

Teenagers not taken in by raunchy imagery

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

(Phys.org) -- School-age teenagers are widely exposed to sexualised and raunchy imagery, but are developing their own ways of dealing with it, a Flinders University sociology researcher has found.

As part of her recently completed PhD, Ms Monique Mulholland undertook a study involving children aged 13 to 16 from three Adelaide high schools.

The study used a series of whole-class activities designed to elicit the response of [adolescents](#) to sexualized images popularly available in [mainstream media](#), advertising, music video clips, and internet [cultures](#). (No pornographic imagery was viewed as part of the study.)

While the study confirmed that [young people](#) are finding sexual images readily accessible, Ms. Mulholland said they did not seem to be “taking over their hearts and minds”.

She said, however, that strong concerns must remain about the long-term effects of such exposure.

Thanks to the Internet and social media, “sexual images are definitely out from under the bed”, Ms. Mulholland said, but she also found that one of the dominant ideas of the public debate – that sexualized imagery had become “normal” and was causing a loss of moral sense with regards to sexuality – was not borne out by the teenagers’ responses.

“They weren’t saying that anything goes. They haven’t normalised it: rather, they are keeping it at a distance, often by using humour,” she said.

“The young people are saying that they’re laughing at it, and it seems that they still have very conventional ideas of what’s good and bad.”

One of the teenagers drew a parallel between sexualised imagery and video games, and said that young people are well aware of the difference between fantasy and real life.

“They are saying they have some agency in this, that they are quite savvy about it,” Ms. Mulholland said.

But because her study was conducted in broad, collective terms on

widely available sexualized images, Ms. Mulholland said it could not assess the long-term and individual effects of ‘raunch culture’ on the actual sexual practices of [teenagers](#), which, she said, remain an issue of major concern.

“While young people are not blindly mimicking what they see, it has to affect them somehow, and the ease of access is still deeply concerning,” she said.

Ms. Mulholland believes that more research is needed to help in formulating policy about a practical response.

She said that parents, authorities and schools need to deal rationally with the existence of the phenomenon, since the effect of ‘protective panics’ is that children are denied proper practical support and advice in dealing with what they may see.

Provided by Flinders University

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