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PREVIEW

CONFIRMATORY AND EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS  
OF A RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE MODEL AND SCALE

by  
Alan Toulouse

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Interdepartmental Area of Psychological and Cultural Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Lisa Larson

Lincoln, Nebraska  
May, 1997

**UMI Number: 9734644**

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Confirmatory and Exploratory Factor Analysis of a

Rape Myth Acceptance Model and Scale

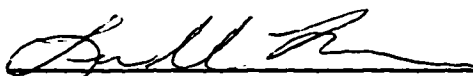
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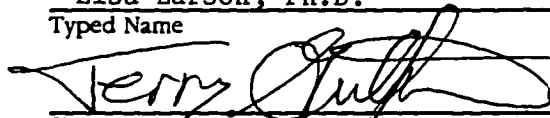
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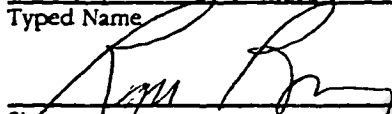
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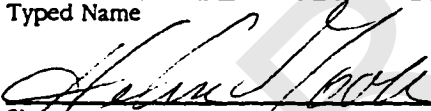
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GRADUATE COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

CONFIRMATORY AND EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS  
OF A RAPE MYTH ACCEPTANCE MODEL AND SCALE

Alan Toulouse, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1996

Adviser: Lisa Larson

A model of rape myth acceptance (RMA) was proposed which accounts for the domain of rape myths along two axes. The first axis divides myths into two groups: those myths which are used to blame females for rape and those used to excuse males. The second axis divides the same myths into three further groups along a continuum according to whether they indicate a denial of the occurrence of rape, a belief that rape occurs but is essentially harmless, or a belief that rape occurs and is harmful but should be blamed on survivors rather than on rapists. These six groups of rape myths were seen as being conceptually distinct. A RMA scale containing 48 items was developed according to the specifications of the model and was administered to 299 undergraduate students. Confirmatory factor analysis results indicated that the model did not achieve a good fit with the data, either in its original configuration or in modified versions which were created to isolate for the effects of each of the model axes alone. Exploratory factor analysis results showed the scale to have four correlated factors, two of which measure a general factor, one factor measuring rape as harmless, and a final factor excusing rapists based on sexual urges. The dichotomy between blaming females and excusing males only held up at the level of blaming survivors after the fact; and the separation of the myths along a continuum of severity was not supported, except that the items at the midpoint of the continuum were more uniformly rejected.

Thus, the matrix model did not fit the data well, and the scale could not be said to entirely represent the model, either. Thus, whether the scale accurately measured participants' actual RMA remained unresolved.

Recommendations were made for further RMA scale development.

PREVIEW

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Chapter I	
INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	1
Definitions	1
Conventions	2
The Problem of Rape	3
Chapter II	
LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Rape Theory	7
Socio-cultural theory	7
Attribution theory	8
The just-world theory	9
The defensive attribution hypothesis	10
Feminist theory	11
Other theories	11
The Domain of Rape	13
Disinhibition	15
The Domain of Rape in Context	18
Study RMA Scale	20
Rape Myth Acceptance Scales	24
The Attitudes Toward Rape Scale	25
The Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	32
The Attribution of Rape Blame Scale	48
The Rape Belief Scale	50
The Rape Awareness Scale	51
Giacopassi and Dull's Scale	53
The Acceptance of Rape Myth Scale	54
The Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale	57
The General Attitude Toward Rape Scale	62



	page
RMA Summary	64
RMA and RMA Scales Critiqued	64
What Is Needed	71
Purpose of the Study	76
Research Questions	77
Research Question #1	77
Research Question #2	77
Chapter III	
METHOD	78
Participants	78
Instruments	78
Rape Myth Acceptance	78
Demographic form	79
Informed Consent form	79
Procedures	80
Chapter IV	
RESULTS	81
Descriptive Statistics	81
Confirmatory Factor Analysis	82
Preliminary statistics and procedures	83
Deductive model specifications	104
Results and indices of fit	104
Model comparisons	111
Exploratory Factor Analysis	111
Preliminary statistics and procedures	111
Chapter V	
DISCUSSION	117
Results and Research Questions	117
Conclusions	130
Limitations of the Current Study	131

	page
Recommendations for Future Research	132
REFERENCES	133
APPENDICES	150

PREVIEW

# TABLE OF TABLES

	page
Table 1. Participant Demographics, Means, Standard Deviations	82
Table 2. Rotated Factor Loading Matrix, Communalities, Item-total Correlations, Item Means, Standard Deviations, and Skewness Values	84
Table 3. Covariance Matrix for Confirmatory Factor Analysis	91
Table 4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Fit Indices	109
Table 5. Factor Correlations Matrix for 4-factor Solution	113

## TABLE OF FIGURES

	page
Figure 1. The Domain of Rape	14
Figure 2. The Domain of Rape in Context	18
Figure 3. Factors Within Domains Related to Rape	19
Figure 4. The Matrix Model	75
Figure 5. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Path Diagram for 6-factor Model	106
Figure 6. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Path Diagram for 3-factor Model	107
Figure 7. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Path Diagram for 2-factor Model	108

## TABLE OF APPENDICES

	page
Appendix A. Feild's (1978) Attitudes Toward Rape (ATR) Scale Items	150
Appendix B. Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (RMAS) Items	152
Appendix C. Resick and Jackson's (1981) Attribution of Rape Blame Scale (ARBS) Items	154
Appendix D. Bunting and Reeve's (1983) Rape Belief Scale (RBS) Items	155
Appendix E. Schwartz, Williams, and Pepitone-Rockwell's (1981) Rape Awareness Scale (RAS) Items	156
Appendix F. Giacomassi and Dull's (1986) Scale Items	158
Appendix G. Gilmartin-Zena's (1988) Acceptance of Rape Myth Scale (ARMS) Items	159
Appendix H. Ward's (1988) Attitudes Toward Rape Victim's Scale (ARVS) Items	161
Appendix I. Larsen and Long's (1988) General Attitudes Toward Rape (GATR) Scale Items	163
Appendix J. Version "A" of Scale	164
Appendix K. Scale Items Arranged by Boxes in Matrix Model	167
Appendix L. Scale Demographic Items	170
Appendix M. Consent Form	171
Appendix N. IRB Approval Form	172

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose

There are several related purposes to this study. The first is to develop a simplified model of rape myth acceptance (RMA) which accounts for the entire domain of rape myths as represented by the item content from nine RMA scales already published. The second is to create a RMA scale based on this model using accepted item-writing procedures. The third, through confirmatory factor analysis, is to assess how well the model fits data collected specifically for this study. The fourth, through exploratory factor analysis, is to determine the underlying factor structure of the scale. This study is founded on the proposition that a common simple structure does exist among current rape myth acceptance (RMA) scales, but that because of limited interaction between the authors of these scales, such a structure has not been articulated. Therefore, a review is also made of the theoretical underpinnings of the scales as expressed by the scale developers and researchers who have subsequently used the scales in further studies.

#### Definitions

There are many definitions of rape. The courts, researchers, awareness and prevention programs, common citizens, and various social agencies use a variety of definitions for a variety of reasons. In 1975, Brownmiller defined rape as follows: "If a woman chooses to not have intercourse with a specific man and the man chooses to proceed against her will, that is a criminal act of rape" (p. 8). Others have added to this the inclusion of a woman who is unable to give her consent, and expansion of the term "intercourse" to include a range of behaviors. For this study, no set definition of rape will be used, so as to not eliminate review of some works. There will not be any distinctions between acquaintance (date), stranger, marital, gang, or

any other classification of rape, except where demanded by review of a particular author's work.

Rape myth will be defined as "Attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women" (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Other rape myth definitions can be found (Burt, 1980; Briere, Malamuth, & Check, 1985), and while they also have shortcomings, studies which have been based on them are included in this review in order to be as comprehensive as possible.

Rape myth acceptance (RMA) is just that - agreement with specific rape myth statements. As a research construct, RMA is usually a discrete entity, used either as an independent or dependent variable, and represented by a single scale score.

#### Conventions

In keeping with current feminist usage, the term "victim" will be used in this review only if it is included in a quote or where it is needed to reflect on author's intention of conveying a sense of continued helplessness, powerlessness, and negative stigma. The term "survivor" will be used to describe women who have endured rape.

In this study, rapists will be exclusively referred to as male and rape survivors as female. While there are rapists and survivors of both sexes, there have been no RMA studies concerning male survivors or female rapists. The vast majority of rapists are male, and the vast majority of survivors are female.

It must also be noted that all the researchers cited in this study accept that all the myths cited in this study are indeed untrue. The veracity of the myths is not debated. Rape myth research is not based on investigating the degree to which they are true, but rather the degree to which people believe them to be true. This is a vital distinction, and is not predicated upon any particular theoretical orientation. Researchers who design RMA studies within all theoretical

frameworks accept that individual rape myths do not vary in degree of falseness, and are not conditional, even though a participant's overall belief in them may be. A corollary of this is that women are never to be blamed for their own rapes. The moment a woman is blamed even in part for her rape, one or more myths become at least partly true. Again, researchers accept this as a constant and proceed from it accordingly, since to allow blame of survivors to vary conceptually makes the results from most RMA studies impossible to interpret. Although many designs incorporate survivor-blaming as a continuous variable along which participants are allowed and expected to range, they are not founded conceptually on a belief that survivors are contributors to their own rapes. While it is common for researchers to interpret their results in terms of warnings and suggestions for behavior that could lead to avoidance of rape, that is not to imply women are responsible in any way for rape.

#### The Problem of Rape

Rape is common. Ever since Susan Brownmiller (1975) estimated that one third of all women will be raped some time during their lives, researchers have set about verifying this claim. Today, the best estimates of the incidence of rape among college women range from 15% (Finley & Cory, 1993) to 25% (Baier, Rosenzweig, & Whipple, 1991); while women in the general population have reported rates as high as 44% (Russell, Horn, & Huddle, 1988).

Rape has devastating short- and long-term consequences for women (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974a) that are well documented. It negatively affects all aspects of their personalities and relationships (Burge, 1988; Burgess & Holmstrom, 1979; Cohen & Roth, 1987; DiVasto, 1985; Ellis, Atkeson, & Calhoun, 1981; Symonds, 1975), and disrupts the lives of those close to them (Burgess, 1974; Feinauer, 1982; Remer & Elliott, 1988; Schwartz & Brand, 1983). Rape recovery and the treatment of rape survivors is well-understood (Burgess & Holmstrom,



1974b; Ellis, 1983; Holmes & St Lawrence, 1983; Koss & Burkhardt, 1989; Meyer & Taylor, 1986; Sharma & Cheatham, 1986). The chances are very good that female clients seen in any counseling setting are rape survivors (Bassuk & Apsler, 1983; Patten, Gatz, Jones, & Thomas, 1989).

Therefore, it is important that ways be found to change our culture of rape which has evolved to the point that rape-supportive attitudes, beliefs, and expectations have become commonplace throughout society. Since 1978, researchers have recognized that a better understanding of rape myths may well support this cause. Subsequently, at least nine scales have been created to measure how strongly people accept rape myths. However, as will be made clear, because these scales have been developed so independently, the construct of rape myth acceptance as measured by them still remains ill-defined. Only four of these nine scales have been factor analyzed, meaning that any underlying constructs which may be common to all, some, or only one of them remain unverified. Also, few of the developers employed acceptable item-writing standards when they created these scales. Some of the scales have been used as well as misused in many studies, while others have never been used beyond their initial development study. The scales follow from a variety of theoretical approaches and contain items that emphasize several distinct aspects of rape, sometimes in a vague fashion.

Therefore, research is needed to bring about a better understanding of these scales and what they actually measure by analyzing their components either by way of a consistent theoretical approach or a statistical, data-driven approach. It is the purpose of this study to perform both these tasks; to factor analyze those scales which have not yet been factor analyzed and to interpret the entire set of factors found across all nine of them, using a coherent, logical theory of rape myth acceptance.

As the numbers and problems of rape survivors encountered by counseling psychologists grow, and the costly consequences of rape for both women and men increase in all societies, the validity of such research becomes apparent. If it is true that rape behavior follows from rape attitudes and beliefs, then it is important to understand the genesis, nature, and function of such attitudes and beliefs. Framing them in terms of rape myths has become a common, if not preferred, method for operationalizing these beliefs and attitudes, both for researchers and practitioners, as well as for those who construct rape awareness and prevention programming. Therefore, they merit study.

PREVIEW

## Chapter II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

First, those theories which have been endorsed by researchers so far in the construction of RMA scales are outlined. Examples of rape myths that follow from each of these theories are given.

Next, a model of rape is described which accounts for the overall domain of rape-related phenomena which have been addressed in RMA scales. This model is then expanded to locate the domain of rape within the larger social context nearly all RMA scale items relate to. Following this, an assessment is made of the nature and function of RMA in society, and the ways researchers have used RMA.

Next, the nine RMA scales evaluated for this study are presented in the chronological order of their creation. The development of each scale is described, and all studies which could be found to have used that scale are briefly described and evaluated. These studies are first arranged according to the aspect of the domain of rape they apply to, and then by their contribution to the reliability and validity of the scale. The effect size of their statistical results and therefore, the relative contribution each makes to understanding the scale are noted whenever possible. Three searches were employed to create this collection of studies: a review of the PSYCHLIT database for 1978-1995, a manual search of Social Science Citation Index across the same years, and a review of the reference sections of all studies found as well as related others.

Following this, a critique is made of RMA and the scales overall. The chapter is closed with a description of the theoretical approach to be used in the later interpretation of the factors derived from the scales. As a demonstration of its applicability, the model is used to interpret those four scales which have already been factor analyzed.

### Rape Theory

Just as rape beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are seen as products of larger social factors, so are theories about them adapted from larger theories of social interaction. There is no theory regarding the continuum of rape that is specific to rape only. To date, all rape researchers have taken a cognitive-behavioral approach to the study of RMA. While the overall phenomena of rape has been accounted for from a Freudian or other psychodynamic point of view, RMA itself has not been adapted to a psychodynamic approach. Likewise, and for obvious reasons, the nature of RMA precludes a strict behavioral approach. All current RMA research accepts the existence and validity of cognitive phenomena such as attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, psychodynamic and strict behavioral approaches are not included in this discussion. Note that theories of larger social phenomena have been adapted at times to incorporate certain salient features within the domain of rape, and at other times to account for the entire domain. Some authors see rape as adequately defined by a single theory and others argue that one theoretical stance cannot account for its varied aspects. In this section, each of the theories adapted so far by researchers to address RMA are briefly described singly but not in combination as they relate to rape. They are in no particular order.

Socio-cultural theory. Most researchers frame their understanding of rape within a socio-cultural context, although many do not acknowledge this overtly. It could be argued that all rape-related phenomena are the products of socialization and that therefore, all rape research is socio-culturally based. Many researchers assume this within their designs and do not utilize theory that is any more specific, such as Social Learning Theory. However, some authors do describe their work as reflecting distinct aspects of social interaction.

Researchers who adopt a socio-cultural approach are most concerned with how rapists learn to rape and how the culture develops and perpetuates rape-supportive doctrine. This research emphasizes participants' definitions of rape, attitudes toward rapists and rape survivors, sex role identification, self esteem, acceptance of interpersonal violence, knowledge about rape, sexual experiences, and attitudes toward women. A socio-cultural approach has been used by researchers to support the finding that some people consider rape to be an extension of normal sexual activity. It also allows for putting responsibility for rape onto rape survivors by suggesting that they learn to be victimized just as rapists learn to rape.

Attribution theory. Since the 1970's, researchers have used Attribution Theory to explain why participants often blame rape survivors for their own rapes and/or excuse rapists. Essentially, Attribution Theory is concerned with identifying the ways people make decisions about how much their own and others' behavior is caused by internal or external factors and subsequently, how they assign responsibility for such behavior. It is founded on several principles of particular interest to rape researchers:

1. The more people attribute others' behavior to internal causes, the more they hold them responsible.
2. The more people attribute others' behavior to external causes, the less they hold them responsible.
3. People tend to attribute others' behavior to internal causes and hold them personally responsible, especially when those others fail or suffer harm in some way.
4. People tend to attribute their own behavior to external causes when they fail or suffer and thereby lessen their own perceived responsibility.

Attribution Theory predicts that when confronted by accounts of survivors, participants will engage in survival-motivated thinking

directed toward making survivors seem as different from themselves as possible. Participants are expected to look for things that survivors did to get themselves raped that the participants believe they would never do themselves. It also suggests that male participants, since they do not want to see themselves as rapists or be seen by others as such, will attempt to distance themselves from rapists.

Rape researchers are interested in Attribution Theory because it may account in part not only for how people think about rape but how they subsequently behave, as in voting on juries to excuse rapists, placing themselves in situations that could lead to their own victimization, avoiding help after they are raped, or actually committing rape. Researchers who work from this model focus on survivor variables such as age, marital status, dating and sexual history, appearance, and behavior before, during, and after rape. They emphasize situational variables such as stranger versus acquaintance rape and witnesses. They usually look for relationships between these variables and participant variables such as locus of control, autonomy, perceived seriousness of rape, and traditional attitudes.

These factors are most commonly investigated by means of asking participants to assume they are potential jurors expected to render judgement about the guilt or innocence of a rapist. Other scenarios are also used, such as having participants respond to fictitious newspaper accounts. Some designs add video or photographs as an adjunct to depicted rape scenarios to better control the influences of factors such as appearance and communication style.

The just-world theory. The Just-World Theory is best seen as a special aspect of Attribution Theory. It is based on the observation that many people believe life is fair. People find it necessary to hold this belief, or fantasy, in order to maintain a sense of control over their lives. The alternative belief, that the rewards and punishments of life are random, is not acceptable to most people.

Expressed another way, the just world theory rests on the notion that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people. Since rape is a bad thing, rape survivors must somehow have been bad to deserve it and, conversely, people can protect themselves from being raped by being good. While Attribution Theory predicts that participants will focus on survivors' and rapists' behaviors and decision-making, the Just World Theory predicts they will focus on issues of survivor and rapist character.

Researchers who conceptualize their work within the Just-World Theory see rape myths as products of larger just-world beliefs and look for associations between them. Therefore, they focus on participant variables such as religiosity, adherence to traditional values, conservatism, empathy, sense of self control, and deservedness.

The defensive attribution hypothesis. Like the Just-World Theory, the Defensive Attribution Hypothesis is used to explain how people judge others in order to best protect their own sense of well-being. It has been shown that people are less likely to blame others they identify with, since to do so would imply they must blame themselves if they suffered the same fate. From this it follows that male participants will search for ways they can excuse rapists whose beliefs or actions they see as similar to their own, shift blame to survivors, and argue against punishment of rapists. Female participants are predicted to seek ways they can hold survivors blameless, at least those they can closely identify with.

Researchers who use this conceptual framework study just such attempts by their participants. They focus on variables such as whether survivors supposedly derived pleasure from rape, apparent foreseeability of rape, survivor resistance and pre-rape behavior, and survivor-rapist relationships. They are also concerned with participant variables such as self-esteem and sense of adequacy.

Feminist Theory. In rape research, Feminist Theory is primarily focused on the power relationships between men and women. Its proponents hold that male-dominated American culture consciously teaches men to rape and women to be victims. They emphasize the belief that rape is an act of violence purposely used by men to preserve their dominant position over women, and resist the suggestion that rape is related to sex. They note that rape is used to punish women who attempt to do the same things that men can do freely, such as walk outside after dark or go to parties alone. Feminist Theory also rests in the fact that men get to choose whether they will become rapists, but women do not get to choose whether they will be raped. This is in opposition to more general socio-cultural theory which basically asserts that everyone is a product of their socialization, male and female alike. Feminist Theory says there is a difference between being a product of one's socialization and being a victim of it.

Although nearly all current rape research traces its origins to and acknowledges Feminist Theory of the 1960's and 1970's, only a few authors today construct their designs and interpret their results in terms of pure Feminist Theory. Feminist researchers concentrate on their participants' exposure to pornography and women as sex objects, traditional values, perceived power and control, exposure to violence against women, the ability to form close relationships, and variables associated with larger socio-cultural theory.

Other theories. Recently, some researchers have begun to investigate the ways men and women semantically categorize rape among all their other thoughts about sex and violence. Such research will likely affect the way RMA is conceptualized because it demonstrates how participants use language to define the domain of rape to themselves and identifies terms they use to label rape and associated phenomena. For example, Sugarman (1994) has used multidimensional scaling to test how closely or distantly participants emotionally