

# Flipping Fifty Shades eroticises equality

February 10 2016, by Emily Harris

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Christine Grey would have been just as sexy as Christian Grey as the lead character in *Fifty Shades of Grey* – and resulted in less ambivalence about rape.

In a study of almost 500 people, University of Queensland School of Psychology researcher Emily Harris has found that equality can be just as erotic as [dominance](#) and that stories depicting male dominance can impact negatively.

"Our research shows that reading about a sexually submissive woman may increase the acceptance of rape myths among men," Ms Harris said.

"Reading about a fictional woman who enjoys sexual submission may lead to the false belief that women may enjoy rape.

"Furthermore, we found that men and women were equally sexually aroused by a story depicting a dominant man and an erotic story in which the man was not dominant."

In the Fifty Shades Flipped study, PhD student Ms Harris and co-authors Michael Thai and Dr Fiona Barlow (Griffith University) gave 481 participants one of four different stories to read before monitoring responses.

One story centred on male dominance, one on female dominance, one on a man and woman of equal sexual standing, and one story that was completely non-erotic.

Ms Harris said the research provided some encouraging results towards possible treatment of sexual disorders.

"The finding that all three erotic stories were equally arousing may have important implications for sex therapy," Ms Harris said.

"Past research has shown that the more a woman associates sex with submission, the less sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction she feels. This emphasises the need to 'eroticise equality'.

"Our findings provide promising evidence that a focus away from female submission does not mean a decrease in sexual arousal.

"The stories describing female dominance or no dominance were equally arousing and less likely to perpetuate the belief in women that sex and submission are necessarily linked.

"What we read does impact how we view the world, so it can be very dangerous if we only read one highly gendered type of narrative. Just like our [sex](#) lives, our erotic fantasies need more variety."

Ms Harris said she was interested to test the effects of popular erotica in non-heterosexual contexts.

'Fifty Shades Flipped' is published in the *Journal of Sex Research*.

**More information:** Emily Ann Harris et al. Fifty Shades Flipped: Effects of Reading Erotica Depicting a Sexually Dominant Woman Compared to a Sexually Dominant Man, *The Journal of Sex Research* (2016). [DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2015.1131227](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2015.1131227)

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