

PRESS RELEASE

Gallup Poll Survey on Attitudes towards Pornography

65 per cent of the British population believe that sex is a private matter and should never be publicly displayed, filmed or staged for money or for entertainment. In addition, 64 per cent of people believe that pornography can trigger off sexual assaults and 70 per cent disagree that there should be no censorship on sexual grounds of plays and films suggesting that a majority of the public are in favour of some form of censorship. These findings emerged from a special Gallup Poll on attitudes towards censorship pornography and the portrayals of sex on television, film and stage.

Gallup interviewed a nationally representative sample of 956 respondents aged 18 and over between 24-31st January 1979. Respondents were read a series of statements and they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each of the statements. The results are reproduced as follows:

I am going to read out some statements people have made about different things. For each of them would you please tell me whether you agree or disagree with it? (Show CARD).

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Neither agree or disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
a) There is no real difference between pictures in pornographic magazines and the paintings with naked people we sometimes see in art galleries.	19	6	71	4
b) Sex is a private matter and should never be publicly displayed, filmed or staged for money or for entertainment.	65	9	21	5
c) The use of pornography is harmless and has no serious effect on those who have a taste for it.	28	9	54	9
d) The pornography trade degrades women because it makes them into 'sex objects' for male use.	60	9	24	7
e) The use of pornography can help some marriages.	29	12	40	19
f) Making pornography available leads to a reduction in sex crimes.	21	10	54	15
g) The authorities should stop interfering and allow ordinary people to decide what is fit for them to see and read, and what is not.	48	7	39	6
h) The use of pornography can trigger off sexual assault.	64	8	15	13
i) There should be no censorship, on sexual grounds, of plays and films.	21	5	70	4
j) Women who get raped are often partly responsible themselves.	30	13	46	11
k) There are too many immoral plays on television.	41	8	44	7

Censorship

"There should be no censorship on sexual grounds, of plays and films."

Only 21 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement whereas 70 per cent of respondents disagreed suggesting that a majority are in favour of some form of censorship.

Only 16 per cent of women were in favour of no censorship whereas amongst men it was 27 per cent. In contrast, 74 per cent of women disagreed with the statement and so did 65 per cent of men. Younger people were less in favour of censorship than older people but they still formed a minority group - 28 per cent aged 18-34. In contrast 62 per cent of young people disagreed that there should be no censorship rising to 75 per cent amongst people aged 65 and over.

There was no significant differences between class groups or by party political support.

Film and Stage

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement:

"Sex is a private matter and should never be publicly displayed, filmed or staged for money or for entertainment."

65 per cent of respondents agreed with this statement and only 21 per cent disagreed, the remainder were undecided. Amongst women, 71 per cent agreed compared to 58 per cent of men; in contrast, 29 per cent of men were opposed to the statement compared to 16 per cent of women - clearly men were less opposed to the public display of sex.

A higher proportion of young people aged 18-34 were willing to tolerate public displays of sex (30 per cent) than old people (9 per cent). However, the majority of young people (51 per cent) were against this and amongst people aged 65 and over this rose to 76 per cent.

Again there were no significant differences between the different class groups.

Television

The following statement was read:

"There are too many immoral plays on television."

41 per cent of respondents agreed, whereas 44 per cent of respondents disagreed - these differences are not statistically significant. The remaining 15 per cent were undecided.

It is interesting to note that the survey was conducted at the time when a series of Continental X-films were starting on BBC 2 on Friday evenings. It would be interesting to see whether there is a significant change of attitudes over the corresponding period when the series has been completed.

More women (47 per cent) than men (34 per cent) thought there were too many immoral plays on television whereas amongst young people only 21 per cent agreed with the statement compared to 69 per cent of those aged 65 and over. Clearly these age differences in attitudes are more pronounced in comparison to the questions on censorship and the filming and staging of sex. This is perhaps to be expected since television material is more restrained than both films and the stage.

Pornographic Magazines

"There is no real difference between pictures in pornographic magazines and the paintings with naked people we sometimes see in art galleries."

Only 19 per cent agreed with this statement compared to 71 per cent who disagreed. The remaining 10 per cent were undecided.

One reason for this may derive from other studies which Gallup has conducted on attitudes towards poster advertising. These studies suggest that it is often the way the content is displayed rather than the actual details of the contents which influences the general public's judgement or taste. In this case, they clearly differentiate between what may be a rather lewd presentation in a pornographic magazine and a sensitive portrayal in a major work of art.

The influence of pornography

Several questions were asked to discover what people believed to be the positive and negative influences of pornography on Society.

"The use of pornography is harmless and has no serious effect on those who have a taste for it."

Whilst 28 per cent agreed with this statement the majority of people (54 per cent) disagreed whilst a further 18 per cent were undecided.

Amongst men, 34 per cent thought pornography to be harmless compared to 23 per cent of women. Amongst young people 38 per cent thought it was harmless compared to 14 per cent of those aged 65 and over.

The following statement was also read to respondents:

"The pornography trade degrades women because it makes them into sex objects for male use."

60 per cent of all respondents agreed with this statement and 24 per cent disagreed. The majority of men agreed with this statement (54 per cent) and amongst women it was 64 per cent. Interestingly, 19 per cent of women disagreed compared to 29 per cent of men. Clearly women felt more strongly than men about this statement but perhaps it was surprising that the differences were not more pronounced.

Another statement was as follows:

"The use of pornography can trigger off sexual assault."

64 per cent of respondents agreed and only 15 per cent disagreed with a fairly large percentage (21 per cent) being undecided. Amongst men, 58 per cent agreed and amongst women it was 68 per cent. Amongst young people 59 per cent agreed and amongst old people it was 70 per cent. Again there were no discernible differences between the different class groups.

Two other statements were read to respondents about the benefits of pornography:

"The use of pornography can help some marriages."

29 per cent agreed, 40 per cent disagreed. A further 12 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed and 18 per cent were classified as "don't know". Men were more convinced of this (34 per cent) than women (23 per cent) and younger people (41 per cent) more than older people (8 per cent).

"Making pornography available leads to a reduction in sex crimes."

Only 21 per cent agreed to this statement compared to a majority (54 per cent) who disagreed - 25 per cent were undecided. There were no significant differences between men and women for this question although young people agreed more (27 per cent) than old people (9 per cent).

Rape

One question was asked about rape:

"Women who get raped are often partly responsible themselves."

30 per cent of respondents agreed to this statement with surprising little difference between men (34 per cent) and women (27 per cent). A total of 46 per cent disagreed - 38 per cent amongst men and a majority of women (52 per cent) disagreeing. Young people disagreed more than older people with the statement and the upper social classes disagreed more than the lower social classes.

Attitude of the authorities

Respondents were asked the following question:

"The authorities should stop interfering and allow ordinary people to decide what is fit for them to see and read, and what is not."

48 per cent of respondents agreed to this statement compared to 39 per cent who disagreed and 13 per cent who were undecided. Amongst men a majority (52 per cent) agreed and 37 per cent disagreed. Amongst women 45 per cent agreed compared to 41 per cent who disagreed.

Amongst young people 59 per cent agreed but after the age of 45 the majority of respondents disagreed. There was no differences between the different class groups.

The survey reveals that 70 per cent of respondents disagreed that there should be no censorship on sexual grounds of plays and films but 48 per cent believe that the authorities should stop interfering and allow ordinary people to decide for themselves.

A similar anomaly can be found amongst the general public on attitudes towards cigarette smoking and the use of official authority to curb it. Whilst the majority of people believe that cigarette smoking is harmful and can damage the health, they are reluctant to agree to the introduction of new laws in areas hitherto not publicly regulated. A similar anomaly can be found in the difficulty of obtaining support for legislation for compulsory seat belts.

Perhaps this is a characteristic of a democracy which has been established for a long period of time - a dislike of legislative authority to regulate what people may consider is part of their private life. At the same time they recognise the harmful effects of pornography as this survey has revealed.