Social Competence Among Rapists

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The social competence of 20 rapists, 20 non-sexual offenders and 20 non-psychiatric, non-criminal controls was assessed. Audiotaped conversations and pre-recorded role-plays varying in the gender of the confederate and the nature of the stimulus situation were used for the behavioral assessment. Two trained judges rated subjects' performance on measures of social skill. Also, subjects rated their own performance on the tasks and completed questionnaires on interpersonal fears, anxiety, assertiveness and attitudes towards women. The results of this study revealed that behavioral measures of social competence, including others' judgments as well as self ratings, failed to identify a sex specific or a situation specific skill deficit unique to rapists. Rapists were seen as less socially competent than non-psychiatric, non-criminal subjects, but did not differ from the other incarcerated offender group. Only measures of assertiveness differentiated rapists from both other groups.

Rape has been hypothesized to relate to a variety of etiological factors, including (among others) sociocultural phenomenon (Brownmiller, 1975), personality variables (Groth & Birnbaum, 1979), negative attitudes towards women (Hegeman & Meikle, 1980), inappropriate sexual preferences (Abel, Blanchard, & Becker, 1978; Barbaree, Marshall, & Lanthier, 1979; Quinsey, Chaplin, & Varney, 1981), psychological conflicts (Cohen, Garofalo, Boucher, & Seghorn, 1971) and deficiencies in inter-
personal social skills (Abel et al., 1978; Laws & Serber, 1975). Numerous investigations have failed to resolve the controversy over the etiological, motivational and situational factors involved in sexual assault. In the continuing attempt to understand this offence, an abundance of data has been collected on the characteristics of sexual assailters (e.g., Amir, 1971; Pacht, 1976). Many of these findings are contradictory and emphasize the difficulty in generalizing about the characteristics of sexual assailters.

Throughout the various studies, however, rapists have consistently been described as heterosocially deficient. Information exists (e.g., Laws & Serber, 1975; Abel, Blanchard, & Becker, 1976; Clark & Lewis, 1977) to suggest that rapists are socially incompetent and have particular problems in interacting with women. In a study of incarcerated sexual assailters, Christie, Lanthier and Marshall (1979) state that in addition to having inappropriate sexual arousal patterns, many rapists demonstrate considerable difficulty establishing and maintaining appropriate social and heterosocial relationships. Clark and Lewis support this by stating that their data suggest that the rapist is a socially dysfunctional person with specific inadequacies centering around women. In a discussion of skills training programs, Abel et al., (1978) state that one of the most impressive phenomena involved in social skills training with sex offenders is the lack of heterosocial skills displayed by some rapists and the rapidity with which they can acquire them.

The area of social competence is important for etiological theories of rape as well as for treatment formulation. Although skills deficits are not exclusive to any one theoretical conceptualization, their causal role in the determination of sexual assault varies. Behavioral theorists (e.g., Abel et al., 1978; Barbaree et al., 1979) maintain that skill deficits play a major role in predisposing an individual to committing sexual assaults. Assaulters’ inability to initiate and maintain intimate relationships, their lack of knowledge of appropriate behaviors and inability to control anger and hostility are seen as behavioral deficits resulting from their socialization histories.

Psychodynamic theories (e.g., Cohen et al., 1971) postulate that a sexual assault may be an unconscious displacement of anger and hostility motivated by unresolved conflicts originating early in life. These underlying causes may be heterosocial fear and avoidance based upon the individual’s interpretation of and reaction to critical life events, relationships (particularly with significant women), and early childhood traumas. Although skill deficits are not central to this theory, they play an adjunctive role in the coping mechanisms and impulse control of the offender.

Sociocultural theories of sexual assault (Brownmiller, 1975; Clark & Lewis, 1977) propose that rape is a natural result of a particular social system rather than the manifestation of individual pathology. This perspective suggests that although men may have inclinations to aggress against women due to socialization factors, not all men would become sexual assailters. Again, social competence is seen as an adaptive mechanism through which an individual can compensate for inadequacies.
Despite the importance of social competence for both theory construction and for treatment formulation, the skills deficits of rapists are not well understood. Several questions are of particular interest on both theoretical and practical grounds. It is unknown whether the rapist’s deficits are specific to the gender of the person he is interacting with or whether a more generalized deficit exists. A further concern about the specificity of the assaulting’s heterosocial deficit stems from descriptions of the rapist as angry, hostile, and sexually inadequate. It could be that rapists are differentially skilled in various social situations. Affectively laden situations involving rejection or sexual provocation may evoke behaviors very different from those evoked by innocuous or by positive and accepting social interactions. It is also possible that rapists misperceive situations, unrealistically devalue their own performance, or feel excessive interpersonal anxiety.

The present study was designed to assess the heterosocial competence of a group of incarcerated sexual assailants and to determine whether measures of these skills would discriminate between the sexual assailants and a group of incarcerated non-sexual assailants, as well as a group of community control subjects. Social skill measures were obtained from sample conversations and from responses to audiotaped social stimuli. Ratings of social performance from external raters and from the subjects themselves were gathered. Other measures related to social competence, including frequency of dating, physical attractiveness, attitudes towards women, and questionnaire measures of interpersonal fears and anxiety were also obtained. It was hypothesized that sexual assailants would demonstrate fewer heterosocial skills than other subjects and that these heterosocial deficits would be most marked in socially rejecting, threatening, or sexually provocative situations. No differences between sexual assailants and comparison subjects were hypothesized in same gender situations.

METHOD

Subjects

Three groups of subjects were used in this study: (a) 20 rapists, (b) 20 non-sexual offenders and (c) 20 non-patient volunteers from the community. The groups were drawn from the maximum security hospital in Penetanguishene, Ontario and from the surrounding communities. Subjects were male volunteers, between the ages of 18 and 35 years and of at least average intelligence as determined by the Shipley Institute of Living Scale (1940). Hospital subjects had no more than one previous psychiatric assessment, had been incarcerated for less than one year and were free of psychosis. Community control subjects were recruited through advertisements and met the same age and intellectual functioning criteria as the offender group. Community subjects were predominantly of the lower socio-economic strata (as determined by educational and occupation levels) and denied any histories of institutionalization.
The specific characteristics of each group of subjects are described in Table 1. As indicated, all sex offenders, and the majority of non-sexual offenders had committed offenses against persons. Sex offenders were charged with rape, attempt rape, or indecent assault. Non-sex offenders were charged with armed robbery, robbery, assault, arson, murder or break and enter.

Although all subjects were within the normal range of intelligence, analysis of variance on IQ scores revealed group differences, \( F(2,57) = 7.47, p<.001 \). Rapists had an average IQ of 98.95, non-sex offenders of 101.85 and community subjects of 108.40.

**Procedures and Assessments**

All subjects were informed of the nature of the assessment, assured of their confidentiality of their involvement and signed a consent form. Assessments were carried out in a ward room within the hospital and consisted of two behavioral tasks and three self-report tasks.

**Audiotaped Assessments.** Each subject participated in two 5-minute conversations. The conversations, counterbalanced for order, were done separately with a female and a male confederate both of whom were unknown to the subject. The subject was asked to have as natural and spontaneous conversation with the confederate as possible. The confederate had been previously instructed to be polite but non-initiating.

Prior to the beginning of the conversation, confederates were asked to rate the subject on his physical attractiveness. Confederates were blind to group membership. This rating, ranging from extremely unattractive (1), to extremely attractive (10) was reported to the experimenter following the conversation. Both conversations were audiotaped on cassettes.

Each subject also participated in 22 prerecorded role-play situations. The first two served as practice. The situations were developed empirically, based upon the behavioral-analytic method described by Goldfried and D'Zurilla (1969). Each of the role-plays involved either a man and a woman or two men interacting in everyday situations. Five types of interaction were used: (a) social acceptance with sexual provocation; (b) social acceptance with warmth and friendliness; (c) social non-commitment; (d) social rejection with coldness; and (e) social rejection with overt hostility. Each type of interaction occurred with a male as well as a female and was presented in two different environments. An example of a situation with sexual provocation is the following:

Introduction: You enter a bar and see a person you recently met sitting alone and reading a newspaper. You do not know this person very well but decide to strike up a conversation. Confederate 1: Hi! You're (male or female name), aren't you? I think we met a few days ago. I'm Joe. Confederate 2: (enthusiastic and sexy voice) Oh ya. I remember you very well Joe. Confederate 1: Ya, I was with that group of people. We sat over there. Confederate 2: Sure, I remember. You

The development of the role-plays based upon the behavioral-analytic method included: (a) a situational analysis involving a comprehensive survey of situations and environments that the individual must cope with; (b) an investigation of the range of possible responses; (c) the determination of effective responses and the attainment of consensus on the responses and; (d) the development of a suitable measurement format.
# Table 1

## Subject Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rapists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td>27.05 (4.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean IQ</td>
<td>98.95 (7.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index offences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Against persons</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against property</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous offences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against persons</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against property</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High frequency of dating</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school or greater (9–13)</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupational level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed (at present or at</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time of arrest)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual labour or other</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality disorder</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosis (in remission)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warrant of remand</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrant of the Lieutenant-Governor</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Standard deviations are given in parenthesis. n = 20 for each group.*
caught my eye. Confederate 1: Well, what are you doing for the next little while? Are you waiting for someone? Confederate 2: Oh no, I was just sitting around and reading the newspaper, but if you're not busy maybe we could have a drink together and then go to my place for a while. It's not very far from here.

Six male university students were asked to listen to the prerecorded role-plays and rank order the situations according to the degree of social acceptance evident in each. They were further instructed to identify which of the five stimulus types were represented in each role-play. The students were in 100% agreement among themselves as well as with the experimenter. In each role-play, one of the stimulus persons (the same male throughout) made a social proposal to the other (male or female) stimulus person. The second stimulus person then responded in one of the above five ways. Each taped interaction was interrupted by a high-pitched tone. The subject was instructed to imagine himself as the male making the social proposal in the interaction and to respond at the end of the tone as he thought appropriate. The prerecorded situations and the subjects' responses were recorded on a second cassette operated by the experimenter.

Following the presentation of the instructions (also prerecorded), two practice situations were presented which served to familiarize the subject with the tasks. The succeeding 20 stimulus situations were presented in four different random orders.

Paper and Pencil Questionnaires. Each subject completed four questionnaires. These were the validated and reliable Social Avoidance and Distress Scale and the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, both developed by Watson and Friend (1969), as well as the Calliner and Ross Assertiveness Questionnaire (Calliner & Ross, 1976). This latter measure was chosen because it examined assertiveness in several content areas including (a) heterosexual assertion, (b) assertion with authority figures, (c) positive feedback, (d) negative feedback, and (e) general assertion. Good reliability and validity information is associated with the measure (see Calliner & Ross, 1976). The original 40-item questionnaire was adapted to a 33-item scale for the present study by eliminating questions related to drugs. Subjects also answered the 25-item Attitudes Towards Women Scale developed by Spence, Helmreich, and Stapp (1973). This scale assesses an individual's attitude towards the rights and roles of women and has been used with rapists (Feild, 1978).

Ratings Scales and Data Reduction Techniques

The audiotaped assessments were independently rated by two trained female raters unaware of the purpose, design, and group composition of the study. The pairs of ratings were averaged after inter-rater reliabilities were calculated for each variable (Strahan, 1980). In order to increase the stability of the ratings and to simplify the analyses, ratings were averaged over the two environments.

External Ratings. Each conversation was rated by two female raters on five variables preselected for their theoretical relevance or their demonstrated sensitivity to treatment interventions: global social skill, anxiety, content relevancy, tonal-vocal expressiveness, and personal reference. Social skill was rated on a 7-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 (not at all skilled) to 7 (extremely skilled).
Anxiety was also rated on a 7-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 (not at all anxious) to 7 (extremely anxious). Content relevancy and tonal-vocal expressiveness were rated on 5-point Likert-type rating scales ranging from 1 (not at all relevant; not at all expressive) to 5 (completely relevant; appropriately expressive). Personal reference was a count of the number of references the subject made to the confederate during the conversation. Only ratings of global social skill and anxiety will be reported in the univariate analyses as other variables failed to reach significance.

Each role-play situation was rated on five variables also preselected for their direct relevance or their demonstrated sensitivity to treatment interventions; global social skill, anxiety, annoyance, content relevancy, and tonal-vocal expressiveness. Annoyance was rated on a 7-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 (not at all annoyed) to 7 (extremely annoyed). All other variables were rated as described above. Only ratings of global social skill, anxiety and annoyance will be reported in the univariate analyses as other variables failed to reach significance.

In the sample conversations, reliability coefficients ranged from .86 to .96 with the male confederate. Inter-rater reliability coefficients ranging from .74 to .90 were obtained for the role-play situations.

Self Ratings of Performance and Perception. Following each sample conversation, subjects rated themselves on anxiety and social skill. The anxiety scale ranged from not at all anxious (1) to extremely anxious (7). The social skill scale ranged from not at all skilled (1) to having excellent social skill (7).

Subjects also rated their own performance and feelings as well as the performance of the confederate in the prerecorded social situations. The tape was replayed and subjects listened to both the stimulus situations as well as their responses. Following each response, subjects rated themselves on subjective feelings of anxiety (1–7), social skill (1–7), annoyance (1–7), and humiliation (1–7) and rated the confederate on perceived domineeringness (1 = not at all domineering; 7 = extremely domineering). Subjects were also asked to identify the social stimulus following the replay of each situation by indicating what type of behavior the confederate was demonstrating (1 = rude and hostile; 2 = cold and rejecting; 3 = neutral; 4 = warm and accepting and 5 = sexually provocative).

RESULTS

The correlation coefficients between behavioral measures, questionnaires, IQ and demographic data are presented in Table 2. The pooled within-group correlation coefficients were tested using Fisher's $r$ to $z$ transformation.

External ratings of social skill in the role-plays correlated significantly with the external ratings in the conversations (.35), but the magnitude of the relationship was small. Correlations between social skill ratings in both tasks and other measures also revealed little relationship between the two tasks. The low correlations (−.09 and .28) between external and self ratings within the conversations and the role plays, indicate that external judges perceived the behaviors differently than the subjects reported experiencing them.
Table 2
Pooled Within-Group Correlation Coefficients Between Role Plays, Sample Conversations, Questionnaires and Demographic Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conversations</th>
<th>Role Plays</th>
<th>Questionnaires</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Skill</td>
<td>Social Skill</td>
<td>Caliner-Ross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Subscale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social skill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>external</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.35 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>-.48 ***</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>external</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.38 ***</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content relevancy</td>
<td>.64 ***</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.27 *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tonal-vocal expressiveness</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reference</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.33 ***</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
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<td>Role plays</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>external</td>
<td>.35 ***</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>-.53 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content relevancy</td>
<td>.37 ***</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.53 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal-Vocal Expressiveness</td>
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<td>-.15</td>
<td>.66 ***</td>
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<td>Questionnaires and Other Measures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caliner-Ross Total Score</td>
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<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caliner-Ross Heterosexual Subscale</td>
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<td>.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes Towards Women Scale</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Negative Evaluation</td>
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<td>-.32 **</td>
<td>.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Avoidance and Distress Scale</td>
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<td>.37 ***</td>
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<td>Physical Attractiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
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</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .005
Fig. 1. Mean global skill external ratings for conversations and role-plays.

Conversations

Multivariate analysis of variance examining overall effects across all the rated variables in the conversations revealed a main effect for Group, multivariate $F(10,106) = 2.83, p < .01$, and a Group by Sex of Confederate interaction, multivariate $F(10,106) = 2.19, p < .02$. Further univariate analyses revealed that, as predicted, groups differed overall in external ratings of social skill, $F(2,57) = 9.57, p < .001$. However, planned contrasts (Dunnett's $t$) indicated that rapists were judged to be less skilled than community subjects, $t(57) = 3.48, p < .01$, but did not differ from the non-sex offenders. The upper panel of Figure 1 depicts this finding. Analysis of covariance for social skill showed that the groups also differed on social skill ratings when IQ effects were removed, $F(2,56) = 5.80, p < .005$.

Analysis of anxiety ratings did not reveal any significant main effects or interactions among groups. No sex of confederate effects were found for either variable. Confederate ratings of subjects' physical attractiveness
revealed that females rated the groups of subjects as differing in their attractiveness, $F(2, 57) = 3.86, p < .02$, while male ratings did not significantly differentiate the groups. Subsequent Scheffé analysis of the female ratings indicated that rapists were rated as significantly less attractive than the community subjects, but that they did not differ from the non-sex offenders.

In self ratings, subjects rated themselves as less skilled with female confederates, $F(1, 57) = 10.83, p < .01$, and as more anxious with females than with males, $F(1, 57) = 16.19, p < .001$. Rapists differed from non-sex offenders only in anxiety ratings, $t(57) = 3.25, p < .01$, in that they were more anxious with female confederates whereas non-sex offenders were not.

A comparison of external and self ratings of social skill and anxiety revealed that subjects rated themselves as less skilled, $F(1, 57) = 32.15, p < .001$, and as more anxious, $F(1, 57) = 68.69, p < .001$, than others perceived them to be. Rapists did not differ from the other subjects in these comparisons.

**Role Plays**

Multivariate analysis of variance examining overall effects across all the rated variables revealed a significant main effect for Situation Type, multivariate $F(24, 35) = 5.16, p < .001$, as well as a Group by Sex of Confederate interaction, multivariate $F(24, 34) = 5.16, p < .001$. In order to test the hypothesized group differences, univariate analyses were used and revealed that subjects differed overall in external ratings of social skill, $F(2, 57) = 8.84, p < .001$, in the role-plays. Again rapists were rated as less skilled than community subjects but did not differ from other offenders. The lower panel of Figure 1 depicts these findings. All subjects were seen as less skilled in hostile situations than sexual situations and as less skilled in the combined threatening situations (hostile and sexual) compared to the combined cold, neutral and warm situations. Rapists did not differ from other subjects in this respect. A Sex by Situation interaction indicated that subjects were less skilled with females than males across situations, $F(4, 228) = 4.82, p < .01$, but again rapists did not differ from other subjects. Analysis of covariance for social skill revealed that groups still differed in skill ratings when the effects of IQ were removed, $F(2, 56) = 6.58, p < .003$.

Subjects were also rated as demonstrating more anxiety in sexual situations than in hostile situations, $F(4, 228) = 9.41, p < .003$, although this effect is small in absolute terms. A significant Group by Situation interaction, $F(8, 228) = 2.27, p < .025$, indicated that rapists exhibited the least situation specific anxiety compared to other groups. This finding is depicted in Figure 2.

All subjects also were found to be differentially annoyed across situations, $F(8, 228) = 12.24, p < .001$, demonstrating more annoyance in hostile and cold situations than in sexual and warm situations. Rapists again
Fig. 2. Mean external anxiety ratings for role-plays presented for groups across situations.

did not differ from others in this respect. Rapists did, however, differ from non-sex offenders in their interactions with the male and female confederates, $F(2,57) = 4.25, p < .025$: non-sex offenders were rated as more annoyed with males than with females across situations.

Subjects' own ratings of social skill and anxiety revealed that rapists and non-sex offenders rated themselves as equally skilled with males and females but these two groups differed from the community subjects, $F(2,57) = 3.69, p < .05$. Rapists and community subjects rated themselves as equally anxious with males and females but differed from the non-sex offenders, $F(2,57) = 4.81, p < .025$. All subjects reported being more anxious in threatening situations than in the combined cold, neutral and warm situations. A gender of confederate effect did emerge in the annoyance self ratings, $F(2,57) = 16.07, p < .001$, where subjects overall rated themselves as more annoyed with males than with females.

Subjects' ratings of their humiliation and of the confederates' perceived domineeringness revealed that subjects felt most humiliated, $F(4,228) = 68.93, p < .001$, and perceived the confederate as most domineering, $F(4,228) = 71.84, p < .001$, in the hostile situations as well as the combined threatening (hostile and sexual) situations. Subjects overall reported less humiliation with females than with males in the sexual situations, $F(4,228) = 27.98, p < .001$. Rapists did not differ from other subjects on these variables.
A comparison of the subjects' own ratings and the external judges' ratings of social skill, anxiety and annoyance revealed that, as in the conversations, subjects rated themselves as less skilled, $F(1,57) = 165.72$, $p < .001$, more anxious, $F(1,57) = 159.32$, $p < .001$, and more annoyed, $F(1,57) = 251.58$, $p < .001$, than external raters rated them.

Subjects' ratings of confederate behavior (hostile, cold, neutral, warm and sexual) were analyzed using chi-square tests on raw scores of the number of correct versus incorrect assignments of confederate behavior. Separate chi-square tests were performed for environments, sex of confederate and situation type. Groups differed significantly ($p < .05$, $df = 2$) on 5 of the original 20 assignments; 3 with male confederates in neutral, warm and hostile situations and 2 with female confederates in cold and neutral situations. Rapists differed from non-sexual offenders and from community subjects respectively in two situations and from both groups in only one situation. These results indicate that rapists did not generally misperceive or misinterpret the situations and did not consistently differ from other subjects.

**Questionnaires**

Univariate analyses of variance of the Callner-Ross Assertiveness Questionnaire showed that several assertiveness subscales differentiated among the groups. Overall scores indicated that rapists were the least assertive, $F(2,57) = 6.31$, $p < .003$, and significantly less assertive than the community subjects. The same pattern of results emerged in the Negative Feedback subscale, $F(2,57) = 4.25$, $p < .019$. Analysis of the General Assertiveness and Heterosexual Assertiveness subscale scores revealed that rapists were less assertive than both other groups in general assertion situations, $F(2,57) = 7.72$, $p < .001$, as well as in heterosexual assertion situations, $F(2,57) = 9.03$, $p < .001$. Rapists did not differ from other subjects on the Attitudes Towards Women Scale, Fear of Negative Evaluation and Social Avoidance and Distress Scales.

**DISCUSSION**

This study did not find a skill deficit unique to rapists. Rapists differed from non-psychiatric, non-criminal subjects on overall social competence, but did not differ from other incarcerated offenders. Rapists demonstrated neither a skill deficit particular to females nor a situation dependent deficit different from other subjects. These findings support other recent work (Himadi, Arkowitz, Hinton, & Perl, 1980) demonstrating difficulties among socially anxious and minimally dating males in same-sex as well as opposite-sex interactions. Overall, the results of this study support neither a sex specific nor a situation specific social deficit unique to rapists; of course, it should be remembered that the data were gathered in contrived situations. It is possible that in real life situations, the results would be different.
Behavioral measures, including others' judgments as well as self ratings, failed to differentiate rapists from all other subjects. Only self report measures of assertiveness in both general situations and specifically in heterosexual situations differentiated rapists from both control groups. These results tentatively suggest that rapists may have deficits particular to females regarding assertion rather than overall social competence. Although it has generally been assumed that when one acts assertively, one is also acting competently, it has not been established that assertive behavior is socially competent behavior. Individuals' cognitions about the consequences of behavior and their relationship to assertiveness have not been adequately explored.

In addition to being described as incompetent, rapists are frequently described as angry and hostile, with an inability to deal with these emotions in appropriate ways. It has been proposed (Becker, Abel, Blanchard, Murphy, & Coleman, 1978) that a difficulty in expressing anger appropriately (a component of assertion) may lead to rape. The results of this study provide some preliminary information on this issue. Self rated and externally rated anger or annoyance failed uniquely to differentiate sexual assaulters from both comparison groups. Several interpretations of these results are possible. A response inhibition interpretation is plausible from both theoretical perspectives and clinical observations. It may be that rapists are more angry, particularly in rejecting situations, but inhibit the expression of anger because of any one or a combination of inhibiting factors, such as unassertiveness, fear or anxiety. As suggested by Becker et al., (1978), unreleased anger may be a factor in inappropriate acting out. Although the results of the self ratings challenge the plausibility of this interpretation, inhibition of expression may account for suppressed response levels in self report as well.

A possible way to elucidate this issue is to examine rapists' cognitions regarding the potential consequences of expressing anger. Recent work (Morrison & Bellack, 1981) has emphasized the importance of beliefs regarding consequences in determining behavior. Support for this interpretation would be gained if it was revealed that rapists had unrealistic beliefs about the negative consequences of expressing anger or had sex role attitudes which might prohibit the expression of anger with females. An alternative explanation may include a response deficit interpretation (i.e., rapists do not express anger appropriately because they do not know how to). The unanswered questions which remain are whether rapists are unable to or are inhibited from expressing their anger or whether they in fact do not experience anger or express it differently from others.

Preliminary investigation of rapists' perceptions of social stimuli from this study revealed that they identified the behavior of others realistically. How rapists appraise these stimuli and how they draw inferences from them, however, is not known. Further work is needed to explore how rapists' perceptions of social cues are mediated by their cognitions and affect. Josefowitz (1981), in a study investigating individuals' perceptions
of others’ emotional expressions, suggested that unassertive individuals perceive more negative emotion in facial expressions and attribute this more to themselves than do assertive individuals. The fact that rapists are able to identify behaviors as rejecting or as sexually provocative tells us little about what they attribute this to or whether this affects their subsequent behavior or self-appraisal. The results of the present investigation indicate that further exploration of these issues is needed.

The results of this study suggest that interpretive analyses and treatment programs based upon heterosexual/social deficits need to be reexamined. Although rapists, like other offenders, were found to be less socially skilled than demographically similar males with no criminal or psychiatric histories, we cannot specify whether this difference actually implies incompetence. A reconceptualization of social skills as proposed by McFall (1982) may be more fruitful in the further assessment and treatment of sexual assaulters. The present data suggest that rapists’ interpersonal functioning may be affected by a complex interaction of several variables, specifically anxiety and assertiveness. Since the relationship between these factors is unknown, it is difficult to propose specialized treatment programs. Further investigation should focus on the inhibitory effects of anxiety and unassertiveness as well as on the individual’s interpretation of social stimuli. These investigations may suggest the future implementation of desensitization or cognitive restructuring programs.

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