

The Effects of Target Attractiveness and
Subject Gender on Attributions
of Deception

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Running Head: Attributions of Deception

Abstract

Research has suggested that males and females may differ in the importance they assign to attractiveness in a deceptive situation. Males' and females' responses to deceptive situations as a function of the attractiveness or unattractiveness of the alleged offender were investigated. Subjects received a photo of an attractive or unattractive male or female, a scenario and a corresponding questionnaire. Results showed a significant difference between male and female responses for the consequences of alleged deceptive actions, with male subjects overall selecting more lenient courses of action than females, especially when the alleged offender was an attractive female. Overall, males and females differed in the importance they assigned to attractiveness but this was dependent on the gender of the offender and the deceptive act committed. Implications of this difference in attributions for male and female subjects are discussed.

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Attractiveness Literature

A large proportion of everyday social behaviour is strategic: people tell lies, feign emotions, ingratiate powerful others and take stands with which they do not agree (Fleming, Hilton, Darley & Kojectin, 1990). The importance of physical attractiveness in impression formation has been studied extensively in an effort to understand the reason for peoples' various strategic social behaviours.

Research has shown that there is a strong attractiveness bias. People are more motivated to impress attractive individuals and thus treat them differently and talk to them differently (Depaulo, Tang & Stone, 1987). Further attractiveness research has established that physically attractive persons are viewed to have stronger personalities, are seen as more outgoing, and more likeable than are unattractive persons (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani & Longo 1991; & Esses & Webster, 1988). It has also been suggested that people are more likely to flatter, agree with and ingratiate attractive persons in comparison to unattractive individuals (Depaulo, Stone & Lassiter, 1985; Feingold, 1992;

Romano & Bordieri, 1989; & Depaulo, Tang & Stone, 1987).

One study specifically investigating the role of physical attractiveness in impression formation exemplifies this bias toward attractive individuals. Male college students were provided with bogus photographs of either physically attractive or physically unattractive female students with whom they would be conversing by telephone. Results showed that males were more responsive to attractive targets than to unattractive targets (Feingold, 1992). Essentially the males talked more openly, were friendlier and were willing to share more personal information when they thought the female was attractive. Further proof for this phenomenon can be seen in a study where men participated in a "getting acquainted" telephone conversation with a female peer. Results showed that when the men believed that they were talking to an attractive women they communicated in a "warmer, more animated, and more confident way" than did those who believed that they were talking to an unattractive woman (Depaulo & Stone, 1987, p.177).

Physical attractiveness has also been thought to play an important role in determining the effectiveness of persuasive communications. It has been suggested that a message delivered by a physically attractive source will tend to be more persuasive

than one delivered by a less physically attractive source (Debono & Telesca, 1990).

Research on attractiveness with regard to job performance has indicated that attractive individuals are viewed as more qualified job applicants (Romano & Bordieri, 1989). Furthermore, statistics have indicated that not only do employers often show favouritism toward attractive individuals, but these individuals tend to earn approximately 5% more per hour than individuals with average looks (Marshall, 1993).

An important finding in the attractiveness research has been that in jury simulation, attractive individuals tend to be viewed as less guilty and less deserving of punishment than unattractive persons. One study specifically investigating the role of attractiveness in labelling certain convicted criminals as dangerous offenders, found that the subjects perceived physically unattractive offenders as more likely to fulfil the dangerous offender criteria than did attractive offenders. Furthermore, the unattractive offenders tended to be evaluated with more certainty of guilt and a more severe recommended punishment than did attractive offenders (Esses & Webster, 1988).

What all of the attractiveness research shows is that attractive individuals are consistently viewed more favourably

than are unattractive persons. Furthermore, this attractiveness bias tends to be evident in many aspects of life and it is stable across evaluative situations.

Attractiveness/Deception Literature

Past research on deception has focused on methods to detect deceptiveness using nonverbal behaviour, psychophysiological data and by attitude and personality testing. One study investigating the role of physical attractiveness and skill at detecting deception consisted of subjects who were shown video tapes in which individuals told truths and lies to either attractive or unattractive individuals. Results of the study showed that the lies told to attractive listeners in the video tape were generally easier to detect by subjects than the lies that were told to unattractive listeners (Depaulo, Tang & Stone, 1987).

However, attractiveness has recently become an important variable in deception research with regard to how it affects individuals' judgement of culpability. One study specifically investigating the role of attractiveness in deception illustrates that attractiveness plays an important role when making decisions about deceptive situations. It was found that when college students were asked to read a case about a person accused of the deceptive act of cheating, students were less likely to assign

guilt and recommend punishment when the person was identified in a photograph as being attractive (Klienke, 1986).

Therefore, what this research shows is that when individuals are making attributions concerning the deceptive actions of others, they tend to be influenced by the attractiveness of the person. However, one question that the previous research does not address is: "Who is doing the attributing in these situations?" Especially in reference to above study, when attributing guilt or innocence and subsequent punishment to an individual in a deceptive situation, is it a male or female doing the judging?

Gender Literature

Studies have suggested that future deceptive/attractiveness research needs to focus on the characteristics of the detector (Riggio & Friedman, 1983). One variable that has not been studied in direct relation to this area but that may be crucial, is gender. Studies have indicated that whether physical attractiveness is more important to perceivers of one sex than the other is not entirely clear (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani & Longo, 1991). Although there have been no studies directly investigating the role of subject gender in the attributions of deception, it has been suggested that men and women may differ in the importance they assign to attractiveness (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani & Longo,

1991). Therefore, the purpose of the present research is to investigate whether or not males and females differ in their attributions of guilt or innocence and subsequent punishment on the basis of the attractiveness or unattractiveness of the alleged offenders. Essentially, the question that needs answering is: 'When male and female judges make attributions concerning the deceptive actions of others, are they equally influenced by the alleged offenders' attractiveness?' The prediction is that males and females will be influenced by attractiveness of an alleged offender and assign less culpability when the latter is a member of the opposite sex.

References

Debono, K. G., Telesca, C. (1990). The influence of source physical attractiveness on advertising effectiveness: a functional perspective. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 20(17), 1385-1395.

High and low self monitors heard either a physically attractive or unattractive source promote a new product. Results indicated that attractive individuals were more persuasive than unattractive individuals. Exemplified the assertion that attractive individuals are more persuasive in their communications than are unattractive individuals.

Depaulo, B. M., Tang, J., & Stone, J. I. (1987). Physical attractiveness and skill at detecting deception. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 13(2), 177-187.

Was informative as to the bias toward attractive individuals. Reported that lies told to attractive individuals were generally easier to detect than were lies that were told to unattractive individuals. This was to exemplify the fact that other people are motivated to impress attractive persons.

Depaulo, B. M., Stone, J. I., & Lassiter, G. D. (1985). Telling ingratiating lies: effects of target sex and target attractiveness on verbal and nonverbal deceptive success. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 48, 109-128.

Results of the study showed that people are more likely to flatter, agree with and ingratiate attractive individuals.

Eagly, A. H., Ashmore, R. D., Makhijani, M. G., & Longo, L. C. (1991). What is beautiful is good, but...: a meta-analytic review of research on the physical attractiveness stereotype. Psychological Bulletin, 110(1), 109-128.

Study found that subjects ascribed more favourable personality traits and more successful life outcomes to attractive than unattractive targets. Also suggested that whether physical attractiveness is more important to perceivers' of one sex than the other was not clear. Also suggested that research on the stereotyping of attractiveness had focused on the meaning inferred from attractiveness cues and not the importance of attractiveness.

Esses, V. M., & Webster, C. D. (1988). Physical attractiveness, dangerousness, and the Canadian criminal code. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 18(12), 1017-1031.

Discussed how physical attractiveness was used as a criterion in individuals' attribution of 'dangerous'. Showed that attractive individuals are seen as being 'good' or ultimately less responsible for their transgressions. Results of the study indicated that attractive individuals were less likely to be labelled 'dangerous'.

Feingold, A. (1992). Good-looking people are not what we think. Psychological Bulletin, 111(2), 304-341.

Discussed the positive characteristics that are frequently associated with attractive people and how this affects others' behaviour towards them.

Fleming, J. H., Hilton, J. L., Darley, J. M., & Kojeckin, B. A. (1990). Multiple audience problem: a strategic communication perspective on social perception. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58(4), 593-609.

Outlined the situations in which deceptive or hidden messages could be decoded and by whom. Results showed that friends detected and decoded hidden messages, where as strangers did not.

Klienke, C. L. (1986). Meeting and Understanding People. United States of America: W. H. Freeman & Company.

Provided information on individual differences and the stereotypes that surround attractive and unattractive individuals.

Riggio, R. E., & Friedman, H. S. (1983). Individual differences and cues to deception. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45(4), 899-915.

Was helpful in that it suggested that future research needs to focus attention on individual differences in ability to deceive successfully.

Romano, S. T., & Bordieri, J. E. (1989). Physical attractiveness stereotypes and students perceptions of college professors. Psychological Reports, 64, 1099-1102.

Provided information that suggested that physically attractive people are perceived to be more intelligent and are held less responsible for their transgressions.

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Abstract

Research has suggested males and females may differ in the importance they assign to attractiveness in a deceptive situation. Males' and females' responses to deceptive situations as a function of the attractiveness or unattractiveness of the alleged offender were investigated. Subjects received a photo of an attractive or unattractive male or female, a scenario and a corresponding questionnaire. Results showed a significant difference between male and female responses for the consequences of alleged deceptive actions with male subjects overall selecting more lenient courses of action than females, especially when the alleged offender was an attractive female. Overall, males and females differed in the importance they assigned to attractiveness but this was dependent on the gender of the offender and the deceptive act committed. Implications of this difference in attributions for male and female subjects are discussed.

The Effects of Target Attractiveness
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The importance of physical attractiveness in impression formation has been studied extensively in an effort to understand the reason for peoples' various strategic social behaviours. Research has shown that there is a strong attractiveness bias. Attractive individuals are viewed as having better personalities and are seen as more outgoing, more likeable and as more qualified job applicants (Esses & Webster, 1988; Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani & Longo, 1991). Subsequent research also has shown that people are more likely to flatter, agree with and ingratiate attractive persons in comparison to unattractive persons (Depaulo, Stone & Lassiter, 1985; Fiengold, 1992; Romano & Bordieri, 1989; & Depaulo, Tang & Stone, 1987). Research on jury simulation has further exemplified this attractiveness bias. Attractive individuals tend to be viewed as less guilty and less deserving of punishment than are unattractive persons. One study specifically investigating the role of attractiveness in labelling certain convicted criminals as dangerous offenders, found that the subjects perceived physically unattractive offenders as more

likely to fulfil the dangerous offender criteria than did attractive offenders (Esses & Webster, 1988).

Attractiveness has recently become an important variable in deception research. Past research on deception has focused on methods to detect deceptiveness using nonverbal behaviour, psychophysiological data and by attitude and personality testing. However, one researcher investigating the role of attractiveness in deception found that when college students were asked to read a case about a person accused of the deceptive act of cheating, students were less likely to assign guilt and recommend punishment when the person was identified in a photograph as being attractive (Klienke, 1986).

A number of investigators have suggested that future deception/attractiveness research needs to focus on the characteristics of the detector. One variable that has not been studied in direct relation to this area but which may be crucial, is gender. Studies have indicated that whether physical attractiveness is more important to perceivers of one sex than to the other is not entirely clear (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani & Longo, 1991). Although there have been no studies directly investigating the role of subject gender in the attribution of deception, it has been suggested that men and women may differ in

the importance they assign to attractiveness (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani & Longo, 1991). Therefore, the purpose of the present research is to investigate whether or not males and females differ in their attributions of guilt or innocence and subsequent punishment on the basis of the attractiveness or unattractiveness of the alleged offender. Essentially, this study is designed to answer the question: 'When male and female judges make attributions concerning the deceptive actions of others, are they equally influenced by the alleged offenders attractiveness?'

The hypothesis is that males and females will be influenced by attractiveness of an alleged offender and assign less culpability when the latter is a member of the opposite sex.

Method

Subjects

Ninety-eight subjects consisting of 48 men and 50 women participated in this study. They were undergraduate students selected from Algoma University College who received some course credit for their participation. Subjects consisted of both married and single individuals with ages ranging from eighteen to early fifties.

Stimulus Photos

Four target photographs were selected for use in this study. They consisted of pictures of two attractive males and of two attractive females between the ages of 20 and 24. The photos were standardized for angle (the head and neck), pose and background. These photos were rated on a 10 point scale of attractiveness by a separate group of male and female raters. On the basis of these judgements, only the photographs which yielded the highest attractiveness ratings from each class, one male and one female, were used in this study.

The unattractive counterparts were created by using the original four photographs and making transformations using a computer program. Transformations for both the attractive male and female photos consisted of pinching the face, which created an effect of a longer and thinner face and also had an effect of setting the eyes closer together making them appear 'beady'. The nose and mouth also were enlarged, and shading was used to create a more realistic appearance. After the transformations had been made, this group of photos also was rated by a separate group of male and female raters on a 10 point attractiveness scale. Only the photos which yielded the highest unattractiveness ratings from each category, one male and one female, were used. Thus, a total

of four photographs; two attractive and two unattractive, were employed as stimuli in this experiment.

Deceptive Scenarios

Subjects randomly received one of three scenarios which consisted of a small amount of background information about the individual in the corresponding photograph (name and age) and a deceptive situation which had occurred. The deceptive action, always a minor one, involved either lying, cheating or stealing. The lying scenario described an incident in which the individual had been accused of lying about receiving a bag of grocery items which had been delivered to the wrong address. The cheating scenario involved a deceptive situation where the individual had been accused of cheating on a final examination. The stealing scenario consisted of an individual who was accused of taking money from a local charity. The guilt or innocence of the target person in the scenario was unknown; it was left up to the subjects to decide the verdict for themselves.

Questionnaires

There were two questionnaires designed for use in this study and all responses were scored on a 7 point Likert Scale. The first questionnaire consisted of questions such as: "What course of action do you think should be taken in this situation?" and

"Who do you think is the most responsible for the deceptive action, the individual or a third party?" This questionnaire was designed to assess to what extent the subject believed that the alleged offender was responsible for their own actions, and how harshly he or she should be judged.

The second questionnaire consisted of items such as: "How likely is it that the individual committed the offense in question?" and "If this individual were found guilty of the alleged action, what do you think are the chances that this type of deceptive behaviour may occur in the future?" This line of questioning was designed to assess subjects' subjective attitudes toward the alleged offender. It was used to determine if the subjects believed the alleged offender was guilty of the crime, and consequently whether this was dependent upon the offender's attractiveness.

Design and Procedure

Subjects were asked to take part in a study on social perception. All subjects randomly received one photo of either an attractive male or female or an unattractive male or female. Attached to the photograph was one of the three deceptive scenarios and the first corresponding questionnaire. Upon completion of the first questionnaire, subjects were given the

second questionnaire. After completion of the task the photographs and questionnaires were retrieved and subjects were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results

Deceptiveness in the Future

Results showed that, overall, subjects differed in their responses to male and female offenders with regard to how likely it would be that the alleged offender would commit a deceptive action in the future. Results indicated a significant three-way interaction, $F(2,74) = 4.96$, $p = .009$ between the variables of: gender of the alleged offender, the attractiveness of the alleged offender and the scenario. Figure 1 shows that when the alleged offender was an unattractive female, she was viewed as being less likely to commit a deceptive action in the future in both the lying ($M = 5.375$) and stealing ($M = 4.313$) scenarios in comparison with attractive female. Means for the attractive female in the lying and stealing scenarios were 5.875 and 5.198, respectively. However, in the cheating scenario the effect was reversed. The female unattractive alleged offender was viewed as more likely to commit a deceptive act in the future ($M = 4.938$) than the

attractive female ($M = 2.438$).

Insert Figure 1 about here

For the male offender, Figure 2 shows that subjects' responses were significantly different. In contrast to the female offender, the unattractive male in all three of these scenarios; lying ($M = 5.438$), stealing ($M = 4.75$) and cheating ($M = 4.222$) was judged as being less likely to commit a deceptive action than was the attractive male. Means for the attractive male for each of the three scenarios were 5.563, 4.9 and 5.25 respectively.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Consequences for Deceptive Actions

Males consistently $F(1,74) = 4.90, p = .030$ assigned a more lenient penalty to alleged offenders in 10 of the 12 deceptive situations in comparison to females. Table 1 illustrates the means for male and female subjects for all 12 of the deceptive situations.

The largest difference between male and female responses was

found within the lying scenario when the alleged offender was an attractive female. As illustrated in Figure 3, male subjects responded with a more lenient penalty to the deceptive situation ($M = 3.25$) than did female subjects ($M = 5.75$).

Insert Table 1 and Figure 3 about here

The first exception, where males assigned a more severe penalty to an alleged offender for a deceptive action, was found in the cheating scenario when the alleged offender was an attractive male. Figure 4 shows that in this scenario, males assigned a slightly more severe penalty ($M = 3.25$) in comparison to female subjects ($M = 2.75$).

The second exception was found in the stealing scenario when the alleged offender was an attractive female. Figure 5 illustrates that in this case, males again assigned a slightly more severe penalty to the alleged offender ($M = 6.125$) than did female subjects ($M = 5.125$).

Insert Figure 4 and 5 about here

Responsibility for Actions

There was a significant difference, $F(1,74) = 8.18, p = .005$ between male and female subjects' responses. Figure 6 illustrates that female subjects tended to view an attractive female offender as being more responsible for her own actions in comparison to an unattractive female offender. However, when the alleged offender was an attractive male, female subjects tended to view the deceptive incident as being the fault of someone else.

In contrast, male subjects' responses were slightly different. As illustrated in Figure 7, male subjects tended to view the deceptive incident as being the fault of someone else when the offender was an attractive female in comparison to an unattractive female offender. However, when the alleged offender was an attractive male, male subjects tended to view him as more responsible for his own actions in comparison with an unattractive male.

Insert Figures 6 and 7 about here

Discussion

The responses of subjects to the likelihood of deceptiveness

in the future indicate that when they are judging a female offender, it is to her disadvantage in most cases to be attractive. The reasoning is that subjects tend to view an attractive female as being more deceptive or more likely to be deceptive in a future situation than an unattractive female. It is interesting to consider subjects' responses to a male offender on the possibility of him behaving deceptively in the future. These responses indicate that it is a disadvantage in all cases for him to be attractive. The reasoning again, is that subjects tend to view the attractive male as being more deceptive, or more likely to be deceptive, in the future. However, the differences in subjects' responses for the attractive and unattractive male offenders were not as great as were the differences for the attractive and unattractive female offenders. Therefore, a subject's decision on the likelihood of future deceptiveness was more likely to be based on the attractiveness factor when the alleged offender was a female.

Male and female subjects' differences in responses for the consequences of deceptive actions suggest that males and females differ in the importance they assign to attractiveness in a deceptive situation. Male subjects were more likely to place more emphasis on attractiveness in a deceptive situation, and base

decisions of penalty on this factor, than were female subjects. Female subjects in contrast, tended to base decisions concerning consequences on the facts present and placed little emphasis on attractiveness. Subject gender differences, in response to who was responsible for the deceptive action also support the hypothesis that males and females are not equally influenced by target attractiveness. In contrast to female subjects, males tended to view attractive females as being less responsible for their transgressions than unattractive females. However, when the offender was an unattractive male, male subjects tended to view him as less responsible for his actions in comparison to an attractive male offender than did females. Thus, females in this case viewed the unattractive male as more responsible for his own actions.

This suggests that males are more likely to see the deceptive incident as being the fault of someone else, when the alleged offender is an attractive female. For female subjects, when the offender is an attractive male, they tended to also view the deceptive situation as being the fault of someone else. These results suggest that with regard to responsibility for actions, males and females are both influenced by the attractiveness of the offender but only when evaluating actions carried out by a member

of opposite sex.

The above results then, do support the hypothesis that males and females differ in the importance they assign to attractiveness. Overall, we can say that, attribution depends on the judge's gender, but it also depends upon the gender of the target and the deceptive situation that occurs. Why the type of deceptive situation is a factor could be due to the fact that different individuals have different value systems. Thus one person may view stealing as being more morally reprehensible than cheating while another may not.

The reason why gender of the offender is an important factor could stem from the fact that people in everyday situations tend to look more at the attractiveness of the opposite sex. Thus males and females tend to be more influenced by a 'pretty face' from the opposite gender. The implications of this study are important in that they show that people need to make judgements based on the facts at hand and not on an individual's appearance. This information can also be important in jury selection, assuming one wants people who make judgements about deceptiveness to be both impartial and objective. It can also be important in everyday situations such as a job interview, where people should base decisions on credentials and not on appearance.

This research could also be applied in school setting where often a student may be judged as lacking certain intellectual or physical skills simply because of appearance. Most importantly, these results can be applied to everyday life. As is usually the case, people tend to base their first impressions of others solely on appearance. This research should encourage people to look beyond this and get to know the 'real person' underneath. In essence it is a reminder to others of two important rules. The first being, never judge a book by its cover and secondly that beauty is only skin deep.

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Table 1

Differences in Male and Female Responses to Consequences
For Alleged Deceptive Actions

	Male Subjects				Female Subjects			
	Male Target		Female Target		Male Target		Female Target	
	attr	unattr	attr	unattr	attr	unattr	attr	unattr
Lying	2.25	4.87	3.25	4.0	3.37	5.87	5.75	4.12
Cheat	3.25	5.0	2.0	3.62	2.75	5.8	2.25	5.0
Steal	6.5	4.5	6.12	5.12	6.7	5.75	5.12	6.62

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Likelihood of deceptiveness in the future for female alleged offender.

Figure 2. Likelihood of deceptiveness in the future for male alleged offender.

Figure 3. Consequences for deceptive actions for attractive female alleged offender.

Figure 4. Consequences for deceptive actions for attractive male alleged offender.

Figure 5. Consequences for deceptive actions for attractive female alleged offender.

Figure 6. Female subjects' responses to responsibility of alleged offender for deceptive actions.

Figure 7. Male subjects' responses to responsibility of alleged offender for deceptive actions.

FIGURE 1

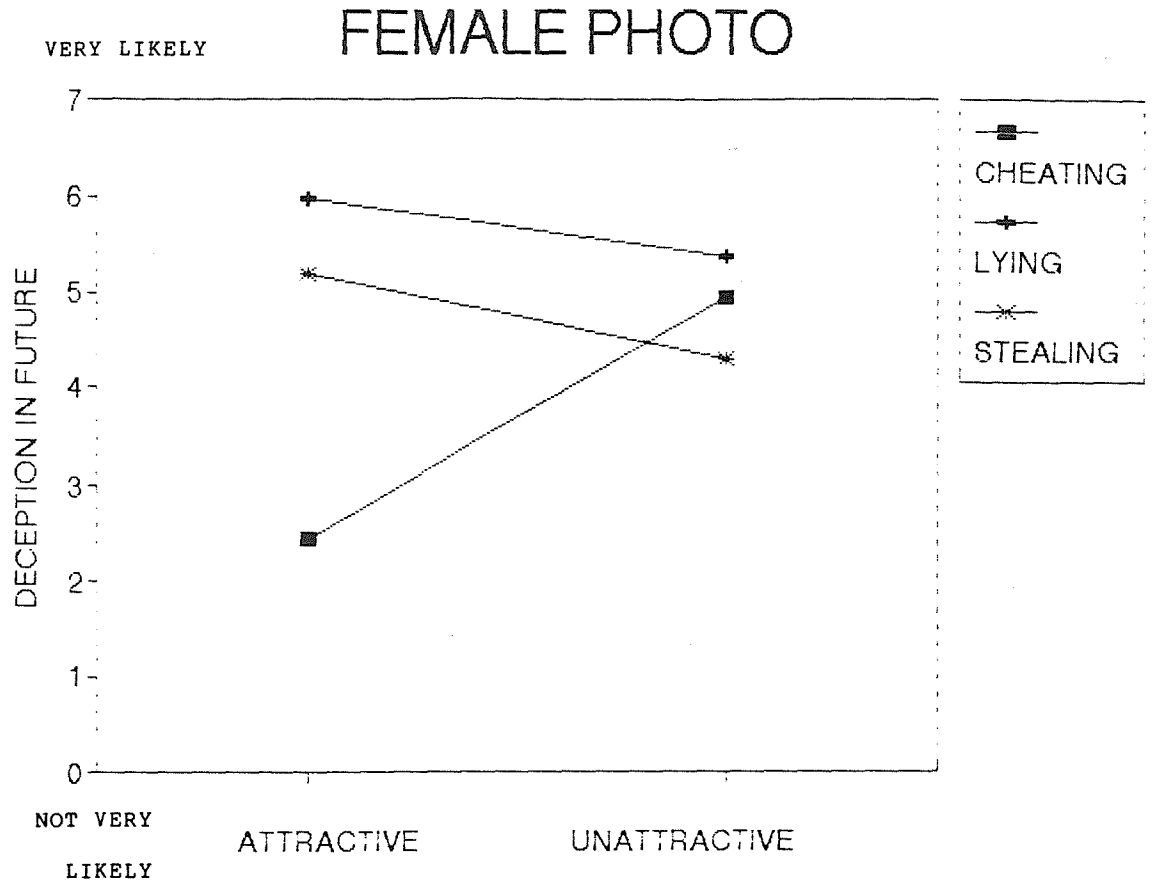


FIGURE 2

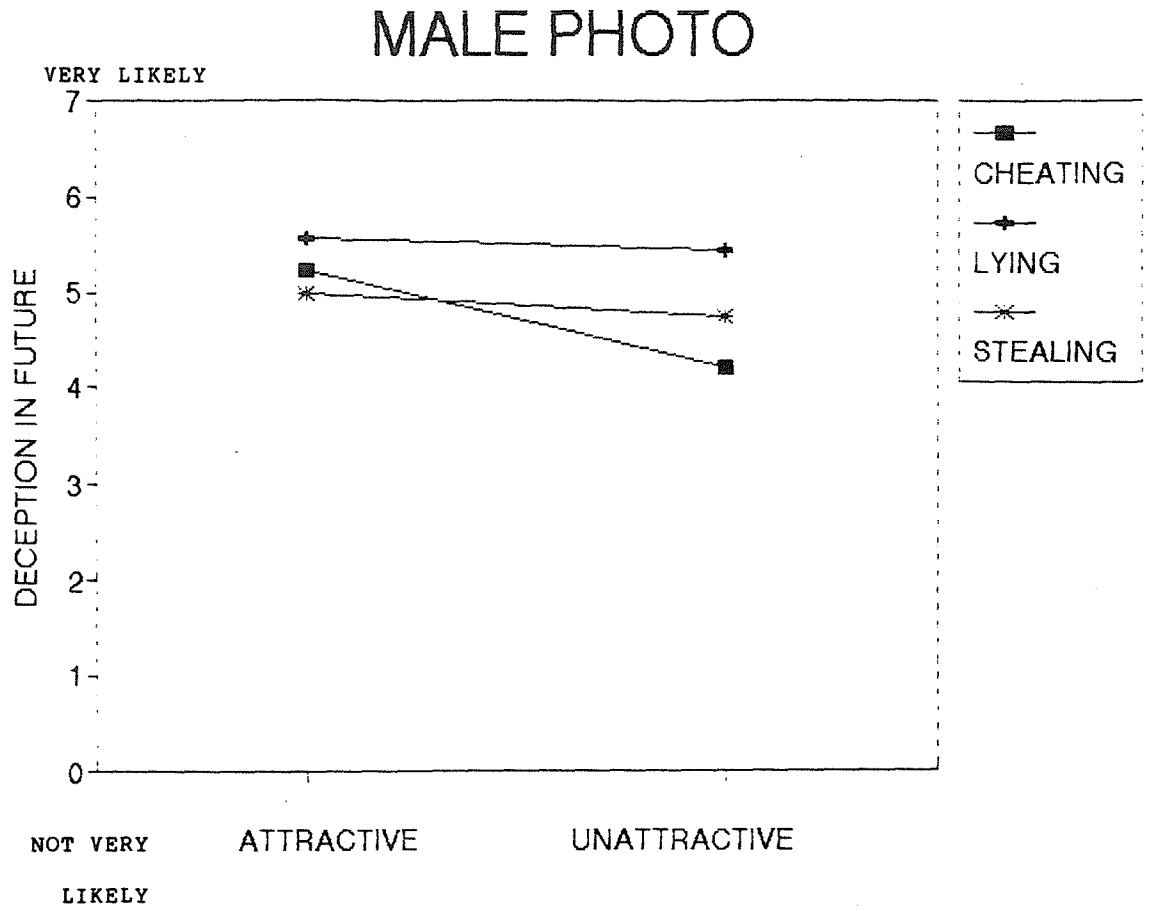


FIGURE 3

FEMALE ATTRACTIVE PHOTO LYING SCENARIO

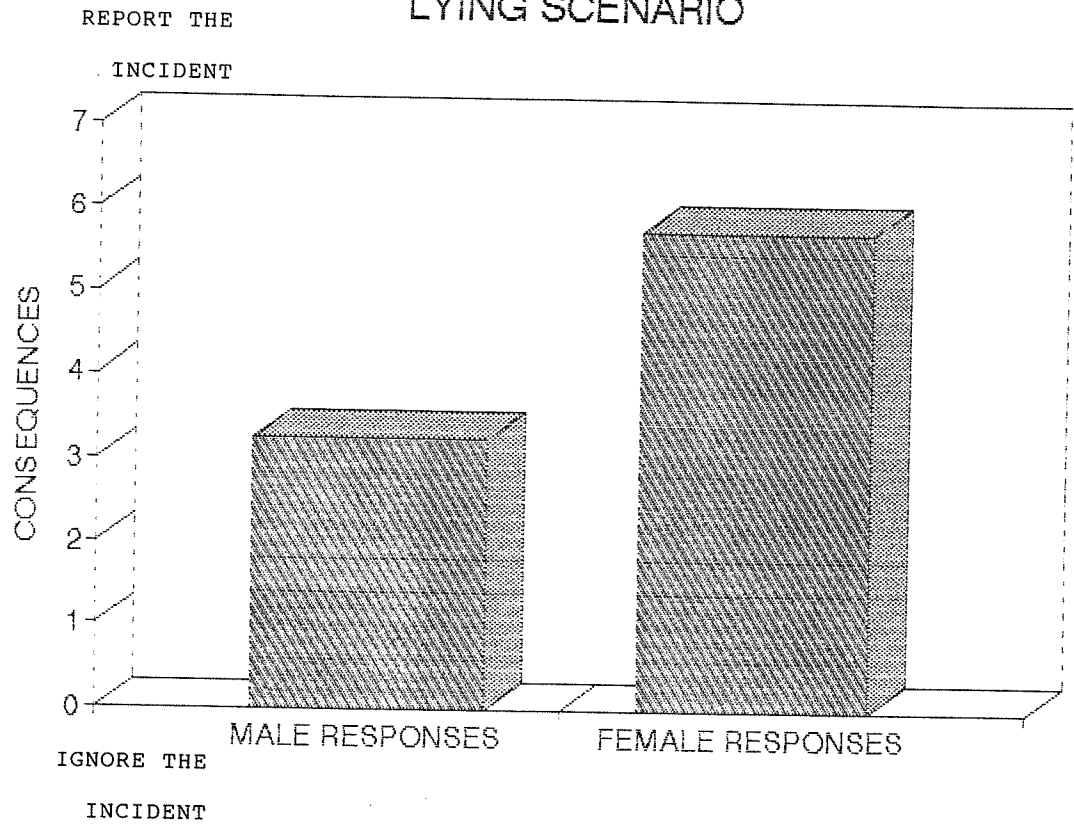


FIGURE 4

MALE ATTRACTIVE PHOTO CHEATING SCENARIO

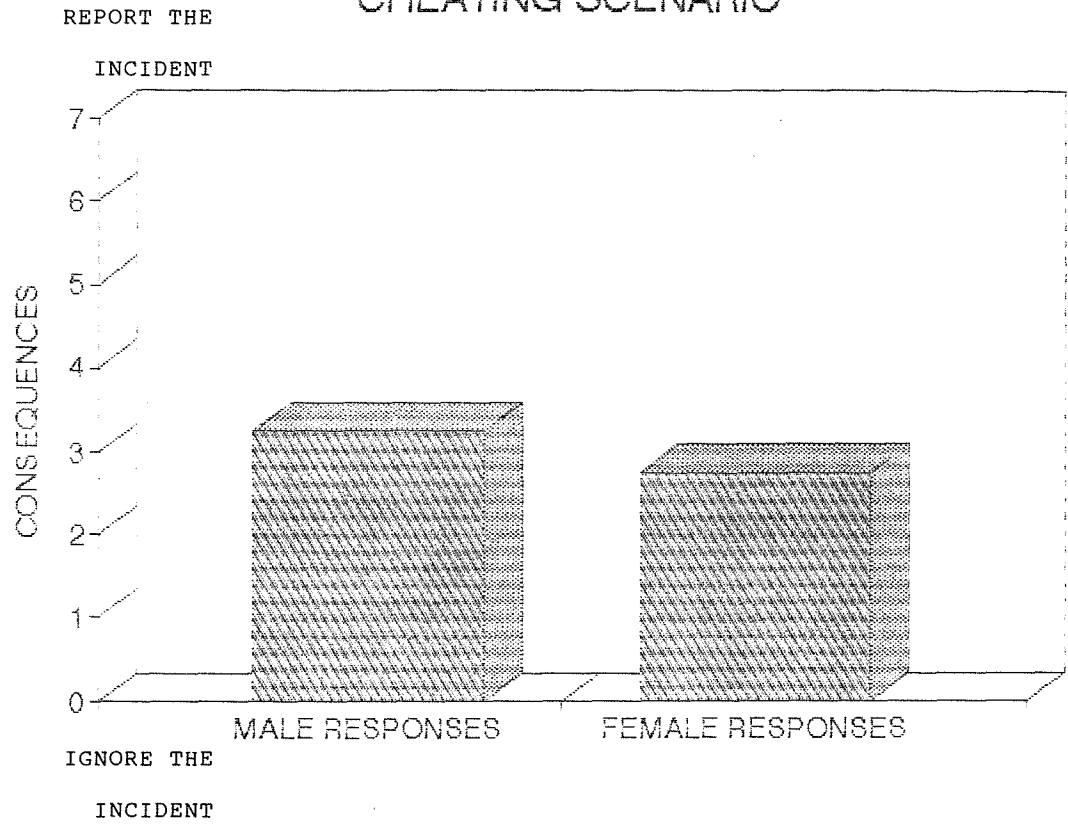


FIGURE 5

FEMALE ATTRACTIVE PHOTO STEALING SCENARIO

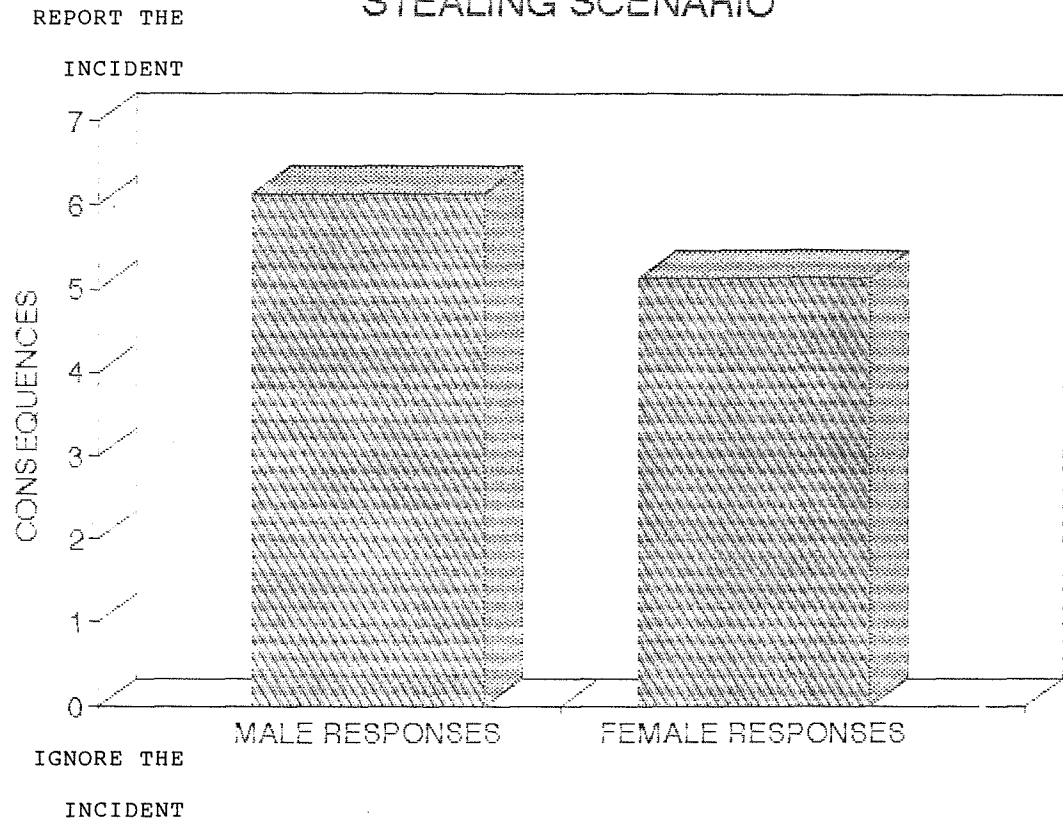


FIGURE 6

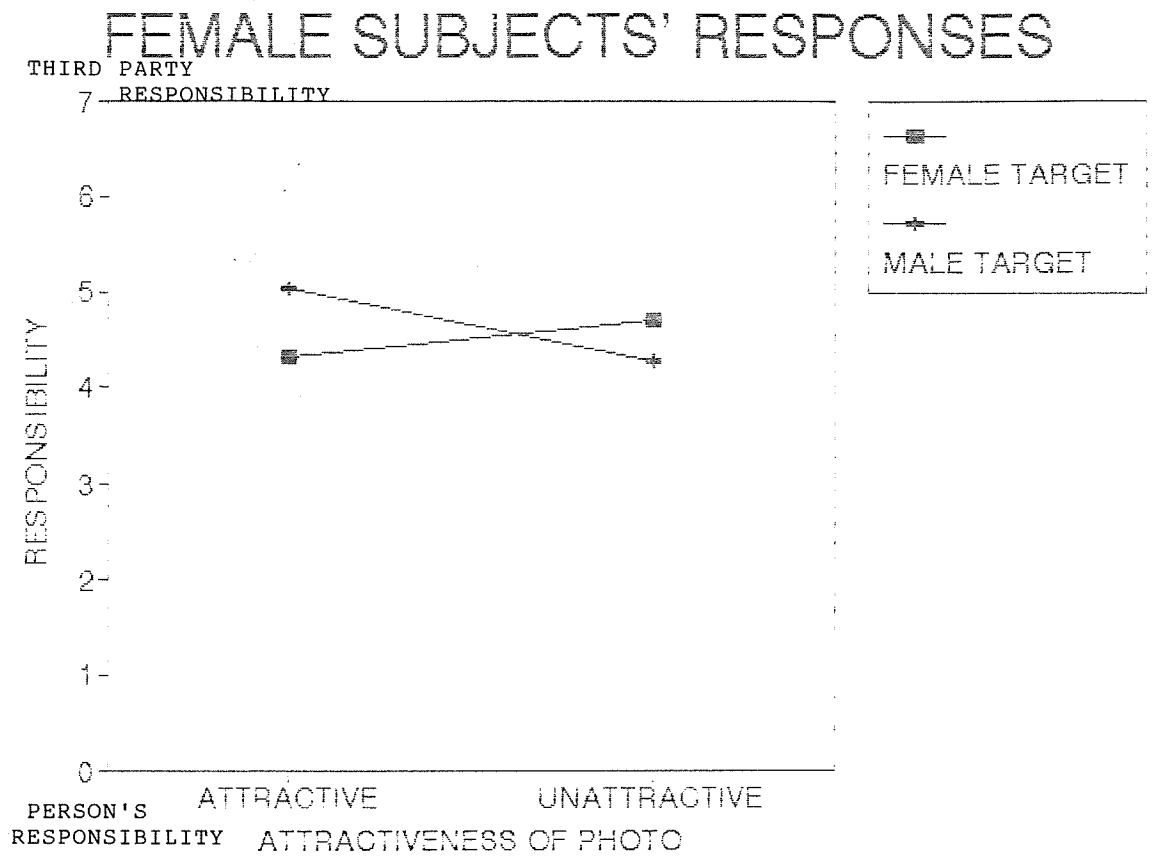


FIGURE 7

