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Not Practicing What You Preach: Religion and Incongruence Between Pornography Beliefs and Usage

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Religious Americans, and conservative Protestants in particular, have historically been the most ardent opponents of pornography's production, dissemination, and use. Yet while religiously committed and theologically conservative Americans are generally less likely to view pornography than others, the difference is often not as great or consistent as one might suppose given their strong moral stance. Drawing on insights from religious incongruence theory, this study considered whether religious commitment and theological conservatism predicted a greater incongruence between what Americans say they believe about pornography morally and whether they actually watch it. Data are taken from the nationally representative 2006 Portraits of American Life Study (N = 2,279). Analyses show that greater religious service attendance and prayer frequency are predictive of American men (not women) affirming that viewing pornography is "always morally wrong" while still viewing it in the previous year. Evangelicalism and other sectarian Protestantism are also the religious traditions most likely to believe pornography is always morally wrong while also viewing it. Findings ultimately suggest that religious commitment and affiliation with theological conservatism may influence Americans (primarily men) to oppose pornography more strongly in principle than reflected in actual practice. Data limitations and implications for future research are discussed.

Pornography¹ and religion in the United States have been closely connected for decades. Long before the advent of the Internet and smartphones, conservative Christians vehemently opposed pornography's production, dissemination, and consumption (Sherkat & Ellison, 1997; Thomas, 2016), with some fundamentalist leaders calling it "a cancer that is changing the character of our republic" (Falwell, 1980, p. 200) and "the single most inflammatory force for evil in our society" (LaHaye, 1985, p. 119). For devout conservative Christians, pornography violates direct commands against nonmarital sexual desire, encouraging solo masturbation at best and, at worst, addicting viewers and catalyzing pedophilia, homosexuality, bestiality, and rape throughout whole societies (see descriptions in Driscoll, 2009; Foubert, 2016; LaHaye, 1985).

For these reasons, evangelical Protestants—and increasingly Mormons (Sumerau & Cragun, 2015a, 2015b)—have been at the forefront of efforts to halt the growing acceptability and accessibility of pornography in the United States. Still today, studies show that Americans who are more religious and more theologically conservative are the most likely to oppose the distribution or use of pornography (Carroll et al., 2008; Grubbs, Exline, Pargament, Hook, & Carlisle, 2015; Hardy, Steelman, Coyne, & Ridge, 2013; Lykke & Cohen, 2015; MacInnis & Hodson, 2016; Nelson, Padilla-Walker, & Carroll, 2010; Patterson & Price, 2012). Concurrently, studies most often find that religiously committed and theologically conservative Americans are less likely to report viewing pornography than others (Carroll et al., 2008; Doran & Price, 2014; Hardy et al., 2013; MacInnis & Hodson, 2016; Maddox, Rhoades, & Markman, 2011; Perry, 2016, 2017b; Poulsen, Galovan, & Busby, 2013; Regnerus, 2007; Short, Kasper, & Wetterneck, 2015; Stack, Wasserman, & Kern, 2004; Wright, 2013; Wright, Bae, & Funk, 2013).

And yet there is some inconsistency in research linking religion and pornography. On one hand, religion does seem to prevent or reduce pornography use to some extent. Hardy et al. (2013), for example, showed that religious commitment (operationalized as religious internalization and involvement) reduced intentional pornography use in adolescents

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All data for replication are available from the ARDA. Coding specifications are available from the author upon request.

¹ The term *pornography* can carry moral connotations that are unintended here. The term is used to be consistent with religious discourses on this type of media that oppose "pornography" by name, as well as with the data set used for this study. Throughout, the term *pornography* or *porn* will refer to any sexually explicit visual material (websites, videos, magazines) created with the intention of stimulating sexual arousal.

by increasing disapproval toward porn use, self-regulation, and social control. Paradoxically, however, the association between religious factors and pornography consumption is often not as strong and consistent as one might expect given the near-universal moral disapproval of pornography among devout, conservative Christians. Several studies of undergraduates at both secular and Christian universities, for example, reported no statistically significant correlations between religiosity and viewing pornography (Abell, Steenbergh, & Boivin, 2006; Goodson, McCormick, & Evans, 2001; Short et al., 2015). Foubert and Rizzo (2013) reported that extrinsic religiosity (i.e., religious engagement done for self-interested reasons) was actually positively associated with students viewing Internet pornography and listing more reasons to view pornography. Perry's (2016, 2017b) studies of married Americans found that worship attendance was not a significant predictor of viewing pornography at all or more frequently. Other studies linking religiosity to pornography use have painted conflicting pictures. Baltazar, Helm, McBride, Hopkins, and Stevens (2010), for example, found that religiosity was not significantly related to porn viewing in general, though it was negatively associated with hours spent viewing porn among men who were weekly users. By contrast, Grubbs et al. (2015) found that their multi-item measure of religiosity was negatively associated with using pornography at all; but among those who reported viewing pornography, religiosity was not significantly related to viewing frequency.

Other studies point to an inconsistency in what is openly affirmed by religiously committed or conservative Christians and what may be practiced in private. Several studies over the past decade, for example, have found that online pornography viewing and searches often take place in more religious states. Edelman (2009) analyzed state-level correlates of credit card subscriptions to a leading pornographic website, finding that subscriptions were more prevalent in states with larger proportions of religious conservatives. In studies analyzing Google trends data, MacInnis and Hodson (2015) reported that terms like "sex" were more often searched for in states with higher aggregated religiosity. And Whitehead and Perry (2017) found that higher percentages of evangelical Protestants, theists, and biblical literalists in a state predicted more Google searches for the terms "porn," "sex tape," "lesbian porn," "amateur porn," and "free porn," as did high rates of religious service attendance.

The potential incongruence between pornography opposition and usage among committed, conservative Christians is also recognized by the groups themselves. Indeed, there is rising alarm among conservative Christian communities in the United States that their ranks have become consumed by "addiction"² to pornography (Barna Group, 2016; Grubbs &

Hook, 2016). As an indicator of this concern, a virtual cottage industry has emerged marketing Internet filters or "accountability" software (e.g., Covenant Eyes, X3watch) and books aimed at helping evangelical Christians (e.g., Barna Group, 2016; Driscoll, 2009; Lambert, 2013), as well as Mormons (e.g., Harker, 2014; Hilton, 2009) and even conservative Catholics (e.g., Kleponis, 2014; LeJeune, 2016) break their "addictions" to Internet pornography. Moreover, a growing research literature suggests that committed or conservative Christians experience a unique sort of anxiety, cognitive dissonance, and shame surrounding pornography use, precipitated by the fact that they unequivocally reject pornography morally and yet considerable numbers seem to be consuming it anyway (Grubbs et al., 2015; Grubbs, Exline, Pargament, Volk, & Lindberg, 2016; Grubbs & Hook, 2016; Nelson et al., 2010; Perry, 2017a; Perry & Hayward, 2017).

The current study considered how religious commitment and belief, though protective against pornography use to some extent (Hardy et al., 2013), may be associated with Americans opposing pornography more strongly in principle than they reflect in actual practice. Several theories have been proposed to account for apparent inconsistencies between porn beliefs and use among devout, conservative Christians. Some, for example, suggest that conservative Christians may sometimes justify their porn use as preferable to sexual promiscuity (Abell et al., 2006; Baltazar et al., 2010; Regnerus, 2007). Along these lines, Whitehead and Perry (2017) proposed that the prevalence of traditionalist Christian expectations regarding sexual behavior may limit opportunities for open sexual education and exploration within conservative Christian communities. Online pornography, because it is covert, is thus the best alternative for individuals within these networks. In contrast, MacInnis and Hodson (2015) drew on the preoccupation hypothesis to account for why Google searches for porn would be higher in states with more religious individuals. They theorized that religiously committed Americans, perhaps due to underlying personality factors like authoritarianism, may become preoccupied with the very sexual content they oppose and thus pursue it covertly. While this may be true to some extent, it does not account for the fact that, at the individual level, religiously committed and theologically conservative Americans do tend to report viewing porn at lower rates than other Americans (Patterson & Price, 2012; Regnerus, 2007; Stack et al., 2004; Wright, 2013; Wright et al., 2013), even in studies where porn use is reported anonymously (e.g., Carroll et al., 2008; Hardy et al., 2013; MacInnis & Hodson, 2016; Perry, 2016, 2017b; Poulsen, Busby, & Galovan, 2013; Short et al., 2015).

Chaves (2010) developed theoretical expectations surrounding what he called "religious incongruence," based on his observation that individuals' beliefs and behaviors

² I put this term in quotes to indicate that I am not referring to pornography addiction in a clinical sense, which is not included in the

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5). Rather, I am merely indicating that conservative Christians frequently use the term.

are often assumed to be congruent when in fact they may be highly variable. Social scientists, he argued, often fail to recognize that religious individuals frequently find themselves within contexts that constrain their ability to live out their stated beliefs and values. Moreover, researchers also fail to perceive that measures of religious commitment or belief are more often markers of social identity and community belonging than they are indicators of deeply internalized moral convictions that guide day-to-day behaviors (see also Read & Eagle, 2011). Drawing on Chaves's theory of religious incongruence, the current study proposed that the potential incongruence between porn beliefs and use for devout conservative Christians stems largely from (1) a growing discordance between their traditionalist sexual ethic and the changing context in which they live, coupled with (2) the fact that stated moral values often reflect group membership more than they reflect private behaviors.

While religious groups tend to be largely united in their moral rejection of pornography, religiously committed and theologically conservative Americans are sexual beings themselves who live and interact with the same media technologies and sexualized cultural messages as other Americans (Burke, 2016; Lindsay, 2007; Rossman, 2009). Indeed, compared to other Americans, devout conservative Christians are confronted with a culture that is increasingly more at odds with their sexual ethic (Attwood, 2006; Lykke & Cohen, 2015), while utilizing the same media technologies that make pornography ever more accessible, affordable, and anonymous. Moreover, scholars have long recognized that religious identification and participation are fundamentally about group identification and participation (Durkheim, 1912/1995; Haidt, 2012), and a voluminous amount of research suggests that stated moral commitments and beliefs—even about sexual purity—are more reflective of social identities than of what one does in private (see discussions in Chaves, 2010; Haidt, 2012; and Regnerus, 2007). Given this situation, devout conservative Christians would predictably exhibit a greater incongruence between their own moral rejection of pornography and whether they actually view it themselves, compared to relatively irreligious Americans who do not take such a strong moral stance against pornography. Following Chaves (2010), given the larger cultural and technological context in which most Americans live, including devout conservative Christians, religion likely becomes *more* predictive of group judgments and intentions, and *less* so of whether one actually avoids pornographic material.

How might different aspects of religiosity be associated with experiencing an incongruence between porn beliefs and use? According to Chaves (2010), religious incongruence commonly results from contradictions between stated religious beliefs and the contexts believers inhabit. Theologically conservative Christians (evangelical Protestants in particular, but increasingly Mormons) have simultaneously been the most vocal in their opposition to pornography (Sherkat & Ellison, 1997; Sumerau & Cragun, 2015b; Thomas, 2016), while also being the most engaged with society at large, including

popular culture and media (Burke, 2016; Lindsay, 2007; Rossman, 2009). This tension, then, between their ardent moral opposition to pornography and their cultural engagement, would suggest that theologically conservative Christians will exhibit the most incongruence between porn beliefs and use compared to others.

It is also possible that it is not theological conservatism per se that most strongly predicts a greater incongruence between Americans' porn beliefs and use, but rather greater ostensible commitment to religion itself. Because measures of religiosity, though they are often taken to measure the depth of one's commitment, are more often indicators of one's group attachment or identity (Brenner, 2011; Chaves, 2010; Read & Eagle, 2011), it may be that measures of religiosity, rather than measures of theological beliefs, would more strongly predict a greater moral rejection of pornography that may not be matched by one's actual practice.

Last, Chaves (2010) proposed that researchers commit the "religious congruence fallacy" when they ignore how connections between beliefs and practices differ across social identities. With this in mind, the most important social identity intersecting the link between religion and pornography use is gender. Men tend to be more accepting of pornography than women (Lykke & Cohen, 2015), and they are also more likely to view pornography than women (Price, Patterson, Regnerus, & Walley, 2016; Wright, 2013; Wright et al., 2013), to do so more often (Perry, 2016; Regnerus, Gordon, & Price, 2016), and for the purposes of solo masturbation as opposed to with a partner (Maddox et al., 2011). Moreover, the vast majority of attention within conservative Christian subcultures on pornography "addiction" and recovery revolves around men and their pornography use. And while religiously committed and theologically conservative women also view pornography (see Barna Group, 2016, pp. 58–59), it is possible that the greater prevalence of pornography use among their male counterparts contributes to a greater incongruence between porn beliefs and use for men.

Method

Participants

Data were taken from Wave 1 of the Portraits of American Life Study (PALS), which was fielded in 2006. Originally called the Panel Study of American Religion and Ethnicity, PALS is a nationally representative panel survey with questions focusing on a variety of topics, including social networks, moral and political attitudes, and religious life. The PALS sampling frame includes the civilian, non-institutionalized household population in the continental United States who were 18 years of age or older at the time the survey was conducted. Surveys were administered in English or Spanish. From April to October 2006, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 2,610 participants in

their homes. Interviewers used audio computer-assisted self-interviewing (ACASI) for more sensitive questions (i.e., pornography usage). The response rate was 58%. PALS data include sampling weights that, once applied, bring the PALS sample in line with the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) three-year average estimates for 2005 to 2007. These weights were used in all analyses. The full models ultimately used data from 2,279 participants who provided valid responses to measures used in this study. For a more exhaustive discussion of the PALS sampling and data collection procedure, see Emerson, Sikkink, and James (2010).

Measures

Incongruence Between Pornography Beliefs and Use. The primary outcome of interest for this study was whether Americans oppose pornography as morally wrong while also viewing it, thus indicating an incongruence between their stated moral beliefs about pornography and their usage of it. An indicator was constructed from two measures. PALS asked participants what they thought about the morality of viewing pornography. Responses included (1) *Always morally wrong*, (2) *Usually morally wrong*, (3) *Sometimes morally wrong*, (4) *Never morally wrong*, (5) *Not a moral issue*, and (6) *Case by case*. PALS also asked participants, "In the past 12 months, how often have you viewed pornographic materials?" Responses ranged from 1 = *Once a day* or more to 8 = *Never*. These two measures were asked at different times in the interview, so it is unlikely that participants were primed for either question. Moreover, Emerson et al. (2010) explained that to mitigate social desirability bias for sensitive questions like one's pornography viewing habits, each PALS participant wore earphones to hear the prerecorded questions and then entered their responses directly into the computer apart from the knowledge or help of the interviewer. From these two measures, a dichotomous dummy variable was constructed to capture Americans who (1) reported viewing pornography in the past year (about 38% of the sample) and (2) believed pornography to be "always morally wrong" (about 55% of the sample). Those who fell into both categories were categorized as 1; all others were categorized as 0. Because of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, binary logistic regression is used.

Religious Commitment and Theological Conservatism. Focal independent variables were measures of religious commitment and theological conservatism. Religious commitment was measured with participants' frequency of religious service attendance and prayer. Religious service attendance is intended to measure institutional religious participation, a more external and social dimension of religiosity (Brenner, 2011; Hempel & Bartkowski, 2008; Stroope, 2012) which is commonly used in studies examining the connection between religion and pornography (e.g., Doran

& Price, 2014; Lykke & Cohen, 2015; Regnerus, 2007; Sherkat & Ellison, 1997; Stack et al., 2004; Wright, 2013; Wright et al., 2013). Prayer frequency, by contrast, taps a more private, devotional aspect of religious commitment (Short et al., 2015). Attendance included values from 1 = *Never* to 8 = *Three times a week or more*, while prayer frequency included values from 1 = *Never* to 9 = *More than three times a day*. The two measures are included in models separately.³

Two measures of theological conservatism were used. The first was participants' religious affiliation following a modified version of the RELTRAD classification scheme (Steensland et al., 2000). Categories included evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Black Protestant, other Protestant (which also includes sectarian Protestant groups and denominations outside those historically classified as evangelical such as Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses), Catholic, other religious traditions (including Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and others), and the unaffiliated.⁴ For multivariate analyses, the unaffiliated serve as the reference category. Last, researchers consistently identify belief in the full "inspiration" of one's sacred text as a measure of theological conservatism, because persons who hold this view are more likely to consider the moral teachings of their sacred text authoritative (see reviews in Hempel & Bartkowski, 2008; Trembath, 1987).⁵ Consequently, I draw on a PALS question regarding whether a participant believed their sacred text was fully inspired by God. Responses included 1 = *Fully inspired by God* to 4 = *I have never heard of the religious text*. The measure was dichotomized so that 1 = *Fully inspired by God* and 0 = *Other*.

Controls. Analyses also included a variety of sociodemographic controls that were selected both for theoretical reasons and for their association with key predictors. Age was measured in years from 18 to 80. Dummy variables were constructed for gender (male = 1), education (bachelor's degree or higher = 1), marital status

³ Analyses were run with the attendance and prayer frequency standardized and summed into a scale. The results were substantively the same as when attendance is included on its own, but this hides important variation in the way the two measures are related to porn viewing and incongruence between porn beliefs and use. Thus, the two measures are kept separate in analysis. Collinearity diagnostics showed that tolerance levels were all well within acceptable ranges.

⁴ In the PALS data, adherence to the original RELTRAD scheme would have required that "other Protestants" be included in the residual "other religions" category. The current study demonstrates that these two groups differ in terms of the outcome variable and thus they were kept analytically separate. The original RELTRAD scheme also kept Jews as a separate category, but their numbers in this sample ($N < 40$) are too small to conduct a meaningful analysis on them alone and so they are included in the "other religion" category.

⁵ While there are different camps of scriptural interpretation among conservative Christians, Hempel and Bartkowski (2008) argued that belief in full inspiration unites all of the camps including those who believe the Bible to be inerrant, infallible, and/or interpreted literally (see also Perry, 2015).

(married = 1), and parental status (children in home = 1), and a series of dummy variables were used for race (White = reference) and region (South = reference). Household income was measured in categories from 1 = less than \$5,000 to 19 = \$200,000 or more. For descriptive statistics of all variables in the analyses, see Table 1.

Analysis

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables to provide an overview of the dependent variable and focal predictors. It also presents zero-order correlations between all predictor variables and (1) whether participants believed pornography is “always morally wrong,” (2) whether they used pornography in the previous year, and (3) whether they *both* believed pornography is always wrong *and* viewed it

(the primary outcome). Table 2 presents binary logistic regression models predicting the three measures of pornography use. The first two models establish the net associations between religious factors and the measures of porn belief and use. Model 1 predicts viewing pornography as “always morally wrong.” Model 2 predicts viewing pornography in the previous year. Model 3 predicts incongruence between porn beliefs and use. And Models 4 and 5 are the interaction models. Each model includes the full array of controls described. Table 3 predicts incongruence between porn beliefs and use across the three largest religious traditions: evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Catholic. Formally, each model takes the following form:

$$\text{Logit}(Y) = \log p(Y = 1) / 1 - (p = 1) = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2$$

where log corresponds to the natural logarithm; $p(Y = 1)$ is the probability that the dichotomous dependent variable $Y = 1$; α is the Y intercept; β s are regression coefficients; X_1 is pornography use in 2006; X_2 is a vector of 2006 control variables. Tables 2 and 3 present unstandardized betas (b), standard errors (SEs), and odds ratios (ORs).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Predictors	Range	Mean or %	SD	Corr ^a	Corr ^b	Corr ^c
Porn “always morally wrong”	0–1	55%		1.00		
Viewed porn in past year	0–1	38%		-.46***	1.00	
Porn always wrong AND Viewed porn	0–1	10%		.29***	.42***	1.00
Religious service attendance	1–8	3.6	2.2	.33***	-.21***	.08***
Prayer frequency	1–9	4.8	2.7	.32***	-.26***	.04
Sacred text fully inspired	0–1	59%		.31***	-.23***	.04
Unaffiliated (ref.)	0–1	16%		-.24***	.16***	-.05**
Evangelical Protestant	0–1	27%		.23***	-.10***	.08***
Black Protestant	0–1	6%		.05*	-.06**	-.01
Mainline Protestant	0–1	14%		-.01	-.04	-.04
Other Protestant	0–1	4%		-.01	.01	.03
Catholic	0–1	27%		-.01	-.01	.00
Other religion	0–1	7%		-.08***	.05*	-.02
Male	0–1	49%		-.18***	.35***	.11***
Age	18–80	45	16.1	.20***	-.28***	-.07***
Bachelor’s or higher	0–1	27%		-.11***	.03	-.03
Household income	1–19	9.3	4.6	-.12***	.11***	.02
Married	0–1	58%		.10***	-.04*	.05*
Children in home	0–1	46%		.07***	.01	.05*
White (ref.)	0–1	71%		-.03	.03	-.01
Black	0–1	11%		.02	-.02	-.01
Latino	0–1	13%		.03	-.01	.02
Asian	0–1	5%		.01	-.03	-.01
Native American	0–1	1%		-.06**	.05*	-.02
South (ref.)	0–1	33%		.05*	.01	.03
West	0–1	26%		-.10***	.08***	.01
Midwest	0–1	24%		.11***	-.09***	-.01
Northeast	0–1	17%		-.08***	.00	-.04

Source: 2006 Portraits of American Life Study; $N = 2,279$.

^aCorrelation with “porn always morally wrong”;

^bCorrelation with viewed porn in the past year;

^cCorrelation with porn wrong AND Viewed porn.

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

Results

Descriptive statistics in Table 1 indicate that about 10% of Americans report an incongruence between their moral views on pornography and their usage of it, believing pornography is “always morally wrong” while also viewing it in the previous year. Analyses of these participants as a group show they do not differ greatly from the rest of the sample, except that they are more likely to be slightly younger, male, and more religiously conservative. Zero-order correlations show, unsurprisingly, that Americans who attend religious services and pray more often, are evangelical, and believe their sacred text is fully inspired by God are more likely to view pornography as always wrong, while also being less likely to report viewing pornography in the previous year. Interestingly, religious service attendance, prayer frequency, and belief in the full inspiration of one’s sacred text are virtually identical in their correlations with believing porn use to be always wrong (attendance $r = .33$, $p < .001$; prayer $r = .32$, $p < .001$; inspiration $r = .31$, $p < .001$) and viewing porn (attendance $r = -.21$, $p < .001$, prayer $r = -.26$, $p < .001$; inspiration $r = -.23$, $p < .001$). Correlations with the focal outcome measure, however, show that religious service attendance is positively associated with reporting an incongruence between porn beliefs and usage ($r = .08$; $p < .001$), though not prayer or belief in full inspiration. Being an evangelical Protestant ($r = .08$; $p < .001$) is positively associated with reporting an incongruence, while being religiously unaffiliated is negatively associated ($r = -.05$; $p < .01$). Though these correlations attain statistical significance, they are admittedly not particularly large. Multivariate analyses will

Table 2. *Binary Logistic Regression Models Predicting Pornography Beliefs and Usage*

	Porn “Always Morally Wrong”			Viewed Porn in Past Year			Porn Always Wrong AND Viewed Porn			Porn Always Wrong AND Viewed Porn (Attendance × Male)			Porn Always Wrong AND Viewed Porn (Prayer × Male)		
	<i>b</i>	SE	OR	<i>b</i>	SE	OR	<i>b</i>	SE	OR	<i>b</i>	SE	OR	<i>b</i>	SE	OR
Religious service attendance	.18	.03	1.20***	-.03	.03	.97	.16	.04	1.16***	.04	.06	1.04	.15	.04	1.16***
Prayer frequency	.08	.02	1.08***	-.07	.02	.95**	.02	.04	1.02	.02	.04	1.02	-.09	.05	.91
Sacred text fully inspired unaffiliated (ref).	.63	.11	1.88***	-.67	.12	.51***	-.14	.18	.87	-.14	.18	.87	-.15	.18	.86
Evangelical Protestant	.92	.18	2.51***	-.26	.18	.77	.62	.30	1.86*	.60	.30	1.82*	.61	.30	1.83*
Black Protestant	.57	.30	1.77	-.50	.32	.61	.30	.47	1.35	.26	.48	1.30	.28	.48	1.32
Mainline Protestant	.32	.19	1.38	-.23	.20	.80	.09	.34	1.10	.09	.34	1.09	.09	.34	1.10
Other Protestant	.67	.27	1.95*	-.20	.29	.82	.86	.40	2.35*	.84	.40	2.33*	.86	.40	2.36*
Catholic	.07	.18	1.08	.14	.18	1.15	.35	.29	1.42	.32	.29	1.38	.34	.29	1.40
Other religion	.09	.24	1.09	.21	.23	1.24	.11	.40	1.11	.13	.40	1.14	.05	.40	1.05
Attendance × Male										.18	.07	1.20**			
Prayer × Male													.17	.06	1.18**
Male	-.57	.10	.57***	1.64	.11	5.14***	.89	.16	2.44*	.15	.32	1.16	.01	.34	1.01
Age	.03	.00	1.03***	-.05	.00	.95***	-.02	.01	.98***	-.02	.01	.98***	-.02	.01	.98***
Bachelor's or higher	-.36	.12	.70**	-.11	.13	.89	-.38	.19	.68*	-.41	.20	.67*	-.39	.20	.68*
Household income	-.05	.01	.95***	.06	.01	1.06***	.02	.02	1.02	.02	.02	1.02	.02	.02	1.02
Married	.41	.12	1.51***	-.21	.12	.81	.30	.18	1.34	.29	.19	1.34	.30	.19	1.34
Children in home	.35	.11	1.42***	.05	.11	1.05	.20	.17	1.22	.20	.17	1.22	.22	.17	1.25
White (ref).															
Black	-.19	.22	.83	.07	.23	1.07	-.07	.33	.93	-.03	.33	.97	-.05	.33	.95
Latino	.49	.17	1.63**	-.63	.18	.53***	-.08	.24	.93	-.10	.24	.91	-.08	.24	.92
Asian	.65	.25	1.91**	-.85	.26	.43***	-.24	.39	.79	-.26	.40	.77	-.30	.40	.74
Native American	-1.31	.69	.27	.89	.56	2.44	-.85	1.44	.43	-.92	1.43	.40	-.93	1.43	.40
South (ref).															
West	-.16	.13	.85	.01	.14	1.01	.07	.19	1.08	.08	.19	1.08	.08	.19	1.09
Midwest	.38	.14	1.46**	-.52	.14	.60***	-.14	.20	.87	-.15	.20	.86	-.15	.20	.87
Northeast	-.41	.15	.66**	-.04	.16	.96	-.26	.24	.77	-.26	.24	.77	-.26	.24	.79
Constant	-2.4	.26	.09***	1.3	.25	3.78	-3.1	.39	.05***	-2.6	.43	.08***	-2.5	.43	.09***
Nagelkerke pseudo <i>R</i> ²	.335			.356			.088			.094			.095		
<i>N</i>	2,281			2,281			2,279			2,279			2,279		

Source: 2006 Portraits of American Life Study.

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001 (two-tailed test).**Table 3.** *Binary Logistic Regression Models Predicting Incongruence Between Pornography Beliefs and Usage*

Predictors	Evangelical Protestant			Mainline Protestant			Catholic		
	<i>b</i>	SE	OR	<i>b</i>	SE	OR	<i>b</i>	SE	OR
Religious service attendance	.19	.8	1.29*	.17	.16	1.18	.23	.09	1.26*
Controls	√			√			√		
Constant	-2.36	.63	.09***	-4.66	1.31	.01***	-3.25	.80	.04***
Nagelkerke pseudo <i>R</i> ²	.127			.264			.121		
<i>N</i>	497			245			656		

Source: 2006 Portraits of American Life Study.

Note. All models include the full array of controls from Table 2.

p* < .05, **p* < .001 (two-tailed test).

provide more clarification as to whether these associations hold with controls in place.

Models 1 and 2 in Table 2 predict the independent measures of porn belief and use to compare the net associations with religious factors for each. Consistent with expectations, Model 1 shows that religious service attendance (*b* = .18; *p* < .001; OR = 1.20), prayer frequency (*b* = .08; *p* < .001; OR = 1.08), and believing one's sacred text is

fully inspired by God (*b* = .63; *p* < .001; OR = 1.88) are each highly predictive of Americans believing pornography use to be always immoral. Similarly, evangelical Protestants (*b* = .92; *p* < .001; OR = 2.51) are roughly 2.5 times as likely as the unaffiliated to view pornography use as morally wrong, while “other Protestants” (*b* = .67; *p* < .01; OR = 1.95) are also more likely to do so. Model 2 predicts actually viewing pornography in the previous year. While

prayer frequency ($b = -.07$; $p < .01$; $OR = .94$) and belief in full inspiration ($b = -.67$; $p < .001$; $OR = .52$) both predict lower likelihoods of having viewed pornography, neither religious service attendance nor being an evangelical Protestant is significantly associated with porn use. Thus, while worship attendance and evangelical affiliation are both highly predictive of morally rejecting pornography use, neither predicts a lower likelihood of viewing pornography with controls in place. In ancillary analyses (available upon request), when prayer frequency is removed from the models, both religious service attendance and evangelical Protestantism barely attain statistical significance at the .05 level. But even this suggests an inconsistency between the strong moral rejection of porn use among frequent attendees and evangelicals and their actual practice.

Model 3 predicts reporting an incongruence between porn beliefs and usage. Religious service attendance is a strong, positive predictor of Americans both believing pornography is “always morally wrong” while still viewing it ($b = .15$; $p < .001$; $OR = 1.16$). Prayer frequency, however, is not significantly associated with this incongruence. Thus, the expectation that those who are more religiously committed are more likely to report an incongruence between porn beliefs and usage is only partly confirmed. Greater institutional religious participation is positively associated with experiencing an incongruence, while prayer is not. As interaction effects will show, however, this noneffect for prayer is largely due to differences across gender.

Being an evangelical Protestant ($b = .62$; $p < .05$; $OR = 1.86$) or some other sectarian Protestant such as a Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness, or Seventh Day Adventist ($b = .86$; $p < .05$; $OR = 2.35$), compared to being unaffiliated, are also positive predictors of incongruence between porn use and beliefs. Ancillary analyses also showed that both evangelical Protestants and other Protestants are statistically more likely than mainline Protestants to report an incongruence between their porn beliefs and usage. However, believing one’s sacred text is

fully inspired by God is not a statistically significant predictor of incongruence with controls in place. The expectation regarding theological conservatism thus only receives qualified support. Americans who identify with a theologically conservative religious tradition are more likely to report believing pornography is “always morally wrong” while also viewing it, but not necessarily those who profess more theologically conservative views about their sacred text. Indeed, those who believe their sacred text is fully inspired by God seem quite consistent in their morally rejecting pornography and avoiding it (see Models 1 and 2).

Figure 1 illustrates the predicted probabilities of reporting an incongruence between porn beliefs and use across religious traditions. With controls in place, the religiously unaffiliated, mainline Protestants, and persons of “other” religious faiths are the least likely to report believing pornography is “always morally wrong” while using it. Evangelicals and other sectarian Protestants, by contrast, are the most likely, with each being roughly twice as likely as the unaffiliated, mainline Protestants, and persons of other religious faiths to report an incongruence between porn beliefs and use.

Model 3 also showed that being male ($b = .89$; $p < .001$; $OR = 2.44$) is a strong, significant predictor of experiencing an incongruence between porn beliefs and usage. To examine how gender potentially moderates the connection between religiosity and incongruence, Model 4 includes an interaction term for religious service attendance \times male ($b = .18$; $p < .01$; $OR = 1.20$) and Model 5 includes a term for prayer frequency \times male ($b = .17$; $p < .01$; $OR = 1.18$), both of which are positive and significant. Thus, even while prayer in the main effect is not associated with experiencing an incongruence between porn beliefs and usage (Model 3), the interactions suggest that males experience a stronger incongruence between their porn beliefs and use as worship attendance and prayer increase. Ancillary models were also tested with cross-product

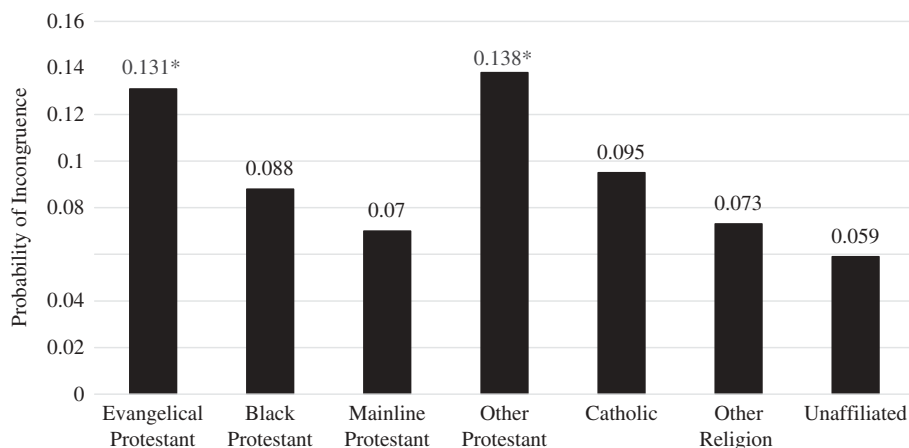


Figure 1. Predicted probability of incongruence between pornography beliefs and usage across religious tradition. *Significantly different from “Unaffiliated” and “Mainline Protestant” at .05 level.

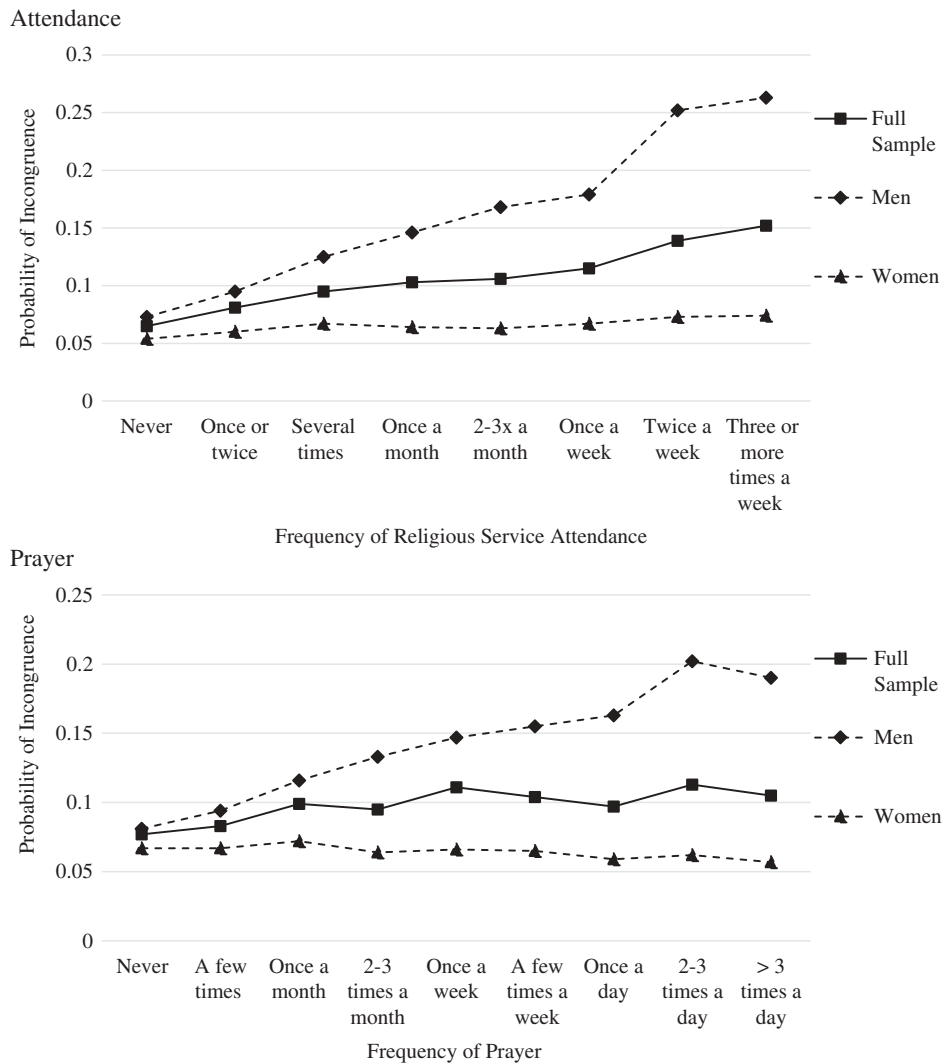


Figure 2. Predicted probability of incongruence between pornography beliefs and usage by gender across worship attendance and prayer frequency.

interactions between gender and other religious factors, but none were significant (available upon request).

Figure 2 illustrates how gender moderates the link between both religious service attendance and prayer and incongruence in porn beliefs and usage. For women, there is virtually no increase in the likelihood that they believe pornography to be “always morally wrong” while also viewing it as either religious service attendance or prayer increases. Men, however, show a dramatic increase in this likelihood as both religious service attendance and prayer increases. At the extremes, it is predicted that about 7% to 8% of men who never attend religious services or pray will report an incongruence, believing pornography is always wrong yet still viewing it.

This percentages climbs to about 20% for those who pray more than daily and to more than 26% for those who attend religious services more than weekly, nearly four times as much as those who never attend. Put another way, about 1 in 5 American men who pray several times a day and 1 in 4 American men who attend religious services several times a

week report viewing pornography in the previous year while also affirming that it is “always morally wrong.”

Interaction terms for religious service attendance \times scriptural inspiration were statistically nonsignificant. However, is the association between religious service attendance and reporting an incongruence between porn beliefs and use stronger for Americans in more theologically conservative religious traditions? Rather than introduce a large number of interaction terms in models which would risk multicollinearity, Table 3 compares the net association between religious service attendance and incongruence between porn beliefs and use for the three largest religious groups: evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants, and Catholics. All controls from Table 2 are included. Findings indicate that religious service attendance is a positive, significant predictor of incongruence between porn beliefs and use for evangelical Protestants ($b = .19$; $p < .05$; OR = 1.29) and Catholics ($b = .23$; $p < .05$; OR = 1.26). And though the effect of religious service attendance is statistically nonsignificant for mainline Protestants ($b = .17$; $p = .55$; OR = 1.18), because

the beta coefficient and odds ratio for mainline Protestants are similar to those of evangelicals or Catholics, the non-significance is likely because of the relatively small sample size (less than half of evangelicals or Catholics). Thus, there does not appear to be a large difference in the association between religious service attendance and incongruence in porn beliefs and practice across theologically conservative (evangelical) or liberal (mainline) traditions.

Discussion and Conclusion

Religious Americans, and particularly conservative Protestants, have typically been found to report viewing pornography less frequently than other Americans, but often the differences have not been as great or consistent as one would expect given the strong moral stance of these groups against pornography. This study examined whether religious commitment and theological conservatism predicted a greater incongruence between whether Americans consider pornography morally wrong and whether they actually watch it. Multivariate analyses of nationally representative data affirmed that American men (not women) who attend religious services or pray more often are more likely to both believe that pornography is “always morally wrong” while still viewing it in the past year. Evangelicals and other sectarian Protestants were also more likely compared to the unaffiliated or more liberal Protestants to believe pornography is always morally wrong while also viewing it. This higher likelihood of incongruence between porn beliefs and usage was not found, however, among those who believe their sacred text to be fully inspired by God. Findings ultimately suggest that religious commitment and affiliation with theologically conservative groups, for American men in particular, are associated with being more strongly opposed to pornography in principle than reflected in actual practice.

Findings from this study contribute to our understanding of the interplay between religion and pornography in the United States. Devoutly religious, theologically conservative Americans are overwhelmingly opposed to pornography on moral grounds. They view it as a distortion of their sexuality, attribute a variety of sex-related social problems to its use, and worry greatly about the potential consequences of porn addiction in their own lives (Barna Group, 2016; Foubert, 2016; Lambert, 2013). Yet these Americans live and interact with a world in which pornography has never been more mainstream, accessible, or anonymous. This study has shown that while religiously committed and theologically conservative Americans are (somewhat) less likely to use pornography and far more likely to denounce it than other Americans, their actual avoidance of pornography does not (perhaps cannot) keep pace with their professed opposition to it. Rather, religious service attendance and prayer among American men strongly predicts a greater incongruence between their stated beliefs about pornography and their use of it, as does their

affiliation with a theologically conservative Christian group compared to either the unaffiliated or more liberal Christians. Consistent with theories of religious incongruence (Chaves, 2010), these findings support the idea that institutional religious participation and identification, and even more personal religious behavior like prayer, may be stronger indicators of the moral commitments and ideals of one’s group than they are of internalized values that actually shape actions (see also Durkheim, 1912/1995; Haidt, 2012; Read & Eagle, 2011).

To consider an alternative explanation, it is conceivable that, rather than religiosity or theological conservatism influencing Americans to experience incongruence between their porn beliefs and usage, persons who hold strongly negative attitudes toward pornography may simply be more likely to experience an incongruence as opposed to persons who do not hold strong, negative opinions about porn use. In this case, the fact that religiously committed or theological conservative Americans are more likely to experience incongruence may just be due to the fact that they are more likely to strongly reject porn morally and thus put themselves at greater risk for violating their own beliefs with porn use.⁶ But this would not explain why belief in full scriptural inspiration—which was just as strongly associated with moral opposition to pornography as worship attendance, prayer, or being conservative Protestant—was not associated with experiencing an incongruence. Why would this group not follow the same pattern? Moreover, it would also not explain why women—who were more likely to consider pornography morally wrong than men—were less likely to experience incongruence and experienced virtually no increase in experiencing incongruence as religious service attendance or prayer increased. Rather, it cannot be only opposition to pornography use that explains a greater propensity to experience incongruence between porn beliefs and usage.

How then do we understand the relationship between religion and incongruence between pornography beliefs and usage? Chaves (2010) specified that religious

⁶To explore this possibility empirically, regression models (available upon request) were estimated predicting porn use on believing porn is always wrong, religious measures, and controls. Believing porn use is immoral was negatively associated with watching porn, as was prayer frequency and belief in full inspiration. Worship attendance and religious tradition were not significant predictors of porn use, net of controls. Interaction terms were included for religious measures \times believing porn is always wrong, but none approached statistical significance. Three-way interaction terms were also run with gender; none were significant. These null effects, however, may be due to overfitting. Other models were estimated predicting porn use with the subsample restricted to those who felt porn was always wrong ($N = 1,236$). In these models, worship attendance was a *positive* predictor of viewing porn, though with the restricted sample it did not attain statistical significance ($p < .10$). Interaction terms also showed a positive interaction between worship attendance and being male, though again, just beyond statistical significance ($p < .10$). Though marginal, these results are suggestive that, for men who already believe porn use is morally wrong, worship attendance predicts that they will violate their moral beliefs by watching porn.

incongruence is not the same as hypocrisy. The issue is not necessarily that religious service attendance, prayer, or identifying with theologically conservative groups promotes duplicity per se. Indeed, holding a high view of one's sacred scriptures was *not* predictive of experiencing incongruence, and conservative Christians themselves are openly recognizing and fighting against what they sense is a growing pattern of men experiencing deep shame and conflict due to their perceived addiction to pornography (e.g., Barna Group, 2016). In light of religious incongruence theory, the patterns observed in this study reflect both the social nature of religion as well as a growing discordance between what a large population of Americans believe about sexual morality and what their broader cultural and technological milieu promotes. In this view, religious service attendance and affiliation with a theologically conservative Christian denomination, and to some degree prayer as it often takes place in religious social settings, represent social embeddedness within and identification with particular moral communities (see Stroope, 2012)—communities in which condemnation of pornography use (along with other forms of “sexual immorality”) are foundational. Membership in these communities requires that individuals ostensibly embrace, among other things, their traditional sexual ethic (Burke, 2016). And yet given that devout, conservative Christians inhabit a cultural context in which pornography is increasingly mainstreamed and pervasive, these factors prove to be stronger indicators that individuals affirm the moral beliefs of their religious community regarding pornography, and less so of whether such Americans are able to avoid it. This would also help explain why neither worship attendance nor evangelical affiliation was a significant predictor of pornography use with controls in place.

Hardy et al. (2013) found that adolescents who had more deeply internalized their religious values were less likely to intentionally view pornography. Thus, the finding that Americans who hold a high view of their sacred scriptures were not more likely than others to report an incongruence between their porn beliefs and use may suggest that such Americans have more effectively internalized their religious teachings and are consequently more adept at avoiding sexual media that violates their own moral standards. Sherkat and Ellison (1997) argued that the moral opposition of sectarian Protestants to pornography use stems primarily from their commitment to the authority of the Bible. It is possible, then, that individuals who hold more firmly to the authority of their scriptures show greater consistency in their porn beliefs and use, compared to those who formally affiliate with conservative religious traditions or actively participate in religious activities.

Despite some recent negative media attention toward pornography (e.g., cover article in *Time* magazine; see Luscombe, 2016) and revamped political attempts to outlaw it (S.C.R. 9 Concurrent Resolution on the Public Health Crisis, 2016), there are few signs that American culture will reverse course in terms of pornography's acceptability and accessibility.

Correspondingly, some conservative Christian authors have already lamented the development of such virtual reality devices as Oculus Rift, Samsung Gear VR, and HoloLens that they fear will “lure an entire generation deeper into a virtual world of pornography, turning what is already a crisis into an epidemic of addiction” (McDowell, 2016, p. 6). Given that deeply religious, theologically conservative Americans are unlikely to adjust their views on pornography much, the cultural and technological landscape before them will likely only grow more at odds with their traditionalist sexual ethic. It is likely, then, that the observed incongruence between devout, conservative Christians' beliefs about pornography and actual usage of it will only increase.

Future research should draw on longitudinal data to discern whether the incongruences between porn beliefs and use observed here are growing over time for these populations.

Limitations

Several data limitations should be discussed to chart a path for future research. First, the data were cross-sectional, and while the dominant theoretical expectation is that religion influences attitudes and behaviors involving pornography (e.g., Grubbs et al., 2015; Hardy et al., 2013; Lykke & Cohen, 2015; Regnerus, 2007), the observed associations could also be bidirectional (Perry, 2017a; Perry & Hayward, 2017). Second, the pornography use measure does not specify what sort of pornography is being consumed. Some studies have found that participants can have different ideas of what constitutes pornography (Willoughby & Busby, 2016); and while it is unlikely that Americans' definitions of pornography vary so widely as to influence the outcome here, future research would benefit from knowing whether there might be differences in the consumption patterns of religious Americans.

Relatedly, while the primary outcome measure does indicate an incongruence between Americans' moral beliefs about pornography and their consumption of it, this study design does not take the frequency of use into consideration. As other studies that draw on a binary indicator of pornography use must acknowledge, those who view pornography several times a week likely have a different relationship with pornography than those who do so once a year (Doran & Price, 2014; Patterson & Price, 2012; Perry, 2017b; Price et al., 2016; Wright, 2013; Wright, et al. 2013). Yet the prevalence of robust associations between binary indicators of porn use and key measures suggests there are important differences separating even occasional viewers from abstainers. The implications of this limitation for connecting religion to incongruence is unclear. Some studies suggest that Americans who are more religiously committed or theologically conservative watch pornography at lower frequencies than other Americans (Hardy et al., 2013; Perry, 2017b; Short et al., 2015). Others, however, find that,

among pornography viewers, religiosity is not significantly associated with use frequency (Grubbs et al., 2015; Perry, 2016). Nevertheless, while religiously committed and conservative Americans do evidence greater incongruence between their beliefs about pornography and use of it, this should not be understood to mean that they view it at high frequencies or evidence anything like the “addiction” Grubbs et al. (2015, 2016) find devoutly religious Americans often worry about.

Last, the data are unfortunately rather dated. And because the data were collected in 2006, participants would not yet have been exposed to smartphone technology, which was introduced in 2007 and has become a common medium for viewing pornography (Griffith, 2016). Yet Internet pornography was very much available at the time of PALS, and the reported use frequencies for men and women are very similar to those of other surveys fielded since 2012 (Perry & Hayward, 2017; Regnerus et al., 2016; Wright, 2013; Wright et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, future research would ideally explore the connection between religion and experiences of incongruence between porn beliefs and usage with more recent data when available.

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