

Soft-core pornography viewers 'unlikely to hold positive attitudes towards women'

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Frequent viewers of soft-core pornography, such as photographs of naked and semi-naked female models, are unlikely to think positively about women and are likely to have become desensitised to soft-core pornography common in newspapers, advertising and the media.

Those are the findings of research by University of Nottingham forensic psychologists, Dr Simon Duff and Sophie Daniels to be presented today, Wednesday 15 June 2016, at the Annual Conference of the British Psychological Society's Division of Forensic Psychology in Brighton.

Research on viewing exposure to hard-core pornography has demonstrated that there are links to increases in sexual deviance, sexual offending, negative attitudes to intimate relationships and acceptance of rape myths. But there is less research on viewing exposure to soft-core pornography, such as images found in tabloid newspapers.

The researchers say this is surprising because images of naked and semi-naked [women](#) are prevalent in advertising campaigns and [social media](#) and, therefore, there is more opportunity for most people to be exposed to soft-core rather than hard-core pornographic images of women.

One theory is that soft-core pornography has become such a regular feature of our daily lives that we have become de-sensitised to these images. However, the impact of these images on thinking and behaviour is unknown, particularly among young people who are frequent users of social media and the targets of some advertising campaigns.

Daniels and Duff examined the relationship between frequency of exposure to soft-core pornographic images of women and attitudes towards women, rape myths and level of sensitivity or desensitisation to the images.

The study recruited 143 participants (46.2% male, specifically young people with an average age of 19). The survey measured:

- Self-reported exposure to soft core material across various media types
- Sensitivity to soft core material
- Attitudes to women, using the Attitudes Towards Women Scale
- Acceptance of rape myths using Assessing Subtle Rape Myths Scale

The results indicated that people who frequently viewed soft-core pornographic images were less likely to describe these as pornographic than people who had low levels of exposure to these images. People who were desensitised to these images were more likely than others to endorse rape myths. Furthermore, people who frequently viewed these images were less likely to have positive attitudes to women.

Dr Duff says: "It's difficult to unpick cause and effect with this type of research, so it's not possible to say that soft-core pornography changes attitudes towards women. For example, it might be that people who do not hold positive attitudes towards women then seek out soft-core pornography. However, there is a relationship between frequency of exposure to soft-core pornography and [attitudes](#) towards women and that warrants further exploration."

The researchers state that "an argument could be made for greater media regulation and censorship" of soft-core pornographic images of women. They say further research in this area is required in order to understand the potential "threat to public health", as frequent [exposure](#) to hard-core [pornography](#) has demonstrated.

Provided by University of Nottingham

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