"If They Knew What I Was Thinking:" What Sex Offenders Can Teach Us About Interviewing

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Why Do We Need Sex Offenders To Admit?

• Children (victims) suffer less.

- Less guilt/self-blame
- Less need to testify
- Family more supportive

Victim and offender can start treatment from a better place.

- Increase offender accountability, surveillance and relapse prevention techniques.
- Reduce risk in future "safety planning" or family reunification.

System Benefits

- "Confessions have a greater impact on jury decisions than witness statement or even, hard physical evidence." (Kassin & Kneuman, 1997)
- Confessions were one of the primary reasons for charging in 37% of cases (Gray, 1993).
- Result in more "guilty" pleas and convictions.
- Reduce the use of valuable resources by police and court systems.

Improving Offender Accountability

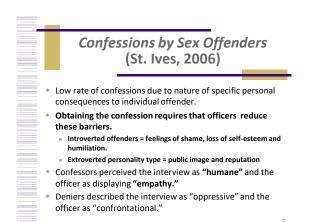
- Do you know what your confession rate is?
- Are you tracking it?
- Why not?
- What would it take to start?

Confession Rates • Confessions rates for general crimes 42% to 55% (Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004). • Confessions rates for child sexual offenders range from 21% to 37%. • Reduction probably due to increased shame interviewer skills. • Advanced age, experience with criminal justice system, and generic criminality decrease

More Studies

- Confessions more likely when offender was White, single, had a higher IQ, expressed feelings of guilt, had a dependent personality, and "seduced" as opposed to violently offended child victim (St Yves, 2002).
- Found that child molesters were more likely to confess than rapists or violent child molesters (Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2000).

confession rates.



Interactions Between Factors Related to the Decisions of Sex Offenders to Confess During Police Interrogations (Beauregard, et al. 2010)

- 624 sex offenders in Canadian prison system.
- 39% CM, 25% Rape III, 36% Rape/Sex Assault.
- Average age = 39.
- Average prison sentence = 4.2 years.
- 30.6% were sexual recidivists.

Interactions Between Factors Related to the Decisions of Sex Offenders to Confess During Police Interrogations (Beauregard, et al. 2010)

- 43% confessed, 57% did not.
- Found that offenders were more likely to confess if they were:
 - Introverted (avoidant, dependent, passive-aggressive)
 - Specialists (sex offenders vs. general criminals).
 - Had deviant sexual fantasies prior to offense.
 - Had male victims, and/or the victim came from "criminal environment" (child was being neglected or maltreated by own family, living in poverty, parents were criminals, etc.)

Understanding the Psychology of Child Molesters: A Key to Getting Confessions (O'Conner & Carson, 2005)

- Interviewed 45 incarcerated child molesters
- 36% confessed, 64% hadn't.
- Officers who exhibited "decency, patience, composure, and professionalism" had been more likely to elicit confessions.
- Offenders reported that they knew "within seconds," whether or not "there would be rapport, or honest conversation."
- Results suggested that police should use a "pseudotherapeutic approach" to interviewing.
 - "non-threatening," "non-judgmental," and "empathetic."

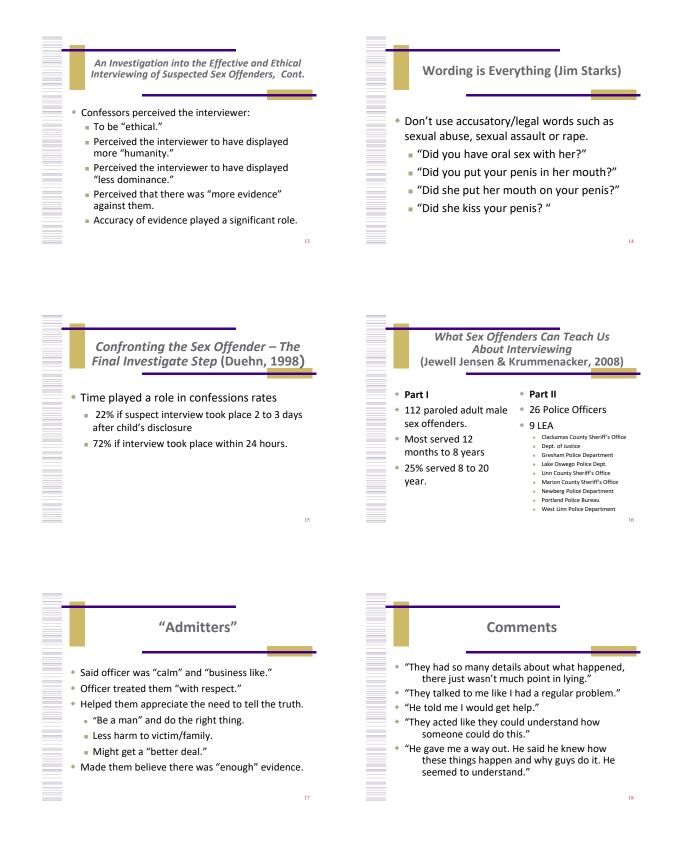
An Investigation into the Effective and Ethical Interviewing of Suspected Sex Offenders (Kebbell, Hurren and Mazerolle, 2006)

- 19 incarcerated sex offenders.
- 17 confessed, 2 didn't.
- Semi structured interviews.
- Participants more often confessed if they thought they would receive "a more lenient" sentence.
- Results supported the use of "fair, compassionate, non-aggressive and honest" interviewing procedures.
- Interviewer dominance associated with a reduction in confession rates.

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An Investigation into the Effective and Ethical Interviewing of Suspected Sex Offenders, Cont.

- Subjects were impacted by minimization ("it's not like you killed her" or "other people have done things that are much worse") and maximization ("at least you are standing up and taking the blame like a man" or "you might have touched the kid inappropriately, but admitting it now will help them get over it").
- Displaying an understanding of "cognitive distortions" ("you just got too close to the kid and were showing the kid how much you loved them") led to increased effectiveness in interviewing.
- Empathy ("I know you didn't mean to hurt them" or "I know how hard this must be for you").



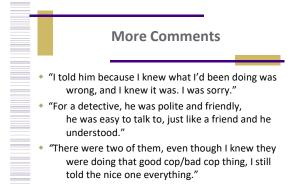
Cory Jewell Jensen, M.S.



* "They came in and caught us together. One cop took her in the other room and started questioning her while the other one kept me in the living room. I could hear the cop talking to her. He was talking to her about being a rape victim. I knew the way he was talking to her, he was going to screw her up more, so I confessed so he'd stop talking to her.

"While they were talking to me they said they understood how someone could do something like that, I didn't feel like such a monster."

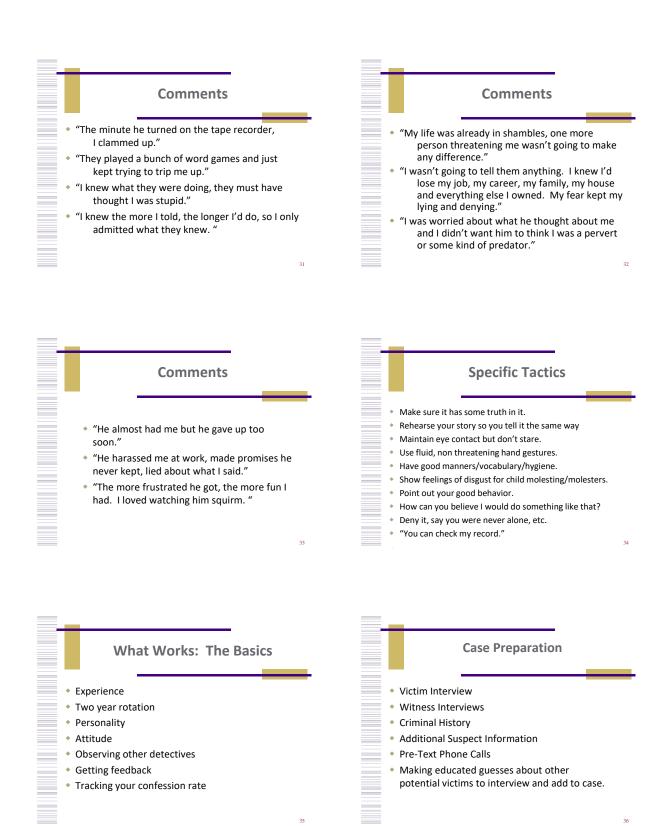
- "The cop told me they had everything they needed and just wanted to hear my side for the record."
- "He took his time with me. He was patient and really seemed to want to see it from my point of view."
- "Even though I knew he was doing his job, he treated me fair."
- "He didn't even treat me like a pervert."

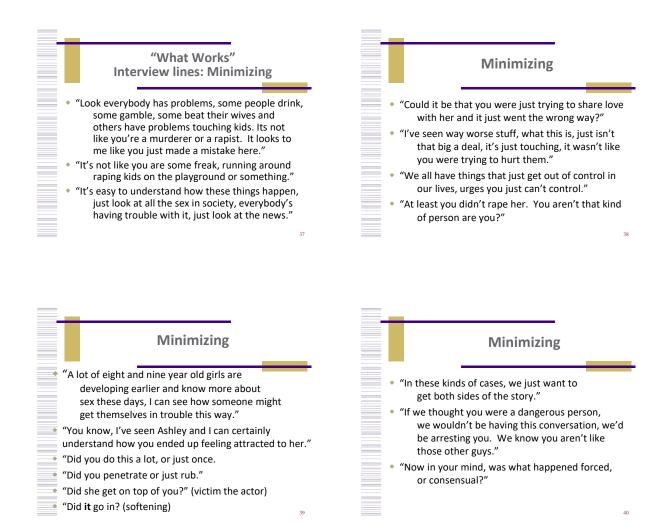


"The cop told me lying would only hurt my family more." 23









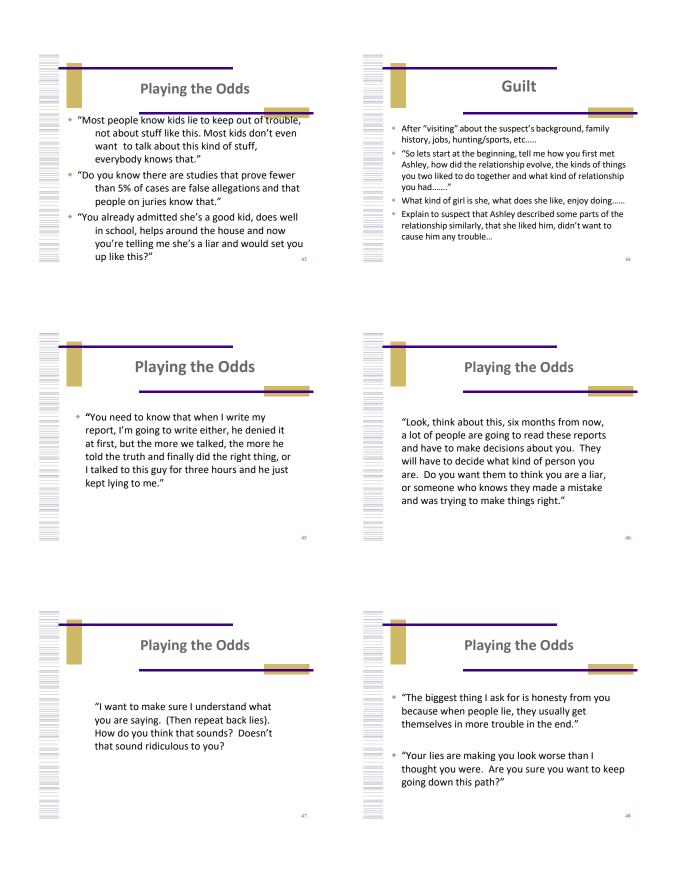
Empathy and Understanding

"It's ok if you change your story as we go along. I know it's hard to admit these kinds of things and talk about them. As you get to feeling more comfortable it will be easier to talk about and I won't think badly of you for that."

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Maximization: Playing the Odds

"Think about it this way, imagine you are on a jury and you hear some poor little kid have to testify about being molested. Then, you hear this guy come in, with all the excuses and bullshit you're giving me, who would you believe? And then, when it came time to dole out the punishment, what would you do if you thought the guy did it, then lied about it and forced the poor kid to testify?"





Apology Letters

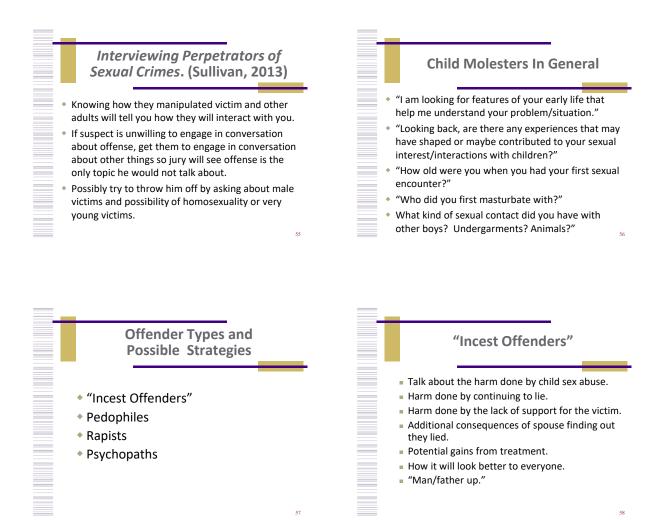
 "I bet you'd feel a whole lot better about yourself if you wrote her a letter apologizing for what happened between the two of you. It would also show that you know what you did is wrong and people will think better of you for doing that."

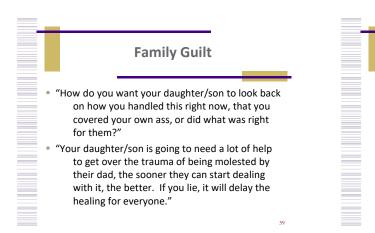
 "If you could get a message to the victim, what would you say?"

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After the Confession

- "Is there anything I forgot to ask you about?"
- "Have I done anything to threaten or intimidate you, or have I promised you anything?"
- "Anything you would like the Court to know?"
- "What do you think should happen to you?"
- "So, why did you tell me all this stuff?"
- "Is there anything you could tell me to help me do a better job with people who are in your situation in the future?"

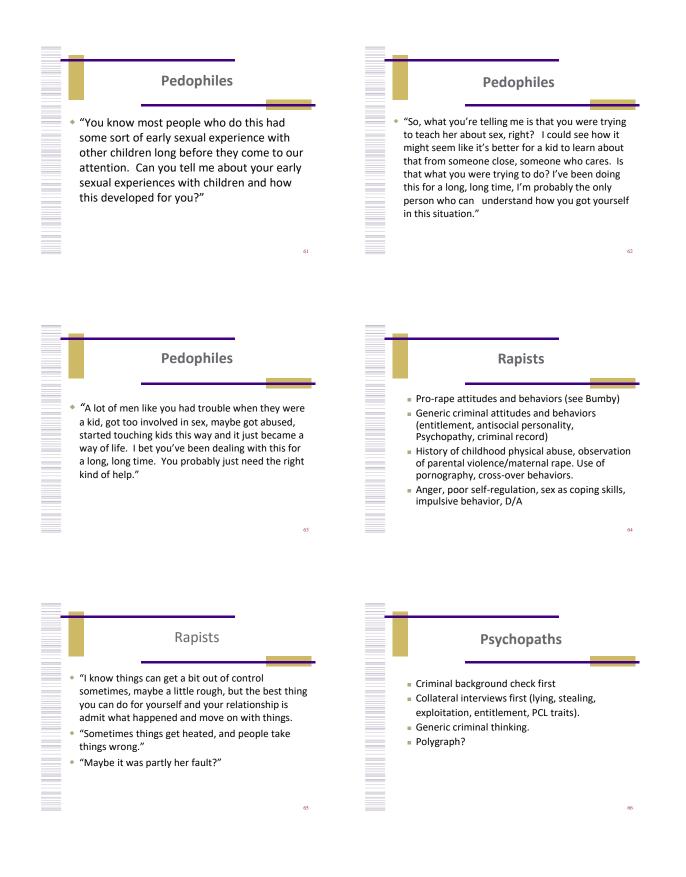






 Sexual development of pedophilic arousal (early sexualization via peer play, abuse, incest, exposure to pornography or adult sexuality.)

- Pro-pedophilic attitudes and behaviors.
- Recent impact of exposure to child pornography and pro-pedophilic attitudes via the environment or Internet.
- Suspect's inability to control it on his own, without professional help.







- We should always consider the possibility that a suspect might be an unusually gifted performer.
- Some people view their behavior in a distorted manner, eliminating any chance of guilt, shame or confession.
- Other suspects may feel excitement, either when anticipating the challenge or during the very moment of lying.

Other findings/speculations

- Special interest in deception detection and advanced training were correlated with accuracy.
- Age, gender and job experience were not.
- In some groups, age was negatively correlated (>40).
- Desk jobs diminish accuracy.

"Most of us would do well to entertain some skepticism about our ability to detect deception" based solely on demeanor." Eckman, 1999

- Confidence in ability was not correlated.
- Increased accuracy appeared to be based on the ability to spot and decode emotional non-verbal cues on the face.
- Professional whose case loads involve a low base rate of deception do better than those with a high base rate.

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Many Thanks to Some of Oregon's Finest

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- Newberg Police Dept.
- West Linn Police Dept.