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ABSTRACT

Experimental research on social perceptions of rape victims has been conducted within the framework of two different models. The first, a naive observer model, is oriented toward how the average person perceives a rape victim and how her character and aspects of her behavior affect these perceptions. The second, a jury process model, is directed toward how these same factors affect decisions reached by a jury in a rape trial. Results suggest that the attempt to follow both of these models in a single experiment, often a common practice, yields ambiguous results. (Author)

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Abstract. The experimental research on social perceptions of rape victims is reviewed. It is suggested that much of the research is difficult to interpret due to a confusion between a naive observer model and a jury process model. This confusion should be avoided in the future.

In 1973 Jones and Aronson published a study which has generated considerable subsequent research. On the basis of the "just world theory" (e.g., Lerner & Simmons, 1966) they predicted and found that a respectable rape victim was attributed more fault for being raped than was an unrespectable rape victim. As a result not only of the counterintuitive nature of these results, but also as a function of greatly increasing awareness of the difficulties experienced by rape victims, many social psychologists undertook to explore more fully others' perceptions of rape victims. This paper will focus on experimental research dealing with social perceptions of rape victims and, while briefly reviewing the findings, will consist primarily of an evaluation of the research from a methodological perspective.

Review of the Research Findings

The paradigm used in virtually all of the research under discussion is simple. Different subjects are given different information about a rape victim after which they evaluate her (and sometimes the accused rapist) on a variety of attitudinal and attributional measures. Variables that have been manipulated include the victim's respectability (Feinman, Note 1; Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Fulero & Delara, 1976; Jones & Aronson, 1973; Kahn, Gilbert, Latta, Deutsch, Hagen, Hill, McGaughey, Ryen, & Wilson, 1977; Kanekar & Kolsawalla, 1977; Kerr & Kurtz, 1977; Luginbuhl & Mullin, Note 2; Smith, Keating, Hester, & Mitchell, 1976), the defendant's respectability (Frederick, Note 3; Frederick & Luginbuhl, Note 4; Kahn et al., 1977) the crime itself, e.g., attempted rape, rape, robbery (Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Fulero & Delara, 1976; Jones & Aronson, 1973; Kanekar & Kolsawalla, 1977; Kerr & Kurtz, 1977; Scroggs, 1976; Seligman, Brickman, & Koulack, 1977), degree of resistance by the victim (Feinman, Note 1; Scroggs, 1976), attractiveness of the victim (Feinman, Note 1; Seligman, Brickman, & Koulack, 1977; Thornton, 1977), prior acquaintance between the victim and the rapist (Calhoun, Selby, & Warring, 1976; Smith, Keating, Hester, & Mitchell, 1976), and sex of subject in the experiment (all studies).

Dependent measures have included various types of blame attributed to both the victim and the defendant, liking for the victim, perceived psychological damage to the victim, the penalty the rapist should receive were he to be convicted, and a variety of other measures many of which are found only in a single experiment. Many of the studies have paid particular attention to assessing the responsibility or blame ascribed to the victim since this was the aspect of Jones and Aronsons' study that generated the most interest.

Several results are relatively well-documented. The most consistent may be the lack of support for the just world prediction that the respectable victim will receive more blame than the unrespectable victim. Due to such consistent lack of support, we feel this prediction is no longer tenable. Fulero and Delara (1976) have suggested that

often been viewed as a better person, more likeable, and as having experienced greater psychological trauma. However, in most studies the manipulation of respectability has been confounded with the victim's presumed sexual experience (i.e., the respectable victim is a virgin or a married woman; the unrespectable victim is a divorcee or a topless dancer). The cause of these differing social perceptions is thus unclear.

A second reasonably consistent set of findings concerns sex differences in responding to the rape victim. Males have generally, although not always, been less sympathetic toward the victim than females, attributing the victim with greater responsibility for the rape, seeing her as less adversely affected by the rape, and being more influenced than females bu such irrelevant factors as the victim's attractiveness, the extent to which she resisted, her respectability, and the respectability of the rapist. Females have generally been more likely to convict the rapist and to assign more severe penalties to the rapist than males.

Other results that are common to more than one study are (a) that rape is considered to be a more severe crime than is robbery or mugging; (b) rapists are given longer prison sentences than robbers or muggers; and (c) that the absolute level of responsibility attributed to rape victims is low while that attributed to the rapist is high, a finding not usually emphasized. Thus, we have experienced a modest gain in information as a result of the experimental research on perceptions of rape victims. There are, however, some interpretive difficulties with some of the findings, and these will now occupy our attention.

Methodological Issues

Frame-of-reference. One of the least standardized aspects of the research we have been describing is the overall context of the indivi-ual experiments, the "frame-of-reference" (Sherif, 1936), experienced by the subjects. Are the subjects to take the role of interested observers or of hypothetical jurors? Is it assumed that the rape took place or is the rape only alleged? Is there a defendant to consider, and must a decision as to his guilt or innocence and the entent of his punishment be made? These and other contextual differences make comparisons across experiments difficult and may also affect attributions to, and perceptions of the victim.

This lack of standardization may stem from the fact that the "purpose" of many of these studies is ambiguous. It appears that researchers have attempted to answer two separate questions, or have implicitly followed two separate and quite different models. These two models we will call the naive observer model and the jury process model. The naive observer model is concerned with how the average person perceives a rape victim and how her characteristics and aspects of her behavior affect these perceptions. The jury process model, on the other hand, asks how members of a jury will be affected by these same factors, and how their resulting perceptions will be translated into a verdict.

The naive observer model, then, focuses simply on the ordinary perceptions of the average person, while the jury process model looks toward an important social and legal issue, the outcome of a rape trial. To anticipate future discussion, it is our contention that the indiscriminate combining of these two models in a single experiment results in ambiguous findings.

Each model suggests an "ideal" research strategy. For the naive observer model this strategy would involve most (probably all) of the

the court process, and jury behavior are all irrelevant to the naive observer model), and (d) within this context the experimenter would manipulate characteristics of the victim, features of the rape situation (depending on the interests of the researcher), and would assess the resulting social perceptions of the subjects.

The ideal research strategy suggested by the jury process model is very different. It would involve (a) an attempt to simulate the court setting as much as possible, (b) selecting subjects as similar to real jurors as possible, (c) providing extensive testimony including witnesses, cross-examination, and instructions by the judge, (d) having the "jurors" decide on the guilt or innocence of the defendant by a process of (e) deliberation, and (f) within this context manipulating the same factors as in the naive observer model. The impact of these factors would be assessed, however, by comparing the verdicts reached in the different experimental conditions, not by an assessment of social perceptions. Thus, while the same variables can be studied within the framework of both models, they would be studied within very different contexts and would be assessed by different measurement techniques.

The significance of this distinction is that when these two models are combined in a single experiment, the experimental results are rendered ambiguous, especially those results dealing with social perceptions. This interpretive difficulty, which exists in much of the published research, stems from two sources. First, since researchers have conducted experiments in which both of these models are being followed, subjects have no doubt often been confused. For example, in some studies there has been no explicit attempt to simulate a jury situation, yet subjects have been asked to decide on the guilt or innocence of the defendant, sometimes before their social perceptions were assessed. Thus, even though they were not instructed to assume the role of jurors, they performed jury-related activity. In at least one published experiment, subjects were asked to assign some number of years punishment to the rapist, but only later were they asked to decide whether or not he was guilty. In still other experiments, subjects have been requested to assign punishment to the rapist without the question of his guilt or innocence ever being explicitly raised. (Are the subjects to simply assume he is guilty? Does their assignment of punishment represent a guilty verdict as well?) It seems likely, then, that subjects in many of the experiments were responding to ambiguous stimuli, leaving the meaning of their responses open to question.

The other reason why a combination of these models in the same experiment results in interpretive problems is that the stimuli which govern the perceptions of the subjects become unclear. If the subject determines whether or not the defendant is guilty and provides his or her social perceptions of the rape victim, which influences the other? Do subjects form certain perceptions of the victim which are then translated into a verdict? Or does the subject first determine in his or her own mind the fate of the defendant and then bring social perceptions of the victim into line with the decision as to guilt? If the subject rendered a harsh verdict for the defendant, would the victim be assimilated to this harsh judgment and evaluated harshly, or would she be contrasted and evaluated favorably? Similarly, if the social perceptions of the defendant were unfavorable, in what way would the perceptions of the victim be influenced?

interest is in jury processes, social perceptions could be assessed at the end of the experiment, after all other measures (including, of course, the verdict) had been obtained. These, in fact, could be compared with social perceptions obtained under the naive observer paradigm to detect any differences attributable to the two contexts. We expect there would be differences, although the foregoing discussion indicates that we are reluctant to predict what they might be.

The confusion in research goals (the simultaneous employment of the two models) stems, we feel, from laudable motivies on the part of researchers. The work of Jones and Aronson stimulated interest in the social perceptions of rape victims, but the practical significance of these perceptions (in terms of how a rape victim would be perceived by jurors and how these perceptions might affect the verdict) was so obvious that the social perception experiments were designed to be as "relevant" as possible. Thus, extra features were added (such as deciding on guilt and/or setting penalties) which confounded the interpretation of the social perceptions. Future researchers must decide which model they are pursuing and design their studies accordingly.

Dependent measures. We will comment briefly on a problem that is not unique to the experimental research on rape. This is the fact that a truly astonishing variety of dependent measures have been employed to measure the same general concept, the extent of the victim's responsibility for being raped. These include (a) how much the victim is at fault, (b) how much she is to blame, (c) how responsible she is for being raped, (d) how much her behavior precipitated the rape, (e) to what extent her character is to blame, and (f) the extent to which her behavior is to blame. This lack of standardization makes comparisons across experiments difficult. Furthermore, these diverse measures may tap different dimensions of the concept "responsibility." "How much is the victim to blame for being raped?" and "How responsible is the victim for being raped?" are two different questions. The former focuses more on the moral component, the latter more on an objective evaluation of the victim's potential contributory role. Thus, greater attention should be given to the choice of dependent measures, not only for the sake of interstudy comparability, but for the validity of the measures themselves.

Conclusions

The research on social perceptions of rape victims has yielded a few important findings, for example, the impact of extralegal factors in the perception of rape victims and also what appear to be fairly consistent sex differences in attributions to victims. Much of the research, however, has been marred by methodological problems. We have emphasized the diversity of dependent measures, and more importantly, a frequent confusion as to what model is being followed. We applaud these efforts to investigate an issue of great practical importance; this very importance necessitates careful and rigorous experimental design.

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Footnote

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(1975, p. 258), "Are the gifted able to attend to simultaneous stimuli and apprehend cognitive complexity without loss of information?" and (b) to generate basic information regarding differences in learning by investigating the variables of sex and intelligence as they relate to the ability to respond to simultaneous stimuli.

Method

Subjects and Design

The subjects were 64 fifth- and sixth-grade children selected from four schools in a school district in Oregon. These schools were selected as representative of a broad cross-section of the district school population.

Nineteen subjects were in the fifth-grade and 45 were in the sixth-grade. Thirty-two were females and 32 were males. The subjects were divided into two ability groups. Those individuals designated as intellectually superior (n = 32) had obtained an IQ score of 130 or higher on the Stanford-Binet, or its equivalent, and had been admitted into the Educationally Advanced program for gifted students in their school district. Students selected for the program are reported as representing the upper five percent of the school population in general intellectual ability.

Individuals designated as having normal intelligence (n = 32) were established as such by virtue of their achievement test scores and the recommendation of a teacher or principal. Though it was not the policy of the school district to administer intelligence

tests, there were a number of normal students on whom IQ data was available. For these students, the IQ scores ranged from 93 to 111, within the range of normal intelligence. All students who participated in the study were at or above grade level in reading ability.

Following selection, all students were randomly assigned to the comparison and control groups. Each student served in one of the following conditions: (a) successive presentation of the stimulus material, or (b) simultaneous presentation of the stimulus material. The research design was a two-group model with randomization of conditions.

Apparatus and Materials

Physical apparatus consisted of a Kodak Carousel 800 Slide Projector and screen. Total time of exposure and density of material was controlled across the experimental and control conditions. The speed of presentation was five seconds per slide and was determined by a pilot study.

The printed material on the slides consisted of two short stories selected from a nationally standardized achievement test at the grade level appropriate for the students. The use of nationally standardized material provided stories and questions with validity and reliability having already been firmly established.

One set of slides consisted of two short stories of comparable length but differing content. These stories were presented

separately, one story at a time. Each story consisted of 12 slides. The students were presented with an eight-to-ten-word section from the story on each slide. This arrangement prevented forward and/or backward glancing by the subjects.

The second set of slides consisted of the same stories as Set One. The two stories appeared on the slides simultaneously. The students were presented with a four-to-five-word section from each of the stories on each slide. Simultaneous presentation of the stories required 24 slides. The format of presentation of the stimulus material closely followed that of Carver (1970).

The dependent variable was two seven-item multiple-choice comprehension tests administered after presentation of the stories. The items were identical across conditions.

Procedure

Subjects were tested in small groups by the investigator. The median group contained five students.

Students in the control group (n = 32) participated in successive presentation of the stimulus material. All students in the experimental group (n = 32) participated in simultaneous presentation of the stimulus material. Half the subjects in each group were of superior intelligence, and half were normal.

The procedure for the control group was:

1. Read Story A.

2. Write down the two main points of Story A.

3. Take the comprehension test on Story A.

4. Read Story B.

5. Write down the two main points of Story B.

6. Take the comprehension test on Story B.

Sixteen students read the stories in the order listed above. Sixteen students read the stories in the reverse order. Subjects were assigned to these conditions randomly.

The procedure for the experimental group was:

1. Read Story A and Story B simultaneously.

2. Write down the two main points of each story.

3. Take the comprehension test on both stories.

The position of the stories was alternated among the subjects. Sixteen students viewed Story A on the left side of the slide and Story B on the right side. The other 16 students viewed Story B on the left side of the slide and Story A on the right side.

At the conclusion of both conditions, the subjects answered questions pertaining to their perception of the task. The students who viewed the stories simultaneously were asked what strategies were used to keep the stories straight.

As an additional measure of evaluating comprehension of the stimulus material, the students were requested to write down the

two main points of each story prior to taking the comprehension tests. The investigator desired to know how well the students had grasped the main ideas of the stories before exposure to any test items.

Results

The means and standard deviations of the dependent measure are presented in Table 1 by sex and classification of students. Mean scores on Condition One (successive presentation of stories) for superior subjects, normal subjects, and both groups combined were 13.56, 12.63, and 13.09, respectively. Scores for the superior students ranged from 12 to 14, with a maximum possible of fourteen. Scores for the normal students ranged from 9 to fourteen.

Insert Table 1 about here

Mean scores on Condition Two (simultaneous presentation of stories) for superior subjects, normal subjects, and both groups combined were 12.06, 9.63, and 10.84, respectively. On Condition Two superior students' scores ranged from 10 to fourteen. The normal students' scores ranged from six to thirteen.

The overall test of significance was tested using a 2 x 2 x 2 factorial analysis of variance.

Results of the analysis revealed no significant differences between sexes on the main effect or with a triple order interaction. Mean scores for females and males did not differ significantly under either condition of stimulus presentation.

The data analysis revealed a significant interaction effect between intelligence and the experimental conditions (F (1, 63) = 4.71, $p < .03$). As can be seen from Table 2, the two interactions of sex x intelligence (A x B) and sex x condition (A x C) contributed to the significant interaction of intelligence x condition (B x C). Table 2 also presents the levels of r_m, magnitude of experimental effect (Friedman, 1968). From the obtained r_m values, it can be seen that while the analysis revealed a strong effect for subjects, the largest effect was the condition (F (1, 63) = 42.41, $p < .0001$).

Insert Table 2 about here

T-tests revealed significant differences in mean scores between the superior subjects and the normal subjects on both conditions (t (30) = 2.82, $p < .01$; t (30) = 3.98, $p < .01$).

As predicted, both superior students and normal students had more difficulty with the simultaneous presentation of the stimulus material than with the successive presentation of the stories. There-

was a significant difference between the two ability groups on both conditions, with a greater difference between the groups on Condition Two (simultaneous presentation). The difference between the groups on Condition One was reliable, but small.

The students' responses to the main points of the stories were evaluated for general comprehension of the stimulus material. The four "main point" responses highest in frequency were observed. These four main ideas were then used as the criterion for administering scores to the subjects. Thus, each subject received one point for each response that matched with one of the four most frequent responses.

The analysis of the main idea data replicated the main effects found in the analysis of the comprehension test data. There was a significant difference between the two ability groups on both conditions, with a greater difference favoring the superior subjects under the simultaneous condition. The second order interactions were not significant at an alpha level selected at .05. The triple order interaction was significant at the .006 level (F (1, 63) = 8.24, $p < .006$).

Discussion

The hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between intelligence and the ability to attend to and comprehend

simultaneous visual stimuli received support in the direction expected. Intellectually superior students performed more successfully than normal students under both successive and simultaneous presentation of the stories. The gifted students appeared more capable of responding to and comprehending simultaneous visual stimuli than the normal students.

The children who participated in the simultaneous presentation condition were asked to explain what strategies, if any, they used to keep the stories separate. While the most frequent response was in the vein of "I remembered what I read," several specific strategies were apparently put to use by many of the students.

Several students responded that they read the story on the left side first on each slide. It was anticipated that this method of reading the stimulus material would be the predominant strategy response because it reflects the fact that individuals in this society are taught to read from left to right. Thus it might be argued that it was the natural tendency of the students to respond to the stimulus by reading the left side of the slide first.

There were a number of subjects who deviated from this response and approached the stimulus material differently. A few students commented that they read the story on the right side first. One strategy in particular was adopted by several students. On the first slide, they read the story on the left first and then the

story on the right. On the next slide, they read the story on the right first. This left-right, right-left procedure was followed for the entire presentation.

All of these strategies reflect the same basic approach: though presented simultaneously, the stories were handled successively. No subject remarked that he or she was able to respond to both stories at once. Rather, all of the strategies reported involved successive handling of the material. This finding is consistent with the observations of Das (1973) and Luria (1966a, 1966b). Verbal comprehension, Luria suggests, depends mainly on successive integration.

In reviewing the evidence for two types of information processing, successive synthesis and simultaneous synthesis, Das concluded that rote memory or associative learning tasks tend to require successive processing. More complex verbal tasks involving reasoning and abstraction need simultaneous processing.

Das (1973) has also commented that intelligence is not marked by a preference for either mode of information processing. It is not possible to conclude from the present study whether intelligence is or is not marked by a preference for one mode of information processing. However, intelligence does appear to affect the degree to which an individual is capable of attending to and comprehending

complex visual stimuli when they are presented simultaneously. If individuals of normal intelligence are more capable of successive processing than of simultaneous processing, it might be expected that they would exhibit a preference for the successive mode of information processing.

An alternative explanation for the present finding exists. The intellectually superior students had higher percentile scores in reading vocabulary and reading comprehension than the normal students. Though there was little difference between the two groups of students on the successive presentation of the stimulus material, the possibility of significant differences in reading ability may have accounted for the superior performance of the gifted students in the simultaneous condition. It may be that the independent variable is a complex form of intelligence test.

The present study has helped to generate new information concerning the abilities of individuals to attend to and comprehend complex simultaneous stimuli. The examination of the relationship between this ability and intelligence adds to our present understanding of the cognitive abilities of both normal and intellectually superior children.

Future studies in this area should vary the difficulty of the stimulus material, as well as the speed of presentation (e.g., reduce exposure to three seconds per slide or to the individual

subject's reading rate). Additional investigations might produce new ideas for devising comprehensive test items that would tap an individual's ability for simultaneous processing of information and comprehension of simultaneous stimuli, and otherwise help to identify distinctive abilities at the higher levels of intelligence.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Dependent Variable By Sex and Classification of Subjects

	Condition One (successive)			Condition Two (simultaneous)			Combined Conditions		
Group	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Superior Ss	16	13.56	0.61	16	12.06	1.20	32	12.81	1.21
Females	8	13.63	0.70	8	11.50	1.23	16	12.56	1.46
Males	8	13.50	0.50	8	12.63	0.86	16	13.06	0.83
Normal Ss	16	12.63	1.11	16	9.63	2.06	32	11.13	2.22
Females	8	13.13	0.60	8	9.50	1.67	16	11.31	2.20
Males	8	12.13	1.27	8	9.75	2.40	16	10.94	2.25
All Ss	32	13.09	1.01	32	10.84	2.07	64	11.97	1.98
Females	16	13.38	0.70	16	10.50	1.77	32	11.94	1.96
Males	16	12.81	1.19	16	11.19	2.30	32	12.00	1.99

Table 2

Summary of 2 X 2 X 2 Factorial Analysis of Variance on Comprehension Test Scores (n = 64)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	r_m
Sex (A)	0.07	1	.07	-	-	-
Intelligence (B)	45.57	1	45.57	23.86	0.0001	0.55
Condition (C)	81.00	1	81.00	42.41	0.0001	0.66
(A) X (B)	3.05	1	3.05	1.60	0.21	0.17
(A) X (C)	6.25	1	6.25	3.27	0.08	0.23
(B) X (C)	9.00	1	9.00	4.71	0.03	0.28
(A) X (B) X (C)	0.00	1	0.00	-	-	-
Within	107.00	56	1.91	-	-	-
Total	251.94	63				

Note. r_m = magnitude of experimental effect (Friedman, 1968).

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Footnotes

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