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Negotiating “Good” Parenting in the Digital Everyday:

Parental Narratives of Adolescents’ Exposure with Internet-mediated Pornography in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

Parents in Aotearoa New Zealand are increasingly called upon to navigate their adolescents' encounters with internet pornography within a digitally saturated everyday that blurs boundaries between home, peer networks, platforms, and commercial attention economies. This thesis asks how parents in Aotearoa New Zealand make sense of and respond to these encounters. Situated within narrative inquiry, the study used reflexive thematic analysis to interpret semi-structured interviews with six parents. It reorients analytic attention away from exposure-effects models, diagnostic frames, and individualised risk management toward the relational, moral, and affective labour of everyday care, and explores how parents construct and negotiate responsibility under conditions of uncertainty and limited control. Conceptualised through Donna Haraway's (2016) ethical orientation toward response-ability, the study advances response-able parenting as an unfinished, relational commitment to remaining present and capable of responding when prevention and certainty are unavailable, and when absolute technical control cannot be guaranteed. While existing research has documented the accessibility of online pornography among young people and described parental mediation strategies, comparatively less attention has been given to parents' situated meaning-making or to the cultural and relational conditions that shape what can be spoken within family life. Analysis generated four interconnected themes: the "Good Parent Script", positioning parents as responsible for protection, education, and relational availability; the practical and ethical limits of control, revealing the permeability of rules, filters, and surveillance; the known-but-unspeakable character of pornography, shaped by taboo, inherited silence, and shame; and the ongoing work of keeping conversation possible, negotiated through trust, language, and response-able care. Ultimately, response-able parenting cannot rest on parents alone — it depends on schools, communities, and institutional support, alongside greater accountability from technology companies that design and profit from these commercial attention economies.

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Chapter 1: Beginning with Concern

A research Journey Begins

This project began with concerns encountered across daily life and navigating the digital everyday — these were moments heard, read, and witnessed. These concerns took clearer shape through my location as a father, an emerging researcher, and through my own remembered adolescence. Since 2012, I have worked as a taxi and Uber driver in Auckland. At times, in the casual, random exchanges taking place in the location of inside an Uber driver's cab, the normal "about time we had weather like this" or "been busy today mate?" moves into a non-clichéd direction. My passengers, as I would carelessly categorise them, would occasionally go down the 'unconventional' rabbit-hole with me (do not ask who led the way — likely me, though — I'm typically less aware of social space around me than others), discussing candid topics, like climate change conspiracies, AI saturation, or the 'how we all love to *hate-on* Donald Trump' conversations. And the big one, and I would be the first to admit that I was entangled up with "sameness/difference" —– a gendered power relationship — with how I would talk about pornography, yes, the taboo topic that you would most certainly resist engaging with the 'opposite sex' about, let alone any random person in my cab. Yes, there were the occasional candid, yet cautious, conversations around the general topic of "pornography" on the web — perhaps, most of the time, implicitly framed in the comparative sense that 'internet' pornography is different from 'Penthouses-stashed-away-out of sight-of-prying-eyes' pornography. Yes — pornography today is certainly different from yesteryear, and I think that pervasiveness of internet-mediated pornography was the core pulling weight of why we were having random conversations of pornography while on an Uber ride. There were too, discussions around the pressures of what or how moral tensions that intersected with cultural

expectations regarding the relationships between young kids and their families. To be honest, these conversations were always rather fascinating. It was real. It was topical, and it was happening in front of our noses — right here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The concern was not simply that pornography existed online, but more its intersection with invisibleness and its pervasiveness from being in digital spaces. Was there a greater moving away from relationship between parent and child now? Was it due to this digital divide between the generations? Pornography already was rather an invisible matter between adults and young people — adults required preparation to speak about it, and more often than not, young people had encountered it before the preparation had been made. Young people were growing up with digitally saturated environments in which pornography could be searched for. We all know, the 'cliché' hyper-dramatic statistics of internet pornography: '30% of all internet traffic' or 'Porn sites get more monthly traffic than Netflix, Amazon, and X combined'. Research in Aotearoa New Zealand has documented both the accessibility of online pornography and its normalisation within many young people's life's (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2018; Classification Office, 2020). These findings brought a wider public concern closer to the everyday questions of family life: What can parents realistically know? What form of protection remain possible? How do you communicate concern without closing trust or future disclosure?

From my own observations, from the locations I stand in, internet-mediated pornography seems a rather meaningful discourse — it seems so — as it is entangled with so many other (engendered) discourses of harm. The association of porn is not exactly an angelic one, at least where I stand. It is certainly not waiting to be shared with the innocent or raised in a conversation without some form of negotiating prior hand. I mean, when did you last hear at the dinner table that: "Hey Mum, uncle so and so bought me a premium

subscription of Pornhub for my birthday. How great is that aye!"? Exactly! The invisible nature of pornography, tied up in discourses of taboo, shame and harm, coupled with its pervasive presence in the digital everyday, makes it worthy of closer examination.

The casual 'chats' I have had with the odd passenger in my Uber, or the random mate, only brought this concern closer to my everyday family life and left me asking what parents could realistically do. My earliest understanding of the issue was organised around risk, harm and shame. How would parents understand the responsibilities placed upon them, especially when often difficult to name in family life? The movement from 'analogue' porn to the pervasive internet-mediated pornography has affected the very fabric of our society. The impact it might have on our more vulnerable ones, perhaps our youth, perhaps our marginalised, perhaps everyone; it is a conversation that is quite close to my heart, but this did not fully explain the tension that interested me. My lived experience as a parent informs my use of the word 'protection' — shaping how I understand it not as external device policing, but as an ongoing, relationally cultivated practice of care. My desire to teach, to educate, to guide my children is there. However, how am I, the parent, to do this effectively among digital conditions, in the digital everyday? The concern had widened. It had become, not only what pornography might do, but how parents understood and negotiated responsibility when certainty was unavailable, and prevention could not be guaranteed.

Terminology and the Digital Everyday

Until now, I have been rather loose on how I phrase and term pornography. Instead, I will use internet-mediated pornography, to move away from the idea of an isolated sexually explicit media file to more of an ongoing process through which sexually explicit material is not only accessed but also circulated and encountered across internet-connected media. Given the wide array of how pornography is impacted by a myriad of technologies,

platforms, commercial attention economies, and peer-driven networks (such as TikTok), this impact continuously shapes how these adolescent encounters take place in the digital everyday. So, when we frame these processes as discursive and as relational encounters, we then underscore their unique, context-dependent nature while keeping the broader technological conditions of access, circulation, and platform power clearly visible.

I use the term “encounters” because it captures a myriad of locations such as intentional viewing, unwanted encounter, peer sharing, and experiences that are difficult to classify neatly; that is, they do not fit into a bracketed category. However, I retain “exposure” when it reflects the language of existing research or the words used by parents. The terms are not identical, but together they keep the inquiry open to the varied ways pornography may enter adolescents’ lives.

The digital everyday refers to the ordinary integration of internet-connected media into the different spaces we share across everyday life. As Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) observe, digital technology is no longer a discrete activity families ‘visit’; it is seamlessly woven into the domestic routines of cooking dinner, doing homework, and relaxing. The digital activity from adolescents (or anybody for that matter) blurs into ‘real life’; it is essentially woven through our everyday relationships and routines (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). This framing matters because pornography does not simply enter a self-contained household from outside. Its circulation is entangled with devices, social platforms, peers, commercial infrastructures, and changing expectations about privacy and independence.

Situating Myself in the Research

This work is shaped by my location as a Pākehā father, a former practitioner in alcohol and other drugs (AOD) settings, and a critical social psychology researcher in

Aotearoa New Zealand. I am not sure, but an adolescent life and its entanglements with pornography. I find myself drawn back to my own youth and its entanglements with pornography — remembering what it felt like to navigate that landscape, shadowed by an unpredictable shame that would creep up and recede at its whim, keeping those early encounters locked in silence and uncertainty. These locations influenced what first appeared important to me, the explanations I found persuasive, and the questions I later began to challenge. Naming them here in this project does not remove their influence; instead, it makes that influence available for reflection. It asks me to remain accountable for how my locations shape what I notice, how I (methodologically) interpret the stories parents shared, and how I represent their lives.

In my experience as a father, I recognise a strong desire to protect alongside the anxiety of not knowing when to speak (the worry over timing and approach), or when to let my children figure out on their own. Digital parenting is negotiated amid fatigue, work (and full-time study), competing responsibilities, and the ordinary compromises of family (and everyday) life. I intimately know the wish to protect (my) children and the (sometimes extreme!) unease of not always knowing when to supervise, when to speak, or when to let go. I also recognise an imagined public gaze through which children's actions are felt as evidence of that binary parental success or failure. This location captures a deep empathy to be attentive to the visible and invisible loads parents may carry and to the improvised character of their responses. It may also incline me to recognise sacrifice and availability as care. In doing so, I risk normalising intensive parental responsibility or giving insufficient attention to adolescent privacy and autonomy.

My Christian faith is another important location. It shapes my commitments to care and a fostering of empathy. Alongside this is my commitment to taking seriously the formative power of relationship itself — a way of being with others and let us not forget,

doing. In the context of my story, my rather new journey of parenting, children and internet-mediated pornography, this commitment might mean actively resisting shame-saturated and control-oriented responses that have so often characterised Christian engagements with sexuality.

At the same time, I am acutely aware of and attuned to grand institutions and their long-standing structural role in shaping communities here in Aotearoa and around the world. I acknowledge that Christian traditions, particularly in their colonial and institutional expressions, have supplied powerful resources for shame, surveillance, and control in the domains of sexuality and parenting. Therefore, with trepidation, I treat this location (my positionality that engages with a Christian heritage) as deeply entwined with histories of power. Christian traditions have long participated in shaping moral meanings around sexuality, gender, and family life (Brown, 1988; Foucault, 1976/1990; Ruether, 1983).

While my faith heightens my sensitivity to harm and moral responsibility, it may also make some concerns more readily visible to me than others. Remaining open to participants' meanings therefore requires me to notice when my moral vocabulary enables care, and when it risks closing down interpretation too quickly.

My experience in AOD settings also shaped the development of this inquiry. In that work, I became familiar with frameworks that interpreted distress and problematic behaviour through pathology, diagnosis, and individual responsibility. These frameworks could make suffering recognisable and provide routes to support. In the settings where I worked, however, they could also narrow attention toward the individual while wider relational and cultural spheres became less visible. I was especially struck by how readily Western psychological and biomedical understandings occupied the centre of practice,

while Māori and other relational understandings of wellbeing were less easily heard. This experience led me to ask whose knowledge becomes authoritative, what forms of distress can be recognised, and what remains difficult to name when experience does not fit an established category.

My engagement with feminist and critical psychology began unexpectedly. In 2024, after being unable to enrol in another course, I entered courses in feminist and postmodern psychology. They challenged assumptions I had carried about objectivity, dominant evidence-based discourses, and the position of the researcher. I had come to understand that the concept of detaching our views from nowhere in the name of positivistic paradigms (that aspire to ‘truer’ more ‘purer, knowledge understanding), these traditions asked me to consider how knowledge is produced through or wide range of interpretations and complexity we have through histories, the way we define our relationships, as well as locations (Haraway, 1988). They also gave me language for questioning individualising explanations and for treating reflexivity as an ongoing responsibility rather than a statement made once at the beginning of a thesis. My methodology chapter develops these methodological commitments more fully; here, their importance lies in how they changed the direction of the research journey.

From Diagnostic Recognition to Relational Inquiry

This project did not begin with parents’ stories. It began with a growing unease about the limits of institutional recognition. I was initially interested in why behavioural addictions like gambling disorder and gaming disorder in the International Classification of Disease (ICD-11) or “Internet Gaming Disorder” in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) had been formally classified within addictive disorders, while problematic pornography use remained contested and had no standalone DSM-5 diagnosis. When I scroll through the ICD-11, it includes compulsive sexual

behaviour disorder and classifies it among impulse-control disorders rather than disorders due to addictive behaviours (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Grubbs et al., 2019; World Health Organization, 2019) — obviously has a different interpretation than the DSM-5. These distinctions led me to wonder how diagnostic recognition shaped which experiences could be named, believed, and connected to institutional support or not.

My concern was never only whether pornography met the criteria for an addiction. I was also asking what happened when families experienced distress that did not fit a settled institutional vocabulary. I began to see diagnostic recognition as a double-edged sword: it could open possibilities for support, while also organising attention around an individualised problem. As I became more attentive to the literature, I became increasingly uneasy with explanations that located the issue primarily within an adolescent's pathology, a parent's failure, or a household's ability to prohibit access.

A purely diagnostic frame directed attention toward personal pathology, while a prohibitionist frame risked reducing responsible care to stopping or condemning behaviour. But neither of the two methods, theories, or frameworks was enough by itself to fully explain the situation. Understanding these relationships requires looking closely at how families navigate a complex landscape of competing forces, within which protection and communication are constantly negotiated alongside deeper currents of concern, trust, and shame. This became the central conceptual and ethical pivot of the study: I moved from asking how problematic pornography use should be classified to asking how adolescents' encounters with internet-mediated pornography were made meaningful within everyday family life.

This shift does not dismiss concerns about harm or treat pornography as inconsequential. It required me to look beyond the immediate family unit, the nuclear

family. I needed to keep in view a wider field that encompasses how the boundaries between the physical home, adolescent subjectivities, and the digital everyday are completely blurred; how contemporary capitalism has a way of deeply invisibilising the commercialisation of the digital everyday. Alongside this was our unique family histories and the uneven landscape of knowledge available to parents and adolescents (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Parents were no longer simply decision-makers choosing the correct strategy. I came to understand them as situated people attempting to care within conditions they had not created and could not fully control.

In this context, relationality becomes both an analytic direction and an ethical commitment. It directs attention to the complex intersections of everyday life. What this means for me is paying closer attention to the intersections of lives of parents and their adolescent children, and the structural pressures of new technologies and overarching cultural narratives. It also creates space to ask not only how parents attempt to prevent harm, but how they remain available to respond when control is partial, conversations are difficult, and no response can guarantee a particular outcome.

Research Focus and Scope

My project turned towards parents because they occupy a consequential and uncertain position in adolescents' digital lives. They may be expected to protect and establish boundaries. Parents might also provide moral and sexual guidance, recognise distress, and sustain open communication. As a parent, I feel the pressures around the wellbeing of our children, yet I also surrender to the reality that there will always be limitations to our care and to our protection. In the digital everyday, my understanding is that these limitations are sharpened, as internet-mediated pornography can make each of these responsibilities difficult to enact (Classification Office, 2020; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Parents may not know whether an encounter with pornography has occurred,

but when they know or suspect that it has, they must decide what to ask, and decide, discreetly, what kind of language and tone to use without making future disclosure less likely. These actions, hesitations, and non-responses form part of parental meaning-making.

It should be mentioned, some might say obviously, that the parents' stories do not stand in for adolescents' own experiences. This research project does not claim to explain what pornography means to young people through their parents. Instead, I am interested in how parents talk about what they believe has happened, what they may fear, what they may value, and the kind of parent they are trying to be or would like or not like to be. Narrative theory understands that a parent's story of their adolescent children do more than report events; they organise experience and make actions intelligible within particular relational and cultural worlds (Riessman, 2008). Attending to parents' stories therefore allows the study to ask questions about the '*hows*' — how protection or education is made important and becomes meaningful in the digital everyday. It tracks how control or silence finds meaning within a parent's life, and how the qualities of trust and relational availability constitute meaning in the broader context of the digital everyday.

A story becomes the lens through which people make sense of their choices and justify how they treat others. Attending to parents' narratives can unlock deeper insights and therefore enable questions about how protection, education, control, silence, trust, and relational availability acquire meaning. It also makes visible how wider ideas about adolescence, sexuality, risk, and 'good' parenting enter parents' accounts and are reproduced, resisted, or reworked through everyday care.

The study is interpretive rather than representative, as I aim to analyse the meanings that are generated and co-constructed between myself and the parents through

our shared narrative encounters. Six parents cannot stand for all parents in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the analysis does not evaluate which parenting strategies are universally effective. This project does not aim or attempt to give broad parenting advice; rather I seek to closely examine how a specific group of parents talks about their responsibilities. Its purpose is to develop a situated account of how responsibility is narrated and negotiated within a particular set of parental stories, while locating those stories within wider cultural, institutional, and technological conditions. The study connects their personal stories to modern pressures of internet-mediated pornography.

Research Question and Aim

The research question guiding this thesis is:

How do parents in Aotearoa New Zealand make sense of and respond to their adolescents' encounters with internet-mediated pornography?

The study is looking at how parents navigate a product of cultural taboo and shame that has become a contemporary issue: their teenage children coming across pornography on the internet. Therefore, the aim of the study is to explore parents situated narratives of adolescents' encounters with internet-mediated pornography and to examine how concepts like responsibility, protection, control, communication, and care are made meaningful within the digital everyday. By locating family negotiations within wider discursive and structural conditions, the study seeks to move beyond accounts centred solely on adolescent behaviour or individual parental success and failure.

Chapter 2: Entering the Literature – From Problem to Possibility

Introduction: Re-reading Mainstream Psychology

Before[1] examining the scholarly landscape, it is necessary to chart the very discursive terrain that determines which parental responses are deemed intelligible, and which are drowned out. Prior to this critical literature review, I really had no concept of dominant narratives or that certain stories were even marginalised — the truth was the truth, history was history. When I started to engage with critical social psychology and social constructionist traditions, there was a convicting process within me that any framework that is interrogated, will *always* view knowledge not as neutral discovery, but as socially produced. That is, this worldview situates knowledge historically, demonstrating that the discourses that that flow through and around it are inextricably bound up with relations of power (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1999/2015; Parker, 1992). When paired with narrative inquiry, this orientation reveals how both academic scholarship and parental accounts do not merely reflect reality, but actively construct it through cultural narratives, institutional language, and social expectations. From this stance, I recognise that my own review of the literature is not a neutral summary of a pre-existing problems, but an active, situated interpretation. As Foucault (1969/2002) demonstrates, discourse constitutes objects of knowledge and the subjects who speak about them. So how we talk about pornography or how parents mediate the safety of children, determines what priority of attention we give and to what extent we start to treat and discriminate on what is 'expert' or potentially who becomes a 'victim'. Hemmings (2011) shows in a similar fashion in how academic narratives organise conceptual terrain and what renders as intelligible. In reflection, well at least over the recent years at university, I have definitely

[1] I used Grok (xAI, 2026) to assist in the structuring and mapping of the narrative arc.

caught myself doing this. For example, the DSM-5 seemed very intelligent —.I have critically reflected on this and realise that it is not as simple as how it neatly presents itself. In addition, now that I am a father, I too am discursively moved in 'feeling' very responsible. I am still working out how far these frameworks let me hear some parents clearly and to what degree we start balancing and avoid (quietly) sidelining others.

Within the broader field of research on youth, digital media, and sexuality — where internet-mediated pornography has increasingly become a central object of both public concern within Aotearoa New Zealand and scholarly inquiry — traditional studies rely heavily on a positivist paradigm. This is because (mainstream 'scientific') psychology inherited its foundational methods from the natural sciences, where the primary objective is to observe, measure, and verify objective facts (Crotty, 1998). If I dare to take you back a few hundred years to hear a story from a Western philosophical standpoint, we see a major transformation — Modernity was beginning to show itself. As Hicks (2004) points out, Enlightenment reason and empirical science liberated human inquiry by breaking away from premodern dogmas and rigid religious authorities. Under premodern frameworks, truth was primarily established through institutional authority, scriptural interpretation, and long-standing tradition, constraining the subjective flow of human inquiry into a rigid state of epistemological stagnation. Hardly anyone dared to question the status quo, less treated as heresy (and some serious consequence would follow), and because dogma possessed no internal self-correcting mechanism, errors could not be challenged or corrected. As surreal as this might sound in a relatively free, democratic Aotearoa New Zealand, I cannot help but find myself reflecting that I might be naïve to think that the same intolerance would not linger in more contemporary forms.

By replacing this oppressive 'herd mentality' to authority with a bold empirical observation and new methods like systematic testing, Modernity introduced a framework

capable of refining its own knowledge, ultimately unlocking unprecedented material prosperity and scientific progress.

Yet, in claiming absolute objectivity, naive positivism inadvertently replicated a similar top-down posture — what Haraway (1988) terms the "god trick" of seeing everywhere from nowhere. When applied to human subjectivity, this empirical framework encounters distinct epistemological limits. In an effort to standardise knowledge for a modern liberal society, the complex, textured nuances of human experience are often treated as unreliable noise rather than meaningful. Specifically, mainstream psychology flattens the textured reality of caregiving into isolated, measurable variables — such as "levels of parental control," "frequency of device monitoring," or standardised "risk perception scores." In doing so, these approaches strip away the contradictory, affect-laden, and deeply relational narratives that parents actually live through, reducing nuanced interpersonal dynamics to static inputs and outputs. Dominant, quantifiable accounts easily become accepted as 'common sense,' while alternative interpretations and ways of knowing are marginalised. Recognising knowledge as situated has, for me, become the closest thing to a self-correcting mechanism that neither premodern dogma nor naive positivism really offers. When I examine the ontological stance, positivism, it appears or attempts to isolate cause-and-effect variables. As a consequence, this view of reality strips digital sexuality and internet-mediated pornography of its social, affective, and relational contexts. Though I can see some merit in exclusively honouring direct observation, the contrasting, constructivism, and post-structuralist critiques offer a vital counterweight to this empirical reductionism. Genuine knowledge production, then opens up space to examine how meaning, power, and discourse shape lived experience. I have found this stripping away particularly limiting when trying to understand what a digital sexual encounter actually feels like for people — it detaches a lot of the important 'baggage' that

is relevant to the human experience and how our ‘baggage’ connects and relates us to our wellbeing. Scholars in these traditions challenge the notion of grand, universal narratives, arguing instead that knowledge is inherently partial, linguistic, and tied to discursive power (Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1972/2002). When applied to human sexuality and digital life, a postmodern orientation makes it harder to treat a pornography encounter as a simple cause-and-effect variable. It keeps pushing me back toward the messier question of how language, institutional power, and cultural narratives decide what gets labelled ‘normal,’ ‘vulnerable,’ or ‘pathological’ in the first place.

It is precisely at this intersection that narrative inquiry becomes an indispensable methodology. If the rich nuanced stories of experiences ‘with’ pornography cannot be captured through exposure-effect models, narrative inquiry provides the qualitative methodology needed to explore the fluid, discursive, and relational spaces where parents and adolescents actively negotiate these encounters. I have become increasingly uneasy in the last couple of years with evaluating parents against normative rubrics of control or failure. Narrative approaches, by contrast, try to honour the stories families construct to make sense of concepts like silence, discomfort, intimacy, and internet-mediated pornography — that are riddled with nuance and internet-mediated pornography. By treating stories as social practices rather than passive recollections, narrative inquiry renders visible the subtle ways parents navigate competing discourses — reclaiming the complex, embodied realities that positivist models drown out.

In practice, a diagnostic lens shapes how the literature defines the core problem itself, organising research concerning adolescents and pornography almost exclusively around risk, exposure, harm, and parental control (e.g., Attwood, 2006; McKee, 2010; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Crucially, adopting a critical orientation does not mean dismissing these concerns or denying the genuine challenges young people face in digital

environments; these worries — and the real distress they can cause — warrant serious scholarly attention. The critical task is to examine how these challenges are framed, who is responsibilised for them, and what alternative understandings are silenced when research operates exclusively through the logic of risk and pathology.

Therefore, when I situate this project within a social constructionist framework and navigate the broad field of pornography literature, a critical review cannot merely summarise what previous scholars have discovered. Instead, it must analyse how the academic field constructed the very narratives that parents and adolescents are now expected to live inside. Relying strictly on the positivist assumptions of traditional pornography research risks stripping away essential human nuance — shrinking a complex, relational, and cultural reality down to a decontextualised, diagnostic measurement.

Thus, attending to the literature in this chapter follows a deliberate movement from problem to possibility. I first examine exposure-effects and harm frameworks alongside the specific subject positions they produce. From there, I consider alternative readings of adolescence, sexuality, and situated agency within the context of the digital everyday. The review then turns to parental mediation, intensive parenting, and the politics of responsibilisation, before situating these dynamics within the specific socio-cultural landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand. I conclude by identifying the analytical space for a relational account of parental meaning-making, introducing response-ability — a theoretical orientation that will be developed across the subsequent chapters.

Exposure-Effects, Harm, and the Production of Risk

This section navigates a difficult theoretical line: critiquing the reductionism of exposure-effects paradigms without dismissing the genuine material realities and harms

that flow through and around internet-mediated pornography. There are examples of gendered and coercive sexual scripts that arise from certain productions of pornography. I also highlight *algorithmic extraction* — a type of harm that harvests human attention. And these are just some of the realities that induce parental anxiety and create the difficulties young people experience when interpreting what they encounter (Flood, 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Wright, 2011). However, when harm-focused and individualising frameworks become the principal way of narrating this engagement, they narrow analytical attention to what pornography does to an isolated individual and whether a parent has successfully managed the risk. The complex socio-digital dilemma is thus shrunk down to just two actors — the internally bounded adolescent who absorbs the harm, and the 'Good' parent responsible for preventing it. In the process, the wider structural, technological, and economic forces shaping these encounters are put out of view.

When I read the research on young people's encounters with pornography, it makes sense that the academic literature has long been shaped by a positivistic-type exposure-effects questions (e.g., Allen, 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Wright, 2011). At its most basic, this body of work asks whether viewing pornography is associated with particular attitudes, behaviours, or psychological outcomes. I do not want to dismiss what this research has achieved. It has mapped patterns of access and exposure with real care. It has also examined links with sexual beliefs and behaviour and drawn attention — sometimes forcefully — to the gendered, coercive, and unequal scripts that circulate in much online pornography (Attwood, 2006; Flood, 2009; Horvath et al., 2013; McKee, 2010). None of this leads me to treat pornography as a harmless digital backdrop or a simply neutral space of exploration. The risks and power imbalances remain real; they just cannot be the only story the research tells. These concerns should not be dismissed — particularly where

young people encounter material that is unwanted, confusing, or violent — nor should they be analysed in ways that obscure underlying patriarchal structures.

Grounding research on adolescents' pornography encounters in the lived realities of young people in Aotearoa New Zealand is vital to addressing the core research questions. In a 2018 national survey, 71% of young people who had encountered pornography reported that they had not deliberately sought it out on the first occasion (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2018). This suggests that pornography forms part of many young people's digital environments.

Later qualitative work described pornography as accessible and normalised while also showing that young people may experience it as unrealistic, pressuring, or emotionally difficult to navigate (Classification Office, 2020; Meehan, 2023). Meehan's (2023) interviews shows that young people's situated accounts reveal competing ideological positions: while they navigate pornography as an accessible and ubiquitous media form, they also critically evaluate its unrealistic and gendered sexual scripts. These findings complicate any account that treats exposure as a single, voluntary act or assumes that all encounters carry the same meaning — reinforcing my insight that adolescent's views are rarely one dimensional and therefore to better understand parental responses, I would have to embrace these nuances. Adolescent agency is therefore complex: young people are navigating content that pops up uninvited, while trying to make sense of unrealistic sexual scripts in an environment where tech algorithms push content automatically. As a father, I realise that my approach to internet-mediated pornography is not reduced to protection alone but to a much wider systemic and structural net.

Parents' concerns are neither unfounded nor can they be reduced to mere moral panics (Attwood, 2006; McKee, 2005); rather, they are substantiated by critical content

analyses that systematically examine commercial pornography (e.g., Bridges et al., 2010; Shor & Seida, 2019). Pornography is not all the same. There are many different sub-genres. To name a few, there are ethical, feminist, queer. These all represent different pictures of what intimacy looks like. This helps me to avoid sweeping, moralistic generalisations that *all* explicit material is harmful or the same. Though, analyses have repeatedly identified unequal gender relations, aggression, objectification, and restricted representations of bodies, pleasure, and consent within widely circulating commercial material (Flood, 2009; Gavey, 2005). These kinds of patterns matter because media are among the cultural resources through which sexuality becomes thinkable. What becomes thinkable can become actionable. However, their significance, however, cannot be inferred from content analysis alone.

The critical concern is therefore not that exposure-effects research is without value, but that its dominant questions individualise what fundamentally is a systemic phenomenon — that is, it is more than an adolescent's mind at play or questioning a parent's *lack of* competency. How I see it is when research and frameworks start reducing pornography encounters to isolated cause-and-effect interactions and internal cognitive processes, traditional paradigms fail to account for how pornography discursively constructs cultural realities (Healy-Cullen et al., 2024). This critical orientation does not mean I dismiss the real worries parents carry, or the genuine distress digital environments can cause young people. Those concerns still matter — they just need to be held alongside other, quieter stories that the 'risk-and-control' literature rarely makes room for. Here, Braidotti's (2013, 2019) critique of advanced capitalism becomes vital too: it exposes how liberal individualism masks the extractive, profit-driven digital markets engineered to capture adolescent attention, monetise desire, and algorithmically shape subjectivity. This platformised dynamic becomes particularly significant as young people navigate digital

environments independently, often beyond the direct presence or technological literacy of their parents. Peter and Valkenburg's (2016) review likewise identified a parallel negativity bias, wherein possible adverse outcomes have received far greater empirical focus than the varied meanings young people construct around pornography. Consequently, while the field is highly developed in measuring individual effects, comparatively less attention has been paid to how these encounters are interpreted within everyday relationships and digital cultures.

When news media oversimplify statistical analyses, actors like politicians can twist them into sweeping claims like "Porn causes teen aggression." However, it is wider then 'X content leads to Y behaviour'. When someone engages with pornography, their sexual attitudes are scaffolded by broader systemic drivers. It could be gender norms, peer cultures, and structural power dynamics (Gavey, 2005). When we utilise a situated approach, however, it at least justifies why this research is not just trying to measure whether pornography is 'good' or 'bad.' Instead, it preserves space for qualitative accounts of meaning, context, and contradiction.

Exposure-effects frameworks can also construct pornography and harm as comparatively stable objects — assuming that explicit content carries a fixed meaning and produces predictable, direct outcomes (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004; McKee, 2010). However, as mentioned before, pornography spans a wide range of genres, each carrying vastly different meanings and possibilities (Attwood, 2010; Paasonen, 2011;). When I draw on a relational ontology (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984/2003), this provides a different starting point. Subjects are then understood as fundamentally formed in relationship. Therefore, from this perspective, the significance of an internet-mediated encounter cannot be measured by bracketing out real-world context — meaning is continuously shaped through discourse and through the relationships in which it is

embedded. So while statistical associations can identify important patterns, they cannot by themselves explain how a particular encounter was understood or how its consequences unfolded and made meaning within a family (e.g., Gavey, 2019; Paasonen, 2011).

These frameworks cast adolescents and parents in overly simple roles. This provides a picture that restriction and prohibition appear the most responsible response. Already the adolescent is positioned as a sexually innocent object that is psychologically impressionable. The parent is positioned as the responsible adult who should prevent exposure and manage its effects (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; Healy-Cullen et al., 2024; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Such positions may draw attention to real asymmetries of age, experience, and power. At the same time, they can also reduce young people to passive recipients of harmful media and place an expanding burden of surveillance on parents. When exposure is narrated as contamination or corruption, restriction and prohibition can appear to be the only responsible responses (Egan & Hawkes, 2010; Fine, 1988; Tolman, 2002).

Once again, I am not interested in minimising parental concern or dismissing the real challenges young people face online — there are certainly widely claimed challenges that occur from internet-mediated pornography. The point is, however, is that exposure-effects frameworks often reduce complex family dynamics to a simple cause-and-effect story, and that story has consequences for how parents and young people get positioned. A critical approach does not require rejecting evidence of harm or replacing protection with permissiveness. It requires greater precision about what is being claimed, for whom, under which conditions, and with what consequences. This thesis therefore treats harm as a serious but situated possibility rather than an inevitable and uniform outcome of pornography exposure. It asks how parents themselves interpret encounters, risk,

protection, and responsibility, and how these interpretations draw upon wider discourses that make some responses seem necessary while rendering others difficult to imagine.

Adolescence, Sexuality, and Situated Agency

The interpretation of adolescents' digital encounters is discursively mediated by the dominant cultural narratives through which 'youth' itself is constructed. I keep returning to how the stories we tell about adolescence shape the way pornography encounters get understood and narrated. Within mainstream developmental psychology, adolescence is still most often presented as a broadly universal stage of biological maturation, cognitive development, identity formation, and growing independence (Santrock, 2023; Steinberg, 2023). This framing is so familiar that it can easily pass as neutral description rather than a particular way of seeing young people. These accounts provide useful descriptions of developmental change. However, viewing youth through this lens alone risks treating 'being a teenager' as a purely natural, timeless, and universal experience. Discursive approaches to youth scholarship do not need to deny embodiment or maturation to question the assumption that adolescence is a culturally neutral or self-evident category. Lesko (2012) and Wyn and White (1997), for example, show how adolescence is historically produced through institutional practices, situated expert knowledges, and culturally located expectations concerning age, maturity, dependence, and responsibility.

From this perspective, adolescence starts to look less like a clear developmental stage and more like an unstable boundary between childhood and adulthood — a place where anxieties about innocence and sexuality sit in tension with competing demands for protection and autonomy (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004; Egan & Hawkes, 2010; Griffin, 1993; Lesko, 2012) Parents do not respond to pornography encounters from a neutral position. Their responses draw upon available ideas about what young people should know, when they are ready for sexual knowledge, how vulnerable they are presumed to be,

and which forms of adult intervention count as responsible care. These ideas are consequential because they determine whether adolescent curiosity is interpreted as an expression of emerging subjectivity, or as a site of moral panic, vulnerability, and harm.

Treating age purely as a measure of capability closes down meaningful inquiry and dialogue. When adults presume to already know the meaning of an encounter, they replace the adolescent's lived experience with their own diagnostic assumptions. In response, young people are forced into silence — preserving adult authority while rendering invisible what Haraway (1988) terms the situated meanings of their encounters. Developmental categories are not neutral markers of age; they actively distribute epistemic authority (Fricker, 2007; Griffin, 1993; Lesko, 2012). Adults and institutions are commonly positioned as possessing legitimate knowledge about what young people need, while adolescents' own accounts are dismissed as incomplete, unreliable, or premature (Griffin, 1993; Lesko, 2012). While adult responsibility is widely accepted as reality, holding that responsibility does not require foreclosing dialogue. For parents, the challenge is not simply to choose between authority and autonomy. It is to recognise that the responsibility to protect, guide, and hold risk is inherently asymmetrical — falling heavier on the adult — without allowing that duty to flatten what the adolescent may know, feel, or interpret differently.

Young people's sexuality is frequently organised through contradictory discourses. On one hand, adolescents are positioned as innocent and in need of protection from sexual knowledge (Egan & Hawkes, 2010; Jackson & Scott, 1999). On the other hand, even though they are denied information and agency because adults assume they are "innocent," they are blamed as irresponsible the moment they struggle to navigate complex digital relationships, placing adolescents in an impossible double bind (Allen, 2005; Livingstone & Third, 2017). When adolescents are treated *only* as innocent, this can make sexual

knowledge appear contaminating and can restrict the language available for open discussion. Treating them as fully autonomous digital actors, however, can obscure their continuing need for care, guidance, and supportive relationships. When adolescent agency is understood relationally — as opposed to an *isolated* independent type agency — these tensions that may see contradictions with protection versus free will can be held together. This recognises that agency is exercised within cultural, material, and interpersonal conditions rather than being either wholly absent or complete (Bay-Cheng, 2015).

Conflicting demands construct an impossible double bind for adolescents, requiring them to navigate complex social worlds while denying them the epistemic authority to interpret their own experiences (Bay-Cheng, 2015). Untangling these contradictions requires looking closely at how power operates on the body (Foucault, 1978). In this regard, feminist scholarship has been particularly crucial in demonstrating how sexual subjectivities are formed within relations of gender and power (Allen, 2005; Holland et al., 1998; McRobbie, 2009). Fine's (1988) account of the missing discourse of desire, for example, demonstrated how girls' sexuality was frequently organised through danger, victimisation, and moral regulation while their desire and active judgment remained difficult to articulate. Tolman (2002) extended this critique by attending to girls' embodied desire. Her study showed how girls actively navigate and negotiate by pushing back against social rules, rather than being treated as passive objects to be taken advantage of. Gavey (2005/2019) showed that when women feel subtle pressure or unwanted sex in heterosexual relationships, it is not just an isolated event; it is within cultural conditions that normalise coercion. Allen (2005) and Keddie (2003) examined how sexuality education can reproduce moralised assumptions — what is allowed and *not* allowed and therefore what is *legitimate* sexual knowledge. Together, this scholarship shows that

adolescents are never really vulnerable nor agentic, but rather, can be understood outside the gendered worlds through which sexuality becomes meaningful.

Aotearoa New Zealand scholarship has developed these questions in relation to pornography and education. Meehan (2023) examines the politics of pornography education and the assumptions about protection, knowledge, and young people that shape what can be taught. Healy-Cullen et al. (2022) show how young people, parents, and educators draw upon sexual scripts when making sense of youth engagement with pornography. Healy-Cullen et al. (2023) further demonstrate that pornography literacy involves interpretive practices shaped by gender, culture, relationships, and opportunities for dialogue. Adolescents have a degree of discernment — they not completely docile or passive as some overprotective caregivers may think. They are already being equipped with criticality skills that provides the agency to question or resist pornographic scripts. Their interpretive possibilities, however, remain constrained by peer norms, digital platform conditions, and uneven access to non-shaming, non-judging parental (adult) support.

The idea of pornography literacy has emerged partly in response to these limitations. In the Aotearoa research, literacy involves recognising performance, commercial production, gendered power, consent, bodies, pleasure, and the difference between pornography and lived sexual relationships (Healy-Cullen et al., 2023). Yet literacy should not be reduced to a checklist delivered by an expert adult. It is relational and contested: what can be discussed, who is authorised to speak, and whether questions can be asked without shame all affect how interpretive knowledge is developed. This is one reason parental meaning-making matters. Parents help create, or constrain, the conditions under which critical interpretation can occur.

Young people therefore emerge in this review neither as passive victims nor as autonomous consumers; rather, they are capable, active thinkers and situated meaning-makers whose interpretations develop through their interaction the world around them. Their worlds are shaped by many things — whether it's family and peer relationships to the schools they attend. Gendered norms also play a big part as well as the digital everyday they are constantly immersed in. So, with this, my framing shifts attention away from asking only what internet-mediated pornography does to adolescents, toward asking *how* encounters become meaningful, *how* young people are positioned within them, and importantly, *what* kinds of relational support make interpretation and safe disclosure possible.

Pornography in the Digital Everyday

So, I attempted to establish some of the limitations of exposure-effects frameworks that *individualise* pornography encounters. I then attempt, in this section, to shifts focus to the kind of conditions through which pornography is mediated.

When we I look into the literature, it paints a picture of the landscape which is helpful for understanding why traditional models of parental control often falter. The digital devices and platform interfaces that are used by adolescents are not neutral pipelines delivering discrete pieces of content. I like to describe them as *active*, largely *commercialised* (commodified) spaces to organise visibility and capture their attention. By mapping the interplay between everyday peer cultures found among the digital everyday alongside the broader attention economy, the impression that adolescents encounters are structured long before they engage with a glass screen. In doing so, I hope to reframe parental challenges as ongoing negotiations within a pervasive and continually shifting digital infrastructure.

For many adolescents, digital media are not separate from “real life” but are deeply woven into their ordinary relationships and routines through which everyday life is organised. The digital everyday serves as a multitude of purposes. For adolescents they are places to make and sustain friendships. They weave and are constantly negotiating with their emerging identities that are deeply woven with their participation of peer cultures. I ask, possibly rhetorically, who have we met today that does not seek information within a digital space? For adolescents, digital media like internet-mediated pornography are also spaces where questions of intimacy and sexuality are explored (boyd, 2014; Buckingham, 2019; Livingstone et al., 2018)

The digital everyday exchanges cross into every corner of daily life — from private bedrooms to secondary school classrooms to the breakfast table — where is it not? At the same time, offline norms, gender dynamics, and social inequalities shape everything that occurs online (boyd, 2014; Marwick, 2013). I also like to draw on a Deleuzian process — Tucker (2009) reminds us that psychological and relational life consists of ongoing processes of *individuation* rather than the traditional bounded entities. Taking this idea, the family home becomes a permeable socio-technical assemblage. Pornography is therefore encountered as an affective event circulating within an already embedded everyday, where every interaction and process folds onto one another (Pink et al., 2016; Tucker, 2012). Consequently, internet-mediated pornography does not enter an otherwise non-digital household from an external “outside” because the contemporary household is already saturated with the digital everyday.

Encounters with pornography are extremely varied too. For example, adolescents may intentionally seek pornography, or they may receive it from peers. Pornographic material can be encountered through private messages or (accidentally) come across sexualised content while navigating mainstream social media platforms (Classification

Office, 2020; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2018). In Aotearoa New Zealand, adolescents rarely manage life without a smartphone. National survey data confirms near-universal device saturation, with Stats NZ reporting mobile phone access in 93.5% of households, while youth health studies indicate that 97% to 98% of secondary school students have regular access to a portable digital device (King-Finau et al., 2021; Pacheco & Melhuish, 2019). If an adolescent lacks personal digital access, this phenomenon is no longer a lifestyle variation, but rather, an acute site of social exclusion. Digital devices contain features such as privacy, instant shareability possibilities, and algorithmic recommendations that make pornography encounters diffuse and difficult to locate. Therefore, discerning or differentiating between a single deliberate decision is not straightforward — rather near impossible in my eyes — complicating explanations centred solely on adolescent intention or parental permission. This is the way of the digital everyday.

Peer relationships are particularly important concerning encounters with internet-mediated pornography. Adolescents experience the digital everyday together with their friends. This adds peer pressure to the dynamics and how relationships heavily influence how pornography is found, shared, and understood. When an adolescent forwards or receives an explicit image, video, or meme, the material acts as a form of social currency within peer networks (Flood, 2008; Ringrose & Harvey, 2015). The exact same piece of media can serve entirely different social functions depending on the immediate relational context. The meaning of receiving an image from a peer in a group chat is fundamentally distinct from privately searching for pornography online, even where the material itself is identical (boyd, 2014; Livingstone et al., 2018). This is what peer culture dictates to adolescents. These differences are critical for parents and caregivers to understand. So as a parent, an effective response will often address underlying dynamics of relationships their

adolescents are entangled with. Also, the understanding that dynamics like coercion, bullying, and embarrassment come into play with pornography encounters (Classification Office, 2020; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; Melhuish & Pacheco, 2021). So instead of an isolated *individualised* event, encountered pornography is a relational act driven by adolescent peer culture and the shrewdness of platform design

In the digital everyday, adolescents *do not* have total control over what they see or do online, because social media platforms are deliberately designed to steer their attention. Platforms do not simply host neutral content. Adolescents communicate within platform architectures where commercial entities actively shape, prioritise, and profit from user engagement (Gillespie, 2018; van Dijck, 2013). When I take a step back, my understanding is deepened when I see many aspects of the digital everyday operating under the economic logic of platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017). The recommendation from algorithms systematically amplifies provocative, high-arousal, or boundary-pushing content to maximise user engagement and advertising revenue (Zuboff, 2019). Consequently, an adolescent's encounter with pornography is never a purely voluntary, isolated choice, but an interaction mediated by commercial technology designed to capture and monetise attention.

This does not imply that algorithms deterministically dictate human action or that every encounter follows an inevitable escalation toward extreme content. It does mean, however, that young people act within architectures they did not design and whose commercial imperatives rarely align with educational, parental, or ethical wellbeing.

Big Tech companies operate within an outdated, analogue-era legal framework — which does not help parents that much. This essentially provides BigTech with a legal shield. In Aotearoa New Zealand, for example, digital platforms are largely governed by

the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 — legislation drafted prior to the advent of algorithmic social media — and the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015. Under the latter's "safe harbour" provisions, BigTech's platforms are fundamentally treated as passive hosts rather than active curators. In effect, this protects digital platforms from liability for the pornographic or extreme content their recommendation engines amplify (Department of Internal Affairs, 2023). Recent parliamentary inquiries have explicitly condemned this outdated framework, noting that leaving the toxic architecture of these platforms *untouched* will undoubtedly place an uphill burden of onto adolescents and their parents (Education and Workforce Committee, 2026). As Kosseff (2019) argues, this ultimately removes digital platforms of accountability for their own design and algorithmic curation. Therefore, when operating within this legislative landscape — that are largely devoid of democratic oversight or community-led ethical frameworks — these companies run the commercial filters and recommendation loops that dictate what content is pushed into domestic spaces and what is blocked. Consequently, they prioritise engagement and profit over user safety or family relationships (Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). The main issue I have is the power that the companies have to unilaterally set these operational rules. Therefore, what I see and read about is that Big Tech's prowess is immense. It is capable of exerting a *disproportionate* level of control over what adolescents see on their screens and whether parents receive adequate recourse when things go (Gillespie, 2018; van Dijck et al., 2018). Such decisions are often technically complex and commercially contested, but they are profoundly normative. When these design choices remain invisible, parental struggles can appear to arise solely from poor individual decisions rather than from environments structured through institutional choices.

These architectures sit within attention economies that monetise an adolescent's participation, data, 'visibility' — defined by who gets seen — and continued engagement

(Srnicek, 2017; Wu, 2016; Zuboff, 2019). Social connection and identity work increasingly occur inside commercial interfaces designed to sustain use. Sexualised content can therefore become part of a broader ecology in which bodies, intimacy, attention, and visibility are circulated and assigned economic value. This structural context does not eliminate individual agency, but it challenges accounts that locate responsibility only in the choices of the adolescent or the household.

Research on recommendation systems has also raised concern about pathways through which users may be directed from 'ordinary' mainstream material toward increasingly extreme or ideologically charged content. Ribeiro et al. (2020), for example, examined pathways on YouTube in relation to political radicalisation rather than pornography. The study cannot be used to claim an inevitable pornographic 'rabbit hole,' but it demonstrates why platform infrastructures and recommendation systems matter to analyses of online exposure. More recent research has similarly examined how recommender systems can normalise harmful or toxic content for young users (Regehr et al., 2025). While claims about specific pornography pathways require empirical caution, the broader analytical point remains — online encounters are shaped as much by architectures of circulation as by deliberate searching.

The digital everyday fundamentally alters the conditions of caregiving, rewriting the traditional 'rules,' boundaries, and expectations required to keep a young person safe and connected (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; Lim, 2020; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Monitors, filters, restrictions, and household rules may remain useful, but they operate under a completely different regime — the digital everyday's relational entanglements are now portable, networked, and rapidly evolving. Therefore, parents respond not only to an adolescent's choices but also to peer sharing, the exhausting reality of managing extra screens and additional devices beyond a primary smartphone. This understanding helps

explain why parental responsibility can be intensely felt while remaining practically impossible to fulfil.

Parental Mediation, Intensive Parenting, and Responsibilisation

Navigating a young person's digital life requires a delicate balance of oversight, trust, and continuous adaptation. This section examines how parents negotiate these responsibilities at the intersection of everyday family practice, commercial platform pressures, and wider cultural expectations of 'good' parenting. The review traces how mediation strategies shift during adolescence, the emotional and gendered labour that contemporary digital parenting can demand, and the processes of responsibilisation through which systemic digital risks are repeatedly returned to individual households (Hays, 1996; Kelly, 2001; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Rose, 1999).

Parental mediation research examines the specific strategies parents and caregivers use to guide and protect their children as they navigate the internet in the digital everyday. Commonly discussed practices include restrictive mediation, monitoring, co-use, and active mediation through conversation and guidance (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Modecki et al., 2022). The literature demonstrates that parents are active. They are constantly negotiating boundaries, doing their part to interpret adolescent concerns within their capability. As a father I teach values and do my best to adapt to responses as they get older. Although I my children are still quite young, I understand that parental mediation recognises that adolescents require privacy, space to grow into independence, and likely are equipped with technological, digitally native competence that is unparallel to their parents technical understanding of the digital everyday.

While parental mediation research can be useful, family practices do not remain neatly separated in reality (Clark, 2013; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Parents seldom deploy a single ‘technique’ in isolation. Instead, the meaning of any parent’s action depends fundamentally on how it is narrated, experienced, and embedded within an ongoing relationship. The same technical action — such as auditing a device — can communicate protective care in one context and hostile surveillance or punishment in another. This complexity underscores why this project focuses on parents lived stories and meaning-making processes. Moving beyond positivist categories makes visible the immense affective labour parents perform, while pushing back against a neoliberal responsibilisation that treats families as the sole managers of the pervasive socio-digital landscape.

At the same time, mediation frameworks can make digital parenting appear primarily as a matter of individual parental skill and oversight (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Modecki et al., 2022). Filters, settings, household rules, and communication techniques become tools through which parents are encouraged to manage risks generated across global platforms and peer networks (Clark, 2013; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). While the practical usefulness of these tools should not be denied — and as a parent I recognise their everyday appeal — a social injustice arises when their availability makes the family appear to be the natural or sufficient site of responsibility, allowing questions about platform design and commercial imperatives to recede from view (Kelly, 2001; Rose, 1999; Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019).

Mediation practices seem to change as children grow older. Strategies oriented toward younger children often rely on relatively visible forms of restriction — shared devices, household rules, and technical controls (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Modecki et al., 2022). I recognise in my home (unfortunately — my ‘intentions’ are not to saturate our

children with devices but in a nuclear setting they act as caregivers while the parent is readily achieving some *isolated* project). In adolescence, however, access expands through multiple points of digital entry. There are school devices, peer networks from gaming, and more private *incognito* digital spaces. For parents, the same tools and strategies become harder to sustain without intensifying surveillance (Clark, 2013; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). It is at this point that the affective labour of digital parenting often increases. Monitoring that may be treated as ordinary care for a younger child can, with an older adolescent, be experienced as a breach of privacy and a strain on trust (Hays, 1996; Lim, 2020). I certainly do not have adolescent children now, but the concept makes a lot of sense. When public guidance continues to locate safety primarily in parental oversight, families are left to manage expanding digital complexity with tools and expectations that fit unevenly with adolescent autonomy (Kelly, 2001; Rose, 1999).

My own location as a father shapes how readily these dynamics become visible to me as a researcher. Intensive parenting ideals can make care feel insufficient at times, with responsibility concentrated inside our nuclear household even as extended networks of support become less available in daily life (Hays, 1996; Lee et al., 2014). That lived familiarity is analytically useful: it attunes me to the fatigue, uncertainty, and moral pressure in parents' accounts. It can be interpreted from a position to recognise sacrifice and vigilance as the most intelligible forms of care, or to over-identify with parental struggle at the expense of adolescent privacy and autonomy — these are real possibilities for me. Naming this location does not authorise my experience as evidence for the analysis; it makes its influence available for scrutiny as I interpret how parents narrate responsibility, control, and the limits of what a household can carry (Kelly, 2001; Rose, 1999). This expanding burden can be understood through scholarship on intensive parenting. Hays (1996) describes an ideology in which good parenting requires a lot of

intensive style of parenting. For example, a parent needs to be ‘child-centred’, ‘expert-guided’, ‘emotionally intelligent’, and ‘hands-on’-intensive care. Later work has shown how expectations of vigilance, optimisation, and risk management have intensified, often placing disproportionate demands on mothers (in my case I refer to the primary parent, which has been myself while I have supported my wife to obtain a tertiary qualification) while also expanding the standards by which parents more generally are judged (Lee et al., 2014). Digital parenting adds further domains of expected expertise. Parents may be expected to understand devices and applications, anticipate new risks, establish effective boundaries, recognise signs of distress, and remain emotionally available for difficult conversations.

Intensive-parenting expectations are profoundly gendered; the structural reality is that the demands of this work rarely fall equally on all caregivers. Hays’s (1996) original formulation explicitly concerned motherhood, and later parenting-culture scholarship demonstrates how the responsibility for anticipating and managing children’s risks remains unevenly distributed (Lee et al., 2014). Historically, expert child-rearing guidance (from mid-century attachment theory to modern parenting manuals) was implicitly directed at mothers, treating women as the primary students of expert advice. Consequently, when organisations like Netsafe release digital safety guides today, they land in a society already conditioned to expect mothers to read, master, and implement these rules. While the present study includes mothers and fathers and does not assume that all families reproduce a strictly traditional division of labour, cultural scripts routinely ensure that whoever occupies the primary caregiving role absorbs the bulk of the digital labour (Hays, 1996; Lee et al., 2014): society’s invisible rules still demand that one person act as the primary shock-absorber for digital risk — a role that carries a significant affective toll (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Framing digital parenting in strictly gender-neutral terms creates a

superficial illusion of shared responsibility, disguising how historical, gendered expectations of care continue to drive an uneven distribution of parenting labour, anxiety, and blame.

Rose's (1999) account of responsibilisation helps explain how these unequal expectations are politically organised and culturally sustained. Responsibilisation describes the processes through which individuals and families are governed by being made accountable for managing risks that originate within broader social, technological, and economic conditions. In the digital everyday, parents are positioned as the primary line of defence — held singularly accountable for preventing, detecting, and mitigating harm generated through commercial platform architectures, peer circulation, and systemic gaps in public education. Risk generated far beyond the household is thus systematically returned to the intimate, everyday practices of family life.

These converging discourses produce a distinct and highly recognisable subject position that this thesis terms the "Good Parent Script." Within this normative script, the responsible digital parent is expected to be technologically literate and continuously vigilant, while simultaneously remaining calm, open, and non-judgmental. Parents are instructed to establish firm boundaries without becoming controlling, protect adolescents without compromising their autonomy, and encourage open disclosure without appearing permissive. These expectations function as far more than practical recommendations; they operate as rigid moral standards through which parents evaluate their own worth and are judged by others. Consequently, an adolescent's encounter with pornography is rarely experienced as just a developmental or digital event — it becomes loaded with affective weight, interpreted as direct evidence of parental success or moral failure. The "Good Parent Script" is contradictory by design. Constant vigilance can undermine the relational trust required for voluntary disclosure; strong moral boundaries can clarify a parent's

values while simultaneously increasing the adolescent's fear of judgment; and openness is publicly praised while parents are privately warned not to normalise or encourage sexual curiosity. Because no strategy can satisfy these competing demands at once, parents remain permanently vulnerable to retrospective blame. Whatever outcome unfolds can be reinterpreted as evidence that they monitored too much, too little, too early, or too late.

The emotional and relational labour required to navigate this landscape is substantial. As the narratives in this study illustrate, parents must manage not only their adolescent's behaviour, but also their own internal landscape of fear, uncertainty, and moral commitment. In particular, parents often worry that initiating conversations about pornography will inadvertently introduce unwanted concepts, encourage curiosity, disclose too much, or damage an already delicate relationship. Simultaneously, adolescents navigate their own affective barriers, frequently anticipating punishment, device loss, adult disappointment, or shame. International research on parent–adolescent communication consistently identifies embarrassment, anticipated judgment, uncertainty, and low self-efficacy as formidable obstacles to open discussions about sexuality and pornography (Ashcraft & Murray, 2017; Dawson et al., 2024). Research in Aotearoa New Zealand confirms this exact relational impasse: young people frequently express a desire for open guidance while harbouring a persistent, protective fear of negative or reactive adult responses (Classification Office, 2020).

Active mediation, therefore, involves far more than the one-way transfer of 'accurate' information. It depends upon cultivating specific relational conditions under which concern can be expressed without reducing the adolescent themselves to a site of pathology or failure. Parents may critique pornographic content or articulate clear moral boundaries while intentionally preserving a safe space for future disclosure. Empirical research demonstrates that meaningful conversations are far more viable when parents can

regulate their immediate emotional reactions, listen without rapid condemnation, and remain relationally available even when the topic generates acute discomfort (Ashcraft & Murray, 2017; Dawson et al., 2024; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). This represents demanding, ongoing relational work — a practice of sustained presence rather than the mechanical execution of a communication technique.

Shame and silence are central to this relational dynamic;[2] far from being isolated emotional flaws, shame is socially and relationally produced through circulating norms concerning bodies, sexuality, conduct, and exposure — governed by how one fears being seen by others (Ahmed, 2004; Probyn, 2005). Silence, likewise, is far more than a mere absence of speech. It is an active discursive practice shaped by inherited family histories, moral expectations, institutional silence, and the anticipation of judgment (Foucault, 1972; Morgan & Coombes, 2001). A family may genuinely value openness and connection yet still lack the linguistic tools or affective safety required to discuss pornography without invoking embarrassment or moral injury. Silence can therefore comfortably coexist with deep care, protection, and good intentions.

Adopting a responsibilisation lens does not render parents unimportant or passive. On the contrary, parents remain uniquely situated to notice subtle signs of distress, offer guidance, establish meaningful boundaries, navigate difficult questions, and sustain the relational safety through which support can be sought (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). The analytical value of this critical lens lies in its ability to prevent complex socio-digital friction from being reduced to diagnostic claims of deficient or failed parenting. A parent's capacity to respond is continually shaped by their available time, economic resources, cultural location, family history, access to trustworthy knowledge, and the broader

[2] Shame has been an underlying reason in my interest with internet-mediated pornography.

platformised conditions surrounding their children. Parents matter immensely; however, they cannot reasonably or ethically be treated as the sole shock-absorbers of risk in a young person's digital everyday.

Aotearoa New Zealand and Relational Responsibility

While the architecture of digital platforms and the neoliberal impulse toward responsibilisation are global phenomena, the affirmative labour of parenting is always culturally, materially, and geographically situated. To understand how parents perform the affective and relational work of responding to adolescents' encounters with internet pornography within the digital everyday, this study must ground itself in the specific context of Aotearoa New Zealand. This section examines the local landscape of public guidance, illustrating how even well-intentioned advice often reproduces the responsibilisation of the family by privatising systemic digital risks into the emotional labour of individual parents. Furthermore, by engaging with the bicultural foundation of Aotearoa, it introduces a relational framework of responsibility — drawing upon local conceptual resources that challenge Western individualism to argue for an understanding of wellbeing and care that extends far beyond the isolated nuclear household, setting the stage for an examination of parents lived meaning-making experiences.

Public guidance in Aotearoa New Zealand increasingly encourages parents, caregivers, and whānau to remain actively engaged in young people's digital lives. Research from the Classification Office and guidance produced by Netsafe place explicit emphasis on open communication. *Age*-attuned discussions become pivotal as well as embracing critical digital literacy. The relational aspect is highlighted too and points towards *sustained* parental involvement rather than reliance on technical restrictions alone (Classification Office, 2020; Melhuish & Pacheco, 2021; Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2018). These institutional recommendations acknowledge that technological

filters and device monitoring are at best partial and temporary measures — particularly as adolescents gain personal autonomy, navigate multiple networked devices, and develop superior technological literacy.

This public guidance nevertheless harbours a profound responsibilisation tension. Parents are continuously encouraged to cultivate the technological literacy, emotional capacity, and confidence required to navigate an escalating digital environment, even as the practical labour of risk management remains heavily concentrated within individual households. Parents are tasked with mitigating complex challenges engineered across global platforms, amplified through peer networks, and exacerbated by gaps in public education — despite possessing virtually no influence over these broader structural conditions. Consequently, systemic questions surrounding how explicit material circulates in the digital everyday are repeatedly redirected away from corporate and regulatory bodies and returned to the intimate sphere of individual family practice.

Access to this affirmative labour, however, is profoundly uneven in family environments. Public recommendations for parents to remain informed, vigilant, and communicatively open can be a ‘tough ask’. These recommendations implicitly presume the parents have the time of day with the energy, the confidence, and the knowing of digital literacy. In reality, families differ significantly in their access to resources involving the digital everyday and the know-how of their adolescent’s engagement with this environment. Recognising digital-social inequalities however complicates public advice because it requires acknowledging that the practical capacity to enact public guidance is materially, culturally, and socially distributed rather than simply chosen.

Our Aotearoa context provides crucial conceptual resources for questioning models of responsibility centred on an isolated individual or the ‘self-contained’ nuclear family. I

bring into light, Māori scholarship on health, wellbeing, and decolonising research. Māori worldview foregrounds the foundational anchor on the importance of the relationship in question. It emphasises who one is in relation to others, to the community, and to the environment, making the centring of whanaungatanga the starting point for all health, healing, and ethical knowledge. Durie's (1998, 2006) Te Whare Tapa Whā model, for example, conceptualises wellbeing as a holistic and interconnected whole, in which tinana (physical), hinengaro (mental/emotional), wairua (spiritual), and whānau (family/social) dimensions are inseparable and must be understood in relation to whenua (the relationship between people and the land), culture, and collective life. Smith (1999/2012) offers a vital critique from the position of Aotearoa New Zealand tangata whenua and seminal decolonising scholarship, arguing that Western research traditions have historically individualised both knowledge production and responsibility. This orientation contrasts with Indigenous frameworks that understand wellbeing as an active state of connection rather than a solo achievement, challenging traditional Western systems that foreground the isolated self.

Epistemic Humility and Positionality in Aotearoa

Within Indigenous epistemologies and tikanga-informed frameworks, true knowledge is understood as a collective taonga (treasure), held by the community, passed down through generations, and co-created through shared experiences (Hudson et al., 2010; Smith, 2021). Accountability in many Indigenous frameworks in Aotearoa is therefore shared and historically situated (Durie, 1998; Mikaere, 2011; Simmonds, 2011). When I return to my location in Aotearoa New Zealand, I am mindful that research involving Māori has a long history of operating through a colonising, extractive lens, in which Western researchers positioned themselves as omniscient observers interpreting non-Western lives from an intellectual height (Smith, 2021). Epistemic humility, for me,

has meant breaking from that detached authority and recognising the clear boundaries of my own knowledge and location.

While my father identifies himself as a “quarter-cast” Māori and in that I acknowledge and honour that heritage, I am also mindful that I am generally perceived and responded to as Pākehā, which renders my standpoint complex. This is regularly underscored at my Fijian father-in-law’s home where he affectionately (and humourously) calls me his “white” son-in-law and my son his European grandson — a daily reminder of the layered, sometimes decultured realities of our family. Navigating these identity locations has required holding epistemic humility at the core of the research: refusing an uncritical Indigenous standpoint while remaining accountable to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Rather than speaking for communities or imposing Western individualist assumptions onto relational concepts such as whanaungatanga, it has meant listening deeply, holding analytical claims lightly, and honouring the lived, culturally situated expertise of the families who shared their stories.

From this nuanced Pākehā location, I draw on Indigenous accounts of collective knowledge not to speak for Māori knowledge, but to make visible a contrast that shapes the conditions of my own inquiry. Dominant neoliberal systems of responsibility locate accountability primarily in the individual or nuclear family and tend to render history invisible (Kelly, 2001; Rose, 1999). While this ahistorical framing can create an appearance of fairness and simplicity, it often disproportionately harms those who are already less privileged, thereby contributing to their further marginalisation (Hays, 1996; Lee et al., 2014)

In the context of adolescents’ encounters with internet-mediated pornography, this individualising stance starts to ‘wobble’. When platforms design the architectures of

circulation and states regulate (or fail to regulate) those architectures at scale, responsibility is nonetheless repeatedly returned to the household (Education and Workforce Committee, 2026; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Srnicek, 2017). Parents are positioned as the primary site of prevention, monitoring, and moral education, while the commercial and institutional conditions that make encounter ordinary remain largely out of view (Kelly, 2001; Rose, 1999). A relational account does not relieve parents of care; it relocates the question. Instead of asking only whether a parent has successfully controlled access, it asks how responsibility is distributed, what forms of support are absent, and how families continue to respond when certainty and technical control cannot be guaranteed.

Indigenous scholarship thus supports a profound critique of the individualisation of digital parenting responsibility. Expecting parents to manage, largely alone, as I locate myself in nuclear home setting, the risks produced by global commercial platforms can be understood as an extension of Western and colonial patterns of governance. These patterns render structural conditions invisible while placing the entire burden of response on the traditional Western nuclear family system. Ultimately, this individualising framework risks severing families from vital systems of collective care, shared knowledge, and mutual accountability.

A relational orientation is also compatible with the broader obligation to take the colonial and bicultural context of research in Aotearoa seriously (Hudson et al., 2010; Smith, 2021). This thesis is not a kaupapa Māori study and does not claim a Māori standpoint. Its responsibility is more modest but still important: to avoid presenting Western individualism as culturally universal, to recognise the authority and specificity of Māori scholarship (Mikaere, 2011; Simmonds, 2011), and to remain accountable for how Māori concepts and participants are represented. Relationality should not become a decorative addition to an otherwise unchanged individualising framework (Smith, 2021).

This distinction requires analytical care. Māori communities, whānau, and scholarly traditions are diverse, and concepts such as whanaungatanga should not be treated as mere direct equivalents of frameworks drawn from Western feminist theory. Nor should Indigenous knowledge be introduced instrumentally to bolster an already established non-Māori argument. As Indigenous scholars have long argued, subsuming Mātauranga Māori under Western theoretical umbrellas reinforces Eurocentric dominance by reducing complex, living worldviews to mere decorative evidence (Smith, 2021).

In a study led from a non-Māori research position, I believe that engaging with local conceptual resources requires maintaining epistemic humility (Smith, 2021). Rather, instead of hyper-focusing on people as isolated individuals, who act alone in relative independence, our identities are better seen as being shaped by our connections and enduring history with others. Our ethical responsibility is therefore inherently inseparable from those relational ties (Durie, 1998; Hudson et al., 2010; Noddings, 1984/2003). Then, for a study conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, this orientation destabilises any universal script of the self-sufficient 'good' parent, directing critical attention toward the collective, institutional, and historically situated conditions of care (Hays, 1996; Kelly, 2001; May, 2008). A relational approach therefore moves analysis beyond the isolated parent while preserving the central importance of family relationships. Relevant networks encompass whānau, schools, health and community services, public agencies, regulatory bodies, and the technology companies that architect digital environments (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; van Dijck et al., 2018). Responsibility, however, is not equally distributed across these actors, as their structural power and capacities differ vastly. Platforms and state institutions shape conditions at a scale unavailable to individual households, while parents and adolescents negotiate the intimate, daily consequences of those conditions (Education and Workforce Committee, 2026; Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). Ultimately, a relational

account examines how these asymmetric forms of responsibility connect — and reveals precisely where structural support is absent (Kelly, 2001; Rose, 1999).

The preceding discussion of relational responsibility sharpens the focus of this inquiry. Research on adolescents' pornography encounters has grown, and parental mediation studies have described many digital-parenting strategies (Classification Office, 2020; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Modecki et al., 2022). What remains less fully examined is parents' own meaning-making: what it feels like to occupy the position of the responsible parent, how moral and cultural commitments shape what can be spoken, and how parents interpret the limits of their control within conditions they did not create. Dawson et al. (2024) identify barriers to parent–child conversations, while Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) illuminate the hopes, fears, and moral labour of parenting for a digital future. The present study brings these concerns into direct conversation with parents' narratives of adolescent pornography encounters in Aotearoa New Zealand, asking how responsibility is made meaningful when structural support is uneven and technical control remains partial

I take a step back and caution against imposing one universal model of good digital parenting across families whose diversity, histories, and relationships differ so much. Advice that appears simple in theory, however, may be difficult to enact amid the reality of parental life. It is often messy. There are work commitments, financial pressure that seem to inevitably happen. Families deal with disabilities, with conflict. Religion, morals and culture is bound to intersect somewhere along the way. So, this being said, my study does not claim to represent all parents in Aotearoa. It finds meaning in six parents situated stories to understand how responsibility is made meaningful within particular lives and how those meanings connect with wider discursive and structural conditions.

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter demonstrates that adolescents' encounters with pornography and parents' responses cannot be adequately understood through decontextualised models of exposure, individual risk, or parental technique alone. Harm remains an important concern, but its meaning and subjective impact are far from universal. Adolescents interpret what they encounter through gendered sexual cultures, peer relationships, family histories, educational contexts, and commercially organised digital platforms. Parents respond within those same conditions while carrying expectations of vigilance, expertise, protection, and emotional availability.

The critical task is not to reject exposure research, developmental knowledge, parental boundaries, or communication guidance. Each can contribute to care. The task is to understand their limits and to resist allowing any one framework to become a complete account of the problem. Exposure-effects research can identify patterns without explaining situated meaning. Developmental accounts can describe change without exhausting what adolescence means culturally. Parental mediation can identify useful practices without making parents solely responsible for systemic conditions. This also clarifies the contribution of a literature review organised through critical social psychology. The purpose of this theoretical critique is not to determine which model is 'correct,' but to examine how different knowledge traditions frame the object, distribute agency, and locate responsibility. By comparing mainstream psychological and policy frameworks against feminist post-structuralist and Indigenous perspectives, this chapter exposes how traditional models individualise systemic digital risks, while critical traditions create conceptual space for relational care and collective response-ability.

This movement from critique to possibility is provisionally captured in Haraway's (2016) concept of response-ability: the situated capacity to become able to respond within

specific relationships and socio-material conditions. In this thesis, response-ability does not function as a new normative standard against which parents should be evaluated or judged. Rather, it directs critical attention toward the structural and relational conditions that make response possible in the first place — such as trust, open language, relational presence, accessible institutional support, and genuine accountability from corporate actors who profit from digital environments. Re-framing care in this way recognises that parents can remain deeply caring and responsible even when complete prevention is impossible and certainty remains out of reach.

Braidotti's (2013, 2019) affirmative ethics supports this conceptual shift by asking how scholarly critique might generate sustaining possibilities rather than remaining trapped in cycles of fear, moral panic, and prohibition. An affirmative orientation does not minimise digital harms or offer a simplistic endorsement of pornography. Instead, it explores how difficult affects, anxieties, and moral concerns might be transformed into active capacities for relationship, critical thought, and collective care. In the present study, this means examining how parents work to keep channels of communication open, how they navigate the delicate tension between protection and adolescent autonomy, and how responsibility might be shared collectively rather than intensified as an overwhelming demand on individual households.

Here, Braidotti's (2013) insight regarding the body signaling "too much" — reaching the threshold of embodied endurance — captures the lived reality of the participants who carry a heavier, more embodied load as the responded to and attempted to navigate the potential risks (of internet-mediated pornography) in their adolescents digital everyday. What we might see in a typical mainstream discourse is a repeatedly asked diagnostic question: "How do we make parents control their children better?" In contrast, Braidotti's affirmative framework asks: "How do we support families when they have

reached the structural limits of their endurance?"— there is a difference from shifting blame from the person to reframing it as a much bigger systemic issue. This question directly aligns with critical perspectives in Aotearoa New Zealand. As scholars like Mikaere (2011, 2017) remind us, care was historically designed within Indigenous paradigms to be a collective, whānau-centred responsibility, rather than a private burden locked inside an isolated nuclear household. Refusing the deficit lens requires recognising the structural precarity parents face while honouring their ongoing, relational efforts to practice care.

Ultimately, this study is situated within a central tension: acknowledging genuine vulnerabilities and digital harms while refusing to reduce either adolescents or parents to individual failures. By examining how parents narrate these encounters, this thesis explores what responsible care comes to mean within everyday domestic life. It investigates how protection, boundary-setting, control, silence, trust, and relational availability are discursively constructed, contested, and reworked within the digital everyday. These personal meanings are analysed in relation to broader master narratives surrounding adolescent sexuality, digital risk, and the "good parent."

The following chapter details the methodological, epistemological, and ethical framework through which these stories were invited, interpreted, and developed into the analysis that follows.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Situating the Inquiry

As I reached the end of the literature review, I found myself resonating with profound epistemological tensions that sat with those who care for adolescents within a typical contemporary nuclear home. The difficult emotional and relational work that parents navigate remains largely invisible, while responsibility for managing risks produced outside the home is placed primarily on them. It had also become increasingly clear that the dominant ways of framing parents' responses were leaving way too much out. These framings challenged particular groups of people by unfairly reinforcing individualistic paradigms in Aotearoa New Zealand — which will impact certain groups. While individualised models of risk management and developmental accounts of mediation can neatly categorise parenting strategies, they frequently pathologise the family unit. What is actually a symptom of broader systemic and commercial pressures as an individual deficit. In the process, the heavy moral, emotional, and relational labour that parents carry becomes obscured. This realisation forced a shift in my own orientation as a researcher. I gradually sat with, and resisted, the impulse to evaluate whether particular strategies 'worked' against idealised, dominant models. Instead, recognising myself as an emotional human being who values the full spectrum of human feeling and expression, I committed to a reflexive inquiry that directly aligns with my core values around human understanding. This orientation led me to adopt a qualitative approach capable of exploring how parents themselves navigate and make sense of these complex encounters, and what they come to understand responsible care to require. The methodology chapter details the methodological, epistemological, and ethical foundations of a qualitative framework designed to explore how parents situate their stories guided by the research question: How

do parents in Aotearoa New Zealand make sense of and respond to their adolescents' encounters with internet-mediated pornography?

Consistent with narrative approaches to meaning-making (Bruner, 1990, 1991; Riessman, 2008), my study centres how parents construct meaning, rather than relying on reductionist methods that prioritise decontextualised, ahistorical, cause-and-effect explanations. This choice reflects my commitment to exploring how parents actively construct responsibility and interpret risk discourses around digital sexual content within the routines and relationships of the digital everyday. From my position as a father, protecting my children from harm likely comes from a place of love and kinship. However, as previously contextualised, this protective force is undoubtedly intersected with my personal history, cultural and ideological persuasion. Navigating this terrain is inherently complex: parents are continuously working out how to practice care within situations that feel unfamiliar, rapidly evolving, and morally charged. They were actively working out how to care in situations that felt unfamiliar and morally charged. A qualitative design was appropriate because it allowed close attention to how parents interpret such experiences and make meaning through the discourses available to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Willig, 2013). The study was designed around the idea that people make sense of their experiences primarily through stories: parents were invited to share their stories. Reflexive thematic analysis was then used to develop patterned meanings across the six accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The chapter begins by situating the inquiry within qualitative, narrative, and reflexive commitments, including my positioning as a researcher. It then explains narrative inquiry and ethical hearing. The research process is described through recruitment, participants, interviews, transcription, familiarisation, coding, and theme development.

The final sections address ethical approval, Te Tiriti-informed and bicultural considerations, relational ethics, confidentiality, data management, and researcher safety.

Qualitative, Interpretive, and Reflexive Design

The journey toward establishing this study's framework began with the doing of the research question itself. Unpacking how parents navigate digital precarity required a design capable of engaging with messiness, contradiction, and deep emotion. Rather than viewing the researcher as a neutral recorder, I intentionally structured the methodology around an interpretive stance. Aligning with Braun and Clarke's (2013, 2022) 'Big Q' qualitative paradigm established a clear path forward: this choice recognised that making sense of these stories required an active, critical researcher. By explicitly donning my 'critical research hat', I become someone using set of interrelated concepts and reflexive judgment to pull back the layers of everyday parental understandings. Grounding this study in an interpretive paradigm means I push to critically interrogate my own location as a researcher in Aotearoa New Zealand, recognising that my findings are partial and co-constructed through the complex, emotional encounters between my participants' stories and my own critical lens. The insights offered in this project were actively produced through the conversation between my encounters with the parents' stories and my own critical lens. They emerged through the active co-construction of meaning between my participants' stories, my own positioning and interpretive choices, the cultural landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand, and the critical theoretical tools I brought to the transcripts. In adopting this framework, I take responsibility for my active role in shaping, interpreting, and presenting these narratives.

From this position, researcher subjectivity is not contamination to be eliminated. It is one of the resources through which interpretation becomes possible, while also requiring reflexive accountability. The analysis is therefore presented as a situated interpretation of

six parents' narratives rather than a final or objective account of parents, adolescents, or pornography.

Narrative inquiry and reflexive thematic analysis played related but distinct roles in my research process. Narrative inquiry guided how I conducted the interviews, prompting me to approach parents' stories as temporal, relational, and culturally situated stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I recognise that the broader story I am telling about these parents' experiences is something I have constructed through my interpretive work, and I take responsibility for that construction. This stance reflects an ethical as well as methodological commitment in reflexive and narrative research: the researcher remains accountable for how participants' lives are re-presented (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

Situated Knowledges and Ontological Commitments

Donna Haraway's (1988) essay "Situated Knowledges" immediately caught the attention of a multitude of disciplines forty odd years ago. Since her publication, Haraway's (1988) epistemological intervention has become one of the most influential contributions to feminist epistemology and Science and Technology Studies (STS). What she offers is a quite appealing perspective when you historically situate her story with the longstanding arm wrestle between the two dominant positions on how knowledge is produced: who gets to produce it, and how we should evaluate objectivity.

Haraway rejects both of these positions on knowledge production and criticised ways people try to claim they know the 'truth'. In mainstream psychological knowledge, expert researchers produce knowledge through disciplined methodologies designed to enhance the separation of subjectivity from objectivity. The first is the "god trick" of western scientific objectivity, which is the claim to see everything from nowhere, as if

knowledge could be produced by a disembodied, ahistorical observer. Haraway (1988) argues that this "view of infinite vision is an illusion, a god trick" (p. 582). It is quite deeply political when you step back and reflect on the importance of location. The movements of social power relationships matter in our specific location and through the stories we tell, all influence our "knowing processes". Braidotti's (2013) offering of process ontology and nomadic theory adds something special to our critique over stable, fixed notions of responsibility, and the silencing of history and rich context that weaves through the 'bounded' individual, asking many questions. On the contrary, when we map in our highly spatial and relational world views, like our local indigenous frameworks in such as te Ao Māori (Simmonds, 2011), for example, the heavy burden produced by the bounded individual, nuclear framings, lighten, because relational activity is embedded into our knowing processes, and the combined collective resource of doing life together constructs — not a moral victory, but births new possibilities of doing life itself.

When I examine the philosophical framings of Western intellectual traditions shaped by classical metaphysics that put a huge roadblock in front of relational ontologies we see with our local indigenous frameworks like Whanaungatanga (perhaps I cautiously add, that this is the ethical equivalent to the concept of "Response-ability") feminist care ethics (Gilligan, 1982; Tronto, 2013) and Haraway's relational materialism. Whenever the Western tradition of noticing a difference between two things, it does not just see them as "diverse" or "equal but distinct." Instead, it automatically turns that difference into a value judgment where one side is seen as superior and the other is seen as inferior, deficient, or broken (Braidotti, 1994) and other post-structuralist feminist thinkers argue that Western philosophy is built on rigid dualisms (two-sided pairs). In these pairs, the first term is treated as the universal standard; the "Master subject" or the "Centre." The second term is defined purely by what it lacks in comparison to the first. When I bring this philosophy

into my thinking about psychology and parenting, I can see the exact same “difference as pejorative” dynamic playing out in mainstream models. The “deficit model” used in mainstream psychology often creates a binary between the ‘idealised’, ‘risk-free’ family (the standard) and the messy, anxious family (the different). Because difference is treated as pejorative, any family that isn’t perfectly executing ‘corporate-level’ “cyber-safety guidelines” for their children and family (prohibitionist bans) is potentially pathologised. Their difference is read as a psychological failure or a deficit, rather than a situated, human response to a volatile digital landscape. In this context, Haraway’s (1988) account of situated knowledges helps me to break this binary logic and using it as my central epistemological orientation. Upon rejecting the “god trick”, she likewise rejects a postmodern relativism that treats everything as a perspective where no knowledge is better than any other. Such relativism abandons the possibility of making better knowledge claims, in which sounded quite extreme. Closing down the possibility of stronger, more affirmative accounts of knowledge production surrenders our ability to judge harm; consequently, the very foundation of research accountability is dismantled. Her landmark work reconceptualised scientific objectivity as situated, embodied, and accountable, has informed subsequent work in feminist philosophy of science (Harding, 1991, 2004; Longino, 1990, 2002), STS (Jasanoff, 2004), and posthuman scholarship (Braidotti, 2013, 2019).

For this study, situated knowledge meant that neither the parents’ stories nor my analysis could be separated from the locations in which they were produced. I interpreted their stories through my own positioning as both a parent and a former adolescent. This included the significant difference that I first encountered pornography in a pre-digital era of discrete physical media (magazines and VHS), a structural context very different from the always-available, platform-mediated environment that young people navigate today.

My own location and theoretical history offer particular insights, shaped in part by psychology's position as an interdisciplinary field that draws on both scientific and interpretive traditions. Thus, my commitment to Haraway's partial perspective can be understood as an embrace of a reflexive rigour —one that values honesty, transparency, and open contestability over the illusion of detached objectivity. Furthermore, Haraway's (2016) concept of response-ability informed the ethical orientation of the research. I use the term here modestly to describe an ongoing obligation to remain capable of responding carefully to participants and recognising the limits of my own interpretive position

To anchor this study, I drew on critical social psychology and social constructionism (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1999/2015; Parker, 1992). To translate this situated epistemological stance into analytical practice, I drew on Ian Parker's (1992) post-structuralist perspective regarding the intertextual nature of qualitative accounts:

> The context effectively operates as another text, hence the well-known phrase 'there is nothing outside of the text' (Derrida 1976: 158). Texts, then, do re-present meanings, but those meanings are transformed meanings from other texts, and the meanings change across situations and over time. The implications of this line of argument for a scientific structuralism are dire, since it would make the recovery of 'true' meanings and 'structures' impossible. (p. 57)

Applying Parker's (1989/2014) critique of mainstream psychological reductionism directly aligns with narrative inquiry. Rather than treating parents' stories as 'diagnostic evidence' of personal success or domestic failure, narrative inquiry recognises that individual stories are always shaped by, and negotiated against, dominant cultural master narratives and institutional expectations surrounding the family (Bamberg, 2004; Riessman, 2008). The parents' stories were therefore analysed as rich, evolving narratives

continually co-constructed at the intersection of lived-experience, educational landscapes, and wider media discourses.

Taking a social constructionist approach informed me of how I listened to the language in the parent interviews. I treated everyday terms like exposure, taboo, harmful, responsible, or 'good parent' as culturally loaded tools that parents use to make sense of their lives and construct their identities. For instance, when a parent describes themselves as wanting to be "open" or fears their child experiencing "harm," they are not simply reporting a static fact; they are navigating complex, socially built expectations of what a "good parent" should be. In line with Braun and Clarke's (2019, 2022) reflexive thematic paradigm, my role as an analyst was not to search for an underlying objective 'truth' or evaluate parental accuracy. Instead, I engaged my reflexive subjectivity as an analytical resource to interpret the moral, emotional, and relational work that language was actively performing for these families.

Researcher Positioning and Reflexivity

My initial concern was strongly protectionist and was partly organised through addiction, risk, and institutional-recognition frameworks. As a father, I was readily drawn toward stories of vigilance, safety, and parental availability. My Christian location made religious and moral vocabularies familiar, while my professional background made diagnostic and harm-oriented interpretations readily available. At the same time, my engagement with feminist theory sensitised me to an array of dynamics that required attention to ensuring their visibility. Whether gendered labour, power dynamics, and what silence means. I like to draw from feminist scholarship. I do not claim feminist standpoint grounded in women lived experience however (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; Wilkinson, 1997).

Reflexivity therefore involved more than declaring identity. It required tracing how these locations shaped what I noticed and what I risked obscuring. For example, I had to examine my attraction to protection as self-evident care, my tendency to prefer non-shaming communication, and my investment in openness as a parenting value. In the analysis, I worked to place these initial readings beside alternative interpretations: protection could also become surveillance; developmental care could remain regulatory; and declared openness could not establish an adolescent's experience of relational safety.

Supervision, memo writing, repeated return to full transcripts, and analytic writing supported this reflexive work. The aim was not to remove subjectivity but to make the interpretive process more accountable and open to challenge.

Narrative Inquiry and Ethical Hearing

Narrative inquiry provided the methodological orientation for attending to how parents organised experience through story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Because the research question asks how parents make sense of and respond to their adolescents' encounters with pornography, the study required attention to the ways they narrated those experiences. This meant listening for how they framed responsibility and uncertainty, how they positioned themselves as parents, and how they made moral sense of what had occurred. In addition, how they spoke about care and protection or relational repair in the aftermath of discovery or disclosure, was important for the research question.

When a participant described discovering pornography on a phone, setting a strict boundary, or trying to remain calm, the account was never only about the incident itself. It was also a way of showing a glimpse into their story of being a parent to adolescent children that have encountered pornography. What they were trying to be in that moment, how the responded and made meaning — they shared with myself, the interviewer. These

stories also functioned as identity claims. In describing how they responded, parents were implicitly showing what kind of parent they are in the context of the interview. When a parent recounts a difficult moment, they are choosing their tone, emphasis, and framing to paint a specific picture of themselves. So, depending on how they felt about the situation in the moment they are sharing their story with myself, and how they wanted you to see them, parents step into different narrative identities. If a parent said, “I locked down the devices immediately to keep my child safe”, I would construct that as protective. If a parent said, “I listened to them first so they knew they could always come to me.”, I would likely construct that as understanding and relationally safe. Raising kids in our contemporary world or the digital everyday brings a lot of judgment, self-doubt, and guilt. When parents sit down with a researcher, there is often an unspoken pressure to present themselves as a “good parent” (May 2008). I came to recognise that I was not simply analysing an internet boundary or a phone rule. I was analysing how parents used story to demonstrate, both to me and to themselves, that they had done the right thing, fulfilled a moral duty, and worked to keep their relationship with their child intact.

Stories were also temporal and socially located. Parents connected current digital concerns with their own histories of upbringing, sexuality, migration, faith, schooling, and changing technologies. Pornography was therefore never narrated as an abstract issue. It appeared inside the everyday worlds that shaped family life: bedrooms and phones, social media and peer networks, schools and churches, and the ongoing work of body safety and family conversation. Paying attention to these locations was analytically important. It prevented the analysis from treating parents’ stories as disembodied moral statements and kept them situated in the ordinary, material contexts where responsibility and care were being negotiated.

This approach changed how I handled moments when a parent seemed to stray off topic. In the middle of talking about pornography, a parent participant might suddenly pivot to a story about school bullying, or how a PlayStation interacts with digital spaces that a parent was initially unaware. So, I decided not to cut these tangents or 'rabbit-holes' out as irrelevant noise but rather pay closer attention to them. A story about a teenager's bullying experience or a troublesome encounter on a seemingly 'innocent' platform like the PlayStation was not a distraction; it was the backdrop that gave their fears about pornography its real weight. These sideways moves showed that parents rarely saw explicit content in isolation. For them, pornography was entangled with broader, messy realities like online visibility or peer pressure — the struggle to keep their adolescent children safe without smothering them.

In a local story, Waitere and Johnston (2009) distinguish passive listening from hearing as an active, relational practice. This distinction was vital in the participants sharing of their story with me, because its somewhat like a team sport where two people build understanding together. The context of our relationship is what co-created the narrative. A parent might enter the interview using the vocabulary of their church, talking about "purity" and "temptation." Another might use the language of modern psychology, referring to "boundaries" and "open communication." I brought my own ways of speaking, shaped by research, my maintenance of a gendered social power relationship shaped by both my own cultural conditioning and socially constructed awareness.

Meaning was not simply collected; it was actively negotiated as we worked out what words like "risk," "safety," or "trust" actually meant to both of us in that moment. I acknowledge as the researcher that parent participants tailored what they shared with me based on what they felt appropriate to tell an 'educated white father born in Aotearoa New Zealand'— my positionality had potential for an array of power dynamics. Therefore,

ethical hearing meant remaining attentive to these conditions and resisting the temptation to flatten cultural or meanings into one interpretive frame.

This approach also treated ordinary parental labour as knowledge worthy of analysis. Worrying, checking, setting rules, losing patience, returning to conversation, and trying to remain available were not merely anecdotes. They were situated practices through which parents negotiated wider discourses of ‘good' parenting, risk, sexuality, gender, and responsibility.

Research Process

Recruitment, Eligibility, and Voluntary Participation

Researching parental stories of adolescents’ encounters with pornography required heightened ethical care from the outset (Lee, 1993; Liamputtong, 2007). Because such conversations around taboo topics like pornography that tie into sex, conversations can readily evoke feelings of judgement or discomfort. So instead of putting a parent participant on the spot, I prioritised their interviewee agency in the recruitment process to maximise their freedom and control.

I adopted an indirect, participant-led snowball approach. Study information was circulated through trusted contacts and community networks without those intermediaries identifying potential participants to me. Interested parents had to initiate contact themselves. This boundary was deliberate: it removed any subtle social obligation to take part, protected relational safety, and ensured that parents entered the research relationship entirely on their own terms.

In practice, this approach meant recruitment took considerably longer than a more direct strategy would have. As a full-time student, there was a period well into the academic year when I doubted whether I would reach the six-to-ten participants

recommended by my supervisors. In the end, six parents initiated contact and were interviewed near the close of the academic year. While slower, the process remained consistent with the ethical priority I had set that no parent should feel obliged or exposed in order to take part. The parents' decision to participate may indicate a greater willingness than other parents to discuss sexuality, digital life, or family difficulty. This self-selection is treated as part of the situated conditions of the study rather than as a defect to be eliminated.

Participants

The study sought parents or primary caregivers of adolescents aged 13 to 18 who knew or believed that their adolescent had encountered internet-mediated pornography. Recruitment materials initially used the language of exposure. Eligibility was operationalised broadly and could include direct disclosure, accidental discovery, observed online activity, concern about peer or platform circulation, or a parent's belief that an encounter had probably occurred. The study did not attempt to verify adolescents' pornography use. The analytic concern was how parents made sense of and responded to what they knew, suspected, or believed.

The final group of participants comprised six parents or caregivers living in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis. See Table 1 for a participant overview. The study did not seek demographic representativeness or statistical generalisation. It sought detailed, situated stories from parents willing to speak about a sensitive topic.

Dataset adequacy was considered in relation to the research question, the richness and complexity of the interviews, and the depth of interpretive engagement possible (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The six accounts provided substantial narrative material across

varied parenting, cultural, religious, and vocational contexts. I did not treat saturation as a universal threshold that could mechanically determine adequacy. The question was whether the dataset supported a coherent and sufficiently rich analysis, which it did.

Table 1 ***Participant Overview***

Pseudonym	Parent/caregiver role	Narrative context
Anna	Mother	Digital access, bodily safety, bullying, social media, and unequal parental responsibility.
Lovely	Mother	Migration, Christian and cultural values, sex talk, inherited 'pornography as taboo', and selective openness, tension between progressive and conservative tradition
Angus	Father	Christian responsibility, filters, boundaries, technological limits, and wider support, digital surveillance fatigue, awareness of potential over protection
Roberta	Mother	Discovery of pornography, Muslim moral language, wellbeing, technological controls, and household visibility.
Freda	Mother	Inherited body shame, taboo, social media, secrecy, and efforts to keep conversation possible.
Jill	Mother	Openness, trust, conversations with her son, critical awareness, and the need for school and public education.

Parents who lacked time, considered the topic too private, or did not wish to speak with a researcher are absent from the study. These absences matter because the analysis

reflects stories produced by people who were prepared to talk. The themes should therefore be understood as an interpretive account of this dataset, not as a generalisable map of parents' experiences.

Recognising how easily families can be identified within the tight-knit social and community networks of Aotearoa New Zealand, I assigned pseudonyms to all participants and deliberately moderated specific contextual details. This reflexive choice allowed me to preserve the authentic emotional voice of each narrative while maintaining a strict ethical shield around participants private lives.

Gathering Stories

Although face-to-face interviewing was initially considered, technological barriers started to occur for both me and the first participant on our first attempt to do a Zoom face-to-face call. After some real 'teething issues' from me, we resolved it to call over the phone. The second participant also opted for a phone call based on her limited time. After these interviews, I provided options and in the end the participants expressed a clear preference for phone interviews to fit their daily routines. I intentionally embraced this medium, recognising it as a relational choice rather than a pragmatic compromise. Conducting these conversations by phone removed geographical friction while granting parents complete spatial control over their participation. Speaking from their own chosen, private environments allowed parents to calibrate their physical and emotional proximity to the research encounter.

As an interviewer, working without visual cues required me to adapt my own analytical presence. I was able to shift my focus entirely to vocal cadence, tone, and the heavy pauses between words. While I do not assume the telephone automatically dissolved the difficulty of discussing sensitive family topics, the absence of visual scrutiny provided

a less performative, less exposed space for candid reflection. In evaluating the interview setting, I must account for my own socialised instincts regarding cross-gender dynamics. Raised within a Protestant church environment, I was trained to apply principles of pastoral accountability and relational vigilance to one-on-one, cross-gender interactions. For years, I have held a deep-seated ethical caution around being alone in enclosed spaces with women.

Consequently, the transition to telephone interviewing was not merely a pragmatic or methodological choice, but a deeply personal one. The absence of physical visual contact relieved a subtle, inherited vigilance within my own mindset. In line with Harding's (1991) concept of strong objectivity, which demands that the researcher critically inspect their own background rather than hide behind a mask of neutral detachment, naming this pastoral habitus makes visible the subtle, gendered ways I navigated relational safety and propriety in the field.

This choice also aligns with methodological research demonstrating that phone interviews generate narratives of comparable depth and richness to in-person meetings, with the reduced social presence often offering a crucial protective buffer when exploring sensitive personal lives.

The interviews were semi-structured and narratively oriented (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Riessman, 2008), designed to foster a collaborative space rather than a rigid interrogation. While a flexible interview guide (see Appendix A) outlined core areas of inquiry, such as parenting, digital media, pornography encounters, responsibility, communication, and support, I treated these subject matters as broad thematic anchors rather than a fixed checklist. Opening each conversation with an invitation for parents to start their story in how their general digital everyday may look like. It required me to step

back as the expert interviewer, surrendering narrative control so participants could establish their own entry points and pacing. Narrative interviewing is a relational craft rather than a mechanical technique, and my own posture as an interviewer evolved noticeably over the course of the study. As a researcher new to narrative inquiry, I became increasingly accustomed to the fluid rhythms of storytelling with each conversation. By the final interview, I had developed a more intuitive attunement to pauses, cadence, and open-ended exploration. This shift was also supported by my growing familiarity with the surrounding literature and its connection to the research question. Rather than using this knowledge to steer the conversation, feeling more theoretically grounded gave me the confidence to hold questions loosely and respond more fluidly to the participant's narrative lead. In line with a feminist ethics of reflexivity, naming this learning curve does not diminish the rich validity of the earlier accounts. Rather, it acknowledges that qualitative research is an embodied learning process wherein the researcher's capacity to hold space deepens through practice.

Because adolescents were not direct participants in this study, I exercised a conscious ethical restraint regarding their specific online behaviours. I deliberately avoided probing for unnecessary or intrusive details about young people's exposure to pornography, treating their privacy as a key relational boundary. Instead, the narrative lens remained anchored in the parents' own lived experiences. I focused on how parents constructed their meaning around the digital everyday and how they navigated moments of confrontation when knowing came to past. Were there any moral and developmental anxieties that surfaced for them? And were their ways these encounters reshaped family relationships. Conducted with explicit, written consent, the audio-recorded interviews ranged from 40 to 90 minutes. Most conversations reached a natural conclusion around the

one-hour mark, often signalled by subtle conversational cues indicating that participants were ready to wrap up.

Transcription and Familiarisation

Moving from theoretical design to reflexive analysis demanded an active, relational type of attention — a deep listening accompanied by an active presence. Transcription served as an early and vital stage of familiarisation with participants' narratives. Transcribing each interview personally allowed me to spend extended time with the stories before formal coding commenced. Rather than treating transcription as a mechanical, clerical task, I approached it as an early relational encounter—a process of ethical hearing rather than passive listening (Waitere & Johnston, 2009).

Listening repeatedly to the audio recordings tuned my attention to the art of hearing of stories: moments where parents spoke directly and confidently, versus instances marked by hesitation, anxiety, or defensive humour. Over time, deciphering vocal cadence, long pauses, sighs, and changes in tone revealed layers of meaning that were less visible in written transcripts alone. Digressions that I initially mislabelled as "rabbit holes" proved analytically significant, demonstrating how parents located pornography encounters within the broader domestic ecology of family life.

Listening back also required becoming accustomed to the sound of my own voice, the imperfect nature of my interviewing, and the frequent hesitations of a novice researcher. Over time, these apparent imperfections became analytically useful, highlighting moments where the calm, composed demeanour of participants — such as professional caregivers offering polished, executive-style summaries — challenged my posture and required me to listen more than mechanically.

Moving iteratively between the surface of the stories and latent interpretation came via me working with my literature review and ontological and epistemological positioning (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This required constant reflexive vigilance. Rather than remaining at the surface of explicit, well-formed narratives — in which they were — reflexive thematic analysis demanded an intentional reset: pushing beyond what was mechanically situated to interrogate the moral assumptions and unspoken cultural discourses shaping each parent's story.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to generate patterns of shared meaning across the six narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Unlike traditional thematic analysis, which treats themes as "diamonds buried in the dirt" (Braun & Clarke, 2016, p. 740) waiting to be uncovered, themes were actively constructed through my interpretive engagement with the stories. I remained actively involved in shaping meaning throughout the analytic process, continually returning to the stories, testing my interpretations, and noticing where my own assumptions shaped what I was able to see. For example, when one mother spoke with intense shock and apparent anger about an online exposure, my initial reading was to categorise her response as punitive or reactive. However, returning to the transcript and reflecting on the broader pressures of parenting allowed me to see past the anger. What appeared on the surface as anger became an expression of deep fear and frustration, a protective instinct when faced with a threat she felt ill-equipped to control.

My personal engagement was rather iterative. I did not understand analysis as a linear movement from raw data to discovered themes. Instead, analysis involved repeated movement between transcripts, codes, and especially theoretical ideas like epistemology and the operations of power. Importantly, reflexive questions, and writing was pivotal in

the analysis process. moving to and from my literature review and understandings of how this thesis was birthed.

The analysis was a fluid, recursive process rather than a linear run through a checklist. I moved continuously between reading transcripts, drafting codes, grouping candidate themes, and writing analytic notes. Early on, for example, I noticed how often parents returned to the moment of discovery on a phone; what began as a simple descriptive code around “finding content” gradually thickened into questions about shock, moral rupture, and the sudden re-positioning of the parent–child relationship. I would return to the raw stories to test whether a developing idea still held, refine theme names as theoretical connections became clearer, and let the act of writing itself challenge and reshape my interpretations. Although the work was organised around the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), familiarisation, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and writing, the actual process felt more like an ongoing dialogue between the stories, the concepts I was working with, and my own shifting insights. What worked well with me practically, was the ‘old school’, coloured felt tips (theme distinction), A4 paper, scissors, and a large floor to build the map (see Figure 1).

Coding was an interpretive practice rather than a neutral, administrative procedure, though it did often come across as mundane and clerical. Early coding stayed close to participants’ everyday language, capturing phrases like “open-door rules,” “Family Link,” and putting digital safety in the “too-hard basket.”

As coding progressed, these plain phrases revealed complex layers of meaning. For example, when I asked a Māori identifying parent how the Māori community made meaning (recognising that Māori are relational and that my question intially disconnected the individual parent from the family context), she responded that pornography, was an

issue placed in the ‘too-hard basket’. This phrase opened up a deeply layered reality. It captured the tension between the invisible, culturally delicate (tapu) nature of online sexuality and the urgent, tangible demands of collective life, such as food security, substance risks, and upholding cultural protocols. Pushing digital monitoring into the ‘too-hard basket’ was not a lack of care; it was a pragmatic negotiation of competing survival priorities in a collective world.

Over time, coding moved from describing explicit actions to interpreting the relational tensions underneath. Strategies like installing filters, restricting screens, and checking phones initially appeared as straightforward safety measures. Through repeated comparison across accounts, however, they emerged as a fragile dynamic where control was narrated as care, yet felt intrusive, incomplete, and anxious.

This shift to interpretive depth relied on reflecting on moments where my own assumptions bumped against a participant’s boundaries. In one interview with an experienced maternal health practitioner, I caught myself implicitly framing her son’s brief engagement with a psychologist as a positive “step forward.” Her subtle hesitation and precise composure immediately checked my assumption. She reminded me they were only a few sessions in, quietly protecting her son’s narrative from being pathologised or stripped of “normalcy.”

This moment transformed how I coded surrounding data. What I had initially categorised as “seeking professional support” or “open communication” became coded as a careful, protective negotiation of labels and shame. Across the narratives, whether navigating therapy or speaking around the edges of pornography, parents were engaged in a delicate act of protection: attempting to safeguard their children’s digital and emotional worlds while fiercely defending their dignity from external judgment.

Theme development involved identifying central organising concepts rather than simply grouping similar topics together. I continually tested whether a candidate theme offered a coherent analytic story across accounts, asking how it answered the research question and where it sat in relation to broader power structures.

This process required wrestling with everyday terms like “control” and “protection”. Coming from a straightforward, hyper-independent background, my initial instinct was to treat these words as having firm, almost clinical boundaries. However, as I worked across high-context and collective stories, I realised that terms like “control” were heavily coated in Western, neoliberal, and colonising assumptions.

Rather than discarding these familiar words, I used theme refinement to re-contextualise them for the reader. Candidate themes were combined and renamed to capture how “control” in these narratives was not a simple display of authority, but a complex, culturally situated negotiation of care, vulnerability, and collective responsibility. Refining theme names in this way allowed me to unpack everyday vocabulary and expose the deeper relational forces working underneath. The final analysis generated four interconnected themes:

“The Good Parent Script” sets the stage by examining the heavy societal expectations that frame what 'responsible parenting' has come to require in a digital age (Hays, 1996; Lee et al., 2014; Rose, 1999).

“When ‘No’ Is Not Enough” traces what happens when those protective intentions collide with reality — exposing the structural fragility of technical 'hardware' under platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019) and forcing a pivot toward relationally cultivated discernment.

“Known but Unspeakable” extends the analysis to the limits of speech, examining how pornography operates as an 'elephant in the room' constrained by body shame, religious discourses, and inherited family silences (Ahmed, 2004; Probyn, 2005).

“Keeping the Door Open” captures the move toward domestic 'software', tracing how parents cultivate trust, kōrero, and critical language to remain response-able (Haraway, 2016) within shared digital environments. The generation and refinement of these four themes represented one part of the interpretive process. Equally critical was the ongoing ethical and representational practice required when handling sensitive domestic narratives, as detailed in the analysis and discussion chapters that follow.

Ethical Orientations

Institutional Approval, Consent, and Minimising Harm

My study engaged with a sensitive and deeply stigmatised topic — the domestic negotiation of adolescents’ encounters with internet-mediated pornography within family, cultural, and personal faith contexts. Institutional approval was granted by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 3 (Application number: OM3 25/67; see Appendix D). Guided by Massey University’s *Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants* (Massey University, 2017), the ethical application comprehensively addressed recruitment, informed consent, confidentiality, participant wellbeing, researcher safety, data management, and the protection of non-consenting third parties.

Following ethics approval, I distributed a study advertisement (Appendix C) through my offline social and community networks. Prospective participants made initial contact via my university email or phone number. Upon contact, I thanked participants for their time and conducted a brief pre-screening conversation to confirm eligibility. Once

eligibility was established, I transmitted the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) via the participant's preferred communication channel. Parents were given several weeks to review the document and ask clarifying questions before signing and returning the written consent form (Appendix B) prior to the interview.

Participation was strictly voluntary: parents retained the right to decline any question, pause the recording, or stop the interview at any stage without penalty or explanation. Furthermore, participants were provided with the opportunity to review, edit, or clarify their completed interview transcripts prior to analysis, formalising their approval via a signed Authority for the Release of Transcript form (Appendix F).

Minimising harm required establishing clear analytical boundaries. The interview guide (Appendix E) was intentionally designed to focus on parental meaning-making and relational dynamics rather than probing for explicit accounts of adolescents' digital or sexual behaviours. This boundary was important for me because adolescents and other relatives (and friends) who were (potentially) discussed in the interviews had not consented to participate directly. Protecting these non-consenting third parties demanded ongoing vigilance during every sing step of the research process ensuring family dynamics were represented with dignity, strict anonymity, and contextual care.

My supervisors and I recognised that securing institutional approval was a necessary foundation rather than an endpoint. In practice, ethics was lived as a continuous relational and representational responsibility (Haraway, 2016; Riessman, 2008). Entering these sensitive narratives required navigating intense social taboos, holding a non-judgmental space for potentially distressing reflections, and exercising immense care in how these delicate family stories were re-presented across the final text.

Te Tiriti-Informed and Bicultural Considerations

The study was conducted within Aotearoa New Zealand and required active engagement with Te Tiriti-informed, bicultural ethical responsibilities. Rather than treating Te Ara Tika (Hudson et al., 2010) as a passive checklist, its core principles of whakapapa (relationships), tika (correct practice), manaakitanga (care), and mana (integrity) guided the everyday mechanics of the research. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999/2012) decolonising critique further reinforced that research is never culturally neutral. It served as a constant reminder that parents' stories are not raw data to be extracted, but living stories requiring ongoing accountability.

Early in the research process I consulted with Dr Pita King, a Māori academic and cultural advisor at Massey University. This was great insight, and what I took away was that there are institutional procedures to abide by, then there are relationships we need to consider. We spoke over a Zoom call, and I felt it was a good learning experience. Looking back at some of the feminist articulations of mana wāhine and the diversity of Māori women's lived and embodied realities, it matters that we attune ourselves to these differences across our different locations. Naomi Simmonds (2011) understanding of spaces where in-betweenness, contradiction, and all things that honour difference, was a great ethical approach we ought to live our research processes. Our response-ability to re-frame our human variation is crucial, and provides vital cultural accountability, here in Aotearoa.

Te Tiriti understandings actively pushed me to interrogate my own assumptions, guiding how participant identities were framed. It was important for me in how Māori language like kōrero were used, and how the parent participants were all diverse and unique. These dynamics, the richness of human voice required researcher representation

that avoided flattening them into a single group — like a dominant Western psychological narrative for example.

My ethical test was whether the research upheld or diminished the mana of those involved. In practice, upholding mana meant discarding any assumption that the interview was inherently therapeutic or beneficial for the parent. It required resisting extractive line-questioning, honouring the boundaries parents drew around their stories, and representing their household realities without sensationalism, judgment, or cultural generalisation.

Relational and Affirmative Ethics

I understood participants' narratives as stories shared within a relationship. Feminist and relational ethics became very important to me at the beginning of the research process — I understood that human beings vitally need to be built on compassion, empathy and older language like mercy. Haraway (1988) helped me to be better informed by giving greater attention to power and accountability in the interview encounter (Harding, 1987; 1988; Oakley, 2016). Participants were able to tell stories in their own way, including when those stories moved beyond pornography into adjacent family and digital concerns.

An affirmative orientation (Braidotti, 2013, 2019) also encouraged me not to organise the project solely through themes of harm, deficiency, shame, or parental failure. Engaging with Naomi's work (2011) again reconnected me with the necessity of resisting frameworks that construct difference through deficit, lack, and comparison; measuring participant accounts against a dominant normative baseline remains a fundamentally colonising practice. By rejecting this comparative lens, the analysis avoids pathologising parents' struggles, treating their distinct relational realities not as departures from an ideal standard, but as valid, complex sites of meaning-making in their own right.

This revigorated and reshaped how I approached parental anxiety. Crucially, this orientation did not minimise parents' real concerns or dismiss the genuine risks they navigated. Instead, stepping away from a deficit lens opened an additional analytic question: what capacities for conversation, care, knowledge, and shared response might become possible within difficult conditions? The fuller ethical and political implications of this affirmative, response-able posture are developed in Chapter 6.

Ethical practice continued through analysis and writing. Extracts were selected only when they contributed to an analytic claim, and unnecessary identifying or distressing detail was removed. Ellipses were used to shorten extracts without deleting material that changed their meaning. Ethical representation required neither simply reproducing participants' words nor judging them from outside their moral worlds. It required interpretation with context, caution, and accountability.

Confidentiality, Data Management, and Researcher Safety

Confidentiality was approached not merely as a technical mask, but as a relational commitment to protect participant whānau. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and identifying details regarding adolescents, family members, schools, faith communities, workplaces, and local neighbourhoods were systematically removed or altered. In the participant summary table, demographic combinations were deliberately generalised because even subtle overlaps in family structure and community location could inadvertently make a household recognisable within Aotearoa New Zealand's small social networks.

Digital research data, including audio recordings, transcripts, analytic notes, consent documentation, and draft files, were managed in accordance with the approved ethics protocol and data-management plan. All files were secured within encrypted Massey

University OneDrive storage, strictly restricted to myself and my supervisory team, with consent forms stored separately from transcripts to disrupt any direct linkage. Data will be retained securely for five years following completion before being permanently deleted.

Because young people were present solely through their parents' stories, I exercised heightened vigilance during transcription and extract selection. I intentionally withheld material that risked exposing, embarrassing, or fixing the identities of adolescents who had not consented to the research. Protecting these non-participating youth meant ensuring that parental vulnerability did not come at the expense of an adolescent's privacy or future narrative autonomy.

Researcher safety and emotional integrity were sustained through regular supervision. At times, the sheer chaos of my life threatened to spill directly into supervision. I was being pressed from every angle, carrying a physical fatigue that felt less like routine tiredness and more like surviving severe burnout. In that state, the impulse to offload external struggles was strong. However, reviewing Massey's supervisory frameworks prompted an essential reality check. I realised that time was critical, and my supervisors' primary role was to navigate me through to completion. Learning to protect supervision for thesis progression forced me to hold a necessary boundary, keeping our limited time focused entirely on driving the project forward despite the surrounding pressure.

Listening to parents navigate digital harm and family life frequently resonated with my own experiences as a father, my professional background, and my personal commitments. Supervision was a privilege and it functioned well as a vital reflexive site. Through supervision, I actively interrogated my emotional reactions, confronted interpretive risks, and navigated ethical uncertainties as they arose. This continuous

grounding ensured that my own anxieties as a father sharpened my analytical empathy rather than distorting the parents' stories.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has set out the methodological framework of the study: a Big Q qualitative design that is narratively oriented, critically social constructionist, and analysed through reflexive thematic analysis. The project was designed to examine how parents construct meaning and negotiate responses within digital complexity. Narrative inquiry preserved the temporal and relational texture of parents and adolescents, while reflexive thematic analysis enabled the development of a four-theme account across six situated stories.

Enacting these frameworks in practice required ongoing ethical and reflexive attention. I chose my methodological choices carefully. My choice of conceptual framework was shaped by an awareness of how culture impacts moral expectations and invisible spaces like taboo and stigma. The play of institutional power was pivotal in my methodological selection — I was not going to hyper individualise — I was interested in the structure and powerful systems at play that induce public fear and invisibleness. Reflexivity and my researcher positionality were crucial — a father, a Christian, a Pākehā New Zealander influence relationships and narrative accounts. Finally, the digital conditions, the digital everyday influences what could be spoken and what remained difficult to name — I am aware that there are many places to hide, to remain anonymous but also challenging to find the language that connects others that are not quite familiar with digital lived experiences. Having established how these stories were gathered, held, and interpreted, the thesis now turns to the analysis. Chapters 4 and 5 trace how parents move from the heavy burden of individualised responsibility toward the unfinished, relational possibilities of response-able care.

Chapter 4: Analysis I: Responsibility and the Limits of Control

Beginning the Analysis

This chapter presents the themes generated and co-constructed from interviewing six parents in Aotearoa New Zealand as they reflected on their adolescents' encounters with internet-mediated pornography. While the preceding chapter outlined my methodological design, presenting these narratives demands a brief note on my own analytical posture. Sitting with these stories as both a critical researcher and a father of young children required constant reflexive vigilance. As a father, I felt an immediate, protectionist empathy toward participants' fears regarding the algorithmic "dopaminergic pull" of digital platforms and the perceived loss of childhood innocence (McGinn et al., 2016). At the same time, I experienced a form of analytical "culture shock." Having grown up in social circles where digital exposure was largely normalised — much like pervasive binge-drinking culture — I initially viewed adolescent porn encounters as an almost inevitable background noise of modern life. Recognising this personal baseline was crucial: it prevented me from minimising the acute moral rupture and profound grief experienced by parents for whom such exposure represented a devastating violation. Through iterative analysis, it became clear that pornography was rarely narrated by parents as a standalone object. Instead, it was thoroughly entangled with domestic space, digital saturation, relational availability, and the heavy load of modern caregiving.

This chapter is structured around the first two overarching themes:

- **Theme One:** "The Good Parent Script: Carrying the Burden of Responsibility". This theme analyses how "responsible parenting" is constructed as a demanding moral position requiring continuous protection, education, and relational availability. The analysis reveals how the "Good

Parent Script" (Hays, 1996; Rose, 1999) operates as an intensive, privatised burden — expecting parents to maintain constant vigilance, offer moral guidance, and manage domestic emotional climate even within digital environments they cannot fully govern or contain.

- **Theme Two:** "When 'No' Is Not Enough: The Limits of Control in the Digital Everyday". This theme examines what happens when protective intentions meet the material realities of platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). The analysis demonstrates that while parents deploy filters, Family Link software, modem lockouts, and spatial rules (such as open bedroom doors) as meaningful practices of care, these "hardware" boundaries are inherently fragile. They crack under the combined weight of adolescent technological fluency, co-parenting divides, and ambient algorithmic saturation. Crucially, the theme traces a decisive analytical shift: as external technical control proves incomplete, parents begin relocating protection from external surveillance to an internalised, relationally cultivated practice of critical discernment.

Theme 1: The Good Parent Script: Carrying the Burden of Responsibility

Through repeated engagement with the six stories, I developed responsibility as one of the most analytically salient patterns through which parents made sense of adolescents' encounters with internet-mediated pornography. Parents positioned themselves as needing to respond: to protect adolescents from material understood as harmful or overwhelming, to help them interpret what they might encounter, and to remain available so difficult experiences could still be brought into conversation.

I brought these interconnected expectations together through the “Good Parent Script”. The phrase is my own analytic construction, informed by scholarship on intensive parenting, responsibilisation, and culturally available sexual scripts (Hays, 1996; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2014; Rose, 1999). The script demanded both protective vigilance and intensive relational labour. A “good” parent was expected to notice risk, establish appropriate boundaries, offer guidance, and remain emotionally accessible — even when the digital environment appeared pervasive, morally charged, and difficult to understand.

“The Good Parent Script” was therefore more than a collection of strategies. I interpreted it as a burdened moral position through which parents constructed what they ought to notice, prevent, explain, and respond to. I organised this theme around three interconnected forms of responsibility: protection, education, and relational availability. These forms reveal how care became demanding not only because parents felt responsible, but because that responsibility extended into conditions no individual parent could fully govern.

Responsibility as Protection

Protection was one of the clearest ways parents narrated responsible care. Its organising meaning was not any single rule or device setting, but the felt obligation to remain attentive and to act when harm appeared possible. Parents positioned passivity as difficult to reconcile with being responsible, even when the action available to them was partial, intrusive, or uncertain.

Anna, a mother and the primary parent of a 16 year-old daughter, described being closely involved in her daughter’s everyday safety and wellbeing. While recognising her daughter’s increasing independence, she narrated responsible parenting through bodily

protection, continued availability, and a readiness to intervene when she believed her daughter was unsafe.

She explained: “I’ll always pick my phone up to her … because, you know, twice now she’s been attacked and I want to always be there for her.” Although this extract was not directly about pornography, it sat within Anna’s wider account of schoolyard and online bullying, bodily vulnerability, and parental intervention. Protection extended beyond managing digital access. It involved remaining emotionally and practically reachable when her daughter felt unsafe. Within Anna’s story, responsible parenting meant refusing to remain passive when she believed harm was occurring.

Having been raised primarily by a solo mother, I recognised Anna’s continual availability through a familiar narrative of maternal protection and sacrifice. This sensitised me to the labour involved in carrying primary responsibility, but it may also have inclined me to interpret intensive availability as self-evidently caring. I therefore held this reading alongside questions about the gendered expectations through which vigilance and sacrifice become normalised as maternal duty.

Roberta migrated from Bangladesh to Aotearoa New Zealand with her husband and their teenage son. Her story foregrounded the practical and ongoing labour involved in supervising an adolescent’s digital life through filtering software, manual phone checking, and household visibility rules. She positioned her son as technologically capable, describing him with a mixture of pride and concern as “a very smart boy” who was “really good with IT” and able to circumvent systems intended to regulate his access. His competence therefore complicated her attempts at oversight: the more capable he became, the more provisional parental control appeared.

In sharing her story, Roberta foregrounded protection through a combination of technological tools and continuing parental oversight. She used Family Link to monitor and restrict her son's phone use but recognised that technological controls could be altered or bypassed.

> **Damian:** So, I'm just wondering whether you would employ software to make your job easier with the accountability or would you manually look at their browsing data? How would you what strategies? What strategies do you we have?
>
> **Roberta:** Have the family link? Yes, yeah, we have the family link…

Here, the framing of monitoring as a "job" underscores the heavy lifting of digital policing expected of parents. By confirming her reliance on Family Link, Roberta positioned herself as the daily manager of this software. However, she recognised that these technological controls could ultimately be altered or bypassed by her son. Her account demonstrates that employing software does not actually eliminate the labour of accountability; rather, it shifts the parent's burden from manually checking browser history to constantly supervising the boundaries and limitations of the app itself.

The detailed practices through which she attempted this oversight are examined in Theme 2; here, their significance lies in the obligation she felt to keep trying.

Roberta's vigilance also shows how protective responsibility can become continuous rather than episodic. The concern was not resolved by installing a setting once. Her son's growing competence meant that supervision had to be revisited, adjusted, and supplemented:

> **Roberta:** And he [the husband] has this software called Kaspersky Kids... it restricts some age inappropriate contents... So this software is running in our home already. Yeah. So I took the phone to my husband and I said, 'what on earth is going on? Because I

thought you got this'. And he was in shock... So we just breathe and we just tried to process like how he got this content on his phone...

This positioned parental care as a form of ongoing attentiveness in which success could never be confirmed: even the absence of visible problems could not assure her that the system was working. The burden lay partly in this uncertainty, because responsible care appeared to require action without providing a stable point at which the parent could consider the task complete.

Across these accounts, protection operated as a moral demand to notice, anticipate, and intervene. I initially found this form of responsibility readily understandable because action appeared to demonstrate care. Yet equating care with constant vigilance risked making parental inaction appear negligent and concealing the unequal labour such vigilance required. Protection therefore carried both ethical significance and burden: it allowed parents to act, while positioning them as answerable for risks they could never fully remove.

This interpretation does not establish that parents were compelled by one uniform cultural script or that every protective action carried the same meaning. Anna's availability, for example, was grounded in a history of bodily danger, whereas Roberta's vigilance developed through a specific discovery and a concern about technological circumvention. What connected the stories was not identical behaviour but the moral positioning through which parents made themselves answerable for noticing and responding.

As the limits of prevention became more visible, responsibility extended beyond keeping harmful material out. Parents also described needing to equip adolescents with language and interpretive resources for what might nevertheless get through.

Responsibility as Education

Educational responsibility was less immediately visible than filters, rules, or device removal because it was woven through everyday conversations, warnings, moral guidance, and attempts to explain difficult material. Reflexively, my initial analytical attention was drawn to these concrete actions because they represented the comfortable ‘hardware’ of digital parenting — tangible, measurable steps that appeared to answer how parentsmaintained control. It took sitting deeper with the transcripts to recognise that this focus on hardware was masking the crucial, relational ‘software’ of domestic life, where protection is negotiated not through device lockouts, but through ongoing human connection. Repeated reading shifted my attention toward how parents prepared adolescents for encounters that direct prevention could not eliminate.

This shift also changed how I understood the research question. Parents rarely constructed pornography as a discrete or bounded category. It appeared within a broader ecology of social media, peer circulation, online searching, bodily safety, and sexualised culture. Education became analytically significant because parents described trying to give adolescents language, judgement, and resources for navigating this wider environment. Education was also a way of responding to the temporal problem parents described. They could not know when an encounter might occur or be physically present when it did. Guidance therefore had to travel beyond the immediate conversation, becoming language or interpretive resources adolescents might draw upon later. This made education protective without reducing it to prevention: it sought to shape how an encounter could be recognised, interpreted, and brought back into relationship.

For Anna, education was shaped by her own experiences of sexual harm and by her sense that she had not been given language or confidence when she was younger. Rather

than reproducing the graphic details of those experiences, the analytic point lies in how they informed the guidance she offered her daughter:

> **Anna:** I've always said to [her], 'It's your body, your rules. Nobody gets to touch you in a way that makes you feel yuck. And if they do ever try it, you just tell somebody, tell an adult.' … I always sort of tried to give her that confidence to do that.

The phrase "your body, your rules" positioned bodily authority as something Anna's daughter could name and claim. Anna was not only attempting to prevent harm; she was providing language through which discomfort, boundaries, and unsafe experiences could be recognised and disclosed. I interpreted this as responsibility enacted through preparation rather than prevention alone.

Roberta's account developed education through a different moral vocabulary. After finding pornography on her son's phone, she described him as interpreting the encounter through religious language and worrying that he had "sinned as a Muslim". Roberta did not remove morality from the conversation, but she redirected its emphasis toward his developmental readiness and wellbeing:

> **Roberta:** I just don't want you to watch those things because I think you're too young to understand. … I don't know after watching this how your brain will react, how your body will react. … I'm not worried about sin at the moment … I'm worried about your mental health and wellbeing.

I initially read this as a movement from moral failure toward developmental care. That interpretation appealed to me because my own experience of shame made me sensitive to responses that might narrow communication. On closer reading, however, Roberta did not simply reject moral concern. She reorganised it through care, moving

emphasis away from condemnation of her son's character and toward his readiness, body, mind, and wellbeing. An alternative reading is that religious regulation was partly supplemented by psychological and developmental regulation. Holding both readings prevents care and regulation from being treated as opposites.

Roberta also recalled the unprepared shock of the discovery: "I knew … at some point in time they will probably [watch] these things. But I just wasn't prepared for that early."

My commitment to non-shaming approaches made me want to move quickly past the disgust and awkwardness Roberta described and celebrate the later conversation as "good" education. Staying with the account showed that shock and the sense of "too early" were central to how she understood responsibility. Education did not replace her values or discomfort; it became a way of attempting to communicate them without reducing her son to wrongdoing.

The educational labour parents described was also unevenly supported. Jill who was born in Aotearoa New Zealand drew on an intergenerational connection with Steiner education when making sense of screens and parenting. As she put it, "My mum and myself went to Steiner School, which is quite anti-screens." She also explicitly connected her therapeutic work and upbringing with her willingness to discuss difficult subjects: "…because of my work and the way I was raised, there's literally no topic that I wouldn't discuss [laughs]." Jill, for example, believed that most of her son's awareness had developed through parental discussion rather than through schools or public agencies.

I return to her account in Theme 2 because it shows the movement toward discernment, but it also reveals how educational responsibility was experienced as falling

back upon the family. “The Good Parent Script” thus asked parents to become not only monitors but informal sexuality and media educators.

Across the stories, educational responsibility involved more than possessing correct information. It depended on whether parents could enter difficult conversations despite embarrassment, uncertainty, and the silences inherited from their own families or communities. Within the “Good Parent Script”, parents were expected to provide adolescents with critical language and guidance even when they themselves had received little preparation for doing so.

Responsibility as Relational Availability

I conceptualised relational availability as a third key dimension of parental responsibility. I use the term to capture an ongoing effort to preserve the possibility of communication — remaining approachable, responsive, and willing to listen when adolescents bring forward experiences that are confusing, uncomfortable, or shame-laden. Within the “Good Parent Script”, availability became another demanding expectation of responsible care when parents recognised that they could not know or control everything occurring in adolescents’ digital lives.

Openness is also a value I bring to parenting, and this shaped what became visible to me in the conversations with the participants. I was inclined to interpret openness as self-evidently good. Reflexively, I needed to distinguish parents’ declarations of openness from evidence that adolescents always experienced the relationship as safe or chose to disclose. Relational availability is therefore better understood as an effort or aspiration than as an achieved family condition.

This expectation sat within the same wider processes of intensive parenting and responsibilisation that shaped protection and education. Parents were expected not only to

establish boundaries, but to manage the emotional conditions under which adolescents might disclose difficult experiences. Shame and silence can regulate what feels possible to say within relationships (Ahmed, 2004; Morgan & Coombes, 2001; Probyn, 2005). Relational availability therefore involved affective labour: parents were asked to regulate their own shock, anger, embarrassment, or disappointment so that a pathway back to conversation might remain open.

Jill developed this aspiration through the language of an open family. She described pornography as a topic that had entered discussion within the household and positioned herself as willing to engage with difficult subjects:

> **Damian:** So, when it comes to your experience in [...] the health sector, are you talking about [...] medical incidents or are you talking about violence or are you talking about a range of different issues that have come across your table [...]?
>
> **Jill:** And I think for me, it's come from [...] the area that I work in, we attend conferences and [...] different workshops. And they talk about children's safety. They talk about things like violence and access to [the] internet. [...] We have people from a wide range of topic[s] where people from mental health [...] come and talk about things happen[ing] around the kid. And then access to some of the other bullying and all those other stuff. So I hear them and I think maybe the more I hear them, I know too much. I get a bit more nervous because I have also got a little one, right? So, then I become more nervous.

Jill links her professional encounter at medical and mental health symposiums to her personal anxiety ("I know too much"), Jill illustrates how institutional knowledge about online risks intensifies the individualised burden on parents. Her willingness to maintain an "open family" is not merely a parenting preference; it is a defensive strategy

driven by a heightened, professionally informed awareness of the dangers surrounding her child. The anxiety she describes reveals a complex dynamic where the professional expectation to understand these threats translates into an overwhelming personal obligation to manage and mitigate them at home.

Jill's description could not establish that her son disclosed everything or experienced every conversation as comfortable. It could also be read as a family narrative through which she positioned openness as central to the parent she sought to be. Its analytic significance lies in the communicative environment she described and valued: pornography was not represented as entirely unspeakable, and she presented herself as someone her son could potentially return to without anticipating immediate rejection.

Freda, a Māori mother living in Northland and parenting a young son and three daughters, including an 18 year-old, reflected on the silences and shame that had shaped earlier conversations about bodies and sexuality in her family:

> **Freda:** I found out very quickly that I had to be more open with my daughters. I had to be more accepting [of] what things they were getting into. [...] I found that the more I tried to stop them from saying things and doing things on the internet, the more sneaky they'd be. And they [...] understood how to use the devices and these apps and everything much better than I could. So, I had to learn very quickly to sort of open a bit more to [my girls] and where no subject was taboo. [...] I feel as though I kept them safer because if something came up, they weren't scared to talk to me like, "oh my God, this guy sent me this." [...] So instead of trying to control, I had to open my relationship with my daughters and just make it okay for them to talk about anything with me.

As she linked these inherited patterns to contemporary pressures around social media, pornography, and the monetisation of sexual attention, I interpreted her account as challenging purely restrictive responses. In her story, young people required more than control; without adult guidance, they risked being left to make sense of these experiences alone.

Freda linked relational availability with the risk of making sexual and online matters excessively taboo. Her account positioned continued communication as part of protection rather than its opposite. Chapter 5 develops this tension more fully through her concern that shame and prohibition could narrow disclosure.

Lovely situated her story within a history of migration, having been raised in Zimbabwe, lived in another African nation, and later settled with her family in Aotearoa New Zealand. She described other African cultural traditions, Christian faith, and family expectations as important contexts through which sexuality, marriage, and parenting had been understood during her upbringing. Within the cultural and religious meanings she described, both sex and pornography had largely been treated as taboo — subjects that were difficult to name and, in the case of pornography, positioned as something that should not exist. Within this framework, Lovely presented relational availability through her account of her son confiding in her rather than his father: “We do talk about it, openly. He tells me things; he confides in me more than he does with his father.” Reading this moment, I understood availability as relationally specific rather than evenly distributed within the family. Her son did not necessarily experience “the parents” as a single, interchangeable source of support. Previous interactions, parenting styles, gendered family roles, and anticipated reactions may have shaped whom he experienced as approachable, consistent with broader recognitions that communicative and care labour is often unevenly

distributed (Tronto, 2013). Lovely's story made visible to me how the communicative labour of parenting may become unevenly distributed.

Across repeated readings of the parents' stories, I became increasingly attentive to moments in which they described answering the phone, remaining calm, making subjects less taboo, or attempting to keep conversation possible. I brought these moments together through what I came to call relational availability; one way parents attempted to respond to uncertainty when they could not know everything their adolescents had encountered or anticipate what might occur next. My own investment in relationships as spaces of openness, respect, and negotiation made this form of care particularly visible and appealing to me. It may also have inclined me to interpret declared openness too readily as evidence of relational safety. Parents' claims that their adolescents could talk to them could not establish that adolescents always experienced the relationship in this way or would necessarily choose to disclose.

This is analytically different from claiming that open communication always existed or that parents could guarantee disclosure. Jill's confidence, Freda's warning, and Lovely's account of selective confiding each describe different relational possibilities. Collectively, these stories reveal parents attempting to govern the conditions of speakability, even as they recognised that adolescents maintained their own discretion over what to share, when to speak, and whom to trust.

Relational availability did not mean permissiveness. It involved trying to hold boundaries while attending to how challenging, heated emotions like anger, embarrassment, or disgust might shape what became speakable. Anticipated negative reactions can inhibit disclosure, whereas trust and careful listening can support intimate and challenging conversations about sexuality and pornography (Ashcraft & Murray, 2017;

Dawson et al., 2024). In this theme, relational availability remains part of the burden of responsible parenting; Chapter 5 later develops what such availability might make possible as a more affirmative, response-able orientation.

Across this theme, parents positioned themselves as needing to respond through protection, education, and relational availability. These were not separate techniques but interconnected expectations through which responsible parenting became intelligible. Parents attempted to notice risk, prepare adolescents for what they might encounter, and preserve the possibility of disclosure.

"The Good Parent Script" emerged as a burdened moral position rather than a neutral description of effective parenting. It concentrated responsibility within parents and households while requiring practical vigilance, interpretive guidance, and sustained emotional labour. This resonates with processes of responsibilisation, wherein families must continually negotiate the day-to-day fallout of risks produced across wider social, institutional, and technological conditions (Hays, 1996; Lee et al., 2014; Rose, 1999).

Theme 1 has therefore examined what parents believed responsible care required. Theme 2 turns to what happened when they attempted to enact that responsibility through rules, filters, monitoring, visible screens, and restrictions.

Theme 2: When "No" Is Not Enough: The Limits of Control in the Digital Everyday

If Theme 1 examined parental subjectivity and obligation, Theme 2 examines practice meeting reality. Parents used rules, filters, supervision, visible screens, and restrictions as meaningful ways of creating safety and communicating household values. Their stories also repeatedly unsettled the possibility that these practices could provide complete protection.

I generated this theme to capture how control operates simultaneously as an act of care and a site of material limitation. Through iterative engagement with the narratives, I came to interpret parental rules not as naive attempts at total dominance, but as provisional boundaries. My analysis highlights that parents were acutely aware of their own strategies' fragility — recognising that software locks and household rules crack easily under the pressure of pervasive Wi-Fi, incognito browsing, and adolescent resourcefulness.

My reading of these accounts highlights an ongoing analytical tension: parents continued to treat boundaries as vital enactments of care, even as they recognised that adolescents could bypass technical restrictions, encounter material through peers, move across platforms beyond adult visibility, or become increasingly difficult to monitor with age. Control was never narrated as merely technical. As a parent or human being for that matter, it is a deeply emotional act loaded with moral duty, love, but also guilt, shame and plenty of (invisible) insecurities. Installing a filter, checking a phone, or maintaining visibility carried emotional and moral meanings. These actions allowed parents to demonstrate concern and position themselves as attentive. At the same time, they involved surveillance, reduced privacy, and uncertainty about whether oversight was effective.

I organised this theme through four tightly interwoven moments. It begins with parents attempting to lock down digital spaces through rules, filters, and household boundary-setting. It then moves into the disruption of those boundaries, as adolescents circumvent controls, retreat into secrecy, and claim their own independence. From there, it traces the expansion of encounter, where explicit content saturates the everyday digital landscape despite parental oversight. Finally, it captures a decisive turn: the moment parents begin to step back from the exhausting project of external control and attempt to cultivate discernment within the relationship itself.

Rules, Filters, and Visible Screens: Control as Care

I can speak as a parent and say that wanting control is very standard; not as a selfish power move, but as a deeply caring impulse. When parents set up filters, checked search histories, or laid down house rules, they spoke from a place of deep concern, grounding their vigilance in narratives of safety, emotional wellbeing, and protective care. Yet that same protective umbrella could easily feel like a cage to an adolescent reaching for privacy and autonomy. I certainly have felt like this growing up, and I purposely allow my children to tell me if they feel 'caged' in. What emerged across the stories as not a neat battle between cold surveillance and warm affection, but a juxtaposition in which care and protection were inextricably tangled together.

This reading follows the meaning parents poured into their practices, rather than assuming those practices were inherently caring in themselves. A software filter or an open bedroom door possesses no fixed ethical magic. Its true meaning is forged in the lived heat of a specific relationship, family history, and household moment. The very same rule that a parent experiences as warm, attentive protection can feel to an adolescent like cold, invasive surveillance. Holding both truths in view keeps the analysis grounded, preventing it from either dismissing parental boundaries as mere control or accepting good intentions as proof of a happy outcome.

Anna described turning off the internet when her daughter did not respond to repeated instructions: "If I ask her to do something repeatedly and she doesn't listen to me, I just turn the internet off. … I find that really effective." Turning off the internet functioned partly as a behavioural consequence and an assertion of parental authority. Within Anna's wider story, however, digital use was also connected with TikTok, as well as non-digital flows such as bullying and peer pressure. I therefore read the action as

performing two kinds of work: it disciplined behaviour and created a temporary boundary when digital life felt unsafe or unmanageable.

Angus, a father who migrated from another African nation to Aotearoa New Zealand with his wife, situated his approach to parenting within his Christian faith and what he described as his African cultural upbringing and values. In his story, responsible fatherhood involved protection, moral guidance, and active oversight. His account demonstrated how this protective boundary can be constructed through spatial management rather than software. When his son's mobile phone accidentally broke, Angus chose not to replace it to curb excessive usage. Instead, he replaced the private, individualised device with a console situated in a communal family space:

> **Angus:** So what we used to do was previously [...] he was catching the bus and so I could give [him] a phone. [...] The phone broke and I decided not to replace it because [of] the amount of time he was using playing games and stuff. [...] I bought him in replacement of that, I bought him a PS5. Because then that is more, I think I do [it] for [a] more safety perspective, I feel it's more safer. [...] Playing games on the phone, you don't know what you're doing [...]. But if you play a PS5, they're watching as well, right? Because it's playing on the main TV.

In this moment, protection is conceptualised primarily through technical and physical "hardware" — the strategic placement of gaming consoles on the main TV, modem lockouts, and automated app rules. By delegating the daily burden of digital enforcement to external software limits and physical household layouts, parents like Angus and Jill attempt to construct a tangible, visible boundary against an intangible digital threat. By replacing a technologically highly sophisticated, privatised smartphone with a console tied to the communal lounge, Angus constructs safety through household

architecture rather than device-level restrictions alone. This reliance on physical space highlights how the digital everyday has radically rewritten the boundaries of parental protection (Lim, 2020; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Because parents cannot fully govern a highly mobile, networked digital storm, they attempt to manage what they can physically observe. Consequently, the "Good Parent Script" is enacted through the ordinary management of daily routines and family spaces rather than just software limits.

Roberta described one workaround where we both laughed at the ingenuity and stereotypical teenage behaviour, in how her son crafted a method to bypass household rules. By manually changing his phone's date and time settings, he successfully bypassed the device's scheduled lockout feature, allowing him to stay up late chatting with friends back in his parents' homeland in Africa. Roberta recounted the discovery with a mix of exasperation and amusement:

Roberta: He figured out that if he changed the time zone on his phone, the lock app thought it was still daytime. He was up at 2:00 AM talking to his cousins in Africa, acting like nothing was wrong! They're always one step ahead of the settings.

Roberta's story vividly illustrates the inherent fragility of relying solely on technical "hardware." Software locks, time-zone restrictions, and Wi-Fi cut-offs act as external perimeters, but as adolescent technological fluency grows, these "hardware" boundaries inevitably crack under the weight of teenage resourcefulness. Beyond adjusting software settings, Roberta and her husband recognised that unrestricted device access directly disrupted his sleep, which in turn threatened his school performance. The decision to remove devices altogether during the school term was strongly reinforced by her husband's insistence on academic outcomes. As Roberta explained, "His dad was very firm

on that. He said, ‘If he’s tired, his grades drop, and that affects his whole future.’ So during the term, the phone stays in our room at night. No exceptions.” Her digital protection was similarly woven into the physical layout of her home, prompting her to negotiate strict spatial boundaries after discovering her son had encountered sexual material:

Roberta: At the moment, we are having a no-closing-door rule going on. [...] He is not allowed to close his door anymore around daytimes. Only when he’s sleeping, he’s allowed to close the door. [...] You leave the door almost closed, but you still have to have some gaps so that I can just see what you’re doing.

It appeared that digital safety in Roberta’s home was never confined to a phone screen; it spilled out into physical domestic space, moving between software settings, open doors, and her own vigilant line of sight (Pink et al., 2016). Read through mainstream frameworks of digital risk management, this strict spatial architecture risks being dismissed as intensified parental surveillance (Jackson & Scott, 1999). Sitting with her story, however, reveals that this vigilance was driven by protective care rather than a desire for control—an anxious, loving attempt to safeguard her adolescent's wellbeing after her sudden, traumatic moment of realisation — of discovering that her child had encountered internet pornography “2x” explicit material. Yet, sitting in the researcher’s chair, I had to pause and consider how suffocating this level of oversight might feel to an adolescent, highlighting how privacy and trust are tensely renegotiated across the physical threshold of a bedroom door (Foucault, 1977/1995).

Yet sitting with Roberta’s story revealed that her vigilance was not driven by a desire to control. It was an anxious, loving attempt to hold together his sleep hygiene, adolescent wellbeing, and protection in the wake of an event that had deeply shaken her. In the shadow of that encounter to sexual material (she was not explicit that it was

"pornography"), privacy intertwined with the (re-building) trust, were being tensely renegotiated across the threshold of a bedroom door, as a means of protective care.

Hearing Jill, I was struck by how seamlessly she recruited technology to do the heavy lifting of protection. However, I see that we are (my household included) integrating technology into our everyday more and more by delegating the daily burden of digital enforcement to a automated set of software rules:

Jill: We did have an app that controlled websites that he could and couldn't access and time limits. So the internet would cut off his phone, I think, at 9 o'clock or 8 o'clock at night, and it would block certain websites.

The app she used had time limits tied up with Jill's household expectations. Her parental decisions worked together to establish a temporary boundary. Control was not located solely in parental intention; it was enacted through an arrangement of people, devices, settings, and routines.

Research from the literature as discovered by Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) on parental mediation in the literature review distinguishes restrictive, monitoring, and active forms of engagement, but the parents' stories show how these forms were often combined rather than selected as discrete strategies (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). A technological restriction could lead to a conversation; a rule could be justified through wellbeing; monitoring could intensify after a breach of trust. The analytic issue was therefore not which mediation category each parent used, but how practical control became morally intelligible as care.

These stories complicate simple judgements of parental extended oversight into adolescents' increasingly private lives. Control mattered, but it remained ethically ambivalent and technically incomplete.

Bypassing Boundaries: When Control Breaks Down

Again and again, parents' stories revealed how fragile domestic efforts at control could become. An established boundary could be easily overridden by another adult, as experienced by Anna when her ex-partner purchased their 16 year-old daughter Katie her first smartphone against Anna's explicit wishes. This single act introduced a digital device into her daughter's life without negotiated ground rules, effectively outsourcing the fallout back onto Anna when online difficulties inevitably arose. As Anna recalled:

> **Anna:** He actually bought her first phone and I had said no to him, and he bought it anyway... And then a couple of years ago, he rang me and he says, 'You need to have a talk to Katie... I've just seen these posts that she's put online.' And I'm like, why? ... So you buy her the phone and you open that world up to her, and then you tell me to clean up the mess.

Anna's account illustrates how individual parental strategies, such as withholding a smartphone or setting age-based boundaries, are frequently undermined by external relational dynamics and co-parenting divides. Unsupervised digital access was treated not merely as a possibility for risk, but as an environment where exposure and conflict were almost inevitable. Strategies that once seemed workable became increasingly difficult to sustain as adolescents gained mobility and independence, shifting parenting from a proactive stance of protection to a reactive posture of crisis management, in the case for Anna.

The limits of control were therefore not only technical or behavioural; they were also relational, culturally developmental, and bound up with the changing terms of parenting itself. Research on parental mediation similarly suggests that restrictive practices can reduce some opportunities for encounter without guaranteeing safety across changing

devices and contexts (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Research on pornography conversations also identifies anticipated punishment, embarrassment, and judgement as possible barriers to disclosure (Dawson et al., 2024). The breakdown of parental control happened as a lived, emotional, and everyday reality inside real homes. Failures with controlling their adolescent's boundaries showed up in the raw, dynamic fabric of family life. A shared family computer in the lounge works for control; an encrypted smartphone hidden under a pillow at 2:00 AM completely shatters it.

Anna described a technical boundary that did not produce the expected outcome: "[She] wasn't supposed to go on TikTok. And her father thought that he'd done that parental lock thing on her phone. […] She apparently got around that and still managed to get on there."

This was not only a story of disobedience. The lock depended on an unstable arrangement of passwords coupled with misinforming parental knowledge, settings, and adolescent competence. Installing a control did not guarantee the protection the parents intended.

Roberta described a similar asymmetry through her son's technological ability: "He knows how to tweak systems and how to hide things … really good with IT, really knows how to get around things." Roberta did not position her son only as defiant. His competence was also a source of pride and future possibility. The same capability that could be valued for learning made parental oversight less certain. She was expected to monitor systems he might understand more fluently than she did.

Lovely questioned the assumption that stating a boundary would automatically produce the response a parent intended. She turned attention toward how a limit might be received by the adolescent: "The boundaries we are setting … how are they going to take

that? … The more you say, ‘Don’t touch that,’ they want to touch it [both laughs].” Lovely did not reject boundaries. Rather, she questioned whether prohibition alone created understanding. Her experience situated digital-sexual parenting within ordinary relational negotiation: a rule depended not only on parental authority, but on how the adolescent interpreted it and whether its purpose became meaningful beyond the command itself.

Freda described a relational consequence of intensified restriction: “The more I tried to stop them from saying things and doing things on the internet, the more sneaky they’d be.” I treat this as Freda’s retrospective interpretation rather than a universal claim that restriction causes secrecy. Within her story, stronger control and increased concealment developed together. She later described learning to “open a bit more” and create a family environment “where no subject was taboo.” The shift did not remove boundaries; it changed the relational conditions through which she hoped challenging behaviour or experiences might become speakable.

Jill located another limit in her son’s growing independence: “It’s more use than I would like, but obviously when they’re 17, it’s quite hard to manage them.” Jill shared how a child’s age reshaped what forms of parenting she considered possible or appropriate. Certainly, as a parent I have experienced this and it’s almost a doxa. Her concern remained, but a direct style of parenting became less realistic as her son became older and more private. Jill’s care began to shift toward conversation, entrusting, and his developing capacity to interpret what he encountered.

The story also complicates any easy celebration of adolescent resistance. An adolescent’s behaviour cannot therefore be understood simply as either rebellion that must be stopped or resistance that should be celebrated. Circumvention of could be interpreted as agency from a parent’s location, but equally from an adolescent doing the

circumvention. Competence advances as we gain more experience. Secrecy can also be an exercise as a form of agency depending on the position from which it was viewed; situated knowledges. Parents' stories did not allow me to determine what these actions meant to the adolescents themselves. What they revealed was how circumvention destabilised parental certainty and exposed the limits of a model in which responsible care depends upon continuous adult visibility. The digital everyday breaks this apart.

Across these stories, control broke down in four related ways: technical systems could be circumvented; instructions did not guarantee compliance; restriction could become entangled with concealment; and direct oversight became less possible as adolescents gained independence. These limits did not make boundaries useless. They showed why "no" could not carry the whole burden of protection.

Sexualised Content Everywhere: Digital Saturation and the Expansion of Encounter

Parents also extended encounter beyond deliberate visits to pornography websites. Their stories included less deliberate and more diffuse forms of encounter, such as wider digital-sexual environment in which sexualised material circulated through social media, peer messages, music, videos, group chats, and friends' devices. Encounter could therefore occur through ordinary participation in media culture rather than only through purposeful searching.

Because encounter was a central term in the research question, this broadening required analytic care. Parents' accounts showed that encounter did not refer only to deliberate visits to pornography websites, but could also include accidental encounters, peer sharing, sexualised social-media content, and algorithmically recommended material. These experiences were not interchangeable, and I was careful not to collapse them into a single undifferentiated category. Pornography and sexualised mainstream media, sexual

self-presentation, and peer sharing are not interchangeable phenomena. Parents sometimes brought them together because they experienced them as part of one troubling environment. Rather than treating that grouping as an objective description of a single category, I analysed it as part of how parents constructed the scale and permeability of the problem. For example, Anna constructed sexualised media as difficult to avoid:

> **Anna:** It's everywhere. Like, even on TV. … I remember when my boys were little and we were sitting in the doctor's surgery … and the song 'Sex on the Beach' came on and my boys started singing along to it. And I was like, 'Oh God, you can't get away from it.' … It's in the music, videos.

Although her story concerned her sons when they were younger, it formed part of Anna's longer history of parenting within a sexualised media environment. Her phrase "you can't get away from it" gave sexualised content an ambient quality. The parental task was not simply to block an identifiable website, but to interpret material circulating through ordinary public and domestic spaces. This resonates with Aotearoa research showing that pornography and harmful content may be encountered accidentally, socially, and repeatedly within young people's everyday media use (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2018; Classification Office, 2020; Classification Office – Te Mana Whakaatu , 2024).

> Anna also connected the wider environment with adolescent self-presentation:
>
> Anna: "The thing that's really scary is how these teens are videoing themselves and taking photos of themselves in a 'look at me, I'm sexy' kind of way … posing and making them look like something that they're just not."

Her concern moved beyond mere viewing toward performance and visibility; young people were positioned not only as consumers of images, but as potentially visible

images for others to assess and respond to. Holding these dual interpretations allows us to see how rules and technologies gave parents practical ways to exercise control, communicate concern, and establish structure. This tension matters because parental protection may itself draw on cultural expectations of respectable femininity, even as parents express concern about gendered pressures of desirability and recognition (Bay-Cheng, 2015; Gill, 2007).

Freda similarly described "sexual stuff" as being "everywhere" and connected it with how girls presented themselves:

> **Freda:** There's also trying to educate, because, at the moment, sexual stuff is everywhere — TV, blah, blah, blah — and all the girls have got everything hanging out. And so I've had to slowly, like, not tell my girls what to do, but say, 'Hey, you look just as attractive when you cover up like this.'

Freda's account combined concern about digital saturation with a gendered language of attractiveness and covering up. I read this as both an attempt to protect her daughters from sexualised evaluation and a reproduction of respectability expectations in which girls are made responsible for managing how they are seen. The tension shows how education and protection can carry the very gendered norms they seek to negotiate.

Lovely described sexually explicit material as inherently mobile and socially embedded, moving fluidly across platforms, phones, friendship groups, and private messages rather than remaining hidden within adult-only spaces. She highlighted how explicit media, often leaked or captured informally, spreads through cross-platform requests ("send to my number"), transforming private platforms like WhatsApp into primary distribution hubs:

Lovely: It's no longer as taboo as it was... What happens is this would actually start maybe on TikTok and say, 'Did you see the video...?' And then people will be like, 'Oh, send to my number, send to my number.' ... We have groups of friends... You'll find two or three people sending that same video, meaning it's been circulating everywhere. I think WhatsApp is like the hub of circulation.

As Lovely's narrative demonstrates, explicit content rarely exists in isolation on dedicated adult websites. Instead, it circulates casually through everyday social channels, embedded within peer groups, school networks, and family chats, where sharing and forwarding become normative social practices.

Although Angus placed considerable emphasis on filtering, household boundaries, and monitoring, he did not present technological control as sufficient on its own. Instead, he combined technical parameters with ongoing conversation and direct discernment about what was appropriate for his children. He described his proactive strategy using a vivid spatial metaphor:

> **Angus:** I bought a filter that you attach to your modem... so whenever they try to go on all those unapproved apps, it automatically gives me an alert... It gave me a bit of security for myself that, yes, they've got unlimited access to the internet, but then it's within a certain constraint, right? Like how the sheep have got a pen. So you can eat from everything inside, but you cannot go outside... But then I constantly get an alert of what content they are trying to access, so then I have to talk to them about, 'Oh, remember, you're not allowed to do this.'

As his account illustrates, hardware-level filtering operates not as an automated replacement for parenting, but as a scaffold that triggers relational engagement. The automated system sets the perimeter — the "pen" — while the real-time notifications

provide opportunities for ongoing dialogue, reminding his children of established family boundaries whenever those boundaries are tested. Angus similarly positioned filters and platforms as unable to maintain a clean boundary between educational searching and inappropriate material. Their stories extended encounter beyond individual intention and placed it within networks of peers, devices, platform systems, and everyday media participation.

The widened field also changed the imagined location of risk. Risk was not placed only inside an individual adolescent who searched for prohibited material. It was distributed across media routines, friendship networks, platforms, public spaces, and commercial systems. This interpretation helps explain why parents' stories repeatedly returned to the feeling that personal vigilance was necessary yet insufficient: the object they were trying to regulate did not remain in one place.

Digital saturation therefore helps explain why household control could not carry the burden of protection. Parents could communicate clear boundaries while adolescents continued to inhabit environments in which sexualised images, jokes, performances, invitations, and forms of attention circulated. Pornography became intelligible within a wider sexualisation of the digital everyday, not only as a discrete object parents could locate and block.

From External Control to Relationally Cultivated Discernment

As the limits of external control became visible, several parents expressed hopes that adolescents would develop awareness and some capacity to judge or respond thoughtfully to what they encountered. I use discernment rather than self-regulation because, although self-regulation has an established developmental meaning, it can also locate responsibility for managing risk with-in the individual adolescent. In this context,

that language holds a certain precarity implying that adolescents should resist or navigate through personal restraint risks that are also socially, commercially, and technologically produced (Kelly, 2001; Lievens, 2020; Rose, 1999). Discernment better captures the relational and interpretive work running through these stories. Rather than relying on static rules, it involves learning to navigate uncertainty, weigh consequences, make reflective judgments, and seek support through ongoing relationships with trusted adults.

This movement did not occur uniformly where it was it a smooth, linear journey. Human lives and parenting are messy, recursive, and contradictory. Control and discernment coexist: In reality, parents constantly swing back and forth between setting firm, non-negotiable rules and holding open conversations. Old control strategies often resurface during moments of panic, high stress, or new digital threats; it certainly does in my life. Parents could continue to value filtering and rules while also recognising the need for judgement and dialogue. Discernment therefore developed alongside control; they are dynamic & interwoven where harmony does not always go hand in hand.

The location of protection shifted across participant accounts. Instead of treating protection merely as an external architecture, such as physical room rules or software filters, parents came to view protection as an internal and relational architecture. This involved equipping young people with the critical discernment and trust needed to navigate digital hazards wherever they encountered them. Jill linked developing self-awareness to repeated parental discussion, framing a young person's "critical compass" as something that develops through ongoing conversation with a trusted adult. Her account positioned discernment as relationally supported rather than privately achieved, showing how early conversations contributed to how her son reflected on what he watched and its subjective effects:

Jill: I've just tried to always explain to him that there can be very traumatising things that he won't forget. So to be very mindful of the type of content you're choosing to watch, because once you've seen it, you can't unsee it... and what seems abnormal over time, if you keep watching it, becomes normal—you desensitise to it... We did have an app that controlled websites... when he was younger. Whereas now at 17, I would hope that he has the maturity to be discerning with which content he chooses to watch.

As Jill's narrative demonstrates, software controls, such as website-blocking apps and evening internet cut-offs, served a temporary function during earlier adolescence. However, as her son approached adulthood and the limits of external enforcement became undeniable, a decisive analytical turn occurred: protection began to relocate. Rather than relying on rigid, external "hardware" boundaries that could no longer guarantee safety, Jill shifted her energy toward cultivating relational "software." Protection was no longer framed as absolute prevention or total surveillance, but as fostering an internalised "critical compass" through ongoing, reflective dialogue and equipping her son with the capacity to recognise desensitisation and critically evaluate the psychological impact of digital material.

Chapter 5 revisits the lack of structural support parents experience but shifts the focus to how parents personally adapt by moving from rigid enforcement to critical thinking and communication.

Jill's account therefore positioned conversation as the primary means through which a boundary could become understood rather than merely obeyed. Lovely's earlier question about how adolescents receive a boundary also mattered here, as she suggested that prohibition could heighten curiosity without explaining why the boundary existed in

the first place. Another participant similarly reflected on the historical limits of top-down bans, comparing domestic rules to political prohibitions:

> **Jill:** It's prohibition, isn't it? So social media's prohibited for under 16s... But I mean, history shows us, whether it's alcohol, pornography... I mean, you can imagine pornography in China—it's completely banned. But how many Chinese people have been looking at pornography? People love to break rules.

As these narratives demonstrate, relying solely on prohibition, whether enforced through corporate age-gates, platform bans, or domestic rules, frequently triggers a desire to test or circumvent boundaries. Without ongoing relational dialogue to unpack why a limit is in place, strict prohibition risks transforming digital hazards into forbidden fruit, driving engagement underground rather than cultivating genuine discernment.

Lovely's account highlighted what might happen when a boundary is imposed without explanation, offering one situated interpretation rather than a universal rule about adolescent psychology. Reflecting on how strict domestic limits often backfire, Lovely emphasised that prohibition without understanding frequently heightens curiosity:

> **Lovely:** The boundaries we are setting, are they going to be listened to? The people we are setting boundaries for, how are they going to take that? Because, you know, the more you say, 'Don't touch that,' they want to touch it—they want to know why you're saying 'don't touch that.' ... I want to have sex talk with my daughter. I would rather tell her to use protection than to tell her not to have sex, because we were told not to have sex, but we still went out and did it.

Lovely's concern echoed a familiar "forbidden fruit" discourse, in which prohibition is understood as potentially intensifying curiosity. I treat this not as evidence that restriction inevitably produces curiosity in all young people, but as a culturally

available interpretation through which she made sense of adolescent behaviour. Her narrative pointed toward explanation and ongoing discussion rather than top-down instruction alone, suggesting that without relational dialogue, boundaries risk provoking the very behaviours they seek to prevent.

Angus described technological access as bringing benefits and risks together. Rather than imagining complete exclusion as realistic, he asked what parents could do to mitigate the risks accompanying ordinary digital participation: “You cannot be open to technology and access to internet and not say this is not going to be available. … But the question now is, what then do we do about it?”

Within Angus’s account, risk was not attributed only to a child’s intentions. It accompanied access to technologies that were also valued for education, communication, and participation. Elsewhere he described filters as useful but fallible, making conversation and mindfulness necessary when technical protection did not hold. Discernment was therefore relationally supported rather than privately achieved.

Discernment did not represent a simple transfer of responsibility from parents to adolescents. When parents stop acting as digital security guards, they do not simply step away. Instead, they shift from enforcing restrictions externally to providing active, relational guidance internally. Continuing support might look like this.

Approaches to digital citizenship and pornography literacy similarly position young people as developing participants who need both boundaries and interpretive resources (Buckingham, 2019; Healy-Cullen et al., 2023; Livingstone & Third, 2017).

Critical media and pornography literacy provide one scholarly language for this movement. They emphasise that young people can be supported to question how sexualised media are produced, whose interests they serve, what gendered and commercial

scripts they circulate, and how those scripts differ from mutual and communicative relationships (Albury, 2014; Buckingham, 2019; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022). The parents did not necessarily use this terminology, but their hopes for awareness and judgement resonated with its relational and interpretive orientation.

The turn toward discernment nevertheless carried another uncertainty. Within processes of responsibilisation, parents may be judged not only for restricting encounter but also for successfully producing reflective, agentic adolescents (Rose, 1999). Adolescents also navigate commercial environments organised around sustained engagement—the attention economy, while some algorithmic tools may amplify and normalise harmful content (Regehr et al., 2025; Wu, 2016; Zuboff, 2019). Discernment therefore cannot be reduced to better individual capacity — there are limits.

I therefore understand discernment as relationally and socially cultivated. It depends on trusted relationships, critical resources, and wider institutional conditions. It does not remove the need for boundaries or absolve actors of responsibility. It names the interpretive work adolescents may gradually undertake when they are supported rather than left to manage digital-sexual risks alone.

This movement away from strict digital surveillance is not permissive parenting—it is a transition to a more sophisticated, collaborative form of protection that enables an adolescent's relational agency they carry with them into any digital environment, even when adults are not present.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the first two themes: "The Good Parent Script": Carrying the Burden of Responsibility" and "When 'No' Is Not Enough: The Limits of Control in the Digital Everyday". Together, they articulate a central dilemma within the

parents' stories: parents positioned themselves as responsible for responding to adolescents' encounters with pornography while recognising that this responsibility could not be fulfilled through control alone.

Theme 1 examined what responsible care came to require. Protection, education, and relational availability positioned parents as responsible for noticing risk, preparing adolescents to interpret what they encountered, and preserving the possibility of disclosure. Pornography became entangled with phones, social media, schools, bodily safety, faith, mental health, shame, and family relationships. "The Good Parent Script" therefore carried a moral weight extending far beyond any single parenting strategy.

Theme 2 focused on enacted control and its limits. Rules, filters, supervision, visible screens, and restrictions gave parents practical ways to act and communicate household values. Yet technical controls could be bypassed, rules did not guarantee compliance, restriction could become entangled with secrecy, and direct supervision became less possible as adolescents gained independence. Encounter was also narrated as social, mobile, and embedded within everyday digital participation. Boundaries still serve a crucial function, even if they don't produce total control. Parents used them to create structure and communicate concern. Their stories nevertheless showed that care could not depend on control alone. As external oversight became less reliable, relationally cultivated discernment became increasingly important.

The limits of control highlight the messy reality of parenting in practice. Internet-mediated pornography was often acknowledged, worried about, and indirectly encountered, yet it remained a challenge to name directly. Chapter 5 turns to this tension — focusing on the painful gap between knowing you should talk about digital sexuality

and actually having the language to articulate your thoughts and feelings to someone you trust.

Chapter 5: Analysis II: Silence, Shame, and the Possibility of Response-able Care

Beginning the Analysis

Chapter 4 demonstrated how parents carry a substantial, highly privatised burden of responsibility to protect, educate, and remain relationally available to their adolescents. While technical rules, filters, device restrictions, and spatial monitoring—what I conceptualise as domestic “hardware” — remained meaningful enactments of care, parents experienced these strategies as inherently fragile, relationally fraught, and increasingly difficult to sustain as young people’s digital lives extended beyond direct adult visibility.

Chapter 5 begins where structural and domestic control reaches its limits. When parents recognise that they cannot fully insulate their children from online pornography or sexualised media, open dialogue is frequently positioned as the ultimate domestic safeguard. Yet, as the narratives in this chapter illustrate, pornography was rarely an easy or neutral topic for parents to navigate, nor could they assume that raising it would feel relationally safe for their adolescents — or themselves for that matter.

The analytical problem, therefore, extends far beyond whether parents simply possess adequate "digital literacy" or communication skills. Instead, examining domestic dialogue requires attending to the wider cultural meanings, affective intensities, inherited silences, and relational dynamics that dictate the conditions under which pornography can—or cannot—be spoken into being.

This chapter is structured around the first two overarching themes:

- **Theme Three:** “Known but Unspeakable: Pornography, Taboo, and Inherited Silence”. This theme traces how pornography is constructed as ubiquitous within Aotearoa’s shared cultural landscape (Office of Film and

Literature Classification, 2018, 2020) yet relationally precarious to name, examining how cultural moralities, religious discourses, body shame, and inherited family silences regulate the limits of domestic speech.

- **Theme Four:** “Keeping the Door Open: Trust, Kōrero, and Becoming Response-able”. This theme explores the relational practices through which parents attempt to resist closure — shifting from external technical "hardware" toward cultivating domestic "software" by building trust, fostering critical discernment, offering language, and becoming "response-able" (Haraway, 2016) within shared digital environments.

Crucially, this shift does not describe a simplistic movement from "bad" control to "good" conversation. Parents continued to value boundaries, and communicative openness offered no guarantee of total disclosure or safety. Rather, it marks a shift in analytical emphasis: moving from responsibility imagined as absolute prevention toward an unfinished, ongoing capacity to respond when prevention inevitably proves insufficient.

Ahmed’s (2004) and Probyn’s (2005) accounts of shame help illuminate how embarrassment and anticipated judgment can make certain experiences difficult to voice, while Dawson et al. (2024) show how discomfort, uncertainty, and relational concerns can constrain parent–child conversations about pornography. In the participants' accounts, parents and young people both know that pornography and sexualised digital content exist in their environment, but because of shame, awkwardness, or cultural taboos, it often sensed like an "elephant in the room" — quietly acknowledged around the margins but rarely confronted face-to-face.

The parents continued to value boundaries, and openness did not guarantee disclosure or remove risk. The movement is better understood as a shift in analytical

emphasis: moving from responsibility imagined as absolute prevention toward an unfinished capacity to respond when prevention proves insufficient. I use response-ability (Haraway, 2016) as a brief interpretive signpost here, while Chapter 6 develops its wider ethical and political implications.

Theme 3: Known but Unspeakable: Pornography, Taboo, and Inherited Silence

I developed "Known but Unspeakable" to capture a recurring tension across the stories. Pornography was constructed as present within young people's digital worlds. It was known, suspected, encountered, or circulating through adjacent media, yet difficult to name in direct parent–adolescent conversation. Pornography rarely emerges as a clean, standalone topic that a parent sits down to discuss at the dinner table. Instead, it shows up tangled inside messy, everyday stories about digital spaces, social relationships, cultural backgrounds, and emotional anxieties.

My initial codes treated taboo, embarrassment, religious discomfort, inherited body shame, and the "too-hard basket" as different forms of difficulty. Repeated engagement with the wider narratives changed this reading. I came to understand them as connected ways in which pornography became socially present but relationally precarious. The issue was not simply a lack of information or confidence. Whether a parent or young person speaks aloud, hesitates, or stays silent is governed by a complex web of rules, past experiences, and relational precarities.

This theme therefore extends the analysis from the limits of control to the limits of speech. Parents faced not only the question of what to do, but how pornography could be spoken about without abandoning meaningful values, humiliating an adolescent, or closing the possibility of future disclosure.

Pornography as Taboo: Moral Worlds and Regulated Speech

In reading across the stories, taboo emerged as one of the clearest ways parents constructed pornography as difficult to discuss. Rather than treating it as ordinary or morally neutral, parents attached it to wider boundaries concerning sexuality, bodily conduct, family respectability, and faith. These boundaries supplied meaningful vocabularies for concern, yet they could also regulate who was able to speak and what could safely be admitted. Lovely, for example, located her response within her understandings of Zimbabwean culture and Christianity: "I think it's taboo. It's taboo [long pause] but for our culture, a lot of things are taboo. … As Zimbabweans or as Christians, it is taboo."

Lovely did not present pornography taboo as an isolated personal preference. Her phrase "a lot of things are taboo" placed it within a wider field of matters that might be known but were not necessarily considered appropriate to name. I treat this as Lovely's situated account rather than a definitive description of Zimbabwean culture or Christianity. Its analytic significance lies in how cultural and religious belonging provided both moral orientation and limits on speech.

I draw on Fine (1988) and Morgan and Coombes (2001) here because they treat silence is not simply the absence of words, but meaningful through cultural discourses and (gendered) power relations surrounding a person. Reading the parents' stories through this lens, discourses of sexuality help organise which forms of knowledge become speakable, who can speak them, and what identities become possible in doing so. Silence can be a discursive practice because remaining silent about pornography may: communicate that the topic is shameful, within a personal boundary or morally dangerous. Silence may reinforce the idea that pornography should not be openly discussed. Silence communicated

boundaries, moral meanings, discomfort, and anticipated relational consequences, while shaping who could speak and what could safely be said

Lovely's account made visible a tension between pornography's recognised relevance to young people and its uneasy status as a legitimate family topic. She shifted the frame away from "sin" toward mental health and processing capacity: "I'm not worried about sin at the moment… I'm worried about your mental health and wellbeing… your brain is not properly formed to understand those dynamics."

Angus constructed pornography through a related but distinct moral and spiritual vocabulary: "From the religious circles that I come from, it's a clear no. … We believe your body is the temple of God. … What you see, what you watch, what you listen to … can make you unclean."

Within Angus's account, pornography was not only prohibited content. It was capable of affecting the moral and spiritual condition of the person. The language of the body as a temple offered a coherent account of bodily integrity, seriousness, and responsibility. It also positioned what entered the eyes and ears as morally consequential.

I read this language as permitting more than one reading. It may provide an adolescent with clear values and an explanation for why pornography matters. It may also, as I interpret it, attach a sense of contamination to the person who encounters or watches it.

Lovely refused to disclose the incident outside the immediate family precisely because of the judgment and reputational risk that would attach to them:

> **Lovely:** Oh, absolutely not! Absolutely not! The judgment I will face in the community will be unbearable… even the sofa is still warm, they will start talking about me [interviewer laughs] … Everyone talks like their kids are angels and everyone else's kids are up to nasty things.

The topic does not remain neutral; it risks tainting the person who has encountered or watched it (and, by extension, the parent who admits it has happened). That moral or social stain then makes it much harder to bring into conversation. Angus's story cannot establish that his child experienced the language as shaming. It does show the relational tension between moral clarity and the possibility that the person, rather than only the material, becomes marked as unclean.

My own Christian location made Angus's vocabulary familiar. That familiarity created a tension: defending moral language too quickly because it represented a deeply situated knowledge or distancing myself from it to demonstrate a non-judgemental research position. Holding both possibilities helped me attend instead to what the language accomplished in Angus's story and how it communicated value and seriousness while potentially shaping the conditions under which an adolescent could speak.

Freda made the intergenerational movement of bodily shame particularly visible. She described growing up within an environment in which clothing and feminine self-presentation were subject to ridicule:

> **Freda:** I remember being ridiculed back then. … If I wore a skirt or a tight shirt or something, [my mother] would very quickly say, 'What are you doing? You look like a [derogatory term].' So it was very taboo for me to wear female kind of clothes.

What made Freda's account analytically significant was that this inherited response reappeared when her own daughter wore short shorts:

> **Freda:** When [my daughter] turned 14 … my instant reaction was to want to tell her how disgusting it was. … I felt uncomfortable with how she was dressing, but I remembered how that made me feel.

Freda did not share herself as having simply escaped the moral meanings through which her own body had been judged. Her first reaction showed those meanings returning almost automatically. Remembering how shame had felt, however, created an interruption: she became able to notice the inherited response rather than simply reproduce it. Her story positions shame as a relational entanglement. Freda connected this tension to her culture, religion, and upbringing — elements I interpret as situated aspects of her personal history, rather than static definitions of Māori identity, Christianity, or whānau life. Shame, in this reading, was produced through relationships and expectations about how a body should appear and what a respectable person should be (Ahmed, 2004; Probyn, 2005).

Across these stories, culture, religion, gender, and family history provided situated moral worlds within which parents made judgements about care, bodily conduct, and appropriate speech. The tension arose when the vocabularies available for communicating values also made encounter, curiosity, or uncertainty precarious to disclose.

Known but Unspeakable therefore names more than a missing conversation. Pornography was socially present, morally meaningful, and relationally consequential, while direct speech risked changing how the parent, adolescent, or family might be seen.

Inherited Silence and the Burden of Speaking

Across the stories silence also appeared as something carried across time. Several parents spoke from within histories in which bodies, sex, and harm had been difficult to name. I initially risked reading these silences primarily as deficits—as evidence that families or communities had failed to communicate. Closer engagement made that reading insufficient; silence was often sustained through loyalty, fear, shame, respectability, and uncertainty about the consequences of speaking.

Anna connected her present concern with a childhood experience of inappropriate touching and explained why she did not disclose it at the time: "For me, growing up, I didn't know that I could go and tell anybody about what my uncle had done... I was ashamed and I felt like I would cause trouble with the family."

Anna's silence was not simply an individual decision to withhold information. The possibility of "causing trouble" positioned disclosure as a threat to family relationships. Speaking could make harm visible, but it could also place Anna in the position of disrupting the family. Shame was therefore entangled with loyalty and anticipated responsibility for what disclosure might set in motion.

Silence did not merely conceal an already formed experience; it shaped what Anna could understand herself as permitted to say and who she might become if she said it. The available positions appeared constrained: remain silent and carry the experience or speak and risk becoming the person who caused trouble.

Anna later connected this history with an explicit commitment to giving her daughter language for bodily discomfort and disclosure. Chapter 4 examined her repeated phrase, "it's your body, your rules," as a form of protective education. Recalling her own past, Anna described her approach to equipping her 16 year-old daughter with bodily agency and help-seeking strategies:

> **Anna:** I've always been quite straight up with my kids. Like, I've always said to [daughter], 'It's your body, your rules. Nobody gets to touch you in a way that makes you feel yuck. And if they do ever try it, you just tell somebody, tell an adult.' You know, so I always sort of tried to give her that confidence to do that.

The analytical relevance of this statement lies in the movement across her narrative: past silence became part of how she made present speech and help-seeking

imaginable. This does not appear to be a simple causal claim that childhood harm automatically produced one specific parenting practice. Rather, it is a connection Anna herself actively constructed between her own historical lack of language and her present desire for her daughter to know that physical discomfort could be named, validated, and disclosed.

Lovely made the uneven speakability of sexual topics particularly explicit:

> **Lovely:** I wouldn't talk to him about pornography, but I would talk to him. I would have sex talk with him. If those two things are different, I would want to think they are different. So pornography, no.

Lovely's distinction unsettled any simple categorisation of her family as either open or closed. Sex could be imagined as a legitimate subject of parental conversation while pornography remained more difficult to bring into speech. Her hesitation, "if those two things are different", suggested that the boundary was not entirely settled even for her. She was working out whether pornography belonged within ordinary sexual education or required a different kind of conversation because of its associations with taboo, explicitness, morality, and shame.

Her account therefore showed that family openness was topic-specific rather than absolute. Pornography was not unknown to Lovely; she recognised that adolescents might watch it regardless of parental silence. Yet recognising its presence did not automatically make it speakable.

These stories complicated my early tendency to divide families into "open" and "closed." Speakability was more uneven. A parent might discuss sex but avoid pornography, communicate strong values but struggle with curiosity, or remain available in

a crisis while finding ordinary sexual conversation difficult. Silence therefore moved across topics and relationships rather than describing a fixed family type.

Inherited silence did not mean parents were destined to reproduce the past. It did mean that speaking required labour. Parents were being asked to enter conversations for which they may have received little language, modelling, or institutional support, while also managing the moral and emotional histories those conversations activated.

Shame, Silence, and the Risk of Isolation

Through repeated engagement with the stories, I developed shame as one relational dynamic through which silence could be maintained. Encounter, curiosity, desire, or uncertainty could become attached to judgements about the young person, the parent, the body, or sexuality itself. When an adolescent anticipates disgust, disappointment, punishment, or moral contamination, speaking may become relationally dangerous. I treat this as a risk made visible in parents' stories, not as evidence of what their adolescents necessarily felt.

Freda captured this risk through a warning about taboo: "If you make something so naughty and taboo, you might lose your child in that. … They're going to go and do it anyway. They're just not going to talk to you about it." Freda's statement was a retrospective interpretation of her relationships with her daughters, not proof that prohibition inevitably produces secrecy. Within her account, however, taboo became relationally precarious. Her concern was not only that a rule might be broken, but that anticipated condemnation could make her daughters less visible and less likely to seek support.

Ahmed's (2004) account of shame helps illuminate the relational stakes. Shame concerns how the self imagines it appears before another and the possibility that

connection may be threatened. Freda feared that making the topic excessively “naughty” would alter the pathway back to the parent. The adolescent might still encounter or participate in sexualised digital life but do so outside the relationship.

Jill raised a related concern when she described the limited support she believed young people received from schools and public agencies. In her account, institutional silence mattered because adolescents could be left to interpret pornography primarily through peers, online material, or their own incomplete resources. Recalling her experience as a mother of a 17 year-old son, she noted:

Jill: In my experience, as a mum of a 17 year-old, I don't think he's had much from the education system or any governmental, public departments. I think it's mostly been through parental discussions that's hopefully shaped him to be self-aware about what he's watching and consuming... I think there's a huge, huge scope to give children and teenagers a better understanding of ethical pornography, unethical pornography, the negative impacts, how it can be addictive... [and how it can influence] their real relationships.

This remains Jill’s construction of risk rather than proof of how adolescents themselves respond, but it highlights why she treated ongoing adult conversation as a crucial element of protective care. Her narrative frames the current educational landscape as an institutional void, one where the absence of formal, nuanced discussions on "ethical versus unethical" content forces parents to step in as the primary anchors of digital discernment.

Across these stories, silence was not passive or empty. It organised what could be said, what remained concealed, and who might carry difficult experiences alone. Moral boundaries were not inherently incompatible with communication. The analytic tension

concerned how values could be communicated without making speech itself threaten the adolescent's place within the relationship.

This tension opened the final theme. If shame, loyalty, and anticipated judgement could narrow disclosure, then the question became what parents attempted to do to resist relational closure and how they tried to remain able to respond.

Theme 4: Keeping the Door Open: Trust, Kōrero, and Becoming Response-able

Theme 1 treated relational availability as part of the "Good Parent Script": another demanding expectation parents believed responsible care required. Theme 4 asks a different question. It examines what parents attempted to do with that relational possibility when discomfort, disclosure, or uncertainty entered the relationship. The focus shifts from the obligation to be available toward the practices and transformations through which response remained possible.

I use keeping the door open as a metaphor for resisting relational closure after shame, punishment, disgust, or fear. It does not mean removing boundaries or approving of pornography. It describes an attempt to hold values while preserving the adolescent's capacity to return to their relationship with a parent when something is confusing, distressing, or harmful occurs.

The metaphor contrasts with Roberta's literal open-bedroom door rule in Theme 2. There, openness increased the parent's visibility of the adolescent and could operate as surveillance. Here, openness concerns the adolescent's access to the parent—the possibility of approaching, speaking, and being heard. The contrast shows that increasing parental sight does not necessarily increase disclosure.

I use “kōrero” in the theme title to emphasise conversation as relational meaning-making rather than one-way information delivery. I do not use the term to claim a singular Māori account of communication or to position this project as Kaupapa Māori research.

Becoming response-able names an unfinished orientation rather than a parenting competence. Parents could not guarantee disclosure, critical interpretation, or safety. Response-ability involved trying to remain capable of responding within partial and uncomfortable situations, including situations in which their first reaction was shock, fear, or moral concern. It therefore cannot become a replacement Good Parent Script in which parents are judged for achieving ideal communication.

Keeping Conversation Possible

Several parents described conversation as one way of keeping adolescents connected to adult care when encounter could not be fully prevented. The analytic emphasis here is not that they claimed to be open, but how openness was imagined as to protecting the possibility of response.

Jill described her family through a narrative of openness:

> **Jill:** We are quite an open family. I’d say there’s nothing he wouldn’t talk about. And so I wouldn’t say there’s a lot of discomfort around that. We’ve had some discussions about porn and its effects.

Jill’s statement cannot establish that her son disclosed everything or found every conversation comfortable. It can also be read as an aspirational account through which she positioned openness as central to the parent she sought to be. Its significance lies in the relational possibility she described: pornography could enter conversation without automatically placing the relationship itself in jeopardy.

Trust, in this sense, was not a possession that a family either had or lacked. It was produced through repeated responses: whether a parent listened, how a boundary was communicated, what happened after an uncomfortable disclosure, and whether the adolescent anticipated humiliation or continued belonging. Parents' claims of trust could not establish the adolescent's experience, but they showed what parents understood themselves as trying to preserve.

Freda's warning about taboo, analysed in Theme 3, sharpened this point. Her movement toward openness was not a rejection of her values. It was an attempt to prevent those values from becoming a form of relational closure. Lovely's account of her son selectively confiding in her likewise showed that approachability was specific to a relationship and built through prior interactions rather than distributed automatically across both parents.

Roberta offered the clearest example of response emerging after an initially unsettled reaction. Looking back on discovering pornography, she acknowledged that she had not been prepared.

> **Roberta:** Maybe it was a little bit of an overreaction, but I was not prepared. That's the thing. I was not prepared at all. If I were prepared, I would have reacted differently.

Rather than presenting herself as calmly open from the beginning, Roberta narrated response as something she had to become capable of. She described allowing time for the intensity of her first reaction to settle before returning to her son:

> **Roberta:** After a couple of days, when I sort of calmed down a bit, I pulled him aside and I said, 'You know, Baba, I know boys watch those sorts of things. … I was shocked because it was too soon for you.'

What followed was not simply a repetition of the rule. Roberta moved into an extended conversation about age, wellbeing, how her son might be interpreting what he had seen, and the difference between pornography and sex. Chapter 4 analysed the educational content of this response. Here, I treat its temporal movement as central: initial shock did not become the final relational position.

In my reading, response-ability therefore appeared not as effortless openness but as the work of pausing, reflecting, and returning. Roberta retained her boundary and continued to understand her son as too young, yet she re-entered the relationship after discomfort rather than allowing her first reaction to close the conversation. Her statement that preparation would have enabled a different response also suggests how parents may become more able to respond through the very encounters for which they initially feel unprepared.

Keeping conversation possible was therefore not, in this account, a soft alternative to protection. It was one way protection changed when the parent could no longer guarantee what entered the adolescent's world. I interpreted this parental goal as never being about forcing adolescents to confess everything or agree with every house rule. Rather, it was about keeping the relationship strong enough that when young people made mistakes, felt confused, or experienced distress online, they knew they could still turn to their parents for support.

Giving Difficult Experiences Language

A further dimension of response-able care involved giving difficult experiences language and interpretive resources. This overlaps with responsibility as education, but the analytic emphasis differs. Theme 1 examined education as something parents believed they ought to provide. Here, I look at what happens when parents and teenagers share a

common vocabulary. If adolescents were equipped with ‘having the words at disposal’, this changes the dynamic within a relationship: it helps young people name uncomfortable experiences, think critically about what they see, talk openly about awkward topics, and reach out for help when they need it.

In Freda’s account, this meant equipping her daughters with the language needed to navigate modern attention economies — environments where their bodies are constantly put on display, scored for likes, and turned into commercial assets.

When her daughters encountered unsolicited monetary offers for explicit photos on TikTok or expressed interest in platforms like OnlyFans, Freda resisted relying on moralising shame or prohibition. Instead, she provided alternative frameworks for understanding self-worth, modesty, and the commercial pressures of the gig economy:

> **Freda:** At the moment, sexual stuff is everywhere—TV, blah, blah, blah—and all the girls have got everything hanging out. And so I've had to slowly, like, not tell my girls what to do, but say, 'Hey, you look just as attractive when you cover up like this.' ... In fact, you actually look more attractive because... it gives somebody like, that only you've got, only you can see... It's quite sad for our children growing up thinking you can reach that type of beauty.

Freda’s response was personally impressive and extended beyond reframing aesthetic standards; it also involved providing her daughters with the language needed to label predatory behaviour. When her youngest daughter was sent AI-generated, sexualised images of children by an online contact on Xbox, the relational trust they had cultivated allowed her daughter to report the incident immediately. Reflecting on how she helped her daughter interpret the interaction, Freda noted:

Freda: To keep my children safe, I had to open our relationship in a way so I could feel that they will come and talk to me... So if they were fighting with someone [or if something happened], they'll come and tell. And what I try and do is listen and validate what they're going through and say, 'You do realise this is just somebody behind a screen that's probably miserable and 10 times your age?' [both laughs]

In her incredible story, where I was taken back by the realness of it all, Freda's approach demonstrates how response-able care operates by repositioning the origin of risk. By naming the "ugly humans behind the screen," Freda shifted the locus of discomfort away from her daughter's sense of self or potential shame and onto the external, predatory actor. Giving language to these difficult experiences transformed what could have been an isolating or secretive event into a shared dramatic encounter with their mother. Protection was thus achieved not through top-down surveillance or technical blocking software, but by cultivating an interpretive framework that enabled her daughters to critically evaluate digital encounters, recognise boundary violations, and seek help without fear of judgment.

Anna's bodily-autonomy language, analysed in Chapter 4, connected discomfort with the right to speak. Its significance for this theme is not the repetition of the extract but the relational pathway it created: a bodily feeling could be named, treated as meaningful, and brought to an adult rather than carried as private shame.

Roberta similarly responded to her son's language of sin by foregrounding his wellbeing and cognitive capacity to process explicit material. When her 15 year-old son expressed religious guilt upon being caught watching sexual content, she actively resisted validating his shame:

Roberta: He said, 'Mom, I am also ashamed because I shouldn't be doing that. I'm sinning as a Muslim. It's a big sin to watch those things.' And I said, 'Look, [son],

> I'm not worried about sin at the moment... God will forgive us. It's not a big deal. But I'm worried about your mental health and wellbeing... You're too young, your brain is not properly formed to understand those dynamics.'

On one level, Roberta's response did seem caring shift away from the moral condemnation of his character or spiritual standing. However, on an analytical level, it also represents a strategic movement from traditional religious regulation toward psychological and developmental regulation. Here, adult authority remains firmly centred, but its legitimacy is re-grounded in expert claims about brain maturation, cognitive readiness, and mental health. Holding both readings simultaneously illustrates how situated knowledge can support empathetic, relational care while remaining deeply regulatory in its intent.

Jill described ongoing parental discussion as contributing directly to her son's self-awareness regarding what he watched and how it affected him emotionally and psychologically. In her narrative, critical discernment was not presented as an innate trait that magically emerges at age 17, nor as the automatic result of blocking software. Rather, it was framed as an internalised "critical compass" co-constructed through iterative, relational dialogue with a trusted adult:

> **Jill:** I think I've just tried to always explain to him that there can be very traumatising things that he won't forget. So to be very mindful of the type of content you're choosing to watch, because once you've seen it, you can't unsee it... and what seems abnormal over time, if you keep watching it, becomes normal—you desensitise to it... I think it's mostly been through parental discussions that's hopefully shaped him to be self-aware about what he's watching and consuming.

Analytically, Jill's account positions self-awareness as relationally supported rather than privately or technologically achieved. Rather than relying on rigid prohibition, which

risks driving consumption underground or heightening curiosity, her approach focuses on developing her son's capacity for affective self-monitoring. By introducing concepts like "desensitisation" and the permanence of visual memory ("once you've seen it, you can't unsee it"), adult conversation functions as a scaffold. It equips the young person to evaluate not merely whether a site is "allowed," but how the material actively acts upon their body, mind, and relational worldview. Protection is thus relocated from external technical walls (filters and lockouts) to an internalised, reflective practice of digital agency. These narratives suggest that response required more than saying no. Parents were trying, unevenly and sometimes awkwardly, to provide concepts through which adolescents might interpret bodies, consent, media representations, and online pressure.

Pornography literacy and relational sexuality education offer one scholarly language for this movement. Such approaches emphasise consent, critical media understanding, and ethical relationships rather than prohibition alone (Albury, 2014; Beres, 2014; Healy-Cullen et al., 2023). The parents did not necessarily use these terms, and their stories should not be made to illustrate a pre-existing literacy model. The resonance lies in their attempts to make interpretation and conversation possible.

Knowledge did not guarantee safety or remove shame. "Knowing the facts" about pornography or online safety doesn't magically make the shame go away. It could, however, offer questions around the language through which pressure or discomfort became recognisable. In that sense, knowledge mattered not only as information transferred from parent to adolescent, but as a relational resource that could make an experience easier to bring back into speech.

From Private Burden to Shared Response

The final movement in the theme extended beyond the parent–adolescent relationship. Parents also pointed, directly and indirectly, to the limits of locating education, protection, and communicative care solely within families.

Jill described her son's awareness as having developed largely through family discussion rather than school or public education: "I don't think [son] had much from the education system … or public departments … It's mostly been parental discussions …". Jill did not reject parental involvement. Her account made visible what she understood to happen when wider institutions were absent: responsibility returned to the family. This placed parents in the position of becoming informal pornography and media educators without necessarily having shared language, resources, or support.

Angus similarly located the limits of parental action within the reach of social media: "I can control my kids as much as I want, but if the social medias are exposing them, then sometimes it's quite hard for us as parents to do that."

Angus continued to value parental responsibility, but he resisted locating encounter solely in either the child or the family. His account placed parents within technological conditions they did not create and could not fully control. The limits he described were therefore not evidence of parental indifference or failure; they were part of the environment in which parenting occurred.

These stories allowed response-ability to extend beyond the demand that individual parents become more open, vigilant, or knowledgeable. Drawing briefly on Haraway (2016), I interpret response-ability as a capacity that emerges within relationships and material conditions rather than as a private attribute. Parents remain important, but their

capacity to respond is shaped by the presence or absence of schools, public resources, communities, policy, and accountable digital systems.

Demonstrating that conversation remains possible shows how relational "software" cultivates response-ability through trust, whereas technical "hardware" attempts to enforce compliance through prohibition. Protection thereby transforms from an external security perimeter around a device into an internalised, shared practice of relational care within the family. The fuller ethical and political implications of this shared response belong in Chapter 6. At this point in the analysis, Jill and Angus make one point especially clear: parents were not only asking how to respond better — their stories also exposed how much of that response had been left for families to carry alone.

Chapter Summary

Across Chapters 4 and 5, the four themes tell an interconnected story about how parents made sense of and responded to adolescents' encounters with internet-mediated pornography within a digital environment they experienced as difficult both to contain and to discuss. The first two themes established the moral burden and practical limitations of parental responsibility. "The Good Parent Script" captured what responsible care came to require, while When "No" Is Not Enough showed how rules, filters, supervision, and restrictions became meaningful but incomplete enactments of that responsibility. The final two themes shifted the analysis toward speech and relationship. Known but Unspeakable examined how pornography became socially present but relationally difficult to name within moral worlds shaped by faith, culture, body shame, family histories, and inherited silence. Keeping the Door Open examined parents' attempts to resist relational closure through conversation, trust, interpretive language, and a widening recognition that responsibility could not remain entirely private. This movement did not create a simple opposition between control and conversation. Boundaries communicated care but could

narrow disclosure. Moral language provided guidance but could attach shame to the person. Openness offered relational possibility but could not guarantee speech. Knowledge provided interpretive resources while remaining capable of regulation. Response-ability holds these tensions without resolving them into a new model of ideal parenting. It names an unfinished effort to remain able to respond when certainty and prevention are unavailable. Because parents were already undertaking substantial practical, emotional, and relational labour, the analysis does not conclude that they should simply monitor more, communicate better, or become more knowledgeable.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction: Looking back on Our Haerenga

At the heart of this thesis was a narrative inquiry into how parents in Aotearoa New Zealand make sense of — and respond to — their adolescents' encounters with internet-mediated pornography. Walking side by side the parents' narratives with my reflexive thematic analysis required me to continuously interrogate my own assumptions about what digital protection looks like in practice. It also reminded me of the importance of the partiality of knowledge claims — the researcher, my situated self, "re-telling" the parents' stories, and how they are made sense, only partially understanding their lived experiences, and therefore, ethically locate those partialities.

From this interpretive journey, I constructed four interconnected themes that together trace a movement from control-oriented and protectionist responses, and toward relational care, critical discernment, and response-ability:

- The Good Parent Script: Carrying the Burden of Responsibility;
- When "No" Is Not Enough: The Limits of Control in the Digital Everyday;
- Known but Unspeakable: Pornography, Taboo, and Inherited Silence;
- Keeping the Door Open: Trust, Kōrero, and Becoming Response-able.

Conceptual contributions

As a researcher, the reflexive work lay in honouring the messiness of the parents' lived realities: observing how parents sustained boundaries despite their known limits, how our societal moral ideals could simultaneously guide families and silence both adolescents and parents, and how fostering openness created space for dialogue without erasing the ongoing tension of what remains unsaid. The central argument I advance in this chapter is

that adolescents' encounters with internet-mediated pornography cannot be adequately understood merely as individual behaviours, parental failures, or technical glitches.

In interpreting parents' stories, I found myself continually drawn to the uniqueness and human richness of how these six parents made sense of their adolescents' encounters with internet-mediated pornography. Though each of their stories was distinct, I actively constructed and generated themes from their shared commonalities. Through my analysis, I came to see that their experiences with digital sexuality were deeply entangled with moral, cultural, and ideological frameworks — shaped as much by systemic educational silences as by sophisticated, shrewd commercial platform designs.

While parents remained central figures, my analysis revealed a profound disconnect: they were being asked to carry a private moral responsibility that far exceeded any household's capacity to control, yet the parents felt compelled to meet it completely, yet aspire to meet fully, often 'emptying out the tank' in the name of societal parental pressures to strive for good. As I shared these stories with the broader scholarly literature, I developed four core claims:

- The first one, I argue that parenting in this space involves privately managing what is fundamentally a systemic platform-driven issue;
- Second, I show how confronting the limits of technical control – which I conceptualised as "hardware" — forced a shift among parents toward relationally cultivated discernment and digital sexual citizenship;
- Third, I interrogate how inherited shame and silence continuously govern the conditions under which pornography can become speakable;
- Fourth and finally, I propose response-able parenting as the central conceptual contribution of this thesis. Emphasising response-ability, this approach frames

parenting as a shared relational practice rather than a privatised burden—one through which families and communities might become more capable of connecting and responding together.

Following these claims, I reflect on my own reflexive posture, and outline the thesis's contributions, implications, limitations and horizons for future research.

Reflexive Posture: Navigating the Domestic Everyday as a Researcher-Parent

Sitting in the researcher's chair while navigating the daily realities of domestic life has been a humbling journey. In a sense, I have come from a location and position that resonated with the life of a hyper-individualising man. However, recently, I am becoming a man, a father, a Christian, who aspires to be more collective, interdependent in spirit. Do not get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with independence, but it is the *hyper* that I am concerned about. Whether parenthood is an intentional choice or something we step into, one thing becoming abundantly clear through these interviews is that care does not simply come "naturally." It is an active, day-by-day, hour-by-hour negotiation with oneself. It is a constant calibration of what is working, what is not, and what needs to be let go. This research is not an attempt to prescribe a rigid rulebook for "good parenting" or the "Good parent" script. Instead, I hope to name what is common for so many of us parents in Aotearoa New Zealand — what I have personally felt in my own body as the heavy load, the relentless embodiment of parental duties coupled with life in general, especially in the nuclear frame. There is a profound fatigue in modern parenting, an intensity that saturates the domestic everyday. Yet, I believe this thesis contains hopeful signs that can help lighten that load, regardless of the meanings we make with the digital everyday, with how we respond to what seems so common, or as research describes, normalised; our adolescents' exposure to internet-mediated pornography.

Implications and Contributions

One of the themes that resonated most deeply with me was the complex way parents negotiate the 'Good Parent Script.' Rather than uniformly remaining trapped in reactive and technical policing, parents actively seek to re-frame this societal burden — shifting their focus from enforcing "hardware" boundaries toward cultivating an embodied, relational architecture of care. Protection cannot be reduced to externalised "hardware". It must be relocated into an internalised "software" relational architecture — cultivating an adolescent's critical discernment, media literacy, and trust through ongoing, non-shaming dialogue. By shifting energy away from policing global platform "hardware" and redirecting it toward nourishing the human "software" of connection, digital parenting transforms from an exhausting security job into a sustainable practice of care.

A crucial contribution of this thesis lies in exposing the profound power asymmetry embedded in contemporary digital life, directly challenging the public policy illusion that families can manage this landscape through individualised, 'Do-It-Yourself' (DIY) cyber-safety. In addressing how parents in Aotearoa New Zealand negotiate and respond to the uncertainties and unknown spaces of internet-mediated pornography and, the empirical findings revealed a pervasive pattern of technological fatigue, guilt, and relational isolation concerning their adolescent children. Public guidance initiatives, such as those issued by organisations like Netsafe, frequently offload the burden of digital safety onto individual households by handing parents app-setting checklists, QR codes, and automated guides (e.g., Melhuish & Pacheco, 2021). This kind of individualising framing can operate under the implicit, damaging assumption that if an adolescent encounters harmful or explicit content, it represents a failure of domestic vigilance. What we end up with is a near impossible standard of parental oversight — one that leaves room for the pathologisation

of a parent's struggle while demanding little accountability from the systemic drivers of the digital precarity

When I brought parents' narratives into conversation with the wider systemic horizon, it became strikingly clear why 'DIY safety' hits an immediate structural wall. What isolated parents are up against is not a static tool, but a multi-billion dollar commercial attention economy — a relentless race for human focus and behavioural data accelerated by global market dominance (Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019). As Braidotti (2013, 2019) argues, advanced capitalism is different from traditional capitalism that operated from factories, and the general selling of physical goods. Instead, advanced capitalism operates through a biogenetic and affective logic — exploiting our biological bodies and emotions. This in effect, relentlessly (often an algorithm with little relational ethos attached), commodifies human vitality and our attention through media like pornography. In the domestic everyday, this logic transforms adolescent curiosity and parental concern into raw data points for algorithmic extraction. In a platform landscape where human attention is the primary revenue-generating asset, high-arousal generated from pornography function to capture eyes, maximise screen time, and drive algorithmic recommendation engines (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021; Zuboff, 2019). They are not accidental glitches in the system; they are the core monetisation model, that commodifies, but on steroids!

Crucially, framing this structural asymmetry is not a detour into platform governance; it is essential for answering how parents construct meaning around their own caregiving. It explains why the parents in this study felt so overwhelmed when relying solely on technical boundaries ('hardware'). Expecting an exhausted parent in an Aotearoa living room to out-manoeuvre global attention economies backed by unprecedented wealth is an impossible demand. Exposing this illusion reframes parental struggle from an

individual moral failure into a structural condition, showing why protection must be relocated away from privatised household policing and toward relational trust, critical media literacy, and collective community care.

One more contribution of this thesis is methodological, centred on the practice of epistemic humility within a qualitative 'Big Q' narrative paradigm. Reflexively tracing my own trajectory as a researcher, I recall entering tertiary education with an unshakeable confidence in objective 'hard' science, empirical facts, and encyclopaedic certainty. At that time, concepts like epistemic racism, dominant paradigms, or the hidden politics of knowledge production were entirely absent from my framework. Yet, engaging deeply with critical psychology and bicultural research in Aotearoa New Zealand revealed that 'science' is never neutral — it always operates through a situated cultural and political lens. In digital media research, this dominance often manifests as what Nikolas Rose (2007) calls the 'neuromolecular gaze', a clinical, top-down perspective that reduces complex human experiences to brain chemistry, addictive neural pathways, and diagnostic categories. When academic institutions or public health bodies operate solely through this clinical gaze, they risk practicing a subtle form of epistemic arrogance, positioning everyday families as deficient for failing to execute expert-designed safety protocols or align with dominant knowledge producers.

Acknowledgement of Ongoing Challenges

Epistemic humility demands that researchers critically examine their own epistemological assumptions before evaluating the lives of others. Drawing on Donna Haraway's (1988) concept of situated knowledges, this study asserts that knowledge is always partial, embodied, and produced from a specific socio-material location. Epistemic humility is not about diminishing qualitative inquiry as 'subjective fluff' — something I was guilty of framing in the past (arrogance), but to take immense value of parents' voices

and lived experiences as an interpretive agency and relational authority in navigating the digital everyday. By adopting a qualitative ‘Big Q’ narrative framework, this thesis asserts methodological respect. It honours parents’ stories as legitimate, meaningful, and situated knowledge. Epistemic humility ultimately means stepping back from the pedestal of expert authority, laying down the clinical gaze, and attending closely to the situated truths of families navigating the messy, vital work of everyday care in Aotearoa.

Offering concepts like epistemic humility and response-ability (Haraway, 2016) has provided me with a new possibility to view the pervasive ‘diagnostic melancholy’ of clinical addiction models (DSM-5). Yet, as I sat with my transcripts, I felt a persistent tension: theoretical frameworks alone can easily become abstract academic exercises if they do not touch the messy realities of the domestic everyday. To ground these ideas in lived experience, I realised that future research must move beyond the adult gaze. We need methodologies capable of discovering what is genuinely ‘influential’ from the gaze of an adolescent in building and sustaining relational connection between parents and adolescents (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Reflecting on local practice and literature in Aotearoa New Zealand, it becomes clear that young people often tune out when parents talk in ‘Dad speak’ or ‘old speak’ or rely on mechanical ‘hardware’ solutions like app locks and filters (McGinn et al., 2016). Instead, adolescents respond to an assertive, authentic posture — perhaps even a light-hearted humorous posture. Outside of authenticity, the use of humour has emerged in my thinking as a powerful relational circuit-breaker. It diffuses the intense shame and moral solemnity that typically surround explicit digital media such as pornography. This my signal to the adolescent that the parent is relationally secure enough to step into taboo territory without panicking or overly judging.

The "Too-Hard Basket" and the Courage of Relational Care

Co-constructing these narratives alongside six parents was a deeply humbling, iterative process. Each parent brought a rich, textured, and complex story to share, and my earnest hope throughout this research has been to honour and represent their voices faithfully from within my own situated place as a researcher and father.

Among the many insights that emerged across these encounters, one concept resonated with undeniable force: the “too-hard basket.” Although the phrase arose specifically from Freda’s situated perspective regarding Māori as a Marae of people — a community — with internet-mediated pornography — where historical trauma, colonisation, and cultural taboos intersect — it immediately became clear that Freda was not alone in telling the story of the ‘too-hard basket’. It echoed across other conversations and other observations — talking about porn is not everyone’s cup of tea; I believe it *does* take courage to put oneself into a space to enact relational care.

This concept, the “too-hard basket”, also resonated deeply with my own initial motivations for beginning this project. It started years ago with my quiet realisation that people hide from digital sexuality, or from ‘porn’ given a specific context. Whether it is the parent who wants to assist in caring or an adolescent who wants to approach someone for help, it can be incredibly difficult, uncomfortable, and often a relational risk to face — it requires courage and support.

So, facing this overwhelming infrastructure brings us right back to the beating heart of my thesis: relationships. The relational care, the love, and authentic human concern can be missing sometimes. We cannot police, audit, or algorithmically filter our way out of a ‘steroidal’ digital ecosystem. The only antidote to the “too-hard basket” is the courage to pull these difficult conversations out from under the carpet. By replacing hyper-

individualised fear with relational presence, we create the non-shaming spaces required to support young people — moving away from the isolation of digital harm and stepping into a shared, affirmative practice of domestic joy.

Research Limitations

Every qualitative research journey operates within distinct boundaries. In keeping with a reflexive qualitative paradigm grounded in Donna Haraway's (1988) situated knowledges, defining the limits of a study does not undermine its validity; rather, it outlines the exact conditions under which knowledge was produced. Looking back across the research design, fieldwork, and situated stories, several limitations require reflection. Entering the early interviews, I felt very much like an "intern" stepping into the field without a rigid blueprint, relying almost entirely on my own professional experience, clinical intuition, and personal background as a father. In those first encounters, I was undeniably a bit jittery, hyper-focused on my interview schedule, the 'must dos and don'ts', and worried about my performance of the narrative. However, as the fieldwork progressed, each interview became visibly smoother. I learned to surrender rigid checklist control and allow my hearing to truly serve the speaker. As my active listening deepened with experience, I felt parent participants were given the relational space to speak with candour, transforming what could have been a clinical audit into a genuine rich narrative encounter. Reflecting on the recruitment and interview format, a collaborative approach, interviewing mothers and fathers together would have brought an entirely different, highly fascinating dynamic to the research. While joint interviews carry distinct challenges (such as one partner dominating the conversation or domestic tensions muting disclosure), interviewing parents together would have made visible the real-time, relational micro-negotiations that occur between partners. It would have revealed how couples navigate digital boundaries, negotiate the "too-hard basket," and balance authority and care in

shared living spaces. It may have revealed the invisible or the unspeakable and enriched the narrative.

It deeply touches my heart to acknowledge the clear equity and material privileges at play within the narrative accounts of the participants. The parents who participated described homes with separate bedrooms with doors, individual smartphones, Family Link applications, personal laptops, and high-end gaming consoles like PS5s. These are relatively privileged material conditions and can provide a physical and technological buffer that allow parents to implement boundaries and monitor spaces. There is also space to negotiate privacy in specific ways. However, families experiencing acute financial precarity often contain elements of digital poverty too. In addition, there is the potential to have overcrowded housing and therefore face vastly different structural realities than those parents I interviewed. In this case, physical privacy becomes a privilege, and digital access is limited to public places. This inequity sat at the silent edges of my study.

Centring six parental accounts was a deliberate design choice aimed at achieving deep, textured qualitative insight rather than producing a broad, demographically generalisable map of Aotearoa New Zealand — no doubt that was not the focus. My recruitment process relied on an indirect, participant-led snowball method. This gave way for those parents and caregivers who already possessed the time, perhaps the confidence and safety, to speak candidly about a highly stigmatised topic. It seems that parents facing trouble or those in communities, where speaking about pornography carries severe social penalties remain absent. While my study intentionally incorporated Māori (Indigenous) concepts (whanaungatanga, kōrero) and accounts from migrant parents, the overarching analytical frameworks (post-structuralism, neoliberal responsibilisation, and care ethics) originate within the privileged Western academic tradition. How digital sexuality and

authority are navigated in non-Western or strictly collectivistic paradigms warrants distinct future consideration.

Finally, due to necessary institutional ethical guardrails surrounding research on sensitive topics with minors, adolescents were not interviewed directly. Consequently, youth digital culture, peer-to-peer informal support networks, and adolescent motivations are mediated entirely through adult retrospective accounts. While this adult lens was essential for examining the "Good Parent Script," it provides more room (potentially) for *unfiltered* voices of adolescents, and hopefully as a critical horizon for future research.

Final Synthesis

In the final synthesis, this thesis asks a fundamental question: What are we becoming response-able to? Drawing on Haraway (2016), response-ability is not the neoliberal burden of individualised stressing 'overthinking' digital policing. Nor is it privatised guilt. It is the cultivated capacity to remain present and capable of responding when digital life becomes messy. We are becoming response-able to the inevitability of digital encounters, to the heavy fatigue of modern parents, to the inherited silences surrounding sexuality, and to the systemic power of global platforms. Most of all, we are becoming response-able to one another, ultimately shifting away from the isolated domestic survival of a modern nuclear home toward a shared, affirmative practice of community care that rebuilds the digital village in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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List of Illustrations

Figure 1

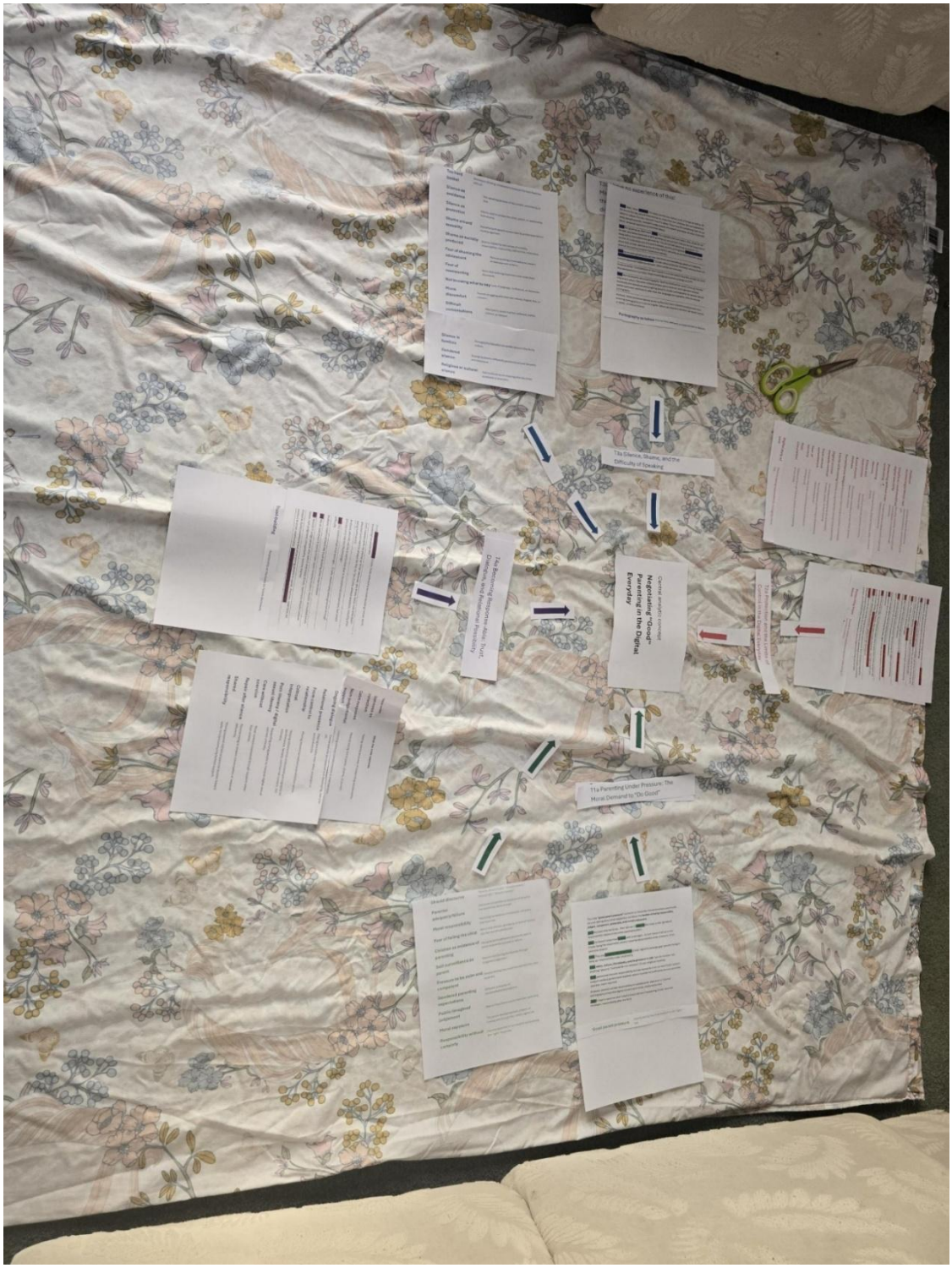


Figure 1 *Getting into the groove of coding and theme development*

Appendices

Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Parents, Adolescents and Internet Porn Study

Working Thesis Title: **Parental Perspectives on Adolescents' Exposure to Internet Pornography: A Narrative Inquiry in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Researcher: Damian Blake Master of Arts (Psychology), School of Psychology, Massey University

Supervisors: Professor Mandy Morgan and Dr Jeronimo Menezes

Researcher Introduction and invitation to take part

My name is Damian Blake, and I am a Master of Arts (Psychology) student at Massey University.

You are invited to take part in a research study exploring how parents in Aotearoa New Zealand make sense of, and respond to, their adolescents' exposure to internet pornography.

This Participant Information Sheet explains the purpose of the study, what participation would involve, possible risks and benefits, and how your information will be protected. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish before deciding whether to participate.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may decline to answer any question, pause or stop the interview at any time, or withdraw from the study.

You may withdraw from the study up to two weeks after your interview without giving a reason. If you withdraw within this period, all data related to your participation (including audio recordings and transcripts) will be removed and securely discarded.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how parents understand and respond to their adolescents' exposure to internet pornography in a digitally saturated environment.

Appendix B: Participant consent form

Participant Consent Form



Project Title: **Parents' Experiences of Adolescents' Exposure to Internet Pornography in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Researcher: Damian Blake, Master of Arts (Psychology), Massey University
Researcher's email: [redacted]@massey.ac.nz; mobile: +64[redacted]

Supervisors:
• Mandy Morgan (C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz | +64 6 951 8058)
• Jeronimo Menezes (J.Menezes@massey.ac.nz)

Consent Statement

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Participant Information Sheet. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study up to two weeks after my interview, without disadvantage.

I understand that:

• My interview will be audio-recorded (with my consent) and later transcribed.
• Transcripts will be anonymised, and pseudonyms used in all written outputs.
• My personal details will remain confidential, and data will be securely stored.
• I may decline to answer any question, pause, or stop the interview at any time.
• I may request a summary of the research findings once the project is completed.

Please tick one option for each statement:

☐ I agree ☐ I do not agree to the interview being audio-recorded.

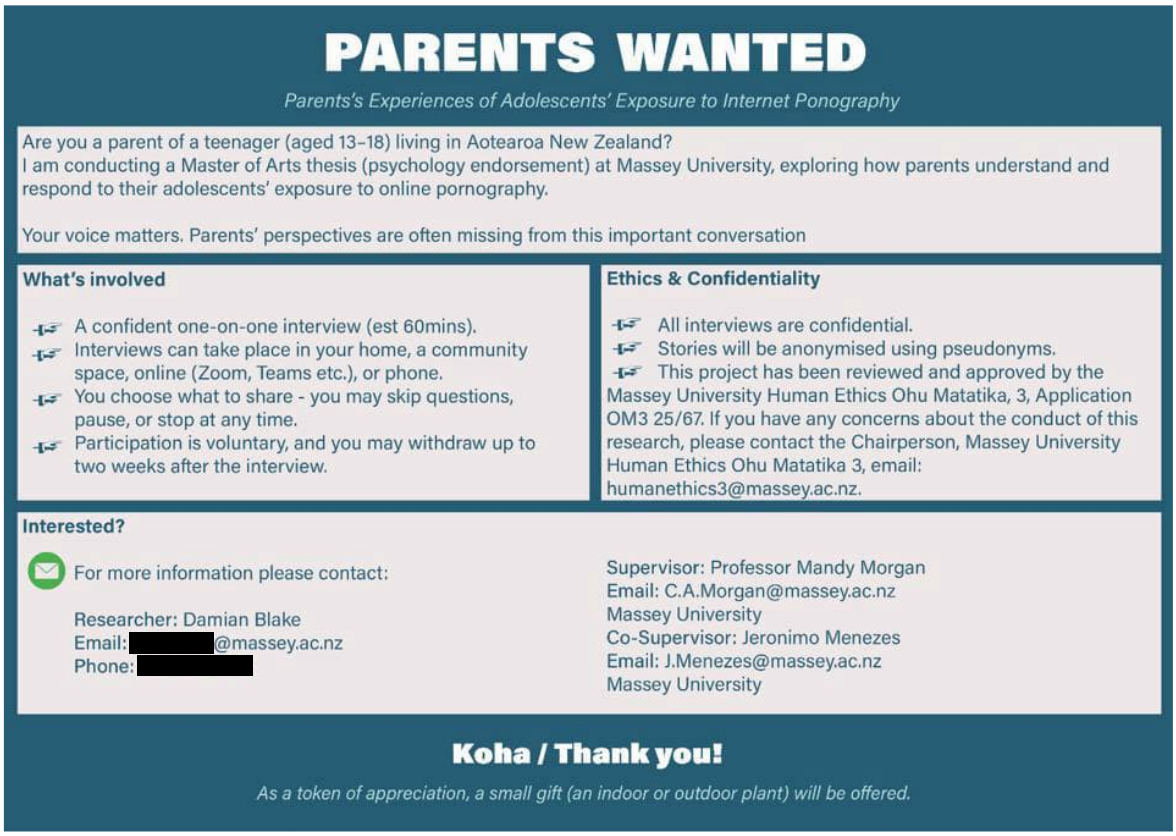
☐ I agree ☐ I do not agree to my anonymised data being used in publications and presentations arising from this research.

Declaration by Participant

I, _____ [print full name], hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Advertisement



PARENTS WANTED

Parents's Experiences of Adolescents' Exposure to Internet Ponography

Are you a parent of a teenager (aged 13–18) living in Aotearoa New Zealand?
I am conducting a Master of Arts thesis (psychology endorsement) at Massey University, exploring how parents understand and respond to their adolescents' exposure to online pornography.

Your voice matters. Parents' perspectives are often missing from this important conversation

What's involved

- A confident one-on-one interview (est 60mins).
- Interviews can take place in your home, a community space, online (Zoom, Teams etc.), or phone.
- You choose what to share - you may skip questions, pause, or stop at any time.
- Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw up to two weeks after the interview.

Ethics & Confidentiality

- All interviews are confidential.
- Stories will be anonymised using pseudonyms.
- This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika, 3, Application OM3 25/67. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 3, email: humanethics3@massey.ac.nz.

Interested?

For more information please contact:

Researcher: Damian Blake
Email: [redacted]@massey.ac.nz
Phone: [redacted]

Supervisor: Professor Mandy Morgan
Email: C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz
Massey University
Co-Supervisor: Jeronimo Menezes
Email: J.Menezes@massey.ac.nz
Massey University

Koha / Thank you!

As a token of appreciation, a small gift (an indoor or outdoor plant) will be offered.

Appendix D: Massey University Human Ethics Committee application approval

TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA | MASSEY UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

28/01/2026

Dear: Damian Blake

Re: Ethics Application - OM3 25/67 - Parental Perspectives on Adolescents' Exposure to Internet Pornography: A Narrative Inquiry in Aotearoa New Zealand

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

Ohu Matatika 3at their meeting held on **Thursday, 16 October 2025**

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Professor Tracy Riley,
Acting Chair, Research Ethics Chair's Committee

Appendix E: Interview guide

Interview Guide



Project Title: Parents' Experiences of Adolescents' Exposure to Internet Pornography in Aotearoa New Zealand

Researcher: Damian Blake, Master of Arts (Psychology), Massey University

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• Mandy Morgan (C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz | +64 6 951 8058)

• Jeronimo Menezes (J.Menezes@massey.ac.nz)

Opening / Relationship-Building

Thank the parent for their time and contribution.
Reassure them about confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any stage until release of scripts. Offer one open invitation to speak first, such as: "I'd love to begin by hearing about your experiences as a parent that navigates in the digital world — wherever you'd like to start."
Warm-up prompts can be used if needed (e.g., "What does a typical day look like for you and your family?").

This interview guide is designed to support conversation rather than prescribe it. Rapport, which comes from the French rapporter (to report, to bring back), is about creating the trust and openness needed for parents to share their stories. The purpose of this guide is not to present a fixed set of scheduled questions, but to hold space for participants' narratives, using prompts only when helpful.

Therefore this guide is flexible and participant-led. Prompts are included to support conversation if needed, rather than as fixed or scheduled questions.

Rapport, as mentioned previously, here is understood not just as small talk, but as opening a trusting space where parents can share their lived experiences. The first invitation to speak is deliberately open, to encourage participants to begin with the stories they feel matter most.

The following prompts are examples of follow-up questions that may be asked as each parent's story unfolds. The direction of the interview will be guided by what participants share, rather than imposed by the interviewer. These prompts serve to keep the conversation

connected to the research interests while respecting parents' practical knowledge and lived experience.

General Digital Parenting

• What role does the internet play in your child's life?

• What kinds of conversations (if any) do you have with your child about their online activities?

• How confident do you feel in guiding your child through contemporary digital spaces and potential challenges they may have?

Experiences with Pornography Exposure

• Have you ever thought about or encountered the issue of pornography or sexually explicit or sexually offensive material in relation to your child?

• What comes to mind when you hear about young people accessing pornography online?

• How do you think pornography might influence adolescents' understandings of sexuality or relationships?

— If they share a specific incident, follow up with curiosity: Can you tell me what happened and how you responded?

Parental Responses & Strategies

— If a concrete situation is shared: How have you responded? How do you think you might respond? How do you think you are supposed to respond?

— If hypothetical situations are shared: How do you think a parent should respond to their children's exposure to online pornography? How does your own approach align with, or differ from, those expected responses?

— If the child was exposed to pornography: What makes these conversations easier or harder?

• Are there cultural, religious, or community values that shape how you approach this?

Reflections on Support & Resources

• What kinds of support or resources would be helpful for you as a parent?

• What role should schools, policymakers, or community organisations play in helping families with these issues?

Closing

• Invite final reflections: Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences or views on this topic?
• Reassure participant about withdrawal rights and data confidentiality.
• Provide support resource sheet again (e.g., Lifeline, Youthline).
• Thank them sincerely and offer a token of appreciation such as an indoor plant.

Appendix F: Authority for release of transcript

Authority for the release of transcripts

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AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Full Name (printed): _____