The Widening Gender Gap in Opposition to Pornography, 1975-2012

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Abstract

In the last several decades pornography in the U.S. has become more mainstream, more accessible, more phallocentric and more degrading to women. Further, consumption of pornography remains a major difference in the sexual experiences of men and women. Yet research has not addressed how opposition to pornography has changed over the this period, despite shifts in the accessibility and visibility of pornography as well as new cultural and legal issues presented by the advent of Internet pornography. We examine gender differences in opposition to pornography from 1975 to 2012, measured by support for legal censorship of pornography in the General Social Survey. Results show that both men's and women's opposition to pornography have decreased significantly over the past 40 years, suggesting a cultural shift toward "pornographication" affecting attitudes. However, women remain more opposed to pornography than men, and men's opposition has declined faster, so the gender gap in opposition to pornography has widened, indicating further divergence of men's and women's sexual attitudes over time. This is consistent with the increasingly normative nature of pornography consumption for men, increases over time in men's actual consumption of pornography, and its increasingly degrading depiction of women.

Introduction

Research on pornography has focused on the consumption of, and attitudes about, pornography as a major gender difference in sexual attitudes and experience (e.g., Petersen and Hyde 2011), as well as pornography's entrance into mainstream media and culture (e.g., American Psychological Association 2007; Dines 2010; Tyler 2011). Coinciding with the anti-pornography feminist movement in the United States (e.g., MacKinnon 1985; MacKinnon and Dworkin 1997; cf. Strossen 1993), scholarship in the late 1980s and early 1990s investigated attitudinal correlates with support for pornography censorship in the U.S., finding the strongest support among women, anti-pornography feminists, and religious fundamentalists (Cowan, Chase, and Stahly 1989; Cowan 1992). However, researchers have not recently revisited the question of gender differences in support for the legal control of pornography.

This article addresses how men's and women's opposition to pornography has changed over the past four decades, as the U.S. saw large attitudinal changes on many social issues including sexuality (Davis 1992) and gender norms (Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman 2011). We address anti-pornography attitudes among U.S. men and women in the context of three recent historical trends. First, social attitudes on sexuality, gender, and free speech have grown increasingly permissive, and attitudes toward pornography as treated in research are often wrapped into this overall trend (Davis 1992), though it is up for debate whether public opinion on pornography represents evolution of these attitudes, or a general "gut reaction" separate from other social views (Sharp 1999).

Second, inexpensive (or free) pornography has grown increasingly accessible on the Internet, in an anonymous (or at least private) setting that may reduce the stigma previously attached to pornography consumption (Edelman 2009); this shift also makes pornography more difficult to regulate legally (Cossman 2007). Additionally, pornography has become increasingly visible, and many scholars agree that pornography and "raunch culture" have infiltrated mainstream culture (Dines 2010; Douglas 2010; Levy 2005; McNair 2013; McRobbie 2008; Tyler 2011).

Finally, due to changes in the pornography industry, readily available pornography is increasingly degrading to and violent toward women (Bridges 2010; Bridges, Wosnitzer, Scharrer, Sun, and Liberman 2010 Jensen 2010). Indeed, violence and degradation are hallmarks in the industry of "good" pornography (Tyler 2010). Recent analysis shows that the majority of popular pornography videos include verbal or physical abuse of women (Bridges et al. 2010). Further, many people are concerned that pornography culture has resulted in the hypersexualization of women and girls (American Psychological Association 2007; Dines 2010; Douglas 2010; Levy 2005; Tyler 2011). In fact, concern about its effects strongly predicts individual opposition to pornography (Cowan 1992; Fisher, Cook, and Shirkey 1994). The growing accessibility of pornography, its increasingly degrading nature, and its incorporation into mainstream culture fit within the broad concept of "pornographication" (Attwood 2006; McNair 2013; Smith 2010; Tyler 2011). These trends might contribute to women's opposition to pornography as they are increasingly confronted with problematic images and media.

Men's relationship to pornography may be more straightforward than women's, at least among the dominant majority. Men, particularly young men, consume pornography with greater frequency than women (Carroll, Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Olson, Barry, and Madsen 2008), and although consistent measures are difficult to find, it appears U.S. men's pornography consumption has increased at least slightly over the past several decades (Wright 2013). Further, men increasingly are "groomed" by the pornography industry to be consumers, exposed to images and messages that are phallocentric and privilege male sexual pleasure, dehumanize women, and desensitize men to violent and degrading sexual imagery (Kimmel 2008; Whisnant 2010). Thus, even if pornographication increases acceptance of pornography in the dominant culture generally, changes in pornography content and the industry, combined with men's higher rates of consumption, may have created a climate of opposing forces potentially pulling men's and women's attitudes further apart.

To examine changes in anti-pornography attitudes from 1975 to 2012, we use the U.S. General Social Survey (GSS), a nationally representative, repeated cross-sectional survey. We assess changes in anti-pornography attitudes using a survey item on respondents' opinions regarding the legal censorship of pornography. This question, asked in all 23 administrations of the GSS over 37 years, captures one di-

mension of general acceptance of pornography in the U.S.'s legal and cultural context. This study contributes to scholarship on U.S. gender differences in attitudes about sexuality in the context of liberalizing social attitudes, and the rise of pornographication more specifically.

Pornographication

Researchers agree that pornography has permeated social life and culture in the U.S. (e.g., Dines 2010; McNair 2013; Tyler 2011). Pornographication as a concept is both directly linked to pornography—its content, availability, acceptability, and the industry that produces it -- and more generally to the sexualization of popular culture. In the 1970s and 1980s, film and videotape technology changed the pornography industry, and this change initially triggered political concern and outrage; however these changes have been dwarfed by the Internet as a tool to make pornography more accessible to the public (Buzzell 2005; Fritz 2009, in Neely 2010). Pornography is now more accessible, more affordable, and anonymous to consume (Cooper, Delmonico, and Burg 2000; McNair 2013). According to Edelman (2009), as of June 2008, 36 percent of Internet users visited at least one adult website each month, and among users who visit a pornography site at least once a month, users visit sites on average twice a week. Companies such as AVN Media Network – which reported $2.8 billion in annual revenue from online adult entertainment (AVN Media Network 2008, in Edelman 2009) – have shown the profitability of online pornography. For example, major hotel chains and cable companies profit from the sale of pornography along with sports packages and room service (Martin 2010). Because it is increasingly socially acceptable and relatively low risk, even large mainstream corporations such as General Motors are entering the pornography market and companies such as Google derive ad revenues from pornography (Bartow 2008).

The content of actual pornographic materials is increasingly degrading and violent toward women (Bridges et al. 2010; Tyler 2010; Williams 1999, in Buzzell 2005). This is particularly true of Internet pornography, which is more violent and more often portrays nonconsensual sex compared to pornography in magazines and videos (Barron and Kimmel 2000). Competition among pornography producers has increased the accessibility of free material, and pornography sellers and producers increasingly feel pressure to offer content that pushes the envelope or takes on new formats, such as interactive pornography (Edelman 2009). One such new format is "Gonzo" pornography, containing back-to-back scenes of sexual acts, focusing on male sexual pleasure and orgasm, often achieved through humiliation and violence against women (Dines 2010). In fact, those within the pornography industry openly acknowledge that mainstream pornography is becoming more extreme, violent, and physically damaging to the actors involved, particularly women (Tyler 2010).

Content analysis of pornographic materials confirms claims about the increasingly violent and degrading nature of pornography content. A recent examination of 50 best-selling pornography videos revealed that 48 percent of scenes included verbal aggression and 88 percent included physical aggression such as spanking and gagging; 94 percent of violent acts were directed at women (Bridges et al. 2010). That is an increase from the 1980s, when 78 percent of pornography scenes in X-rated movies portrayed sexual dominance of men over women and 73 percent portrayed physical aggression toward women (Cowan, Lee, Levy, and Snyder 1989). Further, although pornography explicitly appealing to rape fantasies was once difficult to obtain, it is now readily available online (Gossett and Byrne 2002). These images align with cultural myths that normalize or trivialize rape, such as the myth that women who are raped "asked for" or enjoy it and the myth that women of color cannot be raped (Burt 1980; Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994), raising concerns that pornography contributes to violence against women and providing a cultural context for grooming of viewers into believing that the women of pornography enjoy sexual degradation and violence (Bridges 2010; Dines 2010; Jensen 2007; Whisnant 2010). Indeed, viewers do enjoy this content and find it sexually arousing, and habitual pornography consumers in particular have a greater appetite for violent pornography (Bridges 2010).

Pornographication also may be seen in the hypersexualization of girls and women, from marketing sexy underwear to young girls to stripper pole-dancing "exercise" classes for women, to reality television shows focused on Playboy bunnies (American Psychological Association 2007; Dines 2010; Douglas 2010; Kimmel 2008; Levy 2005; Tyler 2011). In the cultural context of pornographication, companies such as Playboy are able to enter the mainstream entertainment market with television shows and merchandise while continuing to produce hardcore, violent pornography (Bartow 2008). These cultural phe-

nomena represent how "pornography and pornographic imagery are fragmenting and blurring into traditionally non-pornographic forms of culture" (Tyler 2011:74), and promote a cultural model of sex that is particularly harmful and degrading to women.

Pornography Attitudes

Pornography and Public Opinion

Recent research has not addressed attitudes about pornography censorship as a legal issue, although the explosion of pornography available on the Internet has made it more difficult for governments to restrict access. This difficulty has inspired spurts of renewed enforcement of obscenity law (Cossman 2007), and led to the Supreme Court's grappling with Internet pornography (*Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union* 1997).

Historically, the United States has dealt with the regulation of sexually explicit materials through obscenity standards. The obscenity standard established by *Miller v. California* (1973) uses "community standards" to determine whether pornographic materials are legally obscene and therefore subject to regulation; this standard is still in effect today. However, with the exception of child pornography and the distribution of pornography to children, pornographic materials are currently presumed not obscene or harmful to women unless otherwise demonstrated (Waltman 2010). This reflects the U.S.'s concern with protecting freedom of speech over the welfare of women involved in pornography production (MacKinnon 1993). Further, the rise of the Internet as the main point of distribution for pornography has made it difficult to ascertain what "community" is relevant when determining the standard of obscenity (Cossman 2007; Krause 2008).

Public opinion scholars have grappled with how people form their opinions about censorship of pornographic materials. One assumption about democratic governance is that policy reflects the opinions of citizens and vice versa, known as a "responsiveness" model (Page and Shapiro 1983); however, public opinion and policy do not always align (Manza and Cook 2002). Despite spikes of pornography regulation and prosecution activity in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly during the Reagan and first Bush administrations, attitudes toward the legal censorship of pornography grew slightly more permissive. Therefore, Sharp (1999) characterizes public opinion about pornography as a "non-attitude" rather than a reflection of a responsiveness model – that is, a "substantial portion of public opinion on pornography consists of something like gut-level responses divorced from knowledge about the issue" (Sharp 1999: 126).

More recently, the mid-2000s saw a renewed wave of federal obscenity prosecutions targeting hardcore adult pornography, such as the high-profile 2005 prosecution of Extreme Associates for distributing particularly violent pornographic materials across state lines (Cossman 2007). However, since then, despite promises during the second Bush administration to crack down on pornography and the industry, federal prosecutions have been few (Krause 2008). Further, Supreme Court decisions, particularly *Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union* (1997) have essentially placed Internet pornography outside the purview of government regulation because free speech on the Internet "deserves the highest protection from governmental intrusion" (*Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union* 1997).[i] It is an open question whether and how attitudes about legal censorship of pornography have changed since the 1990s in the context of this shifting legal and political landscape.

Further, many studies that do examine attitudes about censorship typically include pornography censorship as part of a constellation of views about free speech rights, instead of isolating pornography attitudes specifically (e.g., Davis 1992). However, studies in the 1980s and 1990s found a substantial portion of U.S. adults supported outright bans on pornography, especially among those who are older, female, more religious and churchgoing, politically or sexually conservative, married, less educated, and concerned about pornography's effects on viewers (Buzzell 2005; Davis 1992; Fisher et al. 1994; Patterson and Price 2012; Sherkat and Ellison 1997; Stack et al. 2004; Woodrum 1992). We bring this literature up to date, isolating attitudes toward pornography from more general political, religious, and free speech attitudes, and focusing on the gender gap in opposition to pornography.

Consumption of Pornography

Consumption practices are potential indicators of attitudes toward pornography, and there is a larger body of research available regarding the use of pornography than about corresponding attitudes. Given its content, it is not surprising that men and boys in the U.S. consume pornography at higher rates than women and girls, including two-thirds of adolescent boys versus one-third of adolescent girls (Brown and L'Engle 2009), and 87 percent of young men (aged 18 to 26) versus 31 percent of comparable women (Carroll et al. 2008) – an increase over rates found in

a separate study among U.S. college students a decade earlier (Goodson, McCormick, and Evans 2001). However, most research on pornography consumption is cross-sectional in nature. In one exception to this, Wright (2013) found that men's pornography consumption increased slightly from the early 1970s to the 2000s. Users of online pornography are disproportionately male, younger, nonreligious, unmarried, and have higher education (Buzzell 2005; Doring 2009). Men show stronger motivation than women for Internet pornography use (Paul and Shim 2008) and report more positive emotions associated with consuming pornography (Murnen and Stockton 1997). Overall, pornography consumption represents one of the main gender differences in sexual behavior in the United States according to a recent review of several meta-analyses of studies on sexuality (Petersen and Hyde 2011).

Attitudinal Correlates of Pornography Opposition

Research on gender differences in attitudes toward pornography mostly parallels research on consumption. Prior research has found that young men are more likely than young women to express the belief that pornography is socially acceptable. For example, 67 percent of U.S. young adult men compared with 49 percent of young women think viewing pornography is an acceptable way of expressing one's sexuality (Carroll et al. 2008). These gender differences in attitudes may be related to how sexually explicit media elicits different emotional responses for men and women, as women often experience fear or dissatisfaction with their own bodies, while men's early experiences with pornography are often in the context of male bonding (Attwood 2005; Ciclitira 2004). Young men are more likely to report feeling entertained or sexually aroused while watching Internet pornography, while young women more frequently report feeling angry or disgusted (Carroll et al. 2008), a reaction that is perhaps not surprising given trends in pornography's content (Bridges et al. 2010; Tyler 2010). Women report that they feel they cannot compete with the sexual ideals portrayed in pornography, leading to lowered feelings of self-worth (Bergner and Bridges 2002). Further, women may object to their partners' pornography consumption: for example, young adult women in the U.S. who reported that their partners viewed pornography regularly reported lower self-esteem, lower relationship satisfaction, and lower sexual satisfaction than women who did not report a high frequency of partners' pornography consumption (Stewart and Szymanski 2012).

Concern about pornography's negative effects may help to explain some of the gender gap in attitudes toward pornography. Women are more likely than men to attribute rape to pornography consumption, whereas U.S. men who have more personal experience with pornography are less likely to attribute rape to pornography (Sharp and Joslyn 2001). Concern that the consumption of pornography contributes to violent, misogynistic, or destructive behavior is a strong predictor of support for pornography censorship, especially among U.S. women (Cowan 1992; Fisher et al. 1994).

Race may also be significant: in a study using 1972-2006 GSS data, Black men and women were more likely to watch pornography than Whites (Patterson and Price 2012), and a study of U.S. adolescents found that Black adolescents are more likely to have been exposed to pornography than White adolescents (Brown and L'Engle 2009). Further, living in the South is associated with decreased likelihood of visiting a pornography website according to a study using the 2000 GSS (Stack et al. 2004).

Religious conservatives are one of two groups that commonly oppose pornography, along with a subset of feminists, although these two groups differ in their antipornography rationales (Cowan et al. 1989; Luff 2001; Waltman 2010). Conservative Protestants in particular often express moral opposition to pornography, driven in part by the concern that the immoral nature of pornography is socially contagious (Sherkat and Ellison 1997). Critical feminist opposition to pornography, on the other hand, takes the position that pornography sexualizes rape and other forms of violence against women and eroticizes power inequalities between men and women (Boyle 2000; Cowan et al. 1989; Dworkin and MacKinnon 1997; MacKinnon 1985). Critical feminists argue that the mainstreaming of pornography necessarily entails the mainstreaming of a "harmful model of prostitution sex and perhaps even the mainstreaming of eroticized violence against women" (Tyler 2011:9). However, this view is not without strong opposition: some feminist scholars consider pornographication to be part of a broader trend of sexual progressiveness (McNair 2013) or find antipornography feminism paternalistic (Strossen 1993; Ciclitira 2004; Segal 1998) (see also Attwood 2006, Smith 2010). Feminist pornography also exists (for more on this topic, see Penley et al. 2013).

Pornographication has coincided with a cultural

turn toward a mainstream "postfeminism" – a term typically attributed to Judith Stacey (1990) – which may undermine prior feminist critiques of pornography. Stacey described postfeminism as beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s when people incorporated some feminist ideals into their thinking, but maintained a distance from political feminism (although Stacey's definition of the term has been contested and is often ambiguous [Lotz, 2007]). Public opinion data show some support for the claim that feminist ideology has declined since the mid-1990s. Many young women are ambivalent or disinclined toward about feminism (Aronson, 2003; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003). Gender attitudes steadily liberalized from the late 1970s through the early 1990s, followed by a halt in the mid-1990s, which may be attributable to feminist backlash in popular culture (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2011). Thus women in this cultural climate of both pornographication and postfeminism may be discouraged from speaking out against the pornography industry – or the sexualization of women and girls in culture more generally – for fear of appearing hostile to men or being branded as feminists (McRobbie, 2004, 2009). Measuring postfeminism directly is outside the scope of this study, but these attitudes as documented by other researchers are an important aspect of the cultural context of pornography attitudes.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Our research seeks to determine how opposition to pornography has changed, and whether opposition among men and women has converged or diverged. This study addresses two research questions, and we consider competing hypotheses:

First, has opposition to pornography changed in the time period 1975 to 2012? Given the increasing ubiquity of pornographic elements in popular culture and increased accessibility of actual pornography, a "pornographication" hypothesis predicts that overall opposition to pornography for both men and women has decreased steadily. Alternately, attitudes about pornography may fluctuate, as predicted by the "responsiveness" hypothesis (Page and Shapiro 1984, Sharp 1999), which expects attitudes toward pornography to align with political attention and action.

Second, is the gender difference in opposition to pornography widening? In addition to the trends up or down, the gender difference in opposition to pornography is important, representing a potentially growing division between the sexual experiences and attitudes of men and women. Men consume pornography at higher rates than women, and the content of mainstream pornography increasingly focuses on male sexual satisfaction and power over women. Further, women are more concerned about the negative effects of pornography, men are the primary targets for pornography consumption by producers; thus a "divergence" hypothesis predicts that the gender gap in pornography opposition will widen over time. On the other hand, a "convergence" hypothesis predicts that the gender gap in pornography opposition is closing as both men and women are influenced by the pornographication of mainstream culture. The cultural turn toward postfeminism may contribute to this convergence as women distance themselves from political positions that oppose pornography.

Methods

We use the 1975-2012 General Social Survey to address our research questions. The GSS is a nationally representative survey of non-institutionalized adults in the United States collected via in-person interviews. Surveys have been conducted 23 times since 1975, mostly biennially, with sample sizes of 1500 to 3000. The GSS asks the following question about opposition to pornography:

> *Which of these statements comes closest to your feelings about pornography laws: 1. There should be laws against the distribution of pornography whatever the age. 2. There should be laws against the distribution of pornography to persons under 18. 3. There should be no laws forbidding the distribution of pornography.*

Although the political emphasis placed on banning pornography has fluctuated over the years, "feelings about pornography laws" still serve as a general measure of opposition. The legal status of adult pornography is less clear than the legal status of child pornography, which is banned entirely; as discussed previously, adult pornography falls under the umbrella of "obscenity," which can be subject to regulation on a case-by-case basis (Krause 2008; Waltman 2010). Therefore, it is possible that respondents may not be aware that adult pornography can in fact be subject to legal regulation, and as a result could assume the question pertains to child pornography; however, this measure of pornography attitudes has been used by multiple other studies (e.g., Cowan 1992; Davis 1992; Fisher et al. 1994; Sharp 1999),

and it is the only long-term measure of attitudes toward pornography asked in a nationally representative dataset, with important covariates, of which we are aware.[ii]

Although the GSS offers three response categories to the question, we condensed them into two categories to represent opposition and lack of opposition (only one response category could be selected by survey respondents). Opposing the distribution of pornography to minors does not constitute opposition to pornography *per se*, and because there are already laws against the distribution of pornography to people under 18, the third response category is not particularly meaningful. Prior research on public opinion about pornography supports this decision: Sharp (1999) argues that the primary split in public opinion is between those who think pornography should be legal in some or all contexts and those who think it should always be illegal.[iii] Therefore, we coded *opposition to pornography* as 1 for respondents who favor laws against pornography whatever the age – and 0 otherwise. While most research on pornography conceptualizes pornography as sexually explicit materials that are designed to create sexual arousal in the viewer (e.g., Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 1986; Bridges et al. 2010; Carroll et al. 2008), respondents to the GSS were not given a definition for pornography.

We used logistic regression models to test for differences on this measure between men and women. We tested time effects with a continuous variable for *year*, which ranges from 0 in 1975 to 37 in 2012. This coding allows for an intuitive interpretation of the intercept and produces coefficients equal to the predicted change in the odds of opposing pornography associated with a one year change in survey year. A similar approach has been taken in other articles that look at trends over time using GSS data (e.g., Cotter et al. 2011; Wright 2013). Non-linear specifications of the time trend did not improve the model fit.

To isolate gender differences in attitudes toward pornography, we controlled for covariates that have been shown to affect gender-related attitudes, most specifically in a recent analysis of changing gender-related attitudes over time in the GSS (Cotter et al. 2011). Education is an important control variable, given that higher education has increased, especially for women (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006). *College graduate* was coded 1/0. Being married decreases the likelihood of purchasing online pornography (Edelman 2009; Patterson and Price 2012; Woodrum 1992), so we control for *Married* status (1/0), and the number of *children* respondents have ever had. We also control for *age* in years, as older people are expected to be more opposed to pornography (Fisher et al. 1992; Woodrum 1992). Given some evidence of differences in pornography use – with nonwhites consuming more than Whites (Brown and L'Engle 2009) – we controlled for race/ethnicity with dummy variables for *White* (excluded in the regressions), *Black* and *Other* (the only categories available in the GSS). Because of historical differences in regional culture with regard to gender issues (Moore and Vanneman 2003), we controlled for *South* region with a 1/0 dummy variable.[iv]

We controlled for other attitudes that might affect responses to a question about pornography laws. For *political views* we use the GSS 7-point scale from "extremely liberal" (1) to "extremely conservative" (7). After initial testing showed the effect on pornography views was roughly linear except for "extremely liberal" and "liberal," which had the same effect, we collapsed those two categories and then treated the variable as continuous, transformed so that liberal equaled 0 and higher scores represented increasingly conservative views. In the seven percent of cases missing values on political views we coded respondents to the grand mean and enter a dummy variable coded 1/0 for those with imputed scores.

The dependent variable summons the subject of government censorship, as noted, so we controlled for *free speech* views to better isolate attitudes toward pornography specifically (Waltman 2010). The free speech indicators asked on the GSS are politically skewed, only asking whether liberal viewpoints should be silenced. We combined three items from the scale used by Davis (1992), asking whether respondents favor removing a "communist book" or a book "in favor of homosexuality" from the public library, and whether someone "against churches or religion" should be allowed to speak in the respondents' community. The scale ranges from 0 for the most permissive to 3 for those who would remove the books and ban the speaker; it has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .73. (Although these questions may seem anachronistic, in the most recent year 29 percent of respondents scored 3 on the scale.) The questions for this scale were not asked in four years (1975, 1978, 1983 and 1986); in those years we coded all respondents to the midpoint between the mean for the years before and after the missing year.

Because of the important role of conservative religion among people in the U.S. opposed to pornography (Sherkat and Ellison 1997), we controlled for

several religion-related characteristics. The first is a measure of religious service *attendance*, which ranges from never (0) to more than once per week (8). We treated this as a continuous variable. In the case of missing values we coded respondents to the grand mean and enter a dummy variable coded 1/0 for those with imputed scores. To capture religious denominations (or lack of religion) we used seven mutually-exclusive categories: *Catholic* (excluded in the regressions), *no religion*, *Jewish*, *Baptist*, a combined Methodist-Lutheran-Presbyterian-Episcopalian or *MLPE*, *other Protestant*, and *other religion*. In addition to the specific denominations, the GSS also identifies those denominations that are fundamentalist in orientation (Smith 1990). We coded respondents as 1 on *fundamentalist* if they identify with one of those denominations, 0 otherwise.

All analyses were weighted using the GSS sample weights and Black oversample weights. With adjustments, our sample size is 32,249, an average of 1,402 respondents per year. Descriptive statistics for the variables used are presented in Table 1, disaggregated by gender.

Results

The unadjusted trends in opposition to pornography are shown in Figure 1. Women's opposition has remained consistently higher than men's. The linear trend shows a drop from 53 percent in the late 1970s to 43 percent in the early 2010s for women. Men's opposition has fallen as well, from 34 percent to 23 percent. Despite considerable variability from year to year, the linear trends for both men and women are negative and statistically significant at $p<.05$, as is the growing difference between them – men's opposition has declined more rapidly. This is consistent with both of our hypotheses. However, much has changed since the 1970s, including education levels, other social and political attitudes, and religious practices and affiliations. To assess the trends in opposition to pornography by gender, then, we turn to the multivariate models.

Logistic regression results for opposition to pornography on gender, time and other characteristics are presented in Table 2. The first model combines men and women, while models 2 and 3 analyze men and women separately, after tests showed differences in the coefficients by gender on six of the variables (marked with superscript 'b').[v]

Model 1 is consistent with the "pornographication" hypothesis. It shows that the overall decline in opposition to pornography persists in the full model. A logistic model with no variables other than year (not shown) produces a downward trend in opposition to pornography equivalent to .38 percent per year. With all of our variables (Model 1), the logistic regression coefficient, when converted to predicted probabilities at the mean of all variables (calculations not shown), also implies a decline of .38 percent per year. Thus we find that the "pornographication" hypothesis is supported, while the "responsiveness" hypothesis is not, given that opposition to pornography did not fluctuate in response to political action around the issue of pornography control.

The first model shows that opposition to pornography is lower among college graduates, Blacks, people with positive free speech attitudes, and Jews (compared with Catholics). And opposition is higher among older people, people with children, married people, Whites, and those of "other" race/ethnicity (compared with Blacks), Southerners, political conservatives, people whose religious beliefs are fundamentalist and who attend religious services more often, and Protestants (compared with Catholics). Over the period studied, some social trends (such as increasing average age) have increased opposition to pornography, while others (such as an increase in college graduates) have reduced opposition to pornography. Although some of these coefficients differ significantly between men and women, they are all in the same direction.

Comparison of Model 2 and Model 3 confirms that the decline in opposition to pornography has been more pronounced for men than for women. The coefficients for the year variable show that the annual change is almost twice as large for men (-.023) as it is for women (-.012). The more rapid erosion of opposition among men is not the result of changes in the gender distribution of values on the covariates over this period. Controlling for these factors, men's opposition to pornography has decreased faster, and the gap between men's and women's opposition to pornography has grown significantly. Thus the results support the "divergence" hypothesis: the gender gap in opposition to pornography is widening over time as men's opposition declines more rapidly than women's.

We estimated several alternative models, the results of which increase confidence in the robustness of our conclusions (all results available upon request). First, as noted, the unadjusted trends (shown in Figure 1) are consistent with both a "pornographication" hypothesis and a "divergence" hypothesis. Second, we

estimated multinomial logistic models using all three values on the question about laws regarding pornography to ensure that the decision to combine response categories 2 and 3 for the dependent variable was analytically appropriate. These models show the same pattern of trends in opposition to pornography. Third, we estimated a set of models including a control for whether respondents reported that they had "seen an x-rated movie in the last year." Although this variable is negatively correlated with support for pornography censorship, for both men and women, and the percentage reporting x-rated movie watching has risen over time, including this control did not alter the basic pattern of our results (although it attenuated the coefficients modestly). Finally, we estimated models with all variables except for free speech views, which had almost no effect on the results.

Discussion

Despite cultural and structural shifts in the pornography industry, pornography itself, and pornography's role in mainstream culture, as well as the continuing importance of pornography-related attitudes for understanding gender differences in sexuality, research has not recently revisited the question of trends in opposition to pornography over time measured by support for legal censorship. This study seeks to fill this gap. We show that opposition to pornography in the United States over the last four decades has declined, even with controls for important simultaneous trends such as rising age, the rise of education levels, and the decline of religious affiliation. In addition to the general decline of opposition, our findings show that the gender gap in opposition to pornography has grown: women's stance on pornography censorship has changed less since 1975 than men's.

Although we cannot establish this connection definitively, we interpret these findings through the lens of cultural trends during this time period. Social attitudes about gender and sexuality have liberalized (McNair 2013), although prior research has not isolated pornography attitudes from other issues such as free speech (e.g., Davis 1992). We argue that public opinion about pornography has responded to the "pornographication" of mainstream culture as well as the increased visibility and accessibility of pornography. Starting in the mid-twentieth century, pornography began its entrance into mainstream U.S. culture (Dines 2010; Tyler 2011), and the U.S. now has a giant market of cheaply produced, easily distributed, anonymously consumed pornography (Edelman 2009). Public opinion on pornography does not appear to align with changes in the political landscape regarding pornography regulation or obscenity prosecution, as a "responsiveness" model of public opinion would predict (Page and Shapiro 1984); instead, our study suggests that pornography attitudes are contingent on factors other than policy (Manza and Cook 2002), such as the mainstream cultural context. Further, our results may challenge the idea that pornography represents a "non-attitude" that does not shift over time (Sharp 1999); although pornography attitudes do not shift with political fluctuations, these attitudes do appear to be sensitive to what is going on with pornography itself, rates of pornography consumption, and the acceptability of pornography in mainstream culture.

Pornography-related attitudes and behavior reflect a major difference in men's and women's sexual preferences (e.g., Petersen and Hyde 2011). Men are the target group for the industry: most pornography is male-oriented, and men are "groomed" into being pornography consumers who believe that violence against women is normal and without serious consequences, and who are able to morally disengage from disturbing content in pornography (Kimmel 2008; Whisnant 2010). Women, on the other hand, are caught between cultural and structural forces that complicate their attitudes about pornography. Women consume pornography at lower rates and on average find pornography less acceptable (Carroll et al. 2008; Goodson et al. 2001), so a gender gap in opposition to pornography is unsurprising. However, men's and women's attitudes are diverging.

The growing gender divide in attitudes toward pornography may reflect the changing content of pornography and pornography's consequences for heterosexual romantic relationships as experienced differently by men and women. Readily accessible pornography has grown increasingly violent and degrading toward women (Bridges 2010; Bridges et al. 2010; Tyler 2010). Women in the U.S. often find this type of pornography repellent and inauthentic (Parvez 2006), yet research shows that men's sexual scripts are influenced by pornography; for example, men who watch pornography frequently are more likely to request that their partners imitate sexual acts seen in pornography (Sun, Bridges, Johnason, and Ezzell 2014). Women who report high rates of pornography consumption among their partners also report lower relationship quality (Stewart and Szymanski 2012). Thus the growing divergence in men's and women's attitudes toward pornography may represent both a

divergence in the sexual experiences of men and women and the negative consequences pornography has for heterosexual relationships, particularly as perceived by women.

Women also may be influenced by a cultural turn toward postfeminism that coincides with pornographication (Aronson 2003; Douglas 2010; Hall and Rodriguez 2003; McRobbie 2004, 2009; Stacey 1990). The antipornography feminist movement was strong during the 1970s and 1980s, but since the mid-1990s, women have been confronted with cultural forces that discredit political feminist activism, previously one major source of opposition to pornography. Postfeminism entails political distance from feminism (Stacey 1990), and some scholars argue that postfeminist culture also pressures women to uncritically embrace male-oriented sexual attitudes, including the social acceptance of pornography (McRobbie 2009). It could be that women's trajectory toward acceptance of pornography is influenced by cultural forces that discourage women from critiquing sexual norms that serve masculine interests (McRobbie 2009). Thus, postfeminism's influence on gender differences in attitudes toward pornography is a fruitful area for future research, and feminist scholarship should investigate whether and how postfeminist cultural norms discourage or silence women's criticisms of pornography and pornography culture.

The widening gap between men's and women's opposition to pornography, particularly men's decreased opposition over time, may be of concern to scholars and laypeople alike given research investigating the consequences of pornography and pornographic culture on people's attitudes. There is evidence that sexually explicit media is associated with U.S. men's positive attitudes toward risky sexual behaviors (Wright 2012). The effects of pornography on violence against women are uncertain, and research shows mixed results. Consuming pornography is correlated with attitudes supporting violence against women, and this effect is stronger for violent pornography, according to a meta-analysis of studies conducted between 1985 and 2007 (Hald, Malamuth, and Yuen 2010). However, individual characteristics and attitudes, such as a predisposition to sexual aggressiveness, may moderate this relationship among men in the U.S. (Malamuth, Hald, and Koss 2012). Given that concern about pornography's social consequences is a major predictor of opposition to pornography (Fisher et al. 1994), the decline in opposition to pornography may additionally reflect decreasing worry over its effects as pornography gains social acceptability in a climate of pornographication.

This study is limited by the question on opposition to pornography through legal censorship. While this captures an important dimension of attitudes, it may not fully capture the degree to which people find pornography socially acceptable. However, our data have the unique advantage of a repeated survey question over the past four decades, with many important covariates, allowing for an analysis of attitudinal changes over a long period.

Another limitation to these data is their specificity to the United States. A large body of pornography research in the social sciences is conducted in European countries, where attitudes about and access to pornography differ from the United States. (e.g., Hald 2006; Luder et al. 2011). The United States has its own unique history of legal regulation of obscene materials that other countries do not share; for example, legal concerns in Canada center on the potential harms of pornography rather than free speech (Waltman 2010). Comparing attitudes toward pornography across national contexts is a fruitful area of future research. Further, given the increased visibility and acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender populations, future research also should investigate how people feel about LGBT pornography. Finally, our data are limited in their ability to empirically measure cultural shifts beyond attitudes toward pornography; further research that can more directly measure the cultural context of the gender gap in pornography opposition would be fruitful.

In conclusion, we find that pornography attitudes for both men and women have changed over time, and we argue that the pornographication—pornography's cultural ubiquity and accessibility in the United States--is the best explanation for this shift. Further, one might suspect that, due to pornographication and pornography's increasing acceptability, the gender gap in attitudes would narrow. However, pornography attitudes continue to be a differentiating factor between the sexual attitudes of men and women, and increasingly so over time. We argue the increasing gender gap is due to men's grooming into pornography while women are caught between pornography's increasingly visible and publicly acceptable nature, and resistance to their own subjugation.

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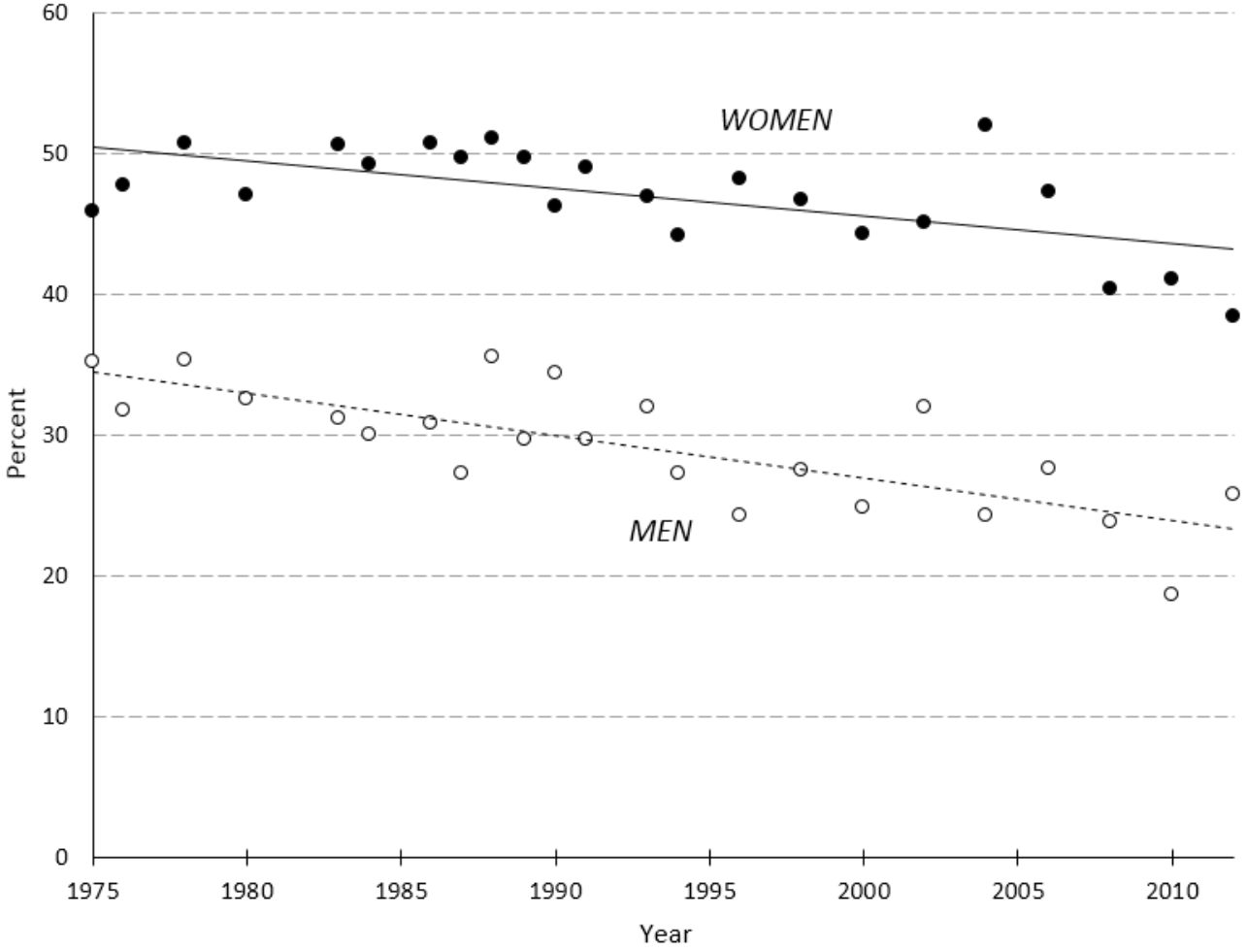
Figure 1. Opposition to pornography, by gender: 1975-2012
Percent agreeing, "There should be laws against distribution of pornography, whatever the age."



Source: Analysis of General Social Survey by Lucia C. Lykke and Philip N. Cohen in, "The Widening Gender Gap in Opposition to Pornography, 1975-2012"

TABLE 1: Descriptive statistics by respondent gender

	Men (N=14,079)		Women (N=18,170)	
	Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*
College graduate	.231	.429	.188	.384
Year	1992.640	11.030	1992.500	10.614
Age	43.837	17.162	44.570	16.872
Children	1.806	1.793	2.064	1.768
Married	.632	.491	.589	.484
Black	.838	.376	.820	.378
White	.104	.311	.129	.330
Other race	.059	.240	.051	.217
South	.343	.484	.351	.470
Political views	2.217	1.321	2.129	1.206
Free speech	1.403	1.253	1.317	1.186
Religious attendance	3.476	2.694	4.127	2.654
Fundamentalist	.283	.459	.315	.457
No religion	.135	.348	.080	.267
Jewish	.021	.145	.017	.128
Baptist	.183	.394	.202	.395
MLPE[a]	.188	.398	.212	.402
Other protestant	.169	.382	.186	.383
Other religion	.048	.218	.042	.199
Political views missing	.045	.211	.079	.266
Religious attendance miss-ing	.008	.093	.009	.094

[a] Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian

TABLE 2: Logistic regression coefficients for opposition to pornography, 1975-2012

	Full Sample (1)			*Women (2)*			*Men (3)*			
	β		SE	β		SE	β		SE	
Female	.778	**	.030							
Year	-.016	**	.001	-.012	**	.002	-.023	**	.002	b
College Graduate	-.294	**	.037	-.223	**	.048	-.388	**	.058	b
Age	.031	**	.001	.029	**	.001	.034	**	.001	b
Children	.052	**	.009	.055	**	.012	.048	**	.014	
Married	.098	**	.031	.064		.039	.121	*	.053	
Black	-.758	**	.052	-.845	**	.062	-.593	**	.089	b
Other race	.168	*	.074	.016		.093	.365	**	.120	b
South	.103	**	.032	.115	**	.040	.083		.051	
Political views	.164	**	.012	.188	**	.016	.144	**	.019	
Free speech	-.233	**	.012	-.229	**	.016	-.240	**	.020	
Religious attendance	.174	**	.006	.162	**	.008	.196	**	.010	b
Fundamentalist	.348	**	.051	.337	**	.067	.367	**	.080	
No religion	.102		.066	.088		.087	.145		.103	
Jewish	-.674	**	.121	-.664	**	.154	-.680	**	.197	
Baptist	.114		.068	.102		.087	.128		.110	
MLPE	.133	**	.043	.156	**	.055	.098		.071	
Other Protestant	.420	**	.051	.373	**	.066	.485	**	.080	
Other religion	.249	**	.077	.185		.101	.326	**	.119	
Political views missing	.292	**	.058	.232	**	.068	.460	**	.104	
Religious attendance missing	.172		.139	.388	*	.191	-.135		.224	
Intercept	29.166	**	2.964	21.578	**	3.800	41.791	**	4.780	b
N	32,249			18,170			14,079			

[b] Difference between coefficients for men and for women significant at p<.05

Note: excluded categories are White for race/ethnicity, and Catholic for religion.

*p< .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 (two-tailed tests)

ENDNOTES

[i] Courts have allowed prosecution of porn sites in some cases when the harm is personally demonstrable, as in the criminal prosecution of a man who ran a "revenge porn" site and was convicted of identity theft and extortion (Graham 2015).

[ii] The GSS also includes a question about pornography use, asking whether respondents have "seen an x-rated movie in the last year." We don't focus on this outcome both because it does not measure attitudes and because the term "x-rated movie" seems archaic. However, we control for this variable in one of our alternative models (see results section; model available on request).

[iii] The number of respondents who think that pornography should be legal to all is quite small across the time period (less than 10 percent at all times, and as low as 4 percent), further reason that we combined the "pornography should be legal for all" category with "legal to those over 18." We additionally estimated multinomial logistic regression models, which support this decision (see results section).

[iv] In initial models we also controlled for family income, adjusted for family size and composition (Citro and Michael 1995). However, after initial tests showed that income had a very high variance inflation factor, we dropped that variable, the only substantive effect of which was to increase the size of the coefficients on the college graduate variable.

[v] In the final models, for both men and women only year (17.8 for men, 18.9 for women) and age (10.7 for men) had variance inflation factor (VIF) values greater than 10. Because the effects of these variables are strong, and the confidence intervals around their coefficients are narrow, we are not concerned about the negative effect of collinearity. The average VIF for the remaining variables was 2.3, which is not concerning for control variables (O'Brien 2007).