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More than a magazine: exploring the links between lads' mags, rape myth acceptance and rape proclivity

Abstract

Exposure to some magazines aimed at young male readers – *lads' mags* – has recently been associated with behaviors and attitudes that are derogatory towards women, including sexual violence. In the present study, a group of Spanish adult men were exposed to the covers of a lads' mag while a second group was exposed to the covers of a neutral magazine. Results showed that, compared to participants in the second group, participants who were exposed to covers of lads' mags who also showed high rape myth acceptance (RMA) and legitimized the consumption of such magazines reported higher rape proclivity in a hypothetical situation. These findings suggest the need to further explore the possible detrimental effects of some sexualized media that are widely accepted in many Western countries.

Key words: Sexualization of the media, lads' mags, rape myths, rape proclivity

Introduction

A number of studies have shown that young people tend to acquire and develop their knowledge of sexuality through information provided by peers, parents, schools, and the media (Brown, 2002; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Taylor, 2005). In particular, young people use the media (i.e. TV, the Internet, magazines) to obtain information and answer questions that parents or teachers are reluctant to provide or respond to (Brown, 2002). However, the media often delivers messages and images rife with heteronormative stereotypes and sexist contents (Brown, 2002; Escobar-Chaves, Tortolero, Markham, Low, Eitel, & Thickstun, 2005; Gill, 2008; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Taylor, 2005). A large body of research has analyzed sex-related images in the mainstream mass media (e.g. Gunasekera, Chapman & Campbell, 2005; Turner, 2011 Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008; Wright, 2009) highlighting the negative effects that it can have on the receivers. For example, the sexual victimization of women in pornography, non-pornographic films and music videos has been shown to increase attitudes supportive of sexual violence (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Malamuth, Hald & Koss, 2012).

Studies on depictions of sexuality within magazine editorial contents have been dominated by research on women's and adolescent girls' magazines (Ward, 2003; Wright, 2009), and when analyses of men's magazines have been conducted, they have tended to focus on publications typically defined as pornographic such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse* (e.g. Beggan & Allison, 2003). Such magazines are not equivalent in terms of content to a new genre of lifestyles magazines directed primarily at young men, "*Lads' Mags*", which whilst focusing on sex and featuring numerous photos of provocatively posed naked or scantily clad women, are not defined as pornographic

because they do not feature photos of women's genitalia like *Playboy* and *Penthouse* and are thus available for purchase by boys and young men with no age restrictions (Taylor, 2005). The present study, conducted in Spain, focuses on the role played in this context by *Lads' Mags*. In the United Kingdom and United States of America, several studies have analyzed the contents of such magazines (e.g. Krassas, Blauwkamp & Wesselink, 2003; Object, 2006; Taylor 2005) and have found prominent themes and images of women as sexual objects, stereotypical sexual roles, consistent privileging of a heteronormative male sexual drive discourse (Hollway, 1984) and widespread sexist attitudes (see Coy & Horvath, 2011 for a review).

Researchers have also begun to explore how reading lads' mags may impact on men's attitudes and behaviors towards women and how readers make sense of their content. For example, Horvath, Coy and Murray (2010) explored the relationships between the readership of lads' mags, men's attitudes to women and consumption of other forms of sexual consumerism (visiting sexualized dance clubs and paying for sex) while Horvath, Hegarty, Tayler and Mansfield (2012) focused on the overlaps between lads' mags messages and the words of convicted rapists. However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have explored experimentally whether exposure to the front covers of lads' mags can generate a greater tendency to display behaviors that are derogatory towards women, as has already been showed in the literature about exposure to pornography (Malamuth, Addison, & Koss, 2000; Malamuth et al., 2012; Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002).

The present research was conducted with the aim of learning more about this. More specifically, its objective was to verify whether exposing men to the front covers of lads' mags leads to an increase in what Bohner et al. (1998) have called 'self-reported rape proclivity', that is, men's judgments of their own hypothetical behavior in fictitious

situations of sexual violence. We also analyzed whether this hypothetical relationship was moderated by certain myths and prejudiced attitudes about sexual aggression (Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007; Megías, Romero-Sánchez, Durán, Moya, & Bohner, 2011). There is an ongoing highly charged public debate in the United Kingdom about whether lads' mags should be displayed in full view in shops where they are sold (Boffey, 2013; Cochrane, 2013; Hodgson, 2013). The current policy focus is on the potential harm caused to children and young people through exposure to images on the front covers. Feminist activism, while supporting a restriction on the visibility of the front covers, is also concerned more broadly with the impact of their sexist content (Coy, 2013). This study aims to add to the evidence base by determining if indeed exposure to the front covers of lads' mags leads to an increase in self-reported rape proclivity.

A brief history of lads' mags

Lads' mags are a magazine genre that appeared in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia in the early 1990s. Current examples of lads' mags are *Loaded*, *Nuts*, and *Zoo* in the United Kingdom, *Ralph*, *Zoo*, and *FHM* in Australia

Lads' mags are mainly aimed at 18-30 year old men and include a range of lifestyle contents (e.g., cars, sports, women, travel, politics, fashion, gadgets; Coy & Horvath, 2011). Despite some differences (see Horvath et al., 2010) the majority of lads' mags are highly (hetero) sexualized and focus mainly on the satisfaction or 'maximization' of traditionally masculine sex roles (Coy & Horvath, 2011). Their contents include numerous pictures of half-naked women in provocative and pseudo-lesbian erotic poses, depicting them as decorative/sex objects (Krassas et al., 2003; Object, 2006; Taylor, 2005). These magazines also promote the traditional discourse of

men's sexual 'needs', showing women as sexual 'prey' for men to conquer and consume (Coy & Horvath, 2011; Krassas et al., 2003) and subordinating women's sexual pleasure to men's (Krassas et al., 2003). Yet, lads' mags keep a distance from traditional pornographic magazines (e.g., *Playboy*, *Penthouse*), since their main content focus on other issues such as sports, cars, politics, opinion columns, travel, and so on (Coy & Horvath, 2011).

The circulation and sales of lads' mags show that their consumption is widespread in many countries; for example, *Maxim* reaches 2.5 million readers worldwide every year (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2011), *GQ* reaches 824,334 regular readers every month in the United States (Mags Direct, 2006), the American edition of *Esquire* sold 646,314 issues in the second semester of 2011 (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2012). However it is likely that these figures are an underestimate of the reach of the lads' mags as they all also have websites and many have apps for a wide range of mobile technology.

Although the lads' mags genre has not been defined as clearly in Spain as in other countries, Spanish editions of foreign lads' mags are sold (e.g., *FHM*, *GQ*, *DT*) and there are also Spanish magazines which share important features with lads' mags (e.g., *Interviú*). While there are similarities between the lads' mags mentioned, some titles also show differences. Specifically, *FHM* and *Maxim* contain a stronger focus on naked women and assessment of women's physical attributes whereas *GQ* and *DT* have more emphasis on fashion style and sport. In addition, *Interviú* is a weekly magazine with numerous images of half-naked women in provocative poses and articles covering politics, sport and culture and it has the highest circulation rate in its genre in Spain (Llano, 2012). According to recent figures *Interviú* reaches more than 57,500 regular readers every week (Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión, OJD, 2012). It was the first

magazine sold in Spain (in 1977) that included pictures of half-naked women in provocative and pornographic-style poses. *Interviú* has become the most popular lads' mag read by Spanish men (Llano, 2012). According to national media survey findings, in Spain the average age of consumers of lads' mags is about 30 years, with a range of 20-40 years (Encuesta General de Medios, EGM, 2011). Therefore, when we discuss lads' mags in the Spanish context, we refer in a broad sense to magazines that are either Spanish editions of foreign lads' mags or part of a very similar genre to that of lads' mags from other countries.

Lads' mags and sexist attitudes

Various studies on the contents of lads' mags have found that they are sexist and endorse traditional gender roles (Krassas et al., 2001; Taylor, 2005). For example, they encourage young men not to be honest with women and use alcohol to 'sexually conquer' them (Krassas et al., 2001, 2003); sometimes, lads' mags even depict women as victims of sexual coercion and male domination without making it explicit (Taylor, 2005). Considering this, we argue that it is likely these magazines may instill sexist practices and attitudes in men.

In many studies, researchers have empirically analyzed the relationship between consumption of pornography on one side and sexist attitudes and sexually aggressive behavior toward women on the other (e.g. Hald, Malamuth, & Yuen, 2010; Malamuth, et al., 2012; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Yet, few studies have explored this relationship when sexual contents are not as explicit or from magazines which are widely available for sale with no restrictions, such as in lads' mags. Recently, Horvath et al., (2012) conducted two studies with young people from England and Wales to explore the reactions of young people to derogatory quotes about women drawn from lads' mags and from interviews with convicted rapists. Some examples of these statements are:

“You know girls in general are all right. But some of them are bitches...The bitches are the type that...need to have it stuffed to them hard and heavy” (Quote sourced from convicted rapist); “I think girls are like plasticine, if you warm them up you can do anything you want with them” (Quote sourced from lads’ mags).

In Study 1, Horvath et al., (2012) found that participants’ identification with such quotes was positively correlated with their hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and rape myth acceptance scores. Moreover, participants identified with derogatory quotes about women when they were attributed to lads’ mags, regardless of whether they had actually been drawn from such magazines or from interviews with rapists. In Study 2, the authors found that neither young men nor young women were able to identify correctly whether the source of the quotes was lads’ mags or rapists. Therefore, as indicated by Horvath et al. (2012), although the sexist content was similar in both cases, young people were more inclined to accept and normalize sexist remarks when they thought they came from socially accepted media (lads’ mags).

Within this body research, only a few studies have explored the relationship between contents of lads’ mags and sexist attitudes or sexually aggressive behavior toward women. Moreover, these studies have been mainly focused in analyzing the editorial content present in lad’s mags, putting on the backburner the potential effects that sexualized images have on their targets. However, a handful of experimental studies have shown that viewing non-pornographic sexual images from magazines can lead to greater endorsement of rape-supportive attitudes (Lanis & Covell, 1995; MacKay & Covell, 1997). Drawing on previous research which found media (not lads’ mags specifically) has a strong influence on the generation, activation, and modification of mental schema (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 2002; Huesmann, 1997, 1998; Ward, 2003), Taylor (2005) argues that the images themselves may function to activate

stereotypes and beliefs about women as sex objects and these stereotypes can influence, in turn, how readers understand what they read.

In this context, the main aim of this research was to explore empirically whether exposure to images from lads' mags increases young men's prejudiced attitudes towards women and their rape proclivity.

First, we analyzed the relationship between self-reported readership of lads' mags and participants' acceptance of myths and prejudices about sexual aggression. Second, we studied experimentally whether, compared to exposure to the front covers of neutral magazines, exposure to the front covers of lads' mags led to any appreciable changes in men's self-reported judgments of their hypothetical behavior in fictitious situations of sexual violence (rape proclivity) (Bohner et al., 1998). Third, we analyzed whether participants' level of acceptance of myths about rape moderated the expected relationship between exposure to lads' mags and rape proclivity. Finally, we also analyzed the possible moderating role of participants' perceived legitimacy of lads' mags in this relationship (Horvath et al., 2012).

We expected to find a positive and significant relationship between rape myth acceptance (RMA) and readership of lads' mags (*Hypothesis 1*). We also predicted that exposure to images of a lads' mag (*Interviú*) compared to exposure to a neutral magazine (*Muy Interesante*) would increase men's self-reported rape proclivity (*Hypothesis 2*). Finally, in accordance with the literature, we also predicted that this relationship would be moderated both by participants' rape myth acceptance and by their perceived legitimacy of lads' mags. Thus, we expected to find that exposure to *Interviú* (vs. *Muy Interesante*) particularly influenced the self-reported proclivity of participants with high scores in rape myth acceptance and the measure of perceived legitimacy of lads' mags (*Hypothesis 3*).

Method

Participants

One hundred and twenty five male students from the University of Granada (Spain) accepted voluntary participation in this study. The final sample, by only including heterosexual participants, was composed of 117 students. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 29 years ($M = 22.54$, $SD = 2.63$).

Instruments

Participants completed a questionnaire that included the following scales and measures:

Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression Scale (AMMSA; Gerger et al., 2007 – Spanish version by Megías, Romero-Sánchez, Durán, Moya, & Bohner, 2011). The AMMSA scale is a self-report measure composed of 30 items and designed to measure ‘modern’ myths about sexual violence more subtly than ‘traditional’ RMA measures (e.g., Burt, 1980; Costin, 1985; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). Based on the study conducted by Eyssel, Bohner, and Siebler (2006), we chose to use a short 16-item version of the AMMSA scale, whose psychometric properties are similar to those of the full version. Responses are provided on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). A few examples of items included in the scale are: ‘*Women often accuse their husbands of marital rape just to retaliate for a failed relationship*’ and ‘*When a woman starts a relationship with a man, she must be aware that the man will assert his right to have sex*’. This scale showed adequate internal consistency, $\alpha = .85$, similarly to that obtained in previous studies with the full and the short version (Megías et al., 2011; Romero-Sánchez, Megías & Krahé, 2012). Each participant’s mean across the 30 items was defined as their AMMSA score.

Self-report measure of rape proclivity. We measured rape proclivity using the instrument developed by Bohner et al. (1998), composed of five fictitious scenarios that describe various situations that end in rape (see an example in “Appendix A”). Participants were asked to imagine that they were in the same position as the man in the scenario and to answer three questions for each scenario: ‘*How sexually aroused would you have felt in this situation?*’, ‘*Would you have behaved like this in this situation?*’, and ‘*How much would you have enjoyed getting your way in this situation?*’ The first question was answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not sexually aroused*) to 5 (*very much sexually aroused*). Following Bohner et al. (1998), this item was treated as a distractor item. The other two questions are aimed at obtaining participants’ self-reported level of rape proclivity. This is done by obtaining the so-called rape proclivity index, which is the mean score of the answers to these questions in the five scenarios in a 5-point Likert ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). This measure showed adequate internal consistency, $\alpha = .83$.

Perceived legitimacy of lads’ mags. Based on the measure used by Horvath et al. (2012), participants indicated their agreement or disagreement with each of the four items of the Spanish version of this instrument, aimed at measuring the degree of legitimacy or acceptance of lads’ mags. The response scale ranged from 0 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). A few examples of items included were ‘*Magazines such as Interviú, FHM, GQ, Esquire...are a positive way of learning about sexual relationships*’ and ‘*Magazines such as Interviú, FHM, GQ, Esquire... educate young men accurately on society’s gender roles*’. This scale showed adequate internal consistency, $\alpha = .77$, similar to the original scale ($\alpha = .86$) (Horvath et al., 2012). Each participant’s mean of the 4 items was defined as perceived legitimacy of lads’ mags score.

Reading frequency of lads' mags. We included an item to determine participants' reading frequency: 'How often do you read or have you read magazines such as *FHM*, *Interviú*, *GQ*, *Esquire* or *DT* online or in printed format?' Responses were provided on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*every week*).

Experimental manipulation. We used eight color covers of two magazines published in Spain and available nationally. We decided to show only magazine covers because in them it is possible to see the general and the most representative content included in the magazine; furthermore it is only the covers that can be seen when they are displayed for purchase. For the lads' mags condition, we chose four different covers of *Interviú* because, among the lads' mags sold in Spain, it has the highest circulation, according to the official statistics of the OJD (2011, also see Table 1). Each cover showed a half-naked woman, as do all the weekly issues of the magazine. For the neutral condition, we also selected four different covers of the popular science magazine *Muy Interesante*, also based on the figures of the OJD (2011), according to which it is the magazine with the highest circulation in Spain in its category. Each cover showed different images according to the main subject of its monthly issue (e.g. several persons around a table during a séance).

The experimental manipulation involved exposing participants to the various covers selected. Depending on the condition they were assigned to, participants were shown either the four covers of *Interviú* (lads' mags condition) or the four covers of *Muy Interesante* (neutral condition). Specifically, 60 participants were assigned to lads' mags condition and 58 were in control condition.

Manipulation checks. After being exposed to the four magazine covers (according to the assigned condition), participants responded to an item in which they were asked which magazine the covers came from – either *Interviú* or *Muy Interesante*.

Demographic data. Finally, we included several additional questions to obtain a demographic data on participants (sex, age, citizenship, sexual orientation, and job status).

Design and procedure

The variable ‘type of magazine’ (*Interviú* vs. *Muy Interesante*) was experimentally manipulated between groups. We also measured two variables of individual differences: Rape myth acceptance and perceived legitimacy of lads’ mags.

We used a convenience sampling design, inviting any students in the various libraries of the University of Granada to participate voluntarily in a study on the opinions and attitudes of college students on various issues. Instructions guaranteed that responses would be anonymous and confidential and only used for research purposes. Participants who agreed to cooperate were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions: The lads’ mags condition (*Interviú*) or the neutral condition (*Muy Interesante*). Each of the questionnaires handed to participants included – in this order – the instructions, the Spanish short version of the AMMSA scale, the experimental manipulation, the manipulation check item, the self-report measure of rape proclivity, a question on participants’ reading habits regarding lads’ mags, the measure of perceived legitimacy of lads’ mags, and finally the items assessing demographic data. The questionnaire was collected once participants had responded to all the questions. Participants were thanked for their cooperation and debriefed on the aims of the study and the way of accessing the final results.

Results

Preliminary analyses

First, we conducted a principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation to determine the factor structure of the four-item measure of the *Perceived Legitimacy of Lads' Mags* scale. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was found to be .73 ('adequate' according to Field, 2009). Results of Bartlett's test of sphericity, $\chi^2(6) = 77.73, p < .001$, confirmed that the correlation matrix was also appropriate for analysis. The PCA revealed one single factor with an eigenvalue of 2.41 that explained 60.38% of the variance. Therefore, we calculated the mean score of the four items as a measure of legitimacy of lads' mags according to each participant.

Correlations among variables

Table 1 shows the correlations among participants' scores on the AMMSA scale and the measures of perceived legitimacy of lads' mags, reading frequency of lads' mags, and self-reported rape proclivity. It also contains the means and SDs for the total sample and for control condition and experimental condition separately. As expected, significant correlations were found among the variables. The overall AMMSA score was positively and significantly correlated with reading frequency of lads' mags (*Hypothesis 1*), $r(118) = .182, p = .05$, perceived legitimacy of lads' mags, $r(114) = .354, p = .001$, and self-reported rape proclivity, $r(118) = .435, p = .001$. The measure of perceived legitimacy of lads' mags was positively and significantly correlated with reading frequency of lads' mags and self-reported rape proclivity, $r_s(114) = .455$ and $.382$ respectively ($ps < .001$). However, the correlation between reading frequency of lads' mags and self-reported rape proclivity was not significant, $r(118) = .186, p = .118$.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables

	Total (<i>SD</i>)	Control Condition (<i>SD</i>)	Experimental Condition (<i>SD</i>)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) AMMSA	3.22 (1.03)	3.12 (1.08)	3.33 (.99)	.354 (**)	.182 (*)	.435(**)
(2) Lads' mags legitimacy	.93 (.94)	.91 (.95)	.96 (.94)	---	.455 (**)	.382 (**)
(3) Reading frequency	1.58 (.73)	1.55 (.75)	1.62 (.71)		---	.123
(4) Rape proclivity	1.71 (.80)	1.61 (.64)	1.81 (.92)			---

Reading frequency of lads' mags

Responses showed that 50% (n = 59) of participants interviewed reported reading a magazine included in the list of lads' mags at least once, although 54 of them reported reading lads' mags occasionally.

Manipulation check

All participants responded correctly to the question about which magazine the covers came from (*Interviú* or *Muy Interesante*).

Main analyses

We conducted regression analysis to verify whether participants exposed to a lads' mag (*Interviú*) vs. a general magazine (*Muy interesante*) exhibited higher scores in self-reported rape proclivity. We also included the variables of individual differences, RMA, and perceived legitimacy of lads' mags as possible moderating variables of this

relationship. These analyses were conducted via PROCESS (Model 3), a SPSS macro by Hayes (2013). Collinearity was not a problem in these analyses (Tolerances $\geq .87$, VIFs ≤ 1.15).

Exposure to the magazine (lads' mag vs general) was the independent variable (X), RMA (M) the primary moderator, perceived legitimacy of lads' mags (W) the secondary moderator, and self-reported rape proclivity, the outcome variable (Y). As shown in Table 2, exposure to the lads' mag was not associated to higher scores in self-reported rape proclivity than exposure to the general magazine; so, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. However, it was found a two-way interaction between type of magazine exposure and perceived legitimacy of lads' mags; according to the analyses, exposure to the lads' mag was associated to higher self-reported rape proclivity only in participants with high scores in legitimacy of lads' mag, $b = .66$, $t(114) = 3.52$, $p < .001$ (CI 95% = .2902, 1.0335), but not in those with low scores, $b = -.27$, $t(114) = -1.44$, $p = .15$ (CI 95% = -.6397, 1.005). However, these effects and related two-way interaction must be interpreted in term of a significant three-way Magazine x RMA x Perceived legitimacy of lads' mag, $b = .25$, $t(114) = 2.04$, $p < .05$ (CI 95% = .0076, .4909). As shown in Figure 2 (simple slopes analyses), the relationship between lads' mag exposure and rape proclivity differed on different levels for rape myth acceptance and lads' mags legitimacy. Specifically, the analysis revealed, as expected according to Hypothesis 3, that only in participants high in RMA and legitimacy, exposure to lads' mags vs neutral mags was associated with higher scores in rape proclivity, $b = .63$, $t(114) = 3.15$, $p < .01$. (CI 95% = .2363, 1.033). Rape proclivity scores were not affected by exposure to lads' mags neither in participants low in RMA and high in perceived legitimacy, $b = .27$, $t(114) = .88$, $p = .37$ (CI 95% = -.3444, .9012) nor in participants low in RMA and low in perceived legitimacy, $b = -.02$, $t(114) = -.08$, $p = .92$ (CI 95% = -.4558, .4163).

However, in participants high in RMA and low in perceived legitimacy, exposure to lads' mags was associated to lower scores in rape proclivity, $b = -.62$, $t(114) = -2.22$, $p < .05$ (CI 95% = -1.1715, -.0672).

Table 2. Rape proclivity self-reported as a function of type of magazine, RMA and legitimacy of lads' mags.

		Rape Proclivity		
		Coeff	SE	<i>t</i>
Intercept	i_1	1.68***	.09	17.86
Magazine (X')	b_1	.06	.13	.49
RMA (M')	b_2	.28**	.09	3.19
Legitimacy lads' mags (W)	b_3	-.03	.10	-.37
Magazine x RMA ($X'M'$)	b_4	-.06	.12	-.49
Magazine X Legitimacy lads' mags ($X'W'$)	b_5	.40**	.14	2.76
RMA x Legitimacy lads' mags ($M'W'$)	b_6	-.07	.09	-.71
Magazine x RMA x Legitimacy lads' mags ($X'M'W$)	b_7	.25*	.12	2.04
		$R^2 = .38$		
		$F(7,106) = 9.408, p < .001$		

Type of magazine: 0 =Muy Intersante; 1 = Interviú

Note. Only significant results are reported. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

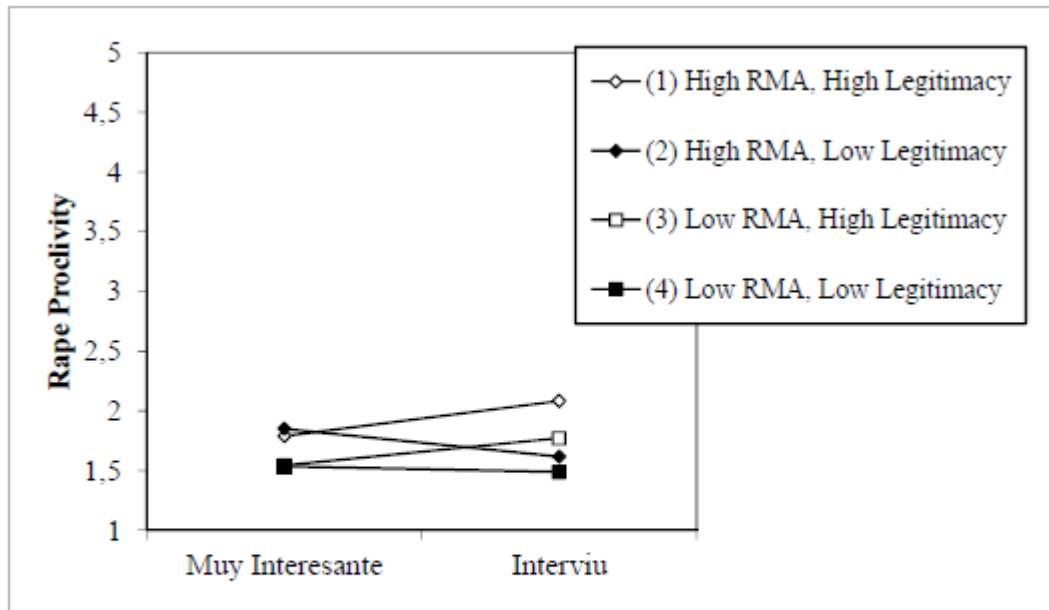


Figure 1. Rape proclivity as a function of level of RMA and scores in perceived legitimacy of lads' mags in participants exposed to a general magazine (*Muy Interesante*) vs. a lads' mags (*Interviu*).

Jointly, these results confirmed the predictions of Hypothesis 3 but did not provide empirical support to the predictions of Hypothesis 2. Mere exposure to the erotic contents of *Interviú* did not affect participants' self-reported rape proclivity (Hypothesis 2); instead, participants' rape proclivity scores also depended on their level of RMA and perceived legitimacy of lads' mags. In accordance with previous studies, higher RMA was associated with higher self-reported rape proclivity. Yet, RMA not only had main effects on men's self-reported rape proclivity but also interacted with the type of magazine and perceived legitimacy of lads' mags. More specifically, when exposed to *Interviú*, participants with higher RMA and higher perceived legitimacy of lads' mags reported higher rape proclivity (Hypothesis 3).

Discussion

The present research broadly contributes to the debate about the influence of women's sexualization in the media on the attitudes and behavioral tendencies of men (Horvath et al., 2012; Krassas et al., 2003; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Taylor, 2005, 2006). Data obtained showed a significant relationship (in the expected direction) between consumption of lads' mags and rape myth acceptance. In addition, this research made it possible to take a step further and clarify the nature of this relationship. Using experimental methodology, we found that for men with higher rape myth acceptance and perceived legitimacy of lads' mags, participants reported higher rape scores in self-reported proclivity after being exposed to several covers of *Interviú* than participants who were exposed to the covers of a well-known popular science magazine.

Various studies have already shown that the contents of lads' mags promote an image of male sexuality focused on sexual consumption without affective ties (Attwood, 2005; Coy & Horvath, 2011), with a purely hedonistic purpose; they advocate an image of women as mere sex objects (Krassas et al., 2001). Moreover, Taylor (2005) found that most of the articles about sex in these magazines are accompanied by images of women depicted suggestively or partially clothed. The impact of these images on men's attitudes has been investigated by researchers such as Lanis and Covell (1995) and MacKay and Covell (1997) who found that exposure to images of women that were sexual but non-pornographic elevated rape myth acceptance in participants compared to exposure to non-sexualized images.

However, no studies so far have explored the possible effects of exposure to images presented in lads' mags on readers' tendency to engage in certain sexual behaviors. While this study also does not explore this directly, its results show that

exposure to front covers of lads' mags influence some participants' self-reported rape proclivity. However, it is necessary to further explore certain issues. First, as we mentioned, mere exposure to the front covers of lads' mags did not generate sexually aggressive behavioral tendencies. For such tendencies to become activated, it may be the case that participants must already have a series of beliefs or schemas that legitimize such contents. Second, these results cannot be used to infer a causal relationship between exposure to and/or consumption of lads' mags among such men and performance of aggressive behaviors; this study only refers to an increase in participant's self-reported tendency to engage in aggressive behaviors. And, moreover, because this relationship is based on cross-sectional data it is impossible to say whether people who hold rape myths seek out and confirm those myths through lads' mags or whether reading lad's mags is a significant source of those myths. It is also not possible to say anything about what influences longer term repeated exposure to the covers and contents of lads' mags may have.

Our findings highlight some of the possible negative consequences of these magazines on people's behavior. Previous research has found evidence for the strong influence of the media on the generation, activation, and modification of mental schema (Gerbner et al., 2002; Huesmann, 1997, 1998; Ward, 2003), building on this we refer to Ford and Ferguson's (2004) prejudiced norm theory and suggest that the widespread display and societal acceptance of lads' mags (Coy & Horvath, 2010, Taylor, 2005) creates an environment in which degrading women is acceptable and the norm. To interpret these findings further it is also helpful to draw on priming theory (Jo & Berkowitz, 1994) as our findings can be interpreted to suggest that for men who are accepting of rape myths and who think lads' mags are a legitimate source of information being exposed to their fronts covers may 'prime' or 'activate' related concepts, such as

sexism and derogatory beliefs about women. Because these beliefs had been made more accessible when they were then asked about how they would behave in sexual assault situations they may have appraised them in the context of the primed and accessible schema which will have made rape seem more acceptable and appropriate. Other alternative explanations for these findings might be that exposure to the lads' mag cover led to greater willingness to report rape proclivity, not as an activation of any schemas but perhaps making the men more comfortable about disclosing and hence more honest in their reporting.

These findings are concerning as magazines have been found to be the favored source of sexual information for young people (Papadopoulos, 2010; Walsh & Ward, 2010). Given that the exposure to covers of lads' mags may make schemas related with rape more accessible, the results of the present research suggest that we need to analyze their contents (quotes, images, pictures, etc) more critically, as they do not seem to be as 'ironic' or 'trivial' as their editors claim (for further discussion see Benwell, 2003, 2004; Jackson, Stevenson, & Brooks, 2001; McKay, Mikosza, & Hutchins, 2005). Future research needs to identify whether these findings are replicable in other countries and with other forms of sexualized media which is normalized and not widely considered to be pornographic, such as adverts and music videos.

Despite these contributions, the present research also has its limitations. First, social desirability may have influenced participants' responses. That is, even though the aim of the research was not revealed until the end of the study, participants may have perceived that it explored sexist contents and may have responded according to what is socially desirable. In that case, their responses would not respond to an activation of sexist schemas and myths but rather to a reevaluation of such schemas and myths. Another of the limitations of the study could be the choice of *Interviú* as an example of

a lads' mags. This magazine was selected as stimulus in our study because it is the most widely known and popular lads' mag in Spain, and although *Interviú* includes similar contents and its front covers are identical in style to other typical lads' mags (e.g. *FHM*, *GQ*, and *Esquire*), it appears to contain significantly more serious journalism on political issues than other typical lads mags. As a result it is possible that *Interviú* may not be entirely typical of this category, as it has been described in the literature over the past few years. Although, given we were only using the front cover of the magazine which does conform to the norms of lads' mags we think that it is typical enough to be categorized in this genre.

In short, despite the abovementioned limitations, we consider that our findings contribute to the debate about the possible negative consequences associated with simply viewing the front covers of lads' mags for some men, when considered alongside their perceptions of their legitimacy and rape myth acceptance. In turn our findings add empirical evidence to the arguments for a need to establish programs aimed at providing sexual education and modifying stereotypes by showing young people the positive consequences of conducting healthy and respectful sexual practices, far from the stereotyped sexist contents of lads' mags.

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Appendix A

Example of scenario included in self-report measure of rape proclivity

You are at a party and meet a good-looking and interesting woman. You chat, dance together and flirt. After the party you give her a lift home in your car, and she invites you in. You both sit down on the floor, then your new friend kisses you and starts to fondle you. That's absolutely fine by you, and now you want more. When you start to undress her in order to sleep with her, she suddenly pushes you off and says she wants to stop now. Her resistance only turns you on more, and, using some force, you press her down to the floor and then penetrate her.