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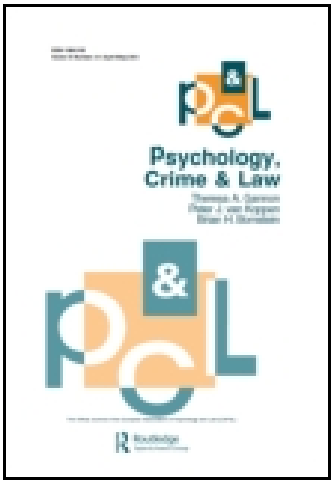

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Practitioner perspectives on rapport building during child investigative interviews

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Practitioner perspectives on rapport building during child investigative interviews

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The inclusion of a rapport phase with children in investigative interviews is considered best practice as research shows that this can improve the quality of information provided. However, the phenomenon of 'psychological rapport', as demonstrated in a person's behaviour, is less understood. Specifically, how do practitioners *build rapport* with children in the rapport phase? The aim of this paper is to provide information on the methods used by practitioners for building rapport with children, with an explanation of how they may influence communication. Nineteen Scottish practitioners (police officers and social workers) were interviewed about their experiences and approach to rapport building with children in investigative interviews. These interviews were qualitatively analysed using a grounded theory approach and produced a model for the relationship between psychological rapport and children's communication. According to this group of practitioners, rapport building acts as a 'communication tool' and is approached using three main strategies. These strategies involve using rapport to assess the child, adjust interview approach based on the assessment, and produce a change in the child's psychological state that facilitates communication. These findings have established practitioner understanding of rapport building and highlighted a number of areas that require further research.

Keywords: investigative interviews; rapport; children; communication

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Rapport building with victims, witnesses and suspects is an established part of the interaction during investigative interviews (Criminal Justice System, 2011). It is encouraged in interview guidelines and practitioner training internationally (e.g. American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, 1997; Criminal Justice System, 2011; Scottish Executive, 2011). Nevertheless, empirical research on rapport building in this context is surprisingly sparse (Marche & Salmon, 2013). The assumption that it facilitates communication and improves the quality of the interaction is based on research highlighting the effectiveness of a humanitarian style of interviewing, which typically involves the use of supportive interview techniques, e.g. empathy and respect (e.g. Carter, Bottoms, & Levine, 1996; Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Vanderhallen, Vervaeke, & Holmberg, 2011).

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Given children's cognitive and socio-emotional limitations during development, rapport building, especially in the rapport phase, may have particular significance for the communication of this group of interviewees. Children and interviewers typically spend time getting to know each other prior to the substantive phase of the interview. This can occur in 'Q and A sessions', assessments or more formally in the rapport phase (Criminal Justice System, 2011). The aims of the rapport phase are to allow the child to feel comfortable with the interviewer and the interview process, and to permit the interviewer to assess the child's communicative capabilities and limitations (Criminal Justice System, 2011; Scottish Executive, 2011). The rapport phase is used to scaffold children's communicative approach to the interview (e.g. through open questions or sometimes through practice recall, see Brubacher, Roberts, & Powell, 2011; Hershkowitz, 2011; Roberts, Brubacher, & Powell, 2011) and is assumed to reduce their anxiety through social support (Almerigogna, Ost, Bull, & Akehurst, 2007).

It is important at this stage to recognise the differences between 'psychological rapport' and the rapport phase of investigative interviews. The former refers to the quality of the relationship between two individuals and how this is maintained throughout the interaction (Bernieri, 2005). The latter is referring specifically to the phase implemented at the beginning of the interview. Dependent upon the tactics used by the interviewer this phase may or may not include psychological rapport. The inclusion of the phase is not necessarily an indication that rapport has occurred in the interview. The phenomenon of psychological rapport is an enigmatic concept where individuals often recognise when they have experienced rapport but struggle to define its characteristics (see Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990 or Abbe & Brandon, 2012 for a hypothetical review of these characteristics in the context of investigative interviews). Furthermore, given the different aims of different communicative interactions, it is likely that the establishment of rapport varies across different contexts (Bernieri, 2005). It is important to examine how 'psychological rapport' is established during an investigative interview, both throughout the interview and during the rapport phase itself.

To gain a greater understanding of how rapport is conducted in child investigative interviews, practitioners in the current study were interviewed about their approach to rapport building for facilitating communication with children. This involved interviews with both police and social work practitioners from Scotland. Although the observation of electronic recordings of child interviews would show what occurs in the interview, they would not produce information about practitioner decision-making. Thus, a qualitative approach was selected for this study. The first step is for practitioners to explain their methods before we can quantify this information.

Despite the lack of knowledge available on how 'psychological rapport' is conducted, some consideration has been given to the implementation of the rapport phase. According to internationally agreed child interview guidelines the rapport phase should include the following three components: (1) explanation of the interview's purpose and the importance of telling the truth; (2) coverage of the ground rules for the interview; and (3) conversation about neutral topics using an open style of questioning (e.g. Criminal Justice System, 2011). These components are used to overcome some of the cognitive limitations often present in children's understanding. For example, children have less metalinguistic awareness than adults where they do not always consider the purpose of their communication and therefore may not produce elaborate accounts (Lamb & Brown, 2006). The use of ground rules in the rapport phase may improve this where children are

instructed to provide as much detail as possible and this is thought to increase their understanding and ability to do so (Criminal Justice System, 2011; Smith & Milne, 2011).

In Warren, Woodall, Hunt, and Perry's (1996) examination of interview practice, they found that although the interviewers attempted to build rapport with the children, they very rarely carried out an open style of communication, which involves the use of open questioning in the rapport phase. This is problematic as research demonstrates that when interviewers use an open style of questioning in the rapport phase, this leads to an increase in the accuracy (Roberts, Lamb, & Sternberg, 2004) and detail of information from children (Sternberg et al., 1997). The open style gives children the opportunity to practise responding to the types of questions the interviewers will use, and the recall strategies they will have to employ during the substantive phase of the interview.

A practice interview (often referred to as practice recall or practice narrative) is another approach that can be used to build rapport with children (Scottish Executive, 2011). It involves asking the child to recall a neutral event unrelated to the event under investigation. The practitioner then interviews the child about this event using the same free recall and questioning technique that they intend on utilising during the substantive interview. Similar to the open rapport approach, the practice interview gives both the interviewer and child an opportunity to rehearse the communication style that will be adopted in the substantive part of the interview (for further detail about the benefits of this procedure see Brubacher et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2011).

The most recent Scottish child interview guidelines highlight the practice interview as a phase separate to rapport building. However, some practitioners use this as an approach for building rapport and this is often suggested during UK interview training programmes (Collins, 2012; Marchant, 2013). Like the open approach to the rapport phase, a survey found that 60% of Scottish practitioners *never* use the practise interview and 26.7% use it rarely (La Rooy, Lamb, & Memon, 2010). The many cognitive benefits of this method of introduction are, therefore, not being put into practice (Brubacher et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997). Perhaps this was due to a lack of awareness on the part of interviewers about the possible communicative implications of a practise interview. A similar argument could be applied to the shortage of use of open questions in the rapport phase (Warren et al., 1996). Without addressing these issues in more detail with practitioners, it is not possible to examine the validity of these explanations.

The rationale provided during training for the inclusion of rapport building is often related to the positive effects of interviewer support. Support has been found to reduce children's anxiety and increase their resistance to post-event misinformation (e.g. Almerigogna et al., 2007). However, although social support and rapport are related, they are not the same psychological construct. Rapport is about the establishment of a relationship in which the people involved in the interaction understand each other and have good communication (Bernieri, 2005). Furthermore, although rapport may be initiated in the rapport phase, it should be carried on throughout the entire interview (Walsh & Bull, 2012). The aforementioned research has neglected to consider this. Finally, whilst using open prompts, instruction and social support in the rapport phase are essential for the quality of children's information (Carter et al., 1996; Hershkowitz, 2009; Roberts et al., 2004; Teoh & Lamb, 2010), they are not necessarily a good indication of the level of or communicative impact of psychological rapport. Behaviours that are explicitly used for the purposes of rapport building should be quantified and examined during these interviews. No research to date has investigated how this is achieved and we therefore have no indication of how rapport building could be measured in this context.

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Consequently, in the current study, the data from the practitioners will be qualitatively analysed to provide a rich and detailed knowledge of how they believe rapport building is conducted in the rapport phase and throughout the interview, and how this may influence children's communication. Interviewing practitioners is the first step in terms of understanding psychological rapport in this context and how it is operationalised.

Method

Participants

Nineteen child protection practitioners from Scotland participated. Thirteen participants were police officers (seven females; six males) and six were female social workers. Participants were aged between 31 and 59, with a mean age of 39 years. Following approval from the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland), interview trainers throughout Scotland were contacted by ACPOS. The trainers forwarded details of the research to the child protection officers in their remit. Nineteen practitioners contacted the researchers and indicated their interest.

Nine different regions across Scotland participated from 14 different locations. In terms of years of service with police or social services, the range was from 5 to 22 years, with a mean of 12 years. All participants were actively involved in the field of child investigative interviewing and experience of interviewing children ranged from 1 to 18 years, with a mean of 6 years 4 months. As such, the sample selected had enough breadth and depth to be considered representative of practitioners and enhanced the transferability of the data (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). Recruitment of the practitioners continued until data saturation had been reached (i.e. no new themes were emerging from the information provided by the participants).

In Scotland, police officers and social workers conduct interviews together and are trained for one week on the Joint Investigative Interview Training course. In the majority of cases the police officer takes the lead with the social worker acting as a supporter.

Data collection

Each interview took place in a quiet room in the participants' work place and the same person conducted all interviews. The mean interview length was 60.4 minutes (range: 30–81 minutes). Interviews were carried out in a semi-structured format to enable the researcher to discuss specific areas relating to rapport and communication, but also to give the participants a degree of flexibility in providing their own answers spontaneously. Similar to an investigative interview, the researcher used the participant's responses as a basis for further elaboration, and provided prompts to keep the communication ongoing. To begin the interview, the researcher always asked the same question, 'Please describe for me a time when you felt you had good rapport with a young person you were interviewing?' Other questions included 'how do you know when you have established rapport with a child?', 'do you have a technique for building rapport? If yes then please describe it for me?' 'Tell me why you think rapport building affects communication?' etc.

Data analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded and then fully transcribed. Once transcription was complete and the interviews were checked for accuracy, they were then analysed using

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the software package *NVIVO* 8. The data were analysed using a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is an inductive method of qualitative analysis used when little is known about the topic of interest, the researcher is interested in participants' views and experiences, and finally the researcher aims to develop a model that would adequately explain the topic (Pidgeon, 1997). These three motives matched the aims of the present study.

Once transcription was complete, the coding occurred in accordance with the methods outlined in a grounded theory approach. Each line was very carefully read from the interviews and the content was assigned to a new category. This open coding was carried out for the first four interviews and further data were then collected. Questions asked of the new participants were then based on information provided by the previous participants. This is typical of a grounded theory approach as the questions are guided by the emerging theory, and further data collected contribute to the emerging model (Payne, 2007).

As more data were gathered, further examples of the same and new categories were coded. Over the process of analysis, *saturation* occurred in which no new categories were identified (total categories = 70, Pidgeon, 1997). The researcher then reviewed, revised and refined the categories. Some of the categories were similar, for example 'reassurance' and 'feeling comfortable' and these were merged to create the new category 'comfortable'. Additionally, some of the categories were re-labelled to better define the content of the information. The initial list of categories was therefore reduced from 70 to 9 (see Appendix for a list of the original 70 categories).

The categories generated up until this point were then further analysed by examining the quotes from each category in detail and looking for links and relationships with other categories (e.g. the category of 'age' was linked to 'understanding' as younger children seem to understand the purpose of the interview less and need the rapport phase to assist with this). At this point, a 'coding paradigm' was adopted that centred on viewing the data from the perspective of the research aim, i.e. 'facilitation of communication'. Coding paradigms are used to ensure that the researcher maintains focus relating to the research question. The data were then analysed in a more abstract and conceptual way by interpreting the meaning of what the interviewers say as opposed to just describing it (Pidgeon, 1997). These interpretations are recorded in memos in *NVIVO*.

The discovery of relationships between the different categories added coherence to the emerging theory, and allowed the researchers to build on the multifaceted aspects of the links between rapport and communication. The relationships between the categories in the data were numerous, and this demonstrates the detail and the explanatory power of the theory that was being generated.

In the final major stage of the analysis, each of the categories were scrutinised and a core category was identified. In grounded theory research, the core category must have the major explanatory power for the data, and in this study the core category was called 'communication tool'. This was decided with the view that the link between rapport and communication was that the interviewers perceived it as a tool for facilitating communication and used rapport building for this aim. The core category should explain the other categories, and the remaining categories are organised and integrated into a conceptually meaningful structure that centres on the core category (see the Results section for further elaboration; and Table 1 for information on how the categories were organised).

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Table 1. Assignment of final categories to the three strategies that explain the core category 'rapport building as a communication tool'.

Rapport building as a communication tool	
Strategy	Category
Assessment	Age differences
	Motivation
	Child's background
Adjustment	Rapport as unnecessary
	Understanding
	Engagement
	Natural interaction
Impact on child's psychological state	Comfortable
	Respect

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A technique called triangulation was employed to verify credibility and dependability (Hammersley, 1997). An independent researcher was employed to analyse a random sample (n = 5) of the initial 19 interview transcripts. The categories that emerged were discussed and were compatible with those of the original researcher. If a slight disagreement occurred then both parties discussed the category and came to an agreement. Negative case analysis was another method used to assess credibility by the researcher. This involves looking for examples that contradict the emerging model, thus creating a balanced perspective. The idea that rapport building is not an effective tool for facilitating communication is considered during the explanation of the second strategy in the Results section.

Results

Once the analysis was complete it became clear that, according to the practitioners, the core concept that explains the link between rapport and communication is the idea that rapport building acts as a 'communication tool'. All practitioners stated that rapport building (whether in the rapport phase or throughout the interview) facilitates communication with children in this setting:

> The fact that you've now got this two way thing going, no matter how difficult or sensitive it is, if the child is engaging with you and attempting to answer your questions it is a fair indicator that you've got rapport going.

The interviewers highlighted that communication through psychological rapport was achieved using three main strategies: (1) assessment; (2) adjustment and (3) a change in the child's psychological state. Parts one (assess) and two (adjust) were often discussed within the context of rapport building in the initial rapport phase of the interview, although the interviewers did acknowledge that they continue to use rapport throughout the entire interview for these purposes. The final component (child's psychological state) related to the impact of rapport building on the child's behaviour and communication during the entire interview. These strategies are explained below and quotes from the interviews are used to support the explanations. The final nine categories coded during

analysis were used as the foundation for the three main strategies (please refer to Table 1). All of these categories are related back to the overall core concept of rapport building as a 'communication tool', as each category identified was described by the interviewers within this paradigm.

Strategy one: assessment

The interviewers said that they often used rapport building as an opportunity to assess the child based on their level of ability (category 1 'age differences', see Table 1). This was in terms of their cognitive, emotional and communicative presentation. The interviewer could assess the child's ability in each of these areas and use this information as a guide for how to communicate in the remainder of the interview:

> It (rapport) gives you a flavour of their communication skills, because sometimes a very young child, a four-year-old the questions you need to ask them would be very different from the questions to a seven-year-old, it's a very different technique.

> It is about getting them feeling comfortable, the younger child feeling comfortable, whereas the older child will tend to have a lot of awareness of why they are being interviewed and whether they are going to disclose or not.

Developmentally there is a great range of abilities with children, even within specific age groups. Rapport building provides the ideal opportunity for the interviewer to assess the child's communicative production and comprehension, and to tailor their approach based on this.

Motivation was the second element of 'assessment' outlined by the practitioners (category 2, see Table 1). The majority of the interviewers mentioned that the child's motivation to communicate was assessed during rapport building, and would impact upon whether or not rapport building was continued. The behaviour exhibited by the children would give a great indication of how willing they were to communicate about the alleged incident:

> Well one wee boy at a primary school had been the victim of physical abuse, as soon as I said who I was he said 'well you're here to speak about my dad hitting me' and it was like boom! He just couldn't get it off his chest quick enough. So we didn't even have time to consider rapport building.

This type of interaction was mentioned frequently by the interviewers, and in cases like these they strayed from the standard protocol of continuing with a formal rapport phase (but continued to maintain psychological rapport throughout the interview). They responded to the overt message given by the child that they did not want a rapport phase, but instead were motivated to move on and communicate about the incident. This assessment of the relationship between rapport and motivation seemed to occur on a continuum, as interviewers also felt that it was clear from the rapport phase if the child was reluctant to communicate, and this would impact upon their decision to extend rapport building:

> Initially she was quite shy and worried about speaking to me; she doesn't know me from Adam because she'd never seen me before, so just to take a bit of time at the start until she relaxed.

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The topic of motivation was often mentioned in conjunction with the category of 'age differences'. The interviewers frequently found that those who presented as willing communicators tended to be older children or teenagers:

> You're going to have young adolescents who are going to be the victims of a sexual assault or something, they know exactly why you are there and a lot of these people it might not be a family member, it might be they've been attacked in the park by a stranger so it's very much like a witness interview, they know 'I'm coming to you to report a crime' so the need for a long rapport building kind of negates itself there.

In contrast, the interviewers felt that younger children are more likely to present as reluctant, and rapport building was more beneficial for this age group. Young children require the reassurance provided by rapport and this allows them to feel more comfortable about the interaction.

In addition to age differences and motivation, the interviewers also mentioned assessing the child's background during rapport building (category 3, see Table 1). The rapport phase often involves discussing neutral topics with children. More often than not this covers home and family life where the child is asked to describe who is in their family or what their home looks like. In these instances the interviewers stated they had the chance to build up a picture of the child's life, and this information provided some investigative groundwork used in the remainder of the interview:

> I always think there's always a reason why you're interviewing the child so if you start with the investigative process by building your scene maybe your locus.

> It should be considered an investigation from the very start of the interview, even during rapport building. You are gathering information about the child's life during the rapport phase.

Strategy two: adjustment

According to the practitioners, once assessment has been achieved there are various ways in which the interviewer can use the rapport building to adjust to the child's presentation in order to facilitate communication. The interviewers mentioned that sometimes their assessment led to the conclusion that a formal rapport phase was not necessary with a particular child (see the 'rapport as unnecessary' category in Table 1). It becomes less necessary if the child makes it clear that they are ready to communicate. The interviewer may then discontinue this phase and commence with the remainder of the interview:

> I can think of one quite recently where the boy was the victim of an assault involving a family member and he was very angry, he knew he was going to have to tell me what had happened and that's why I was there, we had to do it and he wanted to say it so sometimes there would be times where rapport's just not going to be appropriate.

The interviewer adjusted to this by moving straight on to the substantive issues. The boy wanted to talk about the incident only. The young person's response to rapport building permitted the interviewer to see that a more direct approach was needed.

The second adjustment strategy mentioned referred to the child's 'understanding' of the interview (see Table 1). Firstly, this can relate to whether or not they have an understanding of the interview's purpose:

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> Usually the child's been told that two people are going to come and interview them and they haven't got any idea what interview means, so when you go in your on one side of the river and the child is on the other and the child is looking at you as if to say why are you here? But the rapport building allows you to explain to the child, to build that bridge hopefully for them to walk across to you.

An additional way in which rapport building was believed to increase understanding was by conveying to the child what was expected of their communication in the interview. The rapport phase familiarises the child with the questions they will be asked and the general format of an investigative interview:

> I definitely think it sets the tone and I probably think it sets the scene for the child as well, because it lets them get used to you and it lets them get used to being asked questions, being listened to, being given the opportunity to respond.

The communicative style expected in the interview is different to typical adult–child interactions, and the rapport phase gives the interviewer the chance to introduce this style prior to communication about the substantive issues.

Many interviewers also saw rapport building as an opportunity to engage the child's attention (see category 6 'engagement' in Table 1) and found that if they could manage to achieve this then more often than not that facilitated the interaction. They stated that the crucial component for gaining the child's attention was finding out about their particular interests. They would try and obtain information about the interests of specific age groups and focus the rapport topic on these. Initially, some children are not responsive during rapport building, and touching on something that has particular appeal for the child can change their behaviour and result in better communication:

> So you could be blabbering on about something and the child just loses complete interest, but if you get that connection, y'know Sponge Bob square pants or something else, it can get them thinking 'oh', y'know it's just that wee 'in' sometimes.

Many of the participants mentioned that they often attempted to find this information out from caregivers and teachers etc. during the planning and preparation stage, prior to the initiation of the interview.

The final 'adjustment' approach outlined by the interviewers was to make rapport building seem as natural as possible (see category 7 'natural interaction' in Table 1). Some of the interviewers seemed to be frustrated with the overall conceptualisation of rapport building. Many of them stated that it should not be seen as a separate phased component of the interview protocol, but that rapport building is a naturally occurring part of communication that should be evident throughout the interaction:

> I hate that it's seen as a 'tick box' part of the interview. It's part of everyday communication that should occur in a conversation.

Interviewers aim to make this process as natural as possible to make the child feel comfortable. This is often achieved by making sure the rapport topic is something of relevance. They initiate this by focusing the rapport topic on the environment, i.e. what the child is wearing, the setting, etc. By using the environment as the basis for rapport building communication is thought to be less forced and artificial:

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> A lot of joint interviews with children are carried out in schools and the child's either just done a lesson or involved in something, so your instant start there is about the school and build a rapport around school. So rather than make it a strained conversation for the child it's quite natural for the child to speak about school because they are in school, you don't want to go down the line of asking the child all about something and they're thinking where's this coming from?

In direct relation to this, interviewers also mentioned using rapport building as a natural link to information covered in the free recall phase. They stated that they would often cover topics in the rapport phase that would facilitate discussion of the alleged incidents in the substantive phase:

> A father assaulted their child and this was over an argument about a computer game and I'd maybe spoken to the child about 'so you've got a PS2 does your dad play computer games with you?' and 'yes dad plays computer games' and so 'what kind of games do you play?' so it evolves from that.

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Strategy three: change in the child's psychological state

The interviewers stated that the assessment of the child's behaviour and the adjustment in their interview approach would often result in a change in the child's behaviour that improved the interaction. They stated that making children feel comfortable was essential for facilitating the communication (category 8, see Table 1). A reduction in children's anxiety was one of the major benefits of rapport building mentioned by the participants:

> I think it's really important during rapport to make the child feel comfortable in the environment, and to make them feel to some extent relaxed, comfortable in your presence and comfortable to speak in your presence.

One of the ways in which this is achieved is linked to the previously described category of 'understanding' (see above). By demonstrating that the interviewer is there to help the child, this makes the child feel more relaxed about the interview process:

> Sometimes rapport may overcome some of that initial thought 'actually I thought this person was going to be really cold and distant but in fact they are actually okay', so rapport can overcome some of that initial reticence.

When describing this category, the participants often stated that rapport was a tool that they used *throughout* the interview to make children feel comfortable. Rapport building was not solely confined to the rapport phase but was something the interviewers utilised at various stages of the interview:

> You can bring it in at different parts as well if the child has been distressed, I mean we stopped one time for about 10 minutes with the child, we started talking to her about books, it was a child who liked reading books and because we had been talking about that in the kind of 10 minutes when she had been upset it came to lead back into that again, then back into the interview.

This approach was referred to as 'touching base' as the interviewer returns to neutral topics to reduce the child's distress. Communication about the child's favourite book was

an enjoyable topic and may have soothed her. Once the child was calm the interviewer was able to commence with the remainder of the interview.

The final category from this strategy was 'respect' (refer to Table 1). Respect is a communication facilitator that was partly generated through rapport building. The children and their wishes were respected by the interviewer, and if they were not then this could act as a communication inhibitor:

> 'Do you want to talk to us today?', and if they say no, I wouldn't continue, because, you're not gaining that child's trust or, you're not starting off on the right foot when they've already told you 'no I don't want to talk to you, but yet here you are still sitting firing questions at me'.

Interviewers are encouraged to gain an understanding of the child's needs and then respond to this if they can. This was related to trust where the children could then trust that the interviewer would take their concerns on board. Part of respect was also related to the communicative nature of rapport building as a mechanism for getting to know someone. The interviewers felt that often rapport building is required before children will communicate about the allegation:

> I feel the rapport stage is so important, you can't just go into an interview I suppose and try and get to the crux of what you're really wanting to get from the child without taking the time to speak to the child about general things first of all.

The interviewers said that it would be disrespectful to engage in substantive issues without touching on neutral topics to initiate conversation. Interviewers mentioned that children would view it as disrespectful if they had made it evident that they require a specific communicative approach, but the interviewer fails to acknowledge this in some way.

Respect was also related to the age of the child (see category 1, 'age differences'). More often than not it was the older children and teenagers who would be more explicit about what they wanted from the interview. Some of the children in this age group would tend to respond negatively to the rapport phase. A large number of the interviewers stated that they felt the rapport phase could be artificial with this age bracket. Practitioners said that a brief chat initially would perhaps be more appropriate. Rapport building is attempted in some form, but not as elaborately as is often the case with younger children.

> The older children, I always feel the rapport stage is a bit false, they generally know why you are there to speak to them and if you let the rapport stage go on too long, you get the impression that they sit there and say 'what are you talking about that for? You are here to speak to me about xyz why are you giving me this flowery stuff?'

> I've seen it with an older child who's like 15, the rapport phase is this is who I am and they're quite comfortable to come in and sit down and talk and they'll see the rapport phase being this is who I am, this is what I do, and then they're just wanting to get on and speak about the incident.

Therefore, an attempt at rapport building is still carried out for all children regardless of age, but modified dependent upon their presentation during the rapport stage.

Finally, one of the psychological benefits of respect mentioned by the interviewers was the transfer of control from interviewer to child. When rapport building the child is

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answering questions about themselves and is the main source of information. By showing the child that they are listening to what they have to say empowers the child and encourages communication:

> I would say a lot of the time kids let you speak, let you control the interview, but once they get into their talking it's funny because when I think back to it now you do see it totally switching you see glimpses of it in the rapport phase.

There is a power asymmetry that exists in everyday adult–child interactions. Through discussing the child's interests during rapport this can then balance the asymmetry and empower the child. The children are being listened to, which shows that the interviewer respects what they have to say, which in turn increases the child's perception of control.

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Discussion

This paper has highlighted that interviewers perceive rapport building as a tool to facilitate communication with children in investigative interviews. They believe that this is achieved through three strategies: (1) by assessing the child during rapport building; (2) by adjusting interview approach during rapport to facilitate communication; and (3) by producing a psychological outcome in the child that benefits communication. The findings are a starting point with regard to our understanding of rapport practice in child investigative interviews. The majority of the comments made by the interviewers adhere to best practice recommendations. However, on a few occasions the approaches outlined by the practitioners are not covered in UK guidelines for interview practice or supported by research. These approaches must be subject to empirical investigation in order to examine whether or not they truly benefit children's communication.

The finding that interviewers use rapport building as a 'communication tool' is compatible with current training and guidelines. These emphasise that rapport building, and the rapport phase in particular, can be used to assist children's communication (e.g. Criminal Justice System, 2011). It is encouraging to note that many of the diverse strategies employed by these practitioners match recommendations for best practice. Furthermore, the idea that rapport building is not confined to the rapport phase and should be continued for the duration of the interview is an important consideration for interview practice (Walsh & Bull, 2012).

The first strategy outlined by the practitioners, assessment, is one of the more widely recognised aspects of rapport building (Scottish Executive, 2003, 2011). Interviewers are taught that communicative differences are likely to occur during the interview as a result of age (Pipe et al., 2007) and the communication during the rapport phase can give an indication of this. The interviewers also claimed that they assess each child's responsiveness to rapport building and that age differences can emerge. Overall, it would appear that the interviewers believed that the rapport phase was particularly beneficial for younger to mid-aged primary school children (five to nine years of age) who are often reluctant to communicate because of preconceived ideas and feelings of anxiety (Almerigogna et al., 2007; Hershkowitz, Orbach, Lamb, Sternberg, & Horowitz, 2006). Rapport building was thought to help children overcome some of these barriers. Younger children have been found to be better informants when interviewed by a supportive interviewer (Carter et al., 1996; Hershkowitz, 2009). Rapport building may be part of this process.

The relationship between rapport approach and age has been examined in empirical research with younger children. The length of rapport building impacts upon information given with shorter rapport phases producing longer responses (Davies, Westcott, & Horan, 2000) for children aged four to six *and* seven to nine years (Hershkowitz, 2009). Research has also highlighted age differences with younger children benefiting from the explanation provided during the rapport phase (Teoh & Lamb, 2010). Despite these findings UK interview guidelines make no reference to possible age differences with regard to rapport approach.

Interestingly, the majority of the interviewers had a previous negative experience during the rapport phase with adolescents. They stated that *sometimes* these children were less willing to engage in an elaborate rapport phase and attempts at this could reduce their responsiveness. From a social developmental perspective, children from this age group are shaping their sense of self and identity (Meeus, Van De Schoot, Keijsers, Schwartz, & Branje, 2010). Adolescence is the stage in which humans begin to generate a greater sense of who they are, and are motivated to see themselves as distinct from other people (Meeus et al., 2010). The comments from the interviewers indicate that they believe they must be careful not to patronise these young people when trying to establish a relationship, and be aware that they are sensitive to being treated with respect. However, it must be emphasised that although this was mentioned, rapport building with all children regardless of age was still considered as best practice. The interviewers were highlighting that rapport building is still important, but a shorter and less structured format may be more useful with this age group. Nevertheless, despite these claims, no research has systematically investigated the impact of rapport building with adolescents. This information is based solely on the opinions of the practitioners in the study and further research is required to validate this claim.

Adjusting interview approach based on assessment was the second strategy the practitioners claimed to use and this adheres to interview guidelines (Scottish Executive, 2011). An explanation of the interview's purpose during the rapport phase is considered best practice as it can increase children's understanding of what to expect (e.g. Criminal Justice System, 2011). The practitioners claimed that this is more relevant for rapport building with younger children, as older children's maturity generates an awareness of the interview's function and implications. This age difference is supported in field research (Teoh & Lamb, 2010). In accordance with practical recommendations some participants also mentioned that the rapport phase can increase children's understanding of what is expected from them during the interview. This supports research showing that the communication style adopted during the rapport phase (e.g. open questioning, Roberts et al., 2004) gives children an indication of, and an opportunity to rehearse, the level of detail required in the substantive phase.

Engaging the child's attention was also mentioned as an adjustment technique. Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal's (1990) rapport theory shows attention to be a primary indicator of rapport (for an overview of rapport behaviours see Bernieri, 2005). For rapport to be evident, participants in an interaction must be interested in what each other is saying or doing. Within the context of investigative interviewing, attention seems to be encouraged by guiding conversation to neutral topics children are interested in, e.g. television programmes (Criminal Justice System, 2011). The interviewers stated that some children may be reluctant, but if you can capture their attention in some way then that can open the channels of communication. Hershkowitz (2009) found that rapport building was especially

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important for children who are reluctant. However, research is required to establish whether or not the topic selected can influence the child's attention during the rapport phase.

Another 'adjustment' strategy mentioned by the practitioners is that interviewers may sometimes discontinue the rapport phase if the child indicates that they do not want it. This highlights that rapport tends to be used to create a positive interaction and increase communication. If this is already in place, or the rapport phase is having the opposite effect, then (according to the practitioners) it becomes redundant. This contradicts current Scottish guidelines where the rapport phase is strongly endorsed (Scottish Executive, 2011, p. 29) and the 2003 version stated that 'it (rapport) should never be omitted' (Scottish Executive, 2003, p. 23). In contrast, other UK guidelines highlight that discussions in the rapport phase may be counterproductive if a witness is anxious to give their account (Achieving Best Evidence guidance, Criminal Justice System, 2011, p. 71). Components of the pre-substantive phase (rapport and the practice interview) have been shown to improve the information provided by children (Brubacher et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2004), and therefore it is possible that if children are permitted to talk about the allegation straight away then they are not adequately prepared for the remainder of the interview and their communication will suffer. Nevertheless, there has been no systematic empirical research that examines the impact of prolonged rapport building on children's communication when they indicate that they are ready to talk about the allegation. Further research is required in order to provide clear and empirically supported recommendations for this issue.

The interviewers also thought that it was important that rapport building seemed like a natural conversation. To them, it is a necessary part of getting to know someone, and making it a forced exercise was not conducive to communication. Myklebust and Alison (2000) highlighted this in their research when they found that sometimes rapport came across as a 'mechanical' exercise in child interviews conducted in Norway. It seems that Scottish interviewers are more aware of rapport's function from a communicative point of view. Interestingly, many of the participants use the environment surrounding the interview for this purpose. They stated that it was important to select a topic that was relevant to the current situation to make rapport building more natural. Techniques like these, which highlight the subtleties of rapport building, are not mentioned in current UK guidelines and need to be verified by empirical research.

The final strategy outlined by the interviewers was with reference to the psychological effects of rapport. They claimed that their adjustment in interview approach served to facilitate communication. By far the most commonly cited effect was making the child relaxed and less anxious. The relationship between rapport and anxiety is mentioned in best practice guidelines (Criminal Justice System, 2011) but has not been tested in empirical research. Nonetheless, anxiety reduction is one of the proposed theories involved in the benefits of interviewer-provided social support (e.g. Almerigogna et al., 2007). Children have been found to be more accurate when interviewers are supportive, and this may be because anxiety interferes with cognitive processing (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992). The information provided by the interviewers in this study enhances the anxiety reduction model, by offering some insight into how social support could be operationalised within the context of rapport building.

The alternative theory proposed for social support is Davis and Bottom's (2002) resistance efficacy theory where interviewer support empowers the child and makes them more confident. Within the context of our model, it could relate to the theme of 'respect'. Interviewers stated that they believed acknowledging the child's wishes conveyed their respect. They claim that this is carried out in a number of ways, e.g. appearing interested

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and taking their concerns seriously, or focusing on neutral topics that were relevant and interesting for the child. These approaches may make the interview more child-centred. Interviewers stated that they felt that respect was particularly important for older children. As mentioned above, this age group is in the stage of development in which autonomy is increasingly important (Meeus et al., 2010). Therefore, consideration of the young person's wishes during rapport building may be an effective communication facilitator for this age group. Once again, however, this is not mentioned in best practice guidelines or examined in empirical research.

It is important to note that overall, firm conclusions about the communicative impact of these strategies cannot be determined as these findings are based on practitioner self-report. It is possible that practitioners incorrectly perceive their rapport approach and its influence. The strategies and their accompanying behaviours should be examined in field interviews and experimental research to determine how frequently they occur, and their impact on children's information. Furthermore, the model in this study was generated based on the practice of Scottish interviewers. The findings will need to be replicated in other countries to increase the generalisability of the conclusions.

Nevertheless, this study outlined a model of rapport behaviour used by interview practitioners in the rapport phase, and throughout the interview, to facilitate communication with children. It provides an indication of practitioner perceptions of rapport building and what they do in the interview to achieve this. It is encouraging to note that many of the strategies and techniques mentioned by the interviewers adhere to best practice recommendations. However, other considerations were highlighted that are not as well documented and could serve to improve interview practice if supported by further empirical research. Examples of these include the possibility that rapport approach be adapted based on the age of the child being interviewed. Or that rapport is a natural part of communicative discourse and the techniques employed in the interview should reflect this. Further research in field studies is needed to examine the influence of these techniques in practice.

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Appendix. List of original categories from open coding

- Age differences
- Rapport technique
- Feeling comfortable
- Individual basis
- Encourages talking
- Willing discloser
- Limits to rapport
- Flexibility
- Understanding
- Respect
- Appearing interested
- Child led
- Communicative ability
- Play rapport
- Barrier
- Natural interaction
- Planning
- Trust
- Interview skills
- Adapt communicative style
- Engaging the child
- Familiarity
- Training and guidelines
- Ongoing process
- Pick up on the cues
- Build up a picture of the child
- Preconceived ideas
- Removal of anxiety
- Sets tone
- Interviewer's role
- Reassurance
- Being patronised
- Rapport definition
- Recording of rapport
- Rapport outside
- Setting
- Allegation specific
- Use of environment
- Building a relationship
- Tick box
- Impact of rapport
- Link
- Social norms
- Touch base
- Distraction
- Attention span
- Evidence quality
- Structured protocol
- Learning difficulties
- Common interests
- Appropriate
- Control
- Court proceedings
- Supporter
- Reluctant
- Cues to rapport
- Ground rules
- Decisions about interview
- Managing rapport
- Purpose
- Verbally communicating
- Confusion
- Boundaries
- Nature of rapport
- Gender differences
- Closure
- Personal satisfaction
- Preparation for questioning
- Allegation information
- Interview process

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