

Developing Rapport with Children in Forensic Interviews: Systematic Review of Experimental Research

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The vast majority of guidelines recommend that developing rapport with children is essential for successful forensic child interviewing; however, the question remains as to whether there is a sufficient body of scientific research to generate evidence-based guidelines for developing rapport with children in legal contexts. To answer this question, we conducted a systematic review of the literature to identify experimental studies of the effects of rapport-building methods on the reliability of children's reports. Independent raters applied 12 exclusion criteria to the 2,761 potentially relevant articles located by electronic and hand searches of the literature. Experimental studies were few. Although studies to date are a beginning, the overall scientific base is weak regarding even basic issues such as how to best define rapport and the efficacy of common rapport-building techniques. This systematic review highlights what we know, what we do not know, and how much more we need to know to create evidence-based best practice. Recommendations for reshaping the research agenda are discussed. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

DEVELOPING RAPPORT WITH CHILDREN IN FORENSIC INTERVIEWS: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH

Over the last 25 years, research on child forensic interviewing has enjoyed major advances in laboratory research, field study, and practice. The bulk of experimental research has focused on children's cognitive limitations in memory and suggestibility. Research paradigms and outcome measures have been driven in large part by their implications for sexual abuse allegations in adversarial criminal courts where children are often the sole witnesses with little corroborative evidence. In such cases, the accuracy of the children's memory is paramount.

However, increasingly children are called upon to provide information to decision-makers in a widening array of other legal proceedings that vary on a number of dimensions from burdens of proof to children's roles (e.g., immigration, divorce and custody,

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adoption, neglect, foster care, delinquency) (Cashmore, 2002, 2014; Goodnow, 2014; Head, 2011; McCart, Ogden, & Henggeler, 2014; Melton, Gross-Manos, Ben-Arieh, Yazykova, 2014; Saywitz & Camparo, 2014a). Public policies are being enacted worldwide that encourage children to attend hearings and provide input into decisions that affect their welfare (e.g., U. N. General Assembly, 1989, Article 12). As expectations about children's agency, competence, and participation in society have changed, a near exclusive focus on memory and suggestibility interview outcomes may no longer be advisable. With greater child participation in expanding legal contexts, the roles of socio-emotional factors, such as interpersonal rapport, take on greater importance and urgency.

Interviews in legal contexts demand a level of honesty, openness, and effort from children that is rare in their typical interactions with strangers. Unfamiliar interviewers must gain trust and cooperation from children accustomed to speaking primarily with relatives, friends, neighbors, and teachers, especially about topics that are private, upsetting, or frightening. In legal contexts, children are brought by others, rather than of their own volition, often at the behest of those outside their families (e.g., police, child welfare). It is not surprising that some children are reticent, anxious, or uncommunicative.

For example, children in immigration courts seeking asylum find themselves in an unfamiliar culture, without social support from family or friends, fleeing from prior persecution, fearful of authorities, and with little reason to place their faith in the fairness of governmental institutions. Certainly, child witnesses in criminal and dependency courts express anxiety and confusion, as well as concerns about the consequences of their reports, especially if they fear danger to themselves or their loved ones as a result of questioning (e.g., Block, Oran, Oran, Baumrind, & Goodman, 2010; Quas, Wallin, Horwitz, Davis, & Lyon, 2009; Sas, Austin, Wolfe, & Hurley, 1991). In foster care, some children express feelings of helplessness that can impair motivation to cooperate—many are unclear about why they are involved in the legal system, feel they had little say in what has happened to them, and believe professionals have hidden agendas that prevent them from really hearing what children have to say (Burgess, Rossvoll, Wallace, & Daniel, 2010; Gilligan, 2000; McLeod, 2006). Each of these legal contexts presents unique challenges to rapport development.

Moreover, the children most likely to be interviewed in the legal context may have an even greater need for rapport-building efforts than other children. Maltreated children have more difficulty establishing an alliance with a mental health professional than comparison groups, even when level of psychopathology is statistically controlled (Eltz, Shirk, & Sarlin, 1995). Children who have experienced harsh parenting (e.g., emotional or physical abuse) or overly lax parenting (i.e., neglect) may have low expectations about developing high levels of rapport and communication with adults that interfere with establishing rapport (Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1980; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008).

The notion that high levels of interpersonal rapport facilitate interview goals has been present in the clinical literature since its psychoanalytic roots over a century ago. Freud (1913) purported that one's first aim of treatment is to establish "proper rapport" before one "clears away resistances" (p. 375). Through a succession of neo-analytic theories, the importance of establishing rapport has been maintained, albeit with surprisingly little empirical support (e.g., Beebe & Lachmann, 2002; Mahler,

Pine, & Bergman, 1975; Shore, 1997; Stern, 1985; Winnicott, 1965). Even in the forensic context, most guidelines consider establishing rapport as essential before entertaining substantive questions (e.g., Carnes, Wilson, & Nelson-Gardell, 1999; Lamb, Hershkowitz, Orbach & Esplin, 2008; Memon, Wark, Bull, & Koehnken, 1997; Home Office, 2011; Saywitz & Camparo, 2014b).

Although it is assumed that rapport has a positive impact on interview outcome, some experts have raised doubts. Whereas too little rapport is thought to leave children without the incentive to be open and honest with unfamiliar adults, too much rapport, or certain kinds of rapport, are thought to increase children's suggestibility out of a desire to please the interviewer and avoid adult disappointment or rejection, thereby compromising children's accuracy (Ceci & Bruck, 1993; Hershkowitz, 2011; Underwager & Wakefield, 1990).

Additionally, there is concern about a negative association between length of rapport-building and children's productivity in subsequent substantive questioning (Davies, Westcott, & Horan, 2000; Hershkowitz, 2009; Teoh & Lamb, 2010). That is, children may not have enough attentional resources to apply to substantive questioning if rapport building is too extensive. Protocols vary dramatically from an entire session devoted to rapport development (Carnes *et al.*, 1999) to two minutes of introductions (e.g., Davis & Bottoms, 2002). Further, it is not at all clear that experienced interviewers intuitively know the best ways to establish rapport. Hershkowitz *et al.* (2006) found that investigative interviewers in the field responded to children's initial uncooperativeness with increasingly less supportive rather than more supportive comments. These counterproductive measures only served to harden children's resistance further. Given the lack of consensus on the amount or kind of rapport that is optimal, a review of the literature is imperative to help answer these questions.

Despite consensus in both clinical and forensic circles that rapport is essential to successful interviewing, the question remains as to whether there is sufficient scientific evidence on which to base best-practice guidelines for developing rapport with children in legal contexts. That is, how can interviewers engage children, helping them to be open, forthcoming, and cooperative, and to overcome obstacles, such as anxiety or mistrust, fear or ambivalence, threats or secrets, *without jeopardizing the accuracy of the information they provide?* In response to this pressing question, we conducted a systematic review of the experimental research on developing rapport with children in forensic interviews. Before turning to our method and results, we briefly review background literature on rapport development.

Defining and Operationalizing Rapport

Rapport has been deemed the key to gaining a child's cooperation and trust (e.g., Greenspan & Greenspan, 1991). It is thought that when children feel respected, accepted, and safe in the interview, they respond more freely and honestly (Hughes & Baker, 1990). The relationship with the interviewer is thought to be an important determinant of the child's communicative competence and self-disclosure. In fact, the more sensitive the information sought, the more important the relationship in terms of warmth and responsiveness (Yarrow, 1960). However, rapport can be as hard to define as it is necessary for the success of interviews (Barker, 1990).

Components of rapport often noted in the literature include friendly conversation, eye gaze, smiling, uncrossed arms, posture mirroring, and open-ended questions asking for self-description and feeling states (e.g., Keller, Ford, & Meacham, 1978). To establish rapport, textbooks suggest a wide array of strategies, including friendliness, humor, warmth, play, attention, empathy, sensitivity, tact, and timing (e.g., Cepeda, 2010). However, studies of the efficacy of these individual elements are scarce. Moreover, often rapport is poorly distinguished from other related, but distinct constructs, such as interviewer supportiveness. Some researchers include building good rapport as an element of supportiveness; others include being supportive as part of building good rapport (e.g., Davis & Bottoms, 2002; Goodman, Bottoms, Schwartz-Kenny, & Rudy, 1991; Hershkowitz, Orbach, Lamb, Sternberg, and Horowitz, 2006). Definitional issues become murky.

According to Sattler's (1998) definition in his seminal book on child interviewing, "Interviewers must establish an accepting atmosphere in which interviewees feel comfortable talking about themselves . . . without fear of judgment or criticism" (p. 18). "Rapport is based on mutual confidence, respect, and acceptance" (p. 60). Sattler's definition implies that both the child's and the interviewer's subjective experience of the interview (and of each other) are important criteria for successful rapport development. When a high degree of rapport exists, each partner in the transaction feels valued by the other (Barker, 1990). In support of this conceptualization, Rotenberg et al. (2003) found that preschoolers' ratings of adult trustworthiness and likability were positively related to greater rapport and that rapport was positively correlated with self-disclosure, although this study was not designed to assess effects of rapport on accuracy of children's reports. As this short discussion illustrates, definitions vary widely across the literature and often lack clarity.

Theoretical Foundations of Rapport

Izard (1990) proposed secure attachment as a model for good rapport. Mothers of securely attached infants are sensitive and responsive to the signals of their infants and engage in mutual gazing and synchronous behavior (de Wolff & van IJzendoorn, 1997). By analogy, good rapport is characterized by trust, warmth, and low levels of anxiety, disclosure of personal information, calmness, and children's perceptions of likeability and trustworthiness (Rotenberg et al., 2003). Using attachment theory as a starting point, certainly, rapport is not a static concept or limited to a preliminary phase of an interview. Rapport waxes and wanes over the course of the interview as it moves from cursory getting-to-know-you conversation to sensitive and painful topics. Children's subsequent responses are often a function of small balloons floated earlier in the conversation to test the interviewer's reaction. In keeping with the relational revolution in psychology as a whole (e.g., Beebe & Lachmann, 2002; Robb, 2007; Shore, 1997), fluctuating levels of rapport are achieved through bidirectional transactions between children and interviewers evolving over time. In fact, there is some evidence for generalizing from this theory to the forensic interview. Gilstrap and her colleagues found that an interviewer's use of leading questions may be a response to the frustration of dealing with an uncooperative child (Gilstrap & Ceci, 2005).

In addition to attachment theory, developmental and psychoanalytic theories highlight the importance of rapport, suggesting rapport is co-constructed by the unfolding of each individual's ongoing self-regulation at the same time as it is being continuously

modified by the changing behavior of the partner (e.g., Beebe & Lachmann, 2002; Mahler *et al.*, 1975; Piaget, 1954; Sameroff, 1983; Stern, 1985; Tronick & Cohn, 1989; Winnicott, 1965; Werner, 1948). In other words, we are always monitoring and regulating our inner state at the same time as we are tracking our partner's words and actions. Rather than a discrete, static, individualistic view of rapport, rapport is conceptualized as the moment-to-moment interplay of two people co-regulating their affect states, behaviors, goals, and words. Additionally, theoretical insights come from outside psychology, including communication theory (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008), ethnography (James, 2001), and neurobiology (Lacoboni, 2009). Hence, there is no shortage of relevant theories from which researchers could develop predictions about rapport development to be tested.

Factors Influencing Rapport Development

Depending on one's definition and theory, one can predict that individual, developmental, cultural, motivational, and contextual factors could influence the rapport between the child and the interviewer. There is some evidence that individual differences in child temperament (shyness vs. sociability) might mediate rapport development and interview outcomes (Rotenberg, *et al.*, 2003; Gilstrap & Papierno, 2004). The same may be true of adults. Individual differences in interviewer personality might mediate rapport development (e.g., patience, frustration tolerance, sense of humor). In the psychotherapy outcome literature, a significant portion of the variance in outcome is due to a set of therapist interpersonal facilitative skills (e.g., warmth, acceptance, empathy) independent of the specific treatment technique utilized (Lambert & Barley, 2001). Hence, identifying relevant individual differences in the interviewers, as well as children, could be explanatory.

Finally, developmental differences are likely to influence rapport development. No doubt, methods of developing rapport with a preschooler exhibiting intense separation anxiety will differ from those used with a recalcitrant adolescent seeking to assert autonomy by engaging the interviewer in a power struggle over who is in control of the interview. Developmental sensitivity is considered a key rapport-building principle. Nevertheless, it is not clear how developmental differences are at play in rapport development. Rotenberg *et al.* (2003) found that adult smiling, but not eye gaze, promoted rapport with preschoolers; yet it is not known whether these interviewer behaviors operate similarly with older children. Clearly, the role of developmental differences will need to be part of any evidence base on rapport.

Effects of Rapport on Interview Outcomes

Researchers have examined a variety of outcome variables. In one well-known study, Feldman and Sullivan (1971) demonstrated that a few moments of rapport building at the beginning of each subtest of an intelligence test resulted in significantly higher intelligence quotients than standard rapport conditions. Rapport is thought to increase disclosure of emotional states, self-concept, and motivation (Feldman & Sullivan, 1971; Rotenberg, *et al.*, 2003). Researchers have suggested that higher levels of rapport improve communication (Davis & Bottoms, 2002) and verbal productivity (Sternberg *et al.*, 1997) as well as lower anxiety (Hershkowitz, Lamb, Katz, & Malloy, 2013; Sattler, 1998) and suggestibility (Wood & Garven, 2000; Teoh & Lamb, 2010). Hence,

there are many interview outcomes hypothesized to be affected by the level of rapport achieved between the child and the adult. However, the question remains as to whether these hypotheses have been adequately tested.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Virtually every protocol, guideline, and literature review recommends that rapport is essential to successful interviewing of children. Yet it is not clear whether there is sufficient experimental evidence on which to base best-practice guidelines. The amount of time spent, the exact techniques utilized, and the criteria by which interviewers judge high levels of rapport to be successfully achieved, vary widely or are not addressed in the literature (e.g., Abbe & Brandon, 2013; Cepeda, 2010; Hershkowitz et al., 2006; Sattler, 1998; Saywitz & Camparo, 2014b). A systematic review of research is needed to identify what we know, what we do not know, and what we need to know to establish optimal rapport without compromising children's accuracy. In response to this pressing need, the aim of the present study is to conduct such a systematic review of the literature to identify a core body of experimental research (using randomized controlled trials) regarding the effects of rapport-building methods on the reliability of child interview outcomes.

Systematic reviews are a relatively new, rapidly growing, state-of-the-art method for managing large amounts of information used to develop evidence-based policies and practices (Gough, Oliver & Thomas, 2012; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). A systematic review aims to synthesize research that bears on a particular question, using rigorous, transparent, accountable, and replicable procedures at each step, with ample precaution to minimize error and bias. Unlike traditional narrative reviews written by experts who may have their own biases and agendas, the methods of a systematic review are set out in advance, as one would with any piece of social research, including the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies in the review which are applied reliably by independent raters. Systematic reviews are particularly valuable to guide evidence-based practice when a body of literature is controversial and diverse (i.e., the reliability of children's reports), when it is unclear whether particular methods are effective (i.e., rapport-building techniques), and especially when there are claims with strong face validity. Systematic reviews are a method of mapping out areas of uncertainty, identifying where little or no relevant research has been conducted, but where new studies are needed.

METHOD

Data Sources and Search Strategy

Six electronic databases (PsycInfo, PubMed, Sociological Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts, Web of Knowledge, Cochrane Central) were searched to identify experimental studies published in peer-reviewed journals evaluating the effects of rapport-building strategies on the accuracy of children's verbal reports. Additional studies were identified by hand searching the reference lists from 30 authoritative reviews and contacting leading scholars in the field.

Research published in English and in peer-reviewed journals between January 1990 and February 2014 was considered. The year of 1990 was selected because of the surge in research since the ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. Appropriate filters were added to each search strategy as necessary (publication date, age range, language). With the assistance of expert library scientists, care was taken to ensure comparable searches in each database. Searches were conducted using both subject headings (e.g., interviews as topic; interview, psychological; mental recall; questioning; reproducibility of results; child) and key words (e.g., child*, youth, interview*, question*, reliab*, suggest*, valid*, bias, accuracy, mental recall, memory, and recall, where* indicates truncation). The full search strategies are available upon request to first author.

Study Selection (Exclusion Criteria)

All studies generated by the search of the electronic databases were included unless an article met one of the 12 reasons for exclusion listed in Figure 1. Although some exclusionary criteria are self-explanatory, a few require further explanation. First, we required studies to include at least some participants between the ages of 4 and 17 years. Ultimately, this resulted in locating a pool of studies with participants ranging from birth to young adulthood. Second, as we were interested in typically developing children, we excluded studies in which participants were recruited on the basis of their medical or psychiatric diagnoses to eliminate confounding effects of symptoms and medications. Third, our focus was on experimental studies of the efficacy of rapport-building techniques where at least one outcome measure was related to children's response accuracy, that is, studies in

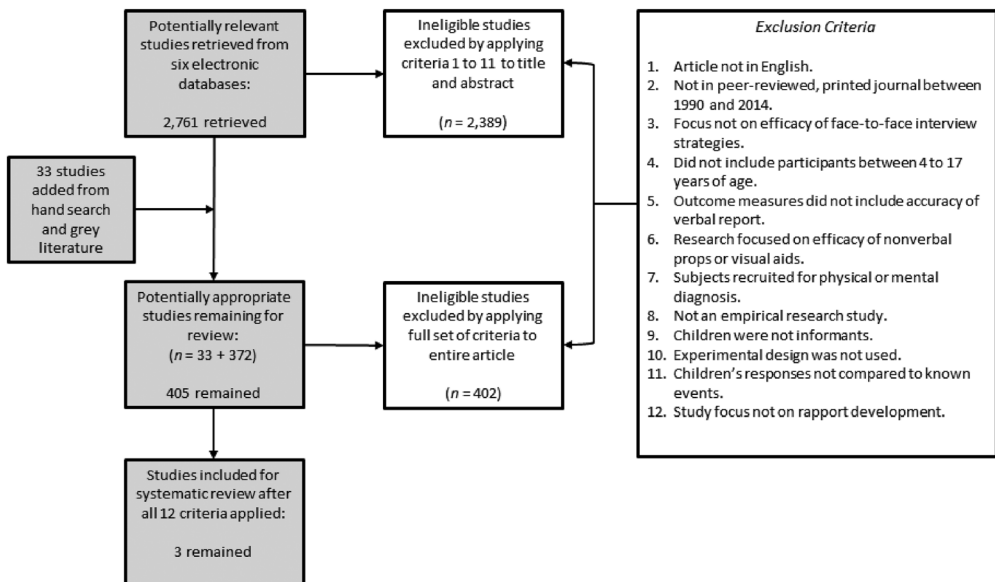


Figure 1. Flow Chart of Identified Studies and Review Process.

which children's responses were compared to known, objective documentation of events (i.e., videotapes, audiotapes, photographs, or adult reports). Finally, we excluded studies where the focus was on nonverbal props, toys, and visual aids, including drawings, as most studies used drawings as a memory aid, not a rapport development tool.

Search Results

Search results are shown in the flow chart in Figure 1. The search identified 2,761 potentially relevant articles. Two raters applied exclusion criteria #1 through #11 to the titles and abstracts and excluded 2,389 ineligible studies with 99% agreement. Differences were resolved by discussion with a third member of the review team. In addition to the 372 potentially appropriate studies remaining for further review, 33 potentially appropriate studies were located through a hand search of the literature and contacting experts in the field. These were added to the database.

These remaining 405 studies were then reviewed by two independent raters, applying the full set of exclusion criteria, and reading the full text of the article as needed. These raters achieved 100% agreement, excluding 402 articles. Three studies remained.¹

While applying our exclusion criteria to the full set of articles, raters found that studies focusing on social support effects often included "simple" rapport as an element of support. Typically, simple rapport was operationalized in these studies as two minutes of introductions (e.g., Davis & Bottoms, 2002) or juice and cookies prior to the interview (e.g., Goodman et al., 1991). Unless researchers operationalized rapport as more than simple rapport, and examined the independent contributions of rapport-building to interview outcome, the studies were excluded from the present review. These studies of interviewer support effects are reviewed elsewhere (Larson, Saywitz, Wells, & Hobbs, 2015).

Study Quality Assessment

The *Checklist for Measuring Quality* (Downs and Black, 1998) was utilized to help assess the quality of the research being included in this synthesis. Two raters applied the checklist to the three included studies with 97% agreement. Differences were resolved by a third judge. Scores ranged from 17 to 20 on a 27 item scale.² Higher numbers indicate better quality. Scores can be used in several ways (e.g., as inclusion criteria, a weight in a meta-regression), although here they are used as a descriptive measure of the quality of each study.

¹ Our hand search of the literature identified two quasi-experimental studies of exceptionally high quality that examined rapport between investigators and child victim witnesses in the field. These were excluded from this review because they lacked two criteria—an experimental design and recall of a known/documented event (Hershkowitz et al., 2006, 2013).

² Possible values range from 0 to 28 because one item is scored 0-to-2 instead of 0-or-1.

Data Extraction

Information collected from the studies included author, publication date, publication title, country, research design, sample characteristics, characteristics of the experiences to be recounted, description of interview strategy or method under investigation, main variables examined, outcome measures, and key findings.

Study Characteristics

The studies were conducted in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. As a group, the participants ranged from 3 to 9 years of age; sample sizes ranged from 128 to 182 participants. The events to be recalled in two of the studies were scripted play activities not intended to be stressful for the children (Brown *et al.*, 2013; Roberts, Lamb, & Sternberg, 2004). In the third study, children watched a live performance that was intended to be mildly frightening (Hardy & Van Leeuwen, 2004).³ Retention intervals ranged from one week to one month. Training and identity of interviewers ranged from postgraduate students in Psychology who attended a 2-day workshop on the NICHD protocol (Brown *et al.*, 2013) to untrained undergraduate students (Hardy & Van Leeuwen, 2004). Outcomes measured included the volume, accuracy, and type of information recalled. In all of the studies, interviewers began with a phase of rapport development followed by free recall, followed by a set of specific questions (some of which were misleading).⁴

Study Findings

Despite the ubiquitous belief that good rapport is critical for successful interviewing, we located few experimental studies of the effects of rapport-building strategies on interview outcomes that included accuracy. It is striking to note that out of the 405 experimental studies we located that tested the efficacy of various interview methods, there were 68 articles that mentioned rapport, usually as an essential component of a protocol; however, only three of these studies actually tested the independent effects of rapport on interview outcome using experimental designs (Brown *et al.*, 2013; Hardy & Van Leeuwen, 2004; Roberts *et al.*, 2004).

All of the interview protocols identified by the search recommended efforts to develop rapport with children before substantive questioning; yet, researchers rarely examined the effects of various rapport-building techniques separately from the effects of the rest of the interview protocol.⁵ There were two exceptions: One study of the

³ In the play, a child is kidnapped by a beast with a thousand teeth and forced to make pastries for the beast followed by a lesson in dental hygiene.

⁴ One article failed to state that random assignment was utilized, although when contacted, the first author stated she did use random assignment (Roberts *et al.*, 2004). Another study used quasi-random assignment within school, balancing gender when possible (Brown *et al.*, 2013).

⁵ These included studies of the Cognitive Interview (Memon *et al.*, 1997), NICHD Investigative Interview (Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, & Esplin, & Horowitz, 2007), Memorandum of Good Practice (Davies *et al.*, 2000), RATAC protocol (Carnes *et al.*, 1999), Narrative Elaboration Interview (Saywitz & Camparo, 2014b); Child Sexual Abuse Interview Protocol (Cheung & Boutte-Queen, 2010), a protocol designed for LGBT youth (Welle & Clatts, 2007), and a child interview intervention in the Netherlands (Rots-de Vries, van de Goor, Stronks, & Garretsen, 2011).

Stepwise Interview (Hardy & Van Leeuwen, 2004) and one study of the NICHD Investigative Interview (Brown et al., 2013).

All three of the included studies treated rapport as part of the preliminary phase rather than assessing whether rapport levels waxed and waned throughout the interview. None of the studies conceptualized rapport as relational, examined the subjective experience of the participants, or collected observations of nonverbal behaviors. The primary focus of all three studies was on the effects of question types and narrative practice prior to substantive questioning. Although it is possible, if not likely, that engaging in narrative practice does in fact enhance rapport, none of these studies provide empirical evidence that this is in fact the case. The extent to which rapport between the interviewer and child was achieved was not assessed.

First, Hardy and Van Leeuwen (2004) investigated two versions of the Stepwise Interview comparing a rapport-building conversation about a past personal *specific* event (e.g., last birthday party attended) to a conversation about a *general* event (e.g., favorite activities). Younger children (3-to-5.5 years) were least accurate when rapport focused on a specific event rather than a generic event. Older children (5.5-to-8 years) were less affected by type of rapport strategy.

Second, Roberts et al. (2004) compared two types of rapport building styles in 3- to 9-year-olds: open-ended questions or direct questions. Researchers reported that the open-ended style was superior; however, it is possible that the amount of time the interviewer spent with the child in rapport-building was confounded with the type of rapport-building method utilized. On average, rapport with open-ended questions lasted 16 minutes while rapport with direct questions lasted only 6 minutes.

In the final study, Brown et al. (2013) investigated the effects of three different rapport-building methods on reports from 5-to-7 year olds for a true and a false event using the NICHD Investigative Interview. The authors report that the results tended to favor the rapport-building style with open-ended prompts, as it was associated with more detailed responses to interviewer utterances. In addition, the results highlight the potential of including narrative practice in a rapport-building phase to increase children's productivity.

In summary, as a group these studies suggest that conversing with children using open-ended prompts and practice retelling a past event during a preliminary stage leads children to provide a greater number of details in subsequent substantive questioning. However, replication with better controls on the amount of time spent with children prior to asking substantive questions is necessary to draw more solid conclusions. In addition, it is possible that discussing a general past event rather than a specific past event may be advantageous with younger (3- to 5-year-olds) but not older children (5- to 8-year-olds); although this finding also requires replication. Still, despite the problems the individual studies possess, they all converge roughly on a similar conclusion that is in line with previous research on children's memory.

Limitations of This Review

Before discussing our conclusions, we first remind readers that our generalizations are limited by the utilized search strings, databases, and exclusion criteria in this particular search. By the same token, this type of electronic search is not necessarily exhaustive; however, it is intended to locate a body of work representative of the kinds of studies and findings in the field. In this regard, we believe it has been successful. Still, the

criteria excluding studies of children recruited for their medical or psychiatric diagnoses, as well as studies using props and visual aids, limit the generalizability of our findings. Future reviewers will want to review the evidence base relevant to special populations and visual aids. Also, readers should keep in mind that our objective was to identify experimental studies with random assignment where at least one of the outcome variables was the accuracy of the information the children provided. As a result, a couple of excellent field studies were excluded. Second, our findings are limited by the quality and characteristics of the studies located by the search; for example, studies focused on short retention intervals, events that were not distressing nor personal, and younger children. Third, our conclusions are limited by the publication bias inherent in the fact that we relied on peer-reviewed journals where non-significant results are less likely to be submitted or published. Positive and negative effects may be overestimated.

DISCUSSION

Given the longstanding importance of interpersonal rapport in both theory and practice for over 100 years, and the explosion of research in forensic child psychology over the last three decades, one might expect a sizable body of relevant experimental research on the efficacy of rapport-building efforts with children for application to legal contexts. Instead, our systematic search suggests that the evidence base for creating best-practice guidelines on rapport development with children is surprisingly small and we are far from fully understanding the factors that influence rapport in legal contexts. Certainly, research lags behind theory and practice. In fact, this review highlights how little we know about something we believe is so important. Virtually all forensic child interview guidelines and protocols highlight the need to develop rapport with children, yet only three of the studies we located tested the independent contribution of rapport-building strategies to interview outcomes applicable to legal contexts.

Furthermore, the experimental studies we located all test a preliminary approach rather than techniques that can be used over the course of the entire interview as rapport waxes and wanes and children's attention, anxiety, and resistance fluctuate from getting-to-know you questions to sensitive topics of personal importance. Most importantly, this body of work fails to demonstrate that this early phase of the interview is actually building rapport. Although the studies earned satisfactory scores on the Downs & Black Quality Checklist (1988), the techniques tested are limited to whether questions are open-ended or closed-ended and whether the conversation revolves around a specific or general past event. Outcome measures are limited to productivity and accuracy. Although these outcome measures are essential if results are to be applied to the forensic context, a narrow focus on question type and narrative practice is a focus on predominantly cognitive strategies designed to enhance later recall, not rapport. In short, the inclusion of a "rapport phase" at the beginning of an interview is not necessarily an indication that rapport has been achieved (Collins, Doherty-Sneddon, & Doherty, 2014).

Clinical wisdom throughout the last century has recommended that establishing rapport is a first order of business, especially if interviewers want to build trust and cooperation, overcome resistance and anxiety, and achieve open, honest self-disclosure. Common sense as well as established theory and practice concur. Certainly, we located

no experimental evidence to countermand a preliminary rapport-building phase. However, there is little experimental research on the efficacy of rapport-building methods for achieving and sustaining high levels of interpersonal rapport throughout the interview. In short, the existing research fails to (a) define critical elements of rapport clearly, (b) operationalize both verbal and nonverbal rapport components, (c) explore outcome variables beyond accuracy and productivity, (d) create measurement tools for determining when high levels of rapport are achieved, and (e) document the amount and kind of interviewer training required to achieve high levels of rapport, without jeopardizing accuracy. Moreover, despite suggestions that high levels of rapport can lower anxiety, resistance, and intimidation causing increased comfort, trust, and resistance to suggestion, the experimental evidence base to date does not test these hypotheses.

Directions for Future Research

Our review suggests that the following questions have yet to be explored: Which rapport building strategies increase motivation and cooperation, or which reduce anxiety, resistance, ambivalence, and power differentials between children and adults, without compromising children's accuracy? How do we know when high levels of rapport are achieved? How do we recognize disruptions in rapport and make repairs? Which rapport-building strategies are most effective for which outcomes at which phases of development? Are there subgroups of children who benefit from extra rapport development, and how can we identify these children? How much variance is accounted for by interviewer personal facilitative factors? Does level of rapport contribute to children believing their experiences and perceptions have been understood, respected, and considered by legal decision-makers? Does this belief matter to the accuracy or quality of the information they provide? Does this belief influence children's attitudes towards the legal system, their willingness to comply with decisions, or their development of self-agency, mastery, or self-esteem? What might an expanded research agenda look like? This systematic review provides steps to consider:

Strengthen Theoretical Grounding

The experimental evidence base located by our search is surprisingly under theorized when it comes to the motivational, social, and emotional aspects of rapport development. Researchers need to re-examine their conceptualization of rapport and broaden the concept from cursory conversations before an interview to viewing rapport as a multi-dimensional, dynamic, and relational construct. In our introduction, we mention a number of theories that could be useful. For example, attachment theory would lead researchers to examine relevant nonverbal, affective, reciprocal processes with sequential analyses and to make predictions about rapport development from attachment security status and from the concomitant defensive patterns that develop. Related, contemporary psychoanalytic theories emphasize the centrality of two people co-regulating their affect states, behaviors, goals, and words during the interview and the commensurate mismatches that disrupt the perceived alliance. For example, Beebe and Lachmann (2002) discuss three principles of salience from contemporary analytic theory that could be relevant for maintaining rapport: ongoing regulation, disruption and repair, and heightened affective moments.

Promote Definitional Clarity

With the lack of consensus on a clear definition of rapport, researchers need to clarify the components of rapport to be operationalized and tested. At a minimum these need to be distinguished from the components of social support and areas of overlap should be addressed. Although related, they are not the same psychological construct. Our raters found numerous studies failed to distinguish these two constructs or to manipulate them separately to ascertain the independent contributions of both to interview outcomes.

For the most part, past studies on child forensic interviewing have conceptualized the process as a verbal, explicit, and objective exchange of information. Although this conceptualization is true as far as it goes, to study rapport effects we need to envision the interview also as a nonverbal, implicit, subjective, social, affective, co-constructed process of mutual influence on conversational partners. Re-conceptualizing the interview in this way opens up new avenues for research and practice.

Moving beyond question type and narrative practice, both verbal and nonverbal indicators need to be better discerned, operationalized, and measured. For example, researchers working with adult populations have utilized self-report and observational data to examine the relative importance of three elements of rapport – positivity (mutual friendliness), mutual attention (interest, focus), and coordination (synchrony). Through a series of studies, researchers demonstrated that these three components vary over the course of an interaction (early, late), across different contexts (adversarial, cooperative), and across different relationships (familiar, unfamiliar; Bernieri, 2005; Tickle-DeGnen & Rosenthal, 1990).

In addition, researchers will want to consider interviewer behaviors that might impair or disrupt rapport (e.g., interruptions, assumptions of inability, disbelief, challenging children's comments, devaluing children's stated feelings). Many of these have been noted to occur in interviews in the laboratory (e.g., Zajac & Hayne, 2003) and in the field (e.g., Lewy, Cyr, & Dion, 2015).

Explore Individual and Developmental Differences

Our review of the literature suggests that individual differences in rapport development are beginning to be explored in field studies (e.g. Hershkowitz *et al.*, 2006) but rarely in experimental paradigms. However, experimental paradigms could be enlisted to complement this effort. For example, differences in trust beliefs (Rotenberg *et al.*, 2003), symptomatology (e.g., hyperactivity, hypervigilance), attachment status, or environmental sensitivity (Ellis, Boyce, Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Van IJzendoorn, 2011) could be decisive in establishing rapport with children in legal contexts and identifying subgroups in need of special attention.

A few studies have begun to examine age differences in rapport development (e.g., Hardy & Van Leeuwen, 2004); however, the existing experimental data base is restricted to subjects 3 to 9 years of age. Hence, studies of developing rapport with older children (9-to-12 years) and especially adolescents are needed. Field investigators report uniquely negative experiences in trying to develop rapport with adolescents (Collins *et al.*, 2014).

Test Clinical and Ethnographic Rapport-Building Methods

For too long, child forensic researchers have assumed that clinical rapport techniques are tantamount to contamination. With experimental paradigms it is possible to test whether these assumptions are true (see Saywitz, Esplin, & Romanoff, 2007, for discussion). For example, there is no reason that anxiety reduction techniques or empathic listening strategies need to be implemented in a suggestive manner to be effective. The same might be said for ethnographic methods to diminish power differentials between children and adults. These are empirical questions we can answer.

With the headlines highlighting children's criminal court testimony in cases of sexual abuse, agendas in both research and practice have become circumscribed. Efforts to protect children's testimony from coaching and suggestion have translated into sharp distinctions between forensic and clinical methods. Although these distinctions have merit, when it comes to the task of rapport development we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Reconsideration of research priorities is overdue. Translating clinical wisdom into evidence-based practice will be a gradual process involving all stakeholders (practitioners and researchers) engaged and enabled to contribute to the process.

Expand Methodologies

Our review suggests the need to expand outcome variables beyond memory accuracy. Studies should be conducted to examine whether rapport building strategies do in fact facilitate goals of lowered anxiety or heightened trust without compromising children's accuracy. To date the available experimental research has not addressed these issues. Neither have researchers measured nonverbal behaviors, the participants' subjective experience of the interview process, nor the interviewers' and interviewees' perceptions of each other, to assess whether high levels of rapport are achieved.

Moreover, the experimental research is limited to reports of events intended to be neither distressing nor personal. Future researchers will want to vary the emotional and personal aspects of the events to be remembered. Thus far, retention intervals have been short. In the legal context, longer delays may mean not only forgetting, but time for defensive postures and mounting frustration, as well as outside pressures, to take hold, necessitating distinct approaches to rapport. Further, the current evidence base does not clarify the tradeoff between providing enough rapport to achieve benefits without diminishing children's subsequent responses due to exhaustion or inattention.

Explore Positive Effects on Development

Finally, the research agenda should include exploration of forensic interviews as a positive factor in children's development. Many speculate that participating in the process of providing information to legal decision-makers is beneficial for children (Cashmore, 2002; Head, 2011; Melton et al., 2014). Benefits might accrue in the form of an increased sense of recognition, self-agency, empowerment, or self-esteem (Head, 2011; Melton et al., 2014). Rapport may be a key variable in promoting the feeling that children are being 'listened to' by adults they can trust, who respect their insights, and perceive them as competent sources of information. Moreover, children may be more

satisfied with decision-making outcomes (e.g., custody plans, foster placements) when they feel as if their voices are heard (Cashmore, 2002), as predicted by the procedural justice literature (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988). Given the widening contexts in which children now participate in legal proceedings, greater resources should be devoted to exploring the benefits of enhanced rapport to children's safety, development, and recovery, as well as creating opportunities for relief, empowerment, and hope.

Conclusion

Given the rising dependence on children's reports for legal decision-making, the need for evidence-based methods of eliciting sensitive information from children in a reliable manner is clear. Experts agree that rapport development is a key ingredient of best practice in child forensic interviewing. Hence, we began our search to aid in creating evidence-based guidelines for developing rapport with children in legal contexts. However, we end this effort with the realization that although studies to date are a beginning, the overall scientific base is weak, experimental research lags behind theory and practice, and a substantial shift in the research agenda is needed. And yet, it seems clear that bridging the gap between research and practice will not be merely a question of more and more experimental research with randomized controlled trials to fill the gap. It is not an issue of pushing and pulling information across the divide. Instead, there needs to be dialogue and ongoing relationships among practitioners and researchers in a dynamic transfer of evolving knowledge to move the field forward.

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