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EFFECTS OF DIFFERENT DEGREES OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AN AUDIENCE ON THE CONTENT OF COMMUNICATION*

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A. INTRODUCTION

Within the last few years the psychology of perception has become of great interest to the social psychologist. We now refer to the problem as social perception. The fact that two recent texts (7, 9) have drawn much of their theoretical strength from studies in social perception illustrates the emphasis placed upon this topic in social psychology.

Sherif's classic experiment (8), using the autokinetic phenomenon to study the effects of other individuals upon the judgments of a given perceiver, demonstrated the importance of social norms upon perception. Bruner and Goodman (3) investigated the motivational influences on perception with particular emphasis upon the social variables affecting the process.

Asch (1), while investigating the same problem, was concerned with a different variable. He demonstrated that changing the order of presentation of descriptive words, or substituting a word with a negative connotation, will affect one's perception of the person being described. Kelley (5) also made a study involving the change in valence toward a person by changing a phrase describing him. In both Asch's and Kelley's studies the manipulation of a descriptive word or phrase was sufficient to bring about significant differences in perception.

Recently Klein, Meister, and Schlesinger (6) suggested that more rigor be exercised in the study of social perception when their duplication of some of the work of Bruner, *et al.* (2, 3, 4) did not yield confirmatory results. Significant differences were found only when comparing the replication of Bruner's experimental conditions with the conditions used by Klein, *et al.*

The experiment reported in this paper grows out of those reviewed above with one exception. The author has attempted to study perception as one step in the general process of communication and not as an isolated problem.

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B. PURPOSE

This study, the first of a series planned to investigate variables in the process of communication, deals with perception. It is an attempt to measure some of the effects of the audience on the content of communication. Specifically, it is designed to ascertain what effect different degrees of knowledge about an audience have upon perception as indicated by the immediate recall of the communicator.

C. APPARATUS AND PROCEDURE

The experimental room was divided into three sections by means of two partitions. The first section was used for briefing the subjects. The second contained a table covered with a black cloth on which rested 45 selected stimuli. In the third section sat the experimenter who served as the audience,² separated from the subject by a table on which stood a wire recorder.

The objects used as stimuli in this experiment were of natural size (see Figure 1). There was a total of 45 items, 15 from each of three groups.³ Selection of items was on the basis of sex differences in usage: one-third were male-linked; one-third, female-linked; and one-third, non-sex-linked⁴ (see Table 1). Agreement of two judges was used as the criterion for

TABLE 1
STIMULUS OBJECTS OBSERVED BY SUBJECTS
The 45 sex-linked groups of items are listed alphabetically. Discussion is given in text.

Male	Female	Neuter
Comb	Bracelet	Ash tray
Knife	Brassiere	Cards
Oilcan	Brooch	Dictionary
Pipe	Eggbeater	Film
Pliers	Frying pan	Glasses (sun)
Powder (shaving)	Garterbelt	Light bulb
Razor	Gloves	Napkin
Shave lotion	Hair curlers	Pen
Sox	Lipstick	Ruler
Supporter	Nail polish	Soap
Tie	Perfume	Thermometer
Tie clip	Pocketbook	Toilet paper
Undershirt	Powder puff	Tooth brush
Wallet	Scarf	Vicks inhalator
Watch	Thread	Wash cloth

²The writer wishes to express his appreciation to Dr. Gloria Lauer Grace, who kindly assisted in the conduct of this experiment.

³Related items will be referred to as *groups* throughout the paper.

⁴Hereafter, non-sex-linked will be referred to as neuter-linked.

inclusion of an item into one of the groups. An equal number of items for each of the three groups was selected on the basis of the following criteria: clothing, household articles or implements, toilet articles, and miscellaneous. No attempt has been made to equate these subgroupings for analysis in this paper.

The position of the items on the table was randomized. Items remained in the same position throughout the entire experiment.

1. *Personnel*

Two experimenters were used, each playing his distinct rôle throughout the experiment. The first experimenter (male) instructed and briefed the subjects and timed them during the observation period: the second experimenter (female) served as the experimental audience.

The subjects were 90 undergraduate college students: sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Their ages ranged from 18 to 36, with a mean of 20. Six of the 90 were married. Forty-five were women and the same number men. Fifteen persons of each sex received similar briefing and comprise the number of subjects in each of the six experimental classifications.⁵

2. *Briefing*

Three major conditions of briefing⁶ were the objects of study in this experiment. In the first condition the communicator did not know the sex of the audience, in the second condition the subject knew the sex of the audience, and in the third condition the subject was definitely briefed concerning the sex of the audience.

Briefing of the subjects was done individually. The general instructions for all of the subjects were as follows:

This room has been divided into three parts. At the word "Go" you will go behind this partition and enter the second section of the room. In that section there is a table with a number of different objects on it. You will have two minutes to study the objects and remember their names. At the word "stop" you are to enter the third section, at which time I will leave the room, and you will make your report.

It was made clear that the experimenter who had done the briefing would be out of the room during the subject's report.

⁵Hereafter, the six experimental classifications (e.g., woman unknown audience, men unknown audience, women known audience, men known audience, women briefed, and men briefed) will be referred to as *classifications*.

⁶The three orders of briefing (*U*, unknown; *K*, known; *B*, briefed) will hereafter be referred to as *conditions*.

Fifteen males and 15 females were told: ". . . you will make your report to the *person* who is sitting there." Notice that the sex of the experimental audience is not given. These subjects represent experimental classifications *W-U* (women subjects-unknown audience) and *M-U* (men subjects-unknown audience).

The subjects comprising experimental classifications *W-K* (women subjects-known audience) and *M-K* (men subjects-known audience) were briefed differently. They were told: ". . . you will make your report to the *girl (woman, lady)* who is sitting there." Each time the instructions were repeated a different female noun was used.

The fifth and sixth experimental classifications *W-B* (woman subjects-briefed about audience) and *M-B* (men subjects-briefed about audience) were briefed more pointedly. The briefing began as in the classifications *W-K* and *M-K*. However, after that introduction it was stressed: ". . . you will make your report to a member of the same sex (or opposite sex) as you are." This was followed by these instructions: "Remember while you are studying the objects in the next section that you are going to be reporting to a *woman (girl, lady)*. The most important part of this experiment is that you keep in mind the fact that you are going to make your report to a member of the same (or opposite) sex."

3. Observation

In all cases observation was limited to two minutes. Subjects were free to move around the table on three sides, and a few picked up objects to examine them.

4. Reporting

After the word "stop" was called, the subject entered the third section of the room. Meanwhile the briefing experimenter left the room and closed the door.

The subject had unlimited time in which to report. When the subject paused for an undue length of time the experimenter might ask if that were all he remembered. If the answer were negative, the subject would continue; if positive, then the experimenter asked if any system of organization or grouping were used in remembering the objects. This occasionally stimulated the recall of a few more items which were included in the subject's final score. After this the subject was free to leave. Items recalled later were not studied in this experiment.

The wire recorder, used to collect all data, was operated by the experi-

menter who served as the audience. Data were transcribed by the experimenters at a later time.

5. *Privacy Data*

Six weeks later an alphabetical list of the 45 items was given to the subjects. They were asked to judge the degree to which each item was "private" or "public." A five-point scale was used: 1—most private, 2—semi-private, 3—moderate, 4—semi-public, 5—most public. The subjects were instructed to consider both how privately or publicly the item is used and how private or public a topic of conversation it is.

D. RESULTS

1. *The Frequency of Objects Recalled*

A frequency distribution was made for each experimental classification on the basis of the total number of items recalled by each subject within the classification. Comparisons were made among the mean frequencies by application of the t test. No significant differences were apparent.

The number of articles recalled in each of the six classifications when broken down by sex-linked groups yielded no significant differences by either chi-square or the t test.

2. *The Frequency of Subjects Recalling a Given Object*

Chi-square was used to compare the distributions of the number of subjects who recalled each object in each of the six classifications. In order that each of the cells of the contingency table contain a value no less than 10, items were randomly combined in groups of three. A P -value of .03 indicates some significant differences.

The number of persons who recalled sex-linked groups of objects within each of the classifications were compared by means of chi-square. The P -values indicate no significant differences among the three sex-linked groups when classifications were used as a breakdown.

Combining all conditions, the number of men recalling each of the three sex-linked groups of items was studied by means of chi-square. The same test was used for the number of women. The P -value for the men was .01 and for the women .02. Neuter-linked items were remembered significantly fewer times than were male-linked and female-linked items by both men and women.

Combining sexes of subjects, the frequency of subjects recalling each of the sex-linked groups of objects broken down by the three briefing conditions

was studied by means of chi-square. No significant differences were found within any of the three conditions.

Chi-square was computed for the three conditions of briefing under each group of sex-linked items. No significant differences appear.

Using the three sex-linked groups of items as a breakdown, the number of men and women who recalled such items were compared by means of chi-square. No significant differences are found in the male-linked or neuter-linked group. However, significantly more women than men remember female-linked items ($P = .05$).

Each item within a sex-linked group was ranked in accordance with the number of persons in each of the six classifications who recalled it. Inter-correlations were computed using the rank-difference method (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
INTERCORRELATIONS USING THE RANK ORDER OF THE FREQUENCY OF RECALL OF
SEX-LINKED ITEMS UNDER THE SIX CLASSIFICATIONS

	W-U	M-U	W-K	MK	W-B	M-B
A. Male-linked Group of Items						
W-U		.69	.53	.33	.35	-.08
M-U			.68	.43	.50	.23
W-K				.02	.83	.32
M-K					.11	.27
W-B						.44
M-B						
B. Female-Linked Group of Items						
W-U		.60	.74	.68	.89	.60
M-U			.73	.83	.73	.81
W-K				.66	.77	.65
M-K					.82	.88
W-B						.76
M-B						
C. Neuter-Linked Group of Items						
W-U		.50	.33	.68	.51	.60
M-U			.76	.53	.42	.58
W-K				.61	.65	.38
M-K					.78	.70
W-B						.37
M-B						

Subtable *A* indicates a high positive correlation between Classifications *W-K* and *W-B*. Subtable *B* may be summarized as follows: *M-U* is highly positively correlated with both *W-K* and *M-K*, and with *W-B* and *M-B*; there are high positive correlations between the classification *W-B* and each of the other classifications; *W-U* and *W-K*, and *M-K* and *M-B* also correlate highly with each other. Three correlations are of interest in Subtable *C*.

High positive correlations are found between Classifications *M-U* and *W-K*, *M-K* and *W-B*, and *M-K* and *M-B*.

Each item was ranked in terms of the number of people who recalled it under each of the six classifications regardless of the sex-linkage of the item. Intercorrelations were computed using the rank-difference method (see Table 3). High positive correlations occur between the Classifications *M-U* and *W-K*, *W-U* and *W-K*, and *W-U* and *W-B*.

TABLE 3
INTERCORRELATIONS USING THE RANK ORDER OF THE FREQUENCY OF RECALL OF TOTAL
ITEMS UNDER THE SIX CLASSIFICATIONS

	W-U	M-U	W-K	M-K	W-B	M-B
W-U		.56	.62	.57	.71	.45
M-U			.75	.61	.64	.58
W-K				.57	.77	.52
M-K					.66	.62
W-B						.63
M-B						

3. Percentile Data

Percentile scores for each item were computed in the following manner. For a given subject each item's raw rank of recall was divided by the total number of items recalled. It was thus possible to combine data for subjects who had originally remembered different totals of items. Average percentile scores were then computed for each classification. The lower the percentile mean of an item, the earlier it was recalled. All of the percentile data have been analyzed by means of the *t* test. Mean percentiles for the sub-groupings under consideration may be found in Table 4.

Items were combined within the three sex-linked groups regardless of the

TABLE 4
MEAN PERCENTILES FOR THE THREE SEX-LINKED GROUPS OF ITEMS BY EACH OF THE
CLASSIFICATIONS, SEXES OF SUBJECTS, AND CONDITIONS

	Male	Female	Neuter
W-U	56.2	52.2	56.3
M-U	45.6	54.5	56.3
W-K	50.7	53.8	56.8
M-K	48.4	60.5	48.3
W-B	60.9	43.5	57.3
M-B	51.9	55.6	48.6
W	55.9	49.9	56.6
M	48.5	56.7	51.1
U	51.1	53.5	56.5
K	49.7	57.3	52.8
B	56.7	49.9	53.1

experimental classifications and comparisons made between the two sexes of the subjects. The t ratio for the male items was 3.7; for female items, 2.1; and for neuter items, 1.8. A t ratio of 2.145 shows significance on the .05 level, and a ratio of 2.977 on the .01 level for 8 degrees of freedom. Men differ from women on the .01 level when male-linked items are considered and on the .05 level for female-linked items. Men recall male items earlier than women, and women recall female items earlier than men. There are no significant differences with respect to neuter items.

When items were combined using conditions as a breakdown, three differences significant at the .05 level were found (see Table 5). In the unknown

TABLE 5
T RATIOS OBTAINED THROUGH COMPARISON OF THE MEAN PERCENTILE SCORES OF THE CONDITIONS WITHIN THE THREE SEX-LINKED GROUPS OF ITEMS

	U	K	B	U	K	B	U	K	B
U		0.5	2.2		1.1	1.3		0.8	1.0
K			2.6			2.3			0.1
B									

audience condition (U) male items are recalled earlier than in the briefed audience condition (B). In the known audience condition (K) male items are recalled earlier than in the briefed audience condition (B). In the briefed audience condition (B) female items are recalled earlier than in the known audience condition (K). No significant differences appear with regard to the neuter group of items.

When the three groups of sex-linked items were compared with each other within each of the six classifications, no significant differences were found.

Comparing the six classifications within the male-linked group, the following differences were found to be significant (see Table 6). In the men unknown audience classification ($M-U$), male items are recalled earlier

TABLE 6
T RATIOS OBTAINED THROUGH COMPARISONS OF THE MEAN PERCENTILE SCORES FOR THE CLASSIFICATIONS WITHIN THE MALE SEX-LINKED GROUP OF ITEMS

	W-U	M-U	W-K	M-K	W-B	M-B
W-U		3.3	1.6	2.7	2.2	1.5
M-U			1.2	0.8	4.5	1.7
M-K					4.7	1.2
W-K				0.7	3.1	0.3
M-K					4.7	1.2
W-B						3.5
M-B						3.5

than in the women unknown audience classification (*W-U*); in the men known audience classification (*M-K*) male items are recalled earlier than in the women unknown audience classification (*W-U*); finally, in the women briefed about audience classification (*W-B*), male items are recalled later than female items in each of the other classifications.

When this comparison was made within the group of female-linked items, the following differences appear to be significant (see Table 7). In the

TABLE 7
T RATIOS OBTAINED THROUGH COMPARISONS OF THE MEAN PERCENTILE SCORES FOR THE SIX CLASSIFICATIONS WITHIN THE FEMALE SEX-LINKED GROUP OF ITEMS

	W-U	M-U	W-K	M-K	W-B	M-B
W-U		0.5	0.3	1.6	1.5	0.6
M-U			0.2	1.1	2.5	0.3
W-K				1.5	2.0	0.5
M-K					2.5	1.0
W-B						1.7
M-B						

women briefed about audience classification (*W-B*) female items are recalled earlier than in the men unknown audience (*M-U*) and men known audience (*M-K*) classification. There are no significant differences with regard to the neuter items.

The rank order of recall for each time was computed on the basis of percentile scores. When the total distributions for the six classifications are correlated with each other, correlation coefficients fall between $-.10$ (*W-U* with *M-B*) and $+.32$ (*W-K* and *M-K*) (see Table 8).

TABLE 8
COEFFICIENTS OF RANK-DIFFERENCES CORRELATIONS OF THE TOTAL DISTRIBUTIONS OF THE SIX CLASSIFICATIONS COMPARED WITH EACH OTHER

	W-U	M-U	W-K	M-K	W-B	M-B
W-U		.02	.10	-.03	.28	-.10
M-U			.19	.10	.13	.05
W-K				.32	.09	.28
M-K					.09	.09
W-B						.06

4. Privacy of Items

The rank of the items based upon weighted publicness-privateness scores was obtained. Percentile scores indicating the degree of privateness of each item were then computed. Since comparison of the male and female scorers indicated no significant differences, these data were combined.

Using the rank-difference method, privacy was correlated with recall for

each of the classifications. The correlation coefficients obtained from the privacy rank and percentile rank for each classification are as follows: *W-U*, .25; *M-U*, .31; *W-K*, .18; *M-K*,—.22; *W-B*, .34; and *M-B*,—.11.

The *t* test was used to study the relationships between the mean percentile scores for privacy and for recall of the items. No significant differences are apparent.

On the basis of the privacy percentiles the total list of items was divided into thirds. The average percentile of recall of items in each third was computed and comparisons made. Using the *t* test, no significant differences on the .05 or .01 levels appear. Order of recall of the items does not seem to be related to these measures of privacy.

E. DISCUSSION

The results of this research bear directly on problems raised in the introduction of this paper. First, we have demonstrated the importance of studying perception as an integral part of the process of communication. Second, the method of this experiment suggests further use of this research design in the investigation of the variables in the process of communication. Third, different degrees of knowledge about an audience affect the content of communication. These effects are not as clear-cut as they have been supposed to be by non-experimental sources. Finally, it is indicated by the results that the mere change of a descriptive word is not usually sufficient to alter the content of communication. This evidence is contrary to some of the studies reviewed earlier. The results which are discussed below primarily concern these last two problems.

The frequency of items recalled on this experiment does not appear to be a meaningful measure of the differences between the classifications. However, the number of subjects who recall a given item indicates significant differences among the classifications. It is important for us to investigate these two types of measures further in order to understand why these differences arise.

Classifications do not seem to affect the total number of items recalled, or the number of items recalled within each sex-linked group. There are no significant differences in the total number of items recalled or in the number recalled within each group when broken down by classifications.

Some significant differences are to be found among the frequencies of the total number of subjects who recall each group of items when they are studied by classifications. This indicates that the classifications have some effect on the total number of persons who will recall an item.

No significant differences occur in the frequency of subjects recalling each group of sex-linked items under the six classifications. The sex-linkage of the items does not appear to have an effect upon the number of items which will be recalled in each classification.

Subjects tend to remember objects which are linked to either sex rather than the neuter-linked objects. There are significant differences in the frequency of subjects who recall each group of sex-linked items when the breakdown is by the sex of the subjects. The sex-linkage of items tends to affect the number of persons who will recall an item. The sex of the subject also seems to be important in this recall.

Since no significant differences are apparent in the frequency of subjects recalling each sex-linked group of items under the three conditions of briefing, we may infer that the sex-linkage of items does not affect the number of items recalled in each condition. In this instance the sex of the subjects may be of more importance.

Conditions do not seem to affect the number of items recalled in each sex-linked group for no significant differences are found in the frequency of subjects among the conditions when studied under each of the sex-linked groups of items.

There are no significant differences in the frequency of subjects when the sexes are compared under the male-linked or neuter-linked groups of items. However, more women than men remember female-linked items. These data suggest that the sex of the subjects affects the female-linked items only. Furthermore, the data may indicate the effect of the audience who was female upon the communicator and the content of communication.

Correlations between the classifications when compared within the sex-linked groups of items on the basis of the rank order of frequency indicate that the sex of the subjects is a strong factor in the frequency of recall of objects. The greatest number of correlations to which importance may be attached occurs between the sex backgrounds of the subjects.

A further inspection of the correlations just described demonstrates that the greatest number of high correlations are to be found within the female-linked group. This suggests the importance of the sex-linkage of the items, and perhaps the influence of the female audience on the communicator and the constant of communication.

When the total list of items is considered and comparisons are made among the six classifications on the basis of the rank order of frequency, high correlations are found between these classifications involving men as subjects. Again the sex of the subject is illustrated to be an important factor in the number of subjects who will recall each item.

Further study of these data show that high correlations exist between the classifications *M-U* and *W-K*. Therefore, we may infer that either briefing or the sex of the audience or both may affect the communicator and the content of communication.

In the percentile data we find that men recall male items earlier than do women, and vice versa. No significant differences exist between the two sexes when neuter items are considered. We may conclude that subjects will communicate earlier the items which are related to their own backgrounds. In this instance the audience does not appear to make as great an effect upon the communicators as do the objects or the communicator's own background.

When we turn our interest directly to the conditions of briefing, significant differences are found in only two comparisons under the male-linked group of items, and in only one under the female-linked group. Briefing may be said to alter the order of recall only for items which have linkage to either sex. Furthermore, briefing tends to delay the order of recall of items whose linkage is opposite to that of the audience, and hasten the order of items linked to the same sex as that of the audience. The condition of briefing and the sex of the audience seem to have a combined effect upon the communicator and the order of the content of communication.

Within each of the six classifications no significant differences are found between the three groups of sex-linked items when the order of recall is studied. Therefore, the mere belonging of an object to a sex-linked group does not tend to produce significant differences. The sex of the subject and the briefing seem to be more important.

Holding the item groups constant and studying the classifications in order to see their effects upon the order of recall, we find that women who are briefed (*W-B*) delay the order of recall of objects opposite from their sex and the sex of the audience. In this case the sex of the subject, the sex of the audience, the sex-linkage of the items, and the briefing combine to produce the greatest effect upon the communicator as measured by order of the content of communication.

When the communicator is a man he recalls male-linked objects earlier than others whether or not he knows the sex of the audience (*M-U* and *M-K*) as compared to women who do not know the sex of the audience (*W-U*). We may infer from this evidence that briefing is not as important as the sex of the subject or the sex-linkage of the object. The audience does not play an important rôle in affecting the communicator or the content of his communication.

Following these data further we find that women who are briefed (*W-B*) recall male objects significantly later than women to whom the audience is unknown (*W-U*). Briefing, therefore, appears to be most important in affecting the degree of lateness or earliness of recall rather than the kind of recall.

Furthermore, women who are briefed (*W-B*) recall female items earlier than men who do or do not know the sex of the audience (*M-U* and *M-K*), but briefed women do not differ significantly from the men who are briefed (*M-B*). This is further evidence of the importance of briefing.

Although there are few significant differences among the classifications when the rank order of the recall of objects is calculated, conversely there are also no high correlations between them. Therefore, the relationships between the classifications are not clear-cut and may be attributable to chance.

The order of recall of items does not seem to be related to the index of privacy which was used. However, it may be interesting to note where negative correlations do occur in the classifications *M-K* and *M-B*. This may suggest that briefing coupled with the audience effect may tend to stimulate the communicator to get private items out of the way early in his report.

The content of a communication as studied in this experiment is affected by many variables. No single variable is sufficient for the prediction of the content. The major variables which affect the content of communication are: the background of the communicator, the objects or referents to be perceived, the nature of the audience, and the degree of knowledge which the communicator has about his audience. The data which are presented in this experiment indicate further possibilities for research designed toward the identification of the variables affecting communication and especially toward the relationships existing between these variables.

Until further experimental evidence is obtained by studying the major variables identified in this experiment, it would be premature to attempt to predict which variables will be operative in a given situation. It is toward this task that further research is now being directed.

F. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study is an attempt to measure the effects of different degrees of knowledge of an audience on the content of communication. It is an initial step in the study of the variables affecting the process of communication.

Six classifications of 15 subjects each individually observed 45 selected objects and immediately reported what they recalled seeing to a special

audience. Three degrees of knowledge of the audience were used, and the results compared.

On the basis of this experiment the following conclusions may be drawn.

1. The content of a communication is affected by the degree of knowledge which the communicator has of his audience. However, these effects seem to be minimal.

2. The change of one word in briefing a subject does not seem to usually alter the content of his communication significantly.

3. The major variables affecting the content of a communication are: (a) the nature of the communicator; (b) the nature of the objects to be communicated; (c) the nature of the audience; (d) the degree of briefing about the audience.

4. The method used in this experiment offers a way to measure these variables and to predict the relationships among them for a specific situation.

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