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Abstract

Best-practice forensic interview protocols recommend that interviews with children should include a practice narrative. While the benefits of practice narratives have been consistently demonstrated in non-Aboriginal populations, particular interaction features in many Aboriginal communities may affect how the interview technique applies to Aboriginal children. Our study aimed to examine the effectiveness of practice narratives on the memory reports of 64 Aboriginal children (6 to 15 years) from three remote Australian communities. Children participated in a staged 30-minute innocuous event, and were interviewed one to two days later by experienced interviewers (half with a practice narrative and half without). Logistic and multiple linear regressions demonstrated that practice narratives did not predict the accuracy or informativeness of Aboriginal children's subsequent accounts. Unexpectedly, results revealed that girls in our sample produced more words and target details, as well as fewer confabulations compared to the boys. The implications of these findings for forensic interviews with Aboriginal children are discussed.

Keywords: *Indigenous populations, Children, Investigative interviews, Practice Narratives, Analogue research.*

Introduction

In cases of alleged child sexual abuse, the child's account is often the only piece of evidence (Quadara, 2014); its accuracy and informativeness is, therefore, paramount. Considerable research into children's cognitive abilities has generated certain interview techniques that help increase a child's capacity to accurately recall events and relay detailed information (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Lamb, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Esplin, & Horowitz, 2007; Lamb et al., 2009; Powell & Snow, 2007). As a result, there are now international best-practice recommendations regarding how children should be interviewed in criminal investigations of alleged sexual abuse.

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One such recommendation is the use of a practice narrative: A discussion of a neutral or positive event in response to open-ended questions, prior to the introduction of substantive topics (see Roberts, Brubacher, Powell, & Price, 2011, for a review). While the benefits of practice narratives have been consistently demonstrated in non-Aboriginal populations (Anderson, Anderson, & Gilgun, 2014; Price, Roberts, & Collins, 2013; Roberts, Lamb, & Sternberg, 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997), particular interaction features in many Australian Aboriginal communities may affect how the practice narrative applies to Aboriginal[i] children. Our study sought to examine the effects of a practice narrative on the informativeness and accuracy of Aboriginal children's accounts of an innocuous event.

Practice Narratives

Practice narratives conducted during the introductory phase of investigative interviews with children serve several purposes. Firstly, they enable the interviewer to build rapport with the child by showing an interest in his or her life. Building trust and rapport is vital as it helps to reduce the child's anxiety and create a more relaxed environment for optimal memory recall to occur (Collins, Lincoln, & Frank, 2002; Fisher & Geiselman, 1992; Hershkowitz, 2009; 2011). If children feel at ease with an interviewer, they are more likely to engage in the interview and willingly share sensitive experiences without fearing judgment or disapproval. Indeed, recent research has revealed that alleged adolescent victims of sexual abuse felt pressured, rushed, and uncomfortable when the police officer taking their report immediately delved into questioning about the assault rather than spending some time talking about non-assault related topics (Greeson, Campbell, & Fehler-Cabral, 2014).

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

Narrative practice can also prepare children for the types of questions that will be asked during the principal topic of concern (Lamb, Hershkowitz, Orbach, & Esplin, 2008). The most desirable question types are those that are open-ended; they are general in focus and encourage elaborate responses (e.g., 'Tell me all about that') (Powell & Snow, 2007). Both field and experimental studies have demonstrated that when an interviewer uses open-ended prompts during the introductory phase of the interview the accuracy and/or informativeness of children's subsequent accounts are enhanced (Anderson et al., 2014; Hershkowitz, 2009; Price et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997; Whiting, 2013). For example, in a laboratory study, children (aged 3-to-9 years) interacted with a photographer and were interviewed either one week or one month later (Roberts et al., 2004). Children whose introductory phase consisted of open-ended questions (e.g., 'Tell me about yourself') reported significantly more accurate information in their subsequent accounts of the event compared to children who were allocated to the specific-questions introductory phase (e.g., 'How old are you?'). Results also indicated that older children (7- to 9-years old) provided more detailed responses compared to the younger children (3- to 4-years old). Moreover, in a field study by Price et al. (2013), children (M = 10.10, SD = 3.12 years) provided more details in response to open-ended prompts during the substantive

phase when their interviews included open-ended practice narratives compared to no practice narratives. It is evident that there are benefits to the inclusion of open-ended practice narratives in investigative interviews with children in general.

Interviews with Aboriginal Peoples

While ample evidence supports the use of practice narratives in investigative interviews, it is unclear how such a task may influence Aboriginal children who often have distinct interaction styles that are markedly different to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Eades, 2013; Queensland Department of Justice 2000; Walsh, 1994). Aspects such as Standard English proficiency, minimal discourse, and common relationship-building styles may impact whether narrative training is an effective technique when interviewing Aboriginal children. Each of these aspects will be discussed in turn.

Many Australian Aboriginal peoples speak a traditional language, a variety of Aboriginal English, or one of the English-lexified creoles such as Kriol as their home language (Eades, 1992, 2013). Moreover, most Aboriginal peoples tend to speak a creole or a variety of Aboriginal English in their dealings with the law (Eades, 2004). The infrequent use and availability of interpreters, however, means that the bulk of investigative interviews with Aboriginal peoples are conducted in Standard Australian English (Cooke, 2004; Dixon & Travis, 2007; Gibbons, 2003). While differences between the languages can be subtle at times (e.g., using the term *story* frequently to refer to past autobiographical experiences) (Hamilton, Powell, & Brubacher, in press), other differences can be more profound and have serious consequences (e.g., the word *kill* in various forms of Aboriginal English can mean hit or strike, rather than exterminate: Walsh, 2008). Thus, it is vital to consider whether narrative training completed in English in an interview can help or hinder an Aboriginal child who speaks a variety of Non-Standard English.

On the one hand, narrative training may provide children with the chance to practice their English before discussing substantive issues. It may also give the interviewer an opportunity to assess whether interpretative assistance is required (Davies et al., 1996; Ministry of Justice, 2011). Conversely, the practice narrative may consume valuable time and mental resources that could otherwise be spent on the discussion of substantive issues. When a person has to translate languages in addition to other mental processes (e.g., remember details of events), the overall cognitive load is increased (Shreve & Angelone, 2010). It is possible that the mental processes required in the practice narrative task might reduce the child's mental energy before the interviewer has even begun to question about the alleged abuse. Indeed, research in the child forensic interviewing field has exhibited that an extended introductory phase (lasting over eight minutes) may be cognitively taxing on children even when conducted in a child's first language, reducing their ability to provide information in the substantive phase of the interview (Davies, Westcott, & Horan, 2000; Hershkowitz, 2009; but see Brown et al., 2013).

Another aspect that may affect the utility of the practice narrative with Aboriginal children is *minimal discourse*; a prevalent communication feature whereby Aboriginal speakers provide brief or unelaborated responses (Malcolm, 1982; Sharifian, 2001). Sharifian (2001) explains that minimal discourse may occur because speakers assume that they have shared schemas with the listener, therefore it is unnecessary to complete or elaborate upon a sentence because it is believed that the listener already understands what the speaker is saying. This can lead to communication difficulties, however, when the speaker and listener share different cultural schemas. Analysis of Aboriginal English texts has revealed that minimal discourse is a common conversational feature, especially when an Aboriginal English-speaking person is speaking to a non-Aboriginal English-speaking person (Sharifian, 2001; Sharifian, Rochecouste, & Malcolm, 2004). It is therefore important to determine whether Aboriginal children provide brief responses

in an interview regardless of whether a practice narrative is conducted, or whether the narrative training in providing elaborate responses can combat minimal discourse responding.

Lastly, the relationship-building styles in many Aboriginal communities may impact the effectiveness of practice narratives with this population. While establishing rapport is especially recommended in investigative interviews with Aboriginal peoples (Powell, 2000), the methods of achieving rapport are not always clear-cut. In a recent study that qualitatively examined the applicability of an investigative interview protocol to Australian Aboriginal children, professionals with expertise in Aboriginal language and culture raised the concern that a rapport-building task would be insufficient if it was directed solely at the child, and did not take the child's family and broader community into consideration (Hamilton et al., in press). Professionals also expressed that a unidirectional rapport-building task (where the interviewer only asks questions) could leave an Aboriginal child feeling anxious instead of relaxed. Similarly, research has indicated that, where it is commonplace to ask questions upon first introduction in Western societies, such an approach may be considered rude and confronting in Aboriginal communities (Eades, 2013). Rather, reciprocity is emphasized in Aboriginal culture, and relationships are usually built over long periods of time often by exchanging information as part of a sharing exercise (Eades, 1982, 2013). Ultimately, these relationship-building differences, paired with the previously mentioned research on language and minimal discourse, led us to believe that the practice narrative in interviews with Aboriginal children warranted empirical investigation.

The Current Study

It is vital to investigate the effects of practice narratives with Aboriginal children so that this population can be interviewed according to the most appropriate techniques. Such research may also have implications for Indigenous children from other countries who share similar experiences and communication styles with Australian Aboriginal peoples (e.g., Canada's First Nations peoples) (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008).

The current study aimed to examine the effects of practice narratives on the informativeness and accuracy of Aboriginal children's reports of a staged laboratory event. While the differences in interaction styles between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples led us to question the utility of the practice narrative task with Aboriginal children, we ultimately thought that the previous research regarding the benefits of narrative training would reverberate with our sample of 64 Aboriginal children (aged 6-15 years). Therefore, we predicted that children who completed a practice narrative in an interview would subsequently produce more words, more event-related details, and more accurate responses, compared to children who did not complete such a task (Roberts et al., 2004; Whiting, 2013).

Despite the wide age range of our participants, we predicted that age would not influence the accuracy or informativeness of children's accounts, due to the unfamiliar interview environment, minimal discourse, the fact that many children would speak English as a second language, and the absence of any very young children (who tend to drive age-related differences in memory reports). Gender differences in the informativeness and accuracy of accounts were also not predicted, as they have not been found in non-Aboriginal children participating in similar events (e.g., Brubacher, Roberts, & Powell, 2011; Powell, Jones, & Campbell, 2003; Roberts & Powell, 2007). Gender was retained in analyses, however, because it has been suggested that gender can be a particularly salient feature in dyadic interactions in this population (Purdie, Dudgeon, & Walker, 2010), and both interviewers in the current study were female.

Method

Participants

The sample comprised 64 Australian Aboriginal children (30 girls and 34 boys) aged 6 to 15 years (*M* = 9.23, *SD* = 1.93). The children were recruited from three remote communities in Australia (through schools and community halls). All three communities were situated near the coast of Australia (one towards the north of Australia and two towards the north-west). Two communities were sparsely populated and highly isolated with alcohol bans (i.e., dry communities), while the remaining was slightly more accessible, populated and permitted the consumption of alcohol (but had no substantial problems with alcohol abuse). Aboriginal languages and kinship systems were prominent in all communities, with different languages often spoken by different kin groups.

Only children who gained informed guardian consent as well as learned and spoke Standard Australian English at school were included in the study (confirmation was sought from parents/guardians/teachers). No compensation was received for participating in the study. All children who met the criteria and who were willing to take part in the study were eligible to participate, resulting in the broad age range obtained. The children were pseudorandomly allocated to an interview condition (practice narrative or no practice narrative), with the stipulation that gender and age be as balanced as possible between the groups (See Table 1).

Table 1. *Features of interviews with and without a practice narrative*

		Practice Narrative (33)	No Practice Narrative (31)
Age (years)		*M* = 9.03, *SD* = 1.88	*M* = 9.45, *SD* = 1.98
Gender	**Female**	17	13
	Male	16	18
Location	**Community A**	10	10
	Community B	10	9
	Community C	13	12

Materials

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

Procedure

Prior to the commencement of the study, a group of senior Aboriginal community workers from across Australia were consulted to discuss the possible benefits and disadvantages of the research to Aboriginal peoples. Group members were given the opportunity to offer suggestions for the adjustment of the project to better suit the needs of Aboriginal peoples. For example,

concern was expressed regarding the inclusion of a non-Aboriginal comparison group; therefore, according to the advice of our colleagues, we adjusted the study design to only include Aboriginal children. The focus of the experiment was rather on the comparison of children who received a practice phase, versus no practice phase (control group).

Moreover, based on the consultation, as well as the previous research that signaled a unidirectional practice narrative could lead an Aboriginal child to feel anxious (Hamilton et al., in press), we decided to adjust the practice narrative so that the interviewers mentioned some brief information about themselves before prompting the child for a practice narrative. It was reasoned that the inclusion of *some* interviewer reciprocity (e.g., no more than 30 seconds) would be appropriate and ethical with this sample, and still allow for an examination of whether practice narratives encourage accurate and informative accounts. Once satisfaction with the aim and method was articulated, ethics approval was sought and granted by the [Name of] University Human Research Ethics Committee, the Department of Education Western Australia, and the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia. All research was carried out according to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies code of ethics for working with Indigenous Australians.

The first author conducted the [Name of University] Activities in all three communities. One to two days after the activities, the children participated in one individual interview ranging from 7.54 to 20.34 minutes (M = 12.7, SD = 3.05). All children were interviewed by one of two plain-clothed women with 10 and 12 years of experience interviewing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in similar communities (but not in the communities of the current research). Both interviewers had recently and successfully completed an advanced child forensic interviewing course. They also practiced mock interviews with the first author (who was trained to play the role of a child) to ensure that they were familiar with the exact interview protocol for the current study. All children were interviewed in classrooms in the presence of a supervising adult (who refrained from any involvement in the interview itself).

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

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

Coding

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

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

Reliability

Interviews were coded by the first author and a postgraduate research assistant. Initially, a random subset of 15% of the interviews were double-coded to ensure inter-rater reliability. Percent agreement (agreements/agreements + disagreements) was calculated for word count totals for the practice and substantive phases, child's responses, and number of interviewer prompts. Agreement ranged from 88% - 100%. Cohen's Kappa was calculated for categorization of the interviewer prompts and focused question responses. Agreement ranged from .75 - 1.00, $\kappa = .89$, $p < .01$. After two-thirds of the transcripts had been coded, the second researcher coded a further random 5% of the interviews and reliability calculations were consistent with the previous scores.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses revealed that interviews with practice narratives were on average 4.16 minutes longer than interviews without practice narratives, t (62) = -7.46, $p < .001$, Cohen's d = 1.9. The difference in length, however, was due to the practice phase itself, as length of substantive phase did not differ across practice conditions, t (62) = -.24, $p > .05$, d = 0.06. Delay between event and interview (1 or 2 days) did not differ significantly between practice conditions, t (62) < 1, p = .80, d = .06, gender, t (62) < 1, p = .58, d = .14, and was unrelated to age, r (62) = -.12, p = .34, so it was not considered further. There were also no significant differences between the number of prompts asked by the two interviewers in both the practice phase, t (31) = 1.60, p = .12, d = .09 and substantive phase, t (62) = 1.03, p = .31, d = .28, suggesting that all children received similar interview treatment. Girls (M = 9.07 years, SD = 2.13) did not significantly differ in age from boys (M = 9.38, SD = 1.74), t (62) = .65, p = .52, d = .16.

Assumptions

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

Inferential Analyses

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

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

Supplementary Analyses

As it has been suggested that practice narratives could be fatiguing with Aboriginal children, we wanted to ensure that talking during the practice phase was positively associated with talking during the substantive phase (rather than flat lining or actually shutting down). Specifically, we asked whether verbosity in the practice narrative (i.e., word count) was associated with any of the dependent variables. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no breach of the assumptions of linearity, normality and homoscedasticity. A Pearson product-moment correlation demonstrated that the word count in the practice narrative was strongly and significantly related to the word count in the substantive phase of the interview, [r (31) = .55, p < .01], and the number of target details relayed in the substantive phase [r (31) = .55, p < .01]. Children who produced more words in the practice narrative phase also produced more words, and more target details, in the substantive phase. Word count in the practice phase was not significantly related to the number of confabulations (p > .05).

Discussion

Our study examined the use of practice narratives in interviews with Aboriginal children. Contrary to our prediction and previous research with non-Aboriginal children (Price et al., 2013; Roberts et al., 2004; Sternberg et al., 1997), overall we found the presence or absence of a practice narrative did not predict the accuracy or informativeness of our sample of Aboriginal children's accounts. It is possible that the current delivery of the task, in Standard Australian English and with brief reciprocity from the interviewer, does not sufficiently build rapport and/or combat the common communication feature of minimal discourse. It was evident, however, that inclusion of the practice phase in its current format conferred no disadvantages. Specifically, it has been argued that time spent conducting a practice narrative could consume valuable time and mental resources, particularly with populations unused to a Western style of discourse (e.g., Hamilton et al., in press). Our correlational analyses provide support against this argument; verbosity during the practice phase was strongly and positively correlated with continued verbosity during the later substantive phase.

Hershkowitz (2009) examined the effects of open-ended narrative practice with both talkative and less talkative children. The results indicated that less talkative children appeared to especially benefit from an open-ended practice session with high levels of interviewer support. It was also observed, however, that interviewers actually provided less talkative children with longer practice sessions (almost seven minutes longer) compared to the more talkative group—possibly because they wanted to ensure that they could get the less talkative children accustomed to the task. The children in our study received brief practice narratives (between three and five minutes), regardless of their individual level of verbosity. Whether practice phases that lasted longer than five minutes would have been more beneficial (see also Hershkowitz, Orbach, Lamb, Sternberg, & Horowitz, 2006), or whether the extra minutes spent warming them up to the task would eventually fatigue them, is a question for future research with this population. Further work should also concentrate on field interviews, as it is possible that the effects of practice narratives may be more salient when children are required to recount a personally relevant event such as repeated child sexual abuse, compared to a one-off experimental event.

We also found that interviews with a practice narrative were longer compared to interviews without a practice narrative, although the difference was entirely due to the length of the practice narrative itself. Some research has likewise found that practice narratives add time to the overall length of the interview (Price et al., 2013), while others have found that children's narratives about a staged event were more efficient (i.e., shorter) following preparatory instructions (Brown et al., 2013). This disparity between the current study and that conducted by Brown and colleagues might reflect differences in the staged event, interviewer experience, or adherence to the NICHD interview protocol. However, the procedures and questioning were very similar across the two studies so it is possible that practice narratives were not as effective at encouraging efficient narratives from the Aboriginal children in our sample.

Effects of Age and Gender on Aboriginal Children's Reports

In line with our prediction, yet in contrast to previous research (Lamb et al., 2003; Roberts et al., 2004), age did not predict the accuracy or informativeness of children's accounts in our sample. Usually, age effects are explained by cognitive developments in memory and verbal ability as children increase with age. As our sample included many children who spoke English as a

second language and did not include any preschool-aged children, it is likely that these features negated any typical age effects seen in other research with non-Aboriginal children. School attendance may also help to explain the results as retention rates in school appear to decrease as Aboriginal children increase in age (Purdie & Buckley, 2010). Future work could benefit from taking an in-depth look at children's educational backgrounds in conjunction with their ages.

Contrary to expectation, and to previous studies employing similar events but with non-Aboriginal children (e.g., Brubacher et al., 2011; Powell et al., 2003; Roberts & Powell, 2007), the girls in our sample produced more words, more target details, and fewer confabulations compared to the boys. To our knowledge, no similar memory study using the [Name of University] Activities (or variations thereof) has reported gender differences in the informativeness or accuracy of children's accounts. Perhaps this finding could be explained by the fact that we had two female interviewers conduct all of the interviews. Some research has found that girls provide more information in response to specific questions when they are asked by a female rather than a male interviewer, although differences tend to diminish when open prompts are delivered (Lamb & Garretson, 2003). More importantly, in Aboriginal culture, there is a strong distinction between the genders when particular types of information are discussed (Purdie et al., 2010). While the nature of our events were not embarrassing or sensitive, experts and agencies do advise that the gender of the service provider should be matched with the Aboriginal client in delicate situations so that they can feel comfortable discussing a range of issues (e.g., child sexual abuse) (Eades, 1992; Queensland Government, 2011). Future analogue studies could benefit from including interviewers of both genders to examine whether Aboriginal boys are more responsive and accurate with male compared to female interviewers regardless of topic.

Conclusions

Drawbacks of the study included the overall limited sample size and the inability to include a non-Aboriginal control group. Further, since analogue lab research involves controlled interviewing where interviewers are required to ask almost exclusively open-ended prompts (77% open in the current study), sometimes the benefits of interview techniques are not observed simply due to a lack of variability in question type. It is known that very high quality interviews "level the playing field," minimizing the effects of other variables (La Rooy et al., 2015). Despite these caveats, our study has shed light on an important issue: the interviewing of Indigenous children in Australia. This research may also have implications for children of other cultures with similar communication styles (e.g., Ball & Bernhardt, 2008). Given recent data which indicates Australian Indigenous children are eight times more likely to be the subjects of substantiated reports of harm compared to non-Indigenous children (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2014), there is a pressing need to ensure Aboriginal children are interviewed according to the best possible and most appropriate techniques.

Overall, our study revealed several important findings. Aboriginal girls unexpectedly provided more words and target details and less confabulations compared to boys. These findings suggest that interviewer gender should be considered an important variable in further research with this population. We found no detrimental effects of the practice narrative (i.e., no effects or associations with inaccuracy, or with lower rates of verbosity). Thus, at the moment we conclude that practice narratives appear to do no harm when used with Aboriginal interviewees, but there is further work to do in improving how practice narratives are conducted with this population.

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Footnote

[1] It is acknowledged that many Aboriginal peoples prefer local terms that better represent their cultural identity. The term *Aboriginal peoples* is used where possible in this article to encapsulate the diversity of Australia’s first custodians.

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