Using a Cognitive Bias Modification Task to Reduce Rape-Supportive Cognition

Victoria Lister, PhD Student
University of Kent

Rape-supportive cognition has been linked with increased likelihood of sexual offending (Abbey & McAuslan, 2004; Thompson et al., 2010), as well as reduced conviction rates of rape (Temkin, 2010). This is thought to be due to the negative impact on jury decision-making (Wilmott, Boduszek, & Booth, 2017) as a result of high prevalence of rape-supportive cognition amongst the general population, especially in men (Canto, Perles, & Martin, 2014). This study sought to investigate whether rape-supportive cognition could be reduced at multiple cognitive levels whilst adopting a sequential information processing approach. Consequently, the cognitive bias modification (CBM) task – previously only used with individuals suffering from depression and anxiety – was adapted and investigated. A sample of forty participants was recruited from the general community. Participants were given the Bumby RAPE questionnaire (Bumby, 1996), an ambiguous vignette and a mouse-tracking activity before and after a task; each activity aimed to measure cognition at a different level of cognitive processing (as per the sequential processing approach). Tasks administrated were either an adapted cognitive bias modification task (n = 20) or a control task (n = 20). The results indicated that the cognitive bias modification task was effective at reducing rape-supportive cognition for both the justifying and excusing rape subscales of the Bumby RAPE scale, but not the ambiguous vignette or the mouse-tracking task. Therefore, the cognitive bias modification task was effective at reducing explicit, but not implicit, rape-supportive cognition. Additionally, the findings provided evidence for a dual-processing model over a sequential information processing model of cognition. The implications of using such an accessible and time-effective cognitive-bias modification task are discussed.

Victoria P. M. Lister, MSc, is currently a Graduate Teaching Assistant and completing a PhD in Forensic Psychology at the University of Kent, United Kingdom. In addition, she is a support worker at a category B prison in the United Kingdom. Previously, she completed an MSc in Forensic Psychology and a BSc (Hons) in Psychology at the University of Lincoln, United Kingdom. The primary focus of her PhD is to explore and understand the cognition of voyeurs through both qualitative and quantitative methodology. Her other research interests include examination of cognition in male sexual offenders and developing measures of sexual interest.