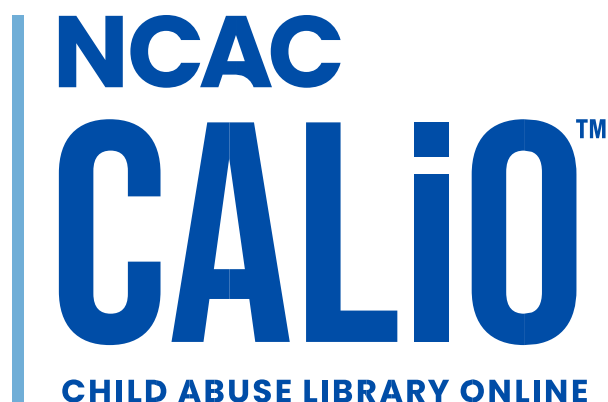




Culture & Diversity Issues in Forensic Interviews of Children

A Bibliography

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**Championing and Strengthening the
Global Response to Child Abuse**

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Scope

This bibliography lists publications covering a wide variety of cultural issues that forensic interviewers may deal with among alleged victims of child sexual abuse.

Organization

Publications include articles, book chapters, reports, and research briefs and are listed in date descending order. Links are provided to full text publications when possible. However, this collection may not be complete. More information can be obtained in the Child Abuse Library Online.

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Culture & Diversity Issues in Forensic Interviews of Children

A Bibliography

Ettinger, T. (2024). [Enhancing cultural safety in forensic interviews during investigations of child abuse: Indigenous perspectives](#) (Doctoral dissertation, The University of British Columbia). Creative Commons. DOI:10.14288/1.0439018

Canada's child-protection services and systems are based on Eurocentric ideologies, which can pose challenges for children raised within non-Western cultural perspectives. Forensic interviews in particular, can have negative impacts on children who are not from the dominant community culture. Attention is needed on addressing this area of practice in a culturally safe manner. More distinctly, studies to better understand culturally safe, traumainformed, inclusive practices with Indigenous communities during investigations of child abuse are almost nonexistent. This gap in the literature is extremely concerning, especially when there is the potential of creating further harm during investigational processes to children who may already be suffering from the effects of child abuse and are also compounded with suffering the negative impacts of colonization. The accounts described above highlight the importance of understanding and effectively addressing the magnitude of traumas Indigenous children may be experiencing during disclosures of abuse. Importantly, we need to ask ourselves: What defines practices as "culturally safe"? This research expands on existing knowledge concerning the deep impacts of colonization on Indigenous children and uses guided conversations with Indigenous community members, Elders, and/or professionals from various communities in British Columbia to explore how might cultural considerations enhance the well-being of Indigenous children and youth during forensic interviews in investigations of child abuse. The participants identified themes within the guided conversations indicating Indigenous children's needs during investigations of abuse. These themes are expanded upon to demonstrate cultural elements to enhance the well-being of Indigenous children and youth during their disclosures of abuse and within forensic interviews. The dissertation concludes with other considerations for practice, including some cultural elements for

workplaces and Child and Youth Advocacy Centres that would demonstrate supportive environments when working with Indigenous populations. Particular practice considerations, visualized through micro, meso, and macro sociological viewpoints, are also demonstrated.

Massarweh, N., & Kosher, H. (2023). Unheard voices of children on child abuse and neglect. *Children and Youth Services Review, 148*, 106904.
DOI:10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.106904

Child abuse and neglect is a serious public health problem affecting millions of children around the world. Over the years enormous efforts have been made globally to define this phenomenon, but those efforts have been based solely on adults' perspectives and knowledge. Children have been excluded from the discourse. This article addresses this gap in the scientific knowledge by examining children's own views on child abuse and neglect, taking into account differences in ethnic group, gender, age and level of religiosity. The study included 1,475 Jewish and Arab children in Israel aged 9–13 years. They were asked to assign degree of severity to each of 34 items describing abusive behaviors against children. Arab and Jewish children differed in the severity they assigned to different kinds of abusive behaviors: Arab children perceived neglect as more severe than Jewish children, whereas Jewish respondents perceived physical and emotional abuse as more severe than Arab children. While no differences were found with regard to level of religiosity, some variance was found with respect to gender and age/grade level.

Stevenson, M. C., & Rivers, M. A. (2023). When disclosure fails to substantiate abuse: Child and perpetrator race predict child sexual abuse substantiation. *Child Maltreatment*, 28(4), 621–633. DOI:10.1177/10775595231157729

We examined the effects of child race, perpetrator race, and abuse disclosure status (within the context of a formal forensic interview) on abuse substantiation outcomes. Specifically, we coded child sexual abuse disclosure, abuse substantiation, and race of 315 children (80% girls, M age = 10, age range = 2–17; 75% White, 9% Black, 12% Biracial, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian) who underwent a child forensic interview in a Midwestern child advocacy center. Supporting hypotheses, abuse substantiation was more likely in cases involving (a) abuse disclosure (vs. no disclosure), (b) White children (vs. children of color), and (c) perpetrators of color (vs. White perpetrators). Also supporting hypotheses, the effect of abuse disclosure on increased abuse substantiation was greater for White children than for children of color. This research suggests that even when children of color disclose their experiences of sexual abuse, they nonetheless face barriers to abuse substantiation.

Hope, L., Anakwah, N., Antfolk, J., Brubacher, S. P., Flowe, H., Gabbert, F., Giebels, F., Kanja, W., Korkman, J., Kyo, A., Naka, M., Otgaar, H., Powell, M. B., Selim, H., Skrifvars, J., Sorkpah, I. K., Sowatey, E. A., Steele, L. C., Stevens, L., ...& Anonymous. (2022). [Urgent issues and prospects at the intersection of culture, memory, and witness interviews: Exploring the challenges for research and practice](#). *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 27(1), 1–31. DOI:10.1111/lcrp.12202

The pursuit of justice increasingly relies on productive interactions between witnesses and investigators from diverse cultural backgrounds during investigative interviews. To date, the role of cultural context has largely been ignored by researchers in the field of investigative interviewing, despite repeated requests from practitioners and policymakers for evidence-based guidance for the conduct of interviews with people from different cultures. Through examining cultural differences in human memory and communication and considering specific contextual challenges for investigative

interviewing through the lens of culture, this review and associated commentaries highlight the scope for considering culture and human diversity in research on, and the practice of, investigative interviewing with victims, witnesses, and other sources. Across 11 commentaries, contributors highlight the importance of considering the role of culture in different investigative interviewing practices (e.g., rapport building, questioning techniques) and contexts (e.g., gender-based violence, asylum seeking, child abuse), address common areas of cultural mismatch between interviewer–interviewee expectations, and identify critical future routes for research. We call for an increased focus in the investigative interviewing literature on the nature and needs of our global community and encourage constructive and collaborative discussion between researchers and practitioners from around the world to better identify specific challenges and work together towards evidence-based solutions.

Danby, M. C., Guadagno, B., & Sharman, S. J. (2021). Interviewers' perceptions of interviewing aboriginal Australian children. *Police Practice and Research*, 22(4), 1356–1375. DOI:10.1080/15614263.2020.1865957

Children from Indigenous cultures experience higher rates of abuse than non-Indigenous children, and their cases face extra challenges progressing through the legal system. When abuse is reported, an investigative interview is conducted with the child. The current study aimed to examine interviewers' perceptions of interviewing Aboriginal Australian children. Sixteen experienced interviewers participated in semi-structured interviews about their experiences interviewing Aboriginal children. Thematic analysis revealed three perceived challenges: engaging the children, communication differences, and obtaining evidential details. Creating strong rapport with the child, simplifying language, and adapting questioning approaches were reported as key strategies to help overcome these challenges, but the interviewers voiced a need for more support and targeted resources to assist them in their roles. This study highlights the need for highly specialist

interviewers versed in Aboriginal culture, and the need for future research into the appropriateness of contemporary protocols for children from minority cultural groups.

Klebanov, B., & Katz, C. (2021). Children's peritraumatic responses during sexual abuse incidents: Exploring the narratives of children from different ethnoreligious groups in Israel. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(15-16), NP14830-NP14853. DOI:10.1177/08862605211016351

The peritraumatic response of children during incidents of child sexual abuse (CSA) is a neglected construct in the literature. Despite the widespread use of the fight-flight-freeze model, recent studies have shown that in the unique context of child abuse, additional peritraumatic responses could be relevant. The current mixed-methods study examined children's peritraumatic responses to CSA. The sample consisted of 249 forensic interviews with children aged from 4 to 13 years. An initial qualitative analysis resulted in identifying various ways in which the children responded to the abuse, the children's decision-making around these responses, as well their perceptions of their response. This analysis was followed by quantitative analyses, which explored the frequency of these peritraumatic responses and their correlation with the characteristics of the children and abuse. Six peritraumatic response categories were identified, the most common being fight, flight, and fear. Only ethnoreligious identity was significantly correlated with the fight-or-flight response, with a significantly lower frequency among Muslim and ultra-Orthodox Jewish children. Frequency of abuse and perpetrator familiarity were correlated with the frequency of the fight-or-flight response, indicating that the latter was less relevant in reoccurring incidents of abuse and with perpetrators who were family members. The findings promote the conceptualization of children's peritraumatic responses during incidents of abuse and the realization of the crucial role of children's ecological systems in their peritraumatic responses to incidents of abuse.

Katz, C., Tener, D., Marmor, A., Lusky-Weisrose, E., & Mordi, H. (2020). "Yes, My Uncle, I'll do whatever you say": Experiences of Israeli Muslim Arab children during forensic interviews following child sexual abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(5-6), NP2465–NP2489. DOI:10.1177/0886260520943732

Children from Arab society in Israel have been overlooked in previous studies and efforts in the area of forensic interviews. The current study provides an in-depth thematic analysis of 30 forensic interviews with Israeli Muslim Arab children following child sexual abuse (CSA), all conducted by Arab forensic interviewers. In multicultural Israeli society, Muslim Arabs make up 18% of the population. In addition to the religious and cultural difference, this minority is involved in an ongoing conflict with the majority Jewish society in Israel and tends to have low trust of government authorities. This background necessarily affects the area of forensic interviews with children. The research explores the unique encounter between maltreated children from Israeli Muslim Arab society and forensic interviewers, highlighting its particular characteristics and challenges. Data analysis revealed a central theme of a clash of worlds. The forensic interviewers, although hailing from a similar background as the children, followed best practices developed in western societies. The children, on the other hand, faced enormous conflict in addressing CSA terminology and complying with the requirements of the forensic world in ways that are forbidden to them in their own. Moreover, having been educated to accept the authority of adults unquestioningly, the children were torn between the difficulty of disclosing the abuse to someone outside the family, and the obligation to communicate candidly with the adult interviewer as required in the forensic context. The findings highlight the urgent need to reform the services these children receive and to dedicate future efforts to further assessment of cultural context and its impact on maltreated children, particularly in the forensic context.

Navarro, C., Knight, T., Sharman, S. J., & Powell, M. B. (2019). Challenges in translating interview protocols for alleged child victims of sexual abuse to different languages: A case study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 94, 104033. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104033

Adequate interviewing of alleged victims of child sexual abuse is critical for the investigation and for preserving the welfare of the child. Investigative interview protocols for children (IIPCs) have been developed to meet this twofold purpose. This article focuses on one previously unexplored issue related to applicability of IIPCs: how well they translate into other languages. This case study provides an in-depth analysis of an example of the translation of an IPC to a new language and its adaptation to a particular cultural setting. Using an interpretive description approach and a mixed-method, stages and outputs of the adaptation process are described, as well as the amount, type and nature of difficulties in translation that were identified and corrected across the process. The main threats to translation equivalence arose from differences among languages, but also from cultural and contextual differences. Prompts to children and interviewers within the protocol presented different translation challenges. Consultation with experts and the protocol's advisors, along with team discussions, were beneficial in identifying and solving translation issues. Typical translation issues and practical recommendations on how to translate and culturally adapt IIPCs effectively are discussed.

Barber Rioja, V., & Rosenfeld, B. (2018). Addressing linguistic and cultural differences in the forensic interview. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*, 17(4), 377–386. DOI:10.1080/14999013.2018.1495280

Given the increased cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity of individuals undergoing legal proceedings, forensic mental health professionals around the world are often tasked with evaluating defendants who are drastically different from themselves. There appears to be a clear consensus that cultural competency should be a key component of both the training and practice of forensic mental health. However, despite the growing literature on multicultural assessment in clinical settings, there is little

guidance on how to apply cultural competency principles to the area of forensic mental health assessment. This article reviews some of the challenges that arise during the forensic mental health interview with culturally diverse individuals. In addition, practice recommendations to mitigate some of these challenges are provided. Identified challenges and recommendations are organized around three stages: preparation for the interview (e.g., what type of knowledge about the defendant's culture is needed beforehand, how to attain that knowledge, or whether and how to use translators), the initiation of the forensic interview (e.g., the effect of culture in the informed consent process), and the interviewing process itself (e.g., cultural challenges to developing rapport, and identification of mental status assessment domains that may be vulnerable to cultural influences).

Cunial, K. J., & Kebbell, M. R. (2017). Police perceptions of ADHD in youth interviewees. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 23(5), 509–526. DOI:10.1080/1068316X.2017.1284216

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in witness-victim/suspect interviews holds strong relevance for policing. Four purpose-written vignettes were used to test the extent to which ADHD interviewee behaviour impacts on the work of 46 experienced Australian detectives and their ability to identify ADHD as a likely diagnosis. Detectives reported frequently encountering ADHD-type interviewees in their work; perceiving such interviewees to be at a very significant risk of future contact with the criminal justice system; and perceiving ADHD-type behaviour to exert a highly significant impact on interviewing time efficiency as well as quality. Detectives gave highly significant ratings of ADHD as a likely explanation of vignettes describing ADHD-type behaviour for witness-victims as well as suspects. However, they could not identify ADHD as the most likely explanation over and above other possibilities. Implications are discussed in terms of a rationale for future research targeting police awareness and training needs in ADHD.

Powell, M. B., Manger, B., Dion, J., & Sharman, S. J. (2017). [Professionals' perspectives about the challenges of using interpreters in child sexual abuse interviews.](#) *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 24(1), 90–101. DOI:10.1080/13218719.2016.1197815

Interpreters play a crucial role in many investigative interviews with child complainants of sexual abuse; however, little has been written about the interpreting process from the perspective of the interviewers. This study elicited interviewers' perspectives about the challenges of using interpreters with the aim of understanding how investigative interviews could be improved. The participants consisted of 21 investigative interviewers and prosecutors of child abuse cases (from a range of jurisdictions) who use interpreters on a regular basis. Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with the professionals about the interpreting process revealed two main challenges particular to child abuse interviews, namely the interpreters' lack of preparedness to deal with the traumatic and sensitive nature of children's abuse histories, and an insufficient understanding of 'best-practice' child interview process. The recommendations focus on the need for more specialised training for, and screening of, interpreters, and more extensive use of pre-conferencing to familiarize children with the interpreter-mediated interview process.

Tishelman, A. C., & Fontes, L. A. (2017). Religion in child sexual abuse forensic interviews. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 63, 120–130. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.11.025

Religion is an under-studied factor affecting children's sexual victimization and their willingness to discuss such experiences. In this qualitative study, 39 child forensic interviewers and child advocacy center (CAC) directors in the United States discussed religious influences on children's sexual abuse experiences, their relationships to CACs, and their disclosures in the forensic setting. Participants reported both harmonious and dissonant interactions between religiously observant children and families on one hand and child advocacy centers on the other. Themes emerged related to abuse in religious contexts and religious justifications for abuse; clergy and religious supports for disclosures as well as suppression of disclosures; and the ways CACs accommodate

religious diversity and forge collaborations with clergy. Participants discussed a wide range of religions. Recommendations for practice and research are included.

Fisher, A. K., Mackey, T. D., Langendoen, C., & Barnard, M. (2016). Child and interviewer race in forensic interviewing. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 25*(7), 777-792.
DOI:10.1080/10538712.2016.1208705

The purpose of this study was to examine the potential effect of child race and interviewer race on forensic interviewing outcomes. The results of the regression analysis indicated that child race and interviewer race had a significant effect on interview outcome category (no findings, inconclusive, or findings consistent with sexual abuse). Furthermore, the results indicate that the interaction of child and interviewer race had predictive value for rates of findings consistent with sexual abuse but not in the direction predicted. Cross-race dyads had significantly higher rates of interview outcomes consistent with sexual abuse. These findings suggest that more research into the effect of race on disclosure of child sexual abuse is needed.

Fontes, L. A., & Tishelman, A. C. (2016). [Language competence in forensic interviews for suspected child sexual abuse](#). *Child Abuse & Neglect, 58*, 51-62.
DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.06.014

Forensic interviews with children for suspected child sexual abuse require meeting children “where they are” in terms of their developmental level, readiness to disclose, culture, and language. The field lacks research indicating how to accommodate children’s diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This article focuses on language competence, defined here as the ability of an organization and its personnel (in this case, Child Advocacy Centers and forensic interviewers) to communicate effectively with clients regardless of their preferred language(s). In this qualitative study, 39 U.S. child forensic interviewers and child advocacy center directors discussed their experiences,

practices, and opinions regarding interviews with children and families who are not native speakers of English. Topics include the importance of interviewing children in their preferred language, problems in interpreted interviews, bilingual interviews, and current and recommended procedures. Recommendations for practice and further research are included.

Joe, J. R., & Malach, R. S. (2011). Families with American Indian roots. In E. W. Lynch & M. J. Hanson (Eds.), *Developing cross-cultural competence: A guide for working with children and their families* (4th ed., pp. 110–139). Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to describe the historical background of American Indians and some of the more common experiences, cultural practices, and beliefs that may influence American Indians' communication and interaction with interventionists. The last section of the chapter discusses some of the communication protocols that nonnative interventionists should be aware of when working with American Indian families.

Fontes, L. A. (2010). Interviewing immigrant children for suspected child maltreatment. *The Journal of Psychiatry & Law*, 38(3), 283–305. DOI:10.1177/009318531003800304

This article examines challenges posed in forensic interviews of immigrant children when there is a suspicion that these children may be victims of child abuse or neglect. Suggestions are made for interviewers regarding the interview setting, preparations, building rapport, conveying respect, narrative training, pacing the interview, and trauma symptoms that may stem from issues that are unrelated to the abuse.

Fontes, L. A., & Plummer, C. (2010). Cultural issues in disclosures of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 19*(5), 491–518. DOI:10.1080/10538712.2010.512520

Cultural norms affect the likelihood that child sexual abuse will be discovered by an adult or disclosed by a child. Cultural norms also affect whether abused children's families will report child sexual abuse to authorities. This article explores the ways ethnic and religious culture affect child sexual abuse disclosure and reporting, both in the United States and internationally. Guidelines for culturally sensitive child abuse interviewing are provided to facilitate disclosures of abuse from culturally diverse children in formal settings.

Maddux, J. (2010). Recommendations for forensic evaluators conducting interpreter mediated interviews. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health, 9*(1), 55–62. DOI:10.1080/14999013.2010.483343

Courts and forensic psychologists are more frequently working with interpreters as a result of the increasing linguistic diversity in the United States. This article reviews the published literature on how interpreter-mediated communication impacts the reliability and validity of forensic evaluation. Until there are sufficient numbers of multilingual forensic psychologists, the use of interpreters in forensic practice is unavoidable. Therefore, this article provides forensic psychologists with empirically-based recommendations to improve the reliability and validity of interpreter-mediated evaluations.

Tishelman, A. C., & Geffner, R. (2010). Forensic, cultural, and systems issues in child sexual abuse cases—Part I: An introduction. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 19*(5), 485–490. DOI:10.1080/10538712.2010.512262

This article introduces the first in a two-part special issue focusing on forensic, cultural, and systems issues in child sexual abuse cases. The five articles contained in this issue include a diversity of perspectives on approaches to extended interviews and evaluations

of child sexual abuse suspicions, an exploration of the ways culture affects child sexual abuse disclosure and reporting, considerations relevant to the management of a child's mental health needs while forensic process are ongoing, and the use of anatomical dolls in forensic interviews. We call for attention to several practice areas, including (a) prioritizing a child's mental health needs while minimizing disruption of forensic processes, (b) developing best practices and models of child sexual abuse assessment and evaluation when a one-session forensic interview is insufficient, (c) appropriately evaluating child sexual abuse concerns when they occur without a disclosure and/or in children with communication limitations, and (d) the integration of cultural sensitivity into interviews and evaluations.

Tishelman, A. C., & Geffner, R. (2010). Forensic, cultural, and systems issues in child sexual abuse cases—Part 2: Research and practitioner issues. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 19*(5), 485–490. DOI:10.1080/10538712.2010.512262

This article introduces the second issue of the special double issue focusing on forensic, cultural, and systems issues in child sexual abuse cases. We briefly review the articles, which include a discussion of child sexual abuse myths, an empirical analysis of extended child sexual abuse evaluations, an article on the role of the medical provider in child sexual abuse evaluations, a study of satisfaction levels with multidisciplinary teams in child advocacy centers, and a commentary advocating for the credentialing of forensic interviewers. We call for further empirical examination of media related to child sexual abuse risk, research on appropriate models for extended sexual abuse interviews and evaluations, and optimal practices relevant to each member of multidisciplinary teams in a child advocacy center.

Fontes, L. A. (2008). *Interviewing clients across cultures: A practitioner's guide*. Guilford Press.

Packed with practical pointers and examples, this indispensable, straight-talking guide helps professionals conduct productive interviews while building strong working relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse clients. Chapters cover verbal and nonverbal ways to build rapport and convey respect; how to overcome language barriers, including effective use of interpreters; culturally competent interviews with children and adolescents; and key issues in working with immigrants and refugees. Strategies for avoiding common cross-cultural misunderstandings and producing fair, accurate reports are presented. Every chapter concludes with thought-provoking discussion questions and resources for further reading.

Fontes, L. A., & Faller, K. C. (2007). Conducting culturally competent sexual abuse interviews with children from diverse racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In K. C. Faller (Ed.), *Interviewing children about sexual abuse: Controversies and best practice* (pp.164–174). Oxford University Press.
DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195311778.003.0012

Professionals who interview children for possible sexual abuse tend to be white and middle class. At the same time, children and families who require assessment for sexual abuse are increasingly from diverse backgrounds. Professionals need to develop special skills to interview cross-culturally. This chapter describes the need for interviewers to take into account race, class, culture, subculture, religious, and language differences when interviewing children. How these differences can pose barriers for evaluators and strategies for enhancing agency and professional cultural competence are covered.

Springman, R. E., Wherry, J. N., & Notaro, P. C. (2006). [The effects of interviewer race and child race on sexual abuse disclosures in forensic interviews](#). *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 15(3), 99–116. DOI:10.1300/J070v15n03_06

This study examined the impact of interviewer race and child race on disclosures by alleged child sexual abuse victims during forensic interviews. Despite findings that supportiveness of caretaker, gender of interviewer, gender of child, and age of child affect disclosure, previous studies have failed to examine race as a variable impacting disclosure in a real-world setting. The study examined 220 cases from an archive of reports generated from forensic interviews in an urban setting. The reports were reviewed and coded for degree of disclosure, focusing on African American and Caucasian children and interviewers. The results indicate that child race and the interaction of child race and interviewer race reliably distinguished between no disclosure, tentative disclosure, and disclosure with detailed account of activity, while interviewer race alone failed to serve as a significant predictor. The interaction between child race and interviewer race was not in the predicted direction, with cross-race dyads disclosing more than same-race dyads. Results are discussed in the context of real-world applications versus the previous analogue child sexual abuse literature.

Powell, M. B., & Bartholomew, T. (2003). Interviewing and assessing clients from different cultural backgrounds: Guidelines for all forensic professionals. In D. Carson & R. Bull (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology in legal contexts* (2nd ed., pp. 625–643). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. DOI:10.1002/0470013397.ch27

This chapter contains sections titled Prior Knowledge about the Person and the Wider Cultural Context, Rapport with the Client or Interviewee, Interpretative Assistance (If Required), Diverse Array of Hypotheses, Effective Techniques for Eliciting a Free Narrative, & References.