



EXPOSing Men's Gender Role Attitudes as Porn Superfans¹

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Much contemporary debate about pornography centers on its role in portraying and perpetuating gender inequality. This article compares traditional gendered attitudes between cisgender men attending the Adult Entertainment Expo (n = 294) and a random sample of male respondents from the 2016 General Social Survey (GSS), a U.S. representative survey of general attitudes and beliefs collected every two years (n = 863). Our survey borrowed questions from the GSS to measure attitudes about gender equality across four dimensions: (1) working mothers, (2) women in politics, (3) traditional gender roles in the family, and (4) affirmative action for women in the workplace. Through bivariate analyses, we found that "porn superfans" are no more sexist or misogynistic than the general U.S. public on two of the four measures (women in politics and women in the general workplace) and held more progressive gender-role attitudes than the general public on the other two measures. We conducted binary logistic regressions for those two measures to determine if the relationship remained significant when controlling for other factors. For one dimension, working mothers, it did ($p < .001$). Our results call into question some of the claims that porn consumption fosters de facto negative and hostile attitudes toward women.

KEYWORDS: attitudes; consumption; fandom; gender; leisure; pornography.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, pornography consumption has been a central part of the debate about the causes and consequences of gender inequality. Feminist antipornography scholars have long argued that pornography normalizes sexist and misogynistic attitudes toward women, perpetuating gender inequality and violence against women (Dworkin 1989; MacKinnon 1982). Despite recent feminist analyses of queer and women-oriented pornography that promotes gender diversity and equality, and despite much recent research on pornography that questions the linear cause-effect link to misogynistic and violent attitudes (Loftus 2002; McKee, Albury, and Lumby 2008; Ruddock 2015; Smith, Barker, and Attwood 2015; Weitzer 2011, 2015; Williams 2004), a small number of social science scholars suggest that exposure to increasingly available digital pornography converts heterosexual male porn consumers into predators who not only lack empathy with female performers but,

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ultimately, foster callousness toward all women (Dines 2010; Jensen 2007). Porn consumption is also alleged to damage relationships and family life (Manning 2006; Paul 2005; Perry 2016). Most recently, there have been claims that the United States (and elsewhere) are in the grips of a public health crisis due to the (supposed) ill effects of (online) porn consumption and porn addiction (Ley 2018; Webber and Sullivan 2018). This public health crisis narrative seems to be rooted in concerns about the volume of online pornography and shifting social attitudes toward pornography. A 2018 U.S. Gallup poll found that an increasing proportion of Americans are supportive of the statement that “porn is morally acceptable.”⁶

Interestingly, spaces of “porn culture” can provide fruitful settings for measuring gender (and wider social) attitudes among consumers (Comella 2010, 2014, 2017; Weitzer 2011, 2015). Settings where committed porn users interact have been criticized by some antiporn scholars for contributing to and perpetuating the *pornification* of society (Dines 2010, 2011). Yet consumers may view pornography as simply (adult) entertainment, and do so via cultural and social practices consistent with consumer culture, in which production, consumption, fandom, pleasure, sex/uality and sexual identity, and gender norms and identities intersect to create a commodified leisure experience (Comella and Tarrant 2015; McCormack and Wignall 2017). Comella (2014) argues that adult industry trade shows in particular are “data-rich field sites” that provide a rich sociological lens into the sex industry. If we seek to move beyond *porn-as-cause* research toward a more nuanced understanding of the interactions between porn and gender, it makes sense to examine attitudes among consumers in these porn culture settings.

In this study, we examine gender-role attitudes of cisgender men, regardless of their sexual identity, at the Adult Entertainment Expo (AEE), an annual expo hosted by Adult Video News (AVN) in Las Vegas, Nevada. While some AEE attendees are not necessarily porn fans and are non-sex business representatives marketing wares to adult businesses, most attendees represent a subset of porn viewers who seek face-to-face encounters with performers in a sexualized expo setting. We compare AEE porn-viewing male attendees with a random sample of porn-viewing male respondents from the 2016 General Social Survey (GSS).

The current study seeks to compare cisgender male pornography fans’ attitudes toward gender equality with a random sample of men in the United States. We use the AEE as a unique data source, and distributed surveys and collected field notes at AEE 2017. We consider individuals who attend this particular expo and who also reported that they watched porn to be “superfans,” by virtue of the fact that they have purposely patronized an adult entertainment convention and paid a significant amount of money for a ticket in order to observe and interact with porn performers. We compare basic demographics and attitudes about gender equality to a nationally representative sample of men in the General Social Survey (GSS). Both the GSS

⁶ “Forty-three percent of Americans now believe pornography is ‘morally acceptable,’ a seven-percentage-point increase from last year and the highest level since Gallup first began measuring moral perceptions of pornography in 2011,” in “More Americans Say Pornography Is Morally Acceptable,” *Gallup News*, June 5, 2018 (http://news.gallup.com/poll/235280/americans-say-pornography-morally-acceptable.aspx?g_source=link_NEWSV9&g_medium=TOPIC&g_campaign=item_&g_content=More%2520Americans%2520Say%2520Pornography%2520Is%2520Morally%2520Acceptable).

and the AEE samples include men who are heterosexual, bisexual, and gay. Our survey borrowed four questions from the GSS to measure attitudes about gender-role attitudes across four dimensions: (1) working mothers, (2) women in politics, (3) traditional gender roles, and (4) affirmative action for women in the workplace. Our primary research question is: Are gender-role attitudes of male porn superfans different than the national average? If so, how?

PORNOGRAPHY, SEXUAL AGGRESSION, AND SEXISM

Unsettled Feminist Porn Wars

Despite more than four decades of pornography research, there has been relatively little research directly measuring gender-role attitudes, and even less that compares attitudes of pornography consumers with the general population. Much of the research on pornography is situated within what McCormack and Wignall (2017) refer to as a “negative effects paradigm” to study sexual aggression or objectification, and relies on small samples of porn viewers, or larger samples of specific populations (e.g., college students), to measure effects and individual attitudes through lab-based experiments or correlating pornography use with mediating variables leading to sexual aggression (Kingston et al. 2009; Malamuth 2018; Malamuth, Addison, and Koss 2000; Malamuth et al. 1995; McKee 2012; McNair 2014; Murnen, Wright, and Kaluzny 2002; Paul and Shim 2008).

The contemporary debate on pornography has its historical roots in the radical feminist tradition that theorized patriarchy as a form of social control grounded in essentialist notions of heterosexuality, masculinity, and femininity (Queen and Comella 2008). For “antiporn” scholars, pornography is an objectifying reproduction of traditional gender norms in our binary gender system (Dworkin 1989; MacKinnon 1982). Indeed, Wright (2011) argues that a majority of mainstream heterosexual porn reproduces traditional gendered scripts.

Recent research is moving beyond studying porn-as-cause toward understanding how pornography is consumed in more real-world settings (McCormack and Wignall 2017; Smith and Attwood 2014; Tarrant 2016). Many of these studies have found that porn viewers have positive attitudes toward women and/or the female performers they are viewing (Loftus 2002; McKee et al. 2008; Queen and Comella 2008; Weitzer 2015). Despite concerns about the runaway accessibility of pornography in the United States and United Kingdom, a number of studies have found that attitudes supporting gender-role equality are increasing in societies generally (Inglehart and Norris 2003; McNair 2014; Smith 2011).

Additionally, the creation and consumption of feminist porn and queer porn revels in diverse representations of LGBTQ+ people, race/ethnicity, disabilities, body types/sizes, and a wide range of sexual acts, desires, and fantasies (Attwood 2007; Jackson and McCubbin 2016; Stewart 2018; Taormino et al. 2013). Instead of writing off pornography as violence writ large, contemporary “sexademics” analyze the sociopolitics of the porn industry and explore issues such as racism among performers (Landes and Neilsen 2018), consent (Brennan 2018; Groeneveld 2018; Kleinig 2009; Scott 2016), porn tourism (Jackson, Sahl, and Brents 2018; Mars,

Yeoman, and McMahon-Beattie 2017), porn politics and economics (Wilkinson 2017), and moral panics around porn (Keilty 2018; Ley 2018).

Assessing Impact on Gender Attitudes

In examining empirical research on attitudes of porn viewers, viewing porn regularly has been linked with a number of attitudes fostering gender inequality, violence, and/or objectification of women (Demaré, Lips, and Briere 1993). On the one hand, both experimental- and survey-based studies find pornography use runs parallel to hostile masculinity, producing antiwoman sexual aggression (Demaré, Briere, and Lips 1988; Hald and Malamuth 2008; Hald, Malamuth, and Carlin 2010; Hald, Malamuth, and Lange 2013; Kingston et al. 2009; Malamuth 2018; Malamuth et al. 1995; Malamuth et al. 2000; Murnen, Wright, and Kaluzny 2002; Wright and Tokunaga 2015; Wright, Tokunaga, and Kraus 2016). This builds on early experimental studies on exposure to pornography that found decreased support for the women's liberation movement (Zillmann and Bryant 1982, 1984) or correlations dependent on the coerciveness or violence in the porn media (Demaré et al. 1988; Demaré et al. 1993; Garcia 1986; Hald et al. 2013). Both Hald et al. (2013) and Garcia (1986) used the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Buckner 2010) which measures attitudes toward women in women's vocational roles, freedom and independence, and marital relationships. In a longitudinal study, Brown and L'Engle (2009) found exposure to pornography in early adolescence predicted less progressive gender-role attitudes (e.g., that girls should not play competitive sports such as football and hockey) in follow-up surveys two years later.

On the other hand, studies find that pornography can foster positive attitudes around gender and sexuality, or at least did not foster consistent negative correlations between pornography use and various sexism scales or measures of gender attitudes (Davies 1997; Garos et al. 2004; Hald and Malamuth 2008; Loftus 2002; McCormack and Wignall 2017; McKee 2007; Padgett, Brislin-Slütz, and Neal 1989; Weitzer 2015). Using measures of "gender-role attitudes" and reported pornography use in the GSS, Wright and Bae (2015) found that pornography consumption was associated with more gendered attitudes toward women for older adults over age 45 but not for younger cohorts, a group who are deemed to be particularly susceptible to the supposed harmful effects of pornography consumption. Also using the GSS, Kohut, Baer, and Watts (2016) found that individuals who indicated that they had viewed pornography in the past year had more egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles along similar GSS gender variables to our study than did nonconsumers.

Definitions of what constitutes pornography can range widely. Pornography itself is a diverse media (online videos, magazines, DVDs, webcamming, custom clips, etc.), with an eclectic customer base in terms of gender, sexuality, and income levels, who utilize one or more of a wide range of access points, and engage in a range of consumption patterns and monetary commitments (Keilty 2018). Overall, scholars agree that because of inconsistencies in how pornography use is operationalized, its effects are measured, or users sampled, pornography does not proffer

a causal, unidirectional path to sexual violence (Comella and Tarrant 2015; Kohut, Fisher, and Campbell 2017; McKee 2007; Ruddock 2015).

Many of the studies cited above examine *porn usage* among consumers, but there is less scholarship differentiating among porn consumers' experiences. Scholars have recently begun to explore the attitudes and behaviors of fans attending sexually oriented adult conventions (Comella 2014; Voss 2012) and pornographic film festivals (Cole 2014). A study of 1,225 men who attended SEXPO, a "health, sexuality, and lifestyle" exhibition, in Melbourne, Australia, identified a number of them as having accessed the services of a sex worker (Pitts et al. 2004). However, this study did not assess the sexual behaviors or activities of male respondents. Another study, this one based on 2009 data from attendees at the AVN AEE found that, controlling for relationship status, relationship type, and different forms of sexualized consumption (e.g., go to a strip club, hire someone for sex), men do not, typically, cheat on their female partners (Jackson et al. 2018). These findings pose a challenge to common stereotypes that heterosexual men who consume sexualized entertainment are bad at relationships and prone to cheating. What is clear is that we need more research on gender attitudes, not just sexual attitudes, or research that addresses the intersection of gender attitudes, sex, desire, and sexualization.

Past research looking at gendered attitudes rely on convenience or volunteer samples among adolescents or college students (Hald et al. 2013; Brown and L'Engle 2009; Garcia 1986; Garos et al. 2004). Some research has examined data from existing datasets, most significantly the GSS (Wright and Bae 2015; Kohut et al. 2016). These studies allow for a larger, more diverse sample in terms of age, ethnicity, marital status, social class, and religion, and allow examining attitudes from individuals who may have various approaches to pornography. There is also a need for research from populations who choose to self-identify as pornography consumers. McKee (2007) specifically recruited self-identified pornography users to better understand how viewing functions in everyday life (see also Padgett et al. [1989], who sampled patrons of an adult theater, and Davies [1997], who interviewed patrons from a single adult video store). Recruiting from individuals who choose to attend a pornography convention is an important setting to view individuals who seek to interact with other pornography consumers. Doing so allows for the opportunity to better understand porn cultures and the effects of pornography among those who see it as a leisure commodity.

METHODS

The data analyzed herein come from two sources: (1) a survey taken by a convenience sample of subjects who attended the 2017 AVN AEE in Las Vegas, Nevada, and (2) the 2016 wave of the GSS (Smith et al. 2017). Members of the research team attended the AEE, which was held in January 2017, and recruited study participants during the event. After consenting to participate in the research study, participants were handed an electronic tablet and completed the survey in-person, while waiting in line to get into the expo. Additionally, a link to the survey

was included in an e-mail sent by AVN to registered participants after the event was over. The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Our survey contained items around several domains in addition to gender-role attitudes—for example, general tourism activities, sexual/ized tourist activities such as visiting a Vegas strip club, and porn consumption queries. While all AEE attendees were eligible to take the survey, for the data addressed herein, we restricted these analyses to a specific subset of participants, guided by one area of our study's inquiry: men's gender-role attitudes. Given that our comparison group was a U.S. nationally representative sample of men, we excluded from these analyses all survey respondents who were women ($n = 66$)⁷ or not U.S. residents ($n = 48$). Also, we excluded study participants who indicated they never or rarely watched porn ($n = 9$). While most attendees of the expo are adult film fans, there are also journalists, expo workers, trade exhibitors, and academics/researchers like us. We sought the fans, those who watch porn "regularly" (i.e., viewing once a month, to every few months, to viewing every day) who the literature suggests are more likely to be negatively impacted and exhibit negative attitudes toward women. Finally, we excluded individuals whose data were incomplete or who did not provide sufficient data on our variables of interest ($n = 72$). The final sample size for the AEE data set was 294.

Adult Entertainment Expo attendees pay to access a sexualized space to meet and take pictures with porn performers, to observe booth interactions, to amass free promotional materials, to drink, and sometimes talk and interact with one another. Interestingly, some booth workers are also fans and take time to meet a favorite performer or check out a particular booth when they are on a break. Otherwise, fans stand in a line in the interior of the casino/hotel waiting to enter the convention halls where the expo is held. They are waiting in an area where other tourists and customers mill about, gambling or walking to a restaurant or entertainment venue. Out here in the casino, there are numerous large AEE posters, supersized pictures of women performers, wearing lingerie and revealing clothing. Once inside, the posters are more numerous and larger, lining booth areas with scantily clad performers posing with fans and talking with fans. In this way, the naturalistic setting shores up the credibility of our study (Jensen 2008).

The responses of the porn superfans were compared to a nationally representative sample of adult men in the United States. We gathered these data from the 2016 wave of the GSS. Conducted every two years since 1972, the GSS collects data on sociodemographic characteristics, attitudes toward community, society, and politics in general. A selection of the items included in the GSS are used to measure participants' attitudes toward gender equality. We used GSS data to estimate the nationally representative figures to compare with those from the AEE attendees. As with the AEE sample, we excluded women and participants who did not provide sufficient data on our variables of interest. We used the WTSSALL sample weight for our analyses. The final weighted sample size for the GSS was 863.

⁷ There were no differences when running the GSS mixed-gender sample with male and female AEE participants; however, for this article we examined responses from only males in both groups.

Variables of Interest

Our dependent variables were four statements on attitudes toward gender equality as used in the GSS:

- (1) "A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work."
- (2) "Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women."
- (3) "It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family."
- (4) "Because of past discrimination, employers should make special efforts to hire and promote qualified women."

Response options on the AEE survey were originally recorded in 5-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," with "unsure" as the midpoint. These differed slightly from the items as they appeared in the GSS. Specifically, in the GSS, the first and third questions above were on a 4-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" with an additional response option of "I don't know." The second question above had only three response options: "agree," "disagree," and "not sure." Finally, the last question above appeared on the GSS on a 5-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," with "neither agree nor disagree" as a midpoint.

For the purposes of this study, support for gender equality was operationalized as (1) agreeing with, or holding positive attitudes toward, working women's ability to care for children and support for making special efforts to promote qualified women given the history of gender discrimination, and (2) disagreeing with, or holding negative attitudes toward, men being more suited for politics and toward women not working outside the home. We dichotomized our dependent variables into "agree" or "disagree" for several reasons. First, the available response options for these four variables were not entirely consistent on the GSS instrument or between the AEE and GSS instruments. However, three of the four items contained uniform response options ("strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree"), and the remaining one contained "agree" and "disagree." Second, as we were interested in measuring participants' attitudes toward gender equality and not the lack thereof, the other available response options (i.e., "unsure" in the AEE sample and "don't know" or "neither agree nor disagree" in the GSS sample) were not particularly useful. Finally, for the purposes of this study, the meaningful difference is related to agreeing or disagreeing with statements that reflect one's gender egalitarianism, and not the strength with which one holds those attitudes. Dichotomizing these variables was an efficient way of utilizing the response options that reflected our study aims. Our main independent variable was AEE attendance, a proxy measure for being a porn superfan.

Covariates

We selected covariates that we hypothesized were related to our dependent variables, specifically age, ethnicity and race, marital status, sexual orientation, and educational attainment. Year of birth was recorded at the time of the survey and recoded into age in years. Race and ethnicity were dichotomized to *non-Hispanic whites* and all others (e.g., blacks, Hispanics, Asians) because the majority of the respondents (over 64%) were white and non-Hispanic. *Marital status*, *sexual orientation*, and *educational attainment* were also dichotomous variables (married vs. not married, heterosexual vs. gay or bisexual, college or higher degree vs. less than a college degree, respectively).

ANALYSIS

First, we conducted a simple frequencies analysis of porn consumption among the AEE and GSS samples. In order to address our research question, we used a two-tiered analytic strategy. Given our large sample sizes, bivariate analyses can sufficiently demonstrate differences and similarities between the two samples. Thus, we conducted Pearson's chi-square and independent samples *t*-tests, to compare porn superfans to the national average on our dependent variables as well as our covariates. However, there was a substantial difference in the sizes of our two samples, so for significant categorical relationships we used Cramer's V post-test statistics to assess the strength of the association. Statistical significance was determined a priori based on the alpha value of 0.05.

For each of the dependent variables for which there was a statistically significant difference between porn superfan and the national average, we ran a binary logistic regression to determine if the relationships we found at the bivariate level remained while holding our covariates constant (Hosmer, Lemeshow, and Sturdivant 2013). Dependent variables were coded such that *not* endorsing gender egalitarianism was the referent, whether it meant agreeing or disagreeing with a specific statement. Again, statistical significance was determined based on the alpha value of 0.05. All statistics tests were conducted using SPSS (version 24).

RESULTS

Tables I and II describe the frequency of porn consumption of superfans and the national average. We asked participants, "On average, how often would you say

Table I. Frequency of Porn Consumption of AEE Attendees

Frequency of Porn Consumption	%	(n = 294)
Every day	36.1%	(106)
Less than once a day but more than once a week	47.3%	(139)
Less than once a week but more than once a month	11.9%	(35)
Once a month to every few months	4.8%	(14)

Table II. Recency of Porn Movie Consumption Among GSS Respondents

Seen X-Rated Movie in the Past Year*	%	(n = 447)
Yes	37.6%	(168)
No	62.4%	(279)

*This question was asked of only a selection of GSS participants.

that you watch porn (online, on TV, and/or on a DVD/video)?” Nearly half of participants (47.3%, n = 139) indicated that they watch pornographic material “a couple of times a week.” Daily consumption was reported by 36.1% (n = 106) of respondents. Thus, it appears that AEE attendees were fairly frequent porn consumers outside of the expo. The only question related to consumption of porn that appears on the GSS asks if participants “have seen an X-rated movie in the last year.” Just over one-third of the sample (37.6%) reported past-year consumption of an X-rated movie. While an imperfect comparison (recency of viewing an X-rated movie vs. frequency of consumption of multiple media sources), it appears that AEE attendees were fairly frequent porn viewers compared with the national average.

Descriptions of, and differences between, the national average and AEE attendees are presented in Table III. The average age of the GSS and AEE participants combined was 47.6 years old. AEE attendees were significantly younger (M = 44.6, SD = 11.23) than the national average (M = 47.0, SD = 16.4); $t(789) = -2.737; p < .01$. There were no significant differences between the porn superfans and the national average related to race and ethnicity or sexual orientation. Roughly 65% of both samples were white, non-Hispanic. The majority of each sample identified as heterosexual (93.5% of the AEE and 96.1% of the GSS, respectively). AEE attendees were less likely to be married ($p < .01; V = .09$) but more likely to have finished a college degree ($p < .001; V = .27$). The association found for education was moderately strong, as opposed to the association for marital status, which was weak.

At the bivariate level, there were significant differences between porn superfans and the national average related to gender egalitarian attitudes on two of the four attitudinal measures (see Table III). For both of these measures, porn superfans were *more likely* to hold gender egalitarian attitudes. Over 90% of porn superfans agreed that a working mother can establish just as warm and secure relationship with her children as a mother who does not work compared with the national average of just over 70%, and the association was moderate ($p < .001; V = .20$). And over 80% of porn superfans disagreed with the idea that traditional gender roles are better for everyone in a family compared with national average of 73%, though the association was weak ($p = .05; V = .075$). Compared with the national average, porn superfans were just as likely to disagree with the idea that men are more emotionally suited for politics than are women. About 80% of each sample disagreed with this idea. Also, there was no significant difference between the samples in supporting the idea that because of past discrimination, special efforts should be made to hire and

Table III. Descriptive Statistics of AEE Attendees and Comparisons to the National Average

	AEE (n = 294) Mean (SD) or Percentage	GSS (n = 863) Mean (SD) or Percentage	Total (N = 1,157) Mean (SD) or Percentage	Test Statistic (t or χ^2)	Cramer's V
Age (years)	44.6*** (11.229)	47.0 (17.786)	47.6 (16.461)	2.737 (789.4692)	–
Non-Hispanic white (vs. all other race and ethnicity)	62.9%	66.4%	66.5%	2.096(1)	–
Marital status (married)	34.1%***	50.5%	46.3%	32.465 (1)	0.143
Sexual orientation (heterosexual)	93.5%	96.1%	95.1%	2.432(1)	–
Education (bachelor's degree or higher)	60.5%***	28.7%	36.8%	95.371(1)	0.27
Agree with "A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work."	91.9%***	70.2%	74.9%	46.293(1)	0.206
Disagree with "Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women."	79.0%	82.6%	81.9%	1.527(1)	–
Disagree with "It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family."	81.1%*	73.2%	74.9%	6.086(1)	0.075
Agree with "Because of past discrimination, employers should make special efforts to hire and promote qualified women."	72.2%	74.5%	73.8%	.399(1)	–

GSS descriptors: Sample Weighted WTSSALL.

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

promote qualified women. Less than three-quarters of each sample endorsed this statement.

We conducted a binary logistic regression for those gender egalitarian attitudes for which there were significant differences between the porn superfans and the national average. The relationships we found at the bivariate level were confirmed in multivariate analyses for one of the two attitudinal items. The results of these analyses, including adjusted odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals, are presented in Table IV. Compared with the national average, porn superfans were just as likely to disagree with the statement that it is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family. However, compared with the national average, AEE attendees were over three times more likely to endorse the idea that working mothers can establish as warm and secure relationships with their children as mothers who do not work ($p < .001$). Thus, results indicate that compared with the national average, porn superfans are just as likely—or in the case of working women’s mothering ability, more likely—to hold gender egalitarian beliefs.

DISCUSSION

This research is not seeking to unveil a “hidden truth” about porn fans or porn consumption, but rather, we are seeking to expand porn scholarship by producing new insights into commercialized sexuality, sexualization, heterosexual masculinity, and gender attitudes. Contrary to the prevalent view that negative attitudes toward women are central to the consumption of pornography, our findings provide little support for the claim that pornography fans hold less gender egalitarian attitudes than the general population of men. Our primary results show that (1) male porn superfans show the same amount of support for gendered notions of home, politics,

Table IV. Adjusted Odd Ratios (AOR) and 95% Confidence Interval (CI) of Gender Egalitarian Attitudes Among AEE Attendees Compared With the National Average (Referent)

	Agree with “A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.”		Disagree with “It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.”	
	AOR	95% CI	AOR	95% CI
AVN Attendee (vs. GSS)	3.391***	(2.39–6.75)	0.792	(0.51–1.23)
Age	1.106**	(0.98–0.99)	0.971***	(0.96–0.98)
White, non-Hispanic (vs. all others)	0.984	(0.79–1.49)	0.800	(0.52–1.22)
Married (vs. not married)	0.771	(0.53–0.97)	0.999	(0.66–1.50)
Heterosexual (vs. other)	0.833	(0.28–2.41)	1.362	(0.51–3.68)
College degree (vs. no college degree)	1.753*	(1.00–1.93)	0.792	(0.52–1.21)
Constant	0.132***	–	18.540***	–

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

and work, and (2) that these fans are more likely to support working mothers than the general male public in the United States.

Interestingly, there is no overarching reliable data on what constitutes “regular” or “average” porn viewing among U.S. male adults. The sole GSS porn-viewing question does not account for frequency, means of viewing (online, DVD, etc.) or intent of viewing, or alternative pornography modes such as webcamming, or the differences between X-rated and XXX-rated movies. Further, when online porn providers such as PornHub (2018) state that they hosted 28.5 billion visits on its websites worldwide in 2017, it is easy to misinterpret volume of online traffic as an indicator of high rates of mass porn consumption. For sure, while lots of individuals may be viewing online pornography, it is worth noting that an individual person visiting an online porn site may view 10 or 20 or more pages in a single session in 10 minutes or over the course of an hour.

Additionally, interpreting our study’s findings in their proper context requires emphasizing the (hyper)sexualized setting of a porn expo, and the “outing” of themselves that porn superfans do by attending the expo. While porn superfans may not be a representative sample of the general population or even of the wider porn-watching population, they do present a unique opportunity to assess gender egalitarianism among a group that have been portrayed and stereotyped as particularly sexist and misogynistic. This is not to say, of course, that sexism and inequalities do not exist within porn cultures, especially ones dominated by men. A radical feminist perspective would hypothesize that porn superfans would be highly likely to exhibit sexist and misogynistic attitudes. Yet our findings support the opposite.

Our findings generally support those of Kohut et al. (2016) who found that pornography consumers had more egalitarian attitudes than did nonconsumers, and Joseph and Black (2012:503) who concluded that “the commodification of sex is not inextricably linked to negative views of women.” They also support Garos et al.’s (2004:90) results suggesting that “pornography use may be motivated by other than misogynistic attitudes about women.” Indeed, using a “leisure framework” to study the effects of pornography helps researchers escape the “negative effects paradigm” and accounts for the centrality of leisure in late-capitalist societies, including sexualized leisure (Anderson and McCormack 2018; Attwood and Smith 2013; Brents 2016; McCormack and Wignall 2017; McKee 2012; Smith et al. 2015). Our findings show that porn cultures do not strengthen a hegemonic masculinity entirely predicated on negative attitudes toward women, as porn critics fear.

Joseph and Black (2012) postulate that men who hold more of a consumerist view of sex and pleasure may be expressing their male privilege and free choice to spend their money as they see fit, more so than expressing patriarchal control over women. In the case of the AEE, while it is clear that male patrons are there to consume sexualized entertainment and interact with their favorite porn stars, they are also there to socialize with other male and female porn superfans. There is a strong element of sociality to fandom, and socializing with other fans enhances the consumption process and experience.

Men who are in a space where others will assume that they are some kind of porn aficionado are not worried about being outed as a porn consumer. It is not an

embarrassing pastime. AEE attendees deliberately out themselves as porn superfans as a result of entering, consuming, and interacting with others within the AEE exhibition areas, wearing their admission passes around their necks and having in their possession merchandise (e.g., signed photos from performers, DVDs, and sex toys) either purchased or given away for free. Ultimately, male fans who attend adult entertainment expos may be seeking what fandom provides: (gendered and sexualized) connection, celebration, and attention (Attwood and Smith 2013).

This study demonstrates that porn cultures are not necessarily built around negative views of women, or at least, not any worse negative views than general society. Commercial sexualized settings are complex sites of gendered interactions between and among fans and adult performers. The performers are not distant, they are not objects of desire flashing across a TV or computer screen, but real-life people whom fans interact with, take pictures with, talk or laugh with, ask for autographs.

In summary, then, this study showcases empirical insights about men who publicly seek attention from and interaction with professional and amateur porn performers—cisgender male and female, and transgender female—exhibit greater or equal levels of gender egalitarianism than the general public. This supports the idea that sexual consumerism and gender egalitarianism are not always competing processes. Perhaps destigmatizing porn consumption is one potential key to negate shame around porn viewing, leading to positive associations of sexuality and gender roles. In this sense, an *interactive* commodified sexualized space could have subversive effects.

Limitations

This leads to other questions that our survey design cannot account for. First, there are a wide variety of ways in which sexism and attitudes about gender egalitarianism can be measured and some may be more robust or capture different dimensions of sexist attitudes. For example, in analyzing results in overt and subtle sexism, the Modern Sexism Scale, and the benevolent subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, Garos et al. (2004:90) conclude that what we may be seeing is that “the sexism involved in pornography use is more subtle than previous investigators have assumed.” The GSS questions measure broader attitudes toward gender egalitarianism, and not individual sexism specifically. These GSS questions have been used in previous research (Ciabattari 2001; Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman 2011) and are increasingly used in pornography research (Kohut et al. 2016; Wright and Bae 2015). But the GSS gender egalitarian items were developed in the 1970s and may be out of date as U.S. culture becomes more gender conscious (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004; Ciabattari 2001; Cotter et al. 2011).

It is also important to note that the GSS gender egalitarian questions do not address attitudes about female sexual availability. Other questions may be better able to get at these attitudes—for example, “A girlfriend or wife should be willing to meet the sexual needs of their boyfriend or husband,” or “A woman is sexiest when she is under the age of 30,” which are part of larger concerns about

pornography's messages and the objectification of women. That said, we contend that nonsexual gender egalitarianism is an important component of gendered attitudes to consider in understanding the effects of porn consumption, and future research on specific porn cultures can, and should, use different measures.

Finally, it is possible, though highly unlikely, that GSS participants also took the AEE survey. Also, while the sexualized setting and fandom interactions would seem to normalize respondents' porn consumption, participants did self-select to take the survey, and those who did may be more likely to want to share their porn habits, or more savvy about stereotypes of themselves and therefore bias their answers.

Further Research

Considering how research on pornography and sexist attitudes is growing, alongside continued studies of pornography and sexual aggression, it becomes important to disaggregate the variations in porn consumers, types of porn, modes of porn access, and porn cultures.

We also must be careful about attributing causality. For example, reflecting on this study, is it that gender-egalitarian porn viewers are more comfortable with public participation in fandom? Or does participation in porn fandom help promote gender-egalitarian attitudes (e.g., meeting performers in person, and interacting with other fans, other performers, and people who work in the industry beyond the performers—does this humanize the media itself, its production and consumption, its workers and performers?)?

Are men who, in general, embody a healthier heteromascularity, of which a consumer masculinity can be a part of, rather than a toxic masculinity, more likely to engage in fandom, whereas hostile heterosexual men are less likely to want to meet stars, mingle with other fans in a public setting, or out themselves as porn consumers? Are superfans more adept at creating dynamic viewing strategies when watching porn with negative messaging around sexuality, desire, or consent, and, to go a step further, is that in itself a humanizing activity? Does the class privilege of traveling and paying for sexualized attention negate hostile masculinity?

We need more studies that account for those who potentially experience diverse kinds of pornography and/or who may read pornography in different ways, and how this all may impact gender attitudes. Overall, more research is needed into the relationship between the stigma of porn viewing, the publicness of fandom, and gender egalitarianism.

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