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Meredith G. F. Worthen

University of Oklahoma, mgfworthen@ou.edu

Trenton M. Haltom

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, tmhaltom@huskers.unl.edu

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Fifty Shades of Leather and Misogyny: An Investigation of Anti-Woman Perspectives among Leathermen

Meredith G. F. Worthen¹ and Trenton M. Haltom²

¹ University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, USA;

² University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln, NE, USA

Corresponding author – Meredith G. F. Worthen, University of Oklahoma,
780 Van Vleet Oval, KH 331, Norman, OK 73019; mgfworthen@ou.edu

ORCID

Meredith G. F. Worthen <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6765-5149>

Trenton M. Haltom <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1116-4644>

Abstract

The *Fifty Shades* books and films shed light on a sexual and leather-clad subculture predominantly kept in the dark: bondage, discipline, submission, and sadomasochism (BDSM). Such new interest in this community also generated widespread misconceptions about the sexual practices that take place in these circles, especially in regard to the treatment of women. In the current study, we investigate how a BDSM or “leather” identity is related to attitudes toward women. We use a nationally representative sample of U.S. adult men aged 18–64 stratified by U.S. Census categories of age, race/ethnicity, and census region ($N = 1474$) and a subsample of leathermen ($n = 65$; 58% hetero-leather identified and 42% nonhetero-leather identified). Specifically, we explore leather identity as it relates to the support of laws/policies helping women, non-feminist identity, patriarchal gender norms, and the stigmatization of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LBTQ) women among both hetero and non-hetero leathermen. Overall, our findings indicate a robust relationship between these anti-woman perspectives and leatherman identity that is especially pronounced among hetero leathermen and demonstrate the importance of continuing to consider how leather identity shapes misogyny among leathermen.

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Introduction

The pop cultural phenomena associated with the *Fifty Shades* books and films (Foley 2017, 2018; James 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Taylor-Johnson 2015) shed light on a sexual and leather-clad subculture predominantly kept in the dark: bondage, discipline, submission, and sadomasochism (BDSM). The frenzy that surrounded the series was accompanied by popular media interest in what is colloquially known as “leather culture” with how-to and information guides published by outlets including *The Atlantic* (Green 2015), *People* (Kimble 2017), *The Guardian* (Smith, 2015), and others. Increased public interest in this community also spurred a need for clarification as members of leather, kink, and BDSM circles began to speak up about the misconceptions the books and movies make about their sexual practices, especially the treatment of women (Green 2015; Smith, 2015; Sprott and Berkey 2015). Though the academic study of BDSM is not new, such commentary demands further empirical research and begs the questions: How does leather identity relate to perspectives about women generally and LGBTQ (lesbian, bisexual, trans, and queer) women specifically? And, how do the intersections between leather and sexual identities (heterosexual vs. non-heterosexual) relate to perspectives about women generally and LGBTQ women specifically?

In the current study, we use data from the 2018 LGBTQ and Hetero-cis Population Study (Worthen 2020) collected via online panelists to investigate how leather identity relates to attitudes toward women. The data consists of a nationally representative sample of U.S. adult men aged 18–64 years stratified by U.S. Census categories of age, race/ethnicity, and census region ($n = 1474$) and a subsample of leathermen ($n = 65$; 58% hetero-leather and 42% non-hetero-leather). Specifically, we explore leather identity as it relates to the support of laws/policies helping women, non-feminist identity, patriarchal gender norms, and the stigmatization of LGBTQ women. Building from previous work that has highlighted how leather/SM culture has been entwined with sexism, the devaluation of effeminacy, and the supremacy of men over women (Cross and Matheson 2006; Faccio, Casini, and Cipolletta 2014; Hennen 2008; Rubin [1982] 2011b; Zussman and Pierce 1998), this research focuses on anti-woman perspectives in leather culture. In doing so, we work

toward a deeper understanding of how men's leather identity relates to misogyny and how healthy, consensual leather relationships can be better cultivated.

Literature review

Leather culture, kink, and SM

Those who fetishize leather apparel and/or accessories (leather gear) are often referred to as "leatherfolk." Though people of all genders can have a "leather" identity, in the current study, we focus on "leathermen" (Kamel 1980; Thompson 2004; Zussman and Pierce 1998). By donning leather gear, leathermen broadcast their sexual interests in various forms of kink including (but not limited to) sadomasochism, bondage, and disciplinary sex acts sometimes more generally described as "leathersex," "S/M," and/or "BDSM" (Hennen 2008). In many ways, leather culture can be synonymous with S/M, though not all S/M practitioners identify with leather culture (Califia and Sweeney 2000; Thompson 2004; Weinberg and Kamel 1995; Zussman and Pierce 1998).

Interest in BDSM and leather culture did not enter public or scholarly discourse as a result of the popularity of *Fifty Shades*, however. The combined term sadomasochism (S/M) was coined by sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1885 (Krafft-Ebing 1965) and commented on by psychologist Sigmund Freud (1938) (see Guidroz (2008) and Weinberg (1995)). S/M refers to giving and receiving pain for erotic pleasure (Krafft-Ebing 1965; Weinberg and Kamel 1995; Zussman and Pierce 1998). Dominance and submission (D/s), characterized by bondage and discipline (B/D) within S/M circles, are performed via "scenes" in which participants "play" with power exchanges and potentially enter an altered state of consciousness (Newmahr 2010; Truscott 2004; Zussman and Pierce 1998). The use/wearing of leather fetish gear such as floggers, bondage cuffs, ball gags, restraints, bed tethers, leads, harnesses, or other accessories is common in S/M play and often helps to enhance both pleasure from inflicting pain onto others (sadism) and pleasure from receiving pain and/or being in bondage, submission, and/or servitude (masochism)

(Zussman and Pierce 1998). Those who identify as leathermen may do so based on their desire for and actual use of leather gear in erotic experiences and/or their connections to a leather community (Sprott and Berkey 2015).

Hetero-leather culture

Hetero-leather culture is characterized by the use of leather fetish gear in S/M experiences between heterosexual men and women. Hetero-leather people's experiences are shaped by some level of privilege (related to their heterosexual identities), but also stigmatization due to their marginalized interests in "deviant" erotic practices (i.e., leather and S/M) (Faccio, Casini, and Ciolletta 2014; Graham et al. 2016; Rubin [1982] 2011b; Sprott and Berkey 2015). In addition, hetero-leathermen and hetero-leatherwomen have distinct experiences effected by the overlapping dynamics that can take place in leather and S/M erotic play. In particular, heterosexual women with leather and S/M interests are increasingly situated in a sexist and misogynistic framework emerging out of both the inaccuracies of the *Fifty Shades* series as well as some cultural aspects unique the hetero-leather community (Altenburger et al. 2017; Deller and Smith 2013; Green 2015; Smith, 2015; Sprott and Berkey 2015; Yost 2010). Together, these dynamics can reinforce problematic perspectives about women among hetero-leathermen.

Hetero-leathermen and attitudes toward women

The anti-feminist image of BDSM has been debated by radical feminists since the 1980s (Butler 1982; Califia 2000; Hopkins 1994; Rubin [1984] 2011a, [1982] 2011b). Indeed, pro-woman discourse can contradict the patriarchal power dynamics in heterosexual BDSM sexual play which can create tensions for kinky feminist women (Ritchie and Barker 2005). This dissonance is not unwarranted as hetero-leather and S/M play can exaggerate real-life experiences in ways that sometimes reflect sexism and misogyny (Faccio, Casini, and Ciolletta 2014; Gebhard 1995; Zussman and Pierce 1998).

In leather and S/M scenes, sexual play is characterized by individuals in Dominant (Dom) and submissive (sub) or "D/s" roles. Either men or women may engage in Dom or sub roles (Breslow, Evans, and

Langley 1985; Dancer, Kleinplatz, and Moser 2006; Ernulf and Innala 1995). In hetero-leather and hetero-S/M erotic scenes particularly, erotic play may take the form of men subs and women Doms. This arrangement, however, only *mimics* a loss of the man's (sub's) power due to the relationship aspects of a scene. In fact, in socially responsible leather and S/M scenes characterized by the ethos of "safe, sane, and consensual" (see Barrett 2017: 183), the sub (in this example, a man) is the one who has control over the scene because he set(s) the boundaries in relation to his physical, mental, and emotional limits. It is the Dom participant (in this example, a woman) who follows pre-negotiated rules about the soft and hard limits of the scene (Newmahr 2010; Zussman and Pierce 1998). Thus, the outsider/first-glance assessment of this arrangement might be that the man/sub is lacking power, while in fact, it is quite the opposite.

For some hetero-leathermen, their power and privilege in setting up and participating in these erotic scenes may relate to their real-life perspectives about women: that women are and should be subservient to men despite the Dominatrix role they may play in a D/s sexual scene. Some empirical research has contested this idea: men subs have been found to have poor self-esteem and negative attitudes toward women in comparison to men Doms who had greater self-esteem and positive attitudes about women (Damon 2003). Damon (2003) theorized men subs have experienced rejection and feelings of inadequacy that contribute to their anti-woman attitudes. Thus, gendered power dynamics can complicate the relationship between leather culture and misogyny.

Fifty Shades, for example, highlights the supremacy of masculinity over femininity in the context of both leather and S/M (Musser 2015). While some studies have found hetero-leather practitioners to have pro-feminist ideologies (Cross and Matheson 2006), there is also evidence of negativity and disparagement of women by men in some hetero-S/M relationships (Faccio, Casini, and Cipolletta 2014; Zambelli 2017). In this paper, we argue that a robust relationship between misogyny and hetero-leather has been popularized through the *Fifty Shades* series' "heteronormativisation of kink" (Musser 2015: 150). Yet, despite these socio-cultural links, no studies to date have specifically examined hetero-leathermen's perspectives about women in the context of feminist identity, patriarchal gender norms, and attitudes

toward formal laws and policies about women. Thus, the current study is the first to do so.

Hetero-leathermen and attitudes toward LBTQ women

Hetero-leather culture can emphasize the value of heterosexual relationships over non-heterosexual relationships as well as the importance of hetero women over lesbian, bisexual, trans, and queer (LBTQ) women. For example, the *Fifty Shades* series itself has been categorically described as a space of consolidated “heterosexual privilege” (Musser 2015:128; Tsaros 2013), and this may be associated with negativity toward LBTQ women by hetero-leathermen. This can take the shape of hostile attitudes toward LBTQ women and the derogatory use of language such as “dyke.” “Dyke” is a term that often refers to a masculine or “butch” appearing woman who is perceived to be a lesbian (Kulick 2000). Especially when used by heterosexuals,¹ “dyke” can be a hostile slur (Roberts 1979; Stanley 1970). Used as an insult, “dyke” can be both homophobic and misogynistic because it refers to negativity toward the intersections of both non-heterosexuality and femaleness (in this case, lesbian women). Thus, due to the overlapping subtexts of hetero-leather culture, negativity toward LBTQ women may be associated with hetero-leathermen identities; however, these relationships have not been explored in previous research. The current study contributes to this gap in the existing literature.

Non-hetero leathermen culture

Non-hetero leathermen culture is characterized by the use of leather fetish gear in S/M experiences between non-hetero men. Non-hetero leather culture can be quite distinct from hetero-leather culture (Brodsky 1995; Kamel 1980; Nordling et al. 2006; Richters et al. 2008). In particular, some gay/bisexual leathermen connect strongly with the military history of leather culture and promote formality, hierarchy, discipline, and respect within a code of conduct (sometimes described as “Old Guard”) (Townsend 2004). These traditions are valorized within the so-called “leather bible,” *The Leatherman’s Handbook* (Townsend 2004). Especially post-WWII, leather-clad men became

1. Because some people use “dyke” to self-identify, “dyke” may not always be a hostile slur (Califia and Sweeney 2000; Hale 1997).

the image of danger and rebellious masculinity, and alongside this, some gay/bisexual men began to imbue leather with a certain erotic power intimately tied to the way it signaled masculinity and simultaneous distancing from effeminacy (Barrett 2017; Hennen 2008: 140; Lahti 1998; Levine and Kimmel 1998; Rubin [1982] 2011b). Because of the raw masculinity that leather evokes, leather (and the sex that came with it) shaped new forms of masculinized and sexual identities among non-hetero leathermen (Harris 1999; Levine and Kimmel 1998). Indeed, leather and kink culture can be opportunities to “queer” heteronormative ideas about gender, sex, and sexuality (Bauer 2016).

Non-Hetero Leathermen and Attitudes toward Women

Non-hetero leathermen are predominately associated with (and interested in) a certain type of hypermasculinity that is frequently defined by opposition to women and femininity (Hennen 2008; Lahti 1998; Mosher, Levitt, and Manley 2006; Nordling et al. 2006). The trust and community non-hetero leathermen form among one another is often built on same-sex intimacy and mutual understanding of their outsider status as both non-hetero men and as leather/SM participants (Mosher, Levitt, and Manley 2006). In conjunction with the connection of non-hetero leathermen culture to the military and motorcycle clubs whose stereotypes of misogyny precede them (Hennen 2008; Lahti 1998), some aspects of non-hetero leathermen culture can reinforce negative attitudes toward women and femininity.

The layers of D/s misogyny found in hetero-leather relationships described above, however, are not as prominent within non-hetero leathermen culture. Because the *Fifty Shades* series depicts a heterosexual relationship, non-hetero leathermen culture is not as closely connected to the leather/SM entwinement of the supremacy of men over women as depicted in the series (Musser 2015). Thus, while non-hetero leathermen may be opposed to femininity, they may not be as hostile toward women specifically. As a result, negativity toward women may be less prominent in non-hetero leathermen culture than it is in hetero-leather culture. Indeed, Hennen (2008) reported that there were no overt instances of misogyny in his ethnographic study of a gay leather club he called “the Sentinels.” Instead, women were welcomed as friends of the Sentinels and only excluded from sexual play (Hennen 2008). Even so, no studies to date have explored non-hetero leathermen’s perspectives about women in the context of

feminist identity, patriarchal gender norms, and perspectives about formal laws and policies. Thus, this study is the first to examine these relationships.

Non-hetero Leathermen and Attitudes toward LBTQ Women

Non-hetero leathermen culture can emphasize the value of non-hetero men's relationships over those of LBTQ women (Califia 1995; Mesli and Rubin 2016; Rubin [1982] 2011b). However, because non-hetero leathermen and LBTQ women can experience negativities and hostilities related to their sexual orientation/identities in similar ways, non-hetero leathermen may be inclined to be supportive of LBTQ women. In addition, leatherdyke culture that involves women interested in leather and S/M experiences with other women is a part of the larger "leather community" (Califia and Sweeney 2000). As a result, the derogatory use of the term "dyke" may be unlikely among non-hetero leathermen who are familiar with the self-proclaimed use of "dyke" as a positive identity in the leatherdyke community. Together, these dynamics may contribute to more awareness and support of LBTQ women among non-hetero leathermen than among hetero-leathermen. Yet, no studies to date have explored these patterns.

Current study

Though there are similarities between both hetero- and non-hetero leathermen cultures in regards to opposition to effeminacy, there are important differences that likely shape each group's attitudes toward women. In particular, because non-hetero leathermen often experience stigma from at least two intersecting identities (as both non-hetero and leather-identified people), they may be aware of and empathetic to marginalized others' experiences with oppression in ways that hetero-leathermen are not (Mosher, Levitt, and Manley 2006). In addition, because non-hetero leathermen are often a part of the LGBTQ community *and* the leather community, they are likely better situated to support LBTQ women than hetero-leathermen are. This leads to the following hypotheses wherein "measures of negativity toward women" is inclusive of lack of support of laws/policies helping women, non-feminist identity, adherence to patriarchal

gender norms, LGBTQ stigmatizing attitudes, and the use of derogatory language (“dyke”):

- *Hypothesis 1a*: Compared to non-leathermen, leathermen will report significantly higher means on measures of negativity toward women.
- *Hypothesis 1b*: Compared to non-hetero leathermen, hetero-leathermen will report significantly higher means on measures of negativity toward women.
- *Hypothesis 2a*: When compared to non-leather identity, there is a positive relationship between leather identity and measures of negativity toward women.
- *Hypothesis 2b*: When compared to non-hetero leather identity, there is a positive relationship between hetero-leather identity and measures of negativity toward women.

Methods

Data and sample characteristics

The data come from the 2018 LGBTQ and Hetero-cis Population Study (Worthen 2020). The data were collected using panelists recruited from Survey Sampling International (SSI), an international survey research and survey sample provider with over 5 million U.S. online panel participants. SSI panel members are recruited from online communities, social networks, and the web. SSI profiles, authenticates, and verifies each panel member as a reliable respondent for rigorous research participation. SSI awards incentives to respondents upon survey completion.

A nationally representative sample of U.S. adults aged 18–64 years stratified by U.S. Census categories of age, gender, race/ethnicity, and census region was obtained by SSI. The original sample included 3104 respondents. Due to the goals of the current study, our sample includes 1474 men; 65² of whom identified as leatherman/leather. See **Table 1** for additional details about the leathermen in the current study.

2. This includes four trans men.

Table 1. Sample characteristics of leathermen (n = 65).

	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>
<i>Sexual Identity</i>		
Heterosexual	0-1	.58 (.50)
Non-Heterosexual (Gay, n = 16; Bisexual, n = 9; Pansexual, n = 1; Asexual, n = 1)	0-1	.42 (.50)
<i>Sociodemographics</i>		
Caucasian/White ^a	0-1	.63 (.49)
Nonwhite (African American/Black, n = 17; Asian American/Pacific Islander, n = 5; Multi-Racial, n = 1; Other Race, n = 1)	0-1	.37 (.49)
Latinx Ethnicity	0-1	.17 (.38)
Education	1-6	3.83 (1.46)
Income	1-5	3.60 (2.84)
Town Type (Rural-Large City)	1-4	2.97 (1.21)

a. Reference category in regression models.

Survey design and implementation

The lead author created the survey instrument on Qualtrics (an online survey platform). The survey was live on the Internet from November 5, 2018 to November 23, 2018. Through the link provided in the invitation e-mail from SSI, panelists could access the survey via PCs, laptops, tablets, and mobile phones. The survey included 184 closed-ended questions with both multiple- and single-response items. The average time to complete the survey was 25.8 minutes.

Dependent variables: perspectives about women

For *Do not support laws/policies helping women*, participants were asked to respond to the statement: "In general, I support laws and policies that help women" with response options of yes (1) no (0). For *non-feminist identity*, response options were (1) "Yes, I consider myself to be a strong feminist," (2) "Yes, I consider myself to be a feminist," (3) "No, I do not consider myself to be a feminist," and (4) "No, do not consider myself to be a feminist and I disagree with feminism." For the *Patriarchal Gender Norms Scale*, five items with response options of "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" on a Likert-type scale were summed: (1) "If my political party nominated a

woman for President, I would vote for her if she was qualified for the job” (reverse coded), (2) “It is more important for a wife to help her husband’s career than to have one herself,” (3) “The household tasks should be evenly divided between both partners in committed relationships” (reverse coded), (4) “All-in-all, family life suffers when both partners have full-time jobs,” and (5) “It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the earner outside of the home and the woman takes care of the home and family” (Cronbach’s alpha for all men = .69; for only leathermen = .70). In addition, all items regarding these perspectives about women were summed together to create the *Summed Women Negativity Scale* (Cronbach’s alpha for all men = .68; for only leathermen = .69).

Dependent variables: perspectives about LBTQ women

We used four of Worthen’s (2020) *LBTQ Stigma Scales* to estimate stigmatizing attitudes toward four groups: lesbian women, bisexual women, transwomen, and queer women. Each of the four scales is composed of items clustered around six key areas: (1) social and familial relationships, (2) positions of importance and social significance, (3) basic human rights, (4) sex-related stigma, (5) LBTQ permanency, and (6) the achievement of femininity. The Appendix provides the 14 individual scale items for each of the four scales. For all men, the Cronbach’s alphas were high: .90 for stigma toward lesbian women, .92 for stigma toward bisexual women, .91 for stigma toward transwomen stigma, and .92 for stigma toward queer women. Cronbach’s alphas were also high among only leathermen: .90 for stigma toward lesbian women, .91 for stigma toward bisexual women, .91 for stigma toward trans women, and .92 for stigma toward queer women. In addition, respondents were presented with the statement “I use the term “dyke” as an insult” and provided with the response options of (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, and (4) frequently. All items regarding perspectives about LBTQ women were summed together to create the *Summed LBTQ Women Negativity Scale* (Cronbach’s alpha for all men = .98; for only leathermen = .98). Finally, all items from both the *Summed Women Negativity Scale* and the *Summed LBTQ Women Negativity Scale* were added together to create the *Total Summed Negativity Toward Women Scale* (Cronbach’s alpha for all men = .98; for only leathermen = .98).

Independent variables

For *Leather Identity*, respondents were presented with the statement “I identify as leatherman/ leather” with response options of yes (1) and no (0). For *Sexual Identity*, respondents were asked “How would you describe yourself?” with the following response options: heterosexual, gay or lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, and asexual. Due to the small number of respondents in the categories other than heterosexual (see **Table 1**), these categories were collapsed into two groups: (1) Heterosexual and (0) Non-Heterosexual.

Sociodemographic controls

Previous studies have found significant relationships between sociodemographics and general attitudes toward women as well as attitudes toward LBTQ women (Appleby 2001; Donnelly et al. 2016; Embrick, Walther, and Wickens 2007; Herek 1988, 2000, 2002; Mohr and Rochlen 1999; Raja and Stokes 1998; Worthen 2016, 2018); thus, the current study includes racial/ethnic identity, education, income, and town type as sociodemographic controls. For racial identity, the response options were Caucasian/White, African American/Black, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Native American/ Alaskan Native, Multi-Racial, and Other Race. Due to the small number of respondents in categories other than Caucasian/White (see Table 1), these categories were collapsed into two groups: (1) Caucasian/White and (0) Nonwhite. In a separate question for Latinx Ethnicity, respondents were also asked “Are you Hispanic or Latino/a/x? (A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture of origin regardless of race)” with response options of yes (1) and no (0). *Education* response options were (1) less than high school, (2) high school/GED, (3) some college, (4) Associate’s, (5) Bachelor’s, or (6) greater than Bachelor’s. *Income* options were (1) less than \$5,000 USD, (2) \$5,000 - \$24,999 USD, (3) \$25,000 - \$49,999 USD, (4) \$50,000 - \$99,999 USD, and (5) \$100,000 USD or greater. *Town type* (where the majority of life was spent) response options were (1) rural, (2) small town, (3) suburb, and (4) large city.

Method of analysis

In the first set of analyses, we compared the mean values of the dependent variables by leather/nonleather identities as well as hetero-leather and non-hetero-leather identities using *t*-tests. In the second set of analyses, we use logistic and OLS regressions to explore the effects of leather identity on perspectives about women using four dependent variables: (1) lack of support of laws/policies that help women, (2) non-feminist identity, (3) patriarchal gender norms, and (4) the *Summed Women Negativity Scale*. In the third set of analyses, OLS regressions estimate the relationships between leather identity and perspectives about LBTQ women using six dependent variables: (1) stigma toward lesbian women, (2) stigma toward bisexual women, (3) stigma toward transwomen, (4) stigma toward queer women, (5) use of the term “dyke” as an insult, and (6) the *Summed LBTQ Women Negativity Scale*. The final set of analyses explores the effects of leather identity on the *Total Summed Negativity toward Women Scale*. All analyses were conducted for both the all men sample ($n = 1474$) and the only leathermen sample ($n = 65$) and all models include socio-demographic controls. We examined multicollinearity using the STATA command “collin” (Ender 2010) which provides collinearity diagnostics for all variables utilized in each model. The Mean VIF values ranged from 1.11 to 1.35 suggesting no issues with multicollinearity (Allison 2012).

Results

t-Test results

In **Table 2**, we compare the mean values of the dependent variables for leathermen ($n = 65$) and nonleather men ($n = 1409$) using *t*-tests. All results are significant. With the exception of non-feminist identity, the mean values for all measures of negativity toward women and negativity toward LBTQ women are significantly higher for leathermen than they are for non-leathermen, mostly supporting *Hypothesis 1a*. Similarly, in **Table 3**, those who identify as both leathermen and heterosexual ($n = 38$) are compared to those who identify as both

Table 2. Mean values of dependent variables with t-test results identifying leather identity gaps in perspectives about women among all men (n = 1474).

	Range	Leather Identity n = 65		Non-Leather Identity n = 1409	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Perspectives about Women:</i>					
Do not support laws/policies helping women	0-1	.58	.50	.38	.49*
Non-Feminist Identity	1-4	2.12	1.07	2.69	.89*
Patriarchal Gender Norms Scale (α = .69,.70)	5-25	14.63	3.34	11.65	3.83*
Summed Women Negativity Scale (α = .68,.69)	6-30	17.34	4.30	14.72	4.30*
<i>Perspectives about LBTQ Women:</i>					
Stigmatizing Attitudes toward:					
Lesbian Women (α = .90,.90)	14-70	39.05	9.57	30.47	11.29*
Bisexual Women (α = .92,.91)	14-70	39.78	9.73	30.82	11.67*
Transwomen (α = .91,.91)	14-70	40.08	9.30	33.09	11.88*
Queer Women (α = .92,.92)	14-70	40.28	9.16	32.65	11.79*
Use the term “dyke” as an insult	1-4	2.57	1.19	1.58	.91*
Summed LBTQ Women Negativity Scale (α = .98,.98)	56-284	161.75	4.58	128.61	1.20*
Total Summed Negativity toward Women Scale (α = .98,.98)	62-314	179.09	4.49	143.33	1.28*

* t-Test results allowing for unequal variances indicate means are significantly different from one another (p < .01); two Cronbach’s alpha scores are provided for the scales: the first was created using the all men sample and the second was created using only the leathermen sample.

Table 3. Mean values of dependent variables with t-test results identifying leather and sexual identity gaps in perspectives about women among all leathermen (n = 65).

	Range	Leather and Heterosexual Identity n = 38		Leather and Non-Heterosexual Identity n = 27	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Perspectives about Women:</i>					
Do not support laws/policies helping women	0-1	.61	.50	.56	.51 ns
Non-Feminist Identity	1-4	1.84	.92	2.52	1.16*
Patriarchal Gender Norms Scale (α = .69,.70)	5-25	15.74	2.24	13.07	4.00*
Summed Women Negativity Scale (α = .68,.69)	6-30	18.18	.42	16.15	4.46*
<i>Perspectives about LBTQ Women:</i>					
Stigmatizing Attitudes toward:					
Lesbian Women (α = .90,.90)	14-70	42.29	7.04	34.48	10.86*
Bisexual Women (α = .92,.91)	14-70	42.74	6.53	35.63	11.89*
Transwomen (α = .91,.91)	14-70	42.67	6.69	36.15	11.04*
Queer Women (α = .92,.92)	14-70	42.58	6.45	37.04	11.34*
Use the term “dyke” as an insult	1-4	2.97	1.03	2.00	1.18*
Summed LBTQ Women Negativity Scale (α = .98,.98)	56-284	173.45	4.05	145.30	44.59*
Total Summed Negativity toward Women Scale (α = .98,.98)	62-314	191.63	4.26	161.44	47.96*

* t-Test results allowing for unequal variances indicate means are significantly different from one another (p < .05), ns = nonsignificant t-test results; two Cronbach’s alphas are provided for the scales: the first was created using the all men sample and the second was created using only the leathermen sample.

leather and non-heterosexual (n = 27). Other than nonfeminist identity, the mean values for all measures of negativity toward women and negativity toward LBTQ women are significantly higher for hetero-leathermen than they are for non-heteroleathermen, mostly supporting *Hypothesis 1b*.

Perspectives about women results

In **Tables 4 and 5**, we use logistic and OLS regression models to investigate the relationships between leather identity and perspectives about women. In Table 4, *Hypothesis 2a* is mostly supported. In comparison to non-leather identity (reference group), leather identity increases the odds of not supporting laws/policies that help women by 1.27. In addition, leather identity is positively related to patriarchal gender norms and the *Total Summed Negativity toward Women Scale*. However, in contrast to *Hypothesis 2a*, non-feminist identity is negatively related to leather identity. In Table 5, *Hypothesis 2b* is only partially supported. In comparison to non-heterosexual leathermen

Table 4. Logistic and OLS regression results estimating the effects of leather identity on perspectives about women among all men (n = 1474).

	<i>Do Not Support Laws/Policies Helping Women</i>		<i>Non-Feminist Identity</i>	<i>Patriarchal Gender Norms Scale</i>	<i>Summed Women Negativity Scale</i>
	<i>Logistic</i>		<i>OLS</i>	<i>OLS</i>	<i>OLS</i>
	<i>Odds Ratio</i>	<i>Std. Err.</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>Coef.</i>
Leather Identity	2.27*	(.59)	-.56*	2.81*	2.45*
<i>Sociodemog. Controls</i>					
Nonwhite	1.19	(.16)	-.07	1.11*	1.09*
Latinx Ethnicity	1.50	(.23)	-.31*	.79*	.58
Education	.96	(.04)	-.05*	-.22*	-.28*
Income	.95	(.05)	-.05*	-.23*	-.29*
Town Type	.91	(.05)	.03	-.19*	-.18
Mean VIF	1.11		1.12	1.12	1.12
R ²	.02 (pseudo)		.04 (adjusted)	.07 (adjusted)	.06 (adjusted)

* p <.05; reference category is non-leather identity.

Table 5. Logistic and OLS regression results estimating the effects of leather identity on perspectives about women among only leathermen (n = 65).

	<i>Do Not Support Laws/Policies Helping Women</i>		<i>Non-Feminist Identity</i>	<i>Patriarchal Gender Norms Scale</i>	<i>Summed Women Negativity Scale</i>
	<i>Logistic</i>		<i>OLS</i>	<i>OLS</i>	<i>OLS</i>
	<i>Odds Ratio</i>	<i>Std. Err.</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>Coef.</i>
Hetero-Leather Identity	1.28	(.74)	-.81*	2.40*	1.65
<i>Sociodemog. Controls</i>					
Nonwhite	2.86	(1.76)	-.24	1.54	1.53
Latinx Ethnicity	2.76	(2.22)	-.58	.35	-.01
Education	.94	(.22)	-.03	-.28	-.32
Income	1.14	(.37)	-.13	.65	.55
Town Type	1.19	(.28)	-.33*	-.04	-.34
Mean VIF	1.24		1.34	1.30	1.26
R ²	.08 (pseudo)		.22 (adjusted)	.19 (adjusted)	.08 (adjusted)

* p <.05; reference category is non-heterosexual leathermen.

identity (reference group), hetero-leathermen identity is positively related to patriarchal gender norms, but negatively related to non-feminist identity.

Perspectives about LBTQ women results

In **Tables 6 and 7**, we use OLS regression models to investigate the relationships between leather identity and perspectives about LBTQ women. In Table 6, *Hypothesis 2a* is supported. In comparison to non-leather identity (reference group), leather identity is positively related to all four LBTQ stigma scales, the use of the term “dyke” as an insult, and the *Summed LBTQ Women Negativity Scale*. In Table 7, *Hypothesis*

Table 6. OLS regression results estimating the effects of leather identity on perspectives about LGBQ women among all men (n = 1474).

	<i>Stigma toward Lesbian Women</i>	<i>Stigma toward Bisexual Women</i>	<i>Stigma toward Trans Women</i>	<i>Stigma toward Queer Women</i>	<i>Use the Term “Dyke” as an Insult</i>	<i>Summed LBTQ Women Negativity Scale</i>
Leather Identity	8.05*	8.49*	6.68*	7.27*	.95*	31.44*
<i>Sociodemog. Controls</i>						
Nonwhite	3.89*	3.56*	2.93*	3.07*	.26*	14.00*
Latinx Ethnicity	3.03*	2.70*	2.32*	2.42*	.40*	10.88*
Education	-.26	-.13	-.10	-.13	.03	-.59
Income	-.29	-.46	.09	-.04	.01	-.86
Town Type	-.86*	-.90*	-.96*	-.87*	-.06*	-3.64*
Mean VIF	1.12	1.12	1.11	1.12	1.13	1.12
Adjusted R ²	.06	.06	.04	.04	.08	.05

* p < .05; reference category is non-leather identity.

Table 7. OLS regression results estimating the effects of leather identity on perspectives about LGBQ women among only leathermen (n = 65).

	<i>Stigma toward Lesbian Women</i>	<i>Stigma toward Bisexual Women</i>	<i>Stigma toward Trans Women</i>	<i>Stigma toward Queer Women</i>	<i>Use the Term “Dyke” as an Insult</i>	<i>Summed LBTQ Women Negativity Scale</i>
Hetero-Leather Identity	8.73*	7.16*	7.25*	6.39*	1.05*	30.58*
<i>Sociodemog. Controls</i>						
Nonwhite	4.74*	4.28	2.14	4.69*	.36	16.21
Latinx Ethnicity	3.72	2.19	4.53	1.62	.72	12.78
Education	-1.39	-1.18	-1.68	-1.21	-.06	-5.51
Income	.25	1.16	1.76	.38	.14	3.70
Town Type	.86	.33	.75	1.36	.15	3.44
Mean VIF	1.35	1.30	1.32	1.30	1.32	1.32
Adjusted R ²	.26	.16	.20	.18	.21	.22

* p < .05; reference category is non-heterosexual leathermen.

2b is also supported. In comparison to non-heterosexual leathermen identity (reference group), hetero-leathermen identity is positively related to all measures of LBTQ women negativity.

Total summed negativity toward women results

In **Table 8**, *Hypotheses 2a and 2b* are fully supported. When the reference group is non-leather identity, leather identity is positively related to the *Total Summed Negativity toward Women Scale*. In addition, when the

Socio-demographic controls and goodness of fit

Among the sociodemographic controls, many are significant, but the results vary. In Table 4, all sociodemographic measures are significant in at least one model. In Table 5, however, only one measure (town type) is significant in one model (non-feminist identity). In Table 6, race (nonwhite), ethnicity, and town type are significant in all models; however, education and income are not significant in any models in Table 6. In Table 7, only race is significant in two models (stigma toward lesbian women and stigma toward queer women). Finally, in Table 8, race, ethnicity, and town type are significant in the models among all men, but no sociodemographic controls are significant in the models among only leathermen. The pseudo and adjusted R^2 values are quite low in the models with the all men sample (see especially

Table 8. OLS regression results estimating the effects of leather identity on total summed negativity toward women scale among all men ($n = 1474$) and only leathermen ($n = 65$).

	<i>All Men</i>	<i>Only Leathermen</i>
Leather Identity	33.89*	-
Hetero-Leather Identity	-	32.24*
<i>Sociodemog. Controls</i>		
Nonwhite	15.09*	17.74
Latinx Ethnicity	11.46*	12.77
Education	-.87	-5.83
Income	-1.15	4.24
Town Type	-3.84*	3.10
Mean VIF	1.12	1.32
Adjusted R^2	.06	.22

* $p < .05$; reference category for All Men is non-leather identity; reference category for Only Leathermen is nonheterosexual leathermen.

Tables 4 and 6), but are relatively higher in the models that include the leathermen subsample (see especially Tables 5 and 7).

Discussion

In the current study, we sought to explore hetero- and non-hetero leathermen's negativity toward women. In doing so, our study considers the associations between leathermen identities and attitudes toward laws/policies helping women, non-feminist identity, adherence to patriarchal gender norms, and LGBTQ stigmatizing attitudes. Overall, we found some support for all our hypotheses indicating that men's leather identity is associated with anti-woman perspectives.

Specifically, our findings indicate a robust relationship between misogyny and leathermen identity. Compared to non-leather-identified-men, leather-identified-men are more negative toward women (generally) and LGBTQ women (specifically) across numerous measures. Our findings are in line with previous research that has highlighted the ways sexism, misogyny, and the supremacy of men over women has been entwined with leather and BDSM (Barrett 2017; Butler 1982; Califia 2000; Cross and Matheson 2006; Faccio, Casini, and Cipolletta 2014; Gebhard 1995; Zussman and Pierce 1998). For example, we found that leathermen identity was significantly related to adherence to patriarchal gender norms, a lack of support of laws/policies that help women, the stigmatization of LGBTQ women, and the use of the term "dyke" as an insult. In addition, all three summed scales (*Summed Women Negativity Scale*, *Summed LGBTQ Women Negativity Scale*, *Total Summed Negativity toward Women Scale*) were strongly related to leathermen identity. Thus, misogyny and negativity toward LGBTQ women may cluster together as an overarching anti-woman perspective that is a significant part of men's leather identity.

However, intersections between heterosexual/non-heterosexual and leathermen identities further complicate these dynamics. Though there are overlaps among hetero- and non-hetero leathermen cultures in regards to negativity toward effeminacy, non-hetero leathermen may be aware of and empathetic to marginalized others' experiences with oppression in ways that hetero-leathermen are not. The extent of this awareness may be due to non-hetero leathermen's experiences with at least two intersecting identities (as both non-hetero

and leather-identified people) (Mosher, Levitt, and Manley 2006), and their experiences in both the LGBTQ community *and* the leather community. As a result, the current study proposed that non-hetero leathermen are better positioned to support both women generally and LGBTQ women specifically than hetero-leathermen are. Our findings indicate that hetero leathermen are significantly more misogynistic and anti-LGBTQ than non-hetero leathermen are. Compared to non-hetero leathermen, hetero leathermen's identity was significantly related to adherence to patriarchal gender norms, the stigmatization of LGBTQ women, and the use of the term "dyke" as an insult. In addition, two summed scales (*Summed LGBTQ Women Negativity Scale*; *Total Summed Negativity toward Women Scale*) were strongly related to hetero leathermen identity and the *Summed Women Negativity Scale* approached significance ($p = .083$). Thus, misogyny may be more closely entwined with hetero leathermen culture than it is with non-hetero leathermen culture. For non-hetero leathermen especially, their own marginalized experiences as well as their (likely increased) awareness of leatherdyke culture may work together to shape these patterns (Califia and Sweeney 2000).

It is important to note, however, that there is still some palpable negativity toward women among nonhetero leathermen. For example, non-hetero leathermen are less supportive of women in comparison to men who do not identify as "leather" (see Tables 2 and 3 especially). This is certainly connected to non-hetero leathermen's opposition to women/effeminacy as well as the tradition, protocols, and hypermasculine idealized image of gay/bisexual men (especially) in leather culture (Hennen 2008; Lahti 1998; Mosher, Levitt, and Manley 2006; Nordling et al. 2006). These anti-woman perspectives may also be a by-product nonhetero leathermen's vested interests in preserving their own unique men's spaces (e.g., gay bars and bathhouses, some of which cater to leather/SM/kink). These interests can be enhanced when leathermen feel their spaces are "invaded" by heterosexual women who "tour" or go on "safari" to gay and leathermen's spaces (Orne 2017; see also Urry (2002). Additionally, leatherdykes and other LGBTQ women (who have notably lacked their own gathering places, see Rubin ([1982] 2011b)) may sometimes come across as if they are coopting leathermen's spaces. Feeling that heterosexual women, leatherdykes, and other LGBTQ women "don't belong" in their spaces may create (or enhance) anti-woman perspectives among

non-hetero leathermen. Together, these patterns suggest a complex relationship between misogyny and leather culture entwined with both hetero and non-hetero identities.

Though the majority of our findings are in line with our hypotheses, the results examining non-feminist identity were not as expected. In fact, they were all in the opposite direction from predicted. Significantly contrasting with the *Fifty Shades* feminist backlash (Musser 2015), our results indicate a *positive* relationship between identifying as a feminist and both leathermen identity and hetero leathermen identity. Such findings may indicate that feminist identity relates to hetero leathermen's identities in ways that differ from the other measures of perspectives about women explored in the current study. For example, in some circles, "the sex-and-power 'bad girl' image is part of the appeal of fetish fashion for women" (Steele 1997: 44). Hetero leathermen may see the eroticization of their sexual partner's (leatherwoman's) "bad girl [leatherclad] image" as a declaration of their power as a woman and as an expression of their feminist identity, and as a result, these hetero leathermen may be identifying as feminists in a way that upholds/supports this dynamic. Hetero leathermen may also have a fundamentally unique understanding of feminism that differs from other groups' perspectives. Overall, it is unclear how and why these men chose to identify as feminists in the current study and as others have found (e.g., Williams and Wittig 1997), the choice to identify as a feminist is widely variant. More clear, however, is that "[t]here is nothing inherently feminist or nonfeminist about S/M" (Rubin [1982] 2011b: 126), and likewise, the leather community is also not inherently nonfeminist, nor is it inherently misogynistic. Overall, the findings here demonstrate the importance of continuing to consider how feminist identity relates to hetero-leathermen's perspectives about women.

Limitations and future research

There are a few notable limitations to the current study. First, though our data come from a nationally representative sample of U.S. adult men, they are not representative of the complex diversity of kink, leather, or BDSM identities or practices (Graham et al. 2016; Nordling et al. 2006), and the number of leathermen respondents was

also relatively small. In addition, the current study focused exclusively on leathermen due to a lack of leather-identified respondents of other genders in the study sample.³ As others have noted (Altenburger et al. 2017; Breslow, Evans, and Langley 1985; Deller and Smith 2013; Green 2015; Smith, 2015; Sprott and Berkey 2015), women's interests in leather and/or BDSM can have important implications for understanding their own attitudes toward women and sexist perspectives. In addition, though there were interesting findings related to the sociodemographic controls in the regression models, a sizable percentage of the leathermen subsample was White (63%), a majority were from a suburb or large city (69%), and most reported some college education (88%). Furthermore, due to small *ns*, the race and sexual identity categories had to be collapsed into "nonwhite" and "non-hetero." Thus, future work should be careful to include larger, more diverse samples in terms of sexual identity and sociodemographics, including women, and especially leatherwomen (Breslow, Evans, and Langley 1985).

Second, there were no measures available in the current study that focused on awareness/feelings about the *Fifty Shades* series nor the actual leather culture involvement/participation or the actual sex practices of these men. For example, it is unknown if these leathermen identified as Doms, subs, switches, or something else. Given that these practices and experiences can shape many aspects of leathermen's lives (Hébert and Weaver 2015; Hennen 2008), future studies should incorporate further dimensions of both *Fifty Shades* and leather experiences and perspectives. In particular, it may be that some men are drawn to leather culture *because* of their perspectives about women, yet these types of relationships cannot be parsed out using data from the current study. Additional qualitative work would better capture the lived experiences of these leathermen and could help inform our understandings of the relationships between the *Fifty Shades* phenomenon, leathermen identities, and anti-woman perspectives.

Finally, though beyond the scope of the current study, the relationships between consent, *Fifty Shades*, leather culture, and negativity toward women are vital to explore in future research (Klement, Sagarin,

3. Other than the leathermen explored in the current study, the study sample included three women (1 cis woman and 2 trans women) and six nonbinary individuals who identified as "leather."

and Lee 2017). In particular, the safety and well-being of those who are newly interested in leather/BDSM sex due to *Fifty Shades* may be in jeopardy because consent is not appropriately addressed in the series (Barker 2013). For example, just after the publication of the three *Fifty Shades* books, a survey among BDSM participants ($n = 3932$) conducted by the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (2013) found that the vast majority (85.6%) believed that the BDSM community needs more education about consent. In their follow-up survey (Wright, Stambaugh, and Cox 2015), 29% of the total sample ($n = 1307/4503$) indicated that their consent had been violated during a BDSM scene (e.g., violation of pre-negotiated limits and/or their safe word/safe sign). The majority of these survey participants were female (68%) and in their first three years of participation in BDSM when their consent was violated for the first time. Such findings suggest that more research is needed to better cultivate a culture of consent that can encourage the appropriate emotional and psychological pre-negotiations necessary in healthy D/s and BDSM relationships that may be newly forming as a result of interest in the *Fifty Shades* series (Kimble 2017; Sprott and Berkey 2015).

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Notes on contributors

Meredith G. F. Worthen is a professor of sociology at the University of Oklahoma.

Her interests are in the sociological constructions of deviance and stigma, gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ identities, as well as feminist and queer criminology.

Trenton M. Haltom (@TMHaltom) is a PhD Candidate in Sociology at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. His research focuses on men’s “crises” of gender and sexuality across media, occupations, health, or sports. His dissertation is a mixed-methods content analysis of representations of men’s bodies in popular U.S. magazines over time. His research has been published in *Gender & Society*, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, and in edited volumes.

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Appendix. LBTQ Stigma Scale Items (Worthen 2020)

Social and Familial Relationships

I welcome new friends who are _____.^R

I don't think it would negatively affect our relationship if I learned that one of my close relatives was a _____.^R
_____are not capable of being good parents.

Positions of Importance and Social Significance

I would not vote for a political candidate who was an openly _____.
_____should not be allowed to join the military.

Basic Human Rights

I believe _____should have all of the same rights as other people do.^R

It is upsetting to me that _____experience violence, harassment, and discrimination just because they are _____.^R

Sex-Related

_____are unfaithful to their romantic partners.

_____are too sexual (hypersexual).

_____are mostly responsible for spreading HIV/AIDS.

I am comfortable with the thought of a _____having sex with a woman.^R

I am comfortable with the thought of a _____having sex with a man.^R

LBTQ Permanency

Most women who call themselves _____ are just temporarily experimenting with their sexuality/gender.^{*}

Achievement of Femininity or Masculinity

_____are not feminine enough.

Notes: Response options were Strongly Disagree–Strongly Agree.

^R items were reverse coded. The stigmatized group of interest (i.e., lesbian women, bisexual women, transwomen, and queer women) was inserted into the blank.

^{*}For this item, “sexuality” was utilized for the models estimating lesbian, bisexual, and queer women stigma and “gender” was utilized for the models estimating transwomen stigma.