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THE UNEXPECTED COSTS OF MORAL MINIMIZATION AS AN INTERROGATION TACTIC

Margareth Etienne* & Richard McAdams**

INTRODUCTION

Consider an infrequently discussed tactic of American police interrogation. Two examples come from the most popular training manual; the third is a description from a journalist who spent a year following a city’s homicide unit:

Egads, man, how in the world can anybody with a family the size of yours get along on that kind of money in this day and age? . . . Anyone else confronted with a similar situation probably would have done the same thing, Joe. Your company is at fault. . . . I can tell you this—if you received a decent salary in the first place, you wouldn’t be here.¹

Joe, this girl was having a lot of fun for herself by letting you kiss her and feel her breasts. For her, that would have been sufficient. But men aren’t built the same way. There’s a limit to the teasing and excitement they can take; then something’s got to give. A female ought to recognize this, and if she’s not willing to go all the way, she ought to stop way short of what this gal allowed you to do.²

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Id. at 222 (proposing the script for a rape interrogation).

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=4044000
Beat your child to death and a police detective will wrap his arm around you in the interrogation room, telling you about how he beats his own children all the time, how it wasn’t your fault if the kid up and died on you.  

These examples employ victim-blaming, which is an explicit part of the common interrogation tactic of moral minimization. Minimization involves efforts to persuade suspects that the consequences of confessing are less than they suppose. Moral minimization involves the interrogating detective endorsing moral excuses and justifications for the crime, attempting to convince the suspect that even the police do not regard the suspected criminal conduct to be seriously wrong.  

These officially endorsed rationalizations for criminality are powerful because they are surprising – coming from law enforcement officials the suspect expects to strongly disapprove of felonies – and are delivered persistently and sympathetically in the intimate setting of an interrogation room. Police minimize the crime with a variety of techniques: diminishing the harm the suspect caused the victim, emphasizing how common the crime is, and shifting the blame to society, the victim, or others. In the first excerpt, interrogators tell an embezzlement suspect that “anyone” in the same situation would have stolen from their miserly employer. In the second, detectives employ sexist tropes to blame the rape victim for the rape. Interrogators described in the third passage confide (falsely, one assumes) to having committed child abuse, which would be the only crime the suspect had committed but for the bad luck of an unexpectedly fragile victim, whose death makes the crime homicide.  

The official theory for how moral minimization works – posited in the interrogation manuals that recommend the tactic – is that it lowers the psychological costs of confession. By making the crime seem less shameful, the guilty suspect will feel less shame in admitting guilt to the detectives. Although this expected effect of moral minimization is not empirically validated, we believe that it is plausible. We argue, however,
that there are two unexpected and harmful consequences that are at least as plausible. First, if moral minimization lowers the internal, psychological costs of confessing to crimes, it also lowers the internal, psychological costs of committing future crimes. The tactic therefore risks promoting recidivism. Second, the training and practice of victim-blaming (one type of moral minimization) adversely affects policing and policing culture. The sexist stereotypes used to blame women, for example, reinforce hyper-masculine police culture, which impedes the investigation of domestic and sexual assaults of women.

Regarding the first point, the interrogation manual recommending the tactic of moral minimization explains its effectiveness by using a psychological idea – *neutralization theory* – that holds that people are more likely to offend if they can first neutralize the shame and guilt they would ordinarily experience from committing a crime. In other words, many offenders have internalized the social norms against violent and fraudulent behavior that the criminal law enforces, but will still offend if they can mentally diminish the norm’s psychological power with some superficially plausible moral justification or excuse, or by trivializing the victim’s injury. The aim of moral minimization is to reinforce this process of deflecting guilt and shame. Ironically, then, the same theory that explains why moral minimization will dis inhibit an individual’s confession of crime predicts that minimization will dis inhibit the individual’s subsequent commission of crime. Moral minimization tactics are likely to be criminogenic.

Alongside neutralization, four distinct criminal law theories buttress our criminogenic claim. The first is restorative justice, a cross-cultural reform movement that advocates the need for reconciliation of the offender and victim. Through a confrontational process that is nearly the precise opposite of moral minimization, and which lasts about the same time as a police interrogation, restorative justice conferences reduce recidivism over a period of years, according to the most rigorous empirical studies. A standard explanation for that success is that the conferences challenge and

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5 There is a legal and psychological literature discussing whether the accusatory style of interrogation, which includes minimization and other tactics, causes false confessions. See infra note 15. This article focuses only on moral minimization and our contribution lies in identifying two novel adverse consequences of that tactic.

6 See infra Part II-A-1.

7 See infra text accompanying notes 179-193.
undermine the offenders’ neutralizations of the crime. We have reason to expect that contrary efforts to endorse and reinforce neutralizations during interrogation will promote recidivism.

The entrapment defense also illustrates the criminogenic risks of minimization.\textsuperscript{8} Entrapment doctrine presupposes that the words and deeds of undercover agents can persuade law-abiding individuals to commit crimes they would otherwise not commit. Some of the most prominent judicial decisions ruling in favor of defendants find entrapment plausible because undercover operatives made appeals to moral values other than law, which is to say, they made appeals that neutralized the immorality of the crime. Under existing doctrine, courts would consider it a fact favorable to the defense that an undercover operative encouraged a theft by saying “anyone” with equivalent family obligations would commit the crime, as in the first script above (even if that fact alone was insufficient for the defense). The same criminogenic risk that exists in some undercover operations exists in some interrogations.

Beyond neutralization, we rely on the social norms literature and the legal legitimacy literature to support our criminogenic claim. Research on social norms finds that people are more likely to obey the law if they believe that others are obeying the law and will informally sanction them for violations.\textsuperscript{9} Moral minimization makes this less likely. Because suspects expect police detectives, as much as or more than anyone, to disapprove of felonies, a detective’s statements trivializing and rationalizing a felony can persuade the suspect that even the police don’t take this seriously, which implies that almost no one else does. And when detectives minimize by saying that the crime is common and/or that “anyone” would have committed it under the circumstances, the desire to reciprocate compliance with compliance is weakened.

Lastly, research on legal legitimacy finds that people are more likely to obey the criminal law and cooperate with law enforcement if they perceive law to be legitimate.\textsuperscript{10} Yet the moral minimization of a crime

\textsuperscript{8} See infra text accompanying notes 194-207.
\textsuperscript{9} See infra text accompanying notes 210-222.
\textsuperscript{10} See infra text accompanying notes 223-229.
effectively critiques the law that defines the crime for its failure to track moral intuitions shared by the perpetrator and (supposedly) police detectives. If anyone would have stolen from their employer under the circumstances, then the law is arbitrary to treat it as a felony. Persuading suspects of this critique damages the law’s legitimacy.

Each of these five discourses – neutralization theory, restorative justice research, entrapment doctrine, social norms theory, and legitimacy theory – point in the same direction: moral minimization undermines internal and informal motivations for legal compliance. The tactic is criminogenic. No one has previously noted this risk. As we explain, moral minimization is most likely to encourage recidivism when the offender’s motivation to comply with criminal law is real but marginal (i.e., someone who may offend but still experiences guilt and shame for offending) and the minimizations are generalizable (i.e., applicable to future criminal opportunities), conditions that apply frequently to crimes like theft, assault, and sexual assault. These conditions are less likely to apply to certain offenses, such as homicide, for reasons we explore. But the fact that no one has ever considered these risks makes it certain that police currently use the tactic in some cases where the criminogenic costs substantially exceed the interrogation benefits.

We consider various objections to our claim, most prominently the possibility that the subsequent prosecution, conviction, and punishment of the offender will undo any criminogenic effects of moral minimization by sending a counter-message validating the moral seriousness of the offense and the offender’s responsibility. This objection is not compelling. Briefly, not everyone who is interrogated is prosecuted or convicted. For those who are, they have a choice of which message to believe, an affirming one they first heard from police detectives and a negative one they may infer from prosecution. At best, there is a compromise between the two messages, so the minimization message dilutes the responsibility message.

At worst, and more likely, those convicted of crime are subject to confirmation bias, seeking to maintain a positive self-image by making

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11 See infra Part II-B.
12 See infra Part II-C.
every possible inference to confirm the earlier message of moral minimization. Instead of inferring that the judge’s criminal sentence disproves the detective’s minimizations, the punished offender may infer that the detective articulated community mores more accurately than does the law. Sometimes the criminal law does fail to track common moral intuitions, so the offender is free to reason, self-servingly, that this is one of those occasions. We consider specific actors in the system – attorneys, judges, jurors, and victims – and conclude that none of them are likely to send an effective counter-message that offsets the detective’s moral minimization and undoes its criminogenic damage, at least not when, as is currently the case, there is no awareness of the risks that minimization poses.

That moral minimization is criminogenic is just one of its unintended adverse consequences. The second one is the effect the tactic has on interrogators. Here we focus narrowly on the minimization tactic of victim-blaming, especially for crimes of violence against women. These tactics likely reinforce hyper-masculine police culture. Many observers point to this culture as a reason that police departments so frequently fail to believe women victims and fail to effectively investigate sexual assault and domestic violence cases. The misogynistic tropes employed in victim-blaming interrogation tactics are a symptom of the cultural problem and a barrier to correcting it. The training in and practice of victim-blaming in interrogations support hyper-masculine culture by encouraging self-selection into detective work of those for whom the sexist tropes are least repellent or even congenial. The experience of empathetically blaming victims in order to appeal to suspects may also, over time, persuade some detectives to move closer to believing what they pretend to believe. In short, the second unintended cost of moral minimization is that it contributes to the cultural problems that make it difficult for police to take crimes against women seriously. No one has previously considered the consequences of moral minimization on the interrogators.

In sum, the interrogation tactic of moral minimization has unexpected costs and, as we also show, entirely uncertain benefits.

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13 See infra Part III.
Although we consider how to develop better counter-messaging to blunt the criminogenic effects, such counter-messaging can never entirely undo the damage and, in any event, does nothing to address the effects of victim-blaming on interrogators. We conclude in favor of a consequential change in modern interrogation regulation: the restriction or partial ban of moral minimization.

Before we proceed, however, we should acknowledge and distinguish other interrogation issues. The vast legal scholarship on interrogation focuses mostly on the constitutional doctrines that define the admissibility of confession evidence in criminal trials.\(^\text{14}\) Other legal scholarship and most social science research on interrogation focuses on the causes and consequences of false confessions.\(^\text{15}\) These important literatures sometimes discuss specific interrogation tactics, including minimization.\(^\text{16}\) To the extent that moral minimization contributes to false confessions, then our article reinforces the risks of such tactics. But the unexpected costs we


\(^{16}\) To ensure admissibility, police interrogators generally avoid specific promises of leniency in prosecution and sentencing (see, e.g., Wilson v. United States, 162 U.S. 613, 622 (1896) (stating that confessions are “inadmissible if made under any ... promise, or encouragement of any hope or favor”), but minimizing tactics may imply a promise of leniency. See Saul M. Kassin & Karlyn McNall, Police Interrogations and Confessions: Communicating Promises and Threats by Pragmatic Implication, 15 L. & Hum. Behav. 233, 239 (1991); Snook et al., supra note 15, at 14-15. Also, maximizing tactics, by which interrogators assert total confidence in the suspect’s guilt and their ability to prove it, even by false claims regarding the evidence, can induce false confessions. See, e.g., Allyson J. Horgan et al, Minimization & Maximization Techniques: Assessing the Perceived Consequences of Confessing and Confession Diagnosticity, 18 Psychol. Crime & L. 65, 66 (2012) (finding that false evidence can trigger false confessions to experimental rule violations).
discuss are distinct from what has been previously considered in interrogation scholarship, doctrinal or social science.\textsuperscript{17}

We proceed as follows. Part I describes moral minimization and the evidence that police detectives employ the tactic extensively. From the case law, we show the exact wording of real world minimizations, with an emphasis on how detectives blame victims. Part II explores the tactic’s criminogenic risks, investigating the five discourses just described. We identify the factors that determine the magnitude of the risk and answer the objection that the criminal process undoes the damage of moral minimization. Part III explores the tactic’s risks for policing and policing culture, \textit{i.e.}, how the training and practice of stereotypical victim-blaming pushes against effective investigation of crimes against those who are stereotyped, particularly women. Part IV addresses the normative implications – what should be done to limit the risks of moral minimization. Part V concludes.

I. MORAL MINIMIZATION IN AMERICAN POLICE INTERROGATIONS

Every day, American law enforcement seeks to convince suspected offenders that the crimes they are believed to have committed are not morally serious and caused no real harm. Just as often, American detectives work to persuade suspects that the true blame for their crime rests with someone else, usually the victim. To document this strange state of affairs, and publicize an understudied policing strategy, this Part reviews the theory and practice of American interrogation methods, with an emphasis on moral minimization.

The United States and a few other nations predominantly employ a “confrontational” or “accusatory” method of interrogation, in contrast to the “information-gathering” methods favored by the United Kingdom and other

\footnote{\textsuperscript{17} A partial exception is Anne Coughlin, who drew attention to the misogynistic tropes in rape interrogations and “specul[at]ed” about the effect on rapists. See Anne M. Coughlin, \textit{Interrogation Stories}, 95 VA. L. REV. 1599, 1599 (2009). Coughlin’s focus is different than ours in various ways, as her concern is limited to the crime of rape, she does not discuss the general tactic of “minimization,” and her framework is narrative theory rather than neutralization or the other social science theories we employ.}
nations. The confrontational method prominently includes the tactics known as maximization and minimization. For the former, interrogators maximize the apparent certainty they have of the suspect’s guilt, suggesting that the evidence is decisive, cutting off and rejecting protestations of innocence, and on some occasions falsely describing evidence of guilt. For minimization, interrogators suggest mitigating factors for the suspect’s crime, which make it less legally or morally wrong or even fully justified.

Within the category of minimization, our focus is on moral minimizations. We define that subcategory in Part A. Part B explores the content of the tactic, relying on widely used interrogation manuals. Part C documents the extensive use of moral minimization in real world interrogations based on surveys, observational studies, and especially case law. Part D roughly estimates how frequently detectives morally minimize criminal offenses each year in the United States.

A. Moral Minimization Defined

Although the training manuals we survey below do not explicitly make the distinction, there are two principal types of minimization: legal and moral. Legal minimization suggests to suspects that the crime may not be as legally serious as they believe or perhaps they have a legally valid defense. In a homicide investigation, for example, the detective may suggest that the suspect could have killed the victim accidentally or in self-defense, though the manuals advise caution when relying on a theme that implies official leniency, given that courts may exclude confessions produced by false promises of prosecutorial leniency. Nonetheless, where the strategy is used, investigators hope to get closer to confessions by inviting suspects to accept a version of the facts that appears to lessen their legal liability while nonetheless connecting them to the crime.

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18 See Christian A. Meissner, et al., Improving the Effectiveness of Suspect Interrogations, 11 ANN. REV. L. & SOC. SCI. 211, 216 (“One primary distinction has been proposed between the use of accusatorial approaches in North America and the development of information-gathering approaches in the United Kingdom, Australia, and elsewhere.”).
19 See SIMON, supra note 15, at 135 (explaining maximization tactics as including, in the absence of “powerful incriminating evidence,” that “interrogators often fabricate it and deceive the suspect into believing it exists”).
20 INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 203, 425; BRIAN JAYNE & JOSEPH BUCKLEY, A FIELD GUIDE TO THE REID TECHNIQUE 277-79 (2014) [hereinafter JAYNE & BUCKLEY, FIELD GUIDE] “[T]he theme should not provide the suspect with a legal defense for his criminal behavior.” Id. at 276.
Moral minimization, however, is our focus. With moral minimization, the interrogator seeks to persuade the suspect that, whatever the law might say, her conduct is morally excused or justified, at least to some degree, so the crime is not a serious moral transgression. Decades ago, the Supreme Court in *Miranda* described this technique in its review of interrogation practices: “Like other men, perhaps the subject has had a bad family life, had an unhappy childhood, had too much to drink, had an unrequited desire for women. The officers are instructed to minimize the moral seriousness of the offense, to cast blame on the victim or on society.”

*Miranda* illustrated the technique with facts from its 1954 case of *Leyra v. Denno*, where an interrogator (a psychiatrist) had said to the accused, “We do sometimes things that are not right, but in a fit of temper or anger we sometimes do things we aren't really responsible for,” and again, “We know that morally you were just in anger. Morally, you are not to be condemned.”

We explore examples below. Dan Simon summarizes: Minimization is “achieved by means of presenting the suspect with a theme that reduces the import of the crime. Themes usually convey the interrogator’s opinion that the crime was not so serious, that the victim deserved his fate, or that anyone else would have acted in the same way.”

The remainder of this part demonstrates the nature and frequency of moral minimization.

**B. The Reid Interrogation Manuals and Moral Minimization**

To move beyond generalities, we explore the most influential interrogation manuals, those defining the “Reid” technique.*Miranda*
relied on, among other sources, the second edition of the police training guide by Fred E. Inbau and John E. Reid, titled *Criminal Interrogation and Confessions.*\(^{26}\) At the time, Chief Justice Warren noted that the three leading texts on interrogation – two of which were authored by Inbau, Reid and their associates – had total combined sales and circulation of over 44,000.\(^{27}\) John E. Reid & Associates, Inc. remains the leading authority on police interrogations, through its multiple training manuals\(^ {28}\) and courses.\(^ {29}\) Since *Miranda*, the Supreme Court has twice referenced Reid interrogation manuals, reflecting its dominant position in the field.\(^ {30}\) Reid states that “hundreds of thousands of investigators have received [its] training,”\(^ {31}\) a claim substantiated by an independent survey of law enforcement personnel, which found that over half had received instruction on the Reid technique.\(^ {32}\) *Criminal Interrogation and Confession* is now in its fifth edition, published in 2013, and we refer to it as “the manual.” (Importantly

\(^{26}\) *Miranda*, 384 U.S. at 448-49 n.9 (1966) (citing FRED E. INBAU & JOHN E. REID, CRIMINAL INTERROGATIONS AND CONFESSIONS (2nd ed. 1962), and noting that the first edition of the Inbau and Reid manual was a revision and enlargement of an earlier text by the authors, LIE DETECTION AND CRIMINAL INTERROGATION (3d ed. 1953)).

\(^{27}\) *Miranda*, 384 U.S. at 448-49 n.9.


\(^{29}\) See also SIMON, supra note 15, at 121-22 (“[U]sed most widely by American law enforcement agencies . . . the Reid Technique of Interviewing and Interrogation has been taught to well over 100,000 law enforcement agents.”). In addition to its books and DVDs, Reid offers training seminars and certificate training programs through its Institute. See Store, JOHN E. REID & ASSOCs, Inc. (last visited Jan. 21, 2022), https://reid.com/store/products.

\(^{30}\) See Missouri v. Seibert, 542 U.S. 600, 610 n.2 (2004) (citing two Reid manuals and one other to show what “[m]ost police manuals” advise about *Miranda* warnings); Stansbury v. California, 511 U.S. 318, 324 (1994) (citing the Reid manual as evidence that an aspect of *Miranda* doctrine was “well settled”).

\(^{31}\) See INBAU, ET AL., ESSENTIALS, supra note 28, at viii. Beyond law enforcement, the method is popular with private security personnel employed to detect and prevent theft and fraud. See “How to Conduct Better Interviews & Interrogations,” Security Director's Report of the Institute of Management and Administration (IOMA), issue 02-12, p.11 (December 2002) (“When asked which vendors they rely on most for building their own skills and that of staff, a whopping 80% of security pros cited John E. Reid & Associates.”).

\(^{32}\) See N. Dickon, Reppucci, et al., Custodial Interrogation of Juveniles: Results on a National Survey of Police, in POLICE INTERROGATIONS AND FALSE CONFESSIONS: CURRENT RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 67 (G. Daniel Lassiter & Christian A. Meissner eds. 2010) (reporting that 54% of respondents had been trained in the Reid technique). See also Melissa B. Russano et al., Structured Interviews of Experienced HUMINT Interrogators, 28 APPL. COG. PSYCH. 847, 848-50 (2014) (reporting on a survey of 42 experienced federal interrogators, half from law enforcement and half from the military, in which 50% indicated they had received formal training in the Reid technique, the highest percentage of any source).
for our focus on moral minimization, even the competitors of the Reid technique often use this particular tactic.33)

The Reid Technique has nine steps.34 Step one is the direct, positive confrontation, in which the detective expresses confidence in the guilt of the suspect.35 Step two – our subject – is “Theme Development.”36 The term “theme” refers only to what we call moral minimization; the manual explains that a “theme” is a “monologue presented by the interrogator in which reasons and excuses are offered that will serve to psychologically justify or minimize the moral seriousness of the suspect’s criminal behavior.”37 The Reid manual explains that “it is natural for [the offender] to justify or rationalize the crime in some manner” and that “[m]ost interrogation themes reinforce the guilty suspect’s own rationalizations and justifications for committing the crime.”38 “Psychologists refer to this internal process [of rationalization] as techniques of neutralization,”39 a topic to which we will return.

Developing this kind of minimizing theme takes time, which is why the manual describes it as a “monologue.” “For a theme to be effective, the investigator must be able to maintain a continuous monologue of theme

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33 For example, the Zulawski & Wicklander interrogation method differs in critical ways from the Reid Technique, but the former also devote a chapter to “rationalizations,” which are essentially moral minimizations. See David E. Zulawski & Douglas E. Wicklander, Practical Aspects of Interview and Interrogation 305 (2d ed. 2002) (recommending a “one-sided discussion presented to the suspect by the interrogator, who offers excuses or reasons that minimize the seriousness of the crime.”). The corporation, Wicklander-Zulawski & Associates, Inc., parted ways with the Reid method in 2017 over concerns that it leads to false confessions. See Liz Martinez, Security, Law Enforcement React to Change in U.S. Interrogation Technique: Wicklander-Zulawski Decision to Drop the ‘Reid Method’ Has Generated Mixed Opinions, SECURITYINFOWATCH.COM (Mar. 10, 2017), at https://www.securityinfowatch.com/security-executives/article/12314618/security-law-enforcement-react-to-change-in-us-interrogation-technique. Nonetheless, there remains considerable inertia favoring the Reid technique. See id. (quoting a past president of an organization for security professionals: “I have some doubts about the success of implementation because the new police officers hitting the streets today have been trained on the Reid method. It will take attrition – years or maybe decades . . . because of resistance to a new method.”). In any event, the Wicklander-Zulawski shift does not abandon their focus on “rationalizations.”

34 Inbau, et al., supra note 1, at 187-90.
35 Id., at 192-98.
36 Id. at 202-55; Inbau, et al., Essentials, supra note 28, at 115-35. See also Senece, supra note 28, which is a 342-page supplemental manual devoted entirety to “interrogation themes.”
37 Inbau, et al., Essentials, supra note 28, at 115.
38 Id. See also id. at 210 (“The interrogation theme represents a persuasive effort on the part of the investigator to reinforce those existing excuses or rationalizations within the guilty suspect’s mind”); Jane & Buckley, Field Guide, supra note 20, at 276 (“For a guilty suspect to relate to an interrogation theme, the justifications offered by the investigator must be similar to how the suspect himself justified the crime.”).
During an interrogation that may last hours, “[t]he investigator must continue offering the suspect a theme.” To avoid a theme statement that “only lasts a few minutes,” the manuals offer several ways to “draw out the length of a theme.”

The manuals offer specific minimization themes. First is “Sympathize with the Suspect by Saying That Anyone Else Under Similar Conditions or Circumstances Might Have Done the Same Thing.” Inbau and co-authors explain: “A criminal offender . . . derives considerable mental relief and comfort from the investigator’s assurance that anyone else under similar conditions or circumstances might have done the same thing.” The manual cautions against promising legal leniency, but notes: “There is, of course, no legal objection to extending sympathy and understanding in order to feed into the suspect’s own justifications for his criminal behavior . . . .”

The manual offers two illustrations. One concerns a hit-and-run suspect, and this script is said to be drawn from an actual case: “Your car hit something. You were not sure what it was, but you had some doubts; so you got excited and drove away . . . . You are no different than anyone else and, under the same circumstances, I probably would have done what you yourself did.” The second example concerns sexual assault, where the manual advises “indicat[ing] to the suspect that the investigator has a friend or relative who indulged in the same kind of conduct . . . [I]t may even be appropriate for the investigator himself to acknowledge that he has been tempted to indulge in the same behavior.” There is a recommended script – that “one of the authors used” – referring to the interrogator’s sister:

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40 JAYNE & BUCKLEY, ANTHOLOGY, supra note 28, at 165.
41 JAYNE & BUCKLEY, FIELD GUIDE, supra note 20, at 271 (offering to answer the question “How can a theme last 30, 60, or even 90 minutes?”).
42 JAYNE & BUCKLEY, ANTHOLOGY, supra note 28, at 165 (section titled “Expanding the Duration of the Theme”). Part of the technique here is to present some themes as not being about the suspect (and his or her motivation), but about third parties or personal stories of the interrogator. Id.
43 INBAU, ET AL., ESSENTIALS, supra note 28, at 210.
44 Id.
45 Id. at 211.
46 Id. at 210 (emphasis added).
47 Id. at 211 (emphasis added). We shall discuss a California case where the detective followed this advice. See Gomez v. California, No. 1:18-cv-00642-DAD-SAB-HC, 2019 WL 358631, at *11 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 29, 2019) (noting that the detective said to a sexual assault suspect: “‘You're a man. And that I get. It's happened to me.’”), discussed infra text accompanying notes 118-119. See also Coughlin, supra note 17, at 1650-
I’ve got a sister who used to get all dressed up and go to these singles bars. She’d pick a guy out and talk real intimately with him while he was buying her drinks. At the end of the evening the guy, of course, would try to get her alone in his car or apartment. She usually ended up driving herself home, which, obviously, made the guy pretty upset. I think in your situation this gal allowed the relationship to get much closer than what my sister did and, we both know, guys reach a certain point of no return. 48

The Reid manual’s second minimization theme is: “Reduce the Suspect’s Feeling of Guilt by Minimizing the Moral Seriousness of the Offense.” 49 The initial illustration is, again, sexual assault, where the manual offers the following script, “has been found effective”:

In matters of sex, we’re very close to most animals, so don’t think you’re the only human being – or that your one of a very few – who ever did anything like this. There are plenty of others, and these things happen every day and to many persons, and they will continue to happen for many, many years to come. 50

The manual also refers to an actual spousal murder case in which “the deceased wife had treated her husband miserably over the years” and the interrogator’s theme was as follows:

Joe, as recently as just last week, my wife made me so angry with her nagging that I felt I couldn’t stand it anymore, but just as she was at her worst, there was a ringing of the

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48 Inbau, E. & McAdams, [Spring 2022], supra note 1, at 211.
49 Id. See also Zulawski & Wicklander, supra note 33, at 317 (explaining that “the interrogator also minimizes the seriousness of the crime from the suspect’s perspective... saying, ‘And sometimes it’s really nothing more than an error in judgment, a mistake’)” and 331 (“Nobody is perfect. A lot of time, our mistakes seem a lot bigger than they probably are.”).
50 Id. at 211-12. This script has been in the Reid manuals since the first edition. See Fred. E. Inbau & John E. Reid, Criminal Interrogation and Confessions 36 (1962) [hereinafter Inbau & Reid, First Edition].
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doorbell by friends from out of town. Was I glad they came! Otherwise, I don’t know what I would have done. You were not so lucky as I was on that occasion.\textsuperscript{51}

If this gendered script sounds like it comes from an earlier era, that’s because the example has been used without alteration since the first edition of the Reid manual in 1962 (as is true for many of the examples).\textsuperscript{52}

The final illustration of this second theme involves employee theft crimes, where the manual recommends using statistics on the ubiquity of such crimes. For example, to minimize the seriousness of stealing from an employer, the interrogator could invoke the claim noted in one Reid manual that “75% of employees steal from the workplace” and that “most do so repeatedly.”\textsuperscript{53}

The third specific minimization theme is: “Suggest a Less Revolting and More Morally Acceptable Motivation or Reason for the Offense than That Which is Known or Presumed.”\textsuperscript{54} The manual offers several illustrations including that the suspect committed the crime only because alcohol or drugs had impaired his judgment, that a suspected embezzler only intended to borrow the money and would have replaced it if not for the discovery, and that a thief took “money . . . for the benefit of a spouse, child, or another person.”\textsuperscript{55} The manual offers a table listing self-serving motives that offenders have offered during confessions for each of eleven different crimes.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{51} INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 212.

\textsuperscript{52} See INBAU & REID, FIRST EDITION, supra note 50, at 37.

\textsuperscript{53} See SENESE, supra note 28, at 141. The main manual includes a lower estimate of one-third of all employees. INBAU, ET AL., CRIMINAL INTERROGATION, supra note 28, at 213-14 (listing a number of bullet points about the high frequency of employee theft). One of the non-Reid manuals notes how easy it is for employees to rationalize workplace theft. See ZULAWSKI & WICKLANDER, supra note 33, at 306.

\textsuperscript{54} Id. at 214.

\textsuperscript{55} See INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 215. See also ZULAWSKI & WICKLANDER, supra note 33, at 339 (recommending that the interrogator “minimizes the loss” by suggesting that the suspect “had intended to return the money or property” and was only borrowing it). See also id. at 332 (“Medical bills, family problems, and financial pressures are things that can push a person into doing something he never dreamed he would do. We all have our breaking points.”). This family motive, when genuine, and especially in extreme cases, would actually mitigate the offense in a way that a judge should consider in sentencing. If the criminal system will actually reduce the sentence because of a mitigating factor, there is no harm to interrogation that incorporates that mitigation (or any other such genuine factor). We note, however, that few of the moral minimizations are relevant in this way. Efforts to trivialize the offense and blame the victim fall outside of a legitimate sentencing judgment.

\textsuperscript{56} INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 216-17. See also ZULAWSKI & WICKLANDER, supra note 33, at 325 (“First, the interrogator might use frustration at being unable to control the child’s crying . . . [and second] the strength of
The fourth specific theme merits special attention: "Sympathize with the Suspect by Condemning Others," a subpart of which is "Condemning the victim."57 “[T]he investigator should develop the theme that the primary blame, or at least some of the blame, for what the suspect did rests upon the victim.”58 Or, as the manual puts it at one point, the strategy is to “degrad[e] the character of the victim.”59

There are suggestions here for blaming victims of assault and robbery.60 Referencing again “the case of a man suspected of killing his wife,” the manual says that the investigator portrayed the suspect’s wife as an “unbearable” creature . . . who would either drive a man insane or else to the commission of an act such as the present one in which she herself was the victim. In this respect, however, the investigator stated that the suspect’s wife was just like most other women. He also said that many married men avoid similar difficulties by becoming drunkards, cheats, and deserters, but unfortunately the suspect tried to do what was right by ‘sticking it out,’ and it got the better of him in the end.”61

In making such misogynistic appeals, the manual recommends empathy:

The investigator should condemn the wife for her conduct, making the point that, by her own conduct, she herself had

57 INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 220. The other suggestions are “Condemning the accomplice” and “Condemning anyone else upon whom some degree of moral responsibility might conceivably be placed.” Id. at 224, 227. See also ZULAWSKI & WICKLANDER, supra note 33, at 306 (advising “the interrogator to create the perception of transferring guilt to someone . . . other than the suspect. . . . [thereby] psychologically minimizing the seriousness of the suspect’s offense.”).
58 INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 220. See also ZULAWSKI & WICKLANDER, supra note 33, at 333-34 (noting that “[t]he victim can be blamed in almost any crime from homicide to a sex crime to theft. The guilt is transferred to the victim by the interrogator, who portrays the suspect as a victim of circumstances.”).
59 INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 222 (emphasis added).
60 See id. (“In assault cases, the victim may be referred to as someone who . . . finally got what was coming to him.”) and id. (“In a robbery case, the victim may be blamed for having previously cheated the suspect . . . [or] for ‘flashing money’ or putting the suspect down in front of friends.”).
61 INBAU, ET AL., ESSENTIALS, supra note 28, at 148-49.
brought on the incident of the killing. . . . [M]uch can be
gained by the investigator’s adoption of an emotional
(‘choked up’) feeling about it all as he relates what is known
about the victim’s conduct toward her spouse. This
demonstrable attitude of sympathy and understanding may
be rather easily assumed by placing one’s self ‘in the other
fellow’s shoes’ and pondering this question: ‘What might I
have done under similar circumstances’?\textsuperscript{62}

Although there is no separate example for domestic battery (as
opposed to domestic murder), the manual’s logic of victim-blaming
endorses the same approach there as well.

Regarding sex offenses, the suggested blame-the-victim theme is:
“The victim initially came on to the suspect and he acted the way any man
would under the circumstances.”\textsuperscript{63} The Reid manual offers two such scripts. One was the rape example given in the introduction.\textsuperscript{64} The other focuses on
clothing:

Joe, no woman should be on the street alone at night looking
as sexy as she did. Even here today, she’s got on a low-cut
dress that makes visible damn near all her breasts. That’s
wrong! It’s too much of a temptation for any normal man. If
she hadn’t gone around dressed like that you wouldn’t be in
this room now.\textsuperscript{65}

The Reid manuals recommend similar themes when the sexual abuse victim
is a child.\textsuperscript{66}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[62] INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1 at 221 (emphasis added).
\item[63] INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 204 (emphasis added).
\item[64] See supra text accompanying note 2.
\item[65] Id. at 221. This example dates back to the original 1962 edition. INBAU & REID, FIRST EDITION, supra note 52, at 45-46. See also INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 204 (“Suggested theme: Having sexual contact with a child the age of the victim (who was nine years old) is much more understandable than if the suspect had the same contact with a two-year-old girl.”); ZULAWSKI & WICKLANDER, supra note 33, at 334 (“The suspect became involved because the victim dressed or acted in a certain way.”).
\item[66] In the supplemental Reid manual specific to child abuse, BUCKLEY, supra note 28, there are examples that seem to distinguish the suspect’s “perception” from reality, id. at 220, but other recommended themes lack this nuance: “Blame the child’s curiosity; they brought up the subject of sex.” Id. at 223, and “Present the argument that children are more mature in today’s society . . . due to television, movies, magazines, news reports, the internet and
\end{footnotes}
The manual offers another means of blaming the rape victim: “Where circumstances permit,” propose “that the rape victim had acted like she might have been a prostitute and that the suspect had assumed she was a willing partner.”67 These examples are from the current edition of the main manual published in 2013, which is before the greater salience of the “Me Too” movement. However, a more recent supplemental Reid text from 2020 provides similar examples and states that “the most common theme to develop in sexual assaults is to blame the victim for doing something that provoked the suspect.”68

Given the recommendation of misogynistic insults of victims, one wonders whether racial or other stereotypes are also used as a minimization theme. Interestingly, the current edition of the main Reid manual comprehensively ignores the issue of race,69 a curious omission in light of (a) its frequent endorsement of sexist stereotypes and (b) a brief reference to race in earlier editions.70 The primary Reid manual does not address hate crimes, but the obvious logic of victim-blaming in these cases is clear: if rape crimes require misogynistic themes, as the manuals claim, then hate

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67 INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 222.
68 See SENESE, supra note 28, at 224 (first emphasis added; second in original). The book is more exhaustive on the subject of minimization themes than the main manual. Senese offers various ways to minimize the seriousness of sexual assault, including that the suspect was under the influence of alcohol. Id. at 226-26 (items 4 and 17). Senese also lists a longer series of specific victim-blaming “rape themes,” such as “Blame the victim’s style of dress for leading the suspect on,” “Blame the victim’s actions and behavior, such as . . . Flirting with the suspect,” and “Suggest the suspect may have been mistreated by the opposite sex his entire life, thus blaming women in general.” Id. at 225-26 (emphasis added). For the separate crime of indecent exposure, see also id. at 186-87.
69 There is no entry on the subject of race in the index of a 450+ page book.
70 In the first edition of the Reid Manual, in 1962, at 115, there was a section titled “An Unintelligent, Uneducated Criminal Offender, with a Low Cultural Background, Should Be Interrogated on a Psychological Level Comparable to That Usually Employed in the Questioning of a Child Respecting an Act of Wrongdoing.” One passage of that section raised the issue of race:

In instances where a subject of the type under consideration happens to be a member of a minority race or group, the interrogator must never make a derogatory remark about that race or group. (Nor should he assume that a person’s attitude, conduct, or even his criminality are the result of the color of his skin or his nationality!) To the contrary, the interrogator should (and in good conscience he always can) eulogize some outstanding member of that race or group and suggest that the subject try to measure up to the conduct exemplified by that particular individual.

Id. at 116. The same text exists in the second edition of 1966, but the entire section is omitted starting with the third edition of 1986. While we applaud the statement that the interrogator should not assume that race determines criminality, we find it disturbing that race was discussed in the book only in reference to “unintelligent” suspects “with a Low Cultural Background.”
crimes would seem to require racist, homophobic, or Islamophobic themes, or others of a similar nature, whatever might have motivated the suspect to commit the crime. Moreover, this logic seems to apply not just to what are technically hate-crimes but to any crime where the suspect and victim are of different races (or ethnicities, religions, etc.) because the suspect might have rationalized the offense with bigoted and stereotyped reasoning. If a simple theft crime is cross-racial, for example, a detective following the technique might experiment with a theme that members of the victim’s racial (or other) group have plenty of money to spare or acquire their money by nefarious means.

In any event, one supplemental Reid manual does address hate crimes. Besides offering various ways to minimize the moral seriousness of a hate crime, the manual says that “the primary themes” should “address the specific motive – namely, the offender’s bias or attitudes toward the specific person or group.” The manual offers specific ideas for using that motive to shift blame away from the suspect, including:

8. Blame the liberal politicians for creating an unfair situation by ‘selling out’ for the vote by enacting laws that favor the victimized individual’s group;
9. Blame the fact that the victim’s clothing suggested a racial or religious bias;
10. Blame the victim’s behavior, i.e., being arrogant, cocky, antagonistic, confrontational, aggressive, etc.;
11. Blame the government for reverse discrimination;
32. Compliment the suspect for standing up for his rights/beliefs and not being hypocritical;
33. Compliment the suspect for standing up for the ‘silent majority’.

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71 For examples, see id. at 171 (“Suggest that the suspect believed he was exercising his right of freedom of speech/expression,” minimize the frequency of the behavior).
72 SENESE, supra note 28, at 169.
73 Id. at 170-72. These themes are all for “[h]ate crimes against individuals.” Id. at 169. There are another set for hate crimes against property, which include “[b]laming the victim” for “using his property as an obnoxious or offensive display of his lifestyle/behavior,” or “[b]laming the victim’s property as being an ‘eyesore’ or blemishing a nice neighborhood or lowering property values.” Id. at 172 (examples B3 and B4).
It is difficult for us to see how an interrogator could implement these victim-blaming themes without endorsing the suspect’s negative stereotypes. Notice that the tenth example uses most of the possible synonyms for “uppity,” a racist code word for non-subservient African Americans. The thirty-second example is to compliment a hate crime suspect for “standing up for his . . . beliefs,” when the relevant beliefs are inevitably negative stereotypes based on race, religion, or sexual orientation. The manual avoids confronting these issues by offering only a single script, which concerns an assault of a gay man. In the script, the interrogator tells the suspect that the victim “should have recognized” that the suspect did “not agree with [his] alternate lifestyle,” but that the victim “began to talk back to you and before you knew it, you struck him.”

The script arguably avoids negative stereotyping (though arguably not), but only by avoiding the use of almost all the theme suggestions just quoted.

Theft cases are another opportunity for victim-blaming. For employee theft cases, the primary manual states: “[T]he employer should be condemned for having paid inadequate and insufficient salaries or for some unethical or careless practice that may have created a temptation to steal.”

We saw one such script in the introduction. Another suggests proposing to a maid accused of theft that she stole fur coats because the owner had so many and didn’t treat them well.

Finally, the Reid manuals also recommend casting blame on targets other than the victim – accomplices, society, government, parents, or other relatives. For example, when the suspect is a juvenile, blame the parents, suggesting that the suspect was “worse off than an orphan.”

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74 Id. at 172-73.
75 INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 222. See also id. at 204 (“[B]lame the company for their poor security.”); id. at 223 (“An employer may be blamed for some perceived unfair treatment of the suspect”); ZULAWSKI & WICKLANDER, supra note 33, at 312 (recommending “rationalizations that placed blame on financial problems” caused by medical problems); id. at 333 (“Bob, if this happened out of frustration because of the way your boss picked on you”).
76 See supra text accompanying note 1.
77 INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 223. See also SENESE, supra note 28, at 141-47 (describing nineteen minimization themes for employee theft, many involving victim-blaming); ZULAWSKI & WICKLANDER, supra note 33, at 334 (“Cindy, I don’t know how you can make it on just $7.00 per hour.”); id. at 335 (recommending interrogators blame the victim’s poor security as creating too great a temptation for theft).
78 See INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 224-30. See also ZULAWSKI & WICKLANDER, supra note 33, at 310 (recommending the blaming of parents for giving too much attention to the suspect’s sibling).
79 INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 251.
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offense is theft,” blame “a spendthrift wife or the financial burden of a child.”\textsuperscript{80} Or the suspect’s creditors may be blamed for pressuring for repayment and “forc[ing]’ him to steal.”\textsuperscript{81} Bringing in politics, the suspected embezzler’s behavior may be compared favorably to the national government’s behavior in “squeez[ing] citizens with burdensome taxes to obtain money to waste on foreign countries.”\textsuperscript{82} In the actual wife-murder interrogation, the investigator blamed the wife’s family for meddling, stating “[a]t one point,” that “probably the relatives themselves deserved to be shot.”\textsuperscript{83}

Returning to sexual assault examples, the Reid manual offers a variety of other targets for blame: pornography, the internet, or “differing cultural beliefs.”\textsuperscript{84} “A person who has taken indecent sexual liberties with a young girl may be told that her parents are to blame for letting her roam around by herself as they did.”\textsuperscript{85} If the suspect is married, the interrogator can cast blame on the suspect’s wife, as with this script: “If your wife had taken care of you sexually . . . you wouldn’t be here now. You’re a healthy male; you needed and were entitled to sexual intercourse. When a fellow like you doesn’t get it at home, he seeks it elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{86}

This final strategy of blaming women, like the others, comes from the latest Reid manual published in 2013, though it also traces back to the first edition of 1962.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{80} Id. at 228.
\textsuperscript{81} Id. at 229.
\textsuperscript{82} Id. at 230.
\textsuperscript{83} Id. at 227.
\textsuperscript{84} See Seneel, supra note 28, at 226.
\textsuperscript{85} Inbau, et al., supra note 1, at 228. See also Buckley, supra note 28 at 222 (“Blame the victim’s parents for not showing any love or attention to the victim . . . . or allowing their child to spend the night, go on a camping trip, ski outing, etc.”). This is in addition to blaming society and the media. Id. at 224.
\textsuperscript{86} Inbau, et al., supra note 1, at 228 (emphasis added). See also Buckley, supra note 28, at 222 (“This is exemplified by offender #3 who had an incestuous relationship with his teenage daughters after his wife refused to have sex with him . . . . In a case like this the investigator would suggest, ‘If your wife would have taken care of you the way she was supposed to this would never have happened.’”).
\textsuperscript{87} See Inbau & Reid, First Edition, supra note 50, at 51-52.
C. Moral Minimization in Real World Interrogations

Do police follow the manuals that recommend moral minimization? A variety of evidence confirms that they do. David Simon, a journalistic observer of the first order, famously spent a year embedded with the homicide unit of the Baltimore Police Department.\(^8^8\) He described their interrogation techniques, including moral minimization, as illustrated by the child-murder examples quoted in the introduction.\(^8^9\) In the same passage, Simon adds: “Kill your woman and a good detective will come close to real tears as he touches your shoulder and tells you how he knows that you must have loved her, that it wouldn’t be so hard for you to talk about if you didn’t.”\(^9^0\)

Simon did not quantify the number of interrogations he observed, but in one study criminologist Richard Leo observed 182 felony interrogations.\(^9^1\) Leo separately categorized two tactics that involve the type of minimization that concerns us: (1) to “offer moral justifications or psychological excuses” for the criminal conduct and (2) to “minimize the moral seriousness of the offense.”\(^9^2\) Police offered moral justifications or excuses in 34% of the interrogations, and minimized the crime’s moral seriousness in 22%.\(^9^3\) Detectives use multiple tactics in any interrogation, but we read these results to indicate that detectives minimized the crime’s moral seriousness and/or offered moral justifications or excuses, such as blame-shifting, in one third to one-half of interrogations.\(^9^4\)

\(^8^8\) SIMON, supra note 3, at 212.
\(^8^9\) See supra text accompanying note 3.
\(^9^0\) Id.
\(^9^1\) Richard A. Leo, Inside the Interrogation Room, 86 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLO. 266 (1996) [hereinafter Interrogation Room] (reporting on 60 recorded interrogations from police departments in two small cities and 122 contemporaneously observed interrogations at a major urban police department).
\(^9^2\) Id. at 278 (table 5).
\(^9^3\) Id.
\(^9^4\) Subsequent observations report significantly different numbers, but confirm that minimization is a real world tactic. In 2013, Barry Feld reported on his review of 307 delinquency files of sixteen and seventeen year olds charged with felonies in Minnesota, and found that minimization was present in only 17% of interrogations. Barry C. Feld, Real Interrogation: What Actually Happens When Cops Question Kids, 47 L. & SOC’Y REV. 1 (2013) (table 4). Most recently, Christopher Kelly and co-authors reviewed twenty-nine interrogations (totaling forty-five hours) conducted by the Los Angeles Police Department in homicide, rape, and robbery cases, and found that interrogators offered moral rationalizations in 83% (24 of 29) of the interrogations. Christopher E. Kelly, et al., On the Road (to Admission): Engaging Suspects with Minimization, 25 PSYCH. PUB. POL’Y & L. 166, 171 (2019) (Table 1). (These researchers also coded the frequency of different interrogation tactics by examining each interview in 5-minute segments. They found that detectives offered rationalizations in 4.7% of the 5-minute intervals, making it the sixth
Second, consider a 2007 survey of law enforcement interrogators. Over six hundred law enforcement officers (574 members of sixteen U.S. police departments plus 57 customs officials from two Canadian provinces) answered questions on interrogation practices. The survey asked which of sixteen tactics they employed using a five-point scale ranging from “never” (1) to “always” (5). For the tactic “[o]ffering the suspect sympathy, moral justifications and excuses,” the mean answer was 3.38, which falls between “sometimes” (3) and “often” (4). Six percent answered this question by saying they never used the tactic (1) and 13% by saying they always did (5). For the tactic “[m]inimizing the moral seriousness of the offense,” the mean response was 3.02, with 11% saying never and 8% saying always. Of the interrogation tactics that involve the substance of questions, these two were the fifth and eighth most frequently employed tactics (where investigators routinely employ multiple tactics in a given interrogation). The mean responses for these two tactics – within a range of “sometimes” to “often” – are consistent with Leo’s study showing that the strategies were employed in at least one-third of the cases.

A final source for confirming the use of minimization are the judicial opinions discussing interrogations. Appellate opinions cannot give us a reliable basis for estimating the frequency of station house minimization. Not only are there the usual concerns that litigated appeals may fail to represent cases not so litigated, but also note that moral minimization is not usually relevant to the lawfulness of interrogation, so defense lawyers have little reason to raise issues concerning its use.

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96 The other options for answering were 2 – rarely, 3 – sometimes, and 4 – often. Id. at 387.
97 Id. at 388, Table 2.
98 Id.
99 Including all tactics, those described in the text were still among the top ten of most frequently employed. Id. See also Allison D. Redlich, et al., The Who, What, and Why of Human Intelligence Fathering: Self-Reported Measures of Interrogation Methods, 28 APPLIED COG. PSYCH. 817 (2014) (finding similar frequency results from a survey of 152 U.S. military and federal law enforcement about the use of “moral rationalizations” and “minimization” (Table 1A, not reported in publication but shared by author Allison Redlich and on file).
100 See, e.g., United States v. Jacques, 744 F.3d 804, 812 (1st Cir. 2014) (finding that “statements . . . minimizing the gravity of Jacques’s offense . . . fall safely within the realm of the permissible ‘chicanery’”). We have found three state cases in which courts suppressing a confession recognized that minimization was one relevant factor in a totality of the circumstances test for voluntariness. See Commonwealth v. DiGiambattista, 813 N.E.2d 516, 525 (2004); State v. Baker, 465 P.3d 860, 873 (Haw. 2020); State v. Stone, 237 P.3d 1229, 1241-42 (Kan.)
Nonetheless, the opinions do confirm as a matter of sworn testimony that the minimization tactics are a “fairly common” practice and confirm the influence of the Reid technique. 101 Moreover, these cases offer a glimpse into the actual minimizing words the interrogators use.

Consider murder cases. In Minnesota, Kelly Ritt was accused of purposely starting a fire to kill her twenty-three month old, special needs daughter (but not her other three children, who survived). 102 The detective who interrogated Ritt energetically used the tactic when “he confided that he too had a disabled child whose care was very demanding, that often he wished he ‘could throw’ his son out the window, that sometimes he wanted to see the child die rather than suffer, and that his own wife ‘could have intentionally done this’ too.” 103 In a Massachusetts case, the detectives offered to a murder suspect “reasons why he might have killed the victim [his mother] without being ‘a bad guy,’ including . . . the possibility that he had been provoked by mistreatment from his mother or his aunt.” 104 “The officers acknowledged at trial that they had been trained in techniques known as ‘minimization.’” 105 In a recent Illinois case, “detectives used minimization tactics and attempted to diminish the legal seriousness and moral seriousness of” the defendant’s killing by remarking “that they, too, would remember and seek vengeance on someone [like the victim, 2010], all discussed infra note 121 and accompanying text. But those cases involved many traditional circumstances supporting involuntariness and we find no similar cases elsewhere.

Appellate courts typically avoid describing moral minimization even when it is present. See, e.g., Schumaker v. Kirkpatrick, 808 F. App’x 47, 49 (2d Cir. 2020) (describing the defendant’s claim that interrogators used “minimization[.]” though without details). Even in a case finding that false promises of leniency rendered a confession involuntary and inadmissible, the court noted that the trial judge stated that the police interrogation techniques had “includ[ed] minimization of the crime,” but “did not specifically describe the ‘interrogation techniques’ used.” State v. Hunt, 151 A.3d 911, 915 & n.1 (Me. 2016).

102 Id.
The police minimize the seriousness of sexual assault. In an Idaho case, police suspected the adult defendant of inappropriately touching a fifteen-year-old foster child at his residence, which would constitute a crime punishable by up to fifteen years in prison. Yet the detective “repeatedly and substantially downplayed the serious of the allegations,” saying: “So [the girl] has made a few statements about some pretty minor issues, in the big scheme of things. . . . This case is (inaudible) not even a blip on the radar hardly because it’s not really major allegations. . . . [E]ven if those things are true, they are just minor issues,” which might be handled that same day, as by an apology letter. Later the detective said that the accusations were “not the end of the world,” and that the greater crime would be lying to the police. Several other reported sexual assault interrogations have used a similar approach, especially when the suspect is a juvenile.

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109 Id. at 1017.
110 Id. at 1017-19 (“[T]hese allegations are not like some major issue that you and I can’t get resolved today.”).
111 Id. at 1018-19.
112 See State v. Chavez-Meza, 456 P.3d 322, 326 (Or. Ct. App. 2019) (reporting that in a rape case involving a twelve-year-old victim, the detectives stated: “Like, we can deal with mistakes. People make mistakes all the time, and you still live your life.”); People v. Morales-Cuevas, 2018 WL 4501114, *9-10 (Cl. App. Cal. 2018) (interrogator used “minimization” techniques regarding defendant’s sexual assaults on stepdaughter beginning when she was nine years old; State v. Stone, 237 P.3d 1229, 1241-42 (Kan. 2010) (interrogators minimized crime with nine-year-old victim by stating: “I mean, she’s not saying that you had sex with her but that you just had her, just basically just jack you off. And that’s, you know, that’s not a big deal.”).
113 In a California case, In re Elias V, 188 Cal. Rptr. 3d. 202, 215-16 (Cal. Ct. App. 2015), the court described how the detective, interrogating a 13-year-old boy, employed “minimization” by offering him two “understandable” explanations for the sexual touching of a three-year-old: “natural ‘curiosity,’” or “that the act was one any normal person in his shoes would find ‘exciting.’” Id. at 216. See also Commonwealth v. Bell, 365 S.W.3d 216, 219-220 (Ky. Ct. App. 2012) (interrogating detective said to the thirteen year old suspect of sexual assault of six-year-old cousin “that thirteen-year-old boys ‘have a lot of hormones,’” and that “you did it because you were horny, had a hard on, and you were curious.”); In re A.W., No. A-0244-09T2, 2011 WL 386999, at *7 (N.J. Super. Ct. App. Div. Feb. 3, 2011), aff’d sub nom. State ex rel. A.W., 51 A.3d 793 (N.J. 2012) (interrogator provided juvenile suspect of the sexual assault of a child the excuse of “‘experimentation’”); In re Welfare of J. M. B., No. CS-00-144, 2000 WL 890401, at *3 (Minn. Ct. App. July 3, 2000) (noting that the “detective told J.M.B. that if any sexual contact occurred, it was not a big deal, it was “normal experience stuff,” during interrogation of juvenile for the sexual abuse of a three-year old).
Rhode Island state police used similar tactics in a child pornography case, where the detective stated that “downloading of child pornography was ‘not the end of the world’ . . . [and] that things can be thought of as ‘a spectrum, with the monster at one side ... good old American porn [on the other end] ... [a]nd then right next to that, is like the stuff you're looking at, inappropriate CP, we call it, Child Porn.”\(^{114}\) The Court found these statements were “clearly based on the Reid Technique.”\(^{115}\)

The sexual assault cases also illustrate the tactic of redirecting blame to other factors, such as alcohol and genetics, and of blaming the victim. From a recent sexual assault case from Hawaii, where the victims were minors, here a sample of the detective’s monologue:

[Y]ou just made an error in judgment. . . . You were just not in the right frame of mind . . . Alcohol is . . . where people get themselves into trouble, cause they lose their inhibitions[.] . . . Women are a lot more promiscuous, you know. . . Everybody fucks up in life, okay . . . [O]ur brains are programmed a certain way . . . Guys are programmed to procreate. . . . We all get busted. This is how our brains are wired. . . You just drank too much, dude. You drank too much. You smoked too much. Bad error in judgment.\(^{116}\)

Minimization of statutory rape crimes includes the ideas that children can initiate and consent to sex and that some minors are particularly mature and attractive. In one California sexual assault case, where the victim was under the age of 14, the detective told the suspect:

[T]his is not all your fault. . . . I've seen this young lady. I know she's very attractive. . . . And she probably had some curiosities and she may have been interested in you in that way. . . . And I can understand how you could be attracted to her because she probably came on to you, okay.\(^{117}\)

\(^{115}\) Id.
In another California case, the adult male defendant was convicted of sexual assault crimes involving a girl A.C. whom he began molesting when she was ten years old and with whom he had anal sex when she was thirteen years old. The interrogating detectives suggested to Gomez that

A.C. was mature for her age, was fully developed with large breasts, and probably ‘came on’ to defendant. . . . [Detective] Skrinde said he and [Detective] Garcia were starting to wonder if it was more A.C. than defendant, suggesting A.C. was a beautiful, fully developed woman who may have been attracted to defendant . . Skrinde said to defendant, ‘You're a man. And that I get. It's happened to me.’

Other cases use the same minimizations along with alcohol consumption to rationalize underage sex crimes.

Minimization shows up for other crimes, especially in Massachusetts. No state holds that moral minimization alone can render a confession involuntary, but Massachusetts is one of the few American jurisdictions to recognize that minimization is a relevant factor within the “totality of circumstances” that determines the voluntariness, and thus admissibility, of a confession. That legal stance explains why there are more cases from this state – defense lawyers have at least a weak reason to
litigate moral minimizations. In one Massachusetts robbery case, detectives offered the defendant reasons for why he may have committed the alleged robberies, such as needing money to buy food for himself and his infant daughter.122 A Massachusetts arson case describes a detective’s minimization in “an hour-long near monologue,” comparing “his view of the defendant's conduct to the sort of mischief, pranking and “tomfoolery” that could take place on ‘cabbage night,’” referring to “the night before Halloween,” and also offering alcohol as an excuse.123

In another Massachusetts arson case, the court recognized the “standard interrogation tactic of ‘minimization’” and its origin in the Inbau/Reid interrogation manual.124 The defendant had a dispute with his landlord over the latter’s failure to make repairs to the apartment, which presented an opportunity to blame the victim.125 According to the court, the trooper “downplay[ed] the crime itself” “by pointing out that . . . in light of the deplorable condition of the premises, the trooper could ‘relate to’ and ‘understand’ his anger at the landlord and the desire to ‘do something like that.’”126

In sum, law enforcement surveys, direct observations, and judicial opinions all make clear that American police frequently employ the interrogation tactic of moral minimization.

D. A Very Rough Estimate of the Frequency of Moral Minimizations

One might ask how frequently? Here, we calculate a “back of the envelope” estimate for the number of moral minimizations in the United States in one year. In 2019, state and local law enforcement made over ten million arrests in the United States.127 If we narrow our focus to likely

124 Id. at 527.
125 Id. at 519.
126 Id. at 520.
felonies of the sort discussed above, then the relevant subset contains 1.5 million arrests for violent and property crimes.\textsuperscript{128} The violent crimes are murder, non-negligent homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault; the property crimes are burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.\textsuperscript{129} FBI Uniform Crime Reports do not separate felony and misdemeanor arrests, but these crimes are nearly always classified as felonies. The number is a conservative estimate considering we are leaving out arrests for non-aggravated assaults and other relevant crimes that are sometimes felonies (and also because the police sometimes interrogate suspects they have not arrested and never arrest). The limited available evidence suggests that, post-Miranda, police manage to interrogate arrestees in about 80\% of felonies.\textsuperscript{130} This figure implies that police manage to deploy some interrogation tactics on about 1.2 million felony suspects per year.

Using the Leo observations from before, under which the conservative estimate is that police use the tactic in one-third of interrogations, we arrive at an estimated 400,000 times a year that police detectives minimize the moral seriousness of the suspected offense and/or shift moral blame away from the suspect. One could work to make the estimates better at each stage, but the exact number is not of great concern for our purposes. The phenomenon would be significant even if it were overestimating it by an order of magnitude.

We also note a final reason to think the number 400,000 understates the significance of the practice. There is no perfect acoustic separation\textsuperscript{131} between the interrogation room and the rest of the world. Suspects no doubt recount what the police said to them to others. Although some of those who receive these reports from interrogated suspects might not believe them,

\textsuperscript{128} Id. (estimating 495,871 violent crime arrests and 1,074,367 property crime arrests).
\textsuperscript{129} Id. at Table 29, n.3.
others no doubt do. If interrogated suspects credibly conveyed the interrogator’s statements to a little more than, one average, one close friend or relative, then our best guess is that more than a million Americans receive a message each year that law enforcement authorities regard some serious crime as trivial and/or that society or the victim is to blame. As indicated, this remains a very rough guess.

II. THE CRIMINOGENIC RISKS OF MORAL MINIMIZATION

We have just roughly estimated that police reach a million people a year – some only indirectly – with a message of moral minimization. If an American state or local government reached a fraction as many people with public service announcements proposing that citizens generally not take personal responsibility for their felonies, it would, so to speak, create concern. The purported difference, of course, is that the moral minimization tactics may make possible criminal convictions that would not otherwise occur, whereas the public service announcement would serve no such end. Proponents of the minimization tactic argue that it is necessary to produce confessions, solve crimes, and thereby secure convictions that might not otherwise be secured.

That is the tactic’s purported benefit. Yet a full assessment of minimization must also reckon its costs, or, if the costs are uncertain, its risks.\(^{132}\) In this Part, we explore one set of risks, the tendency of moral minimization to encourage crime. The government’s persistent effort to trivialize crime and cast blame away from the offender undermines multiple mechanisms of legal compliance. As context for the assessment, however, consider one simple point about the purported benefit of moral minimization: its uncertainty. We do not know if or how much the tactic works.

Presumably, the right way to evaluate an interrogation method or tactic is to consider the sum of its unique effects on true and false confessions (“confessions” here serving as a shorthand for any

\(^{132}\) The interrogation literature already discusses the relationship between interrogation tactics and false confessions. See supra note 16. That risk is less about moral minimization than legal minimization, because the implication of the latter is a promise of leniency.
incriminating statement). But we do not have serious evidence for the unique contributions of confrontational interrogation methods, such as the Reid technique. At one point, the Reid manual claims that “[t]he most experienced and skilled investigators achieve a confession rate of only about 80%.”

Aside from the circularity of deciding who is the most “skilled” by their overall confession rate, and the absence of a genuine effort to identify the false confession rate, there is no comparison here between the accusatory method used in the United States and Canada and its alternatives in the United Kingdom, Australia, and other places. We lack a baseline measure for the success of interrogations using non-accusatory methods or even the improvisations of an untrained investigator. To our knowledge, there is no rich field data to allow such a comparison between real world interrogators who use different methods, much less do we have a randomized trial comparing different methods. Experimental results tentatively suggest that the information-gathering method is superior to accusatory methods.

Even if we did know that the Reid technique or other accusatory methods of interrogation were more effective than the alternatives at inducing true confessions and avoiding false ones, there is no evidence that the particular tactic of moral minimization is important to the success of the overall technique. There are no randomized trials of different interrogation techniques, nor rich data allowing comparison of interrogators using the Reid techniques to those using all the techniques except moral minimization. What does exist is some observational data and a small number of relevant experiments. Neither provide a sound basis for inferring that moral minimizations uniquely causes more true confessions than false

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133 INBAU ET AL., CRIMINAL INTERROGATION, supra note 1, at 302.
134 See Meissner et al., supra note 18, at 216.
ones. In sum, the effectiveness of moral minimization is not empirically established.

To be clear, we find the causal case for moral minimization as an interrogation tactic plausible. A guilty suspect might be hesitant to admit guilt in part because of the expected negative judgment of family, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers. When detectives minimize the moral wrongfulness of a crime, they make it appear, at a minimum, that the detectives will be less judgmental of the confessed perpetrator. The detectives’ attitude also implies that the broader society will be less disapproving of the confessed perpetrator. These implications reduce the

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137 Leo’s observations showed significantly higher confession rates in interrogations with certain moral minimizations than without. Leo, *Interrogation Room*, supra note 91, at 294 (reporting in Table 14 the success rate with the tactic of “moral justifications/psychological excuses”); id at 295-96 (reporting in Table 15 the success of “offer[ing] moral rationalizations”). In each case, the chi-squared test showed significance at the level of p < .05. Id. Leo does not assert that this correlation shows the success of the technique, but one paper later cited Leo as evidence that the tactic is “highly effective.” Copes, *et al.*, * supra* note 39, at 448, 450.

There are two problems here. First, Leo had no way to discern whether confessions were true or false, and therefore no way to judge the tactic a net success. Nor did he compare the accusatory style of interrogation with a competitor, such as information-gathering or the improvisations of an untrained interrogator. Second, one cannot make reliable causal inferences from the data because Leo was not controlling for a host of relevant variables, such as the experience of the detective or length of the interrogation. Among possible confounds, Leo, *Interrogation Room*, supra note 91, at 297, reports that longer interrogations are more successful, and that police had longer interrogations when the victim was female, id., which is precisely when we might expect police to be more likely to minimize by blaming the victim. If so, it could be that the tactic’s correlation with confessions is due to interrogation length rather than the moral minimization that is merely correlated with length.

A recent interrogation study measures a variable Leo lacks—the frequency by which detectives use techniques in actual interrogations, as well as temporally connected self-incriminating statements. The results are mixed, finding that offering moral rationalizations was not significantly associated with admissions, but rationalizations do significantly increase crying by the suspect, which significantly increases the odds of a suspect admission. Kelly, *et al.*, * supra* note 94, at 173 (reporting on results from 45 hours of 29 felony interrogations by Los Angeles Police Department detectives). The experimenters had some reason to think that all the suspects were guilty, but could not be certain, which means the study offers no way to assess how the tactic affected the false confession rate.

Several experiments cast doubt on the net effectiveness of minimization. The experimental design involves the interrogation of participants who have actually violated some rules of the experiment. See, e.g., Melissa B. Russano, *et al.*, * Investigating True and False Confessions Within a Novel Experimental Paradigm, 16 PSYCH. SCI. 481 (2005). Although the researcher-interrogator is blind as to whether a rule-violation had occurred, other researchers were aware. Thus, the experiment allowed measurement of true and false confessions and true and false non-confessions, in response to changes in interrogation tactics. Moral minimization increased confessions among the guilty, but increased confessions by the innocent to a greater extent. Thus, minimization lowered the overall diagnosticity of the interrogation. See *id.* at 484 (table 1). Reaching similar results, see Jessica R. Klaver, *et al.*, * Effects of Personality, Interrogation Techniques and Plausibility in an Experimental False Confession Paradigm, 13 LEGAL & CRIMINOL. PSYCH. 71 (2008); Fadia M. Narchet, *et al.*, * Modeling the Influence of Investigator Bias on the Elicitation of True and False Confessions, 35 L. HUM. BEHAV. 452 (2011); Allyson J. Horgan, *et al.*, * Minimization and Maximization Techniques: Assessing the Perceived Consequences of Confessing and Confession Diagnosticity, 18 PSYCH. CRIME & L. 65 (2012).

Experiments that do not involve actual criminality nor real detectives raise obvious external validity concerns. There is also the possibility that false confessions in the real world might be identified as such before trial, so they matter less for assessing ultimate diagnosticity. See Christopher Slobogin, *Manipulation of Suspects and Unrecorded Questioning: After Fifty Years of Miranda Jurisprudence, Still Two (or Maybe Three) Burning Issues, 97 B.U. L. REV. 1157, 1163-64 (2017). Because of these uncertainties, our claim is merely that the effectiveness of moral minimization remains plausible but empirically unproven.
expected shame from confessing, rendering a confession more likely. Our point, however, is that the case for minimization rests entirely at this level of plausibility, not on empiricism.

The costs of moral minimization that we explore stand on similar footing – not empirically validated, but plausible. Indeed, these costs are necessarily as plausible as the claim that the interrogation tactic induces true confessions because, as we will show, the same psychological process – neutralization – that arguably leads to confessions also makes it more likely that the interrogated suspect will offend in the future. We also identify mechanisms other than neutralization – social norms and legal legitimacy – that link moral minimization to increased crime. In that sense, our criminogenic claim is more plausible than the effectiveness of moral minimization because the latter strictly depends on neutralization theory while the former does not.

This Part develops our claim in three sections. Section A explores the five law and/or social science literatures that reveal the criminogenic risks of moral minimization: the psychological theory of neutralization (upon which the Reid manual relies), research on restorative justice, the doctrine of the entrapment defense, the connection between informal social norms and law’s expressive effects, and research on legal legitimacy. Section B synthesizes the argument by identifying particular crimes and particular defendants for which the criminogenic claim is most -- and least - - powerful. Section C defends the claim against an objection to our thesis, the idea that criminal prosecution, conviction, and punishment contain enough expressive condemnation of the perpetrator’s crime to undo all the damage of moral minimization.

A. The Risks of Minimizing Internal Motives for Compliance

1. The Implications of Neutralization Theory

Moral minimization statements are “a persuasive effort on the part of the investigator to reinforce those existing excuses or rationalizations
within the guilty suspect’s mind.” 138 The manual emphasizes that the goal is to discover and reinforce the same neutralizations as actually motivated the suspect to commit the crime. 139 The theme is presented initially in a monologue and extended throughout the interrogation. The topic is important enough to justify extensive treatment in the Reid manuals, even one supplemental manual devoted entirely to the topic. 140 One might reasonably ask: Why? Why does reinforcing the suspect’s anti-social reasoning help the detective elicit a true confession? The answer is important because it points the way to the unexpected consequences of the tactic.

To justify minimization, the Reid manual points to the psychological theory of neutralization, initially proposed in the 1950s. 141 Neutralization is not an all-purpose theory of crime, but a resolution of a particular puzzle that arises for some people and some crimes. The puzzle is how people who have internalized a norm against certain criminal conduct, as against stealing or violence, can nonetheless engage in the conduct. Or, to put it differently, should we always disbelieve those who intentionally commit a crime when they subsequently claim to feel remorse and suffer guilt? On a simplistic account, those who have internalized the norm against the criminal act of violence or theft would not commit such crimes, so those who commit those crimes show themselves not to have internalized the norms. Their expressed remorse cannot be genuine.

The better view, however, is that those who internalize the norm can still intentionally violate it, and then feel genuine guilt and remorse. One possibility is that the internal motive for avoiding crime usually leads to legal compliance, but in some instances the expected benefit from the crime is so high as to overcome the expected feeling of guilt. Another explanation, complimentary to the first, is that the individuals managed to neutralize

138 INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 210.
139 See id. at 207 (“If the investigator’s suggested moral or psychological justifications are not already present in the suspect’s mind, the suspect will often reject the implications of the theme.”); id. at 202 (noting that the detective aims to “reinforce the guilty suspect’s own rationalizations and justifications for committing the crime”) (emphasis added); Jayne & Buckley, FIELD GUIDE, supra note 20, at 276 (recommending that the interrogator “reinforce the defense mechanisms that already exist in the suspect’s mind.”). The main alternative to the Reid Technique suggests the same. See ZULAWSKI & WICKLANDER, supra note 33, at 308 (“The motive behind the incident will often lead the interrogator to the proper rationalization.”).
140 See SENESIE, supra note 28 (“Anatomy of Interrogation Themes”).
141 See INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 325-26, nn.7 & 15. See also infra note 144.
UNEXPECTED COSTS OF MORAL MINIMIZATION

their internal commitments. Consider this recent account of neutralization, which focuses on the delinquency of minors:

When people are committed to a particular value system, they typically experience guilt or shame for violating, or even contemplating violating, its norms. This guilt, and its potential for producing a negative self-image, dissuades most people from engaging in crime or delinquency. Therefore, to participate in delinquent behavior under such conditions, youths must find ways to neutralize the guilt associated with their actions. They do this by relying on patterned thoughts and beliefs that blunt the moral force of the law and neutralize the guilt of criminal participation. . . . allowing individuals to engage freely in delinquency without serious damage to their self-image.142

Neutralization theory thus explains one necessary causal step for a certain group of people – those who have internalized social norms some criminal provisions enforce – to violate those particular criminal provisions.

Stated more briefly: The criminal “distorts what was done and the motives for doing it until the behavior is consistent with self-concept.”143 The primary Reid manual quotes this explanation of neutralization theory by psychologist Michael Lillyquist as part of its general effort to explain why moral minimization works to elicit confessions.144 The idea is that the suspect expects to experience psychological costs, e.g., anxiety and shame, from confessing. Moral minimization lowers those costs. First, the tactic demonstrates that the detectives themselves will not make critical judgments of the suspect. As noted in a psychological appendix to the third

143 See INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 326, n.15 (quoting LILLYQUIST, supra note 39, at 152.
edition of the primary manual: “The mere embarrassment of having to admit an act of wrongdoing can pose a formidable barrier to overcome during an interrogation.”¹⁴⁵ Second, the suspect makes inferences from the detectives’ minimizations. “[I]f the suspect who is concerned about avoiding personal consequences believes that the interrogator can understand and seem to forgive the offense or suspect, he may believe that others will also be sympathetic and forgiving.”¹⁴⁶

Yet the cited pages of the Lillyquist book are a clear warning to those who would minimize crimes or criminal responsibility. Neutralization theory implies that the easier it is for an individual to neutralize the moral objections to a crime, the easier it is for the individual to commit the crime. Although there are many causes of crime, Lillyquist states (on the same page from which the Reid manual quotes): “It is often the case that the words which a person offers after an event, as a rationalization, were available to the person before the event, and, furthermore, that were they not available, the person may not have committed an action inconsistent with his or her self-concept.”¹⁴⁷ Lillyquist also quotes the sociologist C. Wright Mills: “Often anticipation of acceptable justifications will control conduct. (‘If I did this, what could I say? What would they say?’) Decisions may be, wholly or in part, delimited by answers to such queries.”¹⁴⁸ In other word, the claim being made on the very pages the Reid manual cites, is that, at the margin, neutralizations cause crime. The causal claim is made throughout the cited chapter.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Id. at 341. By “personal consequences,” the psychological appendix refers to effects on the “individual’s self-concept,” such as “loss of self-esteem, pride, or integrity.” Id. at 328. See also Id. at 343 (“[t]he interrogator must be careful in his condemnations; the suspect should experience anxiety not because of the crime committed, but rather because he is lying about it.”).
¹⁴⁷ LILLYQUIST, supra note 39, at 352-53 (emphasis in original).
¹⁴⁸ Id. (quoting C. Wright Mills, Power, Politics, and People 443 (1963)).
¹⁴⁹ See LILLYQUIST, supra note 39, at 160, where Lillyquist asks and answers the causal question: “Are the neutralizations ‘mere’ rationalizations or do they operate before the offense and facilitate it? . . . [T]he theorists who use the term neutralization intend it to be viewed as a pre-offense activity, not just an excuse mustered after being caught.” He quotes a trio of sociologists for the proposition that neutralizations are “not merely ex post facto excuses or rationalizations invented for the authorities’ ears, but rather phrases which actually facilitate or motivate the commission of deviant actions by neutralizing a preexisting normative constraint.” See id. (citing Ian Taylor, Paul Walton & Jock Young, The New Criminology: For a Social Theory of Deviance 176 (1973)).
As should now be apparent, there is no difference between what the Reid manuals call “theme-development,” what we call “moral minimization,” and what this psychological literature calls “neutralization.” On pages cited by the Reid manual, Lillyquist lists the classic “techniques of neutralization” (taken from the seminal article on the subject\textsuperscript{150}): (1) denial of responsibility, (2) denial of injury, (3) denial of victim, (4) condemnation of the condemnors, and (5) appeal to higher loyalties.”\textsuperscript{151} As the manual indicates, these five neutralization techniques supply the Reid themes of moral minimizations.

The first category, “Denial of responsibility” includes claims of ignorance because one was “intoxicated with liquor or drugs,”\textsuperscript{152} which, as we saw, is a common tool of moral minimization in interrogations.\textsuperscript{153} It also includes “tak[ing] the approach of the extreme environmental attributionist who sees all actions as completely determined by situational factors.”\textsuperscript{154} Interrogators use this technique when they blame society or an emotional state.\textsuperscript{155} Recall the sexual assault case in which the interrogator had offered that the suspect acted when he was “not in the right frame of mind.”\textsuperscript{156}

“Denial of injury” involves adopting a narrow view of harm and describing some criminal acts as mere “mischief” or “pranks.”\textsuperscript{157} We saw this narrowing in child sexual abuse cases where the detectives suggested that minors could and did consent to sex, and in a Massachusetts case comparing arson to “cabbage night” pranks.\textsuperscript{158} “Denial of victim” includes the idea that “they had it coming,” which “holds the injured parties...
responsible for their own injuries.”

We saw many such victim-blaming techniques. One example Lillyquist gives is a thief blaming the wealthy victim as have acquired their wealth dishonestly, which fits perfectly with a victim-blaming theme.

The neutralization technique of “condemning the condemnor” posits that everyone commits similar crimes or is corrupt, so the prosecution is hypocritical. The Reid method specifically proposes to tell those suspected of stealing from their employer how surprisingly common such crime is, and to blame the government for “squeez[ing] citizens with burdensome taxes . . . to waste on foreign countries.” Finally, the “higher loyalties” technique justifies the crime as serving values more important than law, such as the protection and welfare of one’s family or friends. Several Reid minimization themes involve proposing that the suspect acted on behalf of his family.

Given the overlap, our claim is simple. First, there is a theory that proposes that people who have internalized social norms against criminal acts are able to talk themselves into committing such acts only if they succeed at “neutralization.” Second, there is an interrogation technique that explicitly seeks to reinforce the suspect’s precise neutralizations. Thus, to secure a confession for a past crime, moral minimization endorses and encourages the very psychological processes that the referenced theory says will lead to future crime. The technique is not a fleeting moment of the interrogation, but a persistent theme requiring an extended monologue. And the theme is memorable and powerful because it is presented with apparent empathy by police officers from whom the suspect expected only disapproval.

To illustrate, we offer a psychological account of a hypothetical case using “Joe,” the prototypical offender named in the manual’s interrogation scripts. Joe stole from his employer. Before embezzling funds, he

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159 Lillyquist, supra note 39, at 154. See Sykes & Matza, supra note 144, at 668 (“The injury . . . is a form of rightful retaliation or punishment”).
160 Lillyquist, supra note 39, at 154.
161 Id. at 156; Sykes & Matza, supra note 144, at 668.
162 INBAU, ET AL., ESSENTIALS, supra note 28, at 230.
163 Lillyquist, supra note 39, at 156-57; Sykes & Matza, supra note 144, at 669.
164 See INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 60.
rationalized away the social norms that would otherwise constrain him, wanting to preserve his identity as a “good person” who is not a “thief,” despite this anticipated crime. Joe initially succeeded at this rationalization by telling himself that he is the true victim of his employer, who underpays him (denial of victim); that the corporate employer is not really harmed by the amount he takes (denial of injury); and that his duty as a parent and spouse requires that he do what he must to provide for his family (higher loyalties). “Anyone” in his circumstances, he reasoned, would take this opportunity to supplement his meager wages by taking from his employer.

Yet the rationalization is tenuous. Joe realizes at some level that his reasoning is self-serving and suspect.165 This would be true even if he had secured some support for his neutralizations from friends or co-conspirators because he knows that they are biased in his favor (or in their own favor) and also not representative of how his broader community would view his act of taking his employer’s money. While his salary is not as high as he wishes, he worries that there is no real sense in which he is underpaid. (He is paid more than some, paid more than he used to be, and was lucky in some ways to have the job at all). If he lets himself think about the aggregate amount of employee theft at his firm, he realizes that his employer is seriously harmed by such theft. And he suspects that he will use much of the money he takes on himself personally, not his family.

Now assume that Joe is arrested for theft. At this time, he is particularly likely to think about these counter-considerations and “see through” his neutralizations. When “caught,” he is forced to consider how his community will reason about his behavior and worries that most people will find the pro-responsibility reasons more compelling than the self-serving rationalizations. This is the moment when he is most likely to reject his neutralizations, which would mean that he would find it difficult to rely on them again in the future.

Except that American detectives step into this pivotal psychological moment armed with the Reid technique. They surprise Joe not merely by

165 See INBAU, ET AL., THIRD EDITION, supra note 144, at 331 (noting that the defense mechanisms of rationalization and projection “function through distorting or denying reality,” but “this does not mean that the individual loses touch with reality; reality has merely been redefined.”).
understanding all of his rationalizations, but by pre-emptively endorsing them. Joe learns that, not merely close friends and family, but even strangers support his rationalizations. Not merely unbiased strangers, but law enforcement officials whom Joe had expected to be biased against him, i.e., the most likely in his community to condemn a felony. And these enforcers of the law do not blandly endorse his rationalizations, they do so with apparent heartfelt emotion, looking him in the eye with a hand on his shoulder. Over the time of the interrogation, Joe begins to think he was right to begin with and wrong to doubt himself. Whatever the law may say, community mores do not hold him to be a real thief. He actually is the victim; his employer really didn’t suffer harm; and he in fact acted to fulfil a higher duty to his family. Just like the detective said.

Which means he is now a greater risk for recidivism. If he ever encounters another opportunity to steal from an employer, he will find it much easier to neutralize the crime than the first time, and easier than would have been the situation where the police offered no such reinforcement. But even if he never encounters an opportunity to steal again from an employer, the neutralizations generalize beyond that specific situation. Given an opportunity, he is more likely to steal from any corporation or individual, even one does not employ him, if their wealth might prevent them from being seriously harmed by the theft (denial of harm). He is more likely to steal from someone who wronged him in some way (denial of victim), perhaps a neighbor or family member who refused a loan he needed and thought he deserved. And he is more likely to steal in any circumstance with the possibility of benefitting his family (higher loyalty).

One might resist the analysis by arguing that the police cannot further corrupt guilty suspects, who have already successfully neutralized the internalized aversion to committing criminal acts. This reply is flawed in two ways.

First, those guilty of offending often retain some internal motivation for complying with law. Recall that the whole point of neutralization theory is to explain that the offender may experience genuine remorse and feelings

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166 See id. at 346 (“Sympathy and expression abound from the interrogator’s voice.”).
of guilt. Whether such an individual re-offends depends in part on whether that linkage – between offending and negative emotions – is weakened or strengthened by the experience of offending. Committing a long series of offenses is likely to “harden” the perpetrator, who thereby loses the capacity for feeling guilt or remorse for that type of offense (perhaps accompanied by entry into a subculture that esteems that criminality). But a single successful neutralization will usually fail to eliminate the linkage, which is why the offender still struggles with guilt.

Indeed, the experience of being apprehended for an offense may instead produce “softening.” As with Joe, being apprehended raises the salience of all the arguments against one’s rationalizations. The perpetrator’s experience of guilt or remorse may be greater than expected, perhaps accompanied by the realization that the supporting rationalizations are flimsy and unconvincing. Neutralization theory therefore applies as much to the decision to re-offend as it does to the decision to offend for the first time.

Second, we should not forget that some of the suspects who listen to interrogators minimize the crime and blame the victim are innocent. The probable cause needed for an arrest is a low evidentiary bar, so police are sometimes wrong in their suspicions of those they interrogate. In each case, a person erroneously suspected of a sexual assault or theft is told by

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167 See, e.g., Maruna & Copes, supra note 151, at 274 (suggesting that “in early stages of delinquency, youths may need to use neutralizations to relieve the cognitive dissonance that occurs when their actions are not in line with their values,” but “[b]y using these neutralizations, delinquents’ commitment to those conventional values are eventually weakened to the point that there is no longer a need to neutralize”); William W. Minor, Neutralization as a Hardening Process: Considerations in the Modeling of Change, 62 SOC. FORCES 995, 1018 (1984) (arguing that “over time, either the desire or the moral disapproval should dissipate, leading one to either conformity or guilt-free deviance”).

168 Thus, even if, contrary to the claim of Lillyquist, supra note 39 and those he cites, neutralizations were in the first instance after-the-fact rationalizations, they may still provide the “rationale or moral release mechanism facilitating future offending.” Maruna & Copes, supra note 151, at 271, citing TRAVIS HIRSCHL, CAUSES OF DELINQUENCY 208 (1969). See also RONALD L. AKERS, DEVIANTE BEHAVIOR: A SOCIAL LEARNING APPROACH 60 (3d ed. 1985) (as quoted in Maruna & Copes, supra note 151, at 271) (If “they successfully mitigate others’ or self-punishment, they become discriminative for repetition of the deviant acts and, hence, precede the future commission of the acts.”). On some accounts, neutralization “theory . . . is best understood as an explanation of persistence or desistance rather than of onset of offending.” Maruna & Copes, supra note 151, at 271-27. See also Jennifer G. McCarthy & Anna L. Stewart, Neutralization as a Process of Graduated Desensitisation: Moral Values of Offenders,” 42 INT’L J. OFFENDER THERAPY & COMPAR. CRIMINOL. 278 (1998).

169 Recall our rough estimate that police use moral minimizations on 400,000 suspects per year, supra text accompanying note 127-31. If only 20% were innocent, that would translate into 80,000 suspects. This seems like a conservative estimate as detectives sometimes interrogate suspects they haven’t even arrested.
detectives that the crimes are not serious and the victim or society is really to blame. Aside from endorsing these neutralizations, the interrogation conveys the meta-rationalization: “if the cops don’t think this is a big deal, why should I?” Those who have not previously found it possible to neutralize a sexual assault or theft may now do so.

The economic concept of marginality is helpful here. Moral minimization works on marginal offenders, those who are still capable of feeling guilty or shame from the offense. Away from the margin of criminality are (1) infra-marginal non-offenders, law-abiding citizens whose circumstances in life do not present them with sufficiently strong temptations to overcome their internalized commitment not to offend, and (2) infra-marginal offenders, the individuals who have not internalized the social norm and will readily offend when the opportunity arises, without guilt or shame. The logic of using moral minimization in interrogation does not apply to either of these infra-marginal types. Non-offenders should not confess and the infra-marginal offenders experience no guilt or shame from which minimization offers relief. The logic of minimization, therefore, applies only to the marginal offender. But these offenders are precisely the ones who might be moved to re-offend or not depending on whether their neutralizations for the crime are reinforced or diminished.

We call this last observation the “goose/gander” point. The Reid argument for using moral minimization in interrogations is plausible only in cases where neutralization theory is plausible. If a suspect possesses no internal motivation for complying with law, there is no criminogenic risk to offering moral minimizations, but there is also no plausible case for why the minimizations would elicit a confession.

171 These distinctions could all be made more complex and realistic, as positions on a continuum, but the basic point would remain.
172 For example, those whose identity comes from a subculture that values a certain kind of criminality will not be inclined to experience guilt or shame when committing those crimes and therefore have no need to rationalize their behavior with their values. See, e.g., Volkan Topalli, The Seductive Nature of Autotelic Crime: How Neutralization Theory Serves as a Boundary Condition for Understanding Hardcore Street Offending, 76 SOCIO. INQUIRY 475 (2006).
The goose/gander point is important for another objection. One might resist our criminogenic claim by noting that the police currently lack legitimacy for large parts of the American population\textsuperscript{173} and/or that the legal estrangement of many Americans renders them immune to the influences we describe.\textsuperscript{174} Although our argument would be strengthened for suspects who view police as legitimate authority figures representing an inclusive criminal justice system, it does not depend on that perception. Our claim only depends on suspects expecting police disapproval and instead being surprised by police endorsement of their neutralizations. From the surprising fact that even the police minimize the moral seriousness of the crime and blame others, one can confirm one’s neutralizations. But what if suspects are so skeptical of the police that they do not believe anything the detective says, including the minimizing statements? Then the goose/gander point applies: if the suspect completely disbelieves the minimizations, there is certainly no criminogenic risk, but also no reason whatsoever that the minimizing tactic will elicit a confession.\textsuperscript{175}

What do the Reid manuals offer in reply to the criminogenic claim we raise? Almost nothing. With one exception, there is no indication that the authors of the manuals realize that they could be helping suspects to neutralize future crimes.\textsuperscript{176} The exception is a passage from (an early edition of) a supplemental Reid manual focused solely on child abuse interrogations, where David Buckley states:

\textsuperscript{173} See infra text accompanying notes 234-235.
\textsuperscript{174} See, e.g., Robert J. Sampson & Dawn Jeglum Bartusch, Legal Cynicism and (Subcultural?) Tolerance of Deviance: The Neighborhood Context of Racial Differences, 32 LAW & SOC’Y REV. 777, 778 (1998) (arguing that “legal cynicism” “is a concept distinct from subcultural tolerance of deviance” and is found especially “in levels of concentrated disadvantage, residential instability, and immigrant concentrations”); Monica C. Bell, Police Reform and the Dismantling of Legal Estrangement, 126 YALE L.J. 2054, 2086-87 (2017) (“A person could simultaneously see the police as a legitimate authority . . . and feel estranged from the police (believing that the legal system and law enforcement . . . are fundamentally flawed and chaotic, and therefore send negative messages about the group’s societal belonging.”).

\textsuperscript{175} See INBAU, ET AL., THIRD EDITION, supra note 144, at 334 (noting the importance of the interrogator’s credibility with the suspect to the success of interrogation).

\textsuperscript{176} In the psychological appendix that accompanied the third edition of the primary manual (1986), Jayne states that the interrogator’s initial accusation – the statements of “direct positive confrontation” – will “abolish[]” the neutralizations the offender had used up to that point. Id. at 345. But this confrontation occurs before the interrogator offers themes of moral minimization, which “reintroduce[s]” the neutralizations. Id. Outside of the Reid manuals, ZULAWSKI & WICKLANDER, supra note 33, at 341-42, has a section on “correcting the rationalizations,” but it is concerned only with “correcting” the legal and not the moral minimizations the interrogators have used. The concern is that rationalization might cause problems for the prosecution where it “remove[s] the intent necessary to prove a violation of the law” (the only example given). Id. at 341. The manual does not suggest “correcting” the interrogator’s efforts to minimize the moral seriousness of the offense nor by moral excuses and justifications.
In offering these themes the author is, in no way, suggesting that a child is to blame for the abuse or that emotions or alcohol decrease the legal consequences of abusing a child. . . . The goal of theme development is to lower the offender’s perception of the seriousness of the offense and to encourage him to tell the truth about his offensive behavior. Having the offender take psychological responsibility for his actions and acknowledge the trauma and harms he caused his victims is beyond the scope of this book and will need to be addressed by other professionals subsequent to the offender’s acknowledgement of the abuse in the victim.177

Notably, this is the only occasion we discovered in which a Reid manual acknowledges the utter falsity of its recommended victim-blaming tactics. The passage, however, is not reassuring. Buckley tacitly admits that minimization works against the offender’s taking psychological responsibility for the harm he has caused the victim. As feelings of guilt and responsibility are correlated with lowering the risk of recidivism, Buckley acknowledges the need for subsequent work “by other professionals” to convince the suspect not to believe the themes the detectives sympathetically endorsed. No doubt, even more work is necessary when detectives followed the Reid technique by reinforcing the offender’s neutralizations. Also, some suspects never confess and are never convicted, in which case there are no “other professionals” to even attempt to undo the detective’s moral minimizations.

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177 DAVID M. BUCKLEY, HOW TO IDENTIFY, INTERVIEW & INTERROGATE CHILD ABUSE OFFENDERS 274 (1st ed. 2006) (emphasis added). The reference to “other professionals” does not appear in the substantially similar passage of the second edition, BUCKLEY, supra note 28. That edition instead says “Expecting the offender to take psychological responsibility . . . at this stage of the process is unrealistic and beyond the scope of this book.” Id. at 212.

178 See, e.g., June P. Tangney, et al., Two Faces of Shame: Understanding Shame and Guilt in the Prediction of Jail Inmates’ Recidivism, 25 PSYCHOL. SCI. 799, 801 (2014) (“Inmates’ propensity to experience guilt, assessed shortly upon incarceration, negatively predicted criminal recidivism during the first year post-release.”). See also United States v. Beserra, 967 F.2d 254, 256 (7th Cir. 1998) (Posner, J.) (“A person who is conscious of having done wrong, and who feels genuine remorse . . . is on the way to developing those internal checks that would keep many people from committing crimes even if the expected costs of criminal punishment were lower than they are.”).
Nor is there any reason to limit the concern to sex offenses against children. If moral minimization works to elicit confessions for any crime, it is because it works at lowering the guilt and shame the offender expected from committing that crime. Weakening internal incentives to comply undermines compliance. In short, if the tactic works as advertised, it is also criminogenic.

2. Neutralization and the Lessons of Restorative Justice

As a possible objection to our criminogenic claim, one might optimistically hope that the effects of moral minimization exist only in the very short term. Perhaps the effect is sufficient to induce a true confession, but then wears off within hours after the suspect signs a statement and leaves the influence of the interrogating detectives.

There is nothing to support this optimistic account. In the quotation above, Buckley does not suggest that the problem he identifies is solved by the passage of time. To the contrary, criminal offenders often manage to resist forever any feeling of personal responsibility for their crimes; they may never empathize with their victims. One might think that the critical moment for shattering the offender’s neutralizations would be in a confrontation with police immediately after their apprehension, but that when detectives instead use that moment to validate those neutralizations, that they become all the more entrenched.

In any event, an important criminological literature examines the long term effects of a brief intervention that is the mirror image of moral minimization – that of restorative justice (“RJ”). According RJ theorists, the ordinary process of criminal trials fails to meaningfully convey to the offender the serious wrongfulness of their actions and the harm to the victim. RJ theory says that to persuade the offender to take responsibility requires face-to-face, emotional engagement during which others might

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180 John Braithwaite, Restorative Justice: Assessing Optimistic and Pessimistic Accounts, 25 Crime & Just. 1, 53 (1999) (noting that criminal defense lawyers “have a trained competence” in neutralization methods, such as “condemning condemners, denying victim, denying injury, and denying responsibility”).
critique the offender’s neutralizations of the crime. This engagement occurs in RJ “conferences” that include victims, offenders, their families and friends, and sometimes a convener (often a police officer) trained in restorative justice techniques. Governments in different parts of the world employ restorative justice conferences at different points in the criminal process: as a diversionary program that avoids prosecution entirely; as a step after a guilty plea and before formal sentencing; as a supplement to a sentence of probation; or as a preparation for release from prison.

John Braithwaite explicitly links the need for RJ to the problem of neutralization, explaining: “Restorative justice conferences may prevent crime by facilitating a drift back to law-supporting identities from law-neutralizing ones.” Braithwaite explains how offenders find it difficult to sustain their neutralization techniques when confronted in a conference by their victims, community members, and even members of their own family. The idea is that engagement will push offenders to appreciate the wrongfulness of their behavior and the flimsiness of their imagined excuses and justifications, which makes it more difficult to neutralize the same kind of crime in the future. If so, then efforts at restorative justice would decrease recidivism.

The evidence from randomized controlled trials – the gold standard in empirical testing – shows exactly this result. A recent meta-review identified studies using a standard protocol for RJ conferences. The review considered only those studies in which crime victims had consented...
to participate in a randomized trial – into RJ or the non-RJ control – before
the random assignment occurred, and which measured recidivism rates for
at least two subsequent years.\textsuperscript{186} There were ten such studies involving a
total of 1,880 offenders who committed violent or property crimes over five
jurisdictions (and three continents). Nine of out ten studies showed lowered
recidivism for those selected for an RJ conference and this pattern across
the studies is statistically significant.\textsuperscript{187} The “average effect size is .155
standard deviations less repeat offending among the offenders in cases
randomly assigned to RJ [conferences] than among the offenders in cases
assigned not to have an RJ [conference].”\textsuperscript{188} Put differently, there were 7 to
45 per cent fewer repeat convictions (or in one study, arrests) across the ten
experiments.\textsuperscript{189} Contrary to some expectations, the effects were higher in
violent than property crimes, and as high for adult offenders as juvenile
offenders.\textsuperscript{190}

In sum, the studies show that an RJ conference \textit{lasting only a few hours} can have effects measured over the next two years.\textsuperscript{191} If brief RJ
conferences that undermine offender neutralizations can measurably
decrease recidivism over a period of years, there is every reason to think
that the opposite intervention –interrogations that reinforce the offender
neutralizations – can have the opposite effect, \textit{also over a period of years}.
As RJ conferences decrease recidivism, the obvious risk of their negation is
to increase recidivism. This seems especially true when there is no
subsequent RJ conference, but one might also expect an RJ conference to
achieve less if the detectives have first entrenched the offender’s
neutralizations.

\textsuperscript{186} Id. at 1-3. In addition, the review only looked for studies published in English on or after 1994, when there
was some standardization of RJ procedures. The review excluded victim-offender mediations, which operate on a
very different model.
\textsuperscript{187} Id. at 11.
\textsuperscript{188} Id.
\textsuperscript{189} Id. The benefits of RJ are substantially larger than the costs. See Id. at 18, Table 2 (reporting monetized
benefits that exceed costs by ratios of 3.7 to 1 to 8.1 to 1.
\textsuperscript{190} Id. at 12-13.
\textsuperscript{191} RJ conferences last one to three hours. See LAWRENCE W. SHERMAN & HEATHER STRANG, RESTORATIVE
JUSTICE: THE EVIDENCE 39 (2007). Compare Leo, \textit{Interrogation Room}, supra note 90, at 279 Table 6 (finding that
65\% of interrogations lasted longer than 30 minutes; 28\% lasted longer than an hour); Kelly, \textit{et al.}, supra note 94
at 171 (reporting on interrogations that average 1.5 hours).
While there is much discussion of RJ ideas in the United States, and efforts to introduce or expand their use, no one has previously noted that it is the common practice of American police interrogators to do precisely the opposite. RJ theory demonstrates that the first step in RJ reform would be to constrain the anti-restorative element of moral minimization.

3. Neutralization and the Lessons of Entrapment Doctrine

Our claim is that the governmental reinforcement of crime neutralizations can increase crime. There is a legal doctrine that recognizes the ability of government actors to cause crime – the entrapment defense. There would be no need for the defense if it were not possible that undercover agents or informants could persuade individuals to commit crimes they would not otherwise commit outside of a sting operation. On close inspection, entrapment doctrine recognizes the risk of persuading someone to commit a crime when government agents engage in certain neutralizations. Although the courts do not use these terms, they find entrapment in some instances because the undercover agent too effectively minimized the crime.

In *Sorrells v. United States*, the first Supreme Court case on entrapment, a crucial fact was the undercover agent’s appeal to a military bond with the defendant, based on shared service in World War I. The undercover crime was the sale of intoxicating liquor. As one witness said at trial, he believed “one former war buddy would get liquor for another.” The Court vacated the conviction and remanded so the jury could consider the entrapment defense.

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193 See, e.g. Seema Gajwani & Max G. Lesser, The Hard Truths of Progressive Prosecution and a Path to Realizing the Movement’s Promise, 64 N.Y. LAW SCHOOL LAW REV. 69 (2020)
195 Id. at 440.
196 Id. at 452.
Something similar occurred in *Sherman v. United States*, where the Court held that the defendant, convicted of selling narcotics, was entitled to an entrapment defense as a matter of law. On several occasions, Sherman had acquired and shared narcotics with an undercover agent he met when they were both (he thought) undergoing medical treatment for addiction. The agent had befriended Sherman and told him that he was “not responding to treatment” and needed to find narcotics. On each occasion, Sherman charged the agent only his expenses in acquiring the drugs, which the two shared. The Court noted this unconventional motive for distributing narcotics and held that the agent’s “resort to sympathy” induced Sherman, as a fellow addict, to secure the drugs.

Using the terminology of neutralization, Sorrells and Sherman involved the tactic of appealing to “higher loyalties” than law, based on bonds of military service or the alleviation of shared pain. Lower court cases show other uses of the higher loyalties appeal, as when undercover operatives claim they need the defendant’s help in committing a crime to make money needed for their children. When considering entrapment in such a context, contemporary courts are wary precisely when government “takes advantage of [such] an alternate, non-criminal type of motive,” i.e., when they morally justify the crime.

The last Supreme Court case on the defense, *Jacobson v. United States*, is more complicated but tells a similar story. The Court found the defendant Jacobson entrapped as a matter of law into the crime of ordering child pornography via the mail. Crucial to the Court’s decision were various communications the government mailed to Jacobson. One was a letter

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198 Id. at 371.
199 Id. at 373. See also id. at 383, 384 (Frankfurter, J., concurring in the result) (stating that the government should not be allowed to exploit “[a]ppeals to sympathy” “based on mutual experiences with narcotics addiction” or “friendship”).
200 See United States v. Kessee, 992 F.2d 1001, 1003 (9th Cir. 1993). See also United States v. Sullivan, 919 F.2d 1403, 1419 & n. 21 (10th Cir. 1990); United States v. Montanez, 105 F.3d 36, 38-39 (1st Cir. 1997).
201 See United States v. Gendron, 18 F.3d 955, 961 (1st Cir. 1994) (Breyer, J.) (noting that the entrapment element of “‘inducement’ consists of an ‘opportunity’ [to offend] plus something else—typically, excessive pressure by the government upon the defendant or the government’s taking advantage of an alternative, non-criminal type of motive.”). According to a Westlaw search on February 1, 2022, thirty-two of the federal cases and three of the state cases citing *Gendron* quote its language about the government’s exploitation of a “noncriminal” “motive.”
ostensibly from an American Hedonist Society, which stated that members have a “right to read what we desire . . . [and] to seek pleasure without restrictions placed on us by outdated puritan morality.”\textsuperscript{203} A second letter from a different (fake) organization “founded to protect and promote sexual freedom and freedom of choice” claimed to be lobbying for the repeal of legislation defining an age of consent.\textsuperscript{204} A third letter, purportedly from a private individual, engaged in “mirroring,” i.e., “reflect[ing] whatever the interests are of the person” addressed, which, for Jacobson, meant stating a shared interest in images of young men; the fictional letter-writer also expressed a preference for amateur pornography because “the actors enjoy it more.”\textsuperscript{205} Finally, the letter offering to sell child pornography, from a supposedly distinct source, decried the “hysterical nonsense” about pornography and asked “why is your government spending millions of dollars to exercise international censorship while tons of drugs, which makes yours the world’s most crime ridden country are passed through easily”?\textsuperscript{206}

In one sense, the facts of \textit{Jacobson} are obviously distinguishable from a few hours of interrogation because the government’s persuasion campaign there lasted for 26 months. Yet the longevity of the operation in Jacobson should not obscure the comparison. Many sting operations, as in \textit{Sorrells}, are quite brief. Furthermore, one might think that supposedly private individuals in \textit{Jacobson} would be less persuasive about what the law should permit than people known to be law enforcement officials. In any event, we merely note that the government tactics in \textit{Jacobson} were tactics of neutralization. There is denial of injury (the actors enjoy it), condemnation of the condemners (blaming the government for an “outdated puritan morality” and for not taking care of more serious crime), and appeals to higher authority (the importance of sexual freedom and freedom of expression). The overall effect of these ostensibly different sources of communication is to convey that “that receiving this material was something that petitioner ought to be allowed to do,” i.e., “that he had or should have the right to engage in the very behavior proscribed by law.”\textsuperscript{207}

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\textsuperscript{203} Id. at 544.
\textsuperscript{204} Id.
\textsuperscript{205} Id. at 545.
\textsuperscript{206} Id. at 546.
\textsuperscript{207} Id. at 553.
This is the message of the minimization tactics reviewed above, especially for sexual assault crimes.

In sum, criminal defendants are sometimes entrapped because the government agents, using the tools of neutralization, persuade an individual into a crime. Of course, the undercover agents intend to induce a crime and police interrogators do not intend to induce the suspect to offend in the future. But the psychological mechanisms are the same, as are the intended and unintended risks. Where we recognize the criminogenic possibility for persuasion in undercover operations, it makes no sense to ignore the parallel risks of persuasion in interrogation.

Neutralization theory is not, however, the only reason that moral minimization is criminogenic.

4. Beyond Neutralization: Social Norms and Legal Legitimacy

One might object to our criminogenic claim by rejecting the theory of neutralization. The theory claims that the rationalizations precede and cause the rationalized crime, but it is difficult to rigorously demonstrate the claim empirically, and powerful evidence does not exist.208

We have two responses. First, there is the goose/gander point previously explained. The case for using moral minimization is only plausible if neutralization theory is plausible.209 If neutralization theory is false, there is no reason to engage in moral minimization. Our second reply

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208 For longitudinal evidence of the causal effects of neutralization on crime, see, e.g., Ian W. Shields & Georgia C. Whitehall, Neutralization & Delinquency Among Teenagers, 21 CRIM. JUST. & BEHAV. 223, 231-32 (1994) (finding among juvenile offenders, weak but positive correlation between high neutralization scores and subsequent recidivism); Robert Agnew, The Techniques of Neutralization and Violence, 32 CRIMINOL. 555, 572 (2014) (“the longitudinal data suggest that neutralization may be a relatively important cause of subsequent violence”). An experimental paper demonstrates how an interlocutor can successfully influence subsequent behavior by arguing for or against the neutralizations. See Immo Fritsche, Predicting Deviant Behavior by Neutralization: Myths and Findings, 26 DEVIAN'T BEHAV. 483, 494-95 (2005) (finding experimental support). Yet other evidence fails to validate the theory. See Maruna & Copes, supra note 151, at 226-27, 228 (concluding that “the relationship between neutralization and offending is probably not a causal one”); Morris & Copes, supra note 142. The bottom line is that empirical evidence on the causal effects of neutralization is ultimately mixed.

209 That is why the Reid manual emphasizes reinforcing the same neutralizations the suspect used to commit the crime. See supra note 139 and accompanying text.
is to note that other legal theories and literatures – besides restorative justice and entrapment doctrine – lead to the same conclusion: that moral minimization is criminogenic.

a. Social Norms and Expressive Theory

One of the law’s expressive mechanisms for influencing behavior derives from its ability to signal and strengthen the informal sanctions that enforce social norms. Social norms involve a pattern of disapproval for counter-normative behavior. The expectation of disapproval itself creates some incentive to follow the norm because people generally value the esteem of others. Disapproval also predicts more serious informal sanctions ranging from a censorious look or comment, to gossip and social ostracism, to violence. Where law and social norms overlap, these informal sanctions explain some legal compliance. People may presume that democratically enacted laws reveal underlying attitudes of disapproval for the behavior the law condemns, so that one needs to comply with law to avoid disapproval, confrontation, and negative gossip. For example, local laws against public smoking and in favor of public breastfeeding of babies respectively signal disapproving attitudes about exposing others to one’s cigarette smoke and approving attitudes about breastfeeding. A large part of the compliance with under-enforced laws may be due to law’s expressive effects. But even if the expected criminal sanctions against, say, theft, are

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212 See Robert Ellickson, Order Without Law 57-59 (1994); McAdams, Expressive Powers, supra note 210, at 83-84, 139-40.

213 See McAdams, Expressive Powers, supra note 210, at 143, 145.

214 See, e.g., Cevat G. Aksoy, Christopher S. Carpenter, Ralph De Haas, & Kevin Tran, Do Laws Shape Attitudes? Evidence from Same-Sex Relationship Recognition Policies in Europe, 124 EUROPEAN ECON. REV. (2020) (Article 103399) (finding that legal changes recognizing same-sex unions preceded increased tolerant attitudes toward sexual minorities); Roberto Galbiati, et al., How Laws Affect the Perception of Norms: Empirical Evidence from the Lockdown, PLOS ONE (Sept. 24, 2021) (finding that lockdown orders significantly strengthened perception of the relevant social norm); Patricia Funk, Is There an Expressive Function of Law?, 9 AMER. LAW & ECON. REV. 135 (2007) (finding that mandatory voting laws increased voting for reasons not explained by expected sanctions); Maggie Wittlin, Buckling Under Pressure: An Empirical Test of the Expressive Effects of Law, 28 YALE J. REG. 419 (2011) (finding evidence that mandatory seat belt laws increase belt usage for reasons not explained by sanctions).
much more serious than the informal sanctions, the latter still add to the formal sanctions and generate higher levels of compliance.

Consistent with these ideas, the empirical evidence further demonstrates that some people comply with law out of a sense of reciprocity with others. For instance, people are more likely to pay their taxes if they believe others are paying their taxes; less likely if they believe cheating is rampant. Dan Kahan explains the psychology: “The more strongly she anticipates being condemned by others should she be caught, the more likely an individual is to refrain from evading. By the same token, the more regret or remorse an individual believes she'd experience for engaging in evasion, the less likely she is to do so.” Thus, if perceived compliance is high, the expected social disapproval from violating the law is high, which makes it shameful; if non-compliance is understood to be widespread, then the expected disapproval and shame seems not so great.

Moral minimization obviously weakens these informal incentives. Detectives strive to convince the suspect that the crime is not serious by giving reasons to expect that the social disapproval will be lower than the suspect initially believes. As noted, the Reid manual identifies this precise mechanism: “[I]f the suspect . . . believes that the interrogator can understand and seem to forgive the offense or suspect, he may believe that others will also be sympathetic and forgiving.” The logic is strong because the suspect expects the police, perhaps more than anyone, to disapprove of felonies. Yet if burning a structure is a mere “prank” or if sexual assault merely demonstrates that “Everybody fucks up in life,” then the expected social disapproval is lowered. Moral minimizations thus undermine the enforcement of social norms and the external incentives to comply with a law that embodies those norms.


Id. at 80-85 and especially 81, n.21. More recent and more sophisticated empirical research reaches the same conclusions. See Cristina M. Bott, et al., You’ve Got Mail: A Randomized Field Experiment on Tax Evasion, 66 Management Sci. 2801, 2810-12 (2020) (informing taxpayers of high compliance rate increased self-reported taxable income); James Alm, et al., When You Know Your Neighbour Pays Taxes: Information, Peer Effects and Tax Compliance, 38 Fiscal Studies 587 (2017) (same).

Kahan, supra note 215, at 81.

INBAU, ET AL., THIRD EDITION, supra note 28, at 341.


Moreover, the tactic explicitly attacks the reciprocity motive for compliance by referring to how “everybody” misbehaves in life and “anyone” would commit the crime under the same circumstances.\(^{221}\) For employee theft crimes, one manual offers the detectives the most inflated figures for the frequency of such crimes – that “75% of employees steal from the workplace and that most do so repeatedly” – precisely to allow the detective to tell the suspect that far more people commit this type of crime than they had previously assumed.\(^{222}\) The empirical evidence suggests that if people believe a crime is exceptionally common, it weakens their reciprocal incentives to obey the law.

### b. Legal Legitimacy Theory

Another literature in law and social science finds that compliance with the law is inextricably linked with the public’s perception of the law’s legitimacy.\(^{223}\) In recent years, much has been written about the law’s \textit{procedural} sources of legitimacy, and the evidence that many people are more likely to obey law and cooperate with law enforcement if they perceive the courts and police to treat them fairly and with respect.\(^{224}\) Other research emphasizes what might be called the \textit{substantive} sources of law’s legitimacy, where many people are more likely to obey law if its content aligns with their own moral intuition.\(^{225}\) Law is less effective in generating compliance when people believe the law consistently deviates from what is morally right.

To see the legitimacy problem posed by moral minimization, consider some themes from the Reid training that directly attack the

\(^{221}\) See \textit{generally} MAX WEBER, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY (1921) (Guenther Roth & Claus Wittich eds., 2013).


Unexpected Costs of Moral Minimization

substantive or procedural legitimacy of regulatory offenses. For smuggling and customs offenses, interrogators should: “[b]lame the laws, rules, regulations and policies as being unfair, unrealistic or outdated.” For passport fraud the suggestion is: “Blame the government policy for placing unfair restrictions on certain countries.” For lacking the appropriate hunting license: “Blame the licensing agency for not providing enough licensed guides.”

These examples, however, only make explicit what is already implicit: moral minimizations inevitably drive a wedge between the formal criminal law and common moral intuitions. The criminal law treats the offender’s conduct as morally serious, but the detectives say it is not serious. The law treats the offender’s claimed excuses and justifications as irrelevant, but the detective insists they are relevant. In situations where the law refuses to blame the victim, the detective energetically blames the victim. In all cases, the interrogator is criticizing the substantive content of the criminal law for its failure to track morality, thus undermining one mechanism for legal compliance. Moral minimization seems a peculiarly effective tool for undermining legal legitimacy because it is carried out by law enforcement officers – whom the suspects expect to support the legal rule.

To summarize this section: if neutralization theory is correct, then moral minimization probably increases confessions and increases crime. The success of restorative justice conferences and appellate court reasoning about entrapment both provide support for the latter, criminogenic claim. If social norms theory and/or legitimacy theory is correct, then moral minimization probably increases crime even if it has no effect on confessions.

226 Id. at 238 (example A2). Alternatively: “Blame the bureaucracy for making it so difficult to obtain the proper licenses to import items such as protected wildlife or property” (example A1) and “Blame the government/country for trying to maintain a monopoly on these goods” (example A5). Id.

227 Id. at 210 (example 1).

228 SOURCE, supra note 28, at 165 (example C1). Other legitimacy-attacking themes: “Blame the license fee as being cost prohibitive,” Id. (example C4; cf. Id. at 166 examples D3 and E3) or “Blame license centers for being too far away.” Id. at 166 (example E2).

229 Of course, those populations who do not perceive the criminal law as having any legitimacy or who are estranged from the law, will be unaffected by this problem of moral minimization. See supra text accompanying notes 173-174.
B. The Criminogenic Risk in Practice

Synthesizing the various causal arguments of the prior section, we can describe the criminal contexts in which the criminogenic risk is most and least compelling. Moral minimization poses the greatest risk of inducing future crimes when (1) the suspect is a marginal offender, (2) the bases of moral minimization are generalizable. In addition, as incarceration sometimes prevents recidivism, we add a third condition, (3) that the resulting criminal sentence leaves open the possibility of recidivism. By contrast, the criminogenic risks are minimal or non-existent when the suspect is an infra-marginal offender, the moral minimization is not generalizable, or the criminal sentence itself incapacitates all further offending. As we show, this means that the risks are greatest for crimes like theft, assault, and sexual assault and are least significant for the crime of homicide.

First, we previously explained the significance of an offender being marginal. If the suspect is a professional criminal, for example, who commits a certain crime whenever the frequent opportunity arises, then it is unlikely such a person feels any need to neutralize the crime. Such infra-marginal offenders have lost the capacity for feeling guilt or shame for the particular crime and are unmotivated by social disapproval or the legitimacy of law. They are therefore not made more likely to offend by moral minimization, but also not made more likely to confess (the goose/gander point). For most crimes, many offenders are marginal, but for some crimes, there may be very few marginal offenders. Drug crimes are a likely example. That sort of black market, *malum prohibitum* offense – selling contraband goods to willing buyers – are frequently committed by professionals who do not struggle with guilt or shame over the offense.

Second, we referred to moral minimizations being generalizable to future offenses. Trivializing a crime, as by suggesting that it causes no harm to steal from a corporation or wealthy individual, offers an excuse that readily applies to future opportunities for crime. Blaming a crime on alcohol or drug use does the same, as the offender is likely to be under the influence again in the future. Most obviously, blaming a female victim of
assault or rape for the stereotypical reasons we saw in the scripts and appellate opinions offers an excuse that readily applies to future crimes, even against the same victim. Most moral minimizations are like these.

Yet some excuses do not generalize. Consider two murder cases discussed in Part I. Where police detectives offered the suspect the excuse for murder that he was exacting revenge against the victim for having killed the suspect’s brother, that rationalization probably does not generalize. At least where only one person committed the sibling’s murder, and the suspect does not have other family members suffering the same fate, the offender is unlikely to again encounter another temptation for this kind of revenge. In another case, detectives proposed to a mother that she set a fire to kill her special needs daughter because she was making it impossible for her to properly raise her other three children. Again, it is not apparent that such an excuse could ever apply to a future situation the mother will face. A non-murder example is the accidental hit-and-run crime. Most people who accidentally hit someone with their car and then flee will not accidentally hit another person in the future; reinforcing their neutralizations for flight cannot risk causing many of them to commit the crime again.

Third, a criminal sentence may prevent future recidivism. There is no criminogenic risk if the resulting confession leads to sentence of incarceration for life and the offender cannot re-offend in prison. If a 50-year old man convicted of sexual abuse of a child receives a thirty-year sentence, he is unlikely to re-offend regardless of the reinforcement of his neutralizations, in which case there is no criminogenic downside to using the tactic to secure his confession.

In most instances, however, the resulting sentence will not permanently incapacitate the offender. First, some offenses – revenge-based assaults, for example – can be and are committed within prison, so the neutralization might promote recidivism during incarceration. Second, the Reid manuals propose moral minimizations for crimes that typically do

231 See Coughlin, supra note 17 (citing the transcripts).
not produce life-long prison terms: assault and sexual assault, hate crimes, arson, embezzlement, and other theft crimes. Such offenders, like most offenders, are released from prison, so we must be concerned about their re-offending.  

To be clear, we do not argue in favor of prison as a means of incapacitation. To the contrary, if one wishes to decrease society’s use of prison, and especially if one wants to eliminate its use, it is essential to take every non-coercive action possible to dissuade offenders from re-offending, which certainly includes not encouraging future crime through moral minimization. Put differently, we should never allow government to perversely justify an increment of prison for its incapacitative effect by saying that an offender is a particular threat to re-offend when that claim is even partly true because police detectives persuaded a marginal offender on the generalizable excuses and justifications for the crime.

The net result of this analysis is that the criminogenic risk does not seem particularly large for the offenses of homicide or hit-and-run, but is great for the far more common crimes of theft, assault, robbery, and sexual assault. Because there are so many perpetrators of these latter crimes, it stands to reason that some non-trivial number of them are marginal offenders. The moral minimizations police offer are generalizable reasons for trivializing the crime, for avoiding responsibility, and for blaming victims. And there is no reason to think that the criminal sentence is permanently incapacitating: assault and sexual assault obviously occurs in prison; for all of these crimes, most offenders are eventually released.

To illustrate, consider again the crime of employees stealing from employers. Substantial evidence suggests that employees do, in fact,
rationalize such theft by focusing on what they perceive as the unfairness of being paid too little, meaning that many such offenders need to neutralize their crime and are therefore marginal. The moral minimizations we saw in the first example in the introduction are entirely generalizable: blame the victim for not paying an appropriate wage and appeal to high loyalties by saying that the employee stole to support his needy family. The sentencing may involve no prison or a short prison term, so if the offender can acquire another job, they will face the same temptations.

In sum, there are a few situations in which the criminogenic risks of moral minimization seem insignificant, but in most cases, they are substantial.

C. The Expressive Objection to the Criminogenic Claim

An objection to our criminogenic claim is that other government expression contradicts the detective’s moral minimization. On this view, after a confession is obtained, the government disavows and nullifies the detective’s message by the subsequent prosecution, conviction, and criminal punishment of the offender. The criminal defendant infers from the experience that there was no truth to the interrogating detectives’ moral minimizations. The interrogator said the crime was not serious, that anyone would have done the same, and that the real blame lies with the victim or society, but the prosecution and punishment show that society regards the crime to be serious and the suspect-convict to be morally responsible. The criminal process expresses the true moral status of the convict’s conduct and this “counter-programming” erases any effects of the detective’s moral minimization.

This optimistic account connects to an old idea in criminal theory that punishment is expressive, i.e., that it communicates societal

condemnation of the criminal act. This expressive objection is, however, unduly optimistic, for three reasons.

First, as previously discussed, not everyone who is interrogated is convicted. Some suspects who receive the moral minimizations are innocent and not convicted; some are guilty, but do not confess and are not convicted. Each year, thousands of such suspects hear the interrogator minimize the seriousness of a category of offenses and/or blame victims, but receive no expressive corrective from the law.

Second, although we contend below that most suspects will never infer that the detectives were lying in their moral minimizations, we note that a distinct problem arises if suspects do reach this conclusion. Police deception undermines procedural legitimacy. The basic claims of this literature are that (1) “citizens are more likely to comply and cooperate with police and obey the law when they view the police as legitimate,” and (2) “[t]he most common pathway that the police use to increase citizen perceptions of legitimacy is through the use of procedural justice,” which involves the police treating civilians fairly and respectfully. Legitimacy “increase[s] both willing deference to rules and the decisions of the police and courts, as well as the motivation to help with the task of maintaining social order in the community.” Yet a simple enough prerequisite for police legitimacy is honesty; lying destroys procedural justice. Thus, if suspects later infer that the detectives were deceptive when offering moral minimizations, the tactic is still criminogenic. To pin one’s hopes on suspects figuring out that the sympathy the police extended was merely a ploy, is merely to hope that the system loses procedural instead of substantive legitimacy. Either damages legal compliance.


See Etienne & McAdams, supra not 238; Tracey L. Meares, Everything Old is New Again: Fundamental Fairness and the Legitimacy of Criminal Justice, 3 OHIO STATE J. CRIM. L. 105, 109-110 (2005) (stating that trust and belief that authority figures will act fairly is a key factor for procedural justice).
Third, and most importantly, even when the guilty suspect confesses and is convicted, criminal proceedings will usually fail to undo the effect of the neutralizations. Remember that what matters here is not the message intended, or the message that most citizens receive, but the message the suspect receives from his encounter with the criminal justice system. To begin, nothing in the moral minimization technique leads the suspect to expect not to be prosecuted. Indeed, the manuals repeatedly express concern that the police not make promises of that level of leniency, for it would obviously incentivize false confessions if suspects thought that a confession would be the immediate end of the matter. Even after moral minimization, therefore, the suspect expects to be prosecuted and the prosecutor’s decision to bring charges does not negate the detective’s reinforcement of the suspect’s neutralizations.

Some may argue that a defendant who pleads guilty after a confession must show some new understanding that their behavior was seriously wrong and not the victim’s fault. Yet a guilty plea need not represent any appreciation of wrongdoing. Defendants often plead guilty for strategic reasons having little to do with consciousness of wrongdoing. The literature on false confessions and resulting guilty pleas is one example where defendants do not believe what they say in the plea colloquy. The literature on remorse during pleas and sentencing hearings tells a similar story. The concern that defendants sometimes tell the court just what it wants to hear is consistent with the notion that we may not really know what portion of the minimizing narrative the defendant might believe.

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244 See Margareth Etienne, Remorse, Responsibility and Regulating Advocacy: Making Defendants Pay for the Sins of Their Lawyers, 78 N.Y. U. LAW REV. 2103, 2123-24 (2003) (explaining that federal courts make highly subjective findings of remorse in determining whether a defendant has accepted responsibility for their conduct for sentencing purposes); Rocksheng Zhong, Judging Remorse, 39 N.Y.U. REV. L. & SOC. CHANGE 133, 142 (“The existing empirical literature, though limited, generally agrees that offenders’ remorse, in practice, does have an impact on legal decision-makers’ perceptions and judgments about them.”).
245 Etienne, supra note 244, at 2162-63 (“True remorse cannot be scheduled to appear precisely at the time of the crime or on the sentencing date”).
Punishment is arguably different, but the mere fact of punishment is not sufficient to negate the moral minimizations. First, there is uncertainty in the communicative content of non-traditional punishments, i.e., probation, fines, and community service.\textsuperscript{246} Even when the sentence involves prison, some observers may think that an unexpectedly light sentence fails to condemn the criminal act and even condones it. Consider the infamous sentence of six months of prison for Brock Turner for the crime of rape.\textsuperscript{247} Many understood the sentence as failing to condemn the crime. If the detectives in his case had, in interrogations of Turner, minimized the seriousness of his crime and/or blamed the victim, as with scripts noted above, it seems doubtful that such a short sentence, far below the mean for rape, would obliterate the effect of their neutralizations. To the contrary, a felon may infer from unexpected leniency that the minimizations were correct.\textsuperscript{248}

Even where the suspect is convicted and the criminal sentence is widely perceived by the public as fully sufficient to condemn the criminal act, the punishment will not necessarily undo the effect of moral minimization on the offender. The offender has now received two conflicting messages: the first from the detectives and the second from the sentencing judge who reveals the punishment the state will inflict. The question is how the offender will resolve the expressive conflict.

The optimistic account is that the second communication (punishment) nullifies the first (moral minimization). Yet another possibility exists. The offender may view the minimizing message as demonstrating that the criminal sentence does not actually reflect community sentiment. The public is sometimes surprised by the harshness as well as the leniency of a particular criminal sentence, so any given sentence might not reflect common morality.\textsuperscript{249} If so, then instead of interpreting the judge’s criminal sentence as negating the detective’s moral

\textsuperscript{247}See Peter Fimrite, \textit{Ex-Stanford Swimmer to Serve 6 Months in Unconscious Woman’s Rape}, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE (June 3, 2016).
\textsuperscript{248}To be absolutely clear, we do not believe that the police use of neutralizations in interrogation should ever justify longer prison terms. Instead, we think that the failure of shorter prison terms or alternative sentencing to undo the damage of moral minimization is a reason not to use the tactic.
\textsuperscript{249}See, e.g., Robinson, et al., supra note 225, at 1974 (reporting that many people believe the appropriate punishment for drug offenses, three-strikes laws, strict liability offenses, and felony murder are far below actual punishments); 1975-78 (describing other studies finding the same divergences).
minimizations, the offender can interpret the detective’s moral minimizations as negating the condemningatory message of the judge’s criminal sentence.

The latter inference is the more likely one, for three reasons. First, the interrogators’ communications may be more powerful than the judge’s. The detectives deliver their patient minimizations in the intimate space of an interrogation room, as part of an emotional performance seeking to connect sympathetically with the offender.250 Lacking physical proximity to the defendant, the judge is often pressed for time and delivers the sentence in a busy public courtroom, using legal boilerplate, and is therefore less likely to seek or create an emotional connection with the defendant. Detectives are selected in part for their ability to develop rapport with suspects during interrogation, but judges are elite technocrats selected more for legal proficiency. Suspects might imagine the detectives being more in touch with common morality.

Second, that fact that the judge has “the last word” by speaking after the detectives is not an advantage. To the contrary, people are often subject to “confirmation bias,” in which they interpret new evidence in a distorted way to preserve their existing belief.251 People are particularly prone to confirmation when it comes to preserving positive opinions about themselves; they resist negative feedback.252 As the detective’s minimizing message reinforces the offender’s pre-existing neutralizations, the literature on the bias predicts that the offender will make all possible inferences to preserve the neutralizing beliefs. Confirmation bias is even more likely when beliefs are motivated rather than rational,253 as is true here: the offender simply prefers to believe that the detectives have articulated community mores more accurately than the law or the judge. The offender knows that the criminal law does sometimes “get it wrong” (fails to track moral intuitions), and conveniently reasons that this sentence is one of those

250 Recall David Simon’s description of detectives putting their arm around the suspect and appearing to be on the verge of tears. SIMON, supra note 3, at 212.
occasions. Offenders want to believe the forgiving and justifying things the detective says, not what society wants its criminal punishment to express. The self-serving inference is always easier than the self-critical one.

Third, if there were an advantage to the judge having the “last word” in a sentencing hearing, it would only be because the judge could answer the specific minimizing statements the detectives made. Yet this possible advantage is lost because the judge usually has no idea what the detectives said to the offender during interrogation. If the defendant contests the voluntariness of the confession and if the defendant’s briefing describes the minimizing details (even though they are not usually legally relevant on their own), the judge would learn what the detectives said. Yet that is rare. Ordinarily, the judge is ignorant of (1) which of the offenders they are sentencing were subject to the tactic of moral minimization, and, when the tactic was employed, (2) what the particular moral minimizations were. Detectives tailor their minimizing message to match the offender’s actual neutralizations, but it hardly be called a “counter-message” if the judge does not tailor his remarks to what the detectives said.

If the prosecutor and judge fail, the final objection to our claim may be that other criminal justice players provide a counter-message that undoes the criminogenic damage of moral minimization. Perhaps the detectives, defense lawyer, jury, or victim provide the expressive antidote. As things stand, however, where there is no recognition of the problem, there is no reason to think these actors do provide an effective remedy.

We find no evidence that any detectives “debrief” the suspect after interrogation, which detectives might naturally resist as long as there is a chance the defendant might try to recant the confession (which such debriefing would make more likely). Defense attorneys may explain to defendants that their rationalizations for the crime are not legally relevant, but it seems improbable that any will articulate the moral wrongfulness of their client’s behavior to their client.
Juries offer no counter-message for the simple reason that almost all cases are resolved by guilty plea.\textsuperscript{254} We pause to note that this observation provides another reason that the scarcity of criminal juries is troubling. Juries are the best positioned of all actors in the system to undo moral minimization. They are a collective body drawn from the community who can therefore speak for the community.\textsuperscript{255} If jury trials were common, we would therefore worry less (but still worry) about the criminogenic effects of moral minimization. Note that when the first Reid interrogation manual was published in 1962, jury trials were far more common than they are today, which might be one reason for the absence of concerns about the criminogenic effects when moral minimization was first introduced.

Victim impact testimony is promising. If presented in front of the convicted defendant at a sentencing hearing, it might undo some of the damage of moral minimization. The most plausible case is where the minimization involved a detective claiming that the victim was not “really” harmed; given the chance, victims can powerfully articulate their harm. Moreover, the place of esteem and respect with which those statements are regarded within the proceeding offers evidence of the victim’s worth, pushing against any victim-blaming narrative.\textsuperscript{256} The need to remedy moral minimization therefore provides a non-standard rationale for giving the victim this voice.\textsuperscript{257}

But there are severe limitations. Even among the offenses for which we claim the criminogenic effect is likely, not every case has an individual natural victim (some theft victims are collectives or corporations), not every state guarantees the victim’s right to give testimony in every case,\textsuperscript{258} and not every victim is available or willing to testify in this way (especially in sexual assault cases). When victims do testify, they are (thankfully) ignorant that the detectives minimized the offense during interrogation, so

\textsuperscript{254} Shari Seidman Diamond & Jessica M. Salerno, Reasons for the Disappearing Jury Trial: Perspectives from Attorneys and Judges, 81 LA. L. REV. 119, 122 (stating that 3.6% of federal criminal cases were disposed of by jury trials in 2013).


\textsuperscript{256} See Bix, supra note 237.


\textsuperscript{258} See Dubber, supra note 257.
they cannot frame their remarks to address the minimizations. Finally, while we think victims can convincing speak to harm, we worry that the detective’s victim-blaming tactics may render the offender immune to being persuaded by what the victim says in court, or from the respect the judge shows the victim. Certainly, victim impact statements would work better to induce the offender’s sympathy and remorse if they occurred without the government officials having first privately “reinforced” the offender’s reasons for blaming the victim. 259

Our ultimate point is rather simple. There are a variety of governmental actors who communicate, by words or actions, to criminal offenders. For a variety of reasons, it matters to the offender’s future behavior whether the government delivers a unified and consistent message – the offender’s conduct was seriously wrong and the offender was responsible for it – or conflicting messages that both condemn and condone the criminal act. The presence of moral minimization is particularly likely to compromise or nullify the contrary messages because they are delivered at a critical early moment in an empathetic manner by detectives from whom the suspect expects disapproval. Whatever the possibilities for remediation with other messages, the criminal system is not designed to offset the criminogenic damage of moral minimizations.

In sum, moral minimization undermines internal and informal motivations for legal compliance. American police detectives contribute to crime control by investigating and clearing crimes, but frequently employ an interrogation tactic at cross purposes, making crime more likely. The benefits of moral minimization are uncertain, and the costs are serious.

III. THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF MINIMIZATION ON POLICING

We hypothesize that the interrogation tactic of moral minimization has consequences beyond the interrogation room. Our first point concerned the criminogenic effect on interrogated suspects. Now we reach our second

259 There is also a separate normative issue whether victim impact statements exacerbate criminal law disparities because judges and juries find some victims more appealing than others for arbitrary or racial reasons. See Andrew E. Taslitz, Racial Threat Versus Racial Empathy in Sentencing – Capital and Otherwise, 41 AMER. J. CRIM. LAW 1, 13-18, 27-29 (2013); Susan Bandes, Empathy, Narrative, and Victim Impact Statements, 63 U. CHI. L. REV. 361, 376 (1996).
point: the unintended effects of minimization on the interrogating police officers themselves.

The starkest example of this danger arises in the interrogator’s treatment of victims, particularly female victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. Recall some examples from Part I. In a domestic homicide case, the Reid manual proposes to call the female victim “an unbearable creature” “who would either drive a man insane or to violence.”\(^{260}\) The manual adds gratuitously: “In this respect, however, the investigator stated that the suspect’s wife was just like most other women.”\(^{261}\) For rape interrogations, recall the Reid manual statement that “the most common theme to develop in sexual assaults is to blame the victim for doing something that provoked the suspect,”\(^{262}\) as by dressing provocatively,\(^{263}\) acting like a prostitute,\(^{264}\) or driving the suspect to the “point of no return.”\(^{265}\) In sum: “The victim initially came on to the suspect and he acted the way any man would.”\(^{266}\) Among appellate opinions involving sexual assault, recall the interrogator’s words that women are “a lot more promiscuous” when they drink,\(^{267}\) that underage girls “came on” to the suspect, and they “consented” to sex.\(^{268}\) There was the empathetic line of one detective: “You’re a man. And that I get. It’s happened to me.”\(^{269}\) The misogyny is pervasive, but with a single exception in a supplemental manual on child abuse cases, the Reid manuals do not say the victim-blaming statements are false.\(^{270}\)

American detectives receive training in victim-blaming, as an interrogation technique, and practice that technique over long careers. In this Part, we explain the result: a detective cadre that is more likely to engage in victim-blaming in their investigative work outside of the interrogation room. Partly, this is because the anticipation of using the

\(^{260}\) INBAU, ET AL., ESSENTIALS, supra note 28, at 148–49.
\(^{261}\) Id.
\(^{262}\) See SENESE, supra note 28, at 224 (emphasis in original).
\(^{263}\) INBAU, ET AL., supra note 1, at 221
\(^{264}\) Id. at 222.
\(^{265}\) Id. at 228.
\(^{266}\) Id. Recall too that the misogyny extends to blaming the wife of the suspect for failing “to take care of him sexually.” Id. at 228.
\(^{267}\) Id. at 204.
\(^{268}\) Baker, supra note 100, at 864.
\(^{269}\) Aguirre, supra note 117, at *2.
\(^{270}\) Gomez, supra note 47, at *1-2.
\(^{270}\) See text accompanying notes 176. See also Coughlin, supra note 17, at 1946-49.
technique likely influences who seeks to become a detective. Partly, this is because some detectives are slowly lulled into believing the victim-blaming stories they tell, at least to some degree. If so, then the interrogation technique of victim-blaming has a deleterious effect on policing because detectives are less motivated to take seriously crimes for which they are less sympathetic to and trusting of the victims. Although we focus on gender-based examples, our analysis is equally applicable to other victim-blaming based on age, race, religion, sexual orientation, or other factors.

We begin in Part A with a description of hyper-masculinity in police culture, and how it impedes the investigations into crimes against women. Part B explains how the victim-blaming tactic reinforces this hyper-masculine culture and its associated problems.

A. The General Problem of Hyper-Masculine Police Culture and Victim-Blaming

Americans are generally inclined to blame victims, and particularly victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. Psychologists studying the general phenomenon start with the pervasive “belief in a just world,” the idea that people generally get what they deserve, which means they generally deserve what they get. To preserve an exaggerated belief in a just world, people look for ways to find that good and bad outcomes are deserved. For bad outcomes, that means blaming the victim. Undeserved suffering threatens the just world belief; victim-blaming sustains it. Feminist scholars have explored the particular ways in which crimes against women are blamed on the women victims, which is a major reason that sexual assault and domestic assault crimes are under-reported and a major barrier to effective solutions.

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272 See, e.g., GERTRUDE J. SELZNICK & STEPHEN STEINBERG, THE TENACITY OF PREJUDICE 63 (1969) (“Far from evoking sympathy, the Nazi persecutions apparently sparked a rise in anti-Semitism in this country.”).

There is no reason to think that police are immune from the tendency to blame victims. To the contrary, the evidence suggests that police are more likely than the general public to make such inferences. A major reason is the intensively masculine culture of policing. Not only are the large majority of police officers male, but police culture celebrates the warrior values of strength, power, and honor. Rudy Cooper describes one feature of police hyper-masculinity as the need for officers to confront disrespect or disobedience with violence. Police officers often engage in masculinity contests that require the domination of civilians in order to counter signs of actual or perceived disrespect. They “get ‘macho’ with civilians” and they then justify their actions on the grounds that they were forced into a position of violence by their victims. Thus, police officers can readily identify with the need to blame the victim for the victim’s own role in creating a situation where violence or aggression occurs.

Perhaps it is not surprising then that social science research shows that police officers are more likely than members of the general population to be the perpetrators of violence in their intimate relationships. In one of the most expansive studies on officer involved domestic violence (OIDV), examining seven law-enforcement agencies across various states, fifty-four per cent of the officers surveyed said they knew of an officer in their department who had been involved in an abusive relationship and forty-five percent knew of an officer who had been reported for abusive behavior.

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278 Id. at 674.
281 Leigh Goodmark, Hands Up at Home: Militarized Masculinity and Police Officers Who Commit Partner Abuse, 2015 BYU L. REV. 1183, 1191 (2015). These figures drop considerably when officers self-report about their own experiences and behaviors. Only 10% of the surveyed officers reported that they themselves had physically
Studies suggest a domestic violence rate two to four times higher than in the general population.\textsuperscript{282} Even the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) recognizes the prevalence of intimate partner incidents among police officers.\textsuperscript{283}

Research also shows that sexual misconduct among police officers is not uncommon.\textsuperscript{284} Sexual misconduct ranges from serious acts of violence and assault to invasions of privacy and invasive searches, to non-violent but more common acts of sexual harassment or quid pro quo promises of leniency.\textsuperscript{285} One study focused on the persistent problem of police officers who stop vehicles for traffic violations in order to get a closer look, seek sexual favors or otherwise sexually harass or abuse female drivers.\textsuperscript{286} In a study involving interviews of twenty police chiefs from agencies in major metropolitan areas, most cited police culture as the single most important factor influencing sexual misconduct among officers.\textsuperscript{287}

Hyper-masculine police culture is also associated with the pervasive failure to properly investigate violent crimes against women, particularly domestic and sexual assault. The IACP has questioned whether abusers can be effective in dealing with domestic violence calls and investigations.\textsuperscript{288} When the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) investigates individual police departments for a “pattern or practice” of misconduct,\textsuperscript{289} they usually focus on unlawful uses of force, but a common theme is the failure to

\begin{thebibliography}{999}
\bibitem{286} Maher, supra note 290.
\end{thebibliography}
properly investigate violent crimes against women. For example, in 2011, the DOJ investigated police in New Orleans and found “a sweeping failure to properly investigate many potential cases of rape, attempted rape, and other sex crimes.”\textsuperscript{290} When police did investigate, detectives frequently used “problematic interviewing techniques” that exhibited “stereotypes regarding how a victim behaves in a ‘real’ case of rape.”\textsuperscript{291} Also, “The documentation we reviewed was replete with stereotypical assumptions and judgments about sex crimes and victims of sex crimes, including misguided commentary about the victims’ perceived credibility, sexual history, or delay in contacting the police.”\textsuperscript{292}

Scholars of sexual assault find the problem to be a general one. Corey Rayburn Yung explains:

\begin{quote}
[P]olice are the largest obstacle to the prosecution and conviction of rapists in the United States. Police disbelieve rape victims far more often than the public and other agents involved in rape investigations. Research shows police believe ‘rape myths’ at a much higher rate leading to widespread distrust of rape victims; . . . As a result, police often conclude that rape complaints are false without investigating or, in some cases, even interviewing the victim. . . . Research shows that police departments failed to investigate approximately one million forcible rape complaints from 1995 to 2012.\textsuperscript{293}
\end{quote}

A parallel problem exists for domestic violence complaints. For example, the DOJ report on the New Orleans police also found failures to investigate such complaints.\textsuperscript{294} The problem is compounded by the fact that police departments fail to investigate their own members for domestic violence. Another DOJ investigation of police officers in Puerto Rico found

\textsuperscript{291} Id. at 47.
\textsuperscript{292} Id. at xi. Thus, they “routinely ask[ed] questions that are likely to heighten many victims’ feelings of shame and self-blame, fear of not being believed, and lack of confidence in the criminal justice system.” Id. at 46.
\textsuperscript{293} Corey Rayburn Yung, Rape Law Gatekeeping, B.C. L. REV. 205, 210 (2017).
\textsuperscript{294} See NOLA Report, supra note 291, at 50-51.
significant intimate partner abuse among police officers. Tolerating domestic abuse within police exacerbates the general difficulty of investigating such abuse because it makes victims more reluctant to report such crimes to a police force. Indeed, it is easy to see the connection from the statements domestic violence survivors have made about the police officers on the scene. Consider three examples: (1) “The police acted as if was my fault because I was married. One policeman said, if he was my husband, he’d beat me.” (2) “I was told I shouldn’t make my abuser angry. I should try to make him happy.” (3) “They feel as though that the woman automatically did something to provoke the man.”

The male dominated culture also tends to be self-perpetuating, as it deters and resists entry by women officers. Women encounter sexual harassment from the moment they enter a police academy, and on the job.

In summary, victim-blaming characterizes policing responses to sexual assault and domestic violence offenses, which impedes the successful prosecution of such crimes. Now we turn to why victim-blaming narratives in interrogations tend to make the problem worse.

B. The Consequences of the Technique of Blaming Women

To significantly improve the investigation of violent crimes against women, we require a change in police culture. The training and practice of

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295 CIV. RTS. DIV., U.S. DEP’T OF JUST., INVESTIGATION OF THE PUERTO RICO POLICE DEPARTMENT (2011), https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2011/09/08/prpd_letter.pdf. The DOJ found that within a five year period ranging from 2005 and 2010, approximately 1,459 victims accused their law enforcement spouses or partners of abusing them, but the complaints were not taken seriously. Id. at 16.


297 Edna Erez and Joanne Belknap, In Their Own Words: Battered Women’s Assessment of the Criminal Processing System’s Responses, 13 VIOLENCE AND VICTIMS 251, 256 (1998).

298 Id.


victim-blaming stands in the way of that change. At best, these interrogation techniques entrench a culture of hyper-masculinity. At worst, the misogynistic tropes imported from 1962 exacerbate the problem.

In making our claim, we acknowledge that professional interrogators know they are playing an informational game with their suspects. Part of that game is a strategy of deception. We are not generally inclined to think that professional interrogators conflate what they believe and what they say to suspects. For example, if a detective tries to sow distrust among suspected co-conspirators, we are confident that the detectives know when they exaggerate the cooperation of one suspect when speaking to the other. The interrogator is an actor who can generally distinguish the role from the self. Notwithstanding this point, however, there are particular risks when interrogators repeatedly play the role of the misogynist, the racist, the homophobe, the Islamophobe, and bigots of other varieties in order to carry out a theme of victim-blaming.

There are two mechanisms by which the training and practice of victim-blaming in interrogation influences policing more broadly: self-selection and persuasion. Self-selection refers to the simple fact the characteristics of a job affects who is drawn into that job, which means that one can indirectly change the characteristics of the employees by changing the characteristics of the job.

Detectives perform a variety of investigative tasks, but one significant part of the job is interrogating suspects. If the occupation of police interrogator is defined as requiring expertise in persuasively deploying victim-blaming narratives, this makes it more likely that individuals who seek the position are those who are comfortable with such narratives, including those for whom a victim-blaming tactic does not actually require lying. By contrast, police officers who are repelled by the thought of playing this role, or simply lack the psychological capacity to fake the necessary sympathy for the hate-motivated perpetrator (especially

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302 Cortney A. Franklin, Male Peer Support and the Police Culture, 16 WOMEN & CRIM. JUST., no. 3, 2005, at 1, 11.
when the officer shares the victim’s sex, race, sexual orientation, or religion), are less likely to seek the job. We are assuming, of course, that the content of interrogation training is not a secret for rank and file officers, but that interrogation stories circulate within the police department. If so, the officers who find victim-blaming odious will see less value in acquiring a job that involves deploying such tropes, and are therefore less likely on the margin to become detectives. As a result, those who choose to become detectives will not be a general cross section of police officers; they will disproportionately be those who are less repelled by the need to endorse misogynistic and other bigoted thinking, and who are fully capable of showing sympathy to the perpetrators’ victim-blaming.

Second, aside from self-selection, there is persuasion. The training and practice of victim-blaming may insidiously persuade its practitioners to take such thinking more seriously. Unlike criminal suspects, who may hear a victim-blaming narrative in the interrogation room once or twice in a lifetime, interrogators are exposed to the narrative repeatedly over a career, either by listening to a fellow detective or by actively deploying the tactic themselves. Doubtlessly, some detectives never lose their repulsion at victim-blaming tropes even as they deploy them. Yet even if some or most detectives resist, other detectives may slowly internalize the narrative to some degree. Even dramatic actors sometimes struggle to separate their own lives with their character’s lives. Given a general American tendency to blame victims, it would be surprising if this constant exposure and rehearsal of the tropes had absolutely no tendency to persuade any detectives to find the logic of victim-blaming more acceptable.

At least two psychological mechanisms are potentially at work here: cognitive dissonance and the illusory truth effect. If one aims to say things one does not believe, there is a dissonance between one’s words and actions, which is partly relieved by moving one’s beliefs closer to the things one is saying. Or as Kurt Vonnegut put it: “We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be.”

Illusory truth refers to the fact that mere familiarity makes things seem more true. This is why lies are more persuasive if they are frequently repeated.\(^3\) People overweight the truth of the repeated statement, even when it comes from a single source, because the repetition makes the statement familiar. The detective who hears himself or another detective repeat the victim-blaming tropes within and among interrogations would therefore be more likely over time to find such familiar statements to be plausible or true. At a time when some police departments are finally attempting to train detectives to be less skeptical of women complaining of sexual assault,\(^3\) interrogation training and experience sends the opposite message.

Although there is no empirical research proving that the lessons of moral minimization seep into the police behavior and culture, we should be concerned about the risks for three reasons. First, police officers who accept even a diluted version of the belief that victims are to blame for their victimhood, will be less effective in investigating and solving such crimes. Detectives who blame women for rape or assault bring excessive skepticism to their reports. Second, such officers will reinforce a culture of misogyny and male superiority in a profession that is already fraught with allegations of sexual harassment and discrimination. Third, officers who are not only exposed to, but are trained to deliver, a barrage of sexist rationalizations for misconduct on a regular basis will be more prone to repeat these behaviors in their private as well as their public lives.

In the end, our point is simple. American police are too prone to blame women victims of violent crimes. We are not likely to make progress on that cultural problem while we are, at the same time, encouraging police detectives to blame women for violent crimes in interrogation rooms.

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IV. Normative Implications

The interrogation tactic of moral minimization – especially victim-blaming – poses risks. Section II explains how minimization weakens the internal and informal incentives to obey the law. Section III explains how misogynistic victim-blaming reinforces a police culture of hyper-masculinity that impedes the investigation of crimes against women. Our aim in this article is merely to begin a conversation on what the appropriate response is. We outline two options: counter-messaging and curbing the use of the tactic.

A. Counter-Messaging: Neutralizing the Neutralizations

If nothing is done to limit the tactic of moral minimization, perhaps we could improve the counter-messaging. In Part II-C, we rejected the argument that various parts of the criminal justice system currently provide an effective counter-message undoing the harm of moral minimization.308 Among a series of reasons for pessimism, one observation was that if no one in the criminal system has noticed the danger of moral minimization, then we cannot expect anyone to have even attempted to formulate the best counter-message. We are now in a position to ask, can we do better? If the costs we identify are no longer unexpected, can we retain the tactic but avoid its harm?

Ultimately, we think the answer is no, but there is room for improvement. Our focus is on the judge. There is a sentencing hearing after every conviction in which a judge may justify the announced sentence to the convicted defendant. Some judges already use this occasion to articulate to the moral wrong of the offense and the basis for the defendant’s responsibility. Where this message is delivered (perhaps supported by victim impact testimony), the system is doing all it can (absent a jury verdict) to create a counter-message to the detective’s moral minimization. Indeed, this may be an important and neglected justification for a judge explaining the moral basis of a sentencing decision to a convicted offender:

308 See text accompanying notes 172-180.
to undermine the offender’s neutralizations for the crime, which may have been reinforced in interrogation via moral minimization. Not all judges take seriously this aspect of sentencing, but our analysis suggests that they should.

Yet, where the judges take this part of their role seriously, they labor under disadvantages discussed in Part II-C, one of which is that the judge usually has no idea what the detectives said to the offender during interrogation. Unlike the other disadvantages, this one is correctible. As long as we continue to permit moral minimization, we offer one concrete reform to improve the expressive position of the judge.

Our proposal is for pre-sentencing reports to henceforth include a section summarizing any moral minimization tactics the detectives employed during an interrogation of the offender, whether or not it led to incriminating statements. This would permit judges to tailor their remarks at sentencing to address and reject the specific minimizations the detectives employed. If the detectives in an embezzlement case blamed the employer for paying too small a salary, the judge should be informed of this tactic and then explain to the offender at sentencing why that particular rationalization is morally unpersuasive.309

B. Limiting the Use of Moral Minimization

Counter-messaging is ultimately insufficient. First, it is not a solution for the adverse effect of victim-blaming on interrogators and policing culture. Second, it is not going to work for those exposed to moral minimizations who are never criminally charged or convicted. Third, we doubt it could ever completely undo the criminogenic damage for reasons stated in Part II-C. But even if we are wrong in the abstract, because some ideal counter-message could work perfectly, in the real world of conviction by guilty plea, busy judges who will not tailor messages to refute particular moral minimizations, and the inevitable absence of victims from some cases, the best counter-messaging plans will often fail.

309 We do not propose that judges use this information to arrive at a sentence. In our view, the fact that a defendant succumbed to confession because of a moral minimization tactic is neither a sentencing aggravator nor a mitigator. Rather, the possibility that judges may have insight into pinpointing the rationale for a defendant’s behavior could actually help reduce the risk of recurrence if that insight is applied well.
As previously indicated, there is no serious empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of the Reid interrogation methods, much less the particular tactic of moral minimization.\textsuperscript{310} Even without absolute clarity about the precise costs and benefits of minimization, a new acknowledgement that there are these costs demands recognition of the tradeoffs in using the strategy. As no one has previously identified the costs described here, they have been ignored. If detectives sense a possible benefit, but fail to recognize the risks, they inevitably use the tactic beyond the socially optimum level. Some limitation is therefore justified. We briefly discuss three options. In all cases, the reforms would be implemented either by state or local legislation or by police department policy changes.\textsuperscript{311}

A minimal categorical approach is to single out the worst minimizations for prohibition. The logical starting point might be to prohibit victim-blaming, or even more narrowly, to prohibit blaming victims by endorsing sexist stereotypes, or parallel stereotypes founded on race, sexual orientation, etc. While any generalizable minimization risks encouraging crime, these minimizations are distinctively problematic for the reasons we explored in Part III. One might analogize such a ban to the prohibition against race-based peremptory challenges in jury selection.\textsuperscript{312} All other minimizations would be permitted.

A broader categorical approach would prohibit all moral minimizations except where the tactic would be expected to do the least harm. As we have discussed above, there are some types of crimes for which moral minimization is least likely to be criminogenic.\textsuperscript{313} Murder is an example where the crime will be punished by such a long prison term that the concern for recidivism is attenuated.\textsuperscript{314} There are also particular kinds of

\textsuperscript{310} See supra notes 133-137 and accompanying text.


\textsuperscript{312} Batson v. Kentucky, 476, U.S. 79, 84-86 (1986) (“Purposeful racial discrimination in the selection of the venire violates a defendant’s right to equal protection because it denies him the protection that a trial by jury is intended to secure.”). By the analogy, we do not address here the question whether a criminal suspect has a constitutional right against the employment of racist or sexist interrogation methods.

\textsuperscript{313} See supra Part II-B.

\textsuperscript{314} See supra text accompanying notes 232-233.
minimizations that are not generalizable, and therefore not likely to diminish internal and informal incentives to comply with law. We illustrated again with murder examples, as in a case where detectives blamed the murder victim for having previously killed a relative of the suspect, a reason to offend that is usually not likely to repeat itself. 315 Considering these two factors on a case-by-case basis would be enormously complicated, but one could combine these points to justify a workable regulation that authorized moral minimization tactics in murder interrogations, but not the interrogation of other crimes.

The most ambitious approach is to abandon wholesale the accusatory method of interrogation. The Reid method is one of several accusatory or confrontational interrogation methods, in which the interrogator persistently asserts confidence in the suspect’s guilt. Broadly speaking, the alternative to the accusatory method is the information-gathering method. In 1992, police in the United Kingdom moved from a confrontational interrogation method to an information-gathering method named PEACE, an acronym for its five phases – planning/preparation, engage/explain, account (clarification and challenge), closure, and evaluation. 316 The method involves communication strategies that encourage building rapport and encouraging suspects to develop a painstaking detailed account of events. The suspect is induced to talk a great deal and on the theory that guilty suspects tend to start contradicting themselves. 317

England and Wales adopted PEACE as a more ethical and professional approach to investigative questioning in response to several scandals involving false confessions. 318 At least one American jurisdiction that has adopted PEACE framework for interrogations – Vermont – and

315 See supra text accompanying notes 230-231.
317 Laura Fallon & Brent Snook, Evaluating the Vermont State Police’s PEACE Model Training Program: Phase 1, 2021 PSYCH. CRIME & L. 1, 2 (2021). The PEACE method is described as a science-based approach to interviewing in which officers are “instructed to collect evidence prior to making decisions, akin to the process of hypothesis testing in scientific disciplines (and in direct contrast to traditional accusatorial interview methods).” Id.
thus we have reason to believe it can be compatible with a U.S. policing and
the constitutional rights that attend the interrogation process.\footnote{Fallon & Snook., supra note 318, at 7.}

A major research question is which method of interrogation is more
successful at securing true confessions while avoiding false confessions.
The existing social science research is unable to provide a definitive answer,
although the existing results favor the information-gathering method.\footnote{See sources cited supra note 136-137 and accompanying text. See also Clarke & Milne, supra note 317; Colin Clarke, Rebecca Milne & Ray Bull, Interviewing Suspects of Crime: The Impact of Peace Training, Supervision and the Presence of a Legal Advisor, 8 J. INVESTIGATIVE PSYCH. & OFFENDER PROFILING 149 (2011).} The
PEACE model is highly regarded among law enforcement in England in
Wales and has been sought after in Australian, European and North
American jurisdictions.\footnote{Fallon & Snook, supra note 318 at 97; Mary Schollum, Bringing PEACE to the United States: A Framework for Investigative Interviewing, POLICE CHIEF MAG., Nov. 2017, at 30 (“The Peace model has resulted in vast improvements in policing interviewing to the extent that many countries . . . have adopted it.”).} At least one other study concluded that PEACE
strategies, when properly used, produced better outcomes with outcomes
defined as either obtaining a fuller version of the occurrence or a
confession.\footnote{DAVE WALSH & RAY BULL, What Really is Effective in Interviews with Suspects? A Study Comparing Interviewing Skills Against Interviewing Outcomes, 15 LEGAL & CRIMINOLOGICAL PSYCH. 305, 318 (2010).} Finally in controlled meta-studies on the cognitive form of
interviewing used in the PEACE framework, the reliability of the
information obtained in the under the PEACE like model was significantly
better.\footnote{Id.}

These empirical issues are ultimately beyond the scope of this
article. Without resolving the debate, this article contributes to it by
identifying two new costs of the moral minimization tactics that are
exclusively a part of the accusatory method. Our concerns over the
criminogenic and sexist effects of moral minimization add two reasons
to the existing literature for why a switch to an information-gathering method
is desirable.

Which brings us to note the obvious point that if American police
interrogators abandoned the accusatory method and switched to
information-gathering, the problems we identify in this article would
disappear. Prohibiting an interrogation tactic is inherently complicated by
issues of remedy, but the simplest way to stop the use of moral
minimization is to shift entirely away from the accusatory method. What this would require is less a prohibition of certain methods (although that might be useful during the transition) than the basic training of detectives in a new approach. If American police detectives learned from a manual that did not advocate the reinforcement of neutralizations via moral minimization, then they would eventually stop using minimizations, at least not as a central and well-elaborated theme of the interrogation.

V. CONCLUSION

Moral minimization is pervasive in American police interrogations, and yet it is a relic of the past, a dangerous anachronism. The misogynistic victim-blaming narratives that the manuals offer to illustrate minimization tactics are every bit as old as they sound, dating back at least to 1962. As jarring as those examples are, however, the tactic’s connection to the past is deeper. We expect twenty-first century policing to be based on data, as much as possible, and yet these tactics were created based on early or mid-twentieth century anecdote. The argument for moral minimization is that “it works,” but there is still no real social science evidence supporting that claim, and it appears that the newer alternatives in the United Kingdom and elsewhere also “work,” possibly better, without minimization.

In 1962, it could not have occurred to anyone that interrogations with a theme of moral minimization were more or less the precise opposite procedure as a restorative justice conference, because such conferences did not (publicly) exist, much less were there randomized controlled trials demonstrating that the brief conferences could reduce recidivism by confronting and critiquing the offender’s neutralizations for the crime. In the mid-twentieth century, there was little in the way of social scientific empiricism that people obeyed the law in part because they were reciprocating the perceived compliance of others and also because they perceived the law to be substantively legitimate. As such, it would not then have been apparent that the energetic efforts of law enforcement officers to persuade suspects that “anyone” would have committed the crime in their place would damage the reciprocity motive for legal compliance, nor that convincing suspects that the crime is not serious and the blame lies
elsewhere would damage the law’s legitimacy and that motive for compliance. Yet all of these problems and more are apparent now.

This article proposes balance where none exists. Police officials gather to discuss crime control, such as how to best deploy patrol officers or how to maintain their procedural legitimacy. In other meetings, detectives gather to train for interrogation techniques. These distinct groups never consider that the training is undermining the crime control. Yet the explanation for the minimization tactic – that reinforcing the offender’s neutralizations for the crime will disinhibit the offender’s confession – necessarily implies that the tactic will also make future offending more likely. And the practice of victim-blaming tactics will make it less likely that detectives believe women and properly investigate violent crimes in which they are the victim. These policing groups might hope that the effects we describe are small in magnitude or short-lived. We agree that more study is needed, but hoping is not enough. As long as the interrogation value of moral minimization is uncertain, we should not continue to ignore the unintended risks of the tactic when other interrogation methods exist.