

# The Role of Egocentric Networks in the Formation of Rape Myth Acceptance

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## BACKGROUND

- **Rape myths** are defined as prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, victims, and rapists.
- Rape myth acceptance (RMA) is shaped by network ties and the ties experiences as well.
- False beliefs about rape may exacerbate the problem of experiencing sexual assault and perpetration, while also serving as a deterrent for reporting rape or lead to a survivor's isolation from loved ones.
- Purpose: To understand the differences across subtypes of rape myths (e.g., she asked for it, he didn't mean it, it wasn't rape, and she lied) and how personal relationships impact college student's perception of myths.

## METHODS

- Online surveys collected data regarding demographics, personal experiences with violence, RMA (using the Illinois Rape Myth Scale) with n=697 college students.
- Name generator: five alters with whom they have the strongest relationship.
- Name interpreter: gender, race, experiences of violence (e.g., sexual, physical, and emotional), and two hypothetical situations.
- Homophily variables: gender, race, experiences of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse
- Compositional variables: the two hypothetical questions (if the alters would believe the ego if they were raped, if the alter would blame the ego if they were raped).
- The Illinois RMA Scale is scored from 0-120, with a higher score indicating rejection of rape myths. The average scores (1-5) for subtypes were calculated so that comparison across groups could occur.
- Hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to examine variables to predict acceptance of the four subtypes of rape myths. The second hierarchy was network level variables.

## RESULTS

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| <p><b><u>Ego Demographics:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 77.2% female (n=538)</li> <li>• Average age 22.2 years old (SD=1.38)</li> <li>• 68.9% white (n=480)</li> </ul> | <p><b><u>Ego Experiences:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 17.8% had experienced rape (n=124)</li> <li>• 12.5% had experienced physical abuse (n=87)</li> <li>• 36.6% had experienced emotional abuse (n=255)</li> </ul> |
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		She asked for it R <sup>2</sup> =15.8%, R <sup>2</sup> Δ= 6.2%	He didn't mean it R <sup>2</sup> = 8.2%, R <sup>2</sup> Δ= 3.3.%	Wasn't rape R <sup>2</sup> = 13.6%, R <sup>2</sup> Δ= 5.5%	She lied R <sup>2</sup> =20.3%, R <sup>2</sup> Δ= 5.8%	Composite R <sup>2</sup> =20.3%, R <sup>2</sup> Δ= 7.3%
Demographic Variables	Constant	3.592	3.559	4.352	3.238	80.939 Avg: 3.680
	Female	.387	.276	.257	.835	9.374
	Freshman			-.119		
	Sophomore			-.100		
	Religious now	-.169	-.091		-.189	-2.670
Network Variables	Truth				-.005	
	Don't blame	.008	.005	.004	.009	.139
	Physical abuse-alter				-.006	-.059
	Emotional abuse-alter			.002	.005	.047

## CONCLUSIONS

- Least believed myth was the "it wasn't rape," and most believed was "women lie" was the most believed.
  - It's possible that through sexual violence education, the "grey areas" of rape myth definitions have been removed.
  - There needs to be additional education on fabricated stories.
- Gender composition of ego networks do not influence an individual's RMA, even though the gender of the ego has the most significant impact on score.
- If a network included people who have experienced emotional abuse and will not blame you the go if raped, then they were more likely to reject myths.
  - Those who believe the ego increased the likelihood of accepting myths.
  - Thus, it is not enough to have people that believe an individual, they need to not blame behaviors.
- RMA was not impacted if the individual had experienced any sort of abuse. Individuals may doubt personal experience or self-blame, but other's experiences may act as a catalyst to change beliefs about rape myths.