

## Authoritarianism, Social Dominance, Religiosity and Ambivalent Sexism as Predictors of Rape Myth Acceptance

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### Abstract

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The study investigates rape myth acceptance (RMA) in relation to 5 attitudinal dimensions, namely strength of religious faith, religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism, social dominance and ambivalent sexism. The findings indicate significant positive relationships between all five dimensions and RMA and provide evidence that gender roles, sexism and conservatism predict victim blaming attitudes. These findings emphasise the need for prevention work and the need for inclusive education. It is hoped that a deeper understanding of rape mythology will promote a more facilitative culture for victims, an increase in progressive policies, higher report and convictions rates and enhanced support.

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**Key words:** Rape Myth Acceptance, Authoritarianism, Social Dominance, Ambivalent Sexism, Benevolent Sexism, Religiosity

### 1. Introduction

The increase in media exposure of gender based violence worldwide as provided many opportunities for affirmative action against it. At the same time however, it has exposed and reignited entrenched social attitudes that sustain it. For example, as more accurate accounts of the prevalence and under-reporting of rape and sexual assault are highlighted, misogynistic attitudes flood social media, offering unfettered routes to views with little likelihood of repercussion. Increased awareness of specific issues pertaining to gender based violence has led to number Governmental responses in the UK, such as anti-stalking and domestic abuse legislation targeting coercive control. On the other hand, the introduction of the two-child policy, as part of changes to tax credit legislation, included a clause regarding “non-consensual conception”, whereby a woman would need to prove rape in order to benefit from tax exemption. This arguably reflects an institutional lack of understanding of the psychological and physical burdens carried over a lifetime by rape victims.

Rape affects women disproportionately and is perpetrated by men usually known to the victims (Rape Scotland, 2017). Recorded sexual crimes in Scotland have increased by 53% between 2006 and 2016 (an additional 7% from 2015) and reported rape alone increased by 68% between 2014 and 2015 following a continuous upward trend since recording of sexual crimes began in 1971. Although the reporting of sexual crimes has shown improvement, under-reporting is still a major concern, with only 16.8% of victims reporting rape in 2015 and 43.4% of rape victims stating that the reason they did not report it was because they thought it would make matters worse (Scottish Crime and Justice survey 2014-2015). In Scotland in 2015-2016, **3,963 sexual assaults (excluding rape as defined by the Scottish Sexual Violence act) and 1809 rapes and attempted rapes** (1,692 rapes and 117 attempted rapes) were reported to the police. (<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00506122.pdf>). 216 of these went to trial, of which 104 led to convictions. (Rape Crisis Scotland). This signifies a 16% drop in convictions from the previous year and it means that currently, despite improvements, only 11% of all reported rapes go to trial and under half of those end up in a conviction. There are multiple reasons for this, not least the fact that sexual violence occurs in private and does not lend itself to offering corroborative evidence.

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The position of women, as it is symbolically internalised across physical, socioeconomic and cultural borders, is still perilous. Rape mythologies, supported by internalised notions of gender and embedded within a patriarchal culture allow for a complacent attitude towards gender based violence, providing fertile ground for the vilification of victims. Victim-blaming attitudes do not arise in vacuum and are often fertilised by personality-forming attitudes, which at first glance might seem unrelated. For example, attitudes pertaining to social and global issues, political orientation, general conservatism and tendencies towards hierarchical structures and social order may include views which place women in dependent and lower social positions and may affect attitudes towards sexual violence. In order to contribute to the understanding of gender based violence taking into account the social attitudes that may inform it, the current study explored the relationship between rape myth endorsement and attitudes relating to conservatism and social dominance, religiosity and ambivalent sexism.

Rape myths are widely held false beliefs about the circumstances surrounding rape that commonly place blame on the rape victim or undermine the victim's credibility. In typical rape mythology scenarios the victim is seen to have some responsibility for the rape because of her behaviours or appearance, is perceived as overreacting or thought to be lying and the rape itself is perceived as an extension of normal male sexual behaviour, with lack of control by an individual being the main issue. This mythology minimises the violence of rape and undermines the victim, making it difficult for rapes to be reported, tried and prosecuted in the same way that other violent crimes are, as it can permeate through all avenues of society, the general public, statutory help agencies and the judiciary and juries.

Burt's (1980) important work on rape mythologies opened the way to extensive research on the issues surrounding rape attitudes and a revised rape myth acceptance questionnaire by Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994). Payne, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1999) as well as McMahon and Farmer (2011) summarised rape myths in terms of distinct cognitive categories. The first category "she asked for it" refers to the victim having brought the rape upon herself, by placing herself in harm's way. The second category "he didn't mean to" implies that the rape occurred because of poor control of a natural male need. The third category "it isn't really rape" refers to the reluctance to believe that rape occurs unless the victim is fighting back or there is significant visible injury. Finally the "she lied" category refers to the common perception that a lot of rape is the result of false reporting for the purposes of revenge, to gain attention or to save face. A persistent myth about rape is that it is ascribed to an atypical male (a stranger or "monster") and places rape in a context where it is rare and extraordinary, while "ordinary" rape is disbelieved altogether or attributed to reckless behaviour on the part of the victim or her misperception of what took place. Rape myths have a real impact on the victims' experiences, the likelihood of reporting and subsequent legal outcomes, of the care they receive and the recovery process. Helplessness, anger, fear along with guilt and shame relating to presumptions of promiscuity (Iconis, 2008) are all contributing factors to the long lasting psychological damage experienced by victims (Regehr, Alaggia, Dennis, Pitts, and Saini, 2013).

Predictors of rape myth acceptance are linked to general ideology and internalised value systems. Aosvedand Long (2006) found that oppressive and prejudicial beliefs including internalised sexism, conservatism and religiosity are associated with rape myth acceptance. The focus of the current study is a discussion of the extent to which rape mythology is sustained by means of entrenched and persistent social attitudes relating to gender roles as well as attitudes relating to social progress and change. Extending research by Manoussaki and Veitch (2015), the current study looks at ambivalent sexism, authoritarianism, social dominance and religiosity as possible predictors of rape myth acceptance.

Ambivalent sexism (comprising of benevolent and hostile sexism) (Glick and Fiske, 1996) is found cross-culturally (Glick, Lameiras, Fiske, Eckes, Masser, Volpato et al, 2004), is linked to gender inequality (Glick and Fiske, 2001) and affects attitudes towards rape (Abrams and Viki, 2002). Individuals who hold ambivalent sexist attitudes seem to be more likely to attribute blame to acquaintance rape victims, particularly when victims are viewed to be violating traditional behavioural expectations (Abrams and Viki, 2002). At the centre of hostile sexism is the belief of the inferiority of women biologically, intellectually and socially, whereas benevolent sexism assumes that women are fragile, reliant and needing protection. The prevailing, patriarchal structures that support both hostile and benevolent sexism stem from imbalances in power and unresolved conflictual interdependency between the sexes. Paternalism (dominative or protective), gender differentiation (the idea that there exist significant biological differences that are either competitive or complimentary), and heterosexuality (hostile or intimate) inform both benevolent and hostile sexism respectively (Glick and Fiske, 1997).

Right wing authoritarianism (RWA) is a theoretical construct introduced by Altemeyer (1998) and largely based on Adorno's classical authoritarian personality theory (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, Sanford, 1950), which describes a cluster of co-existing attitudes characterised by conservatism, reluctance to embrace change, adherence to authority and authority figures, acceptance of the status quo and a belief in the just world (Altemeyer, 1998).

RWA is associated with aggressive feelings towards perceived out-groups (Altemeyer, 1981, 1998) and predicts generalised prejudice (McFarland, 1998; Ekehammar, Akrami, Gylje and Zakrisson, 2004 and Hodson, Hogg and MacInnes, 2009) and prejudice specifically towards women (Altemeyer, 1998; Ekehammar, Akrami and Araya, 2000), as well as benevolent sexism (for example Sibley, Wilson and Duckitt, 2007) and sexual aggression (Walker, Rowe and Quinsey, 1993). Past research has shown RWA scores to be associated with support of rape myths (Manoussaki and Veitch, 2015) both amongst men (Begany and Milburn, 2002) and women (Koesterer and Hoffman, 2003). Social Dominance orientation (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999, Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006) describes individuals who feel most comfortable in strict hierarchical settings, have a tendency to admire those in authority and feel superior to those occupying a lower status, adhere easily to rules, may adhere to myths that perpetuate inequalities and generally show a tolerance for oppression by means of abiding to and supporting power structures. Social dominance orientation is found to be related to racism (see Duriez and van Hiel, 2002, Esses, Dovidio, Jackson and Armstrong, 2001, Heaven and Quintin, 2003 and Pratto and Lemieux, 2001) as well as sexism (Bates and Heaven, 2001, Lippa and Arad, 1999, Pratto, Liu, Levin, Sidanius, Shih, Bachrach Hegarty et al., 2000 and Russell and Trigg, 2004) and show an inclination to blame victims of rape (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth and Malle, 1994 and Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Freymeyer (1997) found an association between religiosity in men and blame attribution to rape victims. This finding is congruent with the idea that religion underpins existing social structures, slows down social change and arguably supports and promotes patriarchy. The current study, while acknowledging the fact that men are victims to sexual violence too (mostly by other men), focuses specifically on rape and sexual violence by men against women, which forms the overwhelming majority of sexual crime statistics and explores the attitudinal framework that allows blame to be placed on the victim and which prevents the rape from being acknowledged, reported and tackled as a violent crime.

Hypotheses: it is predicted that men will score higher than women on IRMA and all its subscales. That there will be a positive correlation between the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance (IRMA) scale and each of the 5 attitudinal dimensions described above, namely strength of religious faith, religious fundamentalism, right wing authoritarianism, social dominance and ambivalent sexism (hostile and benevolent sexism) and that a regression analysis will show that the 5 dimensions together will significantly predict IRMA scores.

## 2. Methods

This study was granted approval by the UWS Media Culture and Society Ethics Committee.

2.1 84 students at the University of the West of Scotland volunteered to take part in this study and the majority were women (62). The mean age for the was 22.47 for women and 23.85 for men

2.1 The following measures utilised Likert scales and were used as one booklet in the following sequence: a. The Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA) (Payne, Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1999; McMahan and Farmer, 2011) assesses adherence to 4 categories of rape myths, namely "she asked for it", "he didn't mean to", "wasn't really rape" and "she lied". b. The Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO) (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth and Malle, 1994) focuses on the tendency to prefer hierarchical structures. c. The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) (Glick and Fisk, 1996) assesses hostile and benevolent sexism. d. The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Scale (SRF) (Plante and Boccaccini, 1997) assesses the importance of religion in one's life. e. The Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale (RFS) (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 2004) relates to the certainty in one's religion as the singular provider of truth and f.. The Right Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA) (Altemeyer, 1981) assesses the tendency towards a conservative, inflexible outlook

### 2.3. Data collection took place on campus

## 3. Results

Significant positive correlations were found between IRMA and all IRMA subscales and each one of the five dimensions tested (tables 1 and 2). A multiple regression analysis showed that the five dimensions predicted 44.6% of the variance of rape myth acceptance with an overall significant model emerging (table 3).

<p><u>Table 1. Correlations</u>  Overall IRMA scores (N=85)  SDO (<math>r=.481, p&lt;.001</math>)  ASI (<math>r=.631, p&lt;.001</math>) and Subscales BS (<math>r=.467, p&lt;.001</math>) and HS (<math>r=.625, p&lt;.001</math>)  SRF (<math>r=.283, p=.009</math>)  RFS (<math>r=.304, p=.005</math>)  RWA (<math>r=.489, p&lt;.001</math>)</p>
<p><u>Table 2. Correlational Analysis IRMA Subscales:</u>  <u>SA (she asked for it)</u>  Significantly correlated with Hostile Sexism (<math>r=.563, p=.001</math>), Benevolent Sexism (<math>r=.430, p&lt;.001</math>), SDO (<math>r=.438, p&lt;.001</math>), SRF (<math>r=.310, p=.004</math>), RFS (<math>r=.268, p=.013</math>) and RWA (<math>r=.532, p&lt;.001</math>)  <u>MT (he didn't mean to):</u>  Significantly correlated with Hostile Sexism (<math>r=.450, p&lt;.001</math>), Benevolent Sexism (<math>r=.432, p&lt;.001</math>), SDO (<math>r=.348, p=.001</math>), SRF (<math>r=.322, p=.003</math>), RFS (<math>r=.317, p=.003</math>) and RWA (<math>r=.398, p&lt;.001</math>).  <u>NR (wasn't really rape)</u>  Significantly correlated with Hostile Sexism (<math>r=.439, p&lt;.001</math>), Benevolent Sexism (<math>r=.341, p&lt;.001</math>), SDO (<math>r=.431, p&lt;.001</math>), SRF (<math>r=.260, p=.016</math>), RFS (<math>r=.326, p=.002</math>) and RWA (<math>r=.373, p&lt;.001</math>)  <u>LI (she lied)</u>  Significantly correlated with Hostile Sexism (<math>r=.542, p&lt;.001</math>), Benevolent Sexism (<math>r=.299, p=.005</math>), SDO (<math>r=.370, p&lt;.001</math>) and RWA (<math>r=.296, p=.006</math>) but was not significantly correlated with SRF (<math>r=.061, p=.580</math>) and RFS (<math>r=.122, p=.268</math>)</p>
<p><u>Table 3. Regression Analysis</u>  Overall the five dimensions predicted 44,6% of the variance of rape myth acceptance with an overall significant model emerging (<math>F(5, 79) = 14.524, p&lt;.001</math>) (Adjusted <math>r^2</math>: .446, checked for multicollinearity).</p>

## Discussion

Gender comparisons were omitted from analysis as two thirds of the participants were women. All five dimensions considered were found to be significantly correlated to the IRMA rape myth subscales with one exception, namely religiosity was found not to be significantly related to the IRMA subscale “she lied”. The findings support the premise that socially conservative attitudes may predict rape myth acceptance. Given that social attitudes influence society’s response to sexual violence, the judicial process and ultimately the support offered to victims, it is imperative that efforts are made to address and change attitudes that support not only rape mythologies but conservative ideologies that strongly correlate with them. Women are restricted by “legitimate” attitudes such as benevolent sexism, conservatism, traditional role expectations reinforced by patriarchal faith systems, whether they are held by women themselves or by men. Thus rape myths cannot be understood or addressed out with social milieu in which they occur. Social dominance and ambivalent sexism, which afford women less social power are both significant predictors of rape myth acceptance and arguably reflect larger societal inequalities, in the workplace and in the family. The essence of these findings is that attitudes towards rape and sexual violence are embedded within wider societal attitudes and the challenge is multifaceted. The discourse occurring as further research and understanding around rape myth acceptance takes place and social movements such as “me too” receive traction, presents an opportunity to improve responses to those who have been victimised. As more awareness in the general public filters through, increasingly appropriate policy responses should evolve to tackle higher reporting rates and to promote a more comprehensively supportive culture for rape victims.

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