

# Men's Objectifying Media Consumption, Objectification of Women, and Attitudes Supportive of Violence Against Women

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**Abstract** A recent White House Council Report on Women and Girls called attention to sexual assault on college campuses and encouraged continued research on this important public health problem. Media that sexually objectify women have been identified by feminist scholars as encouraging of sexual assault, but some researchers question why portrayals that do not feature sexual assault should affect men's attitudes supportive of violence against women. Guided by the concepts of specific and abstract sexual scripting in Wright's (Communication Yearbook 35:343–386, 2011) sexual script acquisition, activation, application model of sexual media socialization, this study proposed that the more men are exposed to objectifying depictions, the more they will think of women as entities that exist for men's sexual gratification (specific sexual scripting), and that this dehumanized perspective on women may then be used to inform attitudes regarding sexual violence against women (abstract sexual scripting). Data were gathered from collegiate men sexually attracted to women ( $N = 187$ ). Consistent with expectations, associations between men's exposure to objectifying media and attitudes supportive of violence against women were mediated by their notions of women as sex objects. Specifically, frequency of exposure to men's lifestyle magazines that objectify women, reality TV programs that objectify women, and pornography predicted more objectified cognitions about women, which, in turn, predicted stronger attitudes supportive of violence against women.

**Keywords** Pornography · Men's magazines · Reality TV · Objectification · Violence · 3AM

## Introduction

Millions of women in the United States are sexually assaulted at some point in their lives and perpetrators of female sexual assault are almost always male (Breiding et al., 2014). A recent White House Council Report on Women and Girls called attention to sexual assault on college campuses (White House Council, 2014). The report cited randomized, campus level research conducted at two large public universities which found that approximately one in five women had experienced completed or attempted sexual assault since entering college (Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2009). Sexual assault was defined as unwanted sexual contact that could include touching of a sexual nature, oral sex, sexual intercourse, anal sex, or sexual penetration with a finger or object (Krebs et al., 2009).

Why collegiate men sexually aggress against their female peers is not easily explained. Sexual assault is the result of a confluence of factors (Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995). One factor that has often been suggested is men's exposure to media that sexually objectify women (Jensen, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012). Experimental and survey studies have found that attitudes predictive of violence against women vary as a function of men's exposure to objectifying media (Hald, Malamuth, & Yuen, 2010; Mundorf, Allen, D'Alessio, & Emmers-Sommer, 2007); however, research in this area is limited in two important ways. First, despite the fact that women are frequently objectified in mainstream media (i.e., age unrestricted, sexually nonexplicit media), most studies have focused on pornographic media (i.e., age restricted, sexually explicit media) (Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, & Giery, 1995; Attorney General, 1986; Hald et al., 2010). Second, scholars have questioned why exposure to media that rarely, if ever, depict sexual

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assault would affect men's attitudes related to sexual assault (Ferguson & Hartley, 2009; Fisher, Kohut, Gioacchino, & Fedoroff, 2013).

The present study of collegiate men's exposure to objectifying media and attitudes supportive of violence against women (ASV) addressed each of these limitations.<sup>1</sup> To address the first limitation, exposure to objectifying reality television (TV) and exposure to mainstream men's magazines were assessed, in addition to pornography exposure. To address the second limitation, the possibility that objectifying media affect ASV by increasing men's notion that women are sex objects was investigated.

### Aggression Responses Approach to Media and ASV

Pornography has been the focal point of research on ASV, most likely because pornographic media have been said to actually depict men sexually assaulting women (Cowan, Lee, Levy, & Snyder, 1988). But recent content analyses suggest that sexual assault is rare in the pornography commonly consumed by men. As one example, rape was not depicted in any scene in Bridges, Wosnitzer, Scharrer, Sun, and Liberman's (2010) study of films identified as most-rented or best-selling by the Adult Video Network. As another example, rape was not depicted in any clip in Gorman, Monk-Turner, and Fish's (2010) study of video-clips from popular pornography websites. Such findings have led researchers who operate from an "aggression responses" perspective (Allen et al., 1995, p. 9) to question the validity of correlations between pornography consumption and ASV. From an aggression responses perspective, the causal link between exposure to sexual media and increases in ASV is the depiction of men sexually assaulting women. If sexual assault is not depicted, no change in ASV can occur (Allen et al., 1995).

For example, in a review article, Fisher et al. (2013) minimized studies finding links between popular pornography exposure and ASV (i.e., Malamuth, Addison, & Koss, 2000; Malamuth et al., 2012) because "no compelling explanation [was] offered to conceptualize a linkage between nonviolent sexual imagery and attitudes and behavior involving sexual violence" (p. 4). As another illustration, in their review article, Ferguson and Hartley (2009) stated that because "most pornography is of a non-violent nature" it may be "time to rethink the relationship between pornography and sexually assaultive behaviors" (p. 327). Given the prevalence of sexual assault, the severity of its consequences, and the impact such researchers' conclusions may have on public and practitioner opinion (Bushman & Anderson, 2001; Martins et al., 2013), it is important to consider at a theoretical level

whether there is justification for the hypothesis that rape-absent depictions may still adversely affect men's ASV.

### Female Objectification and ASV

Media often depict women as sexual objects (American Psychological Association, 2007; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Women are depicted as sexual objects when they are assigned the role of providing men sexual pleasure via their physical attractiveness and sexual accessibility. Objectification reduces human beings to entities. In the case of female sexual objectification, women are reduced to entities whose function is male sexual gratification.

Through what mechanism and process might viewing media that objectify women increase ASV? Wright's (2011) script acquisition, activation, application model (<sub>3</sub>AM) of sexual media socialization provides a straightforward theoretical rationale for both the mechanism and the process. The mechanism through which objectifying media are theorized to exert social influence is the sexual script. Mediated sexual scripts provide consumers with socially constructed guidelines for particular sexual roles and behaviors (Gagnon & Simon, 2005; Wright & Tokunaga, 2015). Sexual media can provide novel scripts (acquisition), prime previously acquired scripts (activation), and encourage the personal utilization of scripts by portraying particular sexual roles and behaviors as normative, appropriate, and rewarding (application). That objectifying women is portrayed as normative, appropriate, and rewarding for men in many mainstream and pornographic media is well established (American Psychological Association, 2007; Bridges et al., 2010; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Jensen, 2007). The process through which exposure to objectifying media is theorized to affect ASV is abstract scripting. According to the <sub>3</sub>AM, sexual media provide consumers with scripts for specific sexual roles and behaviors. Abstract scripting occurs when consumers deduce the general principle or behavioral philosophy guiding these specific scripts (Wright & Funk, 2014).

As stated, media often depict women as though they were sexual objects. The more men are exposed to such depictions, the more they may think of women as entities that exist for male sexual gratification (specific scripting). This dehumanized perspective on women may then be used to inform attitudes toward women and sexual violence (abstract scripting). For example, men who think that women should be sexually accessible should also be more able to envision using force to obtain sex and to perceive that women who violate their role as sexually subservient to men are deserving of retaliation (Burt, 1980). In sum, exposure to objectifying media may lead men to think of women as sex objects, and the more men think of women as sex objects, the more likely they should be to hold ASV.

Scholars who have questioned associations between ASV and men's exposure to objectifying but sexual assault absent media have asked for a theoretically compelling explanation for the effect. Each of the tenets just described (i.e., specific scripting, abstract scripting, objectification and dehumanization, dehumanization and

<sup>1</sup> Our conceptualization of attitudes supportive of violence against women follows that of Malamuth, Hald, and Koss (2012), who defined ASV as "positive affective responses to acts such as rape, other types of sexual aggression, and partner violence; evaluative cognitions justifying these acts; and behavioral predispositions or attractions toward such aggressive acts" (p. 428).

the disinhibition of aggression) has a firm basis in theory (Allen et al., 1995; Bandura, 2001; Check & Malamuth, 1986; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Huesmann, 1986, Russell, 1988; Wright, 2011; Wright & Funk, 2014).

### Objectification of Women in Pornography, Men's Magazines, and Reality TV

The objectification of women in pornography has been observed in scholarly inquiry for decades (Dines, 2006; Dworkin, 1989; Jensen, 2007; Linz & Malamuth, 1993; Smith, 1976). As one illustration, Monk-Turner and Purcell (1999) examined 40 pornographic films and found that women were portrayed as indiscriminately available to men for sexual consumption in more than 90 % of scenes. As another illustration, in approximately every other clip in Gorman et al.'s (2010) analysis of 45 online videos, male actors directed women in objectifying ways (e.g., "Get down on your knees." "Get back up." "I'm going to cum, get down.") (p. 138). Nudity was also more likely for female than male actors.

Two mainstream media genres that have recently been the target of much scholarly critique for their objectification of women are men's lifestyle magazines and reality TV. *Maxim* and *Esquire* magazines, for example, have been critiqued for depicting women as "mere sexual objects" (Krassas, Blauwkamp, & Wesselink, 2003, p. 113) and constructing a "male-subject versus female-object" heterosexual norm (Breazeale, 1994, p. 11). Similarly, Cassidy (2012) critiqued the reality TV show *Jersey Shore* for promoting the "objectification and subjugation of women" (p. 169) and Stern (2005) criticized the reality TV show *Real World* for relying on the "exploitation of the female body" (p. 14) to attract viewers. As is the case with recent studies of sex in pornography, statements about men's lifestyle magazines and reality TV suggest that they directly elevate objectification, but not sexual assault.

### Present Study

To conclude, content analyses of pornography and scholarly critiques of men's lifestyle magazines and reality TV suggest that female objectification is common in these genres but sexual assault is not. Accordingly, by measuring men's exposure to such media, notions of women as sex objects, and ASV, it is possible to provide insight into the hypothesis that objectifying but sexual assault absent media affects men's ASV via their notions of women as sex objects.

## Method

### Participants

Men were recruited from undergraduate courses at a large public university following institutional review board approval of the

study. A total of 187 men participated in the study after voluntarily consenting. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 33 ( $M = 20.86$  years,  $SD = 2.08$ ). Participants identifying as White comprised 78.07 % of the sample, 7.49 % identified as Hispanic, 7.49 % as Asian, 3.21 % as Middle Eastern, 3.21 % as Black, and 0.53 % as Other. The majority of participants identified as Christian (56.68 %), 16.04 % as Jewish, 3.21 % as Muslim, 0.53 % as Buddhist, and 3.21 % as an alternate religion. The remaining participants (20.32 %) did not belong to any religion. All participants were sexually attracted to women. The majority of participants (79.75 %) had engaged in sexual intercourse in the last year.

Data were collected via a confidential online survey. Due to a brief misapplication of the survey link, 24 participants were not asked about their sexual experience and magazine/reality TV exposure. Equipment malfunctions should result in data missing completely at random (Howell, 2014). This was the case in the present study. The participants who were asked about their sexual experience and magazine/reality TV exposure were not demographically different from the participants who were not. Missing data were thus imputed in hypothesis tests (see "Results" section).

### Measures

The study's primary measures were exposure to pornography, exposure to men's lifestyle magazines, exposure to reality television, notions of women as sex objects, and attitudes supportive of violence against women.

#### *Pornography Exposure*

Participants were asked how frequently they viewed pornography in the prior year. Pornography was defined as content appearing in any mediated venue that depicted female nudity and/or graphic sexual acts involving women such as intercourse or oral sex. Response options varied from (1) *never* to (9) *several times a day* ( $M = 5.40$ ,  $SD = 1.85$ ). This definition and item were employed by Wright and Tokunaga (2015).

#### *Men's Magazine Exposure*

Participants were asked how much time they spent each week reading men's magazines such as *Maxim* and *Esquire*. Response options ranged from (1) *I do not read magazines such as these* to (8) *more than two hours* ( $M = 1.33$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ). Approximately one in five men indicated at least some weekly reading. Asking about specific magazines has been normative in past magazine and sexual socialization research (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Taylor, 2006). *Maxim* and *Esquire* were used as the particular referents because of their popularity and because the objectification of women in these periodicals has been noted by several

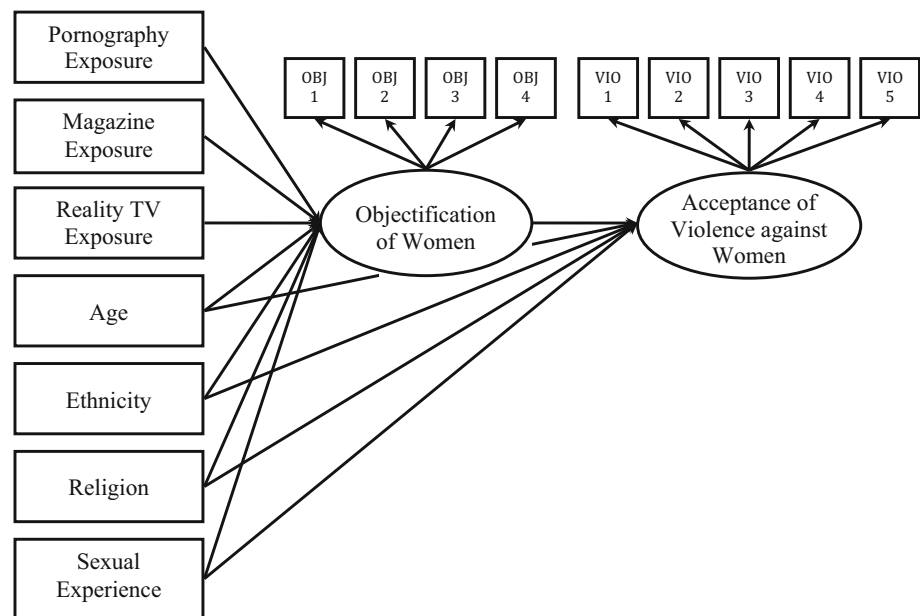
**Table 1** Zero-order correlations

Variable	2	3	4	5
1. Pornography exposure	0.07	0.02	0.22**	0.20**
2. Magazine exposure	–	0.30***	0.18*	0.25**
3. Reality TV exposure		–	0.19*	0.20**
4. Objectification of women			–	0.57***
5. Acceptance of violence against women				–

$N = 187$

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Fig. 1** The proposed conceptual model of the link between objectifying media exposure and attitudes supportive of violence against women through notions of women as sex objects. OBJ1 to OBJ4 refer to the four indicators of the latent objectification of women construct. VIO1 to VIO5 refer to the five indicators of the latent acceptance of violence against women construct



scholars (Brunner, 2013; Johnson & Sivek, 2009; Krassas et al., 2003; Reichert, 2007; Taylor, 2005).

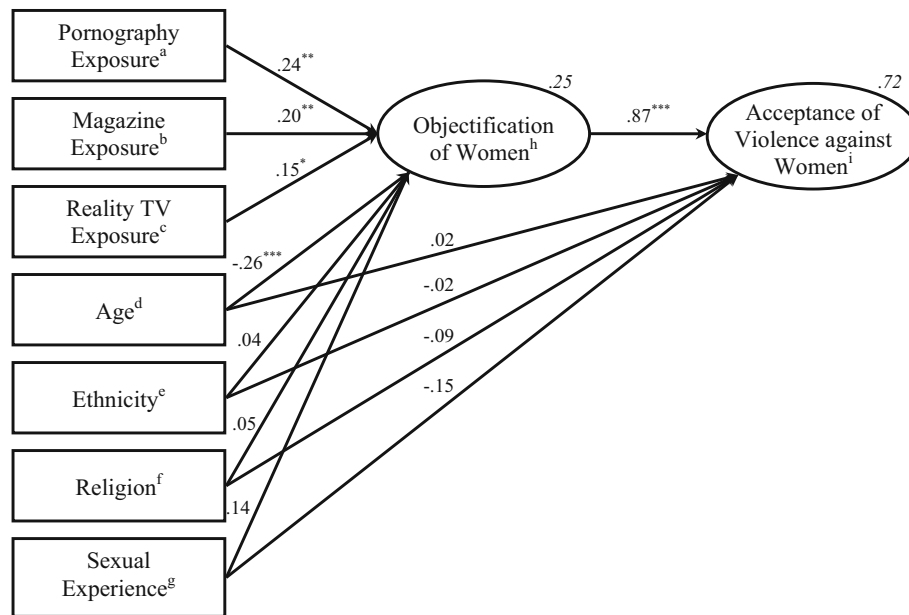
#### Reality TV Exposure

Participants were asked how many days each week they watched reality TV shows such as *Jersey Shore* and *The Real World*. Response options ranged from (1) *zero* to (8) *seven* ( $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ). Approximately one in two men indicated at least some weekly viewing. Asking about specific programs has been normative in past reality TV and sexual socialization research (Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006). *Jersey Shore* and *The Real World* were used as the particular referents because of their popularity and because the objectification of women in these programs has been noted by several commentators (Chrisler, Bacher, Bangali, Campagna, & McKeigue, 2012; Domoff, 2013; Marechal, 2014; Smith, 2005).

#### Notions of Women as Sex Objects

Four items from Peter and Valkenburg's (2007) assessment of adolescents' notions of women as sex objects were adapted for the adult males in the present study. Response options varied from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*.

The items and their corresponding descriptive statistics were: "There is nothing wrong with men being interested in a woman only if she is pretty" ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ , 43.30 % of men expressed at least modest agreement), "Sexually active women are more attractive partners" ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ , 47.60 % of men expressed at least modest agreement), "Unconsciously, women always want to be persuaded to have sex" ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ , 34.80 % of men expressed at least modest agreement), and "An attractive woman asks for sexual advances" ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ , 29.40 % of men expressed at least modest agreement). Maximum likelihood factor analysis



**Fig. 2** Mediation of objectifying media exposure on attitudes supportive of violence against women through notions of women as sex objects. *Note* The parameter estimates provided in the model are standardized coefficients; the italicized estimates at the top right of each latent endogenous variable reflect the variance explained (R<sup>2</sup>) by the linear combination of the predictors. <sup>a</sup>, <sup>b</sup>, <sup>c</sup>Higher scores = more exposure.

<sup>d</sup>Higher scores = older. <sup>e</sup>White = 0, other ethnicities = 1. <sup>f</sup>No religious affiliation = 0, Religious affiliation = 1. <sup>g</sup>Did not have intercourse last year = 0, had intercourse last year = 1. <sup>h</sup>Higher scores = more objectification of women. <sup>i</sup>Higher scores = more acceptance of violence against women. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

using the Kaiser's eigenvalue  $>1$  criterion for extraction indicated that the items were grouped into a single factor (eigenvalue = 2.22, variance accounted for = 55.47 %, Cronbach's alpha = .73). Descriptive statistics when the items were averaged to form an index were:  $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ .

#### Attitudes Supportive of Violence Against Women

Five items from Burt's (1980) research were used to assess attitudes supportive of violence against women. Response options varied from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*.

The items and their corresponding descriptive statistics were: "Being roughed up is sexually stimulating to many women" ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ , 37.40 % of men expressed at least modest agreement), "Many times a woman will pretend she doesn't want to have intercourse because she doesn't want to seem loose, but she's really hoping the man will force her" ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ , 23.50 % of men expressed at least modest agreement), "Sometimes the only way a man can get a cold woman turned on is to use force" ( $M = 2.24$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ , 9.60 % of men expressed at least modest agreement), "When women go around braless or wearing short skirts and tight tops, they are just asking for trouble" ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ , 52.40 % of men expressed at least modest agreement), "A woman who is stuck-up and thinks she is too good to talk to guys on the street deserves to be taught a lesson" ( $M = 2.42$ ,  $SD = 1.71$ , 16.00 % of men expressed at least

modest agreement). Maximum likelihood factor analysis using the Kaiser's eigenvalue  $>1$  criterion for extraction indicated that the items were grouped into a single factor (eigenvalue = 2.39, variance accounted for = 47.73 %, Cronbach's alpha = .72). Descriptive statistics when the items were averaged to form an index were:  $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ .

#### Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the tenability of a theoretical model wherein men who are more frequently exposed to pornography, men's magazines, and reality TV have stronger notions of women as sex objects, which in turn, promote ASV. Zero-order correlations between these variables are shown in Table 1. A structural equation model was used to test the paths from objectifying media exposure to notions of women as sex objects and, in turn, the path to ASV (see Fig. 1).

Multiple imputation with the linear regression method was used to account for the missing data by predicting plausible values for those scores assumed to be missing at random. The measurement and structural models were fit to the imputed dataset. A confirmatory factor analysis was first conducted to test the fit of the measurement model. Pornography exposure, men's magazine exposure, and reality TV exposure were treated as three independent observed variables, notions of women as sex objects was a latent variable that measured four indicators, and ASV was



a second latent factor that measured five indicator variables. Prior research suggested that age, ethnicity, religious status, and sexual experience may confound relationships between objectifying media exposure and attitudes toward women (Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2006; Wright & Funk, 2014). Accordingly, these variables were also included in the measurement model and allowed to covary freely with the observed and latent variables. The fit of the model was acceptable,  $\chi^2(75) = 103.08$ ,  $p = .02$ , CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.045, 90 % CI [0.020, 0.065], SRMR = 0.05.

The proposed hypotheses were tested in the structural equation model. Paths were estimated from pornography exposure, men's magazine exposure, and reality TV exposure to notions of women as sex objects, and a path from notions of women as sex objects to ASV was also estimated. The structural model showed acceptable fit to the data,  $\chi^2(76) = 113.06$ ,  $p = .004$ , CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.051, 90 % CI [0.030, 0.070], SRMR = 0.06. The standardized coefficients for each estimated path are shown in Fig. 2. The results demonstrated that the paths from pornography exposure ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = .001$ ), men's magazine exposure ( $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = .008$ ), and reality TV exposure ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = .05$ ) to objectification of women were all at or below the significance threshold. Thus, more frequent exposure to objectifying media was associated with stronger notions of women as sex objects. The path from notions of women as sex objects to ASV was also significant ( $\beta = 0.87$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Men who viewed women as sex objects had attitudes more supportive of violence against women.

The direct effect of pornography, men's magazine, and reality TV exposure on ASV was tested in a second structural equation model. The fit of the structural model with the direct effects was acceptable,  $\chi^2(73) = 103.08$ ,  $p = .01$ , CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.051, 90 % CI [0.030, 0.070], SRMR = 0.05. However, the relative contribution of the three additional paths was nonsignificant,  $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 3.16$ ,  $p = .37$ . Therefore, the relationship between objectifying media exposure and attitudes supportive of violence against women was fully mediated by notions of women as sex objects.

Indirect effect estimates of the mediation test were obtained from a 5000 bias-corrected bootstrapping resampling procedure. Age, ethnicity, religious status, and sexual experience were again included in the mediation test as covariates of both the mediator and the outcome variable. The indirect effect estimate, and consequently the mediation, is significant if its bias-corrected 95 % confidence interval does not contain zero. The results indicated that notions of women as sex objects mediated the relationship between pornography exposure and ASV (indirect effect [IE] = 0.074,  $SE = 0.026$ , 95 % CI [0.024, 0.127]), the relationship between men's magazine exposure and ASV (IE = 0.134,  $SE = 0.080$ , 95 % CI [0.001, 0.300]), and the relationship between reality TV exposure and ASV (IE = 0.075,  $SE = 0.039$ , 95 % CI [0.007, 0.159]).

## Discussion

The prevalence of sexual assault in the U.S. has led to a recent Presidential Proclamation and White House report calling for increased awareness and commitment to prevention. Both communications directed attention to sexual assault on college campuses (Office of the Press Secretary, 2012; White House Council, 2014). Given that men are the primary perpetrators of sexually aggressive acts against women (Breiding et al., 2014), it is imperative to identify factors that increase men's probability of committing sexual assault.

The sexual objectification of women in media has long been argued to affect men's attitudes in ways that could disinhibit sexually violent behavior (Attorney General, 1986). Data consistent with this premise have been generated using a variety of methodological approaches (Allen et al., 1995; Hald et al., 2010). Yet, this literature's emphasis on pornography and lack of theoretical explication for why depictions that do not feature sexual assault should still affect attitudes related to sexual aggression have been persistent. The emphasis on pornography has limited an understanding of the varieties of media that may affect men's attitudes supportive of violence against women or ASV (Seto, Maric, & Barbaree, 2001). The lack of explanation and empirical investigation of psychological mechanisms underlying associations between exposure to objectifying but sexually assault absent media and ASV has led to persistent questions about the validity of this relationship (Allen et al., 1995; Ferguson & Hartley, 2009; Fisher et al., 2013).

The present study of collegiate males was carried out in response to these limitations. First, exposure to men's magazines such as *Maxim* and *Esquire* and to reality TV programs such as *Jersey Shore* and *Real World* were assessed, in addition to exposure to pornography. Such magazines and TV programs were considered of analytical import because of the recent attention they have garnered from media scholars and because very little prior research appears to have associated exposure to these media with ASV (Brunner, 2013; Cassidy, 2012; Chrisler et al., 2012; Johnson & Sivek, 2009; Krassas et al., 2003; Stern, 2005; Taylor, 2005). Second, notions of women as sex objects was explored as a mediator between exposure to men's magazines, reality TV, and pornography and ASV. According to the 3AM, sexual media provide consumers with scripts for specific sexual behaviors and roles, the principles of which may be abstracted and applied to behaviors and roles that were not depicted (Wright, 2011; Wright & Funk, 2014; Wright, Malamuth, & Donnerstein, 2012). The specific script that objectifying media provide men is that women are sexual instruments that should behave in ways that facilitate men's sexual gratification (Brooks, 1995; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Wright, 2012). Thus, in objectifying media women's role as a source of male sexual pleasure is emphasized and their humanity is deemphasized.

After having internalized the messages of male sexual privilege and female dehumanization, it should be easier for men to envision imposing themselves sexually on women and reacting punitively to women who frustrate their sexual goals.

Consistent with these theoretical postulates, in the present study, notions of women as sex objects mediated associations between pornography, men's magazine, reality TV exposure, and ASV. Men who were more frequently exposed to pornography, men's magazines, and reality TV were more likely to perceive women as sex objects than men who were less frequently exposed to these media. And, men who were more apt to perceive women as sex objects were also more likely to agree with statements such as "Sometimes the only way a man can get a cold woman turned on is to use force" and "A woman who is stuck-up and thinks she is too good to talk to guys on the street deserves to be taught a lesson" (Burt, 1980). Such attitudes have been found to predict sexually aggressive inclinations and behaviors in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (Hald et al., 2010).

### Limitations and Future Directions

The cross-sectional nature of the present study leaves open the possibility of reverse-causality. In other words, it is possible that men who believe that violence against women is acceptable in part rationalize this attitude by conceptualizing women as nothing more than sex objects and then select media that confirm this objectified stance on women (i.e., ASV → notions of women as sex objects → objectifying media exposure).<sup>2</sup> Three waves of longitudinal data are needed to rigorously test the temporal-sequencing proposed by the present study (i.e., objectifying media exposure → notions of women as sex objects → ASV). It is important to note, however, that there already is longitudinal research on objectifying media exposure and notions of women as sex objects and sexual aggression that is supportive of the temporal-sequencing proposed by the present study (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2009).

An additional alternative explanation for the results of the present study is that objectifying media exposure, notions of women as sex objects, and ASV are all caused by some third variable. No correlational study—whether cross-sectional or longitudinal—can ever rule out all possible third variable confounds. To rigorously address the third variable problem,

<sup>2</sup> This selective exposure model, tested using structural equation modeling, demonstrated moderate fit to the data,  $\chi^2(81) = 118.67, p = .004$ , CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.050, 90% CI [0.029, 0.067], SRMR = 0.05. Analogous to the media effects model, the covariates (i.e., age, ethnicity, religion, sexual experience) were modeled as predictors of objectification of women and objectifying media exposure. The path from acceptance of violence against women to objectification of women was significant ( $\beta = 0.82, SE = 0.05, p < .001$ ). Additionally, objectification of women was a significant correlate of pornography exposure ( $\beta = 0.27, SE = 0.08, p < .001$ ), magazine exposure ( $\beta = 0.31, SE = 0.08, p < .001$ ), and reality TV exposure ( $\beta = 0.26, SE = 0.08, p = .002$ ).

experimental research is needed. Although this is an important caveat, it should be mentioned that experimental research with objectifying media as stimuli has already demonstrated effects on men's objectification attitudes and ASV (Kistler & Lee, 2010; Wright & Tokunaga, 2015).

An additional avenue for future research is the assessment of individual differences (Kingston, Malamuth, Fedoroff, & Marshall, 2009). Because evolution would have favored men attracted to young, beautiful, sexually available women (i.e., fertile, healthy women who maximize reproductive rewards while minimizing investment costs), it can be argued that certain elements of objectifying media appeal to a "normal" male fantasy (Buss & Schmidt, 1993; Malamuth, 1996; Wright & Bae, 2016). But some men may be more likely than others to mistake fantasy for reality and to possess beliefs facilitative of sexual antagonism toward real-life women who do not behave like women in objectifying media. An experimental study by Bogaert, Woodward, and Hafer (1999) speaks to the question of individual differences in the fantasy–reality disconnect. In this study, undergraduate men viewed various types of pornography and then interacted with a female confederate. Exposure to rape myth congruent depictions increased the sexually suggestive behavior of lower IQ men only. It was theorized that more intelligent men are less likely to deem scripts from entertainment media as appropriate guides for real-life opposite sex interactions. A study of naturalistic exposure by Malamuth et al. (2012) speaks to the question of beliefs men bring to the viewing experience that may affect how objectifying media impact their attitudes toward women. In this study, young men attending post-high school educational institutions in the U.S. were surveyed. Pornography exposure was assessed, as were ASV. The association between pornography exposure and ASV was strongest among men who exhibited a hostile approach to gender relations and a promiscuous approach to sex. Exposure to depictions of sexually available, nondiscriminating women in media could lead men already hostile to women to become even more so when they consider the behavior of real-life women who refuse to play their part in these men's casual sex script.

The following future research directions are also important. First, while television still dominates the media use of college-aged individuals (Nielsen, 2014a) and lifestyle magazines targeting younger men still report substantial rate bases (Esquire, 2015; Maxim, 2015), the mainstream media landscape is diversifying and evolving. It will be important for future studies to assess men's exposure to objectifying depictions of women across both traditional and emergent mainstream media (Nielsen, 2014b). Second, while studies of the effects of objectifying media have most often used items from Burt (1980) to assess ASV (Hald et al., 2010; Mundorf et al., 2007), and while scores on these items are predictive of collegiate and other men's sexually aggressive behavior (Anderson & Anderson, 2008; Carr & VanDeusen, 2004; Kjellgren, Priebe, Svedin, & Langstrom, 2010; Vega & Malamuth, 2007; Yost & Zurbriggen, 2006), future studies should consider employing additional assessments. Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald (1999) argued

that the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale improves upon the clarity and wording of Burt's items. Gerger, Kley, Bohner, and Siebler (2007) argued that the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression Scale assesses more subtle and covert cognitions supportive of sexual violence than those assessed by Burt's items. Regarding collegiate males specifically, Burgess (2007) contended that the items comprising the Rape Attitudes and Beliefs Scale are more sensitive to the dynamics of sexual aggression in the college context than Burt's items. Third, future studies should compare the effects of highly explicit content that has been argued to not objectify women (e.g., content from *erosexotica.com*; Wright & Funk, 2014) with the effects of highly explicit content that has been identified as objectifying (see Bridges et al., 2010; Dines, 2010, for examples).

## Conclusion

Recent data suggest that male-on-female sexual assault is a serious problem on U.S. college campuses and in the U.S. in general. Responding to the need for research on the varieties of objectifying media that may affect men's ASV and identification of mediating mechanisms, the present study tested whether notions of women as sex objects mediated associations between men's exposure to pornography, men's magazines, reality TV, and ASV. The more men reported exposure to these media, the stronger were their notions of women as sex objects, and the stronger their notions were of women as sex objects, the more they expressed ASV. These results are consistent with prior experimental and longitudinal studies examining direct associations between objectifying media exposure, notions of women as sex objects, ASV, or sexually aggressive behavior.<sup>3</sup>

Although the present study may be the first to examine exposure to reality TV, pornography, men's magazines, notions of women as sex objects, and ASV together in a mediated model, the results were consistent with prior research. Furthermore, although heretofore untested, the suggestion of notions of women as sex

objects as the link between objectifying media and ASV is consistent with prior theoretical articulations. When considered in the totality of prior research and theory, therefore, the results of the present study suggest that media that do not depict sexual assault but that do objectify women may still affect men's ASV through the acquisition and activation of sexual scripts that objectify women.

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<sup>3</sup> Aggregate-level analysis is an additional methodology that has been employed in the study of sexual media and sexual aggression. Aggregate-level analysts correlate rates of documented sexual crime with indicators of the availability of sexual media, such as a loosened legal restriction on access to pornography (Diamond, Jozifkova, & Weiss, 2011) or the number of pornographic movies released during a particular period (Ferguson & Hartley, 2009). This method contrasts with individual-level analyses such as the present study, where attributes of individuals related to sexual aggression are measured directly and correlated with those individuals' actual media exposure. The perils of drawing conclusions about the behavior of individuals from aggregate-level data are well documented (e.g., Robinson, 1950). Associations found at the aggregate-level may not translate to the individual level and should only be considered as a source of possible evidence when individual-level correlations are not available (MacInnis & Hodson, 2015). For a brief treatment of the problems of aggregate-level analysis in pornography and sexual aggression research, see Kingston and Malamuth (2011). For a more detailed discussion, see Malamuth and Pitpitan (2007).



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