

How male 'porn superfans' really view women

27 August 2019, by Paul J. Maginn, Aleta Baldwin, Barbara Brents And Crystal A. Jackson



A scene from the 2017 AVN Adult Entertainment Expo at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. Credit: Paul Maginn, Author provided

In 2007, the pornography website Pornhub averaged [1 million visits per day](#). By 2018 this had increased to [92 million visits per day](#) – or 33.5 billion views over the course of a year.

As an [interdisciplinary group of "sexademics,"](#) we're interested in porn's cultural role and impact. A common question we hear is whether this growth in porn consumption is good or bad for society.

Of course, the honest-but-unsatisfying answer is: It depends. But sometimes studying various aspects of porn consumption can change the way we think about it.

You might have heard, for example, [that porn fuels misogynistic attitudes and sexual violence](#).

If this were the case, you would think that people who consumed a lot of porn would hold particularly negative views towards women.

So we decided [to study](#) a group of men whom we've dubbed "porn superfans"—those who are so enthusiastic about porn that they'll attend the [AVN Adult Entertainment Expo](#) in Las Vegas. We wanted to compare their attitudes about gender equality to those of everyday Americans.

Profiling the superfans

Our study was inspired, in part, by the [journalists](#) and [politicians](#) who have said that [porn consumption](#) is at epidemic levels—so much so that it constitutes a public health crisis.

They write and speak of the perils of porn addiction and objectification, how porn encourages "hatred of women" and "sexual toxicity."

Would this play out in the results of our study?

The 294 expo attendees we surveyed certainly differed from the [general population](#) in a number of ways.

Their average age was 44 years old. Almost half—47.3 percent—indicated that they watched porn "less than once a day, but more than once a week." Over one-third—36.1 percent—indicated they watch porn "every day." In other words, over 80 percent of the attendees in our sample watched porn multiple times a week. Only 34.1 percent of them were married, but they were highly educated: 60.5 percent had a college degree or higher.

We compared these results to the results from the [General Social Survey](#), a nationally [representative survey](#) conducted every couple of years that charts social trends.

This survey only asks whether people have seen an X-rated movie in the last year, and 37.6 percent of the men indicated that they had. Just over half of the men in the General Social Survey sample were married, while just 28.7 percent of them had a

college degree or higher.

Misogyny unmasked?

But we were most interested in comparing the gender attitudes of each group. So we asked the expo attendees the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with four statements from the General Social Survey:

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."

After parsing the results, we discovered that male porn superfans actually expressed more progressive attitudes towards gender equality on two of the questions. For two others, they indicated just as progressive—or, said another way, just as sexist—attitudes as the general population.

Over 90 percent of porn superfans—compared to just over 70 percent of the GSS sample—agreed that working mothers can have just as warm and secure relationships with their children than non-working mothers.

For the statement that men and women should hold traditional gender roles within a family, 80 percent of porn superfans disagreed. Nationally, 73 percent of respondents disagree with this statement.

A similar proportion—80 percent—of AVN Expo attendees and General Social Survey respondents disagreed with the statement that men, rather than women, were more emotionally suited for politics.

Although a majority of porn superfans and General Social Survey respondents—72.4 percent and 74.5 percent, respectively—agreed that women, due to

past discrimination, should get special preference in the workplace, this was the least supported statement we tested. Notably, however, this level of support is higher than a recent [national poll](#) indicating that 65 percent of Americans support affirmative action for women.

Porn crisis or moral panic?

These findings challenge what porn scholars call the "[negative effects paradigm](#)," which sees porn as an inherently bad thing that cultivates harmful attitudes.

Our survey isn't the only one that upends this way of thinking. A 2016 study based on General Social Survey data found that male porn consumers held [more egalitarian views](#) on women in position of power, women working outside the home, and abortion than those who didn't view porn.

And while most [porn](#) is produced and consumed by men, a growing number of women—straight and LGBTQ—are [producing porn](#) and consuming different [genres of porn](#), a trend that's largely been ignored.

For now, it's probably best to pump the brakes on the idea that pornography causes negative attitudes toward [women](#). The evidence just isn't there, and much of today's rhetoric about pornography [seems to be more of a moral panic than public health crisis](#).

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