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Correlates of Support for Censorship of Sexual, Sexually Violent, and Violent Media

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Willingness to ban various forms of sexual, violent, and sexually violent media was assessed through a random digit dialing survey of adults in Seminole County, FL. Of 1,291 eligible adults contacted, 304 (23.5%) completed the interview. Substantial majorities (71-77%) supported censoring sexually violent media, about half (47-54%) supported censoring nonsexual violent media, and about one third supported censoring nonviolent sexually explicit movies (32%) and videotapes (28%). Principle components analysis of these items revealed two clear factors: support for banning sexual media and support for banning violent and sexually violent media. Sexual conservatism, sex role stereotyping, authoritarianism, age, gender, concern about pornography's effects, and support for a local anti-pornography campaign were consistently more highly correlated with support for censoring sexual media than with support for censoring violent media. Regression analysis showed that support for banning sexual media and concern about pornography's effects both contributed to the prediction of support for anti-pornography campaigns. Contrary to expectations, those low in sex role stereotyping showed low levels of support for censoring sexual media and low levels of concern about pornography's effects, relative both to fundamentalists and other respondents.

Assessment of attitudes toward the acceptability of sexually explicit materials has regularly occupied the attention of sex researchers for two decades. Most researchers attempting to assess these attitudes have used a survey methodology that relies on verbal descriptions of erotic materials (Abelson, Cohen, Heaton, & Suder, 1971; Athanasio & Shaver, 1971; Diamond & Dannemiller, 1989; Eysenck, 1976; Gallup, 1985; Herman & Bordner, 1983; Scott, Eitle, & Skovron, 1990). However, some have supplemented survey methodology by showing participants specific examples of erotic materials and eliciting their reactions to these exemplars (Linz et al., 1991; Wallace & Wehmer, 1973). Employing a field study methodology, Zurcher, Kirkpatrick, Cushing, and Bowman (1973) compared the attitudinal and demographic characteristics of ad hoc anti-pornography and anti-censorship groups. Cowan, Chase, and Stahly (1989) examined the similarities and differences in attitudes toward pornography control of self-defined feminists and fundamentalists using a structured interview format.

A limitation of most of these studies is that researchers did not systematically explore differences in attitudes toward sexually explicit media and sexually violent media. The distinction between sexually explicit media and sexually violent media has emerged as central in the literature on the effects of exposure to sexually explicit media (Donnerstein, Linz, & Penrod, 1987; Malamuth & Donnerstein, 1984). Indeed, in a recent review of experimental studies examining the antisocial effects of media exposures, Linz (1989) concluded that the evidence of harmful effects from exposure to (nonviolent) sexually explicit media is weak and inconsistent, whereas the evidence consistently shows that exposure to depictions of violence toward women, whether sexually explicit, produces acceptance of rape myths and desensitization to the suffering of rape victims.

Researchers who have examined public opinion toward sexually explicit materials and have made the distinction between violent and nonviolent examples have found that public opinion is considerably harsher toward depictions of sexual violence (Gallup, 1985; Linz et al., 1991). In the Gallup poll, respondents were told that the interviewer was going to read to them several descriptions of adult entertainment, and the respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought "laws should totally ban any of the following forms of activity, allow them so long as there is no public display—or impose no restrictions

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at all for adult audiences." The percentages of respondents willing to ban "magazines that show sexual violence" (73%), "theaters showing movies that depict sexual violence" (68%), and "sale or rental of video cassettes featuring sexual violence" (63%) were much higher than the percentages of respondents willing to ban "magazines that show adults having sexual relations" (47%), "theaters showing X-rated movies" (42%), "sale or rental of X-rated video cassettes for home viewing" (32%), and even more so "magazines that show nudity" (21%). Also, Linz et al. (1991) found that, among those respondents willing to report to the laboratory and view various materials, those who viewed violent materials became more negative toward the materials they viewed. Those who first viewed nonviolent erotic materials became less negative after viewing them.

The purpose of the current research was to explore further the consequences of the distinction between sexually explicit media and sexually violent media on the willingness of persons to support the censorship of these media. We used survey methods and employed questions patterned closely after those developed by the Gallup organization for the Newsweek (1985) poll. We added items to assess respondents' willingness to censor violent but nonsexually explicit films: "R-rated slasher films that show violence toward women, but are not sexually explicit" and "films that are not sexually explicit, but show graphic violence."

After willingness to ban sexually explicit, violent, and sexually violent materials has been distinguished, several questions can be addressed. Because of the strength and consistency of previous results (Gallup, 1985; Linz et al., 1991), we predicted that substantially more respondents would support the censorship of sexually violent than of sexually explicit materials. We also predicted that more respondents would react negatively to the combination of sexual explicitness and violence than to violence in a nonsexual context, and thus there would be more support for censoring sexually violent materials than violent materials. No firm empirical or theoretical basis could be found for predicting a difference in willingness to censor sexually explicit versus violent materials, although it was noted that Diamond and Dannemiller (1989) concluded that considerable permissiveness exists in U.S. samples regarding sexually explicit materials.

We examined a second set of questions concerning the relationships among the responses to these various items. Based on still unpublished results we obtained from another sample (Fisher, Cook, & Shirkey, 1994), we anticipated that all items dealing with sexually explicit media would form one factor, and the remaining items that dealt either with sexually violent media or nonsexual violence would form another. A principle components analysis of these responses was planned to explore these possibilities.

Another set of questions concerned the correlates of willingness to censor sexual, violent, and sexually violent media. Assuming the emergence of two factors, willingness to censor sexual materials and willingness to censor violent ones, what are the correlates of willingness to censor these two classes of media? Generally, we anticipated that the demographic and attitudinal correlates of attitudes toward sexually explicit materials found in previous surveys would be correlated more highly with willingness to censor sexual media than willingness to censor sexually violent media. This prediction was based on the assumption that most respondents would have had some experience with sexual media, and, reflecting the generally nonviolent nature of these materials (Cowan, Lee, Levy, & Snyder, 1988; Palys, 1986), their cognitive representations of sexually explicit materials would be of nonviolent exemplars. Thus, their responses to questions about the acceptability of sexual media were probably based on their reactions to nonviolent sexually explicit materials, either exclusively or to a greater extent than their reactions to sexually violent ones.

Previous surveys (Abelson et al., 1971; Athanasiu & Shaver, 1971; Diamond & Dannemiller, 1989; Herrman & Bordner, 1983), which have not distinguished sexually violent and sexual media, have consistently indicated that older respondents, those who are more religious, and women have more negative attitudes toward sexually explicit materials. Based on these findings, we predicted that willingness to censor both sexual media and violent media would be correlated positively with age, religiosity, and gender (women would be more supportive of censorship), but that the correlations would be higher for the former relationships than the latter. We also included several items taken from Batson (1976) to assess three religious orientations: means, end, and quest. As originally conceptualized by Batson (1976), persons with a means orientation were seen as attempting to satisfy social and other extrinsic needs through religious practice, whereas persons with an ends orientation were seen as valuing religious experiences and beliefs for their own sake. The quest orientation was seen by Batson (1976) as an open-ended and open-minded search for answers to religious questions. Based on these descriptions and results using similar scales as correlates of attitudes toward gays and lesbians (Fisher, Derison, Polley, Cadman, & Johnston, 1994), we predicted that the means and ends orientations would correlate positively both with support for censoring sexual media and support for censoring violent media,
but more highly with the former than the latter. We predicted that the quest orientation would not correlate positively with either measure.

The original conception of the authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) portrayed authoritarians as overly concerned with sexual matters and supportive of censorship of sexual materials. Subsequent studies in which reactions to sexual materials were assessed have supported this view (Byrne, Cherry, Lambeth, & Mitchell, 1973; Kelley, 1985). Thus, we again predicted that authoritarianism would be positively correlated with willingness to censor both sexual media and violent media, but that the magnitude of the correlation would be greater for sexual media than for violent media.

Anti-pornography feminists (Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1988; Longino, 1980; MacKinnon, 1989) have argued that pornography promotes a sexist ideology and discriminatory practices against women (Baron, 1990). In support of this view, Zillmann and Bryant (1982) found that exposure to nonviolent pornography promoted sexually calloused attitudes and lowered support for the “women’s liberation movement.” Similarly, Check and Gulloien (1989) found that high consumption of nonviolent, dehumanizing pornography was associated with greater acceptance of rape myths and sex-calloused attitudes.

However, other experimental studies (Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988; Padgett, Brislin-Slutz, & Neal, 1989) failed to support the view that using pornography results in changes in attitudes toward women. Also, researchers in correlational studies (Demare, Briere, & Lips, 1988; Garcia, 1986) found no relationship between the use of nonviolent pornography and conservative attitudes toward women. In contradiction of the feminist anti-pornography hypothesis, Baron (1990) found that states that scored higher on his measure of gender equality had higher circulation rates of softcore pornographic magazines, such as Playboy and Hustler. He interpreted this correlation as a result of variation across states in levels of political tolerance, with high political tolerance being associated with both gender equality and greater support for free speech rights, including sexually explicit speech.

To examine this relationship in the current research, we included items taken from three scales developed by Burt (1980): sexual conservatism, sex role stereotyping, and acceptance of interpersonal violence. Burt found all three scales were positively correlated with her measure of rape myths. Applying Baron’s interpretation to individuals rather than states, we predicted that willingness to censor both sexual media and sexually violent media would be positively correlated with sexual conservatism, sex role stereotyping, and acceptance of interpersonal violence, and that the correlations with these variables would be of greater magnitude for willingness to censor sexual media than willingness to censor violent media.

At the time the survey was done (December 1990), public debate over sexually explicit materials was quite active in Seminole County. The State Attorney in the adjoining county had launched a highly publicized and controversial campaign against adult videotapes, and some Seminole County officials had publicly suggested similar initiatives. Also, a recently formed local anti-pornography group was advocating stricter enforcement of obscenity laws in Central Florida to rid the community of “illegal, hard-core pornography.” The rhetoric of these anti-pornography activists tended to characterize “pornography” as consisting mostly of depictions of the torture and sexual abuse of women and children. Given this emphasis on violent pornography by anti-pornography activists, it was of interest to determine whether support for their positions was associated more strongly with the support for censorship of sexual media or sexually violent media. Because these movements were rooted in politically and religiously conservative segments of the community who are quite sexually conservative, we predicted that support for their movement would be associated more strongly with support for the censorship of sexual media than with support for censorship of sexually violent media.

It is still possible that some persons who support the censorship of sexual media and sexually violent media do so because of a genuine concern for the effects of pornography. As previously noted, feminist anti-pornography theorists posit negative effects on women of both violent and nonviolent forms of pornography. Further, national surveys (Abelson et al., 1971; Gallup, 1985) showed that substantial proportions of their respondents believe that pornography has negative effects, such as causing sex crimes or reducing respect for women, or at least, deny that pornography has positive effects, such as improving the sex lives of couples. From these suggestions, we anticipated that concern for the effects of pornography should be positively correlated with support for both the censorship of sexual media and sexually violent media.

Cowan et al. (1989) conducted intensive interviews with self-identified fundamentalist and feminist women. They found that both groups were uniform in their negative attitudes toward pornography and their belief that pornography is related to violence toward women. Fundamentalist women were also uniform in their support of pornography control. Feminist women were split, however, with some opposing pornography control. Anti-control feminists tended to have a greater concern for individual
Support for Censorship

After an eligible, willing respondent was contacted, the interviewer read the interview schedule verbatim and recorded the respondent's answers on the interview schedule. Interviewers were instructed to answer any questions asked by the respondent, and respondents' comments were solicited at the completion of the interview.

Method

Sampling

Seminole County, FL, is part of the Orlando standard metropolitan statistical area and has a population of approximately 300,000 (Shermyen, 1991). A cross reference directory was used to estimate the number of respondents in the sample who should be selected from each of the 46 Seminole County phone exchanges. Randomly generated numbers consisting of the exchange plus a randomly generated block of four digits were called, until the quota was reached for each exchange (Frye, 1989). Interviewers were provided with a standard opening script to read, in which they gave their first name and announced that they were doing a survey under the supervision of the first two authors. They stated that the survey was concerned with "controversial issues facing the County," it would take only a few minutes, participants could decline to answer any questions they liked, and all responses would be held in strictest confidence. (In fact, responses were anonymous.) If respondents indicated a willingness to continue, the interviewer screened them for age and county of residence. If they did not live in Seminole County, the call was terminated. If the respondent was under 18, the interviewer asked whether there was an adult present in the household who could come to the phone. If so, the interviewer began the introduction again with that adult. If no adult was present, an attempt was made to schedule a callback when one would be present.

The four-part interview schedule was developed for the study. Part I contained nine items concentrating on public display of, availability of, and legal restrictions on sexually explicit, sexually violent, and violent materials. This section consisted of a set of questions adapted from those developed for the Newsweek poll by Gallup (1985). The respondents were given nine examples of "adult entertainment" and were asked whether they thought "the law should totally ban this form of activity, should allow it so long as there is no public display, or should allow it with no restrictions at all for adult audiences." Responses to these items formed the measures of support for sexual, violent, and sexually violent media.

Part II contained 11 items, all focusing specifically on "adult" videotapes. This section began with a description of "adult or X-rated videotapes," which were described as being kept in special sections of the videostore and as showing "naked human bodies and all forms of sexual activity, including sexual intercourse, oral sex, group sex, and variations of the above by adult performers." This introduction was followed by questions that dealt with the respondents' personal acceptance of adult videotapes, their perception of the community acceptance of such tapes, their beliefs about positive or negative effects of adult videotapes, whether they had ever viewed "an X-rated videotape or an X-rated film," and their support of or opposition to local anti-pornography campaigns.

rights and freedom, whereas pro-control feminists and fundamentalists were more concerned with responsibility for the welfare of others. Summarizing the responses of the 119 recipients of the National Organization for Women (NOW) newsletter, Cowan (1992) concluded that virtually all feminists have negative attitudes toward "pornography," but many do not support control of pornography through legislation, because they also are concerned about the harm of censorship, and they associate support for censorship with right wing groups. The results of the Cowan (1992) study are limited to some extent by her procedure of asking respondents "to use only degrading or sexually violent material as the definition of pornography" when responding to questions concerning pornography control (p. 170). Also, sampling only men and women identified as "feminist" by their membership in NOW does not allow a comparison between the attitudes of feminists and other members of the population. If these respondents had been asked about the control of sexual media that are neither violent nor degrading, it is possible that this generally politically liberal group would have voiced attitudes similar to or even more permissive than the rest of the members of their community.

The current research allows the attitudes of "feminists" and "fundamentalists" to be compared to the remaining respondents'. Respondents were partitioned into these three groups by selecting those with very low scores on the sex role stereotyping scale ("feminists") and those who scored high on several measures of religious beliefs ("fundamentalists") and comparing these groups to all other respondents. Based on the logic of Baron's (1990) interpretation, we predicted that "feminists" would resemble other respondents in their support for the censorship of sexual media and support for anti-pornography campaigns, showing less support than fundamentalists. However, we predicted that they would resemble fundamentalists in their support for the censorship of violent media and their concern about the effects of pornography, following Cowan's (1992) interpretation.
Responses to three items (Do you think that adult videotapes provide useful information about sex? Do you think these videotapes can improve the sex lives of some couples? Do you think they appeal mostly to sick or morbid interest in sex?) were summed to form a measure of concern about pornography's effects ($a = .64$). Responses to three other items that asked about support of the nearby State Attorney’s campaign against adult videotapes, whether the respondent would support a similar campaign in his or her county, and whether he or she would vote to convict in an obscenity case were summed to form an index of support for anti-pornography campaigns ($a = .84$).

Part III consisted of 18 Likert scale items assessing several other attitudes. Four items were taken from the work of Altemeyer (1988) to measure Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) (Some of the worst people today are those who do not respect the flag, our leaders and the American way of life. Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn. In these troubled times, laws have to be enforced without mercy, especially when dealing with agitators and revolutionaries who are stirring things up. Spanking a child only teaches him resentment and fear and does nothing to teach him right from wrong.) ($a = .60$). These items were selected on a rational basis to reflect the diversity of the item content of the RWA scale, while also avoiding items that dealt specifically with sexual issues. Four items were selected from each of the following scales developed by Burt (1980) and shown to be correlates of rape myth acceptance: sexual conservatism, acceptance of interpersonal violence, and sex role stereotyping. The items combined a high factor loading with a wording judged to be appropriate for presentation over the telephone. The four items forming the sexual conser-vatism scale (Men have a biologically stronger sex drive than women. The primary goal of sexual intercourse should be to have children. A nice woman will be offended or embarrassed by dirty jokes. A woman shouldn't give in too easily to a man, or he'll think she's loose.) had a moderate level of internal consistency ($a = .57$), as did those assessing acceptance of interpersonal violence (A man is never justified in hitting his wife. Being roughed up is sexually stimulating to many women. People today should not use an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth as a rule for living. Sometimes the only way a man can get a cold woman turned on is to use force.) ($a = .49$) and sex role stereotyping (A man should fight when the women he's with is insulted. A woman should be a virgin when she marries. A woman should never contradict her husband in public. It is acceptable for a woman to have a career, but marriage and family should come first.) ($a = .55$).

Part IV contained author-generated sociodemographic questions that addressed the respondents’ age, level of education, occupation, number of children, military experience, voter registration, religiosity, frequency of church attendance, and ethnic identification. Except those who professed to be “not at all religious,” respondents were also asked to respond to nine Likert items, taken from the work of Batson (1976). These items were originally intended by Batson (1976) to assess three religious orientations. Persons with a means-extrinsic orientation were believed to value religion as a means to other ends, such as social acceptance and economic success, whereas those with an ends-intrinsic orientation were assumed to value the religious experience as an end in itself. Persons with a quest orientation were seen as having an open-ended and open-minded approach to spiritual questions that showed that respon-
dents valued religious doubts and were open to change. Although Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993) have questioned the distinctiveness of the means and ends scales, responses to the items were summed for the means orientation (On religious issues, I find the opinions of others irrelevant. A major factor in my religious development has been the religion of my parents. My religion tends to serve my needs for fellowship and security.), ends orienta-
tion (I have found it essential to have faith. God’s will should shape my life. When it comes to religious questions, I feel driven to know the truth.). The ends orientation had acceptable internal consistency ($a = .61$), but the means orientation did not ($a = .28$). The quest orientation (It might be said that I value my religious doubts and uncertainties. I find my everyday experiences severely test my religious convictions. I do not expect my religious beliefs to change in the next few years.) also had low internal consistency ($a = .22$).

Procedure

Five male and three female interviewers participated in data collection. The first two authors recruited, trained, and supervised the interviewers and served occasionally as interviewers. The remaining interviewers were all graduate and undergraduate students from the University of Central Florida. They were employed and paid by a private consulting firm, and no mention was made of the University in the interview. Research assistants were instructed in the proper use of the random number sampling procedure, screening procedures, use of the interview schedule, recording of responses, and telephone survey ethics. They were provided a standard opening statement to read and a list of tips on telephone interview- ing. Inexperienced interviewers were asked to role play at least one call and were given feedback on
their performance. At least one supervisor was present during all interviewing.

Calls were made between 6:00 and 9:30 p.m., weekdays, 11:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. on Saturdays, and noon and 6:30 p.m. on Sundays. The survey was conducted during December 1990.

Results

Sample Characteristics

Out of 4,387 calls, 1,291 eligible households were reached. Of those calls to eligible households, 278 (21.5%) yielded contact with an answering machine, 9 (0.7%) were terminated because of the respondent's deafness or language problems, 141 (10.9%) respondents asked to be called at another time, 546 (42.3%) respondents refused to participate immediately after or during the introductory statement, and 13 (1%) terminated the interview after answering some questions. Interviews were completed by 304 respondents, yielding a completion rate of 23.5%. This rate of completions among eligible households is quite similar to the completion rate (22.4%) obtained by Linz et al. (1991) in a similar survey.

Comparison of the obtained sample characteristics for age, gender, and ethnicity showed a very close match to the April 1990 census data available for Seminole County (Shermyen, 1991). Of the total, 49% were male and 51% female, an exact match to the latest census figures. Fourteen percent were between 18 and 24 years old; 44% were between 25 and 44; 28% were between 45 and 64; the remaining 12% were over 65. These figures deviated from the census figures for the same age groups (13%, 48%, 26%, and 14%, respectively) by a maximum of 4%. Finally, 90% of the obtained sample were White, 4% Black, 4% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 2% gave another ethnic identification. This too was a close match to census figures, which reported 89% of Seminole County residents to be White. Thus, the sample seems to parallel closely the population of the county on the demographic dimensions of age, sex, and race.

Further, the vast majority of the eligible respondents who refused to participate did so before learning the content of the questions. Only 1% terminated after beginning and thus becoming aware of the topic, and many of these attributed their termination to practical concerns, such as an incoming call or someone at the door. It seems unlikely that a self-selection bias based on the content of the survey affected these results.

Support for Censorship

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses concerning willingness to censor various forms of entertainment. Respondents were consistently more accepting of sexual media than they were of violent or sexually violent media. Nonparametric Sign tests (Norusis, 1988) were used to compare sexual media with their sexually violent counterparts. There was greater support for censoring sexually violent magazines than sexually explicit ones, $Z(300) = 9.23, p < .0001$; greater support for censoring theaters showing sexual violence than theaters showing sexually explicit films, $Z(295) = 10.65, p < .0001$; and greater support for censoring sexually violent videotapes than sexually explicit videotapes, $Z(295) = 10.73, p < .0001$. Similar tests showed less support for censorship of sexually explicit videotapes than for either slasher films, $Z(296) = 5.98, p < .0001$, or graphically violent films, $Z(296) = 5.11, p < .0001$, and less support for censorship of sexually explicit films than for either slasher films, $Z(295) = 4.97, p < .0001$, or graphically violent films, $Z(295) = 3.87, p < .001$. Finally, sign tests revealed greater willingness to censor sexually violent films than either slasher films, $Z(296) = 5.78, p < .0001$, or other graphically violent films, $Z(296) = 7.42, p < .0001$. Thus, respondents were not only less accepting of sexually violent media than they were sexual media, but they were also less accepting of violent media than they were sexual media (sexually explicit videotapes and movies).

Principal Components Analysis

For subsequent analyses, numerical values were assigned to responses to questions about support for censoring various media; a score of three was assigned for "totally ban," two for "no display," and one for "no restrictions." These nine variables were then submitted to a principal components analysis with varimax rotation. Two very clear factors emerged, willingness to censor sexual materials and willingness to
censorship and violent and sexually violent materials. Four nonviolent sexual items formed the sexual materials factor. Three sexually violent items and two violent items formed the violent materials factor. The rotated factor structure is shown in Table 2. The correlation between these two factors, \( r(296) = .14, p < .01 \), is statistically significant, but low.

**Correlates of Support for Censorship of Sexual and Violent Media**

To test the hypotheses regarding the correlates of the sex and violence factors, both factor scores were correlated with all predictor variables, and Fisher’s \( r \) to \( z \) transformation was used to test the significance of the differences between the correlations with the sex factor and the correlation with the violence factor for each predictor variable. Table 3 shows the results of these analyses. As expected, all these variables were significantly correlated with the sex factor, with the exception of the quest religious orientation and acceptance of interpersonal violence. Also as expected, the magnitude of the correlations between the predictor variables and the sex factor were significantly greater than the magnitude of the correlations between the corresponding variable and the violence factor, except in the case of respondent’s gender, for which this difference was nonsignificant. Thus, the sex factor was significantly correlated with age, gender (women were more willing to censor), religiosity and church attendance, the means and ends religious orientations, right wing authoritarianism, sexual conservatism, sex role stereotyping, and concern about the effects of pornography. Scores on the violence factor were significantly correlated with gender, religiosity, right wing authoritarianism, and concern about the effects of pornography. However, these latter correlations were significantly lower than the former, except for those involving respondent’s gender.

To explore further the relationships between the predictor variables and the sex and violence factors, separate forward stepwise regression analyses were performed for each factor. All variables that were shown to be significantly related to each factor were used in the analysis, with one exception. Because of the theoretical and statistical redundancy of the religious orientation measures, church attendance and self-rated religiosity, the religious orientation measures were dropped from the analysis, and church attendance and religiosity were summed to form a single measure of total religiosity. This total religiosity measure was entered into the regression analyses with the other significant predictors. Table 4, which summarizes the results of these analyses, shows that concern about pornography’s effects made the largest contribution to prediction of scores on the sex factor, but sex role stereotyping, gender, age, and religiosity all added significantly to the ability to predict this variable. Concern about the pornography’s effects was also the best single predictor of scores on the violence factor, but gender and right wing authoritarianism also added significantly to the regression equation.

**Support for Anti-pornography Campaigns**

To test the hypotheses about support for anti-pornography campaigns, the sex and violence factors from the principle components analysis were then entered into a stepwise regression analysis, with support for anti-pornography campaigns as the dependent variable. Support for censoring sexual materials entered on the first step and made a significant contribution, \( \text{Multiple } R = .69, F(1,303) = 281.11, p < .001 \). Support for censoring violent media made no additional contribution (\( \text{Beta} = .04 \)). However, when gender of respondents and concern about the effects of pornography were added to the regression equation, concern about the effects
of pornography also entered the equation, Multiple $R = .72, F(2,302) = 24.48, p < .001$. Gender did not provide a significant increase in $R^2$. With both variables in the regression equation, both support for censoring sexual media (part correlation = .45) and concern about the effects of pornography (part correlation = .20) were associated with support for anti-pornography campaigns. Although support for the censorship of sexual violence made no independent contribution to support for anti-pornography campaigns, concern about pornography's effects did.

Correlates of Concern About Pornography’s Effects

In view of the emergence of the concern about the effects of pornography as an important predictor of support for anti-pornography campaigns, an exploratory analysis was performed to determine the correlates of this variable. Correlations were performed between concern about pornography's effects and all variables that were predicted to correlate with support for censoring sexual media. Concern about pornography's effects was found to be significantly correlated with age, $r(299) = .28, p < .001$; gender (females expressed greater concern), $r(293) = .30, p < .001$; total religiosity, $r(292) = .42, p < .001$; right wing authoritarianism, $r(262) = .27, p < .001$; and sex role stereotyping, $r(262) = .34, p < .001$. This variable was also correlated with having viewed adult videotapes, $r(298) = -.36, p < .001$. Thus, those who expressed greater concern about the effects of pornography were older, female, more religious, more authoritarian, more supportive of sex role stereotypes, and less likely to have ever viewed an X-rated videotape.

Feminists, Fundamentalists, and Support for Censorship

To create groups that could reasonably be seen as “feminists” and “fundamentalists,” the sample was partitioned into three groups based on their responses to several questions. Women and men whose scores on the sex role stereotyping scale placed them in the lowest 11.8% were designated “feminists” ($n = 29$). Gender was not used as a part of the definition of “fundamentalists,” because doing so would imply that men cannot support feminist ideals, and also to match more closely the methods of Cowan (1992), who included men in her sample of NOW members. Those who either described themselves as very religious or attended church at least weekly and scored at 10 or above (in the top 42.7% of the distribution) on the ends religious orientation scale were designated “fundamentalists” ($n = 71$). These groups were then compared to the remaining respondents ($n = 204$) on several dimensions.

To test the hypotheses, one-way analyses of variance were performed comparing the three groups, and significant main effects were followed by post hoc comparisons among the three means using the LSD test. Table 5 shows the means for dimensions on which these three groups differed significantly. The three groups of respondents differed significantly in support for the censorship of sexual media, $F(2,269) = 87.55, p < .001$; support for censorship of violent media, $F(2,274) = 4.79, p = .009$; support for anti-pornography campaigns, $F(2,274) = 14.87, p < .001$; and concern about pornography’s effects, $F(2,274) = 14.65, p < .001$. The comparison of group means yielded no support for the predictions, however. In the case of support for censoring sexual media and support for anti-pornography campaigns, we expected that fundamentalists would score higher than both feminists and all others and that the latter groups would not differ significantly from each other. However, for both variables, all three groups differed significantly from each other, with fundamentalists scoring highest and feminists scoring lowest. With regard to support of anti-pornography campaigns, fundamentalists showed more support ($M = 8.17$) than did other respondents ($M = 7.55$), and feminists ($M = 5.70$) showed the least. The same pattern emerged with support for censoring sexual media, with fundamentalists showing more support ($M = 9.89$) than other respondents ($M = 8.53$) and feminists ($M = 7.17$) showing the least. We also predicted that feminists would be similar to fundamentalists in supporting the censorship of violent media and expressing concern about the effects of pornography. In contrast to these expectations, the feminist group ($M = 5.85$) was found to express significantly less concern about pornography’s effects than fundamentalists ($M = 7.59$) and not to differ from the other respondents ($M = 6.31$). The
same pattern emerged with support for censorship of violent media, with the feminist group \((M = 12.40)\) not differing from other respondents \((M = 12.39)\), but both groups differing from the fundamentalists \((M = 13.44)\).

**Discussion**

Although respondents represented, demographically, only the population of one large Florida county, the results of this survey suggested that public opinion is more favorable to the censorship of violent media than it is to censorship of sexual media. These results showed generally lower levels of support for censorship, but the relative levels of support for sexual and sexually violent materials were quite similar to the patterns found in the *Newsweek* poll (1985): when violent and nonviolent forms of pornography were distinguished, respondents were much less likely to support censorship of nonviolent sexual media than they were of those depicting sexual violence. In a comparison not available in the *Newsweek* poll, fewer than one third would censor nonviolent, sexually explicit films or videotapes, whereas nearly half would censor graphically violent or slasher films. At the same time, more respondents would ban sexually violent media than would ban nonsexual depictions of violence. A combination of sexual and violent content contributed to the willingness of persons to ban particular media. Violent content alone made a larger contribution, and the contributions made by sex and violence were additive. The results of the principle components analysis suggested that support for censorship of violent media and support for censorship of sexual media are clearly distinguishable attitudes, although the two components are somewhat correlated. Most notable was the finding that “slasher” films and graphically violent films loaded on the violence factor.

Some researchers might argue that attempts to assess attitudes toward sexual media should also distinguish degrading or dehumanizing sexual media from sexual media that are nonexploitive and egalitarian (i.e., erotica). The differential effects found by Check and Guloien (1989) of these types of sexual media suggest that this distinction may be important. At present, there are problems with such a distinction, however. It is not clear that researchers in this area can agree upon a single operational definition for this distinction. Check and Guloien (1989), for example, described the scenes that they used in the nonviolent, dehumanizing condition of their experiment as containing “portrayals of sexual interactions in which the woman was portrayed as hystERICALLY responsive to male sexual demands, was verbally abused, dominated, and degraded, and in general treated as nothing more than a plaything with no more human qualities other than her physical attributes” (p. 163). In their content analysis of “dominance and inequality” in sexually explicit videotapes, Cowan et al. (1988) included an even wider circle of elements that they believed indicate dominance and exploitation of women, including differentials in the status of men and women, the amount of clothing worn, the frequency of close ups of female versus male genitalia, and the frequency of masturbation scenes involving women versus men, as well as the ubiquitous practice of male ejaculation on the surface of the woman’s body. Both definitions are multidimensional, involving several elements of both the sexual interactions between male and female performers and the broader social context in which sexual activity occurs. Further, both involve elements that are potentially subjective and about which reasonable persons could disagree. For example, at what point is a woman “treated as nothing more than a plaything with no more human qualities other than her physical attributes”?

To complicate further the distinction between degrading or dehumanizing portrayals and egalitarian and nonexploitive ones, Check and Guloien (1989) used individual sex scenes in their experiment rather than full-length videotapes, because degrading and dehumanizing scenes tend to be found in the same full-length videotape as egalitarian and nonexploitive scenes.

Even if researchers can agree upon the set of elements that clearly distinguishes degrading and dehumanizing portrayals from erotica, it still remains to be seen whether public opinion will be more accepting of one type of portrayal than the other. If persons are asked about their reactions to “degrading and dehumanizing pornography,” it seems obvious that their attitudes will be more negative than if they were asked about their reactions to “sexually explicit materials” or “erotica.” However, an empirical question worth asking is whether the public will judge more harshly those media, either actually
displayed to them or described verbally in more objective terms, that contain some themes said to distinguish degrading and dehumanizing materials from their more egalitarian and less exploitive counterparts.

The current results also supported the distinction between reactions to sexual and violent media with the finding that the correlates of the two factors differ consistently in magnitude. Support for the censorship of the sexual media factor showed substantial correlations with age, religiosity, gender, ends religious orientation, authoritarianism, sexual conservatism, sex role stereotyping, and concern about pornography's effects. Only four of these variables correlated significantly with scores on the violent materials factor, and all four correlations were of less magnitude. One variable that was predicted to correlate significantly with support for the censorship of violent media, acceptance of interpersonal violence, failed to correlate with support for the censorship of either sexual or violent media. It is possible that most persons who oppose censoring sexually violent and violent media are those who value free speech and oppose censorship of any speech, no matter how much it offends their personal standards. This possibility must remain speculation, because no measure of support for free speech was included in current survey.

The current results are consistent with the finding of many previous researchers that those who are more religious are less positive in their reactions to erotic materials. Both self-reported religiosity and church attendance were related to support for censorship of sexual media, and an index formed by summing these two variables emerged as one of the variables making an independent contribution to prediction of this variable in the regression analysis. However, the results from the analysis of the correlates of religious orientation scores suggested that a person's orientation to religion is also important in understanding attitudes toward censorship. As predicted, among those who professed to be at least somewhat religious, those who scored more highly on the items assessing a means orientation or an ends orientation to religion showed more support for censorship of sexual media but not for the censorship of violent media. On the other hand, scores on the quest religious orientation measure, which assesses the extent to which religion represents an open-ended quest for the answers to existential questions, were not significantly correlated with support for the censorship of either sexual or violent media. In religious persons for whom religion is a means to an end, such as approval from others, identification with admired models, or satisfaction of other social needs (Batson, 1976), support for the censorship of sexual media may be more a result of social influence processes than personal convictions opposing pornography. However, for those religious persons with a high ends orientation, support for the censorship of sexual media may be based more on the value they place on the religious experience and feelings of virtue and doing good deeds (Batson, 1976).

The variable that emerged as the best single predictor of support for censorship of sexual and violent media was concern about pornography's effects. This is consistent with Cowan's (1992) results and with Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) theory of reasoned action, which suggests that attitudes toward particular actions (i.e., banning sexual media) are more related to beliefs about the consequences of those actions than to attitudes toward the attitude object (sexual media). The finding that concern about pornography's effects is the best predictor of support for censorship of sexual media might be seen as showing that support for censorship is rooted in rational processes.

Other interpretations are also possible. Byrne, Fisher, Lambert, and Mitchell (1974) found that affective responses to sexual materials were related to judgments about whether such materials should be restricted. Applying an affective-reinforcement model of evaluative responses, they argued that persons attribute their own positive or negative affective reactions to a stimulus to the intrinsic properties of the stimulus and further "attempt to justify such judgments and to vindicate them by attributing a general benefit or harm to the object" (p. 115).

Another interpretation of concern about pornography's effects comes from Wood and Hughes (1984). They interpreted belief that pornography has harmful effects as one manifestation of "cultural fundamentalism," a world view that favors adherence to traditional norms, respect for family and religious authorities, an ascetic lifestyle, and a moral outlook on life. In their view, cultural fundamentalism, and in turn belief in the harm of pornography, results from a set of socialization processes and represents the expression of strongly held cultural values. Both interpretations are consistent with our findings that concern about pornography's harms is greater in older, more religious, more sexually conservative, and female respondents.

The finding that concern about pornography's effects was the best predictor of support for censorship of sexual media and violent media might also be taken as evidence that there is widespread support for feminist anti-pornography theory. However, belief that pornography has harmful effects is not unique to feminist thinking. It is shared with the religiously based opponents of pornography. (See American Family Association, 1989.) That concern about pornography's effects was greater in older, more religious, and
more sexually conservative respondents suggests that most respondents who expressed this concern were religious conservatives, rather than feminists. Even more damaging to the notion that a feminist world view informs concerns about pornography’s effects was the failure of hypotheses derived from Cowan et al. (1989) to be supported. Based on Cowan et al.’s interpretations of attitudes toward pornography control in feminists and fundamentalists, we expected that feminists would not differ from fundamentalists in concern about pornography’s effects or support for the censorship of violence. However, the results showed that “feminists,” defined in our research by a very low score on the sex role stereotyping scale, scored significantly lower than fundamentalists on both dimensions, and expressed significantly less concern about pornography’s effects than even the other (nonfundamentalist) members of the sample. Also contrary to expectations, “feminists” scored lower than both fundamentalists and other members of the sample on support for the censorship of sexual media and support for anti-pornography campaigns. It is clear that “feminists,” as operationally defined in the current study, are relatively tolerant and permissive, rather than rejecting and restrictive, in their attitudes toward pornography.

Several possible explanations can be given for the sharply diverging descriptions of feminists’ attitudes toward pornography suggested by the current study and the work of Cowan and her colleagues (Cowan, 1992; Cowan et al., 1988). As previously noted, Cowan (1992) specially asked her respondents to adopt a definition of “pornography” as including only violent or degrading themes. Cowan et al. (1988) allowed their respondents to use their own definitions of “pornography,” but they reported that the definitions offered by their respondents typically involved violence or degrada-

tion. Thus, the concept of “pornography” for Cowan’s respondents was more negative than was likely adopted by the respondents in our study. It is possible that some feminists in Cowan’s studies had relatively positive attitudes toward some sexually explicit media that went largely undetected because of the verbal referents employed. Indeed, when Cowan’s (1992) respondents were asked to indicate their definitions of “pornography,” only 33% labeled “sexually explicit activity” as “pornography.”

The populations of feminists studied by Cowan and her colleagues were also highly self selected. The 29 feminists interviewed by Cowan et al. were mostly graduate students or faculty and were contacted through a network of associates. Although the sample of NOW members studied by Cowan (1992) was larger, it too contained only persons who were committed enough to join the organization and to complete and mail back the questionnaire (about two thirds did not). In the current study, however, we sampled much more broadly from the adult population of the community. Thus, the “feminists” of Cowan and her colleagues tended to be intellectuals and activists in the women’s movement, whereas the “feminists” queried in the current study were simply those who were ardent in their rejection of sex role stereotyping.

The differences between the conclusions of Cowan and her colleagues and those emerging from the current research may also result from limitations of the current study. Although it is defensible, the classification of respondents as “feminists” solely on the basis of the sex role stereotyping scores is questionable. Clearly, there is more to feminism than just this single theme. Another limitation of both the Cowan studies and the current research is the geographical area from which the populations were drawn. Our research was done in a politically and religiously conservative community. The differences between our results and those of Cowan and her colleagues might simply reflect the different political and religious characteristics of the two communities.

However, the differences between these studies are explained, it is very clear that our findings are consistent with those of Baron (1990), who found that states with greater gender equality also had higher circulation rates of sex magazines and interpreted this correlation as resulting from these states having a climate of greater political tolerance. The current research suggests that rejection of sex role stereotyping is found in the same individuals who reject the censorship of sexual media. The overall pattern of the results from this southern community provides little support for the view that support for censoring pornography derives from a feminist perspective.

References
Support for Censorship


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