Masculine Norms, Peer Group, Pornography, Facebook, and Men’s Sexual Objectification of Women

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In this study, we examined the relations between 3 dimensions of traditional masculine gender role adherence (playboy, power over women, and violence) and likelihood to sexually objectify women via body evaluation and making unwanted sexual advances. In addition, we examined the moderating roles of association with a male peer group that abuses women, pornography consumption, and Facebook use in these links. Participants were 329 heterosexually identified undergraduate men who completed an online survey. Results revealed that endorsement of playboy and violence masculine norms and higher levels of pornography use uniquely predicted more body evaluation of women. Pornography use, Facebook use, the interaction of playboy norms and association with abusive male peers, the interaction of power over women norms and association with abusive male peers, and the interaction of violence norms and association with abusive male peers were unique predictors of making unwanted sexual advances. Conformity to playboy, power over women, and violence masculine norms each predicted making unwanted sexual advances toward women for men with high association with abusive male peers but not low or moderate association with abusive male peers. The findings underscore the need to target adherence to traditional masculine norms, negative male peer group associations, and pornography and Facebook use in interventions aimed at reducing men’s sexual objectification of women.

Keywords: masculinity, objectification, sexual assault, pornography, gender roles

Sexual objectification of women refers to the treatment of women as just a body that is used primarily for consumption by men (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Sexual objectification has been linked to a variety of negative psychological outcomes for women including internalization of this objectification, body shame, disordered eating, depression, and posttraumatic stress symptoms (Miles-McLean et al., 2015; Moradi & Huang, 2008; Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). Because of the link between experiences of sexual objectification and negative psychological outcomes for women, it is important not only to explore how women can cope with these experiences but also the variables that make men more likely to engage in sexually objectifying behavior (Szymanski & Feltman, 2014). Therefore, it is important to target men who are most likely to sexually objectify to direct future research toward interventions that can be designed to prevent these harmful behaviors.

Most research examining predictors of men’s sexual objectification of women has focused on extreme manifestations (e.g., sexual assault; McDermott, Kilmartin, McKelvey, & Kridel, 2015). Very little attention has been paid to everyday, subtler forms of sexual objectification perpetration, which may be equally important in terms of the emotional well-being of the women targeted (Szymanski & Feltman, 2014). However, past research has shown a link between perpetration of sexual objectification and sexual aggression. Millburn, Mather, and Conrad (2000) found that exposing men to sexually objectifying media clips made them less likely to express empathy toward a hypothetical rape victim. In addition, Rudman and Mescher (2012) found that men who viewed images of women as less than human (and therefore objectified them) were more likely to endorse sexual violence against women. Furthermore, sexually objectifying women mediated the link between heavy drinking and sexual violence perpetration among undergraduate college men (Gervais, DiLillo, & McChargue, 2014).

Previous research on men’s perpetration of sexual aggression has focused on the role of hostile and hegemonic masculinity, frequently operationalized as hostility toward women, rape myth acceptance, and/or negative attitudes toward women’s sexual roles (McDermott et al., 2015). Research has shown that hostile masculinity is consistently linked to men’s perpetration of sexual assault (for reviews, see McDermott et al., 2015; Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002). To advance the field further, scholars have called for research on socially constructed gender roles and their links to men’s sexual mistreatment of women (McDermott et al., 2015). In addition, they advocate using more socially acceptable ways to measure traditional, restrictive forms of masculinity that may better reflect typical college male experiences. Therefore, assessing adherence to masculine gender role norms that may tap into more typical, subtle, and socially desirable forms of identification with masculinity and may be linked to men’s sexual objectification of women is warranted.

In this study, we examined the relations between three dimensions of traditional masculine gender role adherence (playboy, power over women, and violence) and likelihood to sexually...
objectify women via body evaluation (gazing at, inspecting and evaluating women’s bodies; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and making unwanted sexual advances. We also explored the potential moderating or exacerbating roles of association with a male peer group that abuses women, pornography consumption, and Facebook use in the link between conformity to traditional masculine norms and likelihood to sexually objectify women.

**Masculinity and Objectification**

One popular approach to understanding traditional masculinity, rooted in feminist theoretical perspectives, is the masculine gender role norms approach (Mahalik et al., 2003). According to this perspective, masculine gender role norms are guidelines and ideals that direct and restrict men’s behavior. Masculine norms are learned by boys and men through typical socialization processes, such as being told what unacceptable and acceptable behavior is for men and observation of what men in general and popular men, in particular, do in social situations and interpersonal relationships (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992; Witt, 2000).

The Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory-46 (CMNI-46; Parent & Moradi, 2009) examines adherence to these traditional, restrictive masculine norms across nine dimensions: power over women, risk-taking, self-reliance, playboy, primacy of work, heterosexual self-presentation, emotional control, importance of winning, and violence. Of these norms, playboy, power over women, and violence seemed particularly relevant to men’s sexual objectification of women and thus were examined in this study. Playboy refers to the desire to be sexually promiscuous, power over women refers to beliefs that women are subservient to men and that men should control women, and violence refers to views that physical force and aggression are generally acceptable behaviors for men to display (Mahalik et al., 2003; Parent & Moradi, 2009).

Sexual objectification theory postulates that women are nonsentient beings that are often treated as objects and used by men for their sexual utility (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Therefore, it seems likely that men who score high on the playboy, power over women, and violence masculine norms will be more likely to treat women as objects and engage in sexually objectifying behaviors toward women. The association between these particular masculine ideals and likelihood to sexually objectify is consistent with previous research on masculinity, attitudes toward women, and sexual violence and is an extension of this research.

For example, cross-cultural research has found that greater approval of interpersonal violence, more disrespect for women’s roles, and higher levels of male dominance distinguished “rape prone” versus “rape free” tribal societies (Sandoz, 1981). In a more recent study conducted with a racially diverse sample in the United States, Santana, Raj, Decker, La Marche, and Silverman (2006) found that men who scored higher on a measure of traditional masculine ideology assessing hypersexuality, toughness, antifemininity, and male dominance were more likely to have committed acts of domestic violence against their partners in the previous year. In addition, having multiple dating or sex partners, impersonal sex, and accepting violence in general has been linked to more sexual violence toward women (for a review, see Tharp et al., 2013). Men’s adherence to playboy, power over women, and violence norms were positively correlated with their self-reported engagement in sexual aggression toward women (Locke & Mahalik, 2005) and negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction among heterosexual men (Burn & Ward, 2005).

**Potential Moderators**

In addition to examining the association between adherence to traditional masculine norms and sexual objectification of women, there are other variables that may affect this association. In this study, we examine three variables (i.e., association with abusive male peers, pornography use, and Facebook use) that may exacerbate the link between conformity to playboy, power over women, and violence masculine norms and engaging in sexually objectifying behaviors toward women.

**Male Peer Group Association**

Association with a male peer group that abuses women could have an effect on men’s likelihood of engaging in sexually objectifying behavior toward women. Research has demonstrated that higher levels of male peer group abuse of women (e.g., number of male friends who demeaned or disparaged their girlfriends, used sexual force with women, and engaged in physical aggression with their girlfriends) were related to more sexual assault perpetration among college men (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1995). Similar results concerning peer groups that sexually abuse women in their dating relationships have been found with adolescent boys (Sears, Byers, & Price, 2007). In another study using college men, associating with aggressive peers predicted perpetration of sexual violence (Christopher, Madura, & Weaver, 1998). In a longitudinal study (Thompson, Swartout, & Koss, 2013), having male peer groups who endorse the acceptance of forcing sex with women and hostile masculinity (a combination of rape supportive views and hostile attitudes toward women) predicted involvement in highly sexually aggressive trajectories at both the start and conclusion of the study.

As peer groups serve as one of many influences on gender role identity development and expression (Plummer, 2001), the association with a negative male peer group could affect the link between adherence to traditional masculine norms and engagement in sexually objectifying behavior toward women. That is, the association between endorsement of traditional masculine norms via playboy, power over women, and violence on men’s sexual objectification of women may be moderated/intensified by having a male peer group that abuses women because their own peer group supports and reinforces their masculinity views. In addition, association with peers who are aggressive toward women may communicate messages that normalize, condone, and justify the sexual objectification of women (Flood, 2008). Men with male reference groups who abuse women may also engage in sexually objectifying behaviors to bolster the traditional masculine ideologies they already hold and to prove that they are “real men.” In one qualitative study, Flood (2008) found that higher masculine status in one’s male peer group was achieved by casual sexual relationships with many women. The interaction of conformity to masculine norms and male peer group association predicting sexual objectification of women has thus far gone untested.

**Pornography Use**

Pornography use is another important variable to examine in the context of adherence to masculine norms and likelihood to sexu-
ally objectify women. Pornography use has increased dramatically since 1996 (Ropelato, 2007) and has been shown to be highest among young adult men aged 18–26 years (Buzzell, 2005; Carroll et al., 2008). One study found that 50% of young adult men viewed pornography weekly and another 20% daily or every other day (Carroll et al., 2008). Content analyses have revealed pornography to be high in both sexually objectifying images of women (McKee, 2005) and verbal and physical aggression toward women (Sun, Bridges, Wosnitzer, Scharrer, & Liberman, 2008). In addition, mainstream pornography typically presents women as props for male sexual pleasure: receiving vaginal and anal sex, providing oral sex to men, and as participants in (or victims of) “double penetration” and gang rape (Jensen, 2007).

Higher levels of male gender role conflict (i.e., a psychological state of conflict that emerges when men are rigidly socialized to be hypermasculine, resulting in negative outcomes for self and others; O’Neil, 2008) have been positively correlated with more pornography use among college men (Szymanski & Stewart-Richardson, 2014). Adolescent boys who consume higher levels of pornographic media tend to hold beliefs that women are sex objects (Peter & Valkenberg, 2009) and be more adherent to traditional masculine ideals in pursuing relationships with women (i.e., they tend to be more likely to objectify women and focus on appearance over personality traits; Ward, Vandenbosch, & Eggermont, 2015). Wright and Tokunaga (2016) found that men who engaged in more frequent viewing of objectifying media (including pornography) were more likely to think about women in an objectifying manner, which in turn predicted the endorsement of violence against women. In addition, higher levels of pornography use are related to men’s self-reported likelihood of raping women if they could be guaranteed they would not get caught (Carr & VanDeusen, 2004). Another study found that pornography use via magazines uniquely predicted men’s sexual aggression toward women, above and beyond that accounted for by known predictors of sexual violence (i.e., hostile masculinity, impersonal sex, and antisocial behaviors; Vega & Malamuth, 2007). Taken together, past research suggests a link between consumption of pornographic materials and likelihood to sexually objectify women.

In addition to direct links, there is likely to be an interactive effect between endorsement of traditional masculine norms and men’s sexual objectification of women. That is, greater pornography use may be associated with increased interpersonal sexual objectification of women when endorsement of playboy, power over women, and violence masculine norms are high. Men who hold negative views toward women and positive views toward violence and are receiving messages from pornography that women’s bodies are to be gazed at, touched, and used in anyway and at any time he so pleases (Szymanski & Stewart-Richardson, 2014) may be more likely to act these messages out through staring at and evaluating women’s appearance and perpetrating unwanted sexual advances.

Providing some support for these assertions, Vega and Malamuth (2007) found that pornography use interacted with hostile masculinity and antisocial behaviors in predicting men’s sexual aggression toward women. Among men with high levels of hostile masculinity and antisocial behaviors, high levels of pornography use increased the risk of sexual violence toward women. Furthermore, Ward, Merriwether, and Caruthers (2006) found that the more male participants read men’s magazines that had high rates of sexually objectifying images (e.g., Playboy, Maxim) and the more they identified with male characters on TV shows, the more likely they were to accept traditional gender ideologies that viewed women as sexual objects and sexual gatekeepers.

**Facebook Use**

Beyond peer group and pornography use, social media use via Facebook may also be an important exacerbating variable in the link between conformity to masculine norms and sexual objectification of women. Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites with at least one study showing that 91% of college students surveyed used the site regularly (Wiley & Sisson, 2006). In particular, college students use Facebook and other social networking sites to communicate with friends, express their identity and sexuality, learn peer norms, observe and comment on friends’ pictures, and manage their social standing (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhah, 2008; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). In addition, many social network users post sexually provocative and sexually objectifying pictures to elicit attention and hopefully positive appearance commentary from their peers and potential romantic partners (Manago et al., 2008; Manago, Ward, Lemm, Reed, & Seabrook, 2015). However, viewing sexualized images, particularly of women, can lead to dehumanization. Supporting this notion, Bernard, Gervais, Allen, Camomizzi, and Klein’s (2012) experimental study found that sexualized male bodies were more likely to be viewed as human beings, whereas sexualized female bodies were more likely to be viewed as inanimate objects.

Research has increasingly shown a link between social media use in general and Facebook in particular and women’s self-objectification (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015; Manago et al., 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014; Slater & Tiggemann, 2015; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012). As women are constantly monitoring their bodies on social media sites such as Facebook, it would make sense that men would also be engaging in this evaluative behavior of women on these sites. In particular, Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, and Kruck (2012) found that men were more likely to browse profiles on social networking sites to look for new friends and potential partners, while women were more likely to engage in activities that promoted self-presentation (e.g., changing profile pictures). Additionally, Manago et al., (2008) found that self-presentation on the social networking site MySpace reinforced and even exacerbated traditional gender presentation in real life, with women being viewed and treated as sexual objects more so than men.

In addition to direct effects, there may be potential interactive effects between conformity to playboy, power over women, and violence masculine norms and Facebook use on men’s perpetration of sexually objectifying behavior toward women. In particular, it may be that social networking sites (similar to the findings of Manago et al., 2008) enhance or exacerbate already existing gender role adherence offline. For example, to increase their social status in the real world, some men may use social media as a platform to engage in sexually objectifying behaviors that affirm their traditional notions of masculinity. In addition, men who are high on conformity to playboy, power over women, and violence masculine norms and are being exposed to sexually objectifying
images and commentary on Facebook may be more likely to engage in behaviors that promote these messages in real life.

The Current Study

In this study, we extend previous research by examining the relations between three dimensions of traditional masculine gender role adherence and likelihood to sexually objectify women via body evaluation and making unwanted sexual advances. We hypothesized that men who express higher levels of conformity to playbook, power over women, and violence masculine norms would be more likely to endorse sexually objectifying behaviors toward women. Our study also makes a unique contribution by examining male role norms together with other social factors that are likely to influence men’s sexual objectification of women. As such, we explored the potential moderating roles of association with a male peer group that abuses women, pornography consumption, and Facebook use in the link between endorsement of traditional masculine norms and likelihood to sexually objectify women. We hypothesized that the associations would be stronger for men with more association with a peer group that abuses women, higher levels of pornography consumption, and greater levels of Facebook use.

Method

Participants

The initial sample was comprised of 376 undergraduate participants who began the online survey. We eliminated 18 participants who left the entire survey blank, nine participants who left at least one measure entirely blank, three participants who failed two or more of the three validity checks (e.g., for this item, click the button labeled blue), and 13 nonheterosexually identified participants. This resulted in a final sample of 329 male participants.

Of the 329 participants in the final sample, 75% identified as White, 11% African American/Black, 8% Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander, 1% Latino, 2% biracial/multiracial, and 3% other. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 31 years (M = 18.93; SD = 1.57). Sixty-nine percent were first-year undergraduates, 17% sophomores, 9% juniors, and 6% seniors. Participants self-identified as being a member of the following social class categories: 5% wealthy, 36% upper middle, 43% middle, 11% lower middle, 5% working, and 1% poor. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Missing data analysis conducted on this final sample showed that one quarter of a percent of all items for all cases were missing, 67.92% of the items were not missing data for any case, and 93.62% of participants had no missing data. No single item had more than 1.5% missing values. Given the very small amount of missing data, we used available case analyses procedures, wherein mean scale scores are calculated without substitution or imputation of values, which produces similar results to multiple imputation methods (Parent, 2013).

Measures

Masculine norms. To assess adherence to the three dimensions of traditional masculine norms of interest to our study, we used the playbook, power over women, and violence subscales of the CMNI-46 (Parent & Moradi, 2011). Example items include “If I could, I would frequently change sexual partners” (playboy), “Things tend to be better when men are in charge” (power over women), and “Sometimes violent action is necessary” (violence). Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert types scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Mean subscale scores were calculated, with higher scores indicating more endorsement of playbook, power over women, and violence masculine norms. The entire CMNI-46 (46 items) was administered to ensure the integrity of the measure; however, only the playbook, power over women, and violence subscales were used in the analyses. Reported internal reliabilities range from .80 to .81. Validity was supported by confirmatory factor analyses and positive correlations with two other masculine norms scales and a measure of gender based attitudes toward marital roles (Parent & Moradi, 2011). Alphas for the current sample were .78 for playbook, .74 for power over women, and .84 for violence.

Association with abusive male peers. Peer group abuse of women was assessed using the three-item attachment to abusive male peers scale (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1995). The three items are “To the best of your knowledge, how many of your male friends have ever used physical force, such as hitting or beating, to resolve conflicts with their girlfriends and/or dating partners to make them fulfill some demand?” “To the best of your knowledge, how many of your male friends have ever made physically forceful attempts at sexual activity with women they were dating which were disagreeable and offensive enough that the women responded in an offended manner such as crying, fighting, screaming or pleading?” and “To the best of your knowledge, how many of your male friends insulted their dating partners and/or girlfriends, swear at them, and/or withhold affection?” Response options for each item are 1 (none), 2 (1 or 2), 3 (3 to 5), 4 (6 to 10), and 5 (more than 10). Mean full scale scores were calculated, with higher scores indicating greater association with abusive male peers.

As reported by DeKeseredy and Kelly (1995), validity of the scale was supported by evidence of positive correlations between male peer informational support (i.e., advice and direction from friends that influence men to be abusive to their partners) and sexually abusing their dating partner. They also reported an internal reliability of .65. Alpha for the current sample was .61. Although Cronbach’s alpha scores for this measure are low in absolute terms, it is important to remember that internal consistency is fairly sensitive to the number of items (Field, 2013), which may lead to biased assessments of reliability when the number of items is very small (or very large). To deal with this limitation, some scholars have advocated for examining the raw mean interitem correlation as a statistical marker of internal consistency (see Briggs & Cheek, 1986; Clark & Watson, 1995). Having moderate pairwise correlations that are neither too low (suggesting the items do not measure the same construct) nor too high (suggesting redundancy) is ideal. Using this criterion, all of our items were positively correlated (range = .31 to .50) and the mean interitem correlation was .43. This suggests that scores on this scale had satisfactory internal consistency.

Pornography use. The seven-item frequency subscale of the Pornography Use Scale (Szymanski & Stewart-Richardson, 2014) was used to assess frequency of pornography use. Sample items include “Taken together, how many hours per week do you view...
sexually explicit/pornographic material (such as magazines, movies, and/or Internet site)” and “When using/viewing sexually explicit/pornographic materials (including online, magazines, DVD/videos/movies) in one sitting, I spend approximately X amount of time doing such.” Response options vary (e.g., none, once a month or less, 2 or 3 days a month, 1 or 2 days a week, 3 to 5 days a week, every day or almost every day). Mean full scale scores were calculated, with higher scores indicating higher levels of pornography use. Reported internal reliability was .88. Validity was supported by exploratory factor analyses and positive correlations with problematic pornography use and online sexual compulsivity (Szymanski & Stewart-Richardson, 2014). Alpha for the current sample was .83.

Facebook use. The Facebook Questionnaire (McCord, Rodebaugh, & Levinson, 2014) was used to measure Facebook use. This seven-item measure assesses the frequency with which individuals use the socially interactive features of Facebook (rather than characteristics that are not social, e.g., looking at others’ status updates). Sample items include “I send messages to friends” and “I post comments on friends’ status updates, pictures, etc.” Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert types scale from 1 (about once a month or less) to 7 (many times per day). Mean scale scores were calculated, with higher scores indicating higher levels of Facebook use. Reported internal reliability was .86. Validity was supported by correlations with measures of anxiety that were consistent with social compensation theory (McCord et al., 2014). Alpha for the current sample was .87.

Sexual objectification of women. Sexual objectification was measured using a slightly modified version of the Interpersonal Sexual Objectification Scale (ISOS; Kozee, Tylka, Augustus-Horvath, & Denchik, 2007), which consists of 15 items assessing body evaluation and undesired explicit sexual advances. Because the ISOS is traditionally used with women and asks about their experiences of being sexually objectified, we revised it slightly for use with men to ask them about how often they sexually objectify women. Participants were asked to answer each item by reporting how often they engaged in the stated behavior within the past year. Sample items (with modifications in italics) include “How often have you noticed yourself staring at a woman’s breasts when you are talking to them?” and “How often have you grabbed or pinched a woman’s private body areas against her will?” Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always). Mean subscale scores were calculated, with higher scores indicating greater levels of body evaluation and making unwanted sexual advances.

As reported by Kozee et al. (2007), reported internal reliabilities ranged from .78 to .91. Three week test–retest reliabilities were .89 for body evaluation and .80 for unwanted sexual advances. Validity of the ISOS was supported by exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses and positive correlations with measures of sexism and internalized objectification. Alphas for the current sample were .87 for body evaluation and .78 for unwanted sexual advances.

**Procedures**

Participants were recruited through a department of psychology’s online human research pool at a large United States Southeastern public university. After participants clicked a hypertext link provided to the psychology research pool, they were directed to an online Web based survey located on a secure firewall-protected server. After respondents went to the first page and read the informed consent online, they indicated consent to take the survey by clicking a button. Participants were told that the study would examine gender-related attitudes and experiences. They were told that the research survey would ask questions about feelings, thoughts, and experiences they might have had as a man, including relational attitudes toward women. Participants were told that the survey would also ask questions about sex, pornography use, and Facebook use and that it would take 45–60 min to complete. After clicking the agreement to participate button, respondents were then directed to the web page containing the survey. As an incentive to participate, all participants were given course credit for their undergraduate psychology class. Participants’ names were not linked to the survey responses to ensure anonymity.

To reduce response biases for our theorized model, the measure assessing men’s sexual objectification of women was assessed prior to and independent of measuring the predictor and moderator variables. This created “psychological separation” of the variables as a means of reducing common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Other than placing the objectification scale first in the survey, all other measures were randomly ordered in the survey.

**Results**

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among all continuous variables assessed in this study are shown in Table 1. Data met guidelines for univariate normality (i.e., skewness < 3.

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**Table 1**

**Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for All Study Variables**

| Variable                  | Possible range | M    | SD  | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   |
|---------------------------|----------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. Playboy                | 1–4            | 2.01 | .64 | —   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2. Power over women       | 1–4            | 1.94 | .50 | .24 | —   |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 3. Violence               | 1–4            | 2.83 | .52 | .07 | .13 | —   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 4. Abusive male peers     | 1–5            | 1.36 | .47 | .21 | .13 | .10 | —   |     |     |     |     |
| 5. Pornography use        | 0–4.86         | 1.38 | .81 | .27 | -.09| .02 | .15 | —   |     |     |     |
| 6. Facebook use           | 1–7            | 1.58 | .95 | .04 | .12 | -.06| .04 | .01 | —   |     |     |
| 8. Making unwanted sexual advances | 1–5 | 1.13 | .33 | .15 | .12 | -.07| .23 | .17 | .21 | .21 |     |

*p < .05.*
The subsequent analyses. As hypothesized, at the bivariate level, conformity to playboy, power over women, and violence masculine norms were significantly \(p < .05\) related to more sexual objectification of women via body evaluation. In addition, conformity to playboy and power over women norms were related to higher levels of making unwanted sexual advances toward women. Contrary to our hypothesis, endorsement of violence norms was not related to making unwanted sexual advances. As shown in Table 1, association with abusive male peers, pornography use, and Facebook use were each positively correlated with both body evaluation and making unwanted sexual advances.

To test the moderator hypotheses, two hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted; one predicted sexual objectification of women via body evaluation and the other unwanted sexual advances. Prior to the analyses, scores for measures of playboy, power over women, violence, association with abusive male peers, pornography use, and Facebook use were centered (i.e., put into deviation units by subtracting their sample means to produce revised sample means of zero). Examination of multicollinearity indexes for all analyses indicated that multicollinearity was not a problem (i.e., absolute value correlations < .90, variance inflation factors < 10; tolerance values > .20, and condition indexes < 30; Field, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Correlational analyses between the demographic variables of age and race (coded 1 = White; 2 = racial/ethnic minority) and the two outcome measures, body evaluation \((r = .00, p = .95; r = -.05, p = .34)\) and making unwanted sexual advances \((r = .05, p = .39; r = .08, p = .16)\), respectively, revealed that these associations were not significant. Therefore, we did not include them as covariates in the subsequent analyses.

Main effects (i.e., playboy, power over women, violence, association with abusive male peers, pornography use, and Facebook use) were entered at Step 1 and interaction effects (i.e., the interactions between the three dimensions of masculine norms and peer group, pornography use, and Facebook use) at Step 2. Evidence for a moderator effect is noted at Step 2 by a statistically significant increment in \(R^2\) and beta weight.

### Table 2

**Hierarchical Multiple Regression Models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Outcome: Body evaluation</th>
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<th></th>
<th>Outcome: Making unwanted sexual advances</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(t)</td>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>Adjusted (R^2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playboy</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>.311</td>
<td>.298</td>
<td>.311</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.67</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>3.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abusive male peers</td>
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<td>Pornography use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playboy (\times) Abusive Male Peers</td>
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<td>.332</td>
<td>.299</td>
<td>.020</td>
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<td>Power Over Women (\times) Abusive Male Peers</td>
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<td>.57</td>
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<td>Violence (\times) Abusive Male Peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power Over Women (\times) Pornography</td>
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<td>Violence (\times) Pornography</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playboy (\times) Facebook Use</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Over Women (\times) Facebook Use</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence (\times) Facebook Use</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* \(\beta\) and \(t\) reflect values from the final regression equation.

\(\ast p < .05.\)
male peers, \( B = .00, t = .06, p = .95 \), and at the mean, \( B = .06, t = 1.59, p = .11 \). As shown in Figure 2, the difference between the three groups occurred at the higher levels of conformity to power over women norms where men with high association with abusive male peers reported making more unwanted sexual advances toward women.

The interaction between violence norms and association with abusive male peers accounted for 2% beyond the variance accounted for the other variables in the model (\( \Delta R^2 = .022; \Delta F = 9.048; p = .003 \)). Follow-up simple slopes analysis revealed that violence norms predicted making unwanted sexual advances for men with high (\( SD = +1 \)) association with abusive male peers, \( B = -.13, t = -3.04, p = .003 \); whereas violence norms did not predict making unwanted sexual advances for men with low (\( SD = -1 \)) association with abusive male peers, \( B = .03, t = .76, p = .448 \), and at the mean, \( B = -.04, t = -1.17, p = .242 \). As shown in Figure 3, the difference between the three groups occurred at the lower levels of conformity to violence norms where men with high association with abusive male peers reported making more unwanted sexual advances toward women.

The interaction between playboy norms and pornography use accounted for 1% beyond the variance accounted for the other variables in the model (\( \Delta R^2 = .010; \Delta F = 4.058; p = .045 \)). However, follow-up simple slopes analysis revealed that playboy norms did not significantly predict making unwanted sexual advances for men with low (\( SD = -1 \); \( B = .07, t = 1.72, p = .086 \)), at the mean (\( B = .01, t = .522, p = .602 \)), nor high (\( SD = +1 \); \( B = -.04, t = -.98, p = .330 \)), levels of pornography use. Thus, we did not plot the interaction and did not make any further interpretation concerning these findings.

Discussion

Our study addressed recent calls (e.g., McDermott et al., 2015) to fill current gaps in the understanding of male perpetration of sexual aggression toward women. In particular, we examined adherence to traditional gender roles with less extreme forms of sexual aggression via unwanted body evaluation and making unwanted sexual advances toward women. We also extended previous research by examining how these traditional gender roles might interact with two known predictors of sexual aggression (male peer group association and pornography use) and one untested predictor (social media use via Facebook) in understanding men’s sexual objectification of women.

At the bivariate level, all our predictor variables (i.e., conformity to playboy, power over women, and violence norms, association with abusive male peers, pornography use, and Facebook use) were positively related to more body evaluation of women and all but one (i.e., conformity to violence norms) were positively related to making unwanted sexual advances toward women. However, when direct and hypothesized interactive effects were examined together, conformity to playboy and violence masculine norms, and higher levels of pornography use emerged as unique predictors of more body evaluation of women. Furthermore, pornography use, Facebook use, the interaction of playboy norms and association with abusive male peers, the interaction of power over women norms and association with abusive male peers, and the interaction of violence norms and association with abusive male peers uniquely predicted making unwanted sexual advances toward women. These findings are consistent with feminist perspectives on sexual objectification and sexual assault perpetration that
emphasize traditional, restrictive gender role socialization processes and experiences, as well as gender inequality and devaluation of women at micro (e.g., individual), meso (e.g., group and community), and macro (e.g., structural and systemic) levels (McDermott et al., 2015; Szymanski, Carr & Moffitt, 2011).

Our findings underscore the importance of traditional gender role socialization processes in men’s sexual objectification of women. Our results are consistent with previous research showing that approval of violence, impersonal and hypersexuality, and male dominance are related to more perpetration of extreme forms of sexual and physical violence against women (Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Sanday, 1981; Santana et al., 2006; Tharp et al., 2013). In addition, our findings revealed the important moderating role of association with abusive male peers in the link between endorsement of playboy, power over women, and violence masculine norms and making unwanted sexual advances. Consistent with Vega and Malamuth’s (2007) finding of an exacerbating role of pornography use in the hostile masculinity-violence perpetration link, our study found that at higher levels of both conformity to playboy and power over women norms, men with high association with abusive male peers were more likely to make more unwanted sexual advances toward women. This makes sense, as men who have or wish for multiple sex partners or who try to control women and treat them as subservient may try to evaluate and proposition many women through objectifying ways that have been modeled and reinforced as acceptable by their friends.

Our results also supported a moderating role of association with abusive male peers of women in the link between endorsement of violence norms and making unwanted sexual advances, with the difference between the high and low association with abusive male peers occurring at the lower levels of conformity to violence norms. Thus, it appears that association with abusive male peers may exacerbate the negative effects of conformity to violence norms, but only when beliefs about the acceptability of violence are low. It is possible that men who have low levels of conformity to violence norms may oppose violent action and behaviors on an individual scale but are more greatly influenced by peer groups that abuse women than men who score high on conformity to violence norms. Therefore, these men may not individually support the acceptability of violence toward others but when in a group engage in behaviors toward women that are demeaning or sexually violent. This link between violence norms and association with abusive male peer groups may warrant further exploration, although the sheer presence of other men may be enough to influence nonviolent men to engage in sexually aggressive acts to prove their masculinity within the group (Flood, 2008).

Previous research has demonstrated that women’s perceptions of their male partner’s pornography use may have negative effects on women’s psychological, relational, and sexual health (Stewart & Szymanski, 2012; Szymanski, Feltman, & Dunn, 2015; Tylka & VanDiest, 2014). Our study provides evidence that men’s pornography use is also harmful to women by promoting men’s perpetration of body evaluation and unwanted sexual advances toward women on the screen as well as in real life. As pornography is now readily available on the Internet, it has become more fragmented and categorized according to the viewer’s preference (Garlick, 2010). Because these pornographic images and videos are even more readily accessible and catered to the viewer, it is possible that the people in the videos are being viewed as less than human (Garlick, 2010) which may affect how men treat women in the real world. Our findings expand on previous research linking male pornography use with more sexual aggression toward women (Carr & VanDeusen, 2004; Vega & Malamuth, 2007; Ward et al., 2015; Wright & Tokunaga, 2016).

A novel finding of our study was that social media use via Facebook was uniquely linked to making unwanted sexual advances toward women. Therefore, men who used Facebook more frequently were more likely to “hit on” women who were not receptive to their advances. As stated above, digital images of women are more likely to be treated as less than human compared to digital images of men (Bernard et al., 2012). Men are also more likely to browse profile pictures on Facebook than women (Haferkamp et al., 2012). The combination of men being more likely to view pictures (as opposed to posting pictures or using interactive features) as well as the greater likelihood of women being viewed as objects online could contribute to men’s objectification of women through social media platforms. In addition, our results suggest it is possible that men who use Facebook frequently may be engaging in unwanted sexual advances toward women both online (via Facebook) and offline after viewing and objectifying the pictures of these women online.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations of this study include sampling method (convenience sample of college students recruited through their enrollment in psychology courses at a southern predominately White university), the use of self-report measures, and a correlational and cross-
sectional research design. Generalizability of our study is limited by our homogeneous sample. Thus, our theorized regression models need to be tested with men of color, middle aged men, and noncollege educated men to see if similar relations among variables exist. As is true with all self-report data, findings could be due to a general tendency to respond negatively or method variance, and participants may not have answered survey questions honestly.

In addition, the cross-sectional nature of our data precludes us from drawing conclusions about causal links between variables in our study, and alternative explanations are plausible. For example, engaging in sexually objectifying behaviors might increase men’s adherence to traditional masculine norms and viewing of pornography rather than vice versa. Thus, experimental or longitudinal designs are needed. Our study was also limited by a low alpha for scores on the association with abusive male peers’ measure. Future research is needed to explore adding more items to the association with abusive male peers’ measure to determine if it improves internal reliability estimates. Alternatively, investigations could evaluate reliability of scores on the three-item measure with test–retest reliability methods rather than internal consistency methods.

Our study focused on conformity to traditional, restrictive masculine norms; however, other models of masculine gender role constructs exist (e.g., gender role conflict and strain paradigms; O’Neil, 2008; Pleck, 1981, 1995) and should be included in future research to see if they add to our understanding of men’s perpetration of unwanted body evaluation, sexual advances, and rape of women. Also, the exploration of positive aspects of masculinity (such as being a protector; McDermott et al., 2015) is needed and may be related to less perpetration of treating women as sex objects. Because we focused on heterosexual men’s perpetration of sexual objectification of women, future research is needed examining sexual minority men’s perpetration of sexual objectification of other men, particularly in the gay community.

In addition, although it is important to explore the factors that affect men’s objectification of women, it would also be important to research the factors that influence men’s decisions not to engage in these kinds of behaviors (i.e., men who identify as feminist or promote equal rights for women). Lastly, although we used Facebook as a measurement of social media use, new data suggest that other social media platforms (especially Instagram, which has a sole focus on images) are growing in popularity (Bennett, 2013), and their effect on men’s sexual objectification of women should be explored. Finally, qualitative research would offer a rich, descriptive, and contextual understanding of masculinity, association with abusive male peers, pornography and social media use and men’s sexual objectification of women.

Implications

Our findings are also important in the context of working with men in clinical as well as other (e.g., educational) settings. The harmful effects of sexual objectification on women’s mental health have been well established and are important to understand when working with women (Szymanski et al., 2011). However, it is also important to examine the factors that make men more likely to sexually objectify women. In particular, it is important for heterosexual men who are in relationships with women (whether romantic or otherwise) to understand how their actions affect the women they care about, as well as the factors that can either alleviate or exacerbate engagement in these behaviors.

Our findings may be especially important in terms of psychoeducation for men surrounding their pornography and Facebook use as well as their choice of friend groups. Additionally, our study could further inform psychoeducation in a therapeutic context or interventions in other applied settings surrounding adherence to traditional masculine norms and the harm that adherence to these norms can cause men themselves (O’Neil, 2008) as well as women they care about. Therefore, findings from our study can be used to strengthen the evidence that such factors as engagement in traditional masculine attitudes and behaviors as well as Facebook and pornography use can have a negative effect on men’s psychological well-being, as well as their relationships with women. Taken together, our findings underscore the need to target traditional masculine norms, peer group associations, and pornography and Facebook use in interventions aimed at reducing men’s sexual objectification of women.

References


O’Neil, 2008; Pleck, 1981, 1995) and should be included in future

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