

# EFFECTS OF WAIST-TO-HIP RATIO ON SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

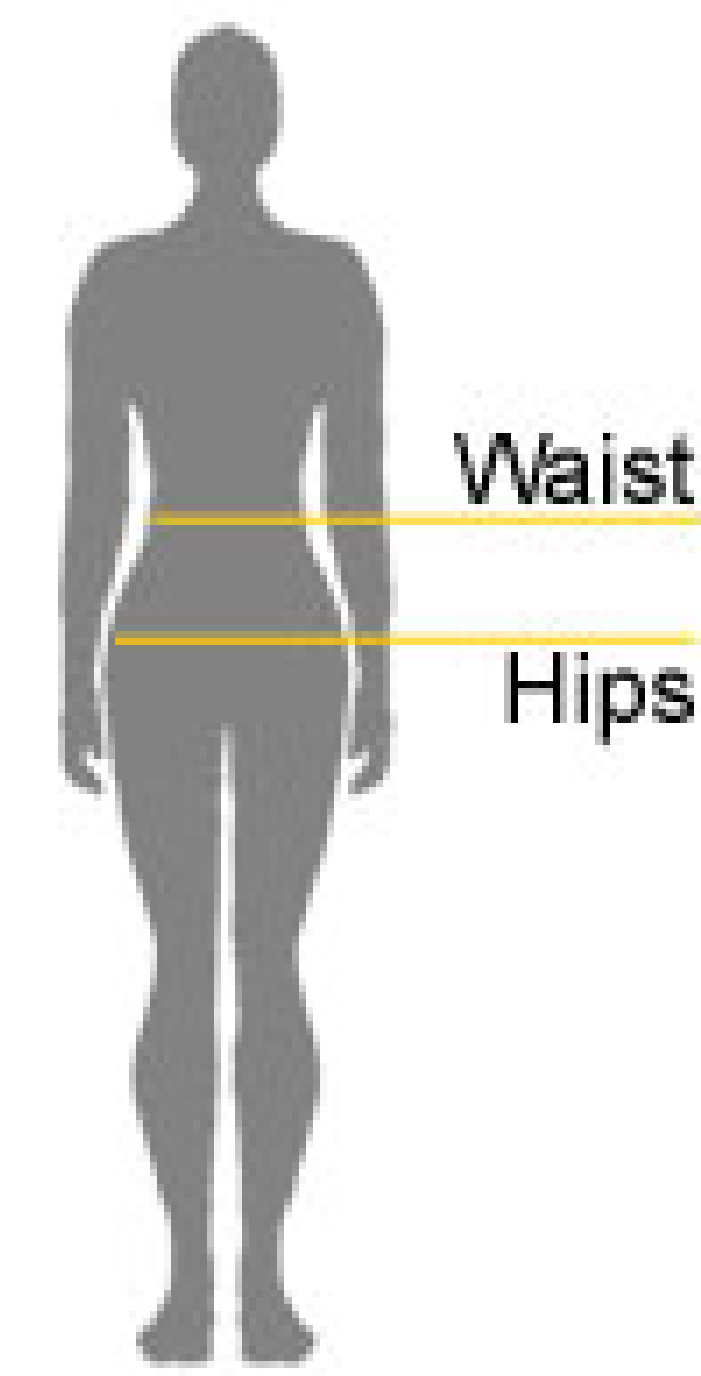
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## BACKGROUND

Existing work on waist-to-hip ratio (WHR)

Women with relatively low WHRs:

- are **more healthy** (e.g., lower rates of diabetes, heart disease; Bjorntorp, 1988, 1991b)
- appear **more youthful** (Kaye, et al., 1990)
- have greater **reproductive success and fertility** (Barber, 1995; Kaye, et al., 1990)
- are rated as **more attractive** (e.g., Furnham et al., 2001, Singh & Luis, 1995).
- Are evaluated as **more sexually desirable** (Barber, 1995)



In sum, women with relatively lower WHRs possess **greater mate quality** relatively to women with higher WHRs

## STUDY 1 - PURPOSE

We aimed to investigate whether the previously documented effects of WHR on mate quality would translate into differences in expectations and treatment of women based on WHR

**Main Effect Hypothesis:** Specifically, because women with relatively **lower WHRs** possess greater mate quality and are evaluated as more sexually desirable we predicted they would **more sexually objectified**

**Interaction Hypothesis:** We also investigated whether participant gender and WHR interacted to predict sexual objectification ratings

- Because mate quality is relevant to reproduction these **effects of WHR on sexual objectification may be stronger for men than women**

## STUDY 1 - METHOD

### Participants:

- Recruited 75 online participants (49.3% female)

### Procedure:

- Viewed 6 BMI matched (21) targets with varying WHR from .6 to .85 (Kościński, 2014)



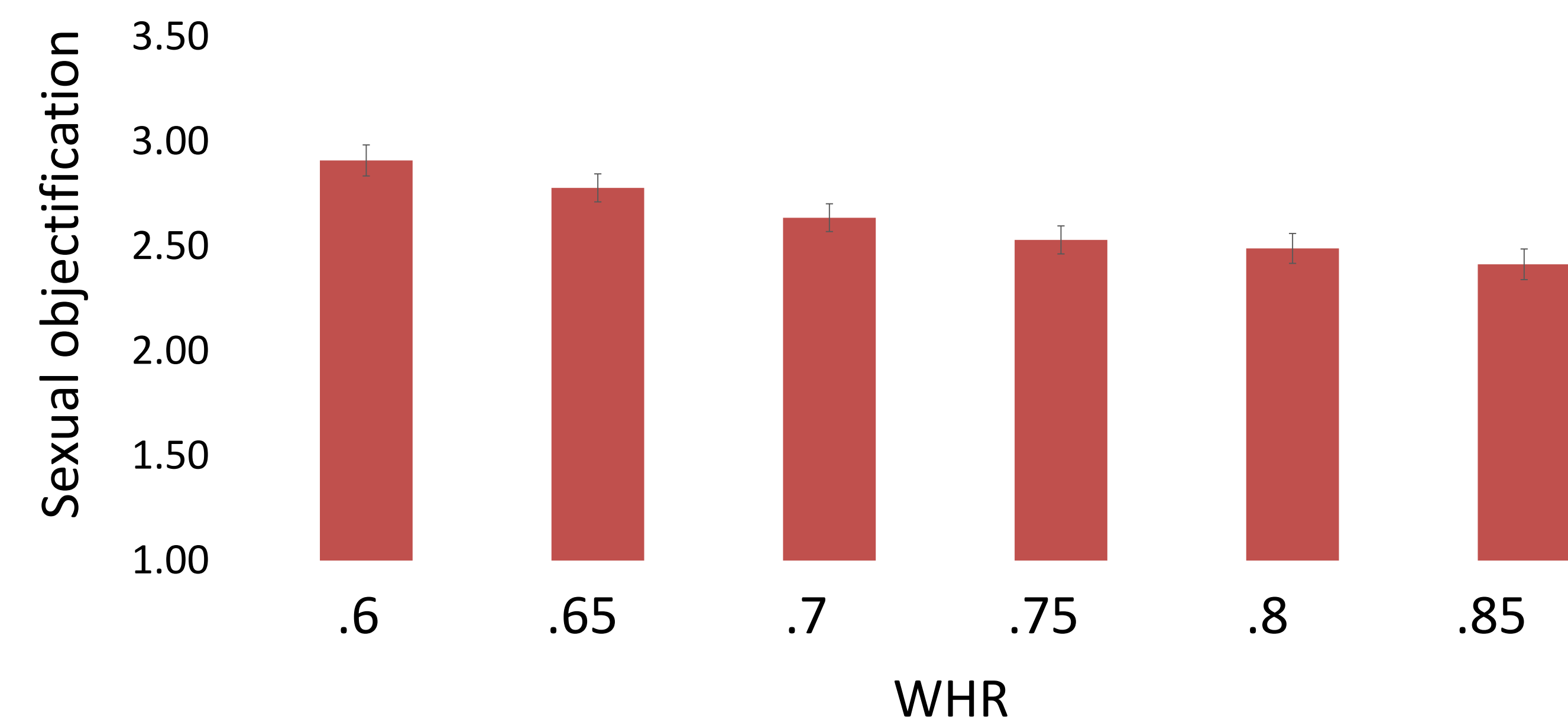
.60 .65 .70 .75 .80 .85

- Participants evaluated each target on 15 questions assessing interpersonal sexual objectification ( $\alpha = .96$ ; adapted from Kozee, Tylka, & Augustus-Horvath, 2006)
  - Body evaluation
  - Unwanted sexual advances

## STUDY 1 - RESULTS

6 (WHR) x 2 (Participant gender) mixed model ANOVA on sexual objectification

- WHR had a significant effect on ratings of sexual objectification,  $F(5,365)=23.05$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.24$
- Not qualified by an interaction with participant gender  $F(5, 365)=.93$ ,  $p=.46$ ,  $\eta^2=.01$ 
  - Because In Study 1 we are assessing general perceptions of the target (not the participants own feelings about the target) men and women might evaluate targets similarly.



## STUDY 2 - PURPOSE

If low WHR targets are seen as both more sexually desirable and more likely to be subjected to unwanted sexual advances – Do these evaluations translate into differential treatment following a reported sexual assault?

**Main Effect Hypothesis:** Because women with relatively **higher WHRs** are perceived as less desirable and less likely to be victims of sexual harassment this could translate into **their claims being taken less seriously or even victim blame following a reported sexual assault**

**Interaction Hypothesis:** We also investigated whether participant gender interacted with WHR to predict responses to sexual assault claims

- Because mate quality is relevant to reproduction the **effects of WHR on evaluations of purported sexual assault may be stronger for men than women**

## STUDY 2 - METHOD

### Participants:

- Recruited 387 online participants
- Excluded participants
  - Failed the attention check
  - Completed the study in under 231.60 seconds (1 SD below mean)
  - Did not disclose their gender
- 335 usable participants (57% female)

### Procedure:

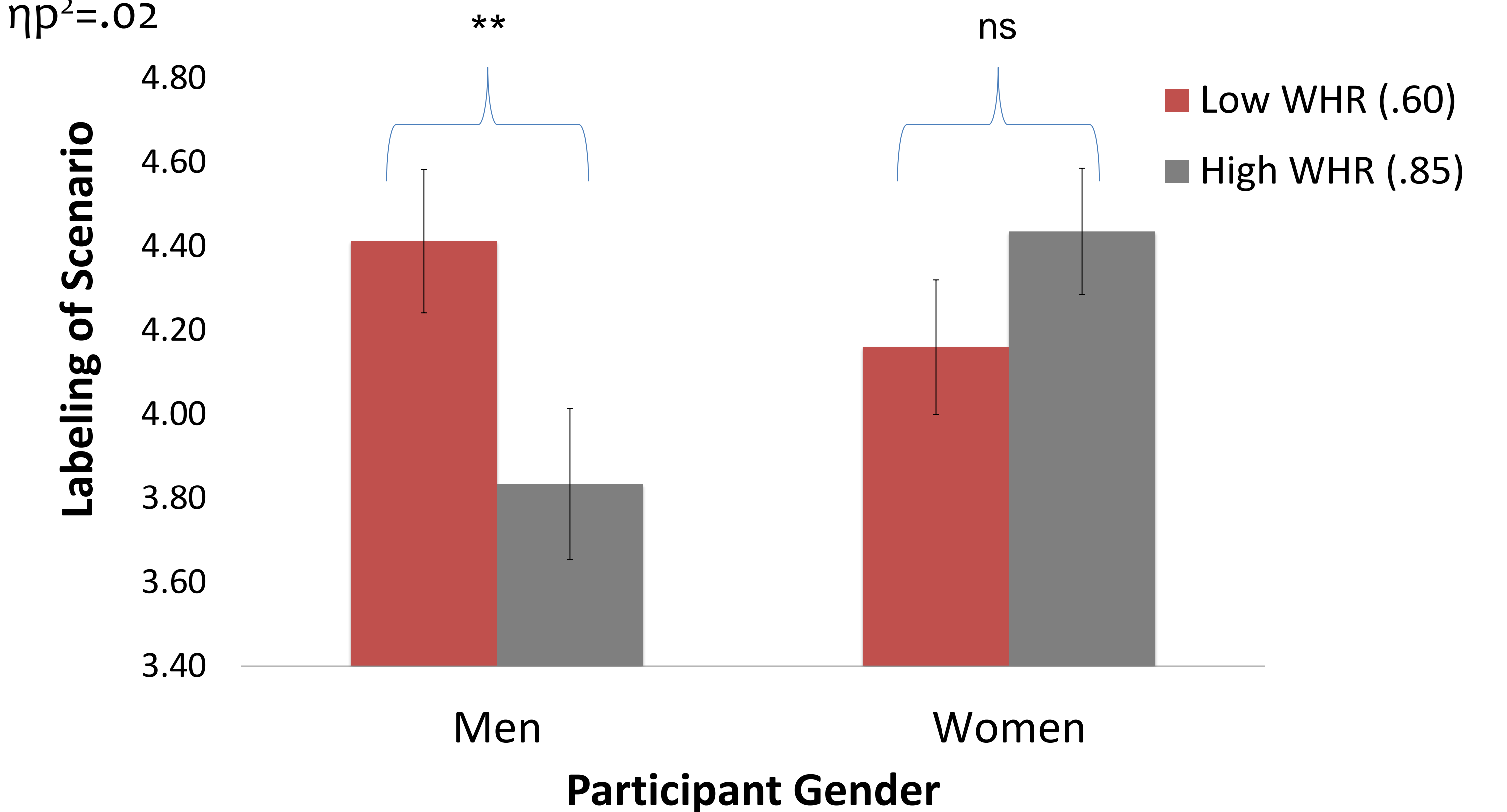
- Viewed image of either low (.60) or high (.85) WHR target from Study 1
- Read vignette about a reported sexual assault from perspectives of victim and perpetrator (adapted from Piatak, 2015)
- Labeled the incident ( $\alpha = .95$ ; Koss & Gidycz, 1985; Messman-Moore, et al., 2010)
  - Rape
  - Sexual Assault
  - Non-Consensual
- Assessment of Victim Blaming ( $\alpha = .90$ ; adapted from Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003)
- Completed Updated Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale ( $\alpha = .92$ ; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999; McMahan & Farmer, 2011)

## STUDY 2 - RESULTS

All analyses reported control for individual differences in rape myth acceptance

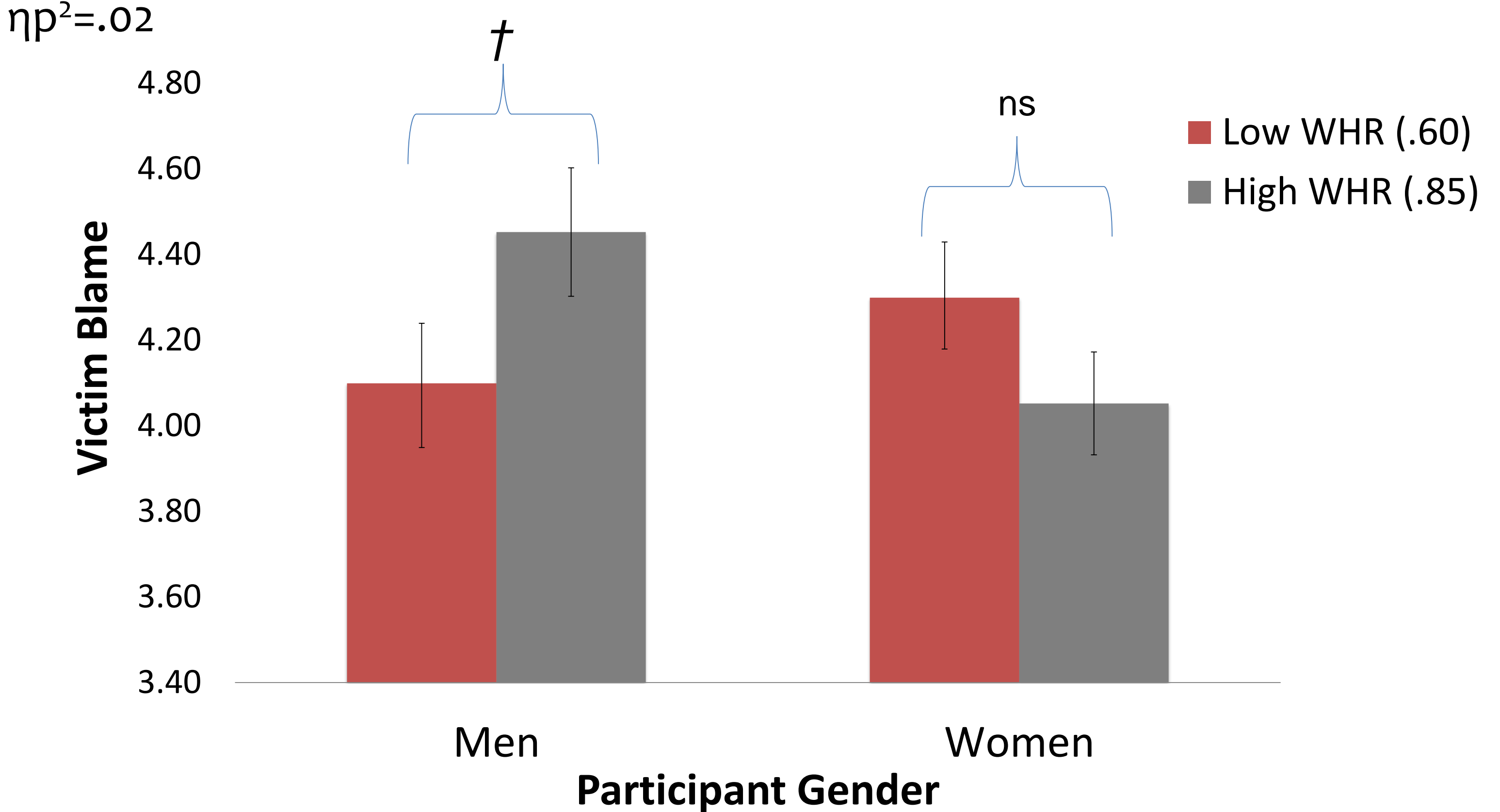
Labeling the Event:

- 2 (WHR Condition) x 2 (Participant Gender) between subjects ANOVA
- No main effect of WHR,  $F(1,330)=.85$ ,  $p=.357$ ,  $\eta^2=.00$
- Interaction of condition and participant gender,  $F(1,330)=6.74$ ,  $p=.010$ ,  $\eta^2=.02$



Blaming the victim:

- 2 (WHR Condition) x 2 (Participant Gender) between subjects ANOVA on blaming the victim
- No main effect of WHR,  $F(1,330)=.16$ ,  $p=.69$ ,  $\eta^2=.00$
- Interaction of condition and participant gender,  $F(1,330)=5.04$ ,  $p=.025$ ,  $\eta^2=.02$



## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Overview

- As WHR decreases perceptions of sexual objectification increase
- Men were less likely to take claims of assault seriously and blamed the victim more when victims had a relatively higher WHR; WHR affected the judgments of women less – and descriptively in the opposite direction

Implications

- Disclosures of sexual assault
  - Reactions to disclosures of sexual assaults have serious psychological consequences for the victim (e.g., PTSD symptomology; Ullman & Peter-Hagene, 2016)
- Court cases involving of sexual assault
  - Decisions of guilt in sexual assault cases may be influenced by victims body

### CONTACT

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