subordinate); therefore, according to the advice of these colleagues, the study design was adjusted to only include Aboriginal children. The focus of the experiment was rather on the comparison of children who received a practice phase, versus no practice phase (control group).

Moreover, based on the consultation, as well as the concerns from Study 1 that a unidirectional practice narrative could lead an Aboriginal children to feel anxious, the practice narrative in the current study was adjusted so that the interviewers mentioned some brief information about themselves before prompting the child for a narrative. It was reasoned that the inclusion of some interviewer reciprocity (e.g., no more than 30 seconds) would be appropriate and ethical with this sample, and still allow for an examination of whether practice narratives encourage accurate and informative accounts. Once satisfaction with the aim and method was articulated, ethics approval was sought and granted by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee, the Department of Education Western Australia, and the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia. All research was carried out according to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies’ code of ethics for working with Indigenous Australians.
I conducted the Deakin Activities in all three communities. One to two days after the activities, the children participated in one individual interview ranging from 7.54 to 20.34 minutes ($M = 12.7, SD = 3.05$). In their plain language statements, children were told that some people from the university would like to chat to them after the activities were over. Children were unaware, however, of the purpose of the interview, and were not told that their memory would be tested. Therefore, it is unlikely that children would have self-practised or practised recall with parents.

All children were interviewed by one of two plain-clothed women with 10 and 12 years of experience interviewing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in similar communities (but not in the communities of the current research). Both interviewers had recently and successfully completed an advanced child forensic interviewing course. They also completed mock interviews, in order to ensure that they were familiar with the exact interview protocol for the current study. All children were interviewed in classrooms in the presence of a supervising adult (who refrained from any involvement in the interview itself).

All children were interviewed with the same interview protocol, which was closely modeled on the NICHD investigative interview protocol (see Lamb et al., 2007b for an overview). The interviewers began by introducing themselves and eliciting a statement from the child that they would tell the truth. Interviewers then explained the ground rules of the interview (e.g., “I might say things that are wrong—you should tell me, because I don’t know what happened”). In half of the interviews, the interviewer briefly mentioned something fun that she had done recently and then prompted the child to provide a practice narrative about an event that was unrelated to the Deakin Activities. This always resulted in a narrative about a fun event (typically relating to the child’s interests). Interviewers were instructed
to use open-ended questions (e.g., “What happened next?”; “Tell me more about that part”) to elicit information about the event for three to five minutes. In the other half of the interviews, no such practice narrative was conducted.

All interviews included a substantive phase where the interviewers asked a broad open-ended prompt, “Let’s talk about why you’re here today—tell me what you’ve come to talk about.” If children were unaware of the purpose of the interview, the interviewers provided further prompting to direct them on topic, “I heard that someone came to your community/school and did the Deakin Activities. Did someone come into your community and do the Deakin Activities?” All children provided an affirmative response, and were then given the following prompt: “Tell me the whole story about what happened when you did the Deakin Activities—start from the beginning.” Interviewers then asked open-ended questions to prompt recall and elicit further details about the event until the free narrative was exhausted (after children indicated they could recall no more).

Coding

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and de-identified. Each transcript was separated into two sections: (i) introductory phase and (ii) substantive phase. In the introductory phase, coders checked that interviews in the practice narrative condition contained a practice narrative and those in the control condition did not. In the substantive phase, coders firstly determined whether the child’s responses were on-topic (related to the Deakin Activities) or off-topic (unrelated to the Deakin Activities). Any off-topic responses were struck out and left uncoded. The informativeness of children’s responses was coded by recording each time the child mentioned one of the 12 target details (the first time it was reported). The
accuracy of children’s responses (or rather the inaccuracy) was coded by recording each time the child reported an error about the event (e.g., “The dog drank some milk” [when no such act occurred]); these were in turn labelled confabulations.

Word counts of children’s responses were also calculated for the practice and substantive phases separately. When calculating the word counts the coders deleted any interviewer utterances, repeated responses, off-topic responses, stutters, noises (e.g., “umm” “ahh”), and anything extra typed by the transcriber that was not a child’s word (e.g., [laughter]). Word counts represented accurately reported details about the event and are considered an acceptable proxy for more detailed coding of syntactic units (Dickinson & Poole, 2000).

Reliability

Interviews were coded by myself and a postgraduate research assistant. Initially, a random subset of 15% of the interviews were double-coded to ensure inter-rater reliability. Percent agreement (agreements/agreements + disagreements) was calculated for word count totals for the practice and substantive phases, child’s responses, and number of interviewer prompts. Agreement ranged from 88% - 100%. Cohen’s Kappa was calculated for categorization of the interviewer prompts and focused question responses. Agreement ranged from .93 - 1.00, $p < .01$. After two-thirds of the transcripts had been coded, the second researcher coded a further random 5% of the interviews and reliability calculations were consistent with the previous scores.
Results

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses revealed that interviews with practice narratives were on average 4.16 minutes longer than interviews without practice narratives, $t(62) = -7.46, p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = 1.9$. The difference in length, however, was due to the practice phase itself, as length of substantive phase did not differ across practice conditions, $t(62) = -.24, p = .81, d = .06$. Delay between event and interview (one or two days) did not differ significantly between practice conditions, $t(62) < 1, p = .80, d = .06$; gender, $t(62) < 1, p = .58, d = .14$; and was unrelated to age, $r(62) = -.12, p = .34$, so it was not considered further. There were also no significant differences between the number of prompts asked by the two interviewers in both the practice phase, $t(31) = 1.60, p = .12, d = .09$ and substantive phase, $t(62) = 1.03, p = .31, d = .28$, suggesting that all children received similar interview treatment. Girls ($M = 9.07$ years, $SD = 2.13$) did not significantly differ in age from boys ($M = 9.38, SD = 1.74$), $t(62) = .65, p = .52, d = .16$.

Assumptions. The three predictor variables in the regression model (age, gender, practice narrative) were assessed for multicollinearity. All independent variables were found to have low correlations with each other and assumptions of linearity, normality, homoscedasticity and independence of residuals were met. Due to the limited sample size, there was not sufficient power to include the interaction terms in the analyses (Pallant, 2005; Stevens, 2012), and it was also not predicted that the variables would interact in this sample.
Inferential Analyses

Multiple linear regression analyses were employed to determine whether age, gender, and practice condition predicted the informativeness of children’s responses in an interview. Informativeness was measured by the number of target details that children relayed, as well as the number of words they produced, in the substantive phase. The model accounted for 21% of the variance in target details reported, \( F(3,60) = 5.23, p = .003, R^2 = .21 \). Gender, however, was the only significant predictor, \( b = .46, t(60) = 3.94, p < .001, d = 1 \). Girls reported on average 2.36 more target details \( (M = 4.74, SD = 2.72) \) than boys \( (M = 2.38, SD = 2.07) \) (maximum 12). The model also accounted for 23% of the variance in word count in the substantive phases of the interview, \( F(3, 60) = 5.99, p = .001, R^2 = .23 \), with gender making the only significant contribution when the other two variables were controlled for, \( b = .45, t(60) = 3.97, p < .001, d = 1.05 \). Girls produced an average of 101 more words \( (M = 189.97, SD = 110.03) \) than boys \( (M = 88.12, SD = 87.60) \) in the substantive phase.

Overall, confabulations produced by children were low. In the practice condition, 77.42% of children made no confabulations and in the control condition 60.60% of children made no confabulations. Due to this absence of false information (i.e., floor effect), children’s accuracy was measured by creating a dichotomous variable: interviews with confabulations during the substantive phase (20) and interviews without (44). A logistic regression found that the same model (age, gender, practice narrative condition) explained 17.60% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in confabulations, \( \chi^2(3) = 8.55, p = .04 \). Once again, gender made the only significant contribution, Wald \( \chi^2(1) = 4.84, p = .03, \phi = .30 \). Boys reported an average of 1.35 more confabulations during the substantive phase compared to girls.
Correlational Analyses

The secondary aim of this study was to examine children’s practice phases in more depth. Specifically, it was asked whether verbosity in the practice narrative (i.e., word count) was associated with any of the dependent variables, as an assumption underlying the benefits of practice narratives is that children do in fact practice providing narrative responses. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no breach of the assumptions of linearity, normality and homoscedasticity. A Pearson product-moment correlation demonstrated that the word count in the practice narrative was strongly and significantly related to the word count in the substantive phase of the interview, \( r(31) = .55, p < .01 \), and the number of target details relayed in the substantive phase \( r(31) = .55, p < .01 \). Children who produced more words in the practice narrative phase also produced more words, and more target details, in the substantive phase. Word count in the practice phase was not significantly related to the number of confabulations \( (p > .05) \).

Discussion

This study examined the use of practice narratives in interviews with Aboriginal children. Contrary to prediction and previous research with non-Aboriginal children (Price et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997), overall the study found that practice narratives did not predict the accuracy or informativeness of Aboriginal children’s accounts in the current sample. It is possible that the current delivery of the task (in Standard Australian English and with brief reciprocity from the interviewer) is not an effective interview technique with Aboriginal children. Yet in line with the second hypothesis, it was found that children who spoke more during the practice narrative continued to speak more and
provide more informative responses in their subsequent accounts of an innocuous event. Thus, Aboriginal children whose communication style was not characteristic of a minimal discourse approach demonstrated patterns similar to what has been found with non-Aboriginal children.

It is of course possible that verbose children would be talkative regardless of whether a practice narrative was conducted. Yet, the benefits of open-ended practice have been found even when researchers have explored the effects in forensic interviews with both more and less talkative children (Hershkowitz, 2009). Further, verbosity in the practice phase was associated with the reporting of target details from the event, not just overall words. Narrative training can prepare children to practise retrieving memories, answer open-ended questions, and do the majority of the talking throughout the interview (Roberts et al., 2011). It is more likely that children who were engaged and talkative in the practice narrative actually fulfilled the purpose of the task and therefore gained the benefits. Children who spoke minimally during the narrative training, however, may not have actually practised recalling memories and relaying a detailed narrative in response to open questions. Consequently they were not primed to provide informative accounts regarding the innocuous event. Whether these children would have eventually warmed up with continued gentle but persistent prompting in practice phases that lasted longer than five minutes (e.g., Hershkowitz et al., 2006), or over multiple interviews (e.g., La Rooy, Katz, Malloy, & Lamb, 2010; La Rooy, Lamb, & Pipe, 2009) is a question for future research with this population. Further work should also concentrate on field interviews, as it is possible that the effects of practice narratives may be more salient when children are required to recount a personally relevant event such as repeated child sexual abuse, compared to a one-off experimental event.
The study also found that interviews with a practice narrative were longer compared to interviews without a practice narrative, although the difference was entirely due to the length of the practice narrative itself. Some research has likewise found that practice narratives add time to the overall length of the interview (Price et al., 2013), while others have found that children’s narratives about a staged event were more efficient (i.e., shorter) following preparatory instructions (Brown et al., 2013). This disparity between the current study and that conducted by Brown and colleagues might reflect differences in the staged event, interviewer experience, or adherence to the NICHD interview protocol. However, the procedures and questioning were very similar across the two studies, and the interviewers were highly experienced in the current study, so it is possible that practice narratives were not as effective at encouraging efficient narratives from the Aboriginal children in the present sample.

It should be highlighted here that the current study included interviewer reciprocity (i.e., when the interviewer mentions information about his or herself) as part of the practice narratives with Aboriginal children; therefore, interviewer reciprocity is confounded with the independent variable of the practice narrative. Based on consultations with senior Aboriginal community workers, it was deemed inappropriate for interviewers to ask children about personal experiences in a practice narrative without first providing some information about themselves. Moreover, it was unnecessary to include interviewer reciprocity in interviews without practice narratives, because the interviewers were solely asking about the event (and not personal experiences of the child). The current study still compared interviews with and without practice narratives, but used an adapted version of a practice narrative. Additionally, the current study was the first ever to test practice
narratives with Aboriginal children, therefore, I wanted to use a practice condition that was *most* likely to produce benefits if indeed there were to be any with this population. Subsequent examinations of practice narratives should take the confounding variable of interviewer reciprocity into consideration.

**Effects of Age and Gender on Aboriginal Children’s Reports**

In line with prediction, yet in contrast to previous research (Lamb et al., 2003; Roberts et al., 2004), age did not predict the accuracy or informativeness of children’s accounts in this sample. Usually, age effects are explained by cognitive developments in memory and verbal ability as children increase with age. The present sample included many children who spoke English as a second language and did not include any preschool-aged children; it was expected that these features would negate typical age effects observed in research with non-Aboriginal children. School attendance may also help to explain the results as retention rates in school appear to decrease as Aboriginal children increase in age (Purdie & Buckley, 2010). Therefore, older children may not necessarily be any more educated or skilled than younger children. Future work could benefit from taking an in-depth look at children’s educational backgrounds in conjunction with their ages.

Contrary to expectation, and to previous studies employing similar events but with non-Aboriginal children (e.g., Brubacher et al., 2011; Powell et al., 2003b; Roberts & Powell, 2007), the girls in the current sample produced more words, more target details and fewer confabulations compared to the boys. To my knowledge, no similar memory study using the Deakin Activities (or variations thereof) has reported gender differences in the informativeness or accuracy of children’s accounts. Perhaps this finding could be explained by the fact that the study had two female interviewers conduct all of the interviews. Some research has found that girls
provide more information in response to specific questions when they are asked by a female rather than a male interviewer, although differences tend to diminish when open prompts are delivered (Lamb & Garretson, 2003). More importantly, in Aboriginal culture, there is a strong distinction between the genders when particular types of information are discussed (Eades, 1992; Sheldon, 2001). While the nature of the events of Study 2 were not embarrassing or sensitive, experts and agencies do advise that the gender of the service provider should be matched with the Aboriginal client in delicate situations so that they can feel comfortable discussing a range of issues (e.g., child sexual abuse) (Eades, 1992; Queensland Government, 2011).

Future analogue studies could benefit from including interviewers of both genders to examine whether Aboriginal boys are more responsive and accurate with male compared to female interviewers regardless of topic.

While females in the current study recalled more target details than males (4.74 and 2.38, respectively), the overall recall of target details appeared to be lower than what has been seen in similar child research studies with non-Aboriginal children (e.g., 7.73: Price & Connolly, 2004). The staged event in the current study was modified to enhance cultural appropriateness, but it is possible that the event was still not salient enough for Aboriginal children. Moreover, most (if not all) Aboriginal children in the study spoke English as a second language, therefore, it is possible that children remembered details, but did not have the language capacity to report such details. In order for researchers to code a target detail, the children needed to use particular labels (e.g., “teddy bear” did not count as a target detail when describing the “koala puppet”); these coding guidelines may have also contributed to the lowered target details. Future research with Aboriginal children
will need to consider the staged event, interview procedure, and coding protocol in more depth.

**Conclusions**

Drawbacks of the study included the limited sample size and the inability to include a non-Aboriginal control group, which prevented the performance of additional analyses. Despite these caveats, this study has shed light on an important issue: the interviewing of Aboriginal children in Australia. This research also has implications for children of other cultures with similar communication styles (e.g., Ball & Bernhardt, 2008). Given recent data which indicates Australian Indigenous children are seven times more likely to be the victims of abuse compared to non-Indigenous children (AIHW, 2015a), there is a pressing need to ensure Indigenous children are interviewed according to the best possible and most appropriate techniques. The current study indicates that overall interview procedure used was not necessarily inappropriate with Aboriginal children, but that there was room for improvement.

Overall, this study revealed several important findings. Aboriginal girls unexpectedly provided more words and target details and less confabulations compared to boys. These findings suggest that interviewer gender might be an important variable in further research with this population. The current study also found that Aboriginal children who were generally more verbal during the practice phase proceeded to provide more words, and more target details in their subsequent accounts of the target event. Furthermore, there were no detrimental effects of the practice narrative (i.e., no effects or associations with inaccuracy, or with lower rates of verbosity). As such, it may be beneficial to include practice narratives in interviews with all Aboriginal children in the knowledge that it will at least benefit
children who are responsive during the narrative training. Yet, further research examining the effects of the practice narrative in forensic interviews is urgently needed before this recommendation should be made. Further, researchers should undertake further study to improve how practice narratives are conducted with all Aboriginal children so that even less talkative children can be encouraged to actively engage in the task and in turn reap the benefits in their subsequent accounts.
CHAPTER 7: INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN IN CASES OF SUSPECTED SEXUAL ABUSE (STUDY 3)⁴

This chapter presents the third study of this thesis, which sought to examine investigative interview components and Aboriginal children’s accounts in the field. The original studies presented so far in this thesis have begun to address the lack of child interview research with Aboriginal children; yet it is clear that field data are still absent from the literature. It is particularly important to conduct research with field interviews so that ecologically valid findings can inform best-practice interview procedure with this population. Australian Indigenous children are two to four times more likely to be victims of sexual assault compared to non-Indigenous children (AIHW, 2014). As discussed in Chapter 4, they also have distinct interactional styles compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts (Eades, 2013; Fryer-Smith, 2008), which could affect their behaviours in forensic interviews. The objective of this study was to examine the investigative interviewing of Aboriginal children in the field, with a specific focus on three commonly included components of best-practice investigative interview protocols: ground rules, practice narrative, and questioning during the substantive phase. These were also the chief areas of discussion by the experts in Study 1.

Ground Rules

Investigative interviews with children typically incorporate ground rules whereby the interviewer instructs the child to tell the truth, alert the interviewer if

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⁴ This study has been accepted for publication: Hamilton, G., Brubacher, S. P., & Powell, M. B. (in press). Investigative interviewing of Aboriginal children in cases of suspected sexual abuse. Journal of Child Sexual Abuse.
incorrect information arises, or indicate if they do not know, understand, or remember information (see Brubacher et al., 2015, for a review). Explaining ground rules to children is important because it highlights how the interview differs from typical interactions with adults and emphasises that the child is the knowledgeable party who should not speculate answers. The ultimate aim of such instructions is to clarify children’s expectations and maximise their ability to be competent participants in the interview. Research with non-Aboriginal children has indicated that the provision of ground rules can improve the informativeness and/or accuracy of children’s accounts (Cordón et al., 2005; Endres et al., 1999; Mulder & Vrij, 1996; Nesbitt & Markham, 1999; Teoh & Lamb, 2010), especially when practised with children (Brubacher et al., 2015; Danby et al., 2015; Gee et al., 1999; Righarts et al., 2013; Saywitz & Moan-Hardie, 1994).

While some research has examined the effects of ground rules with non-Aboriginal populations, little work has addressed how ground rules are interpreted and used by Aboriginal children. In Study 1 of this thesis, professionals raised the concern that the word *if* and the construction of hypotheticals (which are typically used in the delivery and practice of ground rules: e.g., “*If* I asked you what my sister’s name was, what would you say?”) would be problematic for Aboriginal children to understand because these speech structures are rarely used and difficult to translate in a number of Aboriginal languages. Research is needed to establish whether Aboriginal children appear to understand ground rules as typically delivered in investigative interviews, and use them throughout their accounts of abuse.
Practice Narrative

As discussed in detail in Study 2, most interview guidelines recommend that interviewers conduct a practice narrative, whereby they ask the child open-ended questions about an event (unrelated to the alleged abuse) prior to the substantive section of the interview (see Roberts et al., 2011, for a review). While an array of research has demonstrated benefits of practice narratives on the informativeness and accuracy of non-Aboriginal children’s accounts (Anderson et al., 2014; Hershkowitz, 2009; Price et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997; Whiting, 2013), Studies 1 and 2 of this thesis raised uncertainties about the utility of practice narratives with Aboriginal children. Professionals in Study 1 voiced that a practice narrative may be ineffective at overcoming language barriers and personal reservations that make it difficult for Aboriginal children to provide informative accounts. Additionally, Study 2 indicated that a practice narrative did not significantly predict the accuracy or informativeness of children’s accounts. Verbosity during the practice narrative, however, was strongly related to the production of more informative responses during the substantive component of the interview. While important, these findings may not generalise to real-world forensic settings as the target event involved pleasant activities such as reading a story and meeting a puppet. Further research with interviews concerning more personally relevant events (e.g., sexual abuse) is needed to examine how practice narratives apply to Aboriginal children.

Substantive Phase

The substantive component of the investigative interview typically involves transitioning the child to the topic of concern and attempting to elicit a disclosure of
abuse in a non-leading manner. Research has indicated that the majority of initial sexual abuse disclosures from children occur in response to open-ended prompts (e.g., “Tell me everything that happened”; Sternberg et al., 2001). Interviewers are encouraged to deliver open-ended prompts throughout the substantive phase as these are likely to stimulate more accurate and informative responses compared to specific prompts (e.g., “What colour was it?”; Lamb et al., 1996; Lamb et al., 2007a).

Some work has considered the questioning of Aboriginal children in cases of alleged abuse. In Study 1, the majority of professionals (27/28) voiced support for an open-ended narrative approach to questioning Aboriginal children and discouraged direct questioning, as it was reasoned that such an information-seeking approach would be invasive and unusual in many Aboriginal communities. Similar recommendations have also been provided in a general framework for the investigative interviewing of Aboriginal adults and juveniles (Powell, 2000). Field research with Aboriginal alleged child abuse victims is required to validate these suggestions and provide insight into what questioning techniques are the most effective in obtaining disclosures and informative responses from Aboriginal children.

**Current Research**

The central aim of this study was to examine and characterise the investigative interviewing of Aboriginal children in cases of alleged sexual abuse. Interviews about sexual abuse (relative to other types of maltreatment) are complex because they rely more heavily on children's memory reports rather than physical evidence, and include sensitive topics that can be difficult for children to disclose (Pipe et al., 2013). Due to the nature of field data, the accuracy of children’s
narratives could not be measured. Therefore, Study 3 concentrated on measurable aspects such as the comprehension and use of ground rules throughout the interview, the utility of the practice narrative in encouraging informative accounts and open-ended questioning, and the effectiveness of different prompt types in eliciting information and disclosures of sexual abuse.

Based on research with non-Aboriginal children it was predicted that practice of ground rules would be positively associated with the spontaneous usage of rules throughout children’s narratives of abuse (e.g., alerting the interviewer to a miscommunication error). In accordance with the laboratory findings of Study 2, it was expected that the inclusion of a practice narrative would not significantly increase the informativeness of a child’s subsequent narrative or interviewers’ use of open-ended prompts in the substantive phase of the interview. Finally, it was hypothesised that the most information and disclosures would be given in response to open-ended prompts rather than specific or suggestive prompts (Lamb et al., 1996; Sternberg et al., 2001).

Method

Sample

The 70 de-identified interview transcripts included in this study were drawn randomly from a large pool of sexual abuse cases involving children in one jurisdiction of Australia. The investigative interviews were included provided that they were with Aboriginal children (aged 16 or younger) and that the child disclosed at least one sexually abusive event where he or she was the suspected victim. Overall, there were 10 male and 60 female interviewees, aged 5 to 16 years ($M = 11.99$, $SD = 2.59$). Six cases involved allegations of sexual exposure, nine of
touching over the clothes, five of touching under the clothes, and 50 of sexual penetration. In 40 of the interviews the abuse was a single incident, whereas in 30 interviews the abuse was repeated in nature (i.e., multiple incidents). The alleged offenders were: a stranger (7.35%), a family member (25%) or a familiar person to the child (67.65%).

All interviews were conducted between 2009 and 2014, and ranged from 10 to 217 minutes in length (\(M = 64.67, SD = 38.48\)). Interviews were conducted by police officers employed at a child abuse investigation unit and in 25 of the interviews a professional interpreter was present. As the SIM protocol had only recently been introduced in the jurisdiction, children were interviewed according to local police guidelines (that were very similar in structure to the SIM). Interviews began with an introductory phase where the ground rules were delivered (e.g., “If you don’t remember something, just say ‘I don’t remember’”). Twenty-seven interviews contained a practice component where the child was prompted to discuss a positive or neutral event in detail. Finally, interviewers elicited a disclosure and narrative about the sexual abuse from the child by asking a variety of open-ended and focused prompts (substantive phase).

**Procedure**

All research was carried out according to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies’ *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (2012). A number of Aboriginal peoples and organisations from the relevant jurisdiction were consulted during the initiation of the study and throughout to ensure that the research was culturally appropriate. The
relevant police organisation and university approved the use of de-identified interview transcripts for analysis.

**Data Coding**

Audiotaped recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and de-identified prior to their inclusion in this study.

**Case Characteristics.** Similar to other child forensic interview research (e.g., Malloy, Katz, Lamb, & Mugno, 2015), abuse severity was coded by separating abuse allegations into four categories: sexual exposure, touching over clothes, touching under clothes, and sexual penetration. If children described multiple acts in their accounts, the most invasive allegation was recorded. When coding the child’s relationship to the alleged offender, three categories were employed: stranger, family member, and familiar person. Extended family members in many Aboriginal communities often live together or in close proximity to each other (Eades, 2013). As such, it was unclear in many interview transcripts whether children were discussing an immediate or extended family member, hence, a broader ‘family member’ category was deemed most appropriate.

**Ground Rules.** Firstly, coders examined whether interviewers delivered and/or practised any of the following five ground rules: (i) instructions to correct the interviewer if a mistake has been made, (ii) acknowledging the importance of understanding and telling the truth, (iii) saying “I don’t know”, (iv) “I don’t remember”, or (v) “I don’t understand.” No other types of ground rules were used in any of the interviews. If particular ground rules were practised, the coders also assessed the accuracy of such attempts by coding whether children’s responses were correct or incorrect. Consider the following example: An interviewer practises the
truth rule by holding up a pen and asking, “If I said this was an ice-cream, would that
be the truth or a lie?” A correct response was recorded if the child answered “lie.”
An incorrect response was recorded if the child answered “truth” or did not respond.
Based on concerns about the use of hypotheticals and the word “if” with Aboriginal
children (Study 1), coders also recorded whether interviewers used the word “if”
when relaying the rules for practice.

Coders recorded whether children spontaneously used any of the five ground
rules during the interview (either in the practice or substantive phases). Coders
tallied explicit utterances of “I don’t know,” “I don’t remember,” “I don’t
understand,” “you made a mistake,” and any references to telling the truth or lying
(e.g., “That’s the truth.”). Operational definitions for each rule use included
acceptable alternative phrasings (e.g., “I’m not sure” was accepted as “don’t know”,
“I don’t get that” was accepted as “I don’t understand,” and “that’s not right” was
accepted as correcting the interviewer’s mistakes). If a child’s response included
both “don’t know” and “don’t remember” in one sentence the coders only counted
the first.

**Interviewer Prompts.** Based on definitions used in prior literature (Orbach
et al., 2000; Powell & Snow, 2007a), interviewer prompts were assigned mutually
exclusive codes that fell under three categories: open-ended, specific or suggestive.
Open-ended prompts included initial invitations for the child to begin talking (e.g.,
“Tell me everything, start from the beginning”) and prompts that encouraged
children to expand upon events in the narrative (e.g., “What happened next?”) or to
elaborate upon a response without specifying what information was required (e.g.,
“Tell me more about the part where he did that”). Specific prompts included cued-
recall questions that asked about details of the narrative (e.g., “What was his
name?”), or closed questions that required one-word answers (e.g., yes/no) or the selection of an option (e.g., “Was it light or dark?”). Suggestive prompts included questions that strongly communicated what response was expected (e.g., “He made you do that, didn’t he?”) or assumed details that had not been mentioned by the child (e.g., “I heard Joe touched you and you didn’t like it, tell me about that” [when the child had not mentioned being touched]; “Was it one or two o’clock?” [when the child has not mentioned specific times]).

**Amount of Information.** The quantity of children’s responses was measured by calculating word counts for the practice and substantive sections separately. Word count is an accepted tool in evaluating eyewitness narratives (Dickinson & Poole, 2000). As 25 of the interviews contained interpreters, some words came from the interpreters rather than the actual children. Coders deleted any words spoken by the interpreter that were not direct translations of children’s responses (e.g., such as the interpreter asking a question of the child or interviewer). Coders also deleted any words spoken by interviewers, anything typed by the transcriber that was not a child’s word (e.g., [pause]), repeated responses that occurred because of an interviewer’s difficulty in hearing the response, and any stutters, non-words, or noises.

**Disclosure.** The child’s initial disclosure was defined as the earliest point at which the child clearly stated a sexually abusive event, regardless of whether they elaborated upon what happened (e.g., “He did the rude thing to me”). Similar definitions have been adopted by others (Bradley & Wood, 1996; Olfason & Lederman, 2006).

**Reliability.** A random 18% of the interviews were double-coded by my supervisor and I to assess inter-rater agreement. Cohen’s Kappa was calculated for
the categorical variables and ranged between .90 – 1.00, *p* < .01. Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted for the continuous variables and demonstrated strong positive relationships between both sets of codes \( r_s = .94 – 1.00, p < .001 \). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

**Results**

The results are presented in three sections: ground rules, practice narrative, and substantive phase. There were no effects of age in any analyses. Moreover, as there were only 10 males in the sample, this study could not effectively test or draw conclusions about gender; therefore, these variables are not included in analyses.

**Ground Rules**

See Table 2 for the percentage of interviews containing each ground rule, as well as what proportion of these were practised with children. Accuracy rates for ground rules practise questions are also presented, as well as the mean number of times each ground rule was spontaneously used by children. Overall, the “truth” rule was the most common to be practised with children, while the “don’t know” rule received the highest accuracy rates in response to practice questions (when practised) and was the most common rule to be spontaneously used by children during the interview. Frequencies indicated that the word *if* was used in 82.86% of ground rule practice questions.
This study examined whether the number of ground rules delivered or practised at the beginning of the interview was associated with the number of ground rules spontaneously used by children during the interview. Pearson product-moment correlations indicated a positive moderate relationship between the number of overall ground rules delivered by interviewers and later used by children \([r(68) = .37, p = .002]\), as well as a small positive relationship between the number of ground rules practised by interviewers and the number of rules spontaneously used by children \([r(68) = .26, p = .03]\). That is, the more children heard about or practised the ground rules at the beginning of the interview, the more they spontaneously used rules throughout the interview in response to interviewer prompts.

This study also investigated whether the delivery or practice of each ground rule was related to the spontaneous use of that specific rule later on in the interview. Since the “don’t understand” and “don’t remember” ground rules were practised...
infrequently and children rarely referred to truths or lies spontaneously, these variables were excluded from the following analyses. Instead this study concentrated on the remaining rules and created two tripartite variables: interviews with “don’t know” and “mistake” ground rules practised, delivered-only, or not delivered at all. Post-hoc comparisons (Fisher’s LSD) after a significant one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that children who practised the “don’t know” ground rule spontaneously used the same rule more throughout the interview ($M = 7.79$, $SD = 7.86$) compared to children who were not delivered the rule at all ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 4.94$), $F(2, 68) = 3.17$, $p = .03$, $d = .67$. There were no significant differences between children who were solely delivered the “don’t know” rule ($M = 6.75$, $SD = 6.63$) and the other two groups ($ps > .05$). When examining the “mistake rule”, neither delivery nor practise had a significant effect on whether children later spontaneously corrected the interviewer, $Fs = \leq 2.21$, $ps \geq .15$, $ds \leq .38$.

**Practice Narrative**

Children spoke on average 162.07 ($SD = 148.75$) words during the practice narratives. They were delivered between 9 and 60 prompts ($M = 25.07$, $SD = 12.70$), with an average of 11.37 ($SD = 7.50$) open-ended prompts, 12.63 ($SD = 8.39$) specific prompts and 1.04 ($SD = 1.26$) suggestive prompts. This study examined whether practice narratives had an effect on the amount of information that children provided in the substantive phase of the interview. A one-way ANOVA revealed that children spoke more in the substantive phase when their interview had contained a practice narrative ($M = 2008.70$, $SD = 1708.41$), compared to when no practice narrative had been included ($M = 1290.58$, $SD = 1106.54$), $F(1, 69) = 5.67$, $p = .02$, $d = .59$. No interactions were present when the use of an interpreter or the abuse
frequency (single or repeated event) were taken into account, $F_s < 1, ps \geq .71, ds \leq .09$.

The current study also tested whether interviewers who conducted a practice narrative used more open-ended prompts in the subsequent substantive phase than interviewers who did not conduct a practice narrative. A one-way ANOVA demonstrated that interviewers delivered a greater proportion of open-ended prompts in the substantive phase when the interview contained a practice narrative ($M = .42, SD = .14$) in contrast to no practice narrative ($M = .35, SD = .14$), $F(1, 69) = 4.24, p = .04, d = .51$. Interviews with and without practice narratives did not differ significantly in terms of the proportion of specific or suggestive prompts delivered by interviewers in the substantive phase, $F_s \leq 1.17, ps \geq .28, ds \leq .27$.

**Substantive Phase**

The number of prompts interviewers delivered during the substantive phase of the interviews varied substantially, ranging from 28 to 716 ($M = 243.58, SD = 143.73$). Interviewer prompts were 36.64% open-ended, 52.32% specific and 11.04% suggestive. Analysis of frequencies revealed that children most often initially disclosed sexual abuse to an open-ended prompt (60.00%: $\chi^2(2) = 14.89, p < .001$) as opposed to a suggestive (24.30%: $\chi^2(2) = 25.63, p = 1.36$) or a specific prompt (15.70%: $\chi^2(2) = 15.93, p < .001$). When examining what types of prompts elicited the most information, a one-way repeated-measures ANOVA revealed that the average number of words were highest for suggestive prompts ($M = 790.68, SD = 738.79$), followed by open-ended prompts ($M = 620.56, SD = 659.14$) and specific prompts ($M = 148.86, SD = 157.81$), Wilk’s Lambda = .48, $F(2, 68) = 36.58, p <$
Post-hoc tests revealed that there were statistically significant differences between all three means (ps < .01).

**Discussion**

This study was the first known study to examine field investigative interviews with Australian Aboriginal children in cases of suspected sexual abuse. It is crucial to include this population in the growing body of child interview research to identify which interview components are appropriate and effective in eliciting good quality narratives about sexual abuse. This study concentrated on three prominent interview components: ground rules, practice narratives, and substantive phase. The findings for each of these sections are discussed in turn.

**Ground Rules**

In line with the first hypothesis and previous research, the overall delivery and practice of ground rules at the beginning of the interview was positively associated with the spontaneous usage of rules in children’s narratives of abuse (Danby et al., 2015; see Brubacher et al., 2015, for a review). When specifically examining the “don’t know” rule, however, only practice had an effect of children’s usage of the rule (as opposed to simple delivery or no delivery at all). This finding is consistent with research involving non-Aboriginal children, which has also found that the “don’t know” ground rule needs to be practised in order to be effective (Danby et al., 2015; Gee et al., 1999; Saywitz & Moan-Hardie, 1994). Some researchers have suggested that practising rules consolidates children’s memory of the rules, as well as their confidence in using the rules (Righarts et al., 2013). As most (if not all) of the children in the current sample would have spoken English as a
second rather than first language (Eades, 2004), it is also likely that practising the “don’t know” rule strengthened their comprehension of the rule, rather than simply listening to the delivery of the rule.

Conversely, neither delivery nor practise had any effect on whether the child later spontaneously alerted the interviewer when a mistake was made. It is difficult to draw conclusions from this finding, as it cannot be determined how many mistakes were actually made by interviewers. High quality interviewing minimises many effects, such as the need to use ground rules, and age differences (Sternberg et al., 2001). Laboratory studies where it is ethical to manipulate interviewer quality could be used to test this finding further. Studies with non-Aboriginal children indicate that children will be more likely to correct interviewer’s mistakes only when they are given extensive training to do so (Danby et al., 2015; Krackow & Lynn, 2010; Saywitz & Moan-Hardie, 1994).

Altogether, the findings suggest that ground rules have the potential to be a useful component in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children. While practice appeared to enhance children’s use of the “don’t know” rule, however, the accuracy rates of all ground rules practised indicate that further work is needed to improve how ground rules are practised with Aboriginal children. Accuracy scores (50-72%) for all rules practised in the current study were noticeably lower compared to children’s performance on ground rule questions in previous research, where even 83% of 4-year-olds could correctly answer a “don’t know” practice question on the first attempt (Dickinson, Brubacher, & Poole, 2015). Perhaps low accuracy rates are due to how grounds rules were phrased; in 82.86% of interviews, the interviewer used hypothetical scenarios with the word \textit{if} (e.g., “If I asked you what my dog’s name was, what would you say?”). Study 1 signaled concern over use of the term
“if” with Aboriginal children, as it is rarely used in Aboriginal communities and might be difficult to translate in some Aboriginal languages. Indeed, professionals suggested that the term “if” should be removed or replaced by alternatives such as “I might” or “maybe” in investigative interview protocols with Aboriginal children. As the term “if” does not seem to be necessary in the practising of ground rules (e.g., “So, what is my dog’s name?” Dickinson et al., 2015), it might be worthwhile modifying interview protocols to accommodate these suggestions. Since this study was unable to do so, future research should directly test whether ground rules are used and more easily understood by Aboriginal children when the term “if” is removed from practice scenarios.

**Practice Narrative**

Contrary to the second hypothesis, it appeared that the practice narrative was an effective interview technique with this sample. Children spoke more and interviewers used more open-ended prompts during the substantive phase when the interviews contained a practice narrative. This finding echoes the results of numerous studies with non-Aboriginal children (Anderson et al., 2014; Hershkowitz, 2009; Price et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997; Whiting, 2013), yet it deviates from the main findings of the second laboratory study with Aboriginal children. Whereas the laboratory study involved an innocuous event experienced just one time, the current study focused on field interviews regarding sexual abuse, many of which concerned repeated allegations. Both the personal relevance and frequency of events in the current sample should increase the strength of the memories compared to the single laboratory event. As such, the present findings
point to the value of including a practice narrative in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children.

The finding that children spoke more in interviews with practice narratives helps to elucidate the concerns of professionals in Study 1 regarding the utility of practice narratives with Aboriginal children. Professionals voiced that a practice narrative may be ineffective at prompting Aboriginal children to provide informative accounts, especially if the interviewer has not reciprocated information or built rapport with the child’s family and community. As I only had access to transcripts from audiotaped interviews, I was unable to gauge what previous interactions interviewers had with the children off-tape and leading up to the interview. Future research could benefit from exploring such aspects to examine whether prior rapport building influences the productivity of a practice narrative. Nonetheless, this study signals that a practice narrative can be effective in encouraging Aboriginal children to provide informative responses in their substantive accounts.

The present research found benefits of practice narratives for both children and interviewers. Like all research with field interviews, it is difficult to determine the direction of these findings. It is possible that the practice narrative only actually benefited interviewers by encouraging them to ask more open-ended questions in the substantive phase, which in turn increased the amount of information children provided (as opposed to the practice narrative directly enhancing the informativeness of children’s responses). This finding might also help to explain why no main effects for practice narratives were seen in Study 2, because interviewers asked many open-ended questions in the substantive phase regardless of the practice condition. Conversely, there was more variability in open-ended questions asked in the field interviews, so the link between conducting practice narratives and subsequently
asking open-ended questions was more evident. Such findings highlight why it is important to have a program of research that integrates both laboratory and field research.

Moreover, it is possible that interviewers’ use of open-ended prompts in the substantive phase was linked to their personal skillset (e.g., motivation, training, capabilities) rather than the influence of the practice narrative, thereby improving the entire interview (and eliciting longer accounts from children). Previous research, however, has attempted to untangle the influence of practice narratives from interviewer variables and it appears that practice narratives have distinct positive associations with interviewer’s use of open-ended questions (Price et al., 2013). Therefore, it is likely that conducting a practice narrative did indeed prepare interviewers in the current study to deliver more open-ended prompts in the substantive phase (see also Roberts et al., 2011). Overall, while there is some ambiguity regarding how exactly practice narratives benefit interviewers and children, the current findings demonstrate that children’s accounts ultimately benefit from the inclusion of a practice narrative, and therefore underscore the value of including practice narratives in interviews with Aboriginal children.

Substantive Phase

Consistent with the predictions and previous research (Sternberg et al., 2001), children most often disclosed sexual abuse in response to an open-ended as opposed to a specific or suggestive prompt. In Study 1, there was concern that inhibitions and language barriers might prevent Aboriginal children from opening up and providing information in response to open-ended questions. This finding disputes such a concern and suggests that interviewers should utilise open-ended questioning with
Aboriginal children, particularly when attempting to elicit an initial disclosure of abuse from the child.

Contrary to expectation and other research (Lamb et al., 1996), children provided the most information in response to suggestive as opposed to open-ended prompts. It is important to note, however, that 20.33% of the suggestive prompts were open-ended in nature (e.g., “I heard that someone ‘sexed’ you; tell me all about that” [when the child had not mentioned being ‘sexed’]). Therefore, the leading information within the question may have triggered memory recall in children and prompted informative responses. There is often a distinction made in the literature between leading and misleading questions: leading questions lead the interviewees to the correct answer, and misleading questions lead them to the incorrect answer (Milne & Bull, 2003). As suggestive questions (i.e., misleading) can significantly compromise the accuracy of children’s and adult’s accounts (Ceci et al., 2002; Sharman & Powell, 2012), and are particularly harmful to the accounts of Aboriginal witnesses (Eades, 2008, 2013), the use of such questions with Aboriginal children is strongly discouraged. This finding, however, points to the idea of including non-suggestive cues in open-ended questions with Aboriginal children. Study 1 indicated that Aboriginal children could benefit from being asked cued open-ended questions that mention previously disclosed details to prompt information (e.g., “You said X—tell me more about X”; see also Lamb et al., 2003 for similar suggestions with non-Aboriginal children). Future research should focus on the effectiveness of such question types with Aboriginal children.

Conclusion

Overall, this study is a constructive step in addressing the lack of field interview research with Aboriginal children in cases of suspect sexual abuse. A
number of concerns in the extant literature meant that it was unclear how components of investigative interview protocols applied to Aboriginal children. This study has provided some clarity surrounding the effectiveness of three primary interview components with Aboriginal children. As disclosures and detailed accounts are typically essential for the prosecution of sexual abuse cases, it is extremely important that Aboriginal children are interviewed effectively, especially given the low disclosure and conviction rates in many Aboriginal communities (Bailey & Powell, 2015).

While many experiences and styles of relating are shared across Aboriginal communities, it should be emphasised that Aboriginal children are not a homogenous group. The present research included interviews with Aboriginal children from only one jurisdiction in Australia. Aboriginal peoples are diverse in terms of many aspects (e.g., languages, remoteness, cultural practices etc.). Further work should include Indigenous children from other jurisdictions and indeed other countries to encapsulate diversity and broaden generalisability. Moreover, the current study included interviews with and without interpreters; this impeded the ability to accurately measure the exact amount of words spoken by Aboriginal children, as interpreters might have used more or less words to describe certain terms in English, rather than clear-cut translations. Nevertheless, no interactions with interpreters were found in the current results, and I argue that the importance of including interviews in research with Aboriginal children who do not speak English outweighs issues that might be associated.

It should also be noted here that the current study predicted the null effect regarding the effectiveness of practice narratives with Aboriginal children, yet it continued to test this hypothesis using an ANOVA. Strictly speaking, there are
issues with using inferential statistical tests when predicting a null effect, because inferential statistics start by assuming the null hypothesis, so there is a double conjecture of the findings (Field, 2013). On a practical level, this issue is quite minor. Logically speaking, the null hypothesis was made based on a prior laboratory study that found no effect of practice narratives on Aboriginal children’s accounts. This study in question was a field study that required further analysis of the effectiveness of practice narratives with Aboriginal children; therefore, an ANOVA was the most appropriate test for this question.

Despite this study’s limitations, three main conclusions can be drawn from the current sample of interviews with Aboriginal children. Firstly, while a ground rules component appears to be beneficial, it is evident that there is room to improve how ground rules are currently practised, consistent with the findings from Study 1. Further work should concentrate on the way ground rules are phrased when practising with Aboriginal children, with a particular focus on the term “if.” Secondly, the current findings paired with previous field and laboratory studies suggest that practice narratives may be an effective component in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children and, at the very least; they appear to do no harm. Finally, while open-ended questions are useful in eliciting disclosures from Aboriginal children, further work should specifically examine the utility of cued open-ended questions as a means of prompting informative responses.
CHAPTER 8: EXPRESSIONS OF SHAME IN INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

(STUDY 4)\(^5\)

This chapter presents the fourth and final study of the current thesis. Study 4 expands upon the previous study by examining how expressions of *shame* relate to Aboriginal children’s disclosures and narratives of sexual abuse in forensic interviews. In many cases of child sexual abuse, child victims are left feeling a sense of shame (Fontes, 2007; Fontes & Plummer, 2010; Hunter, 2011; McEvoy & Daniluk, 1995). Offenders sometimes instil shame into children at the time of the abuse by encouraging them to feel responsible for provoking the sexual acts or urging them to keep silent about the matters (Deblinger & Runyon, 2005). Negative reactions by others to the initial sexual abuse disclosure can further reinforce feelings of shame (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). Along with additional barriers, shame can significantly impede a child’s ability to recover from the abuse. Indeed, research has found that children experiencing lower levels of shame are more likely to be better-adjusted one year after a sexual abuse disclosure compared to children experiencing higher levels (Feiring, Taska, & Lewis, 2002). While the concept of shame is present in many cultures, it is especially salient in Australian Aboriginal culture.

As discussed in Chapter 3, shame in Aboriginal culture is a complex matter that is markedly different to the Western version of feeling ashamed (Harkins, 1990, 1994; Sharifian, 2005). It can be felt in both positive and negative situations: when receiving a prize, when one is the centre of attention, when meeting strangers, in the

presence of close relatives, when passing near a forbidden place, or when exposed to secret ceremony information. For the most part, it can include a fear of negative consequences arising from a perceived wrongdoing, a fear of disapproval and a strong desire to escape the unpleasant situation (Harkins, 1990). It appears that different schemas or ‘world views’ are associated with the concept of shame between the two cultures. For example, ethnographic research has highlighted that non-Aboriginal students often connect shame with guilt and misdemeanours; Aboriginal students, however, connect shame with a number of factors: praise, respect, punishment, unfamiliarity or being spotlighted in a group (Sharifian, 2005). The phrasing of shame also differs between the two cultures; whereas non-Aboriginal peoples may speak of “feeling ashamed”, Aboriginal peoples are more likely to speak of “getting” or “being” shame (e.g., “I’ve got shame”; “big shame”; “that’s a shame-job”) (Harkins, 1990; Sharifian, 2005).

It is well documented that shame can inhibit or delay the disclosure of sexual abuse by both Aboriginal (Gordon et al., 2002; NSWACSAT, 2006; Robertson, 2000) and non-Aboriginal children (Bonanno et al., 2002; Furniss, 1991; Goodman-Brown et al., 2003; Hershkowitz et al., 2007; Hunter, 2011). In research conducted for the Breaking the Silence Report, consultations with over 300 people from 29 Aboriginal communities in New South Wales revealed that shame was a common consequence of child sexual assault and that it often prevented children from reporting sexual abuse to authorities. When focusing on non-Aboriginal children, a longitudinal study with 137 survivors of child sexual abuse has demonstrated that participants who did not make a voluntary disclosure exhibited more facial expressions of shame (e.g., eye-contact avoidance, downward head movements) during an interview compared to those who made a voluntary disclosure of child
sexual abuse (Bonanno et al., 2002). Further, in another study with 30 non-Aboriginal children, 50% reported feeling fear or shame regarding their parents’ reactions to a sexual abuse disclosure (Hershkowitz et al., 2007). These feelings were more likely to be expressed if the offenders were familiar to the child or if the abuse was repeated and severe. Expressions of shame were also positively associated with delays in disclosure.

In an effort to promote awareness, education and reporting of child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities, a number of initiatives have been developed that take shame into account (Mace et al., 2015; NSWACSAT, 2006; Thorpe, Solomon, & Dimopoulos, 2004). For example, a video resource called ‘Big Shame’ has been created for workers to use in activities with Aboriginal children; it provides a common child sexual abuse scenario and demonstrates what action needs to take place to protect the child (NSWACSAT, 2006). While efforts have begun to address shame in regards to the initial reporting of abuse, there is a lack of work that focuses on shame during the investigative interview. As highlighted in many sections of this thesis, the interview with the child forms a dominant part of evidence in cases of suspect sexual abuse (Ministry of Justice, 2011). Therefore the child’s narrative of sexual abuse during an interview needs to be as complete and detailed as possible. A concern that has been outlined in the literature, however, is that feelings of shame could hinder a child’s willingness to discuss sexual abuse in an investigative interview (Lamb & Brown, 2006). Given the complexity of shame in Aboriginal culture, it is particularly important to examine this concept in an Aboriginal population. Preliminary research is needed to explore how shame is expressed and discussed in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children to determine how best to move forward in combatting its effects.
Anecdotally, my supervisors and I had been informed by police officers and child protection workers that Aboriginal children often express shame in investigative interviews. The current study inspected a sample of interview transcripts with Aboriginal children (same sample as Study 3) to gain a sense of how frequently verbal shame responses were occurring in investigative interviews regarding alleged sexual abuse. It also aimed to characterize how Aboriginal children were articulating shame in investigative interviews, as well as how interviewers reacted to these responses. In light of the Australian initiatives that address shame in child sexual abuse cases and the apparent familiarity with shame in child investigative interviews, I expected to observe a positive relationship between children’s shame responses and interviewer reminders (e.g., “You don’t need to feel shame when talking today”).

Additionally, this study examined how children’s expressions of shame related to the quality of their accounts. It measured the number of substantive (on-topic) words spoken by the child during the interview and the time it took to disclose sexual abuse, measured by the number of interviewer prompts asked before a disclosure was made. Based on previous findings regarding shame and delays in reporting and under-reporting of child sexual abuse (Hershkowitz et al., 2007; Hunter, 2011; NSWACSAT, 2006), it was predicted that children who expressed shame would also speak less and take longer to disclose abuse during the interviews compared to children who did not express shame.
Method

Procedure

Several Aboriginal organisations and peoples were consulted to ensure that the study was culturally appropriate and useful to Aboriginal communities (especially in the area where the interviews originated). All research was conducted according to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies’ Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (2012). The relevant police organisation approved the use of the de-identified interview transcripts for analysis and ethics approval was granted by Deakin University. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and de-identified prior to their inclusion in this study. The inclusion criteria for the current study were that interviews were with Aboriginal children (16 years and under), and the child must have disclosed at least one sexually abusive incident where he or she was the alleged victim.

Coding

Shame responses. Based on previous experience with child abuse interviews and consultation with Aboriginal community workers, my associate supervisor and I developed a coding manual to define “shame responses” verbalised by the children in the interviews. The shame responses fell under three mutually exclusive categories. Firstly, explicit shame responses were coded when children explicitly cited shame, shyness or embarrassment as a reason for being reluctant to talk to the interviewer (e.g., “I’m too ashamed to say it”). The manual instructed that an explicit shame response could be coded anytime one of these words was mentioned by a child in
separate sentences; if they were used twice in one sentence then they were only counted once. When coding these explicit shame responses, the researchers also recorded whether they were spontaneously produced by the child or elicited by the interviewer (e.g., “How are you feeling?”). The second category involved coding explicit shame responses when children explicitly mentioned shame within their narrative of abuse (i.e., explicitly ascribing feelings to the actual abuse as opposed to how they felt during the interview).

Thirdly, implicit shame responses were coded when children made a statement that signified reluctance to talk about sexual abuse when they were previously willing to talk about non-sexual related topics (e.g., “I hate talking about this sort of stuff” [in response to prompts about sexual abuse or genitals]). In other words, the statements had to clearly demonstrate that children were ashamed or embarrassed to talk about the sexual nature of the abuse, without explicitly citing shame as the reason for their reticence. It is important to note that responses such as “I don’t know” or “I don’t remember” did not count as implicit shame responses, as it cannot be determined whether children were reluctant to talk about sexual abuse or whether they genuinely did not recall the information.

**Interviewer reminders.** Interviewer reminders were also coded according to precise rules. Reminders were coded anytime the interviewer addressed potential or expressed concerns by a child within the actual interview setting. These typically related to three concerns: (i) shame, (ii) discomfort and (iii) trouble. Firstly, interviewer reminders involved any acknowledgement of shame, or reassurance that a child should not feel shame (e.g., “Don’t worry, you’ve got nothing to be ashamed about”). Secondly, reminders encompassed interviewer statements that recognized events were difficult or uncomfortable for a child to discuss (e.g., “I know it’s hard
to talk about but we hear this stuff all the time”). Finally, because shame has been linked to punishment in Aboriginal culture (Sharifian, 2005), reminders that specified children were not in trouble were also coded (e.g., “Remember that you’re not in trouble, I won’t get angry or upset with you”). Although it was a rare occurrence, if two different reminders were covered in the one sentence (e.g., “Remember that you’re not in trouble and you don’t have to feel shame”), the manual instructed that each reminder should be counted separately.

**Child’s initial disclosure.** The manual borrowed a similar definition of an initial abuse disclosure from Olafson & Lederman (2006). An initial disclosure was operationalized as the earliest point at which the child clearly disclosed a sexually abusive event during the investigative interview, irrespective of whether they elaborated upon what happened (e.g., “To talk about the rude stuff”; “He touched me down there”).

**Interviewer prompts before disclosure.** An interviewer prompt was coded anytime the interviewer asked a child a question (e.g., “What happened next?”) or encouraged a child to talk through an uttered facilitator (e.g., “mmhmm”). Any prompts that were unrelated to a child’s narrative of abuse (e.g., “Can you take your hands away from your face?”) or directed to interpreters (e.g., “How would you translate that in English?”) were ignored. Coders only counted prompts that were spoken by the interviewer and directed to a child before the sexual abuse disclosure was made.

**Words spoken.** Word counts of children’s responses were also calculated for the substantive phase of the interview (i.e., after the interviewer prompted a child to begin discussing the abuse). It is important to note that in some cases these words came from the interpreters rather than the children themselves. As such, they are not
a perfect measure of the number of words spoken by children in interviews with interpreters, but they are a reasonable approximation. Coders deleted any words spoken by the interpreter that were not direct translations of the children’s responses, any interviewer utterances, repeated responses, stutters, noises (e.g., “um”), and anything additional typed by the transcriber that was not a child’s word (e.g., [silence]).

Reliability. Initially, a random subset of 10% of the interviews were double-coded by my associate supervisor and I to examine intercoder reliability. Percent agreement (agreements/agreements + disagreements) was used for reliability assessment because all coding involved quantifying observations (e.g., tallying the number of responses, prompts). Agreement was calculated for all of the above-mentioned variables and ranged from 90% to 100%. After three-quarters of the transcripts had been coded, a further random 5% of the interviews were double-coded to ensure consistency: agreement scores continued to be at least 90%. All disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

When all categories of shame responses were collapsed, examination of frequencies indicated that shame responses occurred in just over one-quarter of the interviews (19/70, 27.14%). In 17 out of the 19 interviews, children spontaneously expressed one or more shame responses. In two interviews they were solely elicited by the interviewer. In the interviews that included a shame response, the number of separate shame responses expressed by the child ranged from one to 16 ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 3.57$), with a total of 44 separate shame responses. Implicit shame responses
were the most common (52.27%), followed by explicit shame responses within the interview (29.55%) and explicit shame responses within the abuse narrative (18.18%). The majority of shame responses occurred after a disclosure was made (84.21%). See Table 3 for examples of how Aboriginal children spoke about their feelings of shame during the interviews. The shame responses within the interviews were always linked to questions about genitals or the sexual nature of the abuse.

Table 3

Examples of Shame Responses in Investigative Interviews about Sexual Abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Shame Response</th>
<th>Example of Shame Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit shame response within interview</td>
<td>“I’m too shamed to say it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Cause it’s shame-job if I say it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I’m shame.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit shame response within narrative</td>
<td>“He always trying to play with me but I don’t wanna play with him because I feel all shame in my body and all nervous.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Then they told me to take video clip and I was watching the other way. I was shame.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I was too shame to talk to her.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit shame response within interview</td>
<td>“Because it’s a bad word- I don’t want to say it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Can [interviewer 2] look away?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Do I have to say it?” [in response to question about genitals]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All examples were extracted from different interviews.

Examination of interviewer reminders demonstrated that these were extremely common in interviews with Aboriginal children. In total, 87% of the interviews included at least one reminder. In interviews that included a reminder, the number of separate reminders ranged from one to 17 ($M = 3.74, SD = 3.31$), with two reminders per interview being the most common scenario. When breaking down each reminder, it was evident that reminders regarding trouble were the most prevalent (103), followed by reminders acknowledging difficulty (70) and finally,
reminders explicitly concerning shame (55). When focusing specifically on the ‘shame’ reminders, two-thirds of these occurred after a shame response was expressed by the child (67.67%).

The number of prompts uttered by the interviewer before a disclosure was made varied considerably from one to 339 ($M = 40.30$, $SD = 68.31$). Nine children disclosed abuse immediately (i.e., after just one prompt) and altogether 29 children disclosed within the first five interviewer prompts. The number of words spoken by the children (or translated through interpreters) during the entire substantive phase of the interview also varied substantially from 36 to 7039 ($M = 1567.57$, $SD = 1403.23$).

**Inferential Analyses**

This study examined whether interviewers were using more reminders in interviews where children expressed a shame response (regarding their feelings within the interview) compared to children who did not express a shame response. Therefore, a categorical variable was created: interviews with shame responses within the interview (15: excluding shame responses within the abuse narrative) versus interviews with no shame responses within the interview (55). Exploration of the data indicated that the total number of *interviewer reminders* variable was considerably positively skewed. Subsequently, a log transformation was performed to normalise the distribution. Preliminary analyses also established that interviews with interpreters did not differ in terms of the number of ‘interviewer reminders’ compared to interviews without interpreters, $t(68) = -.15, p > .05, d = .03$. A one-way between-groups ANOVA revealed that interviewers relayed more reminders to children who expressed shame responses within the interview ($M = 6.33$, $SD = 5.09$).
compared to children who expressed no shame responses \((M = 2.42, SD = 2.02)\), \(F(1, 69) = 14.31, p < .001, d = 1\).

This study also assessed whether children who expressed shame responses within the interviews also spoke less and took longer to disclose sexual abuse compared to children who did not express shame. Log transformations on the *word count* and *interviewer prompts before disclosure* variables were conducted to reduce the positive skew of the distributions. ANOVAs indicated that children who expressed shame on average spoke the same amount about their abuse experience \((M = 1407.40, SD = 969.94)\) as children who did not express shame \((M = 1611.25, SD = 1504.34)\), \(F(1, 69) < 1, p = .91, d = .02\). However, interviewers asked more prompts to elicit a sexual abuse disclosure from children who expressed shame during the interviews \((M = 60.93, SD = 66.34)\) compared to children who did not express shame \((M = 34.67, SD = 68.34)\), \(F(1, 69) = 5.66, p = .02, d = 1.44\). Standard multiple linear regressions confirmed that these findings held even when the presence of an interpreter was taken into account \((\beta = .003, t[67] = .03, p = .98; \beta = .29, t[67] = 2.88, p = .005\), respectively).

**Discussion**

This study confirmed anecdotal accounts that shame responses are present in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children about alleged sexual abuse, occurring in just over one-quarter of the interviews. The way children in this sample articulated shame was very similar to previous research with Aboriginal children in a classroom context (Harkins, 1990; Sharifian, 2005). As in Harkin’s work, children spoke of shame mostly as a noun (e.g., “Its shame-job”; “I’m shame”) during the investigative interviews. In line with the predictions, interviews where children expressed shame also included a greater number of interviewer reminders (in total),
and a greater number of interviewer prompts before a disclosure was made. In other words, it required more effort to elicit a sexual abuse disclosure from children who expressed shame within the interviews compared to children who did not express shame. In contrast to the final prediction, children who expressed shame within the interview on average spoke the same amount as children who did not express shame. A discussion of these findings now ensues.

Interviewers relayed three times as many reminders in interviews where children expressed shame. Perhaps interviewers’ expression of reminders enabled children to feel comfortable expressing shame responses, or perhaps interviewers felt a greater need to deliver reminders when they perceived higher levels of shame. Of course, reminders were relayed in interviews where no shame was expressed, therefore, many of these would have been standard and precautionary. Yet when specifically examining shame reminders in interviews where shame was expressed, the majority of these were reactive rather than proactive. This finding suggests that interviewers are reacting to shame responses in a potentially positive way. Research in clinical settings has emphasised that providing supportive responses is vital to overcoming children’s feelings of shame (Deblinger & Runyon, 2005). Moreover, researchers in the child investigative interviewing field have recommended non-suggestive support as a means of reducing children’s reluctance to disclose abuse (Katz et al., 2012).

It is important to acknowledge, however, that it may be difficult for interviewers to distinguish between signs of shame from other signs of reluctance to disclose information. As I cannot verify the truth of children’s allegations in this field study, it is possible that children expressed reluctance due to reasons other than shame (e.g., pre-interview suggestion by an involved person, or a false statement.
made by the child; see Hershkowitz, 2001). Research has shown that humans are often inadequate at interpreting verbal and nonverbal behaviour accurately; for example, many studies have indicated that adults are ineffective at distinguishing between those who are lying versus telling the truth (Bon & DePaulo, 2008; Strömwall, Granhag, & Landström, 2007). If interviewers are expecting to see shame, they might engage in confirmatory bias and subjectively interpret verbal and nonverbal behaviour as shame; subsequently, delivering children reminders about shame may potentially be suggestive. Interviewers should be aware of biases and alternative explanations of behaviour before they use shame reminders.

Interviewers delivered almost twice as many prompts to elicit disclosures from children who expressed shame in their interviews than from those who did not, suggesting that children who expressed shame were more reluctant to disclose abuse compared to their non-shame-expressing counterparts. This finding is largely consistent with research that has found shame can prevent Aboriginal children from reporting sexual abuse (NSWACSAT, 2006) or delay non-Aboriginal children’s disclosure of sexual abuse (Bonanno et al., 2002; Hershkowitz et al., 2007; Hunter, 2011). Previous research, however, has typically defined disclosures as the initial revelation of abuse—many of which do not occur until adulthood. The current research focused on childhood disclosures of sexual abuse within the actual investigative interview, arguably one of the most important places to disclose from a legal perspective.

The finding that children who expressed shame received on average 60 prompts before a disclosure was made warrants further attention. On the one hand it indicates that interviewers may need to remain very patient and persistent with gentle narrative prompting before a disclosure is made. On the other hand it raises the
question of whether continued prompting is suggestive and whether it may elicit false disclosures or information. It is a robust finding that repeated questioning within an interview can decrease the accuracy of children’s accounts (Memon & Vartoukian, 1996; Poole & White, 1991). These studies indicate, however, that the negative effects of repeated questioning are only present when closed and suggestive questions are asked, and indeed the accuracy of children’s recall may even improve with repeated open-ended questioning. Moreover, to our knowledge there is no research that has found a negative link between ‘continued varied’ prompting and the accuracy of children’s accounts, therefore, future research definitely needs to address this gap. It could be hypothesised that continued, varied open-ended questioning (e.g., “and then what happened?” “what else happened?”) might allow a child to ease into the interview and tell their narrative in their own way before disclosing sexual abuse (e.g., relaying contextual factors that lead up to the disclosure).

When examining the shame responses, it was evident that children only expressed these when the topic of sex arose (e.g., when prompted to disclose sexual information, discuss their knowledge of sex, or when relaying information about genitals and the sexual nature of abuse). This finding explains why the majority of children did not verbally express shame until after a disclosure was made, which is not surprising given cultural restrictions regarding the open discussion of sexual issues (Coorey, 2001). In fact, research with non-Aboriginal children has also found that five-to-seven-year-old girls are loath to freely report information about vaginal or anal touches during interviews about a medical examination; these girls did not mention genitals until they were directly asked about the touches (Saywitz, Goodman, Nicholas, & Moan, 1991). In a recent qualitative study, however, prosecutors emphasised that interviewers should reduce specific questioning when
asking children about genitalia; instead pertinent details should be acquired through the child’s narrative account or corroborating evidence (Burrows & Powell, 2014).

As a large body of research has found open-ended questioning can maximise the accuracy and completeness of children’s accounts (Lamb et al., 1996; Lamb et al., 2007a; Lamb et al., 2009; Sternberg et al., 2001), I also advocate the use of narrative prompts when questioning Aboriginal children about sensitive topics.

Interestingly, children who expressed shame in the interviews spoke the same amount as children who did not express shame. If children only expressed shame when discussing sexual acts and genitals, it is possible that their discussion of abuse-related but non-sexual matters accounted for the similarity in verbosity. Ideally, future studies could concentrate on the amount of detail children provide when specifically discussing sexual matters rather than the whole substantive phase.

Further, this study only included interviews where children eventually disclosed sexual abuse, therefore, it was unable to provide any quantification of shame in non-disclosing groups. Despite expressing shame during the interviews, the children in this sample may have been more informative than children who do not disclose abuse at all during interviews (as has been suggested by previous research: Hershkowitz et al., 2006).

It is important to note that this study has provided a conservative estimate of shame as it only measured verbal shame responses from interview transcripts. Shame is of course a subjective feeling that is not always expressed externally (Gilbert & Andrews, 1998). Children may have provided non-verbal indicators of shame such as avoidance of eye-contact or downward head movements (Bonanno et al., 2002; Taylor, Thompson, Wood, Ali, & Dimer, 2009). Anecdotally, shame in Aboriginal children may be signaled by fidgeting, moving sideways or away from
the interviewer, or movements of the mouth. Moreover, the tone in which children expressed comments such as “don’t know” or “don’t remember” might have indicated that they were reluctant to discuss information due to shame. In-depth analyses of video-recordings or self-report measures could provide richer information regarding children’s feelings of shame. Nevertheless, the current study provides an important characterization of verbal expressions of shame by Aboriginal children in the context of sexual assault investigation, which may also be useful knowledge for other settings where cross-cultural communication occurs.

A further caveat is that this study may have overestimated the total number of interviewer reminders, as some of the “trouble” reminders could have been unrelated to shame. Yet due to the links between shame and punishment in Aboriginal culture (Sharifian, 2005), I maintain the inclusion of “trouble reminders” in the analyses as warranted. Additionally, this study only included interview transcripts with Aboriginal children from one jurisdiction of Australia. As Aboriginal peoples across Australia are unique and diverse, it would have been ideal to include transcripts from a range of jurisdictions in order to enhance generalizability. Notwithstanding these limitations, this study has important implications for interview practice.

The present study highlights that interviewers need to be aware of shame in investigative interviews, especially with Australian Aboriginal children. As children who expressed shame required more prompts before a disclosure was made, this study indicates the need for interviewers to remain patient and persistent with open-ended questioning about alleged sexual abuse. Indeed, children who expressed shame received on average 60 prompts before a disclosure was made, therefore, the importance of this recommendation cannot be understated. Further, while this research is only preliminary, it points to the value of supportive reminders as a
strategy for dealing with shame in investigative interviews. Future research now needs to extend these findings and establish what strategies are the most effective in overcoming or reducing shame in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children about alleged sexual abuse. Future research should also consider how effective people, and in particular interviewers, are at interpreting implicit and nonverbal signs of shame.
CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter summarises the aims, rationale and four original studies that comprise the current thesis. It then provides a global discussion of the main findings, with a particular focus on the three prominent interview components that have served to structure the thesis: ground rules, practice narrative, and the substantive phase. Directions for future research are weaved throughout, and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the overall limitations, recommendations and implications.

In this thesis, I aimed to examine the investigative interviewing of Australian Aboriginal children, and clarify the suitability of best-practice interview procedure with this population. The objective was to yield information concerning how forensic interviews are conducted with Aboriginal children (in the context of sexual abuse investigation), with the ultimate goal of improving interview protocols to better suit their communication styles. The need for this research arose because it was unclear how extant interview protocols applied to Aboriginal children. Best-practice interview procedure is based on a wealth of research with children across the world (Cederborg et al., 2000; Cyr & Lamb, 2009; Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Lamb et al., 2009; Naka, 2012; Orbach et al., 2000; Sternberg et al., 2001); yet Aboriginal children are absent from these studies. Research indicates that communication styles are markedly different between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures (Cooke, 1996; Eades, 1992, 1996, 2013; Fryer-Smith, 2008; Walsh, 1991, 1994), suggesting that it is important to examine the suitability of interview protocols with Aboriginal children. Aboriginal children are also overrepresented in the statistics summarising child abuse cases in Australia (AIHW, 2014, 2015a); therefore, it is particularly imperative to include this population in child interview research.
Four original and multi-method studies were conducted in this thesis. Firstly, as no previous research had examined the investigative interviewing of Aboriginal children, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate to initially explore the suitability of an interview protocol to Aboriginal children. Further, this step was critical from an ethical perspective, such that the interview protocol used in the experimental Study 2 was appropriate for use with Aboriginal children. In Study 1, in-depth interviews with 28 professionals revealed a number of themes regarding the applicability of an interview protocol to Aboriginal children. Based on some of these themes, in the second study of this thesis I examined one particular aspect of prominent interview protocols: practice narratives. A laboratory study tested the effects of a practice narrative on the accuracy and informativeness of Aboriginal children’s accounts of an innocuous event. The next step of this thesis was to examine interview components and Aboriginal children’s accounts in the field. In Study 3, I examined the effectiveness of ground rules, practice narratives, and questioning in 70 de-identified interviews with Aboriginal children regarding suspected sexual abuse. Finally, Study 4 expanded upon the third study to include an examination of how expressions of shame relate to Aboriginal children’s disclosures and narratives of sexual abuse in forensic interviews.

9.1 Ground Rules

Professionals in Study 1 raised a number of concerns regarding the syntax and vocabulary within the ground rules phase of prominent interview protocols. For example, many participants expressed that hypotheticals and in particular the word “if” are rarely used and difficult to translate in some Aboriginal languages. They also voiced concern regarding terms such as “promise”, “truth”, and language
surrounding childhood (e.g., boy, girl), stating that such terminology could cause confusion or offence. Study 1 concluded that particular phrases could be avoided or replaced with alternatives (e.g., “will you” instead of “do you promise, “true story” instead of “truth,” and generic terms such as “you mob” instead “boy” or “girl”). Previous research may support some of these modifications. For example, one study has indicated that the term “will” is better understood by young American children than “promise” (Lyon & Evans, 2014). Moreover, the phrase “true story” appears to be well documented in many resources regarding Aboriginal peoples (e.g., “Sharing the True Stories” website: http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/stts/sponsorslist.html; or see Cass et al., 2002). Further research should now focus on the effectiveness of such modified terms in an investigative interview context with Aboriginal children.

While professionals in Study 1 raised a number of concerns, they largely emphasised that a ground rules phase would be essential with Aboriginal children, as the general interview format would be very foreign compared to children’s typical communication styles. In Study 3, I examined the ground rules phase in greater depth. I found that the overall delivery and practice of ground rules at the beginning of the interview was positively associated with the spontaneous usage of rules in children’s narratives of abuse (e.g., voicing confusion if a question was not understood). When specifically examining the “don’t know” rule, however, only practice had an effect on children’s usage of the rule (as opposed to simple delivery or no delivery at all). This finding is consistent with research involving non-Aboriginal children (Danby et al., 2015; Gee et al., 1999; Saywitz & Moan-Hardie, 1994) and may be explained by the idea that practising helps to consolidate children’s comprehension and memory of the rule, rather than simply listening to the delivery of the rule.
Altogether, Studies 1 and 3 suggest that ground rules have the potential to be a useful component in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children. They indicate, however, that there is room to improve how the ground rules are currently practised with Aboriginal children. Accuracy scores (50-72%) for all rules practised in Study 3 were quite low, especially compared to previous research with non-Aboriginal children (Dickinson et al., 2015). This may have been due to the way the ground rules were phrased; in the majority of the interviews, the interviewer used hypothetical scenarios with the word if (e.g., “If I asked you what my dog’s name was, what would you say?”). Professionals in Study 1 suggested that the term “if” should be removed or replaced by alternatives such as “I might” or “maybe” in investigative interview protocols with Aboriginal children. Such a modification is simple and innovative, but its effectiveness should be tested in further empirical research.

9.2 Practice Narrative

Professionals in Study 1 reflected extensively on the practice narrative with Aboriginal children. A large concern was that a practice narrative may be cognitively burdensome on children whose first language is not English, and such a task may be insufficient in building rapport with Aboriginal children and encouraging them to provide informative responses. As this formed a dominant theme in Study 1, the second study experimentally tested the utility of a practice narrative with Aboriginal children who were proficient in English as a second language. In Study 2, I found that practice narratives did not predict the accuracy or informativeness of Aboriginal children’s accounts of an innocuous event, suggesting that professionals’ concerns may be valid. However, verbosity during the practice
narrative was strongly associated with more informative responses during the subsequent phase of the interview, indicating that a practice narrative was associated with more elaborate accounts, as long as children were engaged in the task.

Practice narratives were further examined in field interviews of alleged sexual abuse victims in the third study. Results indicated that a practice narrative did indeed have a positive effect on Aboriginal children’s accounts for a personally-relevant event; children spoke more during the substantive phase when their interview contained a practice narrative than when it did not. Such findings are consistent with international research demonstrating the positive effects of practice narratives with non-Aboriginal children (Anderson et al., 2014; Hershkowitz, 2009; Price et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997; Whiting, 2013). The results of Studies 2 and 3 help to clarify professionals’ concerns by highlighting that a practice narrative can be effective in encouraging Aboriginal children to provide informative responses in their substantive accounts, although the salience of the event and actual engagement in the practice narrative may be key (see Hershkowitz, 2006, for a similar argument with reluctant children).

Differences in the main findings between Studies 2 and 3 may have occurred for multiple reasons; namely, the laboratory study involved a single innocuous event and the field study included accounts of sexual abuse, many of which involved repeated allegations. Both the personal relevance and frequency of events in the field study should have increased the strength of the memories compared to the single laboratory event. As such, the findings of Study 3 point to the real-life forensic value of including practice narratives in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children. Study 2 also indicated the potential value of practice narratives with Aboriginal children, yet it suggested that future work could improve how
practice narratives are conducted with all Aboriginal children so that less talkative children can be encouraged to engage in the task and in turn gain the benefits in their subsequent accounts. These results highlight that there can be limitations involved with laboratory research, and it is important to pair laboratory research with field research in order to achieve the most comprehensive and accurate results.

Study 1 suggested that practice narratives could be modified by increasing interviewer reciprocity (i.e., the interviewer shares information before prompting the child for a narrative). Future work should consider the effectiveness of a bi-directional approach when conducting practice narratives with Aboriginal children.

Study 3 also found that interviewers benefited from practice narratives, as they used more open-ended prompts during the substantive phase when the interviews contained a practice narrative—a finding that is consistent with previous research (Price et al., 2013). Such a finding raised the question of whether children distinctly benefited from a practice narrative, or whether increases in informativeness were a flow-on effect from the increases in open-ended questions asked by interviewers. The null findings regarding the practice narrative in Study 2 suggest that interviewer questioning might be an important mediator, as interviewers asked many open-ended questions in the substantive phase regardless of practice narrative condition (thereby quashing the potential link between practice narratives, increased open-ended questions and informative responses in the substantive phase). Future research should concentrate on examining the exact direction and mechanisms underlying the relationship between practice narratives and the informativeness of Aboriginal children’s accounts. In the interim, Studies 2 and 3 indicate that a practice narrative is not harmful and ultimately appears to benefit Aboriginal children’s accounts, despite the lack of a clear causal link.
9.3 Substantive Phase

All but one participant in Study 1 voiced support for the narrative based structure of prominent interview protocols with Aboriginal children. They expressed that open-ended questions (especially focused or cued open-ended prompts; e.g., “Tell me more about X”) should be emphasised and direct questions (e.g., “When did it happen?”) should be avoided where possible, as this approach would be more conducive to Aboriginal communication styles. They also emphasised that when direct questions are necessary, they should be re-phrased into statements and followed by silence (e.g., “I need to know when it happened…”), in order to become more indirect. Such themes are consistent with the broader literature regarding Aboriginal communication (Cooke, 1996; Eades, 1982, 2013; Mushin & Gardner, 2009), and are agreeable with best-practice interview guidelines regarding non-Aboriginal children (Lamb et al., 2007b; Powell & Snow, 2007a; Saywitz & Camparo, 2013).

Professionals’ perceptions regarding open-ended questions were also supported by findings in Study 3; results revealed that open-ended questions elicited more words and sexual abuse disclosures from Aboriginal children compared to direct questions. Study 3 also indicated that Aboriginal children might benefit from cued open-ended questions, as children provided more information in response to questions that contained leading information (e.g., “I heard that you went swimming, tell me about that” [when the child had not previously mentioned swimming]) compared to direct or non-leading open-ended questions. Future research should focus on the value of including non-suggestive cues (i.e., previously disclosed details) in open-ended questions with Aboriginal children.
While Studies 1 and 3 examined the types of questions suitable for Aboriginal children, Study 4 shed light on the amount of questions typically required to elicit disclosures of sexual abuse in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children. It specifically focused on children who expressed shame during interviews and found that interviewers delivered almost twice as many prompts to elicit disclosures from children who expressed shame in their interviews compared to those who did not express shame. Indeed, children who expressed shame received an average of 60 prompts before a disclosure was made. Taken together with the results of Studies 1 and 3, such findings indicate the importance of patience and persistence with narrative prompting, and perhaps also point to the need for greater use of silence by interviewers, especially when interviewing Aboriginal children who express shame during investigative interviews.

Study 4 also examined supportive reminders (e.g., “You don’t need to feel shame”) as a strategy for addressing shame and reducing children’s reluctance to discuss sexual abuse. The most cutting-edge research in child forensic interviews (Hershkowitz, 2009; Hershkowitz et al., 2014; Hershkowitz et al., 2015; Lamb, Hershkowitz, & Lyon, 2013) is beginning to examine socio-emotional topics such as children’s reluctance when talking about child sexual assault. From this research, interview protocols are now being revised to be more sensitive to children’s needs. As shame is a salient feature in Aboriginal culture, it would have been remiss not to consider its presence in forensic interviews with Aboriginal children regarding sexual abuse. Study 4 found that verbal shame responses occurred in just over one-quarter of the interviews with Aboriginal children, and interviewers often reacted to these responses by providing supportive reminders. While the results of Study 4
signaled the value of relaying supportive reminders when children express shame, further research needs to examine the effectiveness of such a strategy in more depth.

9.4 Other Chief Findings

Study 2 revealed some unusual findings: when recalling the same innocuous event, girls produced more words and target details, and fewer confabulations compared to the boys. In other words, their accounts were significantly more informative and accurate compared to the boys. Previous studies that have employed similar events with non-Aboriginal children have not found such gender effects (e.g., Brubacher et al., 2011; Powell et al., 2003b; Roberts & Powell, 2007). These findings regarding gender may be due to the fact that two female interviewers conducted all of the interviews in Study 2. Some research has found that girls are more informative in response to specific questions when they are asked by female rather than male interviewers (Lamb & Garretson, 2003), but most of the questions posed in Study 2 were open-ended. More importantly, in Aboriginal culture, there are strong rules governing interactions between genders and what types of information can be discussed (Eades, 1982; Roe, 2010), often leading experts and agencies to advise that the gender of the service provider should be matched with the Aboriginal client (Eades, 1992; Queensland Government, 2011). Therefore, despite the innocuous nature of the laboratory event, girls may have felt more comfortable than the boys discussing the event with a female interviewer.

Interestingly, gender differences were not replicated in Studies 3 or 4; however, there were only ten males in the sample and interviewers’ genders could not be obtained (although given the recommendations regarding gender-matching, it is possible that boys were interviewed by male interviewers and vice versa for girls).
Future studies should include interviewers of both genders to determine whether Aboriginal boys are just as informative and accurate as girls when male interviewers are involved, or whether gender differences are due to other influences. In the meantime, the results of Study 2 allude to the idea that interviewer gender is an important factor to consider when interviewing Aboriginal children (i.e., that genders should be matched between interviewer and child).

9.5 Final Conclusions

Like all research, this thesis contained a number of limitations. Study 1 asked participants to consider Aboriginal language and culture in general, and the ensuing three studies concentrated on Aboriginal children from communities in two Australian jurisdictions. While many experiences and styles of relating are shared across communities, it should be emphasised that Aboriginal communities in Australia are diverse in terms of many aspects (e.g., languages, remoteness, cultural practices, attitudes to authority agencies etc.). This thesis does not intend to provide a one-size-fits-all protocol to interview all Aboriginal children. Rather, the findings are general enough to provide a foundation for interviewers to form their interviews with Aboriginal children. As previous work suggests (Powell, 2000), interviewers will need to research each community before conducting an interview with an Aboriginal child, and of course be mindful of each child’s communication styles and needs. This may be time-consuming for interviewers, but the task needs to be prioritised in order to gain the best possible evidence.

This thesis also focused on verbal interviewing techniques rather than a broader consideration of non-verbal and environmental elements that may be relevant to interviewing Aboriginal children. This limitation was particularly evident
when examining expressions of shame, as these can be signaled in a number of non-verbal ways (Bonanno et al., 2002; Taylor et al., 2009). It was outside of the scope of this thesis, however, to examine non-verbal shame expressions and other contextual factors in more depth. From anecdotal evidence and my experience in remote Aboriginal communities, many ideas worthy of future empirical research arose. For example, researchers could test whether Aboriginal children benefit from having their interviews conducted outside rather than in clinical rooms where they appeared to be uncomfortable, or whether it is advantageous to have a support person present during the interview. Some research has found that support people (related to the child) can impede the interview process by reducing the informativeness of children’s responses (Santtila, Korkman, & Kenneth Sandnabba, 2004); however, participants in Study 1 described that relationships in many Aboriginal communities are often communal rather than dyadic. Therefore, it could be hypothesised that Aboriginal children might benefit from having others present rather than a one-on-one interview. The findings from Study 4 also suggest that further research needs to focus on supportive techniques that interviewers can engage in to aid Aboriginal children who may be feeling shame to disclose and discuss sexual abuse.

Despite its limits, this thesis has made a valuable contribution, especially to those who are at the forefront of interviewing Aboriginal children in cases of sexual abuse. Previously, interviewers had a dearth of specific information to guide them when interviewing Aboriginal children. This thesis offers some clarity surrounding interview protocols with Aboriginal children, and practical information that interviewers can easily apply in the field. Chiefly, four recommendations can be drawn from the theses’ findings: (i) interviewers should relay ground rules to Aboriginal children, and practise them with simple adjustments in phraseology; (ii)
interviewers should conduct a practice narrative with Aboriginal children before moving to the substantive phase of the interview; (iii) interviewers should predominantly ask Aboriginal children cued open-ended prompts and avoid direct questions where possible; and (iv) interviewers should be aware of shame in investigative interviews with Aboriginal children and consider using supportive reminders to aid the disclosure and discussion of sexual abuse. While additional research on these topics is warranted, the recommendations are in line with existing guidelines for non-Aboriginal children.

Essentially, this thesis demonstrates that the core phases of best-practice interview protocols are suitable with Australian Aboriginal children. It also suggests that slight modifications could be made to best-practice protocols to tailor them to Aboriginal children. Based on the findings of this thesis, previous research (Eades, 2013; Mushin & Gardner, 2009), and collaboration with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal industry partners, a revised protocol for use with Aboriginal children has now been developed by my supervisors and I (see Appendix). This practical resource includes the original phases of best-practice protocols, but also highlights modifications for Aboriginal children in red. As the bulk of interviews are conducted in Standard Australian English with non-Indigenous interviewers, it is likely that this resource will aid intercultural communication in the investigative interview context. Moreover, such a tool is constructive regardless of whether an interpreter is present, because interpreters need to easily understand and translate the interviewer’s statements and prompts. An obvious path for future research is now to test whether Aboriginal children provide more accurate and detailed narratives when interviewed with the revised versus non-revised protocol.
Ultimately, the current thesis has important implications for Aboriginal children. The accuracy and completeness of children’s accounts is paramount, especially in sexual abuse cases where it is often the predominant form of evidence (Quadara, 2014). This research has shed light on some of the most appropriate ways to interview Aboriginal children. Hopefully, the thesis will serve as a launching point for the development of a strong and relevant body of research aimed at improving the interview experience for Aboriginal children and maximising the quality of their accounts. If Aboriginal children are interviewed effectively, there could be some positive repercussions such as the removal from an abusive situation, better relationships with police, increased rates of seeking help, and/or potentially higher reporting, charge or conviction rates of child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities (see Pipe, Orbach, Lamb, Abbott, & Stewart, 2013). Lastly, while this thesis focused on Australian Aboriginal children, there may also be implications for Indigenous children from other countries who share similar experiences and communication styles (e.g., Canada’s First Nations peoples) (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008).
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Appendix

Revised Sections of Standard Interview Method

1. Introduction

(In formal voice, not directed at child)

The date is …………………………… and the time is …………………………….

I’m sitting with …………….. (interviewee’s full name and also state preferred
name if this is different from interviewee’s full name), who is …… years old and
whose birthday is on …………….. My name is ………………………………………… (and with me is ……………………….
(Only introduce your monitor if present in the interview room).(If an interpreter is present
please have them introduce themselves for the camera). We are at the …………………………………….

(state location of interview).

Thanks for coming to talk to me. My job is to talk to children [people] about
things that have happened, so they can tell the truth. Will you tell me the truth?

Thanks for having a yarn with me. My job is to talk to children [blokes/you
mob] about things that have happened, so they can tell me their true story. Will
you tell me your true story?

2. Ground rules

[When hypotheticals are still necessary, use ‘I might’ instead of ‘if’]

I have a few things to tell you before we start.

You may take a break when you need to.

You may use any words you want.

I will write things when you talk. It helps me remember what you say.

I might ask something you don’t understand. Just say ‘I don’t understand’.

[pause]

I might ask something and you don’t know the answer. Just say ‘I don’t know’

[pause]

And I might say things that are wrong. You should tell me, because I don’t
know what’s happened.

So if I said you’re a boy (girl), what would you say?

If child doesn’t respond verbally, say: Are you a boy (girl)?
If child denies but does not correct, say: Right, you’re not a boy, so you say ‘{Name of interviewer}, No, I’m a girl’. If child corrects, say: That’s good you told me the truth. You’re not a boy, you’re a girl.

Avoid “boy/girl” with Aboriginal children over 10 years. Instead: If I said you were from [wrong location], what would you say?

3. Practice narrative

Aim for about 3-5 minutes in practice.

If the child discloses abuse early (prior to termination of practice), listen to what child has to say and don’t interrupt, acknowledge what (s)he has said, and then say: Thank you for telling me that, that’s what we’re here to talk about today, but first I’d just like to spend a few minutes getting to know you better.

Begin by saying: Let’s get started. First I’d like to get to know you better.

Begin by saying: Let’s get started. First let’s get to know each other. Last year I went to X [e.g., festival in town]. I did X, Y and Z (provide brief narrative; no more than 30 seconds).

3a. Choosing an Event

Tell me something fun you’ve done recently.

If the child does not respond: Tell me something you like to do.

If child still does not respond again, and you have an event provided by the caregiver (e.g., you know the child attends swimming lessons) try to elicit it non-suggestively (E.g., Do you play any sports? or Do you have any hobbies?).

If you cannot find an event to discuss, you may ask the child what (s)he did yesterday or today (e.g., Tell me everything you did today, from the time you woke up this morning until the time you arrived here today) but be aware that information related to the allegation may arise earlier than desired. Do not ask children to recount the plots of books, movies or videogames.
3b. Prompting details about a specific occurrence

Have you (done/gone to) X one time or more than one time?

(If repeated event) Tell me all about the last time you did [EVENT].

If the child referred to a specific occurrence of event (e.g., I did ballet last Tuesday), go with that occurrence, as opposed to ‘the last time’.

(If single event) Tell me all about when you did [EVENT].

3c. Useful prompts for Practice and for probing Episodes in the Substantive Phase

Use any of the following prompts to encourage the child to talk about the event for 3-5 minutes.

- What happened then?
- What happened next?
- What happened after that?
- Tell me more about …?
- What else happened?
- And then what happened?
- Tell me everything that happened from the time (portion of event)
- What happened when…?
- Tell me more about the part where…
- You said X. Tell me more about X.
- Tell me the whole story
- Tell me about that story

Encourage the child report what happened, as opposed to descriptive information. It is particularly important to tolerate longer periods of silence with Aboriginal children. It may also be helpful to concentrate on cued open-ended prompts (e.g., Tell me more about…? What happened at the part where…?) rather than the broader open-ended prompts (e.g., Tell me everything…?).
4. Substantive phase

Thank you for telling me about [EVENT]. Now let’s talk about why you’re here today. Tell me what you’ve come to talk about.

[Remain patient and persistent with open-ended questioning when attempting to elicit a disclosure.] If children appear to be feeling shame, it may be helpful to offer some supportive reminders directly addressing shame (e.g., “You don’t need to feel shame when talking to me today”).

4a. Identifying multiple incidents

Once child has produced an abuse-related utterance, ask:

Did X [abuse as disclosed by the child in his/her words] happen one time or more than one time?

6. Further questioning

If some central details of the allegation are still missing or unclear after exhausting the open-ended questions, further questioning is needed. If certain information is missing it may be necessary to ask highly specific questions. Where possible, specific questions should be S.A.F.E. (simple language, absence of specific details or coercive techniques, flexibility on the part of the interviewee to choose to details will be reported, and encouragement of an elaborate response, Powell & Snow, 2007a).

First focus the child's attention on the detail mentioned and the specific occurrence you are referring to, and then ask the focused question. Discuss the occurrences in the same order as during open questioning and exhaust each before moving on. Clarify any matters if needed and ensure all elements of the offence(s) have been elicited from the child.

General Format of Specific Questions:

You said [person/object/activity] [occurrence], [completion of the focused question.]
[Child response.]
[Open-ended prompt].

You may need to soften the direct questions for Aboriginal children. E.g., “I need to know where he touched you.” [Wait for response] “Tell me about that.”