

# EXAMINATION OF ANIME CONTENT AND ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN ANIME CONSUMPTION, GENRE PREFERENCES, AND AMBIVALENT SEXISM

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## Abstract

Across two studies, we examined the extent to which popular anime series contained sexist content and tested whether anime consumption and genre preference were associated with viewers' ambivalent sexism. In Study 1, we content-coded episodes from nine of the most popular anime series and found that women (vs. men) were underrepresented in anime and were more likely than expected to be sexualized (vs. men), curvaceous (vs. secondary characters), and provocative (vs. secondary characters), while men (vs. women) were more likely to use a weapon but were not typically portrayed as hypermasculine. In Study 2, we measured anime consumption, genre preference, and ambivalent sexism in a group of self-identified anime fans. Anime consumption was positively associated with both benevolent and hostile sexism. Preferences for the drama and hentai drama genres mediated the relationship between consumption and hostile sexism, while preferences for drama, slice of life, mecha, and action mediated the relationship between consumption and benevolent sexism. The results support the notion that

anime contains sexist content and that consumption of this content is related to sexist beliefs. The findings also illustrate genre-specific differences, likely driven by genre-specific content, a finding that is consistent with other research on media exposure effects (e.g., violent media and aggression).

*Keywords:* anime, fan, sexism, benevolent sexism, hostile sexism

## Introduction

Gone are the days, at least in American society, where it was considered acceptable for a husband to beat his wife and where women on television were doting housewives. It would be easy to conclude from this that sexism is a thing of the past. Unfortunately, sexism is alive and well in the world (Glick et al., 2000), often manifesting as, or from, stereotypical attitudes about gender. Typically, women are stereotyped as warm, expressive, communal, and nurturing; in contrast, men tend to be viewed as competitive, agentic, and dominant (see Wood & Eagly, 2010). And, when men or women stray from these prototypical gender roles—a woman acting in a dominant manner or a man performing

well in a stereotypically female job—they tend to be viewed unfavorably (Carli, 2001; Heilman & Wallen, 2010; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). These stereotypes, along with ambivalent sexism theory, go a long way toward explaining why, despite the decline in overt sexism in past decades, sexism persists and is still a considerable problem.

Ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) suggests that sexism is more than just negative stereotypes toward women. The theory posits that sexism is comprised of two complementary views of women—hostile and benevolent. Hostile sexism reflects antagonism and antipathy for women; in contrast, benevolent sexism reflects paternalism and a gendered, stereotypical view of women (Glick & Fiske, 2001a). At first glance, it may seem like benevolent sexism is little more than a nuisance for women compared to maliciousness of hostile sexism. However, studies show that the two are positively related and directed toward different subtypes of women depending on whether they adhere to traditional gender roles—hostility toward women who are role-inconsistent and benevolence toward women who are role consistent (Glick & Fiske, 2001b, 2011). For example, hostile sexism, but not benevolent sexism, predicts negative attitudes toward career women (a nontraditional gender role; Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, & Zhu, 1997). Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, legitimizes gender inequality by viewing women who adhere to gender stereotypic roles in a positive manner (Glick et al., 1997); in fact, people tend to like people who espouse benevolent (vs. hostile) sexist comments (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). To put it concisely, ambivalent sexism posits that

benevolent and hostile sexism are the “carrot” and “stick” that perpetuate gender stereotypes—rewarding those women who fall in line by placing them on a pedestal and punishing those women who fall out of line and work against these stereotypes.

Given the undesirability of ambivalent sexism, it is worth asking where these attitudes come from. In the opening paragraph, we provided the example of the classic television housewife, the epitome of female stereotypes. While media portrayals of women may seem trivial when it comes to an issue as broad and multiply determined as sexism, there is ample reason to suspect that the media we consume impact sexist beliefs. Far from being unique to the topic of sexism, a wealth of research shows that media content can influence viewers’ attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors (e.g., Potter, 2011). For example, violent video games, television, films, and music have all been found to affect aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Anderson et al., 2003; 2010), while the introduction of television itself to a rural area of Nepal significantly affected residents’ attitudes and behaviors regarding family issues (e.g., contraceptive use; Barber & Axinn, 2004). However, not all media are expected to have the same effects on beliefs and behavior. Intuitively, it seems to follow that media content should tend to influence beliefs that are relevant to that particular content. For example, watching television crime drama is related to oppositional attitudes toward gun control (Dowler, 2002). Similarly, viewing genres of film or television that focus on relationships (e.g., romantic comedies) is associated with idealistic relationship expectations (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). As a final example, watching shows with paranormal content is associated

with paranormal beliefs (Tseng, Tsai, Hsieh, Hung, & Huang, 2014). Each of these examples illustrates how specific content is associated with specific attitudes in ways that are consistent with the content. Media may influence attitudes as disparate as our perception of aggression and paranormal beliefs, so there is reason to believe that media may also influence sexist attitudes.

Sexism in media partly involves the portrayal of both men and women in ways that are consistent with prevailing stereotypes. Illustrating this sexism, men are more likely to appear in prime-time programming than women, and when women are shown, they are less likely to be shown working outside the home and more likely to be shown in a romantic relationship (Signorielli, 1989). Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan (2008) similarly found that women were underrepresented in prime-time shows and were more likely to be shown in interpersonal or social roles, while men were more likely to be portrayed in work roles. This underrepresentation of women even pervades television commercials, where women not only appear less, but are also more likely to be portrayed as secondary characters supporting a male character when they are present (Ganahl, Prinsen, & Netzley, 2003). The same trend holds true for video games, where female characters are less likely to be heroes or main characters and, when they are included, they tend to dress in a manner consistent with stereotypes (Dietz, 1998). Female (vs. male) video game characters are also more likely to be sexualized and scantily dressed, while male characters tend to be hypermasculine and violent (Dill & Thill, 2007). And, consistent with research on other media effects, sexist content does affect consumers in a content-

consistent manner. For example, media consumption in general (Swami et al., 2010) and frequency of playing sexist video games specifically are both associated with greater benevolent sexism (Stermer & Burkley, 2015). In another study, greater video game playing over one's lifetime was found to correlate with hostile sexism (Fox & Potocki, 2016). Together, the research shows that the way gender roles are portrayed in media can influence consumers' own attitudes.

While a growing body of research is examining the effects of sexism in television and video games on sexist attitudes, there has been little research specifically focusing on this issue in the context of anime. Anime is an abbreviation for Japanese animation, and is often based on manga (Japanese graphic novels/comics). Some genres of anime/manga frequently contain sexist content, including sexual harassment, scantily clad women, and objectification of women (Brenner, 2007). In one study of perceptions of sexism in anime, Bresnahan, Inoue, and Kagawa (2006) asked male and female participants from the US and Japan to watch an episode of *Dragon Ball Z* before rating their perception of the characters. Participants from Japan and males from both of the countries perceived the characters as exhibiting stereotypical traits, but those who held more traditional views of gender roles perceived fewer stereotypes. Both participants from Japan and males (across both countries) endorsed the notion that the characters would serve as good role models and liked the characters. The study suggests that participants were often aware of the sex stereotypes portrayed in the anime and viewed these characterizations as not only acceptable, but good examples for others. And while this is only one study, when

coupled with other scholarly work (Brenner, 2007; Kim, 2002; Napier, 2005) and discussions within the anime fandom itself, there is reason to believe at least some genres of anime may contain more sexist content than others, and may be more closely tied to sexist attitudes as a result.

In the present research, we aim to examine the content of anime for sexist portrayals and to test whether there is an association between anime consumption, genre preference, and ambivalent sexism. To test whether the content of anime is sexist, in Study 1 we coded 45 episodes of anime for the sex of the characters, types of character (e.g., central, secondary, peripheral), nature of the portrayal of male and female characters, and use of a weapon. Based on research showing that women are underrepresented in US prime-time television shows (Lauzen et al., 2008; Signorielli, 1989), commercials (Ganahl et al., 2003), cartoons (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995), and video games (Dietz, 1998), we predict that women will also be underrepresented in anime. And since research has shown that female characters are often portrayed in a sexualized manner in video games (e.g., Dill & Thill, 2007; Summers & Miller, 2014), we expect female anime characters to be similarly sexualized, portrayed with a curvaceous body type and to act provocatively. In contrast, we expect male characters to be portrayed as hypermasculine, in line with stereotypes about men. In a similar vein, we hypothesize that male characters will also be more likely than female characters to use weapons—consistent with the stereotype that men are more aggressive than women.

Given that anime has been suggested to contain sexism (Bresnahan et al., 2006;

Brenner, 2007), and since exposure to media can reinforce content-consistent attitudes (e.g., Fox & Potocki, 2016; Swami et al., 2010), in Study 2 we tested the hypothesis that anime consumption is positively associated with both the hostile and benevolent dimensions of ambivalent sexism. Furthermore, we hypothesized that this association between consumption and sexism is mediated by preferred anime genre: those who prefer genres that contain more sexist content will be more likely to endorse sexist attitudes. Although a tentative hypothesis, given the nature of hentai (e.g., aggressive sexual content), we expect a preference for this genre will mediate the relationship between consumption and hostile sexism. In contrast, we expect preference for action and mecha genres to mediate the relationship between consumption and benevolent sexism, as such genres often portray male heroes saving women from danger (a form of benevolent sexism).

## **Study 1**

The purpose of Study 1 is to test the prevalence of sexism in anime content, both with regard to the number of female characters relative to male characters in popular anime series and with regard to the portrayal of male and female characters in a sexualized manner. We predict that (1) females will be underrepresented, (2) female (vs. male) characters are more likely to be sexualized, (3) main (vs. secondary or peripheral) female characters will be more curvaceous and behave more provocatively, (4) main (vs. secondary or peripheral) male characters will be more likely to be portrayed as hypermasculine, and (5) male

(vs. female) characters will be more likely to use a weapon.

## Methods

### Procedure

We chose nine of the most popular anime series (*Death Note*, *Code Geass: Hangyaku no Lelouch*, *Attack on Titan*, *Naruto*, *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*, *Bleach*, *Angel Beats*, *Fullmetal Alchemist*, *Clannad*) to include in the present study based on ratings from an anime website that tracks which shows fans have watched and their ratings of those shows (MyAnimeList.net). Within each of those nine shows, we randomly selected five episodes to code. Thus, 45 episodes (a total of 732 characters) were included in the present study. Two independent coders watched and coded the various attributes. Any discrepancies were resolved at a later time by a third coder.

### Coding

The coders coded for whether each character was male or female ( $\kappa = .91$ ) and whether the character was central to the plot, secondary (important to the plot but not essential), or peripheral to the plot for that episode ( $\kappa = .47$ ). Next, the coders examined whether each character was portrayed in a manner consistent with sexual stereotypes ( $\kappa = .74$ ). For female characters, the coders indicated whether the character was curvaceously thin (e.g., large breasts and small waist) ( $\kappa = .57$ ), and whether the character acted in a provocative way (e.g., provocative dress, poses, postures, or facial expressions) ( $\kappa = .83$ ). For male characters,

the coders noted whether the character displayed hypermasculinity (large muscles, masculine facial features, facial expressions of power/dominance) ( $\kappa = .70$ ). Finally, the coders indicated whether any of the characters had a weapon ( $\kappa = .53$ ).

## Results and Discussion

Across the 45 episodes included in the present study, 243 (33.2%) of the characters were female and 489 (66.8%) were male. This result is consistent with the notion that women are underrepresented in anime. To test whether female characters were more likely than male characters to be sexualized, we conducted a chi-square analysis,  $X^2 = 87.92$  (1,  $N = 732$ ),  $p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .347$ . The results show that female characters are more likely than expected to be portrayed in a sexualized manner than male characters (see Table 1).

We next tested for the prevalence of gender-specific sexual stereotypes, beginning with the question of whether female main characters were more likely than expected to be curvaceously thin than secondary or peripheral characters. To do this, we conducted a chi-square analysis,  $X^2 = 9.23$  (2,  $N = 243$ ),  $p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .195$ . As shown in Table 2, lead female characters were more likely than expected to be curvaceous than secondary or peripheral characters. Using the same analysis, we tested whether female characters dressed in a provocative manner and found that lead female characters (vs. secondary and peripheral) were more likely than expected to dress provocatively,  $X^2 = 37.51$  (2,  $N = 243$ ),  $p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .393$  (see Table 3).

We conducted an analysis examining a gender stereotype for male characters. A chi-square analysis for male characters between type of character and displays of hypermasculinity was non-significant,  $X^2 = 4.90$  (2,  $N = 489$ ),  $p = .086$ , Cramer's  $V = .100$  (see Table 4), suggesting that lead characters were no more likely than expected to be hypermasculine than secondary or peripheral characters. A final chi-square analysis of sex of character by use of a weapon did reveal that male (vs. female) characters were more likely than expected to use a weapon, an indicator of aggression,  $X^2 = 8.88$  (1,  $N = 732$ ),  $p = .003$ , Cramer's  $V = .110$  (see Table 5).

These results largely support the notion that most popular anime series contain sexist content and are consistent with most of our hypotheses. First, although women make up about half of the world's population, women are largely underrepresented in anime. Second, female (vs. male) characters are more likely to be portrayed in a sexualized manner. Third, main or central female characters (vs. secondary or peripheral) were more likely than expected to be curvaceous and to be dressed and act in a provocative manner. Our fourth prediction, that central male characters (vs. secondary or peripheral) would be more hypermasculine in a manner parallel to that of female characters, was not supported by the data. Finally, men were more likely than women to use a weapon as an indicator of physical violence and aggression, a result consistent with stereotypes about men (Eagly & Steffen, 1986). Together, the results largely support the notion that anime—as represented by several of the most popular series—often contains sexist content. To examine the

influence of exposure to this content, we next turn to Study 2.

## Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 is to test whether there is a relationship between anime fans' frequency of viewing anime, their preference for specific genres, and sexist attitudes. Additionally, we will compare sexism in anime fans with previously published mean responses for hostile and benevolent sexism (e.g., college students, general population), although we have no a priori predictions regarding these comparisons. We do, however, predict that more frequent anime consumption is associated with greater hostile and benevolent sexism. Furthermore, based on the nature of their content, we predict that preference for hentai (e.g., explicit, sexual aggression) in particular will mediate the relationship between consumption and hostile sexism, while preferences for action and mecha (e.g., male heroes saving female characters) will mediate the relationship between consumption and benevolent sexism.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants ( $N = 732$ , 55.2% male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 24.99$ ,  $SD = 8.13$ ) included self-identified anime fans recruited at A-Kon (anime convention in Dallas, TX) and through online anime related websites. As part of a longer questionnaire, participants completed measures related to their frequency of anime consumption, preferences for different

anime genres, and ambivalent sexism (benevolent and hostile sexism).

## Materials

**Anime consumption.** A single item (“This past year, how often did you watch anime?”) assessed the frequency of anime watched on an 8-point scale from 0 = *never* to 7 = *many times each day*.

**Anime genre preference.** We adopted Reysen, Plante, Roberts, and Gerbasi’s (2016) anime genre preference measure to assess participants’ preferred anime genres. The measure contains five dimensions including drama (“Drama,” “Mystery,” “Psychological;”  $\alpha = .82$ ), slice of life (“Slice of Life,” “School,” “Love/Romance;”  $\alpha = .79$ ), mecha (“Mecha,” “Military,” “Space;”  $\alpha = .84$ ), action (“Action,” “Adventure,” “Super Power;”  $\alpha = .74$ ), and hentai (“Hentai,” “Ecchi,” “Yuri;”  $\alpha = .73$ ). Participants rated their degree of liking for the genres on a 7-point Likert-type scale, from 1 = *do not like* to 7 = *very much like*. Participants were also given an “I don’t know” the genre option.

**Sexist attitudes.** To assess sexist attitudes, we adopted the ambivalent sexism scale (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The measure contains two subscales assessing hostile sexism (e.g., “Women seek to gain power by getting control over men;”  $\alpha = .91$ ) and benevolent sexism (e.g., “Women should be cherished and protected by men;”  $\alpha = .81$ ). Participants rated the items on a 7-point Likert-type response scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

## Results and Discussion

We first compared participants mean scores on the hostile and benevolent sexism subscales with mean responses from 426 college students enrolled in a business course (Wesolowski, Luzadis, & Gerhardt, 2011). Anime fans ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) reported significantly less hostile sexism than college students ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ),  $t(731) = -23.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -1.75$ , and anime fans ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) reported significantly less benevolent sexism than students ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) from the Wesolowski et al. (2011) sample,  $t(731) = -25.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -1.88$ . We also compared the present sample to means obtained from a large survey based in New Zealand ( $N = 12,299$ ; Huang, Davies, Sibley, & Osborne, 2016). The anime sample did not significantly differ from the New Zealand sample ( $M = 3.07$ ) on hostile sexism,  $t(731) = -1.60$ ,  $p = .110$ ,  $d = -.12$ , but was significantly lower than the New Zealand sample ( $M = 3.88$ ) on benevolent sexism,  $t(731) = -20.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -1.54$ .

Next, we calculated the correlations between all of the assessed variables (see Table 6). Frequency of viewing anime was positively associated with liking each of the genres and, as predicted, was associated with both hostile and benevolent sexism. With the exception of preference for drama-related anime, all of the genre preferences were positively related to hostile and benevolent sexism. To examine whether different genre preferences mediate the relationship between anime consumption and sexist attitudes, we conducted two mediation analyses using Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) SPSS macro (bootstrapping with 5,000 iterations, 95% confidence

intervals). In each mediation analysis we entered anime consumption as the independent variable, genre preferences as the mediators, and sexism as the dependent variable.

The frequency of anime watched predicted hostile sexism ( $\beta = .13, p < .001$ ), drama ( $\beta = .13, p = .001$ ), slice of life ( $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ), mecha ( $\beta = .18, p < .001$ ), action ( $\beta = .19, p < .001$ ), and hentai ( $\beta = .23, p < .001$ ). Drama negatively predicted hostile sexism ( $\beta = -.10, p = .028$ ), hentai positively predicted hostile sexism ( $\beta = .22, p < .001$ ), and action ( $\beta = .09, p = .050$ ) was marginally significant. Slice of life ( $\beta = .02, p = .660$ ) and mecha ( $\beta = .05, p = .241$ ) did not predict hostile sexism. The inclusion of the mediators reduced the association between anime consumption and hostile sexism ( $\beta = .05, p = .263$ ) as indicated by the absence of zero in the confidence interval (CI = .034 to .101), providing evidence of significant mediation. Drama (CI = -.033 to -.001), action (CI = .002 to .037), and hentai (CI = .023 to .080) were found to be significant mediators, while slice of life (CI = -.015 to .026) and mecha (CI = -.007 to .032) were not (see Figure 1).

In the second mediation analysis, we replaced hostile sexism with benevolent sexism. As with hostile sexism, frequency of anime viewing predicted benevolent sexism ( $\beta = .17, p < .001$ ). Drama ( $\beta = -.11, p = .022$ ) negatively predicted benevolent sexism. Slice of life ( $\beta = .15, p = .001$ ), mecha ( $\beta = .13, p = .005$ ), and action ( $\beta = .14, p = .002$ ) positively predicted benevolent sexism, while hentai ( $\beta = .04, p = .431$ ) did not significantly predict benevolent sexism. The inclusion of the mediators reduced the association between anime consumption and benevolent sexism

( $\beta = .09, p = .039$ ), showing mediation as indicated by the absence of zero in the confidence interval (CI = .034 to .089). Preference for drama (CI = -.026 to -.001), slice of life (CI = .009 to .047), mecha (CI = .007 to .038), and action (CI = .006 to .038) were significant mediators, while hentai (CI = -.009 to .026) was not (see Figure 2).

Although anime fans' degree of sexism tended to be lower than both college students and a community sample, we hypothesized and found that consumption of anime in general is positively related to both benevolent and hostile sexism. In other words, while anime fans generally do not support sexist attitudes, viewing anime is associated with greater sexism. We predicted, and found, that a preference for hentai in particular mediated the relationship between consumption and hostile sexism. Furthermore, we predicted, and found, that preference for action and mecha genres mediated the relationship between consumption and benevolent sexism. Two unexpected results were also observed. First, a preference for slice of life anime also mediated the relationship between consumption and benevolent sexism. One possible explanation is that slice of life anime often contains portrayals of relationships that may well include sexism in everyday interactions. Second, a preference for the drama genre mediated the relationship between consumption and both hostile and benevolent sexism, with drama negatively predicting both dimensions of sexism. It may be possible that anime in the drama genre more accurately portrays the sexes and the nature of their relationships (e.g., trouble or discord in a romantic relationship), although it is surprising that



these results differed so considerably from the slice of life genre. Future research is needed to disentangle these results and better understand what, precisely, leads one to positive associations with sexism and the other to negative associations. Taken together, the results support the notion that consumption of anime is associated with sexist attitudes, though the relationship is specific to particular anime genres.

## General Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to examine the prevalence of sexist content in anime and to test whether there was a relationship between anime consumption, genre preferences, and ambivalent sexism. In Study 1, we predicted, and found, evidence of sexist content in anime, including the underrepresentation of women, sexualization of female main characters, and aggression (via weapon use) of male characters. Contrary to our hypothesis, however, main male characters were no more likely to be hypermasculinized than secondary or peripheral characters. In Study 2, we predicted, and found, a positive association between anime consumption and benevolent and hostile sexism. The results also largely supported our hypotheses that preferring certain genres (e.g., hentai, action, mecha) would be more positively associated with sexism. Unexpectedly, we also found that certain genres (i.e., drama) were less associated with sexism. Both studies support the notion that anime often contains sexist content and that this content may be associated with consumers' own endorsement of sexist beliefs.

The results of the present studies are consistent with prior research showing that

media can affect consumers' attitudes and beliefs (e.g., Anderson et al., 2003; Potter, 2011), as well as suggestions (Brenner, 2007) and research (Bresnahan et al., 2006) showing that anime often contains sexist content. Study 1 found that the most popular anime does indeed contain sexist elements (e.g., underrepresentation of women, sexualized portrayals of female characters), consistent with research showing that women are underrepresented in popular American media (e.g., Lauzen et al., 2008). Furthermore, when women *are* represented, they are often portrayed in gender stereotypic ways (e.g., provocative dress and manner). One possible explanation of the results is that anime reflects the sexism prevalent in society. For example, Japanese (vs. US) participants show stronger endorsement of traditional gender roles (Yamawaki & Tschanz, 2005; Yamawaki, Ostenson, & Brown, 2009), which may be reflected in the anime produced in that culture. A second potential explanation is that the anime industry is itself infused with norms of patriarchy and a male dominated profession, at least at higher positions of power (Clements, 2013). A third possible explanation, and often noted in discussions within the anime fandom, is that the sexist portrayals of women are "fan service," or components of the show meant to please fans (Brenner, 2007) who tend to be male (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi, & Shaw, 2016).

One unexpected finding in Study 1 was the fact that male main characters (vs. secondary and peripheral) did not show differences in hypermasculinity. Males in American television commercials are often muscular and strong (Fowler & Thomas, 2015). Similarly, Dill and Thill (2007) found

that male video game characters tend to be portrayed as hypermasculine. Our results suggest that, in general, males in any role in episodes (main, secondary, peripheral) do not differ with respect to being excessively muscular—these characteristics are not reserved solely for the protagonist. One possible explanation for these differences has to do with cultural differences in the valuation of hypermasculinity, whereby Japanese society may find a less hypermasculine body type (and style) desirable. Supporting this, Dasgupta (2000) suggests that in Japan, desirable masculine traits are that of the “salaryman.” The salaryman works hard in a white-collar job, dutifully supporting the company, but also promotes a patriarchy, with the man as the sole breadwinner of the household and the woman as his stay-at-home wife (Hidaka, 2010). This conception of masculinity suggests the opposite of the muscular, dominant, and overbearing masculinity portrayed in US media. A second explanation would suggest that, in hindsight, we should have predicted low hypermasculine characters, which would be consistent with the idea that sexism in the media more strongly applies to the portrayal of female characters in a gender stereotypic manner. These possible explanations should be researched further in future studies.

Although not a primary focus of the present research, we examined mean levels of sexism in anime fans as compared to other population samples. The results showed that anime fans (vs. college students and New Zealanders) tend to score lower on ambivalent sexism. This result may ease concerns that sexist content in anime may lead to rampant sexism in anime fans. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the

consumption of anime *is* associated with greater sexism in our sample, although the association is a small one. A more nuanced look reveals that a preference for specific genres, notably hentai and drama, can lead to completely opposing associations with when it comes to hostile sexism. We expected a preference for hentai to be a positive mediator, given that hentai contains sexually explicit content. Prior research shows that adolescents’ exposure to sexually explicit pornographic and erotic material is associated with less progressive gender role attitudes (Brown & L’Engle, 2009), and greater hostile sexism (Hald, Malamuth, & Lange, 2013). The finding that drama was negatively associated with hostile sexism was unexpected, and should be considered in future studies, along with possible mechanisms (e.g., more realistic portrayals of male and female characters). Based on the notion that action and mecha genres would contain paternalistic notions of protecting or saving women from danger, we predicted, and found, these genre preferences mediate the relationship between consumption and benevolent sexism. Unexpectedly, preference for slice of life anime mediated the relationship in a similar fashion. As with the drama genre, future studies should consider possible mechanisms underlying this relationship and attempt to disentangle this seemingly counterintuitive fact: that slice of life and drama, which seem on the surface to be related genres, have such distinctly opposing relationships to sexism.

As with all research, the present studies have a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting their results. In Study 1, we selected the most popular anime as rated by fans. However, much of the anime on that list tended to be between three

to ten years old. Similar to sexist portrayals in video games (Summers & Miller, 2014), sexist content in anime may have changed over time. It may prove fruitful to examine the change in sexist portrayals in anime over time to examine whether this is the case. Additionally, although we chose the most popular anime, a fuller examination across a variety of genres, including those genres investigated in Study 2, is needed to test our premise that these genres do differ with regard to hostile and benevolent sexist content. As another limitation, our conclusions about Study 2 are limited by their correlational nature, which makes it impossible to show that there exists a causal relationship between anime consumption and ambivalent sexism. To more directly test this hypothesis, future research can randomly assign participants to view different anime genres in an experiment to test whether exposure increases sexist attitudes. As a final limitation, the present study is drawn primarily from Western cultures. Anime fans from different cultures may show different patterns of relationships between anime consumption, genre preferences, and sexism, depending on the norms and attitudes of Japanese culture. Further studies are needed to test whether this is the case.

In summary, the present research tested the prevalence of sexist content in anime and the associations between consumption of anime, genre preferences, and ambivalent sexism. Study 1 found that popular anime contains elements of sexist, gender stereotyped portrayals of female characters, with little evidence that the same occurs for male characters. Study 2 found that although anime fans tend to show less ambivalent sexism than comparison samples,

consumption of anime is nevertheless associated with greater endorsement of both hostile and benevolent sexism. Preferences for specific genres were found to mediate the relationship between consumption and hostile sexism (drama, hentai) and benevolent sexism (drama, slice of life, mecha, action). Together, the results illustrate that there is often sexual content in anime and that anime is likely not unique in being a form of media like, like other media, can affect the beliefs and attitudes of consumers.

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Table 1

*Observed (Expected) Sex by Sexualized Portrayal*

| Sex of Character | Not Sexualized | Sexualized |
|------------------|----------------|------------|
| Male             | 443 (396.1)    | 46 (92.9)  |
| Female           | 150 (196.9)    | 93 (46.1)  |

Table 2

*Observed (Expected) Curvaceous Female by Role of Character*

| Role of Character    | Not Curvaceous | Curvaceous |
|----------------------|----------------|------------|
| Central Character    | 60 (69.1)      | 27 (17.9)  |
| Secondary Character  | 80 (75.5)      | 15 (19.5)  |
| Peripheral Character | 53 (48.4)      | 8 (12.6)   |

Table 3

*Observed (Expected) Provocative Dress by Role of Character*

| Role of Character    | Not Provocative | Provocative |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Central Character    | 36 (57.6)       | 51 (29.4)   |
| Secondary Character  | 76 (62.9)       | 19 (32.1)   |
| Peripheral Character | 49 (40.4)       | 12 (20.6)   |

Table 4

*Observed (Expected) Hyper Masculinity by Role of Character*

| Role of Character    | Not Masculine | Masculine |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------|
| Central Character    | 129 (128.7)   | 34 (34.3) |
| Secondary Character  | 165 (172.9)   | 54 (46.1) |
| Peripheral Character | 92 (84.5)     | 15 (22.5) |

Table 5

*Observed (Expected) Sex by Use of Weapon*

| Sex of Character | Not Weapon  | Weapon     |
|------------------|-------------|------------|
| Male             | 377 (392.1) | 112 (96.9) |
| Female           | 210 (194.9) | 33 (48.1)  |



Table 6

*Correlations between Assessed Variables*

| Variable             | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Anime Consumption | --   | --   | --   | --   | --   | --   | --   | --   |
| 2. Drama             | .13* | --   | --   | --   | --   | --   | --   | --   |
| 3. Slice of Life     | .21* | .20* | --   | --   | --   | --   | --   | --   |
| 4. Mecha             | .18* | .29* | .07  | --   | --   | --   | --   | --   |
| 5. Action            | .19* | .32* | .10* | .36* | --   | --   | --   | --   |
| 6. Hentai            | .23* | .22* | .39* | .23* | .22* | --   | --   | --   |
| 7. Hostile Sexism    | .13* | .01  | .12* | .12* | .16* | .26* | --   | --   |
| 8. Benevolent Sexism | .17* | .01  | .17* | .19* | .23* | .16* | .50* | --   |
| Mean                 | 5.13 | 5.73 | 4.92 | 4.81 | 5.57 | 3.46 | 2.99 | 3.07 |
| Standard Deviation   | 1.49 | 1.19 | 1.44 | 1.63 | 1.23 | 1.74 | 1.33 | 1.05 |

Note. \*  $p < .01$ .

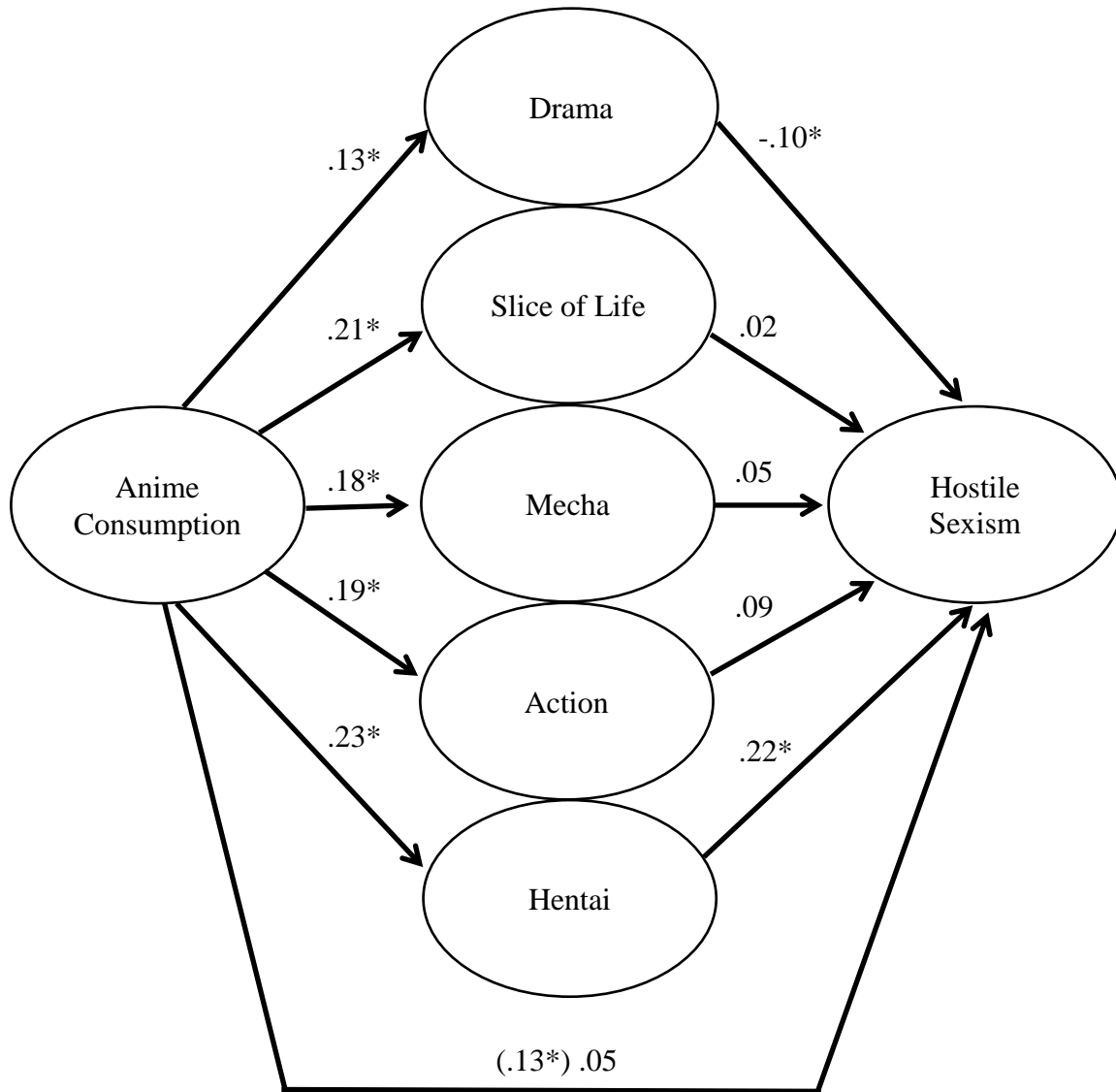


Figure 1: Anime genre preferences as mediators between frequency of anime consumption and hostile sexism. \*  $p < .05$ .

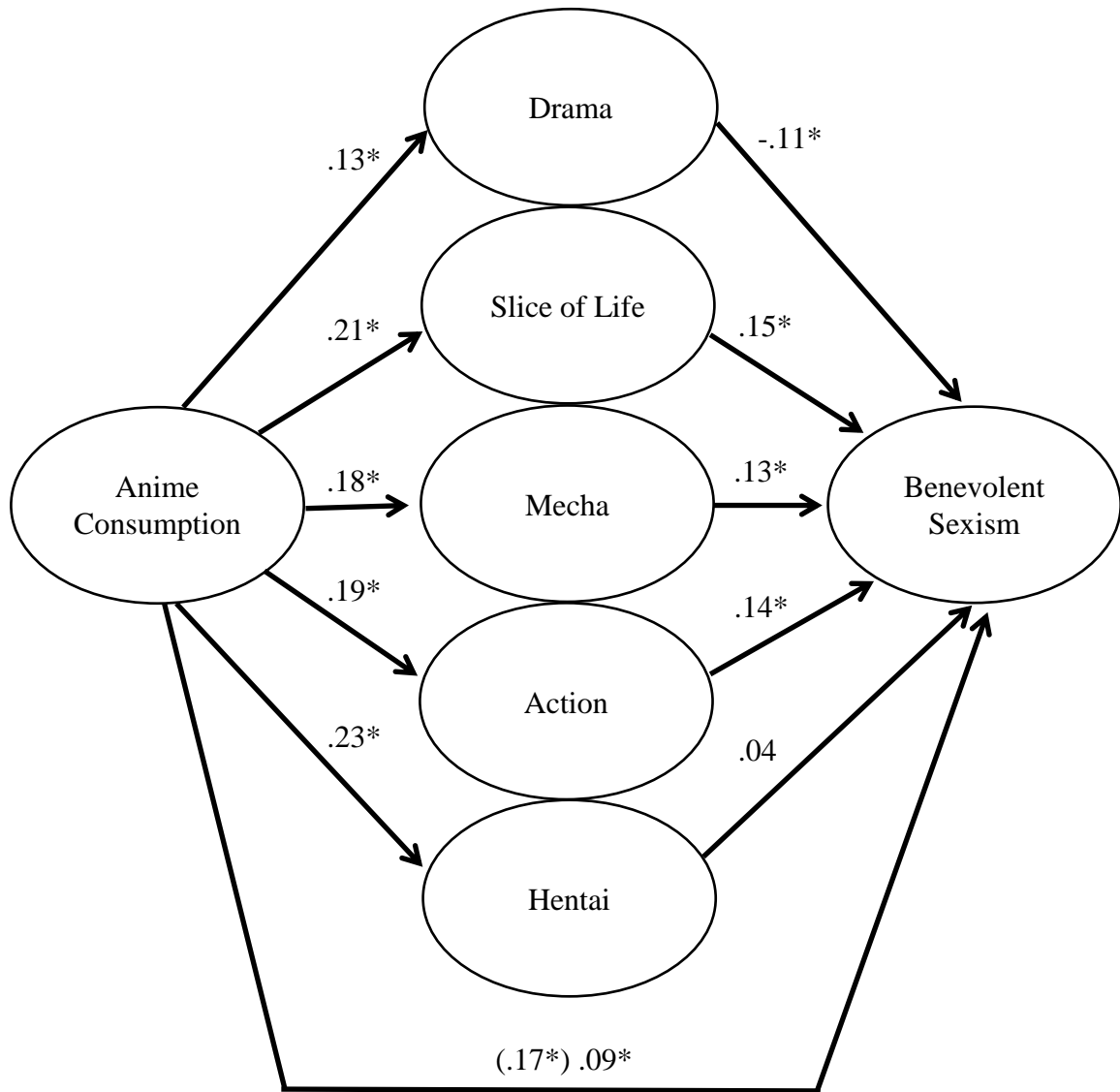


Figure 2: Anime genre preferences as mediators between frequency of anime consumption and benevolent sexism. \*  $p < .05$ .