# Understanding How Adolescents Make Sense of Sexually Explicit Internet Material

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Psychology

at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

Robyn Vertongen

2023

## Abstract

Debate over the effects of pornography exposure on young people has intensified with the ubiquitous use of the Internet, mobile phones and digital devices that allow adolescents easy access to pornography. Research exploring adolescent pornography use has predominantly focused on concerns about the potential negative impacts of such use, with positive experiences typically ignored. Furthermore, adolescent perspectives about pornography are often overlooked or considered questionable. In light of this, I sought to explore adolescent perceptions of pornography use endeavouring to leave space for the sharing of both negative and positive experiences. This was undertaken via in-depth exploratory interviews with 13 adolescents, 14 to15 years of age. Two interviews were conducted with each participant to build trust and openly discuss this private and sensitive topic. Interpretive thematic analysis was used to abstract five dominant dilemmas: Participants positioned pornography as dilemmatic through regarding it as being both natural and unnatural, normal to view but not normal representations of sexual relationships, fake and real, harmful and harmless, and good and bad. These dilemmas often remained unresolved for participants, although they proactively negotiated them using various strategies to manage and control perceived risks, such as restricting their viewing behaviours. The dilemmatic processes that adolescents engage with indicate opportunities to broaden discussions with adolescents about pornography and to encourage critical reflections around their ambiguity. I discuss how these findings relate to key underlying assumptions made about adolescent pornography use. Pornography use did not equate to ongoing frequent pornography use that was judged as harmful nor did it lead to condoning sexual behaviours or interactions that were considered socially unacceptable or outside socially sanctioned sexual practices. Participant's made choices about pornography use based on their underlying value of being a 'good' human being and positioned learning about sex via the media as a normal developmental task. I

challenge the notion that adolescent perspectives about pornography use are faulty due to their immaturity and misalignment with adult perceptions of harm. When adolescent perspectives do not align with adult concerns of harm that are embedded in dominant socio-cultural perspectives then they are typically reframed as distorted due to underestimating risks to themselves. As an alternative, I propose that these discrepancies in perception could equally be conceptualised as showing compassion for others, where such compassion is desirable for social connectedness and healthy sex. Overall, the current study provides new understandings about how adolescents interpret their experiences with pornography and highlights the limitations of the current theoretical proclivity for reducing pornography use to simplified models of risk. It is recommended that future research moves away from evaluating the accuracy of adolescent insights based on how well they align with risk-focused frameworks to recognizing adolescents' ability to hold complex viewpoints about pornography that are grounded in prior knowledge and social values.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to make a special thanks to my supervisors, Dr Clifford van Ommen and Professor Kerry Chamberlain for your sustained support, expertise, humour, and encouragement, which made it possible for this thesis to be completed. Your kind wisdom and purposeful questions have expanded my critical lens in evaluating scientific practices of inquiry. I thank you for this learning opportunity and will carry this gift forward into my own practice with the goal of passing it onto others. I am grateful to the Massey University Ethics Committee who provided ethical guidance and approval of my research project.

Thank you to the participants for having the courage to share their perspectives on pornography use. It was a privilege to work alongside all the teenagers who were open and authentic in their opinions. I want to thank their parents, the board of trustees and staff who understood the significance of being able to talk about pornography with this age group and who supported the courage of their teenagers.

Thank you to Alex Anderson for your advice and expertise in adolescent sexuality, and your guidance on using inclusive language at the outset. Your compassion for inclusivity and creating a link between myself and the young people was greatly appreciated. Thank you to Nephi Skipwith for your cultural input and wisdom, and for reminding me that adolescence is a time to explore and to have fun. Your manaaki of others and validation that sexuality holds a special place in Māoritanga, are gifts that I found useful when working with all people.

To my colleagues Veronica Hopner, Pita King and Kathryn McGuigan, I am grateful for your support, hallway conversations, and encouragement when things wavered. Your validation and reflective conversations around methodology in particular were invaluable. Thank you to Harvey Jones in helping set up all things technical and my online advertisements.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my whānau (family) for their support and understanding when I prioritised my thesis and to my parents for fostering the importance of being open minded. A special thanks to my teenagers who were always willing to share their opinions about pornography and how I should approach this subject with other teens, and my husband whose wit and hugs kept me grounded. Finally, I want to acknowledge Caryl Huzziff, my sister, for our long conversations around clinical perspectives, developmental considerations, and words of encouragement.

## Table of Contents

## Table of Figures

# Chapter One: Introduction

The term ‘pornography’ evokes different images or meanings for different people that can vary greatly. Pornography can include both legal and illegal forms. Legal pornography includes a broad spectrum of sexually explicit material between adult actors that is not considered objectionable under the law. Illegal forms of pornography, such as sexual exploitation of children, bestiality, extreme cruelty, and acts of torture are deemed unlawful (Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act, 1993) and are not the focus on the current thesis. How the term, pornography, is understood is dependent on our social context, gender, culture, values, experiences, and at what point in time we exist (Hunt, 1993; Kendrick, 1987). Consequently, there is significant ambiguity about what content is considered pornographic and how to define it.

The term pornography derives from the Greek word “pornographos”, which comes from porni (prostitute) and graphein (to write) and originally referred to literature depicting the life of prostitutes (Hunt, 1993). Pornography has a long historical association with indecency that continues to permeate current appraisals of what pornography means today. The notion of indecency makes the topic highly emotive and subject to sanctions and social-political indignation. Moreover, debates are fuelled across generations by the perception that young people are confronted by, and doing things that their parents never faced, giving rise to renewed fears and calls to control pornography distribution and access. These vigorous public debates subsequently bestow the impression more is known about pornography than what is applicable. Instead, original research exploring adolescent pornography use and how they understand pornography use is lagging well behind the public discourse with significant gaps prevailing in understanding adolescent perspectives on pornography use ( Alexandraki et al.,

2018; Behun & Owen, 2019; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; Koletić, 2017; Massey et al., 2021; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016).

When the term pornography is paired with adolescents it can be difficult to know how they fit together because they call to mind conflicting images. Adolescence is predominantly conceptualized as a developmental phase marked by the onset of puberty. Adolescence is a relatively new concept that can be described as a prolonged period constructed by societal demands that leave adolescents navigating the gap between the asexual child and sexual adult (Russell, 2005). This gap creates a tension between adult and adolescent perceptions of expected normal sexual behaviours, and blurred lines for when adulthood and its associated responsibilities are reached. And while adolescents are expected to negotiate healthy sexual relationships, claims about their immaturity and naivety lead to concerns around their susceptibility to risks from exposure to pornography (e.g., Behun & Owen, 2019; Brown & Wisco, 2019; Giordano et al., 2022). However, some authors have criticized social attitudes that conflate innocence of youth with the absence of sexuality because it leads to sex being associated with youth being damaged (e.g., Lamb et al., 2018) and conceptualises youth as being incapable of knowing what is needed (Allen, 2011).

Alongside the construction of adolescence, the Internet has provided new opportunities for adolescents to connect with each other and society. The Internet has reignited moral alarms and debate over the effects of pornography due to youth being able to access and create sexual material through mobile phones and digital devices. The ease of access, affordability, and anonymity was dubbed the “Triple-A” effect by Cooper (1998). These three factors are thought to “combine to turbo charge, that is accelerate and intensify online sexual activity” (Cooper & Griffin-Shelly, 2002, p. 5). The Internet also allowed the pornography industry to side-step controls and laws that were used to safeguard youth, and society in general, from potential offensive material. Moreover, it has been noted that while

the pornography industry denies targeting youth, they use genres such as “barely legal” or “teen porn” that are youth orientated (Flood & Hamilton, 2003).

This increased access to online pornography combined with the developmentally sensitive age group of adolescence has raised concerns about pornography’s negative impacts on their wellbeing (Behun & Owen, 2019; Wright, 2014). Concerns have included sexual coercion or victimization (Brown & L’Engle, 2009; Hald et al., 2010; Rothman et al., 2015; Rostad et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2018; Ybarra et al., 2011), permissive attitudes and promiscuity (Baams et al., 2015; Doornwaard et al., 2015; Flood & Hamilton, 2003; Hald et al., 2013; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006), contracting sexually transmitted infections, unprotected sex and unwanted pregnancies (Nigussie et al., 2020; Wingood et al., 2001), heightened sexual interest, sexting and sexual preoccupation (Castro-Calvo et al., 2018; Peter & Valkenburg, 2008a; Nieh et al., 2020), poorer psychological wellbeing (Doornwaard et al., 2016; Efrati & Amichai-Hamburger, 2019; Giordano et al., 2022; Ma, 2019; Tsitsika et al., 2009), self-objectification (Maheux, 2021; Willis et al., 2022), normalising gender inequalities (Coy & Horvath, 2018; Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006; Klaassen & Peter, 2015), sexual uncertainty (Peter & Valkenburg, 2008b) and a moral decline in society (Efrati, 2020; Wright, 2014). However, conflicting findings have stimulated further debate about what is meant by pornography consumption and its associated risks or harm for adolescents (e.g., Martyniuk & Štulhofer, 2018; Štulhofer et al., 2019; Vandenbosch & van Oosten, 2018).

A far less popular idea is the call to include positive aspects of adolescent sexuality in relation to pornography (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018; Boislard et al., 2016; McKee et al., 2021; McKee et al., 2023; van de Bongardt et al., 2015). These authors have called for the documenting of psychological and developmental dimensions of sexuality to support young people as they navigate what it means to be sexual beings. Pornography has been associated with positive factors among adolescence such as, satisfying sexual pleasure and curiosity,

generating ideas, exploring their sexual identity and orientation, and promoting communication about sexual matters (Attwood et al., 2018; Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Castro-Calvo et al., 2018; Doornwaard et al., 2017; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; McCormack & Wignall, 2017).

While there have been clear calls to explore adolescent perspectives on pornography use, ethical barriers often prevent direct discussions with adolescents leading to a heavy reliance on surveys (Alexandraki et al., 2018; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). However, surveys are framed around adult concerns of risk resulting in adolescent perspectives continuing to be marginalised in research, producing one-sided, adult-dominated narratives (Attwood et al., 2018; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; Henry & Talbot, 2019; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). To gain a fuller understanding of adolescent pornography use and their perspectives they need to be included in the dialogue. This inclusion will help bring an understanding of adolescent perspectives of pornography and allows scope to discover alternative meaning making. Exploring how adolescents make sense of pornography forms the foundation of the current thesis. More specifically, in this thesis I seek to gain an understanding of how adolescents engage with and make sense of pornography whilst leaving space for both negative and positive experiences to be shared.

Based on the importance of grounding current knowledge on its historical context, Chapter Two begins by outlining a brief history of pornography, exploring patterns over time, and how it became a central concern in contemporary society. New Zealand history is highlighted to provide the specific context for the current study. The pattern of attempting to control pornography through censorship laws that are intertwined into the political sphere and policy making within New Zealand's history are discussed. The debate over how pornography is defined is unpacked; discussing how the definition is weaved through laws, empirical definitions, and current social debates. The broader term, sexually explicit internet

material (SEIM) is introduced, and the importance of this definition is explained. It is also noted that finding a shared definition that is acceptable across cultures, time, and generations is elusive.

This is followed by an outline of how the term adolescence is conceptualised and then how adolescence and pornography use are brought together. This outlines how adolescents have been studied through a lens of being problematized and how these problems should be rectified. Pornography use follows a similar pattern to how adolescents are often conceptualised as being problematic within society, especially male youth. And although positive psychology has pushed for identifying strengths and resilience (e.g., Shek et al., 2019) this has seldom generalised to adolescent pornography use. Instead, when pornography and adolescence are put together the worry about negative impacts heightens. It is this context that fuels key underlying assumptions made about adolescent pornography use and narrows the focus of research toward adult perspectives of risk and harm.

Chapter Three provides a framework for capturing key assumptions being made about adolescent pornography use and is presented in the article, “Pornography and adolescents: Unravelling dominant research assumptions” (Vertongen et al., 2022a). The underlying assumptions were abstracted using a critical lens to ask, what was being proposed within the literature, exploring meaningful relations between concepts, and what assumptions were folding back on themselves through online media. This translated to the following key questions being asked when scoping the literature; what are the central concerns about adolescent pornography use; what concepts or assumptions are being repeatedly made; what historical issues lend itself to these issues; how well do the concepts explain adolescent pornography use; what are the key relations between the identified concepts; and how are the concepts related more broadly to society? This chapter discusses three key assumptions about adolescent pornography use; once exposed to pornography adolescents continue to

engage with it; pornography is harmful; and pornography provides the template for unhealthy sexual practices. This critical examination of the literature highlights the clear need to extend our knowledge about how adolescents make sense of their pornography use from a broader perspective and provides the justification for the current study.

Chapter Four outlines the purpose of the present study and justification for the research question; how do adolescents make sense of SEIM use? This is followed by the methodology and an overview of the method used in the current study. To provide a methodological consistency throughout the thesis a critical realism framework was used based on the work of philosopher Roy Bhaskar and other key authors such as Margaret Archer, Andrew Sayer, and Berth Danermark. Critical realism is a philosophy of science that theorises what the world must be like for good science to be possible and how we can know what we know (Archer, 1998; Bhaskar, 2011). Although, critical realism does not have a unitary framework it does have shared principles that brings critical realists together (Danermark et al., 2019; Gorski, 2013; Little, 2015). Most importantly, it moves away from the dualism debate of "either-or" perspectives to focus on a "both-and" perspective. A key focus of critical realism is to consider the processes that contribute to experiences or events rather than finding a definitive meaning or objective experience. This framework helped shape the proposed questions put to the literature review, the questions raised in this study and the interpretation of the data. In brief, the current thesis is grounded in ontological realism and epistemological relativism, whereby meaning is contextualised (See Chapter Four for further explanation).

Following on from the methodology discussion, Chapter Four provides the method used to answer the question, how do adolescents make sense of SEIM use. This outlines how 13 adolescents, 14 to 15 years of age, were recruited and the rationale behind using in-depth individual interviews. Individual conversational style interviews align well with the study's

aim of allowing space for all perspectives on SEIM use to be valid, both positive and negative, and for participants to explain how they arrived at their conclusions. Two interviews were conducted for each participant to build trust and allow for open discussion on this highly private and sensitive topic. This chapter concludes with considerations about researcher positionality and how reflexivity was used in the current study. Self-reflections about who I am, and my underlying assumptions are summarised to allow clarity about how this influences my data collection, findings, and conclusions.

Chapter Five expands on the methods and considerations for exploring SEIM use with adolescents. This chapter is presented as the journal article "Sensitive engagement: Lessons learnt from researching pornography use with adolescents" (Vertongen et al., under review). This article details the learnings from engaging adolescents in discussions about pornography, ethical considerations, and risk management planning. The difficulties encountered during the initial recruitment process are explained and how these were managed. The importance of engaging with gatekeepers is then shared alongside the practicalities of how to engage adolescents in conversational-style interviews about pornography. This is especially important given male adolescents have typically participated superficially when interviewed about pornography.

Chapter Six then discusses the main findings, presented in the journal article entitled, "Adolescent dilemmas about viewing pornography and their efforts to resolve them" (Vertongen et al., 2022b). Findings show participants experienced dilemmas about viewing SEIM and used various approaches to manage their dilemmas. Five dominant dilemmas were abstracted through interpretive thematic analysis and highlighted the complexities associated with these dilemmas, which often remained unresolved for participants. How participants positioned pornography as being both natural and unnatural, normal to view but not normal representations of sexual relationships, fake and real, harmful and harmless, and good and

bad are discussed. This is followed by how participants proactively negotiated the dilemmas using various strategies to manage and control perceived potential risks.

Chapter Seven discusses how these findings relate to the initial key assumptions presented in Chapter Three, that: once adolescents view pornography then they will continue to view pornography; pornography is harmful; and pornography provides the template for (unhealthy) sexual practices. The current study extends our understanding to younger adolescents, who showed similar nuanced and contradictory ways of making sense of SEIM use as older adolescents and adults. Implications from these findings are discussed in relation to how we could approach this topic with adolescents in the future and the care that needs to be taken in labelling their perspectives as problematic or distorted. Instead, adolescents fluctuating ambiguity about viewing SEIM is described as an opportunity to explore their nuanced interpretations of SEIM use. This is followed by my final conclusions drawn from this study, whereby I recapitulate the importance of moving away from linear cause and effect assumptions that oversimplifies adolescent pornography use as being harmful through their passive acceptance of negative sexual scripts. Instead, I propose trusted adults can capitalise on adolescent ambiguity as an opportunity that can be expanded upon and openly explored rather than being regarded as distortions that need correcting to conform to dominant social expectations. This chapter is closed with some final reflections about the research process and my experiences.

# Chapter Two: Pornography and Adolescents

In this chapter I begin by outlining a brief history of pornography and how it became a central concern in contemporary society given this underpins our understanding of adolescent pornography use. I have delved into New Zealand's history with pornography and its attempts to control it through censorship laws and policy making to consider the context specific to my study. The debate over what is meant by pornography is then discussed and the importance of the broader term, sexually explicit internet material (SEIM) is introduced as a term used in this study. Given the research question of how adolescents make sense of pornography use, I move on to explore what I mean by adolescence and adolescent sexuality? This is followed by an outline of how adolescence and pornography use are brought together and what is meant by harm or risk. I illustrate how research into adolescent pornography use focuses on adult perspectives of risk, while minimising adolescent perspectives. I explain the need to use a youth-centred approach that remains open to all adolescent perspectives having value. To be inclusive of all perspectives I argue for a broader model, such as Tolman and McClelland's (2011) framework that allows for both positive and negative aspects of sexual matters to be shared and understood.

## A brief history of pornography

The inception of pornography is difficult to pinpoint as sexually explicit material has featured throughout history. For example, the Khajuraho group of monuments in India are famous for their temples that are intricately carved showing sexual positions and practices. Likewise, one could ask if the phallic images and figurine statues in ancient Greece and Roman culture were pornographic. Naples statue from the Pompeii era of Pan, the Greek god of the wild, copulating with a goat may be interpreted as artistic, spiritually inspired, and/or

sexually explicit. In our current era different judgements are placed upon these displays, as demonstrated by the Pompeii exhibition in London that came with parental guidance warning signs (Vout, 2013). We cannot help but look at sculptures through our present-day viewpoints that have been shaped by modern socialisation, and wonder what the intent was behind their construction. Hence, it has always been difficult to define when sexually explicit material is intended to arouse, share a spiritual or mythology connection, educate, or create artistic entertainment.

Whilst sexually explicit material can be seen throughout the ages, Lynn Hunt (1993) highlights some fundamental trends in society that have enabled pornography or sexual materials to become prevalent in their current state. The first was the invention of the printing press in 1455 by Johann Gutenburg, which led to significant advances in communicating information that could be easily copied. Over time the printing press allowed for greater freedom in published materials from books to pamphlets, loosening the control of those in power. According to historian, Lynn Hunt, the earliest modern use of the term “pornography” first appeared in France in 1806 following several years of officials confiscating published obscenities that had been coupled with political mockery. Because pornography was associated with immorality it could be used as a political weapon or to evoke scandals toward targeted aristocrats, politicians, churches, and the like. Other Westernised countries had a steady increase of sexually explicit material starting to permeate society. In contrast to condemning sexually explicit material, it contributed to the Enlightenment movement whereby sexual material was intellectualised and used to inform knowledge, with the idea that sexuality was natural and sexual expression was part of happiness.

Hunt (1993) described a history of pornography being moulded by political and moral conflicts, akin to those found today. Early on, views deviated between writers and artists who wanted liberty of the press on the one hand and government officials, policeman, and clergy

who wanted to protect society from potential harm and loss of morals. During the seventeen and eighteen hundred's sexually explicit material was censored due to religious, political, and moral reasons (Hunt, 1993; Mulholland, 2013). Sexual material was considered especially inappropriate for working class males, who lacked moral judgement, and vulnerable women and children who needed protecting from such indecencies (Kammeyer, 2008). Overtime the responsibility of protecting society was placed upon the courts and the term 'pornography' became common use (Mulholland, 2013; Robertson, 1979). In the twentieth century, new technologies including cameras, television, and recording devices, allowed ever increasing access to affordable sexual material and with each increased access came concerns about people's wellbeing and the corruption of society.

Censorship laws were developed alongside the growth and diversification of pornography amidst fears of moral corruption or contamination of vulnerable people within society. Censorship refers to the official suppression of material deemed objectionable. Censorship was often based on the principle or degree of obscenity, whereby obscenity was considered a crime while sexually explicit material that was not obscene was considered legal (Christoffel, 1989; Robertson, 1979). However, attempts to determine degrees of obscenity were often unsuccessful. For example, in the United States, Justice William Brennan, in the Roth vs United States court case in the late 1950s, first attempted to define obscenity through using community norms or standards as a criterion and the criteria that the material needed to be "utterly without redeeming social value" (Kammeyer, 2008. p. 34). However, due to Brennan's ruling, lawyers were able to defend producers and distributors of pornography by arguing that their work was not "utterly without redeeming social value". This definition was later modified, and obscenity was described as "if the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interests" and "if the work, when taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or

scientific value" (Kammeyer, 2008, p. 34). The use of social-cultural norms to determine obscenity continues to be used in contemporary society. While public debate around censorship and attempts to prohibit pornography was often intended to curtail its availability, it led to increased discourse and interest in pornography (e.g., Foucault, 1978). This then inadvertently pushed pornography back into the public eye and the subject matter perpetuated itself.

A new revelation, that pornography might not corrupt people, entered the debate after Denmark legalised pornography in the late 1960s. Denmark's legalisation of pornography did not lead to the predicted moral decline, as assessed by crime statistics or changes in public behaviour (Robertson, 1979). Hence, the debates between liberal rights and conservative perspectives about pornography now included, as Robertson claimed, potential benefits such as marital sexual communication, providing pleasure for the "undateable", and could serve as a "safety valve" for rapists or paedophiles.

During the 1980s, the strengthening of neoliberal ideology underpinned the proliferation of pornography. Neoliberalism's emphasis on privatization, individual choice, and market freedom provided entrepreneurs with greater opportunities to make substantial profits from commodifying sex (Kammeyer, 2008; Weeks, 1985). Alongside the deregulation of markets was the emphasis on individuals' freedom of choice and liberty that meant opposing narratives were framed as being totalitarian (Barnett & Bagshaw, 2020). These political divides underpinned the debate between what was legitimate or harmful about pornography and pornography was used as political commodity. Constructs such as sexual liberation and empowerment were pitted against erotizing violence and degradation narratives. These polarised debates of being pro-porn or anti-porn reflected oversimplified positions that downplayed the complexities and encouraged antagonistic disputes (Attwood et al., 2018b; Mulholland, 2013; Smith & Attwood, 2014).

In contemporary society, the introduction of the Internet, digital cameras and mobile phones has allowed pornography to be cheaply produced and freely available through the push of a button. This has reignited the moral alarm and debate over the negative effects that pornography use has, especially on young people (Gorman et al., 2010). As a result, some countries have introduced new laws to block online websites that show objectionable, highly offensive, or harmful material. The United Kingdom is currently introducing age verification standards to regulate access to online pornography, whereby users of porn websites must verify they are 18 years and over (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, February 2022). However, the same article acknowledges that many young people access pornography through social media websites, which are not included in this regulation and hence are likely to negate these control strategies. Other government inquiries or reports have likewise highlighted how age verification is a token gesture that can be sidestepped (e.g., Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018; Day, 2021). Still others have highlighted how pornography can be accessed through various mediums, such as online games that can construct sexual experiences digitally, animated sexual activity, and virtual reality formats that allow simulated sexual encounters (Ashton et al., 2019). These examples highlight the difficulties in controlling online sexually explicit material in its diverse forms and how socially sanctioned practices are embedded in historical concerns of harm.

## New Zealand's censorship history of sexually explicit material and current context

Within New Zealand's early colonial era, there were clear differences between Māori and early missionaries' stance on nudity and sex. For example, conservative Christian morality was often imposed on Māori tradition, whereby missionaries censored Māori carvings by removing their penises, requested Māori to cover up, and destroyed artwork that depicted same-sex relationships (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007; Christoffel, 1989). Prior to

colonisation, Māori society was accepting of sexual diversity and evidence points to Māori having multiple partners throughout their lifetime (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007). However, the colonisation of Māori sexuality, which was heavily influenced by various materialisations of the Christian faith, meant indigenous practices and beliefs were reframed as promiscuous and falling short of Pākehā standards (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007; Le Grice & Braun, 2018).

During the initial colonisation period censorship was largely left to the middle-class colonial gentry who controlled positions of power within New Zealand. And although New Zealand censorship legislation was comparable to Britain and Australia, it often followed much later. New Zealand's first censorship legislation dated back to the Offensive Publications Act 1892, which was designed to help customs restrict the increased importation of indecent material and was followed by various amendments that allowed authorities to search and destroy indecent publications. New Zealand society experienced similar tensions and changes as abroad, such as increased liberalisation, science versus religion debates, increased freedoms and mobility, industrialisation, feminism, and a drive for equality, individual freedom, and artistic expression. Simultaneously, conservative groups were concerned with the destruction of public morality and loss of Christian and family values (Christoffel, 1989).

According to Christoffel (1989) the 'Indecent Publications Act' of 1910, and its subsequent amendment in 1954, allowed greater powers to seize material classified as indecent and obscene. Within New Zealand, the term indecent was not defined but rather a set of criteria was drawn up that needed to be considered when making the judgement of indecency. These judgements revolved around the artistic value and/or individual rights to freedom versus obscenity debate. In 1949 restrictive certificates (e.g., R16) were introduced in a bid to help protect children and youth from being exposed to inappropriate material for their age. New Zealand also cycled through attempts to govern indecent material followed by

increasing liberal acceptance of what was normative. For example, censorship laws continued to prohibit publications that contained information on contraception or sex education, and it remained a criminal offence to instruct or supply youth with contraceptives until 1977, due to the fear that it would lead to promiscuity (Christoffel, 1989). General publications about contraceptives and sex education in schools remained banned until 1985 but sexuality education has now become standard practice in New Zealand schools. This allowed youth to make decisions from an informed position (Allen, 2006), which has more recently included pornography as a potential source of education (NZHEA, 2020).

Similarly, the increase in sexual material in film and theatre during the 1970s led to a petition, headed by Patricia Bartlett, for stricter censorship laws against material promoting sexual immorality. Although the petition did not lead to legislation, the Society for the Promotion of Community Standards (SPCS) charity was formed and continues to advocate today for the promotion of moral and spiritual welfare (http://www.spcs.org.nz/objectives/). The SPCS website boldly links pornography to addiction, marital problems, increased rape, child sexual abuse, sexually permissive attitudes and behaviours, and sexual exploitation of woman and children. Through exploring their online literature, it is observed that illegal pornography is also conflated with legal pornography to discredit any legitimacy in pornography and to evoke strong emotional responses. Evoking strong emotions has often been used to activate responses and move audiences toward change (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009; Grüning & Schubert, 2022; Segal, 1998).

Another prominent movement was the Women Against Pornography (WAP) group who formed in New Zealand in 1983 and aligned closely with anti-pornography feminist ideals, such as those advocated by Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon. Dworkin's (1989) and Mackinnon's (1989) writing amalgamates the sexual exploitation of others, such as rape that is rightly so never acceptable, with legal pornography and discusses them as the

same thing. This amalgamation is then used to make the point, according to Dworkin, that all pornography depicts women as “whores” owned by men, which reinforces gender inequalities and power imbalances (Dworkin, 1989). The anti-porn feminism movement considered political activism pivotal in censoring and removing pornography as a form of erotised sexual violence against women. Similarly, the WAP group’s primary focus was on how pornography denigrates and objectifies women, and in doing so sets up attitudes in society that marginalise women.

By the late 1980s, WAP and other community groups campaigned vigorously for pornography to be defined and included in the censorship process. As a result, the New Zealand Government set up a ministerial committee of inquiry into pornography and released its report in 1989, which went on to help construct the ‘Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act' in 1993, which remains in current use (OFLC, 2015; Wilson, 2002). The ministerial committee also suggested that in the future the Human Rights Commission could have the capacity to deal with complaints about pornography given its potential to discriminate against women (Department of Justice, 1989). Although the WAP group disappeared in the mid-1990s, the principle that pornography is demeaning to women and promotes societal inequalities remains present (e.g., Jensen, 2016; Tyler & Quek, 2016; Tyler & Coy, 2022).

New Zealand attempted to define objectionable in 1993 as part of the ‘Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993’. This Act defined "objectionable" (and thus could ban) publications if it "describes, depicts, expresses, or otherwise deals with matters such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty, or violence in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good” (Department of Internal Affairs, n.d. p. 17).

The act lists the following sexual activities as objectionable if they:

promote or support or tend to promote or support:

(a) the exploitation of children, or young persons, or both, for sexual purposes; or

(b) the use of violence or coercion to compel any person to participate in, or submit to, sexual conduct; or

(c) sexual conduct with or upon the body of a dead person; or

(d) the use of urine or excrement in association with degrading or dehumanising conduct or sexual conduct; or

(e) bestiality; or

(f) acts of torture or the infliction of extreme violence or extreme cruelty (p. 17)

According to the ‘Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993' consideration in making the judgement of "objectionable" needs to reflect on the context of the publication as a whole and its intent, such as its intended audience, its character, merit, or importance to "literary, artistic, social, cultural, educational, scientific or other matters". When applying this definition to pornography it clearly excludes practices that are considered outside contemporary norms of acceptability. Hence, similar to other countries, New Zealand uses social norms grounded in contemporary society to determine what is objectionable. Downloading objectionable material from an overseas website is considered an importation and is currently illegal in New Zealand (OFLC, 2015).

At present, the New Zealand Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC, 2015) continues to manage the tensions between the right to freedom of expression and the protection of the public from harm. The OFLC accepts the need for freedom of expression as a mechanism for political, social, scientific, and artistic growth and does not see its role as sorting out matters of personal taste or sexual preferences. It also acknowledges the competing tension of harm through highlighting the potential risk of desensitisation and attitudinal changes. The OFLC notes that repeated exposure to sexual violence and human degradation can make New Zealanders become used to unpleasant images so that over time they will no longer be bothered by the images, and thus "changing attitudes and behaviours

over time and putting current and subsequent generations at real risk" (OFLC, 2015, p. 2). The OFLC emphasise the importance of pre-empting and labelling material before it is released as people unintentionally exposed to highly disturbing content cannot 'un-see' or 'un-experience' what they have viewed.

Like other regulatory bodies, the OFLC acknowledge they cannot regulate or monitor much of the material that enters New Zealand due to the numerous access points and platforms on the Internet (OFLC, 2015). Though Wilson (2002) raised the question about Internet Service Providers (ISPs) having responsibility for the content they provide access to, New Zealand has opted for viewers to self-regulate what they watch alongside warning labels. Therefore, the responsibility for viewing habits is placed on the parents and/or the young person to self-govern. At a broader social-political level, reports emphasise the need for society to protect and educate young people about the risks. For example, the OFLC recommended “to ensure young people are provided with the best resources, we must engage with other organisations with an interest in the protection of children. This means developing and strengthening relationships with schools, libraries, government agencies and NGOs involved with sexual violence prevention, youth health and wellbeing, media regulation, and online safety (2017, p. 10).

In short, pornography has been used to push boundaries, to make political statements, to show artistic expression, and for pleasure throughout time. What sexual material was deemed as indecent depended on both the person’s perspective and the normative viewpoints of the day. New Zealand’s history of censorship has replicated and engaged in similar arguments as other nations. Societal tensions between conservative and liberal perspectives across various groups of people have played out, with renewed concerns about negative societal impacts reoccurring based on the accessibility and transforming content in pornography. Questions raised about pornography’s value versus its cost to society are

longstanding and permeate questions that research asks of contemporary society (Tolman & Diamond, 2014). At present, laws that were initially set up to protect society and youth from harm have now been negated through the ever-evolving platforms on the Internet, which has reignited the moral alarm about the negative impacts pornography has on youth. And while New Zealand adolescents need to self-govern their viewing habits, it is difficult to know how this self-regulated approach is used by youth or how they make sense of the sexually explicit material available to them.

## Defining pornography

We often know what pornography is when we see it, however, creating a clear definition of pornography is complex and troubled. Finding a universal definition for pornography is improbable, as shown by historical and legal debates that have failed to resolve this issue (Grebowicz, 2013). How pornography is defined has often been criticized as vague and inconsistent between studies (Fisher & Kohut, 2020; Hald et al., 2014; Kohut et al., 2020; Koletić, 2017; Marshall & Miller, 2019), and has been an ongoing methodological issue for many years (e.g., Fukui & Westmore, 1994). Pornography covers a broad range of genres from erotic sexually suggestive material to hard-core pornography where aggression and violence are depicted (Carrotte et al., 2020; Miller & McBain, 2022). However, these variations in genres are often conflated and discussed as the same thing, leading to authors raising the problem of knowing precisely what is referred to in pornography research (e.g., Ashton et al., 2019; Döring & Miller, 2022; McKee et al., 2020; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). To understand this issue, potential definitions of pornography are explored, followed by the debate around needing to define or not define pornography. Finally, the implications of how to move forward are discussed within the context of the current research.

Pornography is commonly defined in terms of the content and/or its intention. The most common definition is the depiction of sexually explicit material or sexual activity, and that this material is intended to arouse sexual feelings (e.g., McKee et al., 2020; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Ashton and colleagues (2019) also propose two further elements that permeate the content and intention, namely the contextual judgement and consumer perception. When these elements are brought together it shows the complexities involved in defining pornography and the difficulties in reliably capturing its meaning.

The first component of pornography, *sexually explicit material*, has been described using various terms including specific acts, such as masturbation or intercourse, and images, such as viewing images of nudity. Descriptive labels, such as explicit, graphic, and pleasurable, are also used to describe pornography (Ashton et al., 2019). However, how this sexual material is interpreted is dependent on the consumer perspectives that can lead to very different accounts. For example, the question, do you consider images of a consenting couple having sex as a form of pornography, can lead to varied responses. It may lead to an explicit yes or no or raise further questions about how and when this image would equate to pornography. Therefore, if the couple were having sex as part of a movie storyline this may evoke a very different interpretation to sexual acts produced for consumption or arousal. This variation in consumer interpretation is supported by Willoughby and Busby's (2016) study that showed considerable variability about which sexual acts were judged as pornography. This variability then raises questions about the ability to make inferences about the producers' intent and the viewers' perspective (Ashton et al., 2019).

The second aspect, *aimed at arousing sexual feelings*, has been used to sharpen the definition of pornography by attempting to capture the producer's intent and the consumer's interpretation. If the content is produced to evoke sexual arousal and viewed for sexual gratification, then it should exclude sexual material that is suggestive, such as movies, but is

not directly intended for sexual arousal. However, determining this intent remains dependent on individual preferences, judgements, and the participant's background such as gender and religious affiliation (Willoughby & Busby, 2016). Furthermore, this concept of 'aiming to arouse' is inconsistently applied, while many other studies do not provide any definition of pornography (Kohut et al., 2020; McKee et al., 2020).

The notion of social embeddedness is also important when considering what constitutes pornography. Because of its historical context, as described above, the word pornography implies it is bad and linked to immorality (West, 2012). However, how to qualify the degrees of 'badness' is hugely problematic. Terms such as obscene, objectionable, harmful, and indecent have been used to qualify the level of badness but with great difficulty (Attwood et al., 2018b; Tsaliki, 2011). For example, pornography has been conceptualised as a form of violence against women akin to prostitution (Tyler & Coy, 2022) and as a structural oppression of women (McVey et al., 2021). Pornography has also been conceptualised as a form of leisure (McCormack & Wagnall, 2017) or entertainment (McKee, 2012). These varied opinions lead to conflicting views of what makes pornography good or bad that is entrenched in historical concerns of morality and emancipation.

Efforts have also been made to classify various subtypes of pornography to help distinguish associated levels of indecency, including erotica, mainstream pornography and hard-core or aggressive pornography. Erotica was purported to be related to sexual material that showed more equal relationships between performers who were emotionally responsive and caring toward each other and without submission or coercion implied (Kammeyer, 2008). This definition attempted to align erotica with something good through separating sexuality that was paired with intimacy from pornography. Consumers have also drawn a distinction between erotica and pornography, with the latter being about sex without emotions and intimacy (e.g., Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006). However, this distinction has been

unsuccessfully defended in both academia and legally, due to the considerable overlap between materials perceived as erotica versus pornographic (Kammeyer, 2008).

The second distinction made between nonviolent and aggressive pornography, with the latter often referred to as hard-core pornography, is proposed based on the idea that aggressive pornography is more likely to be associated with harm (e.g., Flood & Hamilton, 2003; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Walker et al., 2015). However, the distinction between aggressive and nonviolent pornography is again highly subjective. Studies analysing pornography content have shown mixed results based on how aggression was defined (McKee, 2015; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Shor & Seida, 2019). For example, Bridges and associates (2010) reported 88.2% of videos contained physical and verbal aggression from their content analysis of the best-selling pornography videos in 2005. This study differs from previous content analyses, as aggression in their research did not require the recipient to be motivated to avoid harm, a criterion traditionally included in the definition of aggression. This adaptation of the definition appears reasonable given pornography actors and actresses are paid, or otherwise motivated, to show pleasure even if the act is painful. However, if Bridges and colleagues followed the typical definition then, by their admission, the rates of aggression would decrease from 88% to 12%, bringing it in line with other findings. Therefore, how aggression is demarcated plays a large role in determining the level of aggression, and hence the debate continues about what constitutes the different types of pornography.

The functionality of using a standardised definition of pornography or no definition has been debated (e.g., McKee et al., 2020). Some have questioned if a set definition of pornography clouds insight into its heterogeneous meanings (e.g., Gilbert, 1992; Kendrick, 1987; West, 2012) and discovering different interpretations can enhance our knowledge of what is meant by pornography (Anastassiou, 2017). For example, Gilbert (1992) has debated

the possibility of suspending the word pornography and instead subsuming it under sexuality as a broader phenomenon where it can be understood within this context rather than in isolation. Furthermore, Kendrick argues the meaning of pornography is subjected to the morals of the time and thus transforms alongside what society sanctions as acceptable (Kendrick, 1987).

Although the argument for a standardised measure of pornography has merit (Marshall & Miller, 2019; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016) it is improbable that it can have a unified definition, or an agreement reached about using the caveat of sexual arousal. For example, McKee and associates (2020) found three-quarters of their panel of research experts defined pornography using the term explicit when referring to sexual content and about half used intended to arouse in some form or another. Whilst Marshall and Miller (2019) found less than 20% of the studies in their review used any definition to conceptualise pornography.

Others propose a flexible stance for defining pornography that aids a shared language to understand what is being studied without being bound to precise definitions (e.g., Grebowicz, 2013) or using the research question to determine if a definition is appropriate (e.g., Ashton et al., 2019). The above complexities are captured by Ashton and associates who note "that a definition of pornography is subject to the varying norms of sexual behaviour and what is identified as pornography across cultures and sub-cultures, and according to time and geography" (2019, p. 162). Ashton and colleagues, alongside others propose the researcher is responsible for considering contextual factors and practising reflexivity within this process (Attwood et al., 2018b; Perry et al., 2004; Tolman & Diamond, 2014).

Within New Zealand, Māori are considered as tangata whenua (indigenous people of the land) and as such their cultural perspective needs to be both recognised and respected. The principle of conceptualising pornography from a broader flexible perspective aligns more

closely with Māori systems of thought that avoids the breaking apart of the whole. According to the Department of Justice (1989) report, Māori perspectives of sex cannot be scrutinised in isolation because sex and relationships exist as part of Māori cosmology and hold spiritual significance that are interwoven with life, love, and death. While the report considered sex to be woven into wellbeing as part of life, it also considered pornography to be something else that could be separated from healthy sexual materials, which mirrors much of the debate already described.

When considering the developmental period of adolescence (described below) it is proposed adolescents need a flexible definition to allow a shared language but with the intention for sexual arousal to be discarded. This is based on the finding that adolescents are not driven by adult worldviews and experiences, although some overlap may exist. Healy-Cullen et al. (2022a, 2022b, 2023a) have found there is a divide between adolescent and adult perspectives about how youth understand and engage with pornography. Research has found adolescents approach online sexual material for more reasons than only sexual stimulation or pleasure (Goldstein, 2021). This includes viewing pornography for curiosity, information-seeking, a sense of belonging through accessing material showing similar sexual orientations or interests, humour, pleasure, mood management, and understanding their sexual identity (Attwood et al., 2018; Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Castro-Calvo et al., 2018; Döring, 2009; Goldstein, 2021; Henry &Talbot, 2019; McCormack & Wignall, 2017; Mulholland, 2015; Peterson et al., 2023). Hence, it is important to not presume why adolescents view pornography.

Another consideration is around using the terminology of pornography or sexually explicit internet material (SEIM). One could argue that sexually explicit material will be found in pornography, but the reverse may not hold true. Therefore, not all SEIM may be judged as pornographic. For example, naked pictures may not be considered pornography

(e.g., Kraus et al., 2015) while others consider sexualised pictures as pornographic (e.g., Rasmussen et al., 2016). In addition, societal disapproval is more likely to be connected to the term, pornography, whereas sexually explicit material has more neutral connotations. For example, the New Zealand Commission Report chose to use the term pornography because it best captured the meaning commonly expressed in public submissions of pornography's derogatory association of dehumanising and objectifying women during sexual intercourse (Department of Justice, 1989). In contrast, the same report states the term sexually explicit materials is a non-judgemental label that may or may not be intended for sexual arousal. To reduce the pejorative presumptions associated with pornography and its connection to illegal material, it is proposed SEIM can be used interchangeably with pornography dependent on the adolescent's preference rather than the researcher's preference.

In short, despite efforts to construct a shared definition, what is understood as pornography remains ambiguous and dependent on the viewers' interpretation. Definitional issues are commonplace and largely driven by the assumptions and ideologies of researchers. I would argue that rigid definitions of pornography neglect the complexities and individual variation associated with this term. While for youth, a broad definition will ease ambiguity and provide a shared language, they equally need space to impose their own interpretation of what SEIM means. Therefore, it is recommended a definition focuses on observable behaviours and does not require adult intentions, such as arousal or masturbation. It is also important to allow the terminology of SEIM and pornography to be used interchangeably to minimise possible negative inferences.

### Disputed methods: What does pornography use, and exposure mean?

Research findings are usually based on the assumption that pornography can be clearly defined and collectively understood. However, as discussed above there is no single

definition that captures the diversity of sexually explicit material available. Another key issue is whether exposure to pornography can be reliably captured. Exposure is typically referenced in research as either intentional or unintentional. It is often unclear why this distinction is drawn, although occasionally unintended exposure is linked to victimization issues (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2003) and wellbeing through its unplanned nature (Ma, 2019). Intentional viewing has been described as emotionally protective based on the assumption that viewers are prepared for what they might view (Massey et al., 2021). However, some studies only include intentional exposure (e.g., Peter & Valkenburg, 2008a), some separate the two (e.g., Ma, 2019), and others make no distinction (e.g., Koletić et al., 2019), leading to varied exposure rates in reports and debate as to whether the two types of exposure are meaningfully distinct. For example, Ševčíková et al.'s (2013) research involving 11 to 16-year-olds found exposure rates of 7% to pop-up images (unintentional exposure) and 8% to X-rated websites (intentional exposure). In contrast, others have reported much higher exposure rates, albeit with older adolescents, of up to 96% for males and 68% of females (Flood, 2007; OFLC, 2018; Sabina et al., 2008).

Furthermore, some have argued that how exposure is assessed can overestimate exposure rates (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018). The consequence of overestimating exposure rates may heighten apprehension among parents and policy makers which is reflected in the citation of the highest exposure rates in online materials (e.g., Netsafe, 2018; The light project, n.d). It has also been found that adolescent's overestimate how common pornography use is amongst their peers (Flood, 2007; OFLC, 2018), but how this influences their decisions about viewing pornography remains unexplored (Taylor, 2021).

Exposure rates have been found to be influenced by numerous factors, such as age, sample composition, individual characteristics, acceptability of disclosure, anonymity, or living in a more liberal country (e.g., Hald et al., 2014; Kohut et al., 2020; Ševčíková et al.,

2013). Moreover, how exposure is enquired about can contribute to variations in self-reported exposure (Regnerus et al., 2016). For example, exposure may be assessed through retrospective data based on recollection of adolescent experiences, asked as a single item or as multiple items to create a composite score (Marshall & Miller, 2019). Participants can be asked to report exposure as a yes/no response or on a Likert scale to recall their exposure from "ever used", "past year" "past 6 months", "past month", and the like. Exposure is often followed by an attempt to quantify its frequency. Frequent use may be quantified as, "seen at least monthly" (OFLC, 2018), "greater or equal to three times a month" (Tsitsika et al., 2009), or "several times a day" (Peter & Valkenburg, 2008a). Therefore, exposure can vary to mean seeing sexually explicit material sometime or may mean regular use, and the definition of regular use varies from study to study. These variations in assessing exposure contribute to discrepancies in research outcomes and make it difficult to interpret meaningful relationships between exposure and harm.

In brief, the current approach to assessing pornography use all too often assumes that pornography exposure or use is a homogenised construct which can be quantified, despite the diverse content (e.g., Bridges et al., 2010; Gorman et al., 2010; Shor & Seida, 2019; Vannier et al., 2014). Moving forward it is important to hold these limitations in mind when considering the assumptions made about adolescent pornography use and its associated risks.

## Adolescents and pornography use

Bringing the ideas of adolescence together with pornography has many tensions due to the opposing connotations that each construct evokes. Hence, it is important to consider how adolescence and sexuality is conceptualised in the first instance. How adolescents are viewed within society and how sexuality is conceptualised has important underpinnings for exploring their pornography use. Sexual behaviours are often used as an indicator of risky or

problematic behaviour for youth, especially early debut, oral sex, sexual intercourse, and casual sex (e.g., Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Häggström-Nordin et al., 2005; Pirrone et al., 2022; Vandenbosch & van Oosten, 2018). Pornography use is then considered as something separate to sexuality and as something that can corrupt society and youth through causing problematic sexual behaviours and reinforcing stereotypic gender roles that encourage inequalities. I will argue that pornography can be conceptualised as part of sexuality and that there is scope to include both positive and negative aspects within this type of research.

**What does adolescence mean?**

The delineation of an adolescent phase situated between childhood and adulthood did not exist before the industrial period. Prior to the nineteenth century westernised children were often considered as mini adults who could work, and thus often endured harsh conditions (Graham, 1987). As children's rights and their need for advocacy became important to society, perceptions gradually adapted, and laws were introduced to protect young people from unjust exploitation. The idea of where adolescence begins and ends has transformed over the twentieth century through various social and systemic influences. In New Zealand, the introduction of secondary education was a significant factor. It meant the age of compulsory attendance shifted from twelve to sixteen years of age and age restrictions were also placed around employment (Graham, 1987). In contemporary society adolescents often attend school to eighteen years of age. These changes led to large groups of adolescents being brought together who could then be marketed to and profited from (Brickell, 2017; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). These societal changes have also meant adolescents remain dependent on their parents or caregivers for longer while adults continue to hold responsibility for protecting them from exploitation.

Adolescence has been described as anywhere between eleven and twenty-one years, though there is a consensus that pubertal maturation marks the onset of adolescence, with physical development being a better marker than age (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Puberty includes the development of secondary sex characteristics and achievement of fertility through menstruation and sperm production. Alongside the physical development, important cognitive, emotional, and social growth occurs. There is good evidence that the adolescent pre-frontal cortex continues to evolve during adolescence and this immaturity is thought to compromise adolescent capabilities to be reflective, to engage with complex decision making, and to self-regulate, in comparison to adults (e.g., Bonnie & Scott, 2013; Eleuteri et al., 2017; Reniers et al., 2016; Santrock, 2016; Woolard & Scott, 2009). These underdeveloped abilities reinforce the notion that adolescents are susceptible to risks and are vulnerable, while adults are responsible for keeping them safe, especially for younger adolescents. This vulnerability lens is also reflected in society (Chmielewski et al., 2017) and policies, as found in New Zealand government reports on youth sexuality (Morison & Herbert, 2019).

From the outset, adolescence has been constructed as a risky phase. Dr. Stanley Hall (1844-1924) is often credited for founding the scientific study of how children transition from childhood to adulthood, labelling this period as adolescence. He postulated adolescence as a turbulent time with his catch phrase *storm and stress* (Santrock, 2016). Hall's terminology of implied turmoil has remained a significant influence on the discourse around adolescence and shaped other notions of developmental stages that followed. For example, Sigmund Freud's psychosexual model understood adolescence as a stage filled with tension and conflict caused by unconscious negotiations between sources of sexual pleasure and demands of reality; Erikson focused on identity development and proposed adolescents either formed a sense of identity or became stuck in a stage of confusion.

As theories evolved through the twentieth century, they began to consider adolescence to be a more fluid process that was influenced by the individual and their interactions with others and society. Each theory emphasised different aspects. Information processing theories placed the individual centre stage as the one who manipulates and interacts with information and through their interactions builds the capacity for increasingly complex knowledge and skills, which challenged earlier models that understood adolescents to be passive recipients of their environment. For example, Bandura's social cognitive theory emphasised the importance of cognitions and agency (Bandura, 1989), which expanded on Skinner's behavioural model. Sociocultural models shifted to emphasise social constructs and cultural significance in shaping adolescent behaviours and beliefs. For example, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model conceptualised learning to occur from relationships and the interplay between and within various systems, which was later expanded to a complex process, person, context, and time model (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Consequently, each theorist can be observed to build on existing knowledge attempting to explain gaps in theory and then deduce a more parsimonious model that helps address the gaps. However, to make something parsimonious, one needs to drop the rich context and multitude of complexities that exist in understanding how adolescents develop. This leaves a conundrum between deducing a parsimonious theory while maintaining the rich context required for idiosyncratic understanding. As a result, no one theory captures the essence of adolescence.

Irrespective of the theoretical models, contemporary academic literature and media have largely engaged with the concept of adolescence from a risk perspective (Allen, 2011; Chmielewski et al., 2017; Healy-Cullen et al., 2023; Morison & Herbert, 2019). Noticeable problems, such as delinquency, risk-taking behaviours, sensation seeking, emotional lability, egocentricity, and the like, have been prioritised over adaptive responses and wellbeing

(Santrock, 2016; van de Bongardt et al., 2015). The focus on negative outcomes in research leads to a publication bias that inflates the perception of risk and harm. For example, a quick search for publications on Discover between January 2010 and December 2020 using the terms “adolescence” and “delinquency” showed 14,190 publications compared with “adolescence” and “diligence” which showed 82 publications. This parallels Moffit and colleagues’ observation about publication biases that lead to null effects going unnoticed, stating “no-difference findings are seldom announced in the titles of papers (or in the ‘key words’)” (2001, p. 6). The focus on risk then permeates into various media forms, and through reiterative processes either consolidates the perceptions of risk or creates new concerns over time.

**Conceptualising adolescent sexuality**

Given adolescents are already framed within a risk model it is not surprising that adolescent sexuality has also been framed within risk and prevention models. Inappropriate adolescent sexuality is often determined by its departure from contemporary sociocultural norms that define what is appropriate for a particular age group. Furthermore, mainstream ideals of what constitutes healthy sexual behaviours are then used to reframe and problematize perspectives that are positioned outside the norms, such as indigenous perspectives on sexual health (Le Grice & Braun, 2018). A brief summary of how sexuality has been conceptualised is discussed before settling on a developmental framework that includes both positives and risks in context when conceptualising adolescent sexuality.

The fallacy that sexuality begins in adolescents as they develop from an asexual child to a sexual adult has traditionally been based on biological models that attribute sexual changes to increased hormone levels (Allan, 2007; Lamb et al., 2018), although this was not always the case. Early models of sexuality, such as Sigmund Freud’s psychosexual model

proposed libidinal urges exert themselves through all stages of development, including childhood. Freud's model understood adolescence as a stage filled with tension and conflict caused by unconscious negotiations between sources of sexual pleasure driven by biological drives and the demands of reality (Santrock, 2016).

Later models included ideas of sexuality within broader concepts such as identity formation and shifted the timing of sexual interest closer to adulthood. For example, Erikson's psychosexual developmental model integrated sexual development as part of negotiating one's identity during adolescence and as an expected task in early adulthood when exploring intimacy (Erikson, 1988). Indeed, Erikson proposes intimacy and romantic relationships need to be developed to avoid loneliness and isolation (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). However, this model binds sexuality to late adolescence and early adulthood, and fixes it to romantic ideals within a heteronormative framework.

Foucault (1978) moved away from individualised or biological perspectives of sexuality to consider social structures and historical contexts in shaping the construct of sexuality. He challenged the notion of a definitive account of sexuality and focuses on how sexuality emerges through discourse processes that evolves from adult and institutional regulations around sexuality. Foucault suggests a 'repressive hypothesis' that meant overt signs of sexuality were banished and the dominant discourses focused on risk and prevention that fitted with the norms of the era. Discourses also confined sex to heteronormative relationships that were meant for reproduction behind closed doors. Foucault then goes onto challenge these repressive ideologies and the absence of sexual pleasure.

Feminist perspectives on sexuality, while not unified, consider the intersectional aspects between socio-political contexts and individual agency that reinforce gender inequalities and power imbalances. Postfeminism explores how gender, sexuality and identity are formed through social-political structures, contemporary sexualized technologies, and

socialisation processes that shape how we experience and talk about sexuality (e.g., Evans & Riley, 2014). For example, male sexuality has positioned young men as the ones who desire sex yet are situated as problematic, whereas female sexuality has positioned young women as the ones who are desired by presenting themselves as being sexy but not too sexy (Gill, 2007). Feminist authors have also challenged the absence of pleasure and desire within sexuality education (Allen, 2007), which continues to be overlooked (Garland-Levett & Allen, 2019) and to be vilified through conservative ideology and religion that argue for abstinence before marriage policies in education (McClelland & Fine, 2014).

Generalised terms, such as sexual objectification and sexualisation, are used to denote how women's liberation is undermined through sexualised media. Sexualisation is thought to occur when a person's value comes from their sexual appeal, when a person is sexually 'objectified', or when sexuality is imposed improperly onto a nonsexual activity, such as sexually objectifying athletes, and these messages are woven into society (American Psychological Association, 2007; Jirasek et al., 2013; Weaving, 2012). Pornography is one form of this, given it sends messages that bodies are sexual objects used for gratification (Willis et al., 2022). Although these umbrella terms have been used to capture the power relations between individuals and social-cultural structures, these constructs have been criticised for being "too conceptually flabby" (Gavey, 2012), misrepresenting complex issues that prevent a meaningful way forward (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018b; Sullivan & McKee, 2015; Tyler & Quek, 2016), and downplaying young peoples' agency to deconstruct the media (Gill, 2012). There are numerous complexities in striking a balance between valuing women's choices to engage with contemporary sexualized technologies while understanding the sexualised culture this is embedded in (Evans & Riley, 2014; Gill, 2012). One solution is to move away from umbrella terms to using "more varied and specific vocabulary" (Gavey, 2012, p. 720).

Another theoretical orientation that overlaps with Foucault and feminist standpoints is queer theory. Queer theory is positioned as an ‘oppositional orientation’ to understanding how bodies and psyches are offered intelligibility through their relationships to privileged norms (Riggs & Treharne, 2017). Heteronormativity frameworks are criticised for constructing heterosexuality as the compulsory norm that then positions ‘other’ sexualities as ‘deviant’ or ‘abnormal’ (Allen, 2011) and misrepresents marginalised sexualities as a fetish (Dawson et al., 2020; Pavanello Decaro et al., 2023). Queer theorists regard sexuality knowledge and practices to be culturally produced and as such the binary concept of gender and sexuality is contested, whereby sexuality is deemed fluid and open-ended (Sullivan & McKee, 2015; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). These privileged norms have been challenged through sexuality education debates (Allen, 2011) and socio-political activism that stands against the ongoing oppression of marginalised sexualities, such as the Manifesto for sex-positive social media (Stardust et al., 2022).

Sexual scripting theory developed by Simon and Gagnon (1986) is another influential theory used within media and psychology studies. This theory postulates that sexual behaviours and values are shaped by others, which involves a complex interplay between individual responses, society, culture, and social learning models (e.g., Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Wright, 2011, 2014). Simon and Gagnon’s (1986) sexual scripting theory propose that adolescents learn about sexuality through cultural scenarios that provide the instructional guides and expectations for sexual activities and roles. These cultural scenarios are thought to change with shifting norms and are subject to diversity which the individual needs to negotiate. Therefore, if intrapsychic sexual scripts fit well with the cultural and interpersonal scripts (congruent) then individual sexual expectations are thought to be embedded in the social norms and accepted without reflection. However, if there is a discrepancy between intrapsychic, interpersonal, and cultural scripts (as judged by normative practices) then the

discrepancies are described as incongruent which leads to critical reflections to adapt their scripts to fit their internal desires and expectations. The discrepancies between self, others, and world are commonly characterised as moral incongruence (e.g., Bandura, 1989; Grubbs & Perry, 2019), moral panic (e.g., Jeffery, 2018; Livingstone & Haddon, 2012), and third-person effects (e.g., Lo et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2023).

It is important to note that the judgement of normative practices is deeply influenced by the dominant culture and religion (Cram, 2001; Le Grice & Braun, 2018; McClelland & Fine, 2014). For example, the colonisation process of indigenous cultures, such as Māori, has led to their sexual health practices and beliefs being reframed as deviant without considering the cultural or historical context (Le Grice & Braun, 2018). Contemporary judgements of normal has also been criticised for the division of the 'normal' from the 'other' using binary categories that alienate Māori values and ways of being (King & Robertson, 2017). The separation of sexuality from identity has been described as "narrow colonist views of sexuality" (Aspin & Hutching, 2007, p. 424). Therefore, sexuality and the pathway to becoming healthy sexual beings is not the same across cultures, yet what is deemed normative practices is usually determined by Western perspectives. And these normative practices are then used to judge discrepancies that are categorised as incongruent or congruent.

Similar to this idea of determining norms is Rubin's (1984) 'charmed circle' of sexuality. The charmed circle described how certain types of sexuality are given special status within society. For example, sexuality that is monogamous, in a relationship, coupled, and heterosexual, is privileged over those that are on the outer circle, such as casual or promiscuous sex, and pornography. These principles are applied equally to adolescent sexuality. Thus, adolescent sexuality is framed as a normal developmental task but with

vigorous debate about what constitutes normal sexuality, where sexuality is shaped by historical and contemporary norms that influence what is acceptable.

Although some frameworks, such as Foucault and Freud, discuss childhood sexuality it is generally avoided. Instead, childhood sexuality is both denied and woven into social-political expectations of protecting their innocence (Lamb et al., 2018). Lamb and associates (2018) assert that it is normal for sexual thoughts, feelings, and activities to be expressed in children. They recommend innocence should not be conflated with an absence of sexuality. Therefore, I would argue that adolescent sexuality is built upon normal curiosity and interests that begins in childhood as a gradual process rather than a clear stage that is driven solely by biological awakenings. Furthermore, what is deemed sexually inappropriate is often based on behaviours that transgress conventional norms, yet once maturity is reached the same behaviours are no longer defined as inappropriate leading to considerable subjectivity about where to draw the transgression line.

An important shift in understanding sexual health has been the move toward positive perspectives on sexuality. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined sexual health as being:

> a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive, respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships and the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected, and fulfilled (WHO, 2010, p.10).

These ideals have also woven through contemporary society with the aim to encourage respect and acceptance of diversity in sexual practices and sexuality, while not imposing expectations of what is right or good (e.g., Kassel, 2020). Similarly, the manifesto for sexual-

positive social media outlines their objectives to destigmatise sex and dismantle structural oppressions that marginalise minority groups (Stardust et al., 2022). Thus, they advocate for ethical practices, such as promoting a consent culture for content creators, and reshaping sexual cultural narratives, such as nudity should not be conflated with sexuality. However, while authors challenge social ideals about what constitutes 'good' or 'bad' sex, adolescent sexuality continues to be overlooked and framed within a risk model (Goldstein, 2020; McKee et al., 2021; Morison & Herbert, 2019; Peterson et al., 2023; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Research has prioritised risks and dangers for adolescent sexuality, such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and sexual violence, over positive or normal developmental processes (Tolman & McClelland, 2011; van de Bongardt et al., 2015). And while understanding risk has led to important insights into how to prevent problems such as STIs, this research has been criticised for neglecting to consider that sexual activity is not innately risky (e.g., Lamb et al., 2018; McKee et al., 2021; Rothman et al., 2021; Russell, 2005; van de Bongardt et al., 2015). Furthermore, risk frameworks both marginalise ethnic minority groups, such as Māori, as being problematic while favouring those with greater agency (Morison & Herbert, 2019) and limit alternative narratives (Allen, 2011).

Contemporary positive developmental frameworks have focused on identifying adaptive tasks that adolescents negotiate (van de Bongardt et al., 2015). Tolman and McClelland (2011) have used the term "normative adolescent sexuality development" to reflect both "positive sexuality" perspectives and the developmental nature of sexuality. Normative in their framework does not refer to setting or conforming to normative standards determined by cultural groups but rather references adolescent sexuality as an expected or normal developmental task as part of being human. The developmental aspect draws attention to "what it means to become a healthy sexual adult" (2011, p. 243). They also draw attention to the change in terminology that has shifted from sexual development to sexuality

development, with the former emphasising a physiological stage and the latter acknowledging the entwining of physiological and psychological processes.

Tolman and McClelland (2011) extracted three key developmental domains from their literature review. This included sexual behaviours and what counts as sexual behaviour, sexual selfhood, and sexual socialisation, with each domain overlapping and working in tandem. Sexual selfhood acknowledges a complicated picture between sexual identity or sexual self-concepts, sexual behaviours and sexual decision making which is a fluid process. Sexual socialisation highlights the context that shapes adolescent sexuality, such as peer networks, religion, media, and the role of culture. They also acknowledge that adolescent development is highly socially produced, emphasising the importance of contextualising research findings. Tolman and McClelland conclude with recommending researchers integrate and incorporate "both positive aspects and risk management and how they develop in tandem or dialectically at the individual, relational, and cultural levels into the overarching concept of sexuality development in adolescence" (p. 251). Therefore, consistent with this framework, the current thesis will move away from the binary of positive and risky qualities to considering a both/and framework for adolescent sexuality that resists pathologising adolescent sexuality.

The principle of contextualising sexual development into a structure that balances both positive and negative aspects is supported by others (e.g., Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; Goldstein, 2020; McKee et al., 2023; Peterson et al., 2023; Russell, 2005; van de Bongardt et al., 2015). For example, an Australian multidisciplinary group with expertise in studying children's sexuality have proposed 15 domains of healthy sexual development (McKee et al., 2010). The group acknowledge the importance of preventing child sexual abuse but that this should not preclude the acknowledgment of

healthy sexual development alongside it. They propose a “holistic approach” that includes the following domains:

- Freedom from unwanted sexual activity, which is dependent on youth holding
- An understanding of consent and ethical conduct in how they treat others
- Education about biological aspects of sexual practice, that contains accurate information
- An understanding of safety, from both risks and the safety to experiment
- Relationship skills, including effective communication among other things
- Agency, such as taking control of their body, pleasure, and choices
- Lifelong learning, where curiosity is normalised
- Resilience
- Open communication, between adults and youth that is age appropriate
- Sexual development should not be aggressive, coercive, or joyless
- Self-acceptance, of their sexual identity and body
- Awareness and acceptance that sex is pleasurable
- Understanding of parental and societal values, while acknowledging what is considered appropriate sexuality differs considerably within society
- Awareness of public/private boundaries
- Competence in mediated sexuality

This shift toward a holistic and inclusive approach toward adolescent sexuality is also reflected in the New Zealand health education curriculum, which states programs include “a wide range of content, perspectives, value positions, and knowledge. Programmes focus on learning, and diversity is valued” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 30).

Proposed gender differences in adolescent sexual development are another contentious issue. In general, young men have been stereotyped as being more problematic

(e.g., Zahn-Waxler et al., 2008) and focused on physical aspects of sex than young women (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Whereas young women are more likely to be conceptualised as having low self-esteem, body image issues and anxiety (e.g., Doornwaard et al., 2017; Owens et al., 2012; Zahn-Waxler et al., 2008) or be victimised and experience sexism (e.g., Coy & Horvath, 2018; Maas et al., 2019; Rostad et al., 2019; Smith, 2013). However, when examining gender differences more carefully, research has found mixed results and significant overlaps in what youth look for in relationships (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Hyde, 2014; Petersen & Hyde, 2010). Similarly, risky sexual behaviours have been found for both female and male youth who present with greater conduct disorder features, and alcohol and marijuana use play a significant role in increasing risky sexual activities for both genders (Holliday et al., 2017). Likewise, boys have been identified as being more aggressive physically but this difference evens out if aggression is conceptualised to include verbal aggression, which girls are more likely to engage in (Moffitt et al., 2001). Concepts such as hypermasculinity, which refers to men's tendency to engage in stereotypical gender roles of dominant behaviour, have been used to explain gender differences (e.g., van Oosten et al., 2017). However, gender-specific research has been criticised for focusing on men's problematic and antisocial behaviours while ignoring their positive qualities (King & Robertson, 2017).

Moreover, how sex is explored with youth has marked effects on what is reported. For example, Smiler's (2008) study showed how young men approach sex and dating was expressed differently when explored through a feminist lens. Smiler's study presented questions derived from a broader feminist study that explored issues for girls and young women. Consequently, the young men were asked questions not typically included in mainstream research for boys about dating. The findings showed the most frequent reasons for dating included liking the person, being attracted to them, and relational aspects of getting

to know them better. The most common reasons for sexual intercourse included desire, curiosity, liking the person, and the partner wanting to have sex. While needing to conform to expectations, or fit in with peers, was the least important. These findings contradict the conventional views of young men who are reported to place greater value on physical attraction, pleasure, and sexual activity, and to gain greater status from sexual activity (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009).

In short, while sexuality in youth is often conceptualised as problematic, it can equally be challenged through sex positive and developmental models that highlight both normal transitions and diversity. However, adding pornography into adolescent sexuality is a particular thorny issue but can be justified by the likelihood of youth viewing pornography to gain knowledge about sexual activity (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; Peterson et al., 2023). For example, a New Zealand survey (OFLC; 2018) found youth who viewed pornography at least monthly and in the last six months had used pornography as a way of learning about sex in 73% and 54% of responders, respectively. Furthermore, the New Zealand health education association (NZHEA, 2020) has updated their guidelines to incorporate teaching and learning about pornography, which is similar to others who have called for pornography to be included as a key topic in sexuality education (e.g., Maas et al., 2022; Peterson et al., 2023; Rothman et al., 2020). Consequently, it can be argued that sexuality can also be broadened to include conversations about pornography.

**Adolescent pornography use**

Pornography clearly sits in Rubin's (2011) outer circle of denounced sexual practices and is infused with a long history of indecency and social-political control. While pornography may show consenting mutual relationships it is usually described as focusing on physical aspects of sex, being devoid of caring, kindness, communication, and normal

relational aspects (e.g., Bridges et al., 2010; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Attention is also drawn to the cruel, aggressive, or "hard-core" content of pornography and the subsequent alleged harms to society, such as promoting the acceptance of rape and exploitation of others (e.g., Dines, 2010; Dworkin, 1989; Tyler & Coy, 2022). When this, unacceptable exploitation of others, is conflated with all forms of pornography it raises the moral alarm, which is further heightened when adolescents are conceptualised as vulnerable and lacking agency.

The negative messages within pornography are thought to permeate society through normalising stereotypes and reshaping sexual scripts, such as gender inequalities and transactional sex (e.g., Carrotte et al., 2020; Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006; Wright, 2014). Indeed, adolescents have described pornography use leading to men wanting to try things, such as performing anal sex, while women have reported feeling pressured to perform such acts (Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006; Lim et al., 2017; Marston & Lewis, 2014; Rothman et al., 2015). Pornography has been associated with reinforcing a rape culture (Dworkin, 1989) and increasing acts of sexual coercion (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Hald et al., 2010; Ybarra, et al., 2011). The adoption of harmful sexual scripts is then reflected in online media platforms (e.g., Enough Is Enough, 2022) who emphasise the same perils.

Understandably, the reported negative effects from pornography use raise considerable discomfort and alarm for adults. This discomfort, in turn, motivates adults to control and regulate both pornography and adolescents (Livingstone & Haddon, 2012), which is reflected in educational material that largely focuses on mitigating risks (Allen, 2007; Crabbe & Flood, 2021; Maas et al., 2022; Peterson et al., 2023). This risk-focused narrative is manifested in numerous places from policies to educational programs. For example, the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC, 2015) clearly states it aims to provide protection to the public, especially children, through restricting indecent material. Parents and

teachers have also framed youth as lacking the ability to make good decisions around pornography or be discerning (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022b; Mattebo et al., 2013). Adult participants have raised concerns that pornography leads to corrupting and damaging adolescents (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022b) and driving normative ideals that are contradictory to public health goals and social laws (e.g., Mattebo et al., 2013).

Many websites also provide dire warnings about needing to protect children, youth, and society from pornography. This is exemplified by Family First New Zealand condemning a UNICEF discussion paper written by Emma Day (2021) about online protection: The UNICEF report focused on age assurance tools to help prevent children from accessing unsuitable online sites. Family First stated:

> The descent of UNICEF into the gutter continues apace. They are now promoting a report that makes the case that porn makes some kids happy. Yes, happy... Mainstream pornography contains horrific sexual abuse, rape, incest, racism – all of which children should not consume... and UNICEF's milquetoast assessment of the impacts hard-core pornography on children does nothing to challenge the political narrative that pornography is benign, and as a result, puts children in harm's way (Family First, 2021).

Five pages in the UNICEF report focused on how various countries use strategies, such as age verification, to control access to pornography and the pitfalls in these strategies given pornography producers can sidestep the controls. The report then notes varying evidence around harm in that "some children appear to be harmed by exposure to some kinds of pornography at least some of the time, but that the nature and extent of that harm vary" (Day, 2021, p. 37). They reported up to 10 per cent of youth were upset and up to 39 per cent felt happy after seeing "sexual images". It is noted that the term 'sexual images' was used and not the term pornography. I interpreted the purpose of describing the risks as aimed at reducing

panic by providing a very brief perspective that children will not automatically be damaged if they view sexual images. This reassurance seems reasonable based on research and given exposure is highly likely to occur as producers move around imposed restrictions. Nevertheless, this backdrop exemplifies the challenges in presenting alternative perspectives that encapsulate the complexities that underlie adolescent pornography use.

Pornography use amongst adolescent men is problematized more than pornography use amongst young women due to their greater likelihood of viewing pornography (e.g., Flood, 2009; Wright et al., 2023) and at an earlier age (e.g., Lim et al., 2017). The content within pornography is thought to reinforce gendered stereotypes that promote inequalities such as male dominance (e.g., Dines, 2010; Flood, 2009; Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006; Klaassen & Peter, 2015). The interpretation of male dominance holds gendered nuances. For example, men who avoid or do not acknowledge male dominant themes have been described as presenting in a detached manner that reflects a 'blind eye' toward problematic gendered differences (Antevska & Gavey, 2015). In contrast, young women have been described more often as victims of pornography and holding conflicting perspectives embedded in patriarchal discourses and moral panics (e.g., Chmielewski et al., 2017; Keene, 2019; Tyler & Coy, 2022).

Lastly, how often pornography is used is claimed to equate to meaningful outcomes. The relationship between how often pornography is used and problematic use is not straight forward (Grubbs & Perry, 2019), yet frequency rates of pornography use are employed as evidence of problematic use (e.g., Nieh et al., 2020) and as a loss of control or compulsive pornography use (Donevan & Mattebo, 2017; Love et al., 2015; Testa et al., 2023). Alternatively, Bőthe et al. (2020) found higher users of pornography were less likely to report their use as problematic compared to those who viewed pornography less frequently. Hence, a stronger emphasis needs to be placed on how adolescents understand pornography and the

meaning it holds, rather than simplifying it to whether they are using pornography and how much pornography they are using it (Goldstein, 2020; Setty, 2022). Chapter Three expands on this by discussing how adolescent pornography use has been framed and what the research can tell us about adolescent pornography use.

**What does risk and harm mean?**

Given adolescence, sexuality, and pornography are framed around risks it is important to consider how risk and harm are conceptualised. Risk has been considered based on the probability of harm occurring, whereby risk is the anticipated or predicted likelihood that stated harms will occur. Risk can be considered objectively, based on the probabilities of predicted outcomes occurring, and subjectively whereby risk is considered an outcome of social processes and risk itself is socially constructed (Hansson, 2010). Neither perspective denies risks or harmful outcomes but rather debates how it is framed. To provide an oversimplified example, an adolescent who is sexually assaulted is not considered unharmed nor are risks denied. Risk can be via the adolescent becoming intoxicated and reduced awareness of their environment but equally via social forces coming together to create an acceptable drinking culture. Hence, both frameworks would consider alcohol consumption as a risk factor but have framed this through the individual's vulnerability or social factors. In addition, the perpetrator brings a raft of unknown factors into the picture, which creates significant uncertainty and fears.

Uncertainty about harmful outcomes leads to the precautionary principle of protecting "against potential harms, even if causal chains are unclear and even if we do not know if those harms will come to fruition" (Sunstein, 2005, p. 4). This is seen in the anti-porn public discourse that has been criticized for using 'grandiose language' to promote fear and emotional outrage (Attwood et al., 2018b; Rubin, 2011), and through numerous books that

have been written to forewarn society of the dangerous perils of pornography, such as Barton's (2021) "The pornification of America: how raunch culture is ruining our society" and Dines (2010) "Pornland: how porn has hijacked our sexuality". The risk and danger perspective of pornography transpose to various regulations, policies, and educational programs (e.g., Crabbe & Flood, 2021; Maas et al., 2022; Peterson et al., 2023; Smith & Attwood, 2014). The precautionary principle is also criticised for lacking evidence and restricting civil liberties, especially if the restrictions are favoured by the majority who are also not hampered by such restrictions (e.g., Egan, 2013; Livingstone & Haddon, 2012; Morison & Herbert, 2019; Sunstein, 2005). For example, poor health outcomes, such as sexually transmitted infections and mental health, are attributed to the individual while the downstream effects from neoliberal policies are minimised and marginalised groups, who are disadvantaged by such policies, are blamed for their own fate (Barnett & Bagshaw, 2020; Morison & Herbert, 2019).

When adolescents are asked about harm, they have questioned what harm from pornography means and were found to perceive pornography as an unimportant part of their lives (Spišák, 2016). This is in direct contrast to adult worries about how pornography has an important negative influence in shaping adolescent sexual development. Others have questioned adolescents' ability to judge harm based on their underdeveloped cognitive judgements (Behun & Owens, 2019; Brown & Wisco, 2019; Giordano et al., 2022) or due to saturation processes whereby adolescent lives become saturated with sexualized media, including pornography scripts, which then becomes their new reality as it is integrated into popular teenage culture (e.g., Kammeyer, 2008; Mulholland, 2013; Mulholland, 2015; Papadopoulos, 2010; Pearson et al., 2018; Smith 2013).

Although there is no clear agreement on what pornification (or pornographication) means, the term has been used to describe the saturation process of mainstreaming

pornography into everyday cultural trends (e.g., Coy & Horvath, 2018; Mulholland, 2015; Olmstead et al., 2023). Legitimization of pornography in mainstream media is found in the popularization of Playboy branded merchandise (Tyler, 2011; Ward, 2016), sexualized images in music videos (Wallis, 2011) and television shows (e.g., Naked Attraction). Both sexualisation and pornification are claimed to be damaging to societies morality, corrupting children's innocence and eroticizing male dominance that fortifies gender inequalities (American Psychological Association, 2007; Lamb & Koven, 2019; Papadopoulos, 2010; Rush & La Nauze, 2006). This mainstreaming process is thought to lead to emotional indifference regarding pornography use (Olmstead et al., 2023). However, this narrow focus has been criticized for overlooking alternative sources of patriarchal attitudes such as religious, medical, or educational systems which create a much messier picture for how gendered inequalities come about (Sullivan & McKee, 2015).

The saturation process is also thought to make it difficult for adolescents to know if their sexual scripts or judgements are part of this process and thus their ability to reflect or show insight into this is questioned. For example, Pearson and associates report highlights that most stakeholders "believed watching porn has become normalised and is now embedded in the sexual culture of many young people in New Zealand" (2018, p. 3). Several studies have found adolescents describe pornography as being integrated into their daily lives and to be socially accepted amongst peers (e.g., Doornwaard et al., 2017; Goldstein, 2020; Goldstein, 2021; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Mulholland, 2015). However, the same authors describe tensions between pornography being part of participant's day to day lives and their non-acceptance of sexual scripts when interviewed. This creates ambiguity about how these two opposing ideas of passive acceptance and critical reflection are brought together and framed within a risk model.

Another common explanation for adolescents' perceptions that differ from socially expected norms of morality is to categorise them as cognitive distortions. Cognitive distortions such as dehumanisation, minimisation, and diffused responsibility are used to explain why the individual's perception of reality is distorted. It is proposed that these types of cognitive distortions provide the permission to override a social standard or value without increasing discomfort or self-condemnation (Bandura, 2002; Grubbs & Perry, 2019). For example, diffused responsibility, whereby one's agentive role in causing harm to another is minimised or the responsibility for causing harm is redirected toward others (Bandura, 2002), is used to diminish any cognitive incongruence between how one feels and how one believes they should behave. Hence, if the pornography industry is to blame for the unethical production of pornography, then this creates distance between the viewer and the content viewed. Cognitive distortions are used to describe why adolescent perceptions are inaccurate and it is then assumed that these distortions should be reframed to align with healthy lifestyles as determined by contemporary norms through various educational programs that often emphasise the importance of heterosexual relationships (Albury, 2014; Coy & Horvath, 2018; Goldstein, 2020; Peterson et al., 2023).

A further cognitive distortion worth mentioning is the third-person effect described in the media literature. The third-person effect is believed to occur when negative media effects are overestimated for others and underestimated for themselves (Lo et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2023) and has been used to question adolescents' insight. For example, adolescents have described concerns about harm for others but did not believe it affected them personally (e.g., OFLC, 2017). The Office of Film and Literature Classification (2016) explored how New Zealanders aged 14 to 17 years understood the impacts of sexual violence in the media using focus groups. Although they did not directly ask about pornography it provides some insights into how violence is perceived. This research found that most participants were

unable to recognize and reflect on the levels of violence reflected in the films, except older girls. Older girls were found to critically reflect on the context for sexual violence and to articulate the broader scope of sexual violence. For both genders, younger participants tended to equate physical force (e.g., rape) with sexual violence but did not recognize more subtle emotional, verbal, or other sexual forms of violence, such as coercion. Perhaps the ability to recognize and articulate subtle differences was limited by participants' developmental capacity. Alternatively, discrepancies between participants self-reported insights into aggression and the researchers' criteria may reflect the researchers' expectation of what subtle differences should be identified. However, this study does not inform us whether the ability to identify mixed messages or unrealistic content changes with age and experience, or perhaps what basic level of insight is needed to make safe choices in sexual behaviours, such as consent. At a more general level, the study did conclude that participants were able to identify potential harm from viewing sexual violence, such as feeling bad or promoting harmful stereotypes, and were reflective about viewing such material. Instead, we know little about how adolescents understand harm from violent pornography.

When considering adolescent internet use, Livingstone and Haddon point out that risks are "too often framed in terms of moral panics rather than sober analyses of harm" (2012, p. 3). Although the term is contested, moral panic is used to understand the reactions to, and representations of, phenomena reported in the mass media in a way that amplifies the perceived adverse effects (Rohloff et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2023). For pornography, ideas' regarding the safety of young people raises public anxiety and moral panic about their susceptibility to being exploited, which is amplified by mass media distorting information or taking individual instances of harm and overgeneralising it to all youth, as exemplified by the UNICEF example above. Parents, alongside policy makers, have greater concerns than

adolescents about the harm from pornography use (e.g., Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; Wright et al., 2023).

Ideas of harm are thus mirrored between societies and policies that focus on the damage from exposure to pornography. However, the assumption that adolescents will 'automatically' be harmed from this exposure is thought to be unhelpful. In studying child sexuality, Lamb and associates call attention to "harm that comes from sexual play and games has more to do with the child's perception that what they are doing is shameful or bad..." (Lamb et al., 2018, p. 29). Instead, several authors recommend using a child/youth-centred approach that allows young people to say what bothers or upsets them (e.g., Lamb et al., 2018; Livingstone & Haddon, 2012; McKee, 2021). When youth are prioritised, they have positioned themselves as discerning consumers of pornography with the possibility that adults are naïve and misguided (e.g., Healy-Cullen et al., 2023a).

Efrati (2020) has proposed defining non-problematic from problematic pornography use, with the latter being related to harm. Efrati proposes three ways of understanding problematic pornography use. First, through a mental health perspective whereby pornography use is equated with disrupted daily functioning. Second, a feminine perspective considers problematic pornography to promote the objectification of women and/or men, irrespective of its effect on functioning. Non-problematic content would not promote objectification, based on how objectification is determined. A third perspective of formulating risk is through a cultural, religious standpoint, "which could define (at the extreme) any type of pornography use as problematic because it opposes morality and any behaviour that contrast morality is problematic" (Efrati, 2020, p. 69). These three perspectives highlight the lack of agreement between different perspectives in identifying problematic or harmful pornography use. Efrati then goes onto argue that problematic use

should be based on whether the behaviour disrupts daily functioning and is uncontrollable and/or addictive.

To summarise, the social-political history of pornography has typically framed pornography within the moral debates of indecency and the need for censorship (Hunt, 1993; Mulholland, 2013). The advancements in technology and neoliberal ideology have increased the accessibility and commodification of pornography (Kammeyer, 2008). Fears about harmful outcomes underpin the various precautionary measures and educational programs that are used to protect society, even if the harms may not eventuate. Censorship laws have been used to curb fears about the moral corruption and negative impacts on society from pornography but equally need to balance this with the right to freedom of expression. Control strategies, such as age verification, have been introduced to mitigate youth access to pornography but are easily side stepped through the numerous access points and platforms on the Internet (Day, 2021; OFLC, 2015; Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018).

Various attempts to define pornography have been hindered by disagreements over what constitutes pornography, what is indecent and what is erotic. Despite the efforts to construct a shared definition, what is understood as pornography remains ambiguous and dependent on the viewers' interpretation (Ashton et al., 2019; Fisher & Kohut, 2020; Marshall & Miller, 2019; McKee et al., 2021; Willoughby & Busby, 2016). This is not surprising given the meaning of pornography is constructed through contemporary norms and morals set by the dominant culture and religion. Mainstream ideals about what constitutes healthy sexual behaviours also positions behaviours deemed outside the mainstream as problematic or abnormal (Le Grice & Braun, 2018). These narrow views of sexuality and generalised terminology oversimplify the complexities in understanding adolescent pornography use (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018b). Consequently, I have argued that a broad

definition focusing on content will provide a shared language for communicating with youth but equally provide space for their specificity and idiosyncratic interpretations.

Through examining how theoretical models, contemporary academic literature and media have engaged with the concept of adolescent pornography use it is clear that these debates are embedded in historical concerns of harm and risk. Pornography is used as a political and capitalist commodity, to create societal gender inequalities and sexual exploitation of others, and to bring about harmful effects on youth. Adolescents are considered at risk from pornography due to their immaturity and passive acceptance of negative sexual scripts. However, risk and harm are poorly defined, and rely heavily on socially constructed dominant norms. If individual perceptions differ from the mainstream norms, then these differences in perception are commonly framed as being abnormal, a cognitive distortion, and/or a failure to recognise harmful effects. Conversely, these risk perspectives are criticised for overlooking adolescent agency (e.g., Healy-Cullen et al., 2023a), for problematizing a normative function of becoming sexual beings (e.g., Rubin, 2011; Tolman & McClelland, 2011) and for oversimplifying the complex intersections between the individual and society (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018b; Taylor, 2022).

Consequently, careful consideration is needed when determining what is meant by risk and harm, which is especially difficult to unpack for covert forms of harm such as moral corruption, damaging youth innocence, promiscuous attitudes, and the like. Exploration of such risks needs to be balanced with the normative function of becoming sexual beings. Likewise, adolescents need the opportunity to express their perspectives about the risks from pornography use rather than these risks been constructed by adults using different generational norms. Hence, when exploring pornography effects, an adolescent-centred approach is recommended to learn from adolescents how they make sense of pornography without framing it as being good or bad.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

# STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
# DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the student and the student's main supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the student's contribution as indicated below in the Statement of Originality.

| | |
|---|---|
| Student name: | Robyn Vertongen |
| Name and title of main supervisor: | Dr Clifford van Ommen |
| In which chapter is the manuscript/published work? | Chapter Three |

Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work:[1]

The article has been led by Robyn Vertongen with Dr van Ommen and Prof Chamberlain contributing to discussions and refinements.

Please select one of the following three options:

- (●) **The manuscript/published work is published or in press**

  Please provide the full reference of the research output:
  Vertongen, R., Chamberlain, K., & van Ommen, C. (2022). Pornography and adolescents: unravelling dominant research assumptions. Porn Studies, 9(4), 430-444. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2022.2114532

- ( ) **The manuscript is currently under review for publication**

  Please provide the name of the journal:

- ( ) **It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student's signature: | Robyn Vertongen Digitally signed by Robyn Vertongen Date: 2023.08.16 09:47:59 +12'00' | Main supervisor's signature: | Clifford van Ommen Digitally signed by Clifford van Ommen Date: 2023.08.16 08:19:23 +12'00' |

*This form should be placed at the beginning of each relevant thesis chapter.*

[1] Refer to the Massey University Publishing and Authorship guidelines (OneMassey for staff, Stream for students) and/ or Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) guidelines for guidance.

## Chapter Three: Pornography and Adolescents: Dominant Research Assumptions

Chapter Three presents a critical review of three dominant assumptions made about adolescent pornography use. The assumptions were formulated while scoping what the literature said about adolescent pornography use, what it did not say, and how conclusions were drawn about adolescent pornography use. The assumptions are presented in the article, "Pornography and adolescents: unravelling dominant research assumptions".

"This is the original manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Porn Studies*, *9*(4), 430-444 on 10 October 2022, available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2022.2114532"

## Pornography and adolescents: Unravelling dominant research assumptions

### Abstract

This critical conceptual article focuses on how adolescent pornography use is commonly researched, examining the key assumptions made in researching pornography and its potential harm. The article first considers the contextual foundations involved in researching adolescents and pornography, which has a long history steeped in notions of indecency and protection. We examined empirical research in the field and how findings translated into media and policy outlets. This leads to the identification and critical discussion of three dominant assumptions in the field: that exposure leads to continued viewing; that increased viewing leads to harm; and that pornography provides the template for sexual practice. This analysis suggests that research has functioned under highly homogenized presumptions about adolescent pornography use and its effects. We argue that there is a fundamental need to

broaden pornography research by directly engaging adolescents to include their perspectives in research and in the translation of research into policy and education.

**Keywords:** pornography; adolescence; sexually explicit material; conceptual assumptions

## Introduction

This article critically examines how research into adolescent pornography use is grounded in key conceptual assumptions. Pornography is steeped in a history that considers it indecent, an assumption embedded in moral, legal, and political debates (for a historical overview of pornography, see Hunt, 1993). These debates led to censorship laws based on protecting vulnerable individuals and preventing moral declines in society. Pornography has also been used to push boundaries, make political statements, express creativity, and for pleasure (Hunt, 1993). Research has associated pornography with negative impacts, such as turning non-sexual children into promiscuous adolescents (e.g., Owens et al., 2012). These concerns are often played out in the media well before scientific enquiry, making it difficult to separate alarms about negative impacts from actuality (Jeffery, 2018). Contemporary understandings cannot be separated from their political and social context and, as Danermark and associates (2019) highlight, individuals reproduce or transform social reality through their actions.

Contemporary concerns have heightened as pornography has shifted technologically, from magazines and DVDs that could be purchased in adult-only stores with clear signage to online media readily available to adolescents through the Internet. The first online pornography website became available in 1994 and online pornography was rapidly capitalized into a multi-billion-dollar industry (McVey et al., 2021). While the pornography industry may claim it was never intended for adolescents, they clearly target this group with

genres such as `barely legal' or `teen porn'. These ever-evolving platforms have meant that censorship laws, initially set up to protect people from harm, can be circumvented, renewing public debate over pornography's influence on society and youth (e.g., Quadara et al., 2017).

Society often considers adolescents as impressionable and vulnerable to indecencies found in pornography. Adolescence is predominantly conceptualized as a developmental phase between innocent child and independent adult, marked by puberty. Adolescence is a relatively new concept, only existing since the post-industrial period when several factors came together, including legislation against unjust exploitation, age restrictions on employment, and increasing emphasis on education and employment skills (Graham, 1987). Societal changes have meant young people remain dependent on their parents for longer, alongside increasingly earlier sexual maturity (Bellis et al., 2006). Hence, adolescence exists as a prolonged period constructed by societal demands, creating tensions between adult and adolescent perceptions of expected sexual behaviours, and blurred lines for when adulthood and its associated autonomy is reached.

Adding pornography into this construction of sexual development creates further tensions about sexuality. Adolescents are expected to negotiate healthy sexual relationships but claims about their immature functioning lead to concerns around risk, especially given their unlimited internet access (Behun & Owen, 2019; Brown & Wisco, 2019). Concerns around teenage exposure to sexual material considered immoral or indecent heightens demands to protect and control both adolescents and pornography. These issues are then entwined in pornography research that predominantly looks for negative impacts, and in reports whose recommendations are based on harms associated with pornography (e.g., Papadopoulos, 2010; Quadara et al., 2017). The desire to safeguard adolescents has meant that adolescent perspectives and understandings are frequently ignored, producing an adult-centric perspective on adolescent pornography use (Henry & Talbot, 2019). This desire to

safeguard adolescents from pornography needs critical consideration in undertaking such research, and researchers need to reflexively attend to their embedded assumptions.

Others have argued for a more positive focus on adolescents' sexuality, to support their navigation of what it means to be sexual beings without pathologizing sexuality (Attwood et al., 2018; McKee et al., 2021; Wright & Štulhofer, 2019). However, bringing notions of teenage vulnerability and pornographic indecencies together renders exploration of positive aspects of pornography particularly controversial. Despite this, pornography has some positive associations for adolescents, including satisfying sexual pleasure and curiosity, understanding the mechanics of sex, determining readiness for engaging in sex, developing sexual identity, and destigmatizing sexuality and sexual practices (Attwood et al., 2018; Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Castro-Calvo et al., 2018; Doornwaard et al., 2017). However, to expand the current debates around concerns or potentials of adolescent pornography use, it is vital to examine the assumptions underlying both positions.

## Assumptions underlying adolescent pornography use

In this article, we critically examine key conceptual assumptions underlying adolescent pornography use through a critical realist lens, emphasising the importance of social embeddedness (Bhaskar, 2011). Following Bhaskar, we consider reality to exceed any interpretation of events; scientific assumptions cannot be separated from actual experiences, which are embedded in social, cultural, and spiritual realities that are transitive and relational. This shaped the key question posed: 'What are the ideas or assumptions being repeatedly made about adolescent pornography?' This approach necessitates immersion in a diverse range of material to evaluate current claims made about phenomena (Grant & Booth, 2009). Therefore, while we prioritized scientific literature, our analysis also explored how books (e.g., Behun & Owen, 2020; Mulholland, 2013), media (e.g., http://spcs.org.nz; Fight the

New Drug 2018; Daily Mail, 11 June 2021, 'Parents urged to use safety features on children's phones to reduce porn access') and government reports and online resources (e.g., netsafe.org.nz; Quadara et al., 2017; The Light Project | Equipping communities to navigate new porn landscape, as of 22 July 2020) represented adolescent pornography use. We also explored public debate through examining other media forums, including documentaries, talkback radio, newspaper articles and opinion pieces. We prioritized material focusing on adolescents under 18 years old and excluded material focused primarily on addiction, sexting, revenge porn, and specialist forensic populations, which were outside our scope.

This material was read and summarised, with key ideas abstracted and given descriptive labels. The labels were mapped out and examined for meaningful relations to each other. This led to conceptualising three key assumptions underlying adolescent pornography use that were reflected within both research and social-political domains. For example, researchers have claimed that pornography content has become more aggressive over time (e.g., Bridges et al., 2010; Gorman et al., 2010), and this has been taken up by online media adopting it uncritically as factual in websites such as itstimewetalked.com and The Conversation (e.g., Flood, 2020).

We discuss these three assumptions – that exposure to pornography leads to increased use of pornography and use of potentially aggressive pornography, that increased viewing leads to harm, and that pornography provides the template for sexual practices – in turn in the following. We comment on limitations and inconsistencies throughout. We conclude by offering recommendations for future research into adolescent pornography use.

Before discussing these assumptions, we acknowledge that they are based on difficult premises (for comprehensive methodological reviews see Fisher & Kohut, 2020; Kohut et al., 2020). Defining pornography is problematic and highly subjective (e.g., McKee et al., 2020) and is often inconsistent across studies (Marshall, & Miller, 2019). Evaluation of exposure

rates varies substantially, and some have argued how exposure is assessed for youth can lead to overestimating their pornography use (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018). Further, research into pornography use is driven by cultural ideologies that typically neglect adolescent perspectives and contextual factors. It is important to hold these limitations in mind when considering the three assumptions.

**Assumption 1: Adolescent exposure to pornography leads to continued engagement**

The first assumption is that adolescents, once exposed to pornography, will continue to view it (e.g., Nieh et al., 2020; Owens, et al., 2012; Quadara et al., 2017). This assumes that viewing pornography will be a positive experience that will strengthen this behaviour. Despite difficulties in accurately assessing exposure, there is good evidence that many adolescents view pornography at some time, and that males are more likely to watch than females (e.g., Alexandraki et al., 2018). However, most research determines pornography use at a single time point and fails to consider how engagement with pornography is experienced or changes over time. Current use is often used to indicate stable ongoing use. In doing so, this research ignores developmental changes, how consumption may vary over time, how consumption is interpreted, and whether it is sustained into adulthood.

The few longitudinal studies that have tracked how young people use pornography over time have reported varied patterns of use (Doornward et al., 2015b; Willoughby et al., 2018), with some claiming significant increase in use as adolescents mature (Nieh et al., 2020; Rasmussen & Bierman, 2016), and that this is common across cultures (Shek & Ma, 2016). However, it can be argued that exposure will increase with normal developmental maturation and as opportunities for viewing increase. Furthermore, rather than sustained patterns of increased use, Doornwaard et al. (2015b) report multiple trajectories of adolescent use, including stable non-use, strong increasing use, occasional use, and decreasing use. Most

girls and more than one-third of boys followed the stable non-use pattern. Additionally, those with higher initial use showed a decline in consumption as their sexual behaviour increased, suggesting that sexual interest was initially fulfilled by using pornography but transferred to sexual activity over time. Doornwaard et al. (2015b) concluded that easy access to pornography did not lead to heavy use among adolescent males and less so for females.

Adolescents also report reduced pornography use as their social development increased (Owens et al., 2012), and nearly half of those reporting regular viewing indicated variable periods of watching less or more pornography (Henry & Talbot, 2019). Research exploring what exposure means with adolescents finds a more complex perspective that moves beyond the dichotomy of viewing or not viewing pornography (Mattebo et al., 2012). Rather, viewing was a complex process integrating how it related to oneself, others, and societal messages, such as gender roles and liberation (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018; Carboni & Bhana, 2019; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010).

Overall, longitudinal research suggests that adolescent engagement with pornography is not stable and fixed but varies with developmental maturation. It is important for future research to understand what exposure means and how it changes over time rather than equating any use in time as equalling sustained use that is detrimental to wellbeing. This echoes other researchers who have called for a broader exploration of the meaning behind current pornography use and remaining open to new perspectives offered by adolescents (e.g., Alexandraki et al., 2018; Attwood & Smith, 2011; McKee, 2014; Wright & Štulhofer, 2019).

**Assumption 2: Pornography is harmful for adolescents**

The second assumption is that increased exposure to pornography is associated with increased harm for adolescents. Harm or risk is difficult to define (Naezer, 2018; Spišák,

2016) and these difficulties are increased when pornography use or sexual activity is applied as an indicator of harm (McKee et al., 2021). Harm can be narrowed into problematic pornography use that negatively impacts one's functioning and is considered out of control (Efrati, 2020), or broader harm that includes development of negative attitudes, associated emotional difficulties, and greater sexual risk-taking behaviours (Alexandraki et al., 2018). Concerns about harm have included sexual coercion or victimization (e.g., Hald et al., 2010; Rostad et al., 2019), permissive attitudes (e.g., Baams et al., 2015), contracting sexually transmitted infections, unprotected sex, and unwanted pregnancies (Nigussie et al., 2020), promiscuity (Hald et al., 2013), poorer psychological wellbeing (Doornwaard et al., 2016; Efrati & Amichai-Hamburger, 2019), self-objectification (Maheux, 2021) and sexual uncertainty (Peter & Valkenburg, 2008b). Social harms have focused on moral declines in society and sexual objectification of women (Coy & Horvath, 2018; Efrati, 2020). However, many of these concerns (e.g., permissive attitudes) are highly subjective while others (e.g., uncertainty and sexual interest) could be considered normal developmental changes.

Findings of harm are often reported in ways that suggest greater certainty in outcomes than might be appropriate, across research, educational resources, and government reports. However, findings have been inconsistent and ambiguous, fuelling ongoing debate about what is meant by pornography consumption and its associated risks (e.g., Martyniuk & Štulhofer, 2018; Štulhofer et al., 2019; Vandenbosch & van Oosten, 2018). In this literature, small differences in findings are often reported as important. Thus, tentative associations are promoted as evidence, even if dutifully qualified as inconclusive, inconsistent, or difficult to replicate. This evidence is then used by other authors to argue that exposure to pornography is related to risk without acknowledging the limitations. For example, influential researchers (e.g., Owens et el., 2012; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016) quote Braun-Courville and Rojas's (2009) study as evidence that exposure to pornography is significantly associated with

increased risky behaviours and attitudes. However, close inspection of that research indicates that the findings offered are much more tentative than subsequently referenced. Other studies have found that pre-existing attitudes and beliefs are important in determining what sexual media adolescents select to view (e.g., Doornwaard et al., 2015b). Hence, although Braun-Courville and Rojas (2009) indicate an association between viewing pornography and permissive sexual beliefs, how this relationship develops over time and in what order remains unclear.

This reporting of tentative claims as certain is illustrated in in many reports into pornography. For example, the Papadopoulos (2010) report is often cited as sound claims of harms associated with pornography. To illustrate, Massey et al. (2021, p.329) depict this report as an "extensive report [which] suggests that pornography is having a profound impact, …by creating a culture of sexualization and body dissatisfaction". However, we agree that the report is of "strikingly poor academic quality*"* (Smith & Attwood, 2011, p. 330) which misrepresents available research and is more about social opinions. This report provides a striking example of the interplay between empirical, social, and political fields coming together to create knowledge claims.

Harm research is also inconsistent in which variables should be considered influential during adolescence. For instance, the developmental milestone of puberty, with hormonal changes and increased sexual interest, has been given different priorities within studies. Nieh and colleagues' (2020) reported that puberty influenced the uptake of pornography use. They did not assess how pornography use translated into harm, but rather considered viewing sexual images as harm. Hence, the only conclusion that can be drawn from studies of this type is that viewing is associated with puberty, and that a significant proportion of participants end up viewing pornography as they mature. Some studies have controlled for puberty status. For instance, Matković et al. (2018) found no significant association between

pornography consumption and sexual debut when puberty status was controlled. These inconsistencies mean that the role considered for constructs in research – as direct, mediating, moderating, covariate, or omitted – can impact on whether effects are reported. A similar pattern can be observed for the role of alcohol use in pornography use. Alcohol use may be considered as a risk factor related to increased pornography exposure (e.g., Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009), or as a potential confounding variable due to its established relationship with increased risky sexual behaviours (e.g., Wagenaar et al., 2018). Hence, across harm research, what are considered as pre-existing influences and what are risk factors remains murky, with current research often sidestepping developmental considerations.

Most importantly, another problem with harm research is that adolescents' understandings are minimized or side-lined. Interestingly, when asked, adolescents express similar concerns to adults about negative impacts, while believing they are personally not at risk (Cameron et al., 2005; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). But these reports of no risk have been interpreted differently. Cameron et al. (2005) conjectured that adolescents were developmentally unable to judge negative impacts, given other research had found negative effects. In contrast, Lofgren-Mårtenson and Månsson attributed this finding to adolescents' developing skills to navigate pornography in a "sensible and reflective manner" (2010, p. 577). Again, such discrepancies in assessing and interpreting adolescent responses lead to quite different understandings of harm.

When adolescent perceptions are prioritized and examined, the landscape broadens to include both positive and negative aspects of pornography (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Attwood et al., 2018; Doornwaard et al., 2017). Doornwaard and associates (2017) found that the experiences of adolescents, mostly girls, were complex and ambivalent. Pornography was used for pleasure, ideas, and communication, but also criticized for creating unrealistic expectations and for being misogynistic and fake. Adolescents have also questioned what

harm from pornography means and were found to perceive pornography as an unimportant part of their lives (Spišák, 2016), in direct contrast to adult concerns about adolescent pornography use.

Another concern is that adolescents will progress onto aggressive pornography either intentionally or accidentally. Online pornography has become more explicit and aggressive, with material used to shock or push boundaries (Bridges et al., 2010; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Exposure to this is proposed to lead to desensitization and increased acceptance of violence, potentially undermining the moral structure of society (e.g., Massey et al., 2021). It is assumed that adolescents are accessing violent or aggressive content based on availability, with very limited research into their actual access or their interpretation of such material. Assumptions about exposure to aggressive content are drawn from content analysis showing that pornography contains aggression (e.g., Bridges et al., 2010; Gorman et al., 2010), although a content analysis across the past decade did not find increasingly aggressive content or an uptake in viewing this content (Shor & Seida, 2019). Irrespective of debates about the prevalence of aggressive pornography, knowing levels of violence does not tell us how much contemporary adolescents are exposed to it or how they manage this exposure.

Some research shows that young people acknowledge seeing aggression or extreme pornography (OFLC 2018; Rothman et al., 2015; Vandenbosch, 2015). The OFLC (2018) showed that approximately 2% of adolescents viewed violent pornography regularly. While concerning, it remains difficult to know how such viewing translates into risk or how it shapes perceptions of sex. The claims of risk are based on adult research finding a small, significant relationship between violent pornography use and attitudes supporting violence against women (e.g., Hald et al., 2010).

Beyond exposure, research investigating the role aggressive pornography has for adolescents is rare. Rostad et al., (2019) found that exposure to violent pornography was

associated with dating violence, especially for males. They surmised that exposure to violent pornography may contribute to more accepting attitudes towards sexual violence or an adoption of violent sexual scripts, or alternatively that some male adolescents have a propensity for aggression and select material that fits these tendencies. They also found that participants who viewed aggressive pornography were more likely to engage in other problematic behaviours, such as marijuana use. Hence, comorbidity issues and pre-existing traits are likely to be important factors influencing the uptake of violent pornography. This area warrants further exploration to unpack the role of violent pornography for different subgroups who choose to view it. However, what constitutes violence and risk, potential predisposing and contextual factors, and interpretations of the material are all salient areas that need clarification to progress this understanding, particularly from adolescent perspectives.

**Assumption 3: Pornography provides a template for (unhealthy) sexual practices**

Concerns about harm from pornography are underpinned by the notion that adolescents are easily corrupted, through processes such as social learning or following online sexual scripts (e.g., Attwood & Smith, 2011; Owens et al., 2012; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). One idea is that adolescents utilise stereotyped scripts depicted in pornography to inform their sexual identity and what is appropriate sexually (Wright & Štulhofer, 2019). Analysis of pornography clearly shows it lacks depiction of relational qualities and positive behaviours, such as kissing, laughing, embracing, and verbal compliments, and reinforces gender inequalities (e.g., Bridges et al., 2010; Klaassen & Peter, 2015). It is then assumed that adolescents have difficulty reflecting on such unrealistic scripts and uncritically adopt similar stereotypical attitudes and expectations (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Wright & Štulhofer, 2019). An opposing concept is that adolescents actively determine what to view

and are capable of critically reflecting on the content as seen through an age-appropriate lens (Byron et al., 2021; Vandenbosch & van Oosten, 2018).

It is argued that permissive attitudes to sexuality reflect acceptance of pornography scripts. This requires a direct influence to be established. Although most authors shy away from claiming directional influences, some have not. For example, Doornward et al., (2015a) found that pornography use in boys predicted permissive sexual attitudes six months later and concluded that pornography use directly influences subsequent attitudes. However, questions can be raised as to whether changes in permissiveness occur irrespective of pornography use. Further, are permissive sexual attitudes problematic or reflective of adopting unhealthy pornography scripts? Alternatively, others have found adolescent exposure to pornography did not predict (at five-year follow-up) greater acceptance of gendered sexual roles or rape myth acceptance (Vangeel et al., 2020).

Wanting to try something viewed has been used as evidence of adopting pornography scripts (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Rothman and associates (2015) found support for this, with some participants re-enacting sexual behaviour they had viewed in pornography. But once again, this is contextual and nuanced, as such re-enactments were also found to be coercive for female participants. Arrington-Sanders and colleagues (2015) found that same-sex-attracted adolescent males used pornographic material as sexual performance scripts and re-enacted sexual behaviours they had viewed, but these experiences were sex-positive and pornography played an important role in their sexual identity formation. Although these studies found that adolescents may want to re-enact what they have viewed, they do not explore what adolescents actually view or which sexual acts they want to re-enact.

Another approach to this research is to assess adolescents' perceptions of pornography as realistically depicting actual sexual interactions (Peter & Valkenburg, 2010). Perceived realism is equated to the adoption of pornography ideas and assumed to reflect

internalization of such sexual scripts. For example, Baams et al., (2015) found adolescents who perceive pornography as realistic to hold more permissive attitudes towards sex. However, in this research once again, little is known about the content viewed or how it is interpreted as realistic. The realistic approach has also been criticized for its heteronormative perspectives and overlooking minority sexual orientations, identities, and practices (Byron et al., 2021).

To understand realism, surveys have attempted to evaluate whether adolescents show an increased focus on sexual performance, utility, and satisfaction. Vandenbosch and colleagues' (2018) three-wave study reported that the frequency of viewing pornography predicted the enjoyment of consuming it, and greater enjoyment was associated with pornography having utility for real-world sex. Utility was indicated by participants believing they could learn things they otherwise would not, and that this information had value. However, the relationship between pornography exposure and sexual performance was small and inconsistent over time. Perceived realism has also been found to be unrelated to pornography use. For example, Wright and Štulhofer (2019) found that adolescents' perceived realism declined with age while their pornography use increased, and they generally did not consider pornography as realistic depictions of sexual activity. Overall, these research findings raise questions about how well realism reflects adolescents adopting pornography scripts, and further exploration is needed before any conclusions can be drawn about this issue.

Research on pornography as script has also explored decreased sexual satisfaction. Satisfaction is assumed to decrease as adolescents are unable to live up to exaggerated sexual scripts found in pornography. Peter and Valkenburg (2009) found sexual satisfaction decreased with increased pornography use over time, while others have found no relationship between pornography use and sexual satisfaction (e.g., Milas et al., 2020; Wright & Štulhofer

2019). Once more, it is unclear how sexual satisfaction and sexual expectations about performance relate to acceptance of pornography scripts by adolescents.

Another concern in this area is that adolescents' lives become saturated with sexualized media, including pornography scripts that promote transactional sex and power imbalances, which then become their new reality. This is integrated into popular teenage culture, with terms such as "pornification", "sexualization", and "hypersexual" (Mulholland, 2013; Papadopoulos, 2010) used to describe this saturation. It is assumed that this saturation causes sexual scripts to be passively accepted, questioning adolescents' ability to reflect on or show insight into this. Several studies have found that adolescents do describe pornography as integrated into their daily lives and socially accepted amongst peers (e.g., Doornwaard et al., 2017; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Mattebo et al., 2012). However, the same authors describe tensions between pornography as part of adolescents' daily lives and their non-acceptance of sexual scripts when interviewed. This creates ambiguity about how these opposing ideas of passive acceptance and critical reflection are brought together.

Debate also exists around adolescents' ability to identify or critically reflect on themes of violence. Research exploring the impacts of sexual violence in the media (OFLC 2016) found that most participants were unable to recognize and reflect on the levels of violence reflected in films, except older girls, who could critically reflect on this. For both genders, younger participants tended to equate physical force (e.g., rape) with sexual violence but did not recognize more subtle emotional, verbal, or other sexual forms of violence, such as coercion. This study does not inform us how the ability to identify such content changes with age and experience, or what level of insight is needed to make safe choices in sexual behaviours, such as consent. More generally, the study did conclude that participants were able to identify potential harm from viewing sexual violence and were reflective about viewing such material.

Overall, while some evidence indicates that adolescents learn about sexual activity, find the information useful, and re-enact some sexual acts from pornography, other evidence shows they also critically reflect on pornography scripts as unrealistic and unrepresentative of relationships. Therefore, the assumption that adolescents use pornography scripts to inform their sexual practice in an unhealthy manner remains speculative. This will remain unclear until researchers start asking adolescents what they are watching, what they want to re-enact, and how they understand pornography as realistic or unrealistic. Further, research into the meaningful assessment of perceived realism is needed before it can be linked to harm, while conceptualizing harm continues to hold the limitations already discussed.

## Implications and Future Directions

This article has aimed to critically examine how adolescent pornography use is researched and the conceptual assumptions underlying this topic. This research explored a diverse range of material, based on the perspective that scientific assumptions are embedded in societal notions about both adolescents and pornography. Three dominant assumptions were abstracted: adolescent exposure to pornography leads to continued engagement; pornography is harmful for adolescents; and pornography provides a template for sexual practices.

The first assumption, that exposure to pornography leads to continued engagement, is based on notions that it is rewarding for adolescents. Exposure is overwhelming based on single time points using cross-sectional designs and surveys (Alexandraki et al., 2018) and is wrapped in the presumption that greater pornography exposure is automatically problematic. However, preliminary longitudinal data showed varied trajectories of adolescent engagement with pornography (Doornwaard et al., 2015a) and for some adolescents it decreased as sexual encounters increased (Owens et al., 2012). Alongside arousal, adolescent curiosity and

information seeking were key reasons for youth to explore pornography (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018; Castro-Calvo et al., 2018; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; Henry &Talbot, 2019). Therefore, the argument can be made that pornography use does not equate with permanent or continual pornography use. Instead, greater consideration needs to be given to how adolescents engage with and make sense of pornography, and how this evolves overtime and is connected to developmental changes.

The second assumption, that pornography is harmful for adolescents, is grounded in the notion that harm can be meaningfully captured. Surveys focus on capturing predetermined notions of risk or harm to prevent future harmful outcomes and inform policies about managing such outcomes. Currently, this research has prioritized concerns that exposure means harm through increasing adolescent sexual interest, activity, and permissiveness, sexually objectifying others, especially women, and more broadly altering social-cultural moralities. Expected developmental changes, such as increased sexual interest, tend to be side-stepped or problematised. In contrast, exploration of positive experiences such as sexual pleasure are largely absent (McKee et al., 2021). We would argue for a more balanced approach to exploring pornography use that includes both risks and pleasures identified from adolescent perspectives.

Further, when adolescents do not report harm, their insight has been questioned. We have argued that the over-simplification of exposure equating to harm is potentially misleading and closes the space for further nuanced explanations. Like Byron et al. (2021), we would encourage research which shifts the focus beyond subjective (hetero)sexual narratives of harm, and that explores harm through a bottom-up approach into adolescent experiences. Our understanding of what constitutes harm would be significantly enhanced through the inclusion of adolescent perspectives.

The third assumption, that pornography provides a template for sexual practices, is usually framed around unhealthy sexual practices understood through a heteronormative lens. The assumption that young people have difficulty reflecting on, and uncritically adopt, pornography scripts that are devoid of intimacy is not well supported. While there is evidence that some vulnerable adolescents do re-enact painful aspects of pornography scripts, precisely which scripts they adopt and how they align their own sexual practices with different content is currently unknown, supporting the call to study this further (e.g., Vangeel et al, 2020). This would require moving away from pre-judging some scripts as more morally acceptable than others, and to exploring how scripts are interpreted and used by adolescents.

A key concern in this research is that aggressive pornography repeatedly paired with pleasure leads to normalization of aggression scripts and a desensitization to such content. However, this relies on the assumptions that adolescents are repeatedly viewing violent material as well as finding it decreasingly arousing over time. To date, no research has directly explored this assumption with adolescents. If adolescents do find violent pornography arousing, it is unclear how they think about arousal and whether arousal is interpreted as liking what they are viewing. Adolescents may experience different emotions to arousal, leading to the material being considered unpleasant or disturbing, and they may consider that aggressive material is incongruent with their views of self. Consequently, further exploration around these ideas is needed to understand how adolescents understand and navigate this material before assuming that they are at risk of adopting such scripts.

Overall, we argue that the assumptions we identify here are based on inconsistent research findings that are problematic to interpret. Despite findings being weak or inconclusive, they tend to be reported as factual in online forums, educational websites, and even policy documents, giving the impression that much is known about adolescent pornography use. Moving forward, we advocate for greater diversity in research approaches

to enrich our understanding and shed light on inconsistencies. Although ethical constraints can create barriers, preliminary qualitative studies show how research can be conducted ethically and allow adolescents to provide their own perspectives and understandings of pornography use (e.g., Doornwaard et al., 2017; Rothman et al., 2015).

In conclusion, the need for further research is well supported by evidence showing that adolescents do view pornography and that it is increasingly integrated into their day-to-day lives. We need greater understanding about the different ways pornography is used by adolescents, how they make sense of it, and how this evolves as they mature. The challenge is how to include adolescent narratives into the debates. Finally, the key assumptions discussed can be useful in aiding reflexive practices when considering how societal and empirical assumptions are blended to produce contemporary understandings of adolescent pornography use.

# Chapter Four: The Present Study, Methodology and My Reflexive Practice

This chapter begins with the justification for exploring adolescent's perceptions about sexually explicit internet material (SEIM) and the current study's objectives. This is followed by the methodological considerations utilised to answer this exploratory question. While qualitative methods allow flexibility they should not be used to side-step important underlying methodological assumptions or reflexivity on how these assumptions influence the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Chamberlain, 2014; Thorne, 2014). Consequently, the underlying methodological assumptions are briefly discussed to share how these underpin the research process followed by an overview of the method. Finally, I discuss my positionality and importance of engaging with reflexivity during the research process given all research is inherently value laden.

## The Present Study

The effects of pornography on youth have been reignited due to it being free and easily accessed via various internet platforms and devices such as mobile phones and laptops. These concerns have led to repeated calls to engage with youth to explore how they interpret pornography (Alexandraki et al., 2018; Doornwaard et al., 2017; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a, 2023a; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Vangeel et al., 2020; Wright & Štulhofer, 2019). Despite these appeals, most research has utilised adult perspectives in discussing pornography use and harm with adolescents (Attwood et al., 2018; Henry & Talbot, 2019). Research exploring pornography use amongst adolescents has largely ignored positive experiences in favour of exploring negative impacts and managing risks. However, the present study aims to explore adolescent perceptions of pornography use while allowing space for both negative and positive experiences to be shared. The broad question posed was,

"How do adolescents make sense of sexually explicit internet material?" Justification for the current thesis and its objectives are summarised below.

**Justification for exploring SEIM with adolescents**

The limited understanding about how adolescents make sense of SEIM is a key justification for undertaking this study. The Internet makes pornography easily accessible, affordable, and anonymous, which is thought to intensify the negative effects (e.g., Cooper & Griffin-Shelly, 2002; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). The Internet also has meant the pornography industry can side-step controls that were set up to safeguard youth from potentially harmful material (e.g., OFLC, 2015; Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018; Day, 2021). This has led to increased concern about the negative effects from SEIM use on adolescents, who are often regarded as passive consumers that are easily influenced (e.g., Behun & Owen, 2019; Brown & Wisco, 2019; Giordano et al., 2022; Rostad et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2023). Numerous concerns have been raised about the risks from SEIM use from adult perspectives, both in the media and by the professionally privileged, but research into how adolescents themselves make sense of SEIM use has trailed well behind (Efrati, 2020; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; Henry & Talbot, 2019). Yet, there are limits to relying only on adult perceptions to describe and understand how adolescent make sense of pornography use, as discussed above.

As evident from the literature review (Chapter Two), adolescents describe varied reasons for SEIM use that include both positive and negative aspects compared with adult perceptions that prioritise risk and harm. In addition, risk models that argue increased SEIM use means increased harm do not inform us about how adolescents engage with the material, what it means to them and how their perception may change over time. Adolescents express varied reasons for SEIM use and nuanced understandings that move beyond the narrow view

of risk and harm from SEIM use (Doornwaard et al., 2015; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022b; 2023; Mulholland, 2015; Willoughby et al., 2018). While it is important to identify risks and any person experiencing harm should not have this minimised, it is also unhelpful to assume harm has occurred. Projecting adult worldviews of harm and negative judgement onto youth can create shame (Lamb et al., 2018), which young people have reported (Dawson et al., 2020). Instead, akin to other authors recommendation (e.g., Boislard et al., 2016; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; Lamb et al., 2018; Livingstone & Haddon, 2012), the current thesis aims to use a youth-centred approach that allows young people to say what bothers or upsets them.

Holding direct conversations with young people under the age of 16 about pornography (with 16 being the consensual age for sex in New Zealand) are typically avoided due to ethical concerns of discussing this sensitive topic. These concerns often centre on the vulnerability of adolescents and the indecency associated with pornography. However, there is good evidence that adolescents can hold robust conversations about pornography in a mature manner (e.g., Doornwaard et al., 2017; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a). Youth completing qualitative interviews about SEIM have described enjoying the process and have been found to speak openly about the topic (Fuzzell et al., 2016; Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010). Adolescents who have participated in sensitive interviews have found them to have potential benefits including being cathartic, increased self-awareness, a sense of empowerment and as an opportunity to help others (Draucker et al., 2009; Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010). Consequently, I have chosen to hold direct conversations with adolescents who I believe can hold mature conversations about SEIM.

This thesis will use Tolman and McClelland's (2011) recommendation of using a framework that conceptualises adolescent sexuality as normative and considers both risks and positive aspects of sexuality to understand adolescent SEIM use. This also aligns with evidence that shows adolescents view SEIM to gain knowledge about sexuality and

relationships (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; OFLC; 2018) and aligns with New Zealand's sexuality health education (NZHEA, 2020) that is delivered within schools. In addition, Tolman and McClelland (2011) acknowledge that adolescent development is socially produced and as such emphasise the importance of contextualising developmental changes within their adolescent culture. Hence, the aim is to provide the context and nuanced understanding of adolescent SEIM use.

### Research purpose and question

The purpose of the current study is to explore how young people, 14 to16 years of age, make sense of their SEIM use through in-depth individual interviews. In-depth interviews provide the flexibility to explore the intricacies of their experiences and to embrace a contextualised understanding of societal and process issues. The empirical goal is both explorative and explanatory. To achieve this, an understanding of their experiences is needed in the first instance, followed by how they make sense of those experiences. The specific underlying questions that feed into this broader objective include how SEIM features in their world, what it means to them, how this may change over time, how they manage what they view, and how they integrate this information into their view of self and relationships. At a practical level, these insights will provide a more nuanced understanding about how adolescent's make sense of SEIM use. This understanding can then be used to inform other youth, service providers and parents or caregivers about how they might understand and help young people navigate similar issues.

## Methodology

The underlying methodological assumptions and how these influence the research process are important considerations that improve the methodological integrity (Braun &

Clarke, 2022; Chamberlain, 2014; Thorne, 2014). Consequently, the underlying methodological assumptions are briefly discussed to share how these underpin the research process. Specifically, I explain how I have interpreted Critical Realism (CR) to show how this influenced my decisions during the research process and how I have crafted this into my method. I then describe the design and how thematic analysis is used in this research project.

Both methodology and the method need to fit well with the research question and objectives to enhance methodological integrity (Larkin, 2015; Levitt, 2020; Levitt et al., 2017; Chamberlain, 2014). Hence, the starting point for this study was to create a good fit between the aim, of openly exploring, and answering the question, "how do adolescents make sense of SEIM use?" This succinct explanation of methodology is framed around this research question rather than debating the contested accounts of what reality is (ontology) and how we come to know what we know (epistemology).

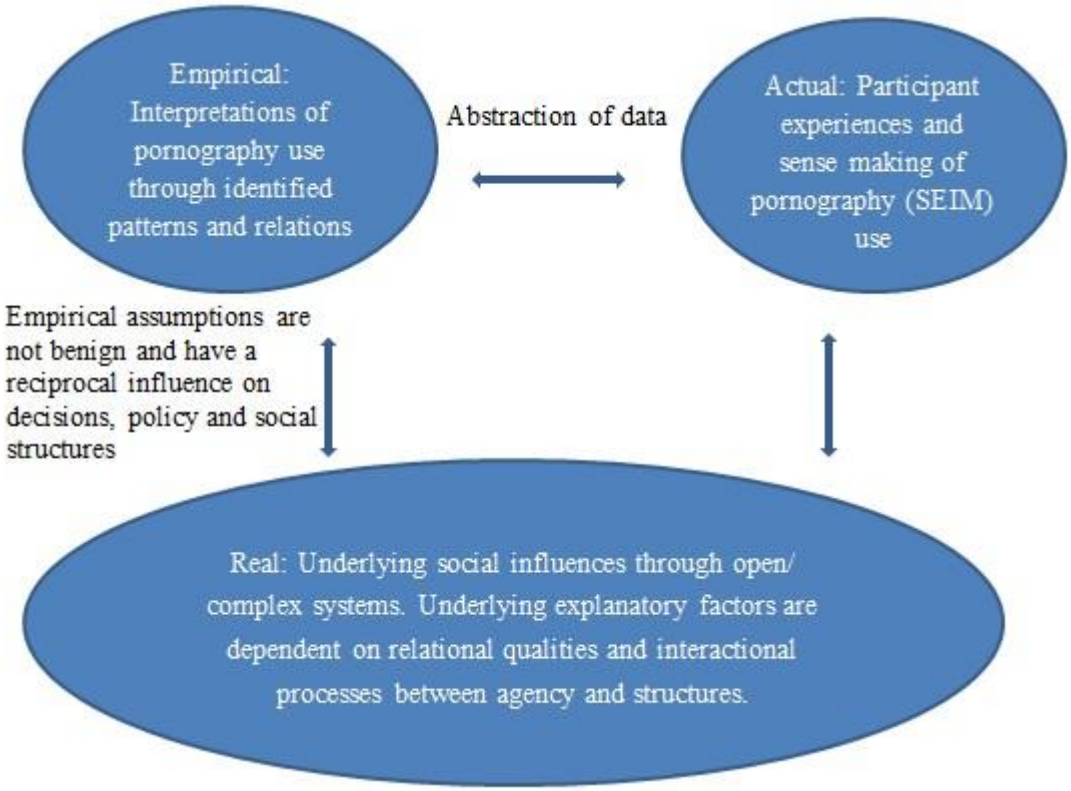
The current research used a critical realist framework that drew upon the work of philosopher, Roy Bhaskar, and other key authors such as Berth Danermark, Andrew Sayer, and Margaret Archer. I used CR to examine the decisions made throughout the research process, to question how I abstracted my data, and to critically reflect on my interpretations and findings. It is acknowledged that the following account of CR is only my interpretation of how these authors describe CR given there is no unified understanding of CR.

CR is a philosophy of science that theorises what the world must be like for good science to be possible and how we can know what we know (Archer et al., 1998; Bhaskar, 2011; Danermark, et al., 2019). CR has been described as embracing ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgemental rationality (Pilgrim, 2019). In line with epistemological relativism, Bhaskar and Lawson (1998) describe the production of knowledge to be a human activity that is mediated by language and is contingent on the context and period of time. Furthermore, CR moves away from dualism debates that focus on

"*either-or"* perspectives, such as positivism versus hermeneutic viewpoints, to a "*both*-and" perspective that uses rationalised judgements when interpreting context-specific findings. Therefore, pornography exists, but how we understand or talk about pornography varies based on differing judgements (not truths) and backgrounds (e.g., risk perspectives, socio-cultural norms) that are relevant to the context that gives rise to them. The abstraction process is shown in Figure one. My interpretative judgement of participant experiences is made through the rationalised processes as described below.

**Figure 1**

The Abstraction Process Used to Explore How Adolescents Make Sense of SEIM




Abstraction in CR, or generating themes (e.g., Braun & Clark, 2022), uses judgemental rationality through the researcher's lens to interpret events or social experiences.

Judgemental rationality is the process of weighing up different explanations to determine which provides a more plausible explanation. This logic is based on notions of sensibleness, descriptive qualities, and explanatory power. Explanatory power is described by Bhaskar (2008, 2009) as concepts that provide 'meaningful explanations' of the relationships that exist between ideas.

This brings me to the importance of looking at relational qualities. Relational qualities are considered meaningful when objects "are what they are by virtue of the relations they enter into with other objects" (Danermark et al., 2019, p. 40). For example, in the current thesis, I considered pornography production and viewers, or educators and students, as important relations that lead to the existence of each other. Relations can be considered at any level, such as societal, peers, or individual interactions. Hence, important relations include any shared characteristics such as, being an adolescent, perceptions of pornography, and responses to viewing pornography. During abstraction, exploring what is absent alongside what is present is also important (Danermark et al., 2019), similar to Braun and Clarke's (2021) recommendation of exploring both latent and explicit meaning when developing themes. Consequently, some relations were explicit while others were implicit and inferred through identifying complex and non-linear patterns that are common within conversations (see Mozdzierz et al., 2014).

Lastly, within CR no single method for data analysis is recommended, as eclectic methods are encouraged to explain phenomenon from different angles (Bhaskar & Lawson, 1998). Hence, in my research process several methods were considered in terms of their ability to answer the research question, *how do adolescents make sense of SEIM use*. The advantages and disadvantages associated with each method were identified and weighed until the method of thematic analysis was settled upon. For example, methods that involved greater insertion of the researcher into participants' lives, such as ethnography, were not considered

suitable. Immersing myself into the adolescent's world to explore pornography was deemed overly intrusive and ethically inappropriate.

I decided that methods that focus on exploring a specific theory were not as well suited to answering my research question given the lack of strong theoretical models about adolescent pornography use (e.g., Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Furthermore, most theoretical models about pornography use focus on mechanisms that pathologise it, which risks ignoring adolescent perspectives that have been found to include both positive and negative aspects (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Attwood et al., 2018; Doornwaard et al., 2017; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). Focusing on a singular theoretical model was also inconsistent with frameworks that conceptualise sexuality as a normal developmental process of being human and being relative to the context that gives rise to it (e.g., Allen, 2011; McClelland & Fine, 2014; McKee et al, 2010; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). I also considered methods that prioritised lived experiences (e.g., Smith, 2011) because I aimed to understand participant experiences with pornography and how they interpreted these experiences. However, it was unclear if adolescents would discuss their lived experiences in detail. For example, adolescents can make sense of pornography use through explaining the experiences of others (e.g., OFLC, 2017), which is common when exploring adolescent perspectives for sensitive topics. Talking about others is thought to be more comfortable when disclosing personal information (Krumpal, 2013). Hence, I decided that exploring lived experiences needed to be balanced alongside exploring social interactions between participants and others (e.g., peers, significant adults, and online mediums).

For these reasons, I chose thematic analysis to guide my approach to developing themes and bringing order to my data. Thematic analysis considers researcher reflexivity and subjectivity as a resource for interpreting data, with an emphasis on exploring patterns across participants within their wider social-cultural context (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021;

2022). Hence, this interpretative thematic analysis was a good fit with my intent of providing the context and nuanced meaning behind adolescent SEIM use to explore my research question, “How do adolescents make sense of SEIM use?”

To sum up, the abstracted themes were weighed up using judgemental rationality that prioritised themes that were well grounded in the data and could provide sensible and meaningful explanations for this data. Therefore, I started with the data then abstracted important themes and relations, compared these abstractions with my existing understanding of adolescent pornography use to identify what fitted with existing research and how it is different, and then related it back to the data, and so on. This reiterative process of moving between the data and abstracting meaningful themes and exploring their relations, continued until I had confidence in the themes that I arrived at as described in the analysis section below.

## Method and practice of inquiry

The current research aimed to explore how New Zealand adolescents made sense of SEIM use employing a qualitative approach drawing on CR framework and Braun and Clarke’s (2021) thematic analysis. This design allowed for an open exploration of participants understandings of SEIM that could include both positive and negative aspects (see Appendix A for the interview guide). I recruited 13 adolescents who were 14 to 15 years of age. This age group was recruited within New Zealand schools because most students14 to 15 years of age have completed sexuality education, which placed them in a good position to be able to discuss sexual matters. Participants were initially recruited through targeted advertising on Facebook (see Appendix B) and then through educational facilities as a more productive route. The details of this recruitment process are outlined in the article “Sensitive Engagement: Lessons Learnt from Researching Pornography Use with Adolescents” in

Chapter Five. This article shares the methods used to address the complexities of engaging youth in open discussions about pornography and the subsequent insights.

Ethical considerations permeated all our research decisions and were guided by the Ethical Research Involving Children document (Graham et al., 2013) and adhered to the key ethical principles of consent, confidentiality, usefulness, and minimisation of harm. Ethical reflection was further facilitated by consulting with the University Ethics Committee, which required a clear risk management protocol (see Appendix C for participant information and consent forms, and Appendix D for the risk management protocol). In addition to practical steps, I also considered several other ethical matters including inclusivity, power imbalances, participant engagement, and researcher positionality with my research team (see Chapter Five).

To ensure inclusivity I consulted with the programme leader from the Peer Sexuality Support Programme, who had expertise in working with sexual diversity, and our cultural consultant that aided responsivity to Māori participants. Responsivity to Māori meant applying Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles of acknowledging their role as tangata whenua (indigenous people of the land) and to be collaborative and open to different perspectives when working with Māori participants and interpreting their data. All research conducted in Aotearoa, New Zealand, is inherently of potential interest to Māori given it may impact on Māori people, culture, and society (Hudson, et al., 2010). The process of engagement and details of these ethical considerations are expanded in Chapter Five.

Participants were interviewed using two semi-structured individual interviews that focused on a conversational approach to obtain in-depth information from participant perspectives. Interviews were conducted by the lead author in a private room, either at their school or the University, according to participant preference. Interviews were carefully planned based on recommended guidelines for interviewing young people (Lobe et al., 2008).

A flexible interview guide was employed focusing on key topics and interviews were audio recorded. Topics included participants understanding of SEIM, experiences with SEIM and how it features in their world, how their experiences change over time, how they made sense of these experiences, and any effects on themselves or others. The conversational style interviews allowed for a detailed exploration of experiences and elicited a rich dialogue from participants. Every transcript was transcribed before the second interview and systematically checked to see if the key questions were explored and if a full picture had been obtained. I identified areas that needed expanding or covered in the second interview, which were usually two weeks apart. At the second interview, I provided an executive summary of the key ideas presented at the initial interview to help bridge between the two interviews, to obtain feedback about my interpretations, and to enhance rapport. After each interview, participants were provided with a $25 voucher to compensate for their time and travel. The reasoning behind these research practices is outlined in Chapter Five and the research design is summarized in Chapter Six, which discusses the procedures as part of the research findings. Chapter Six also provides fuller details of the participants, which I will briefly describe here to help orientate the reader.

**Participants**

Participants were self-selected based on convenience and their willingness to discuss SEIM. It is expected the adolescents who self-select will be more willing to talk about sexual issues and find this topic less stigmatising than non-respondents, as is consistent with previous research (Fuzzell et al., 2016; Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010). The age group of 14 to 16 years was selected based on the scant research with younger adolescents, with most research interviewing older adolescents (e.g., Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; 2022b). Yet concerns regarding vulnerability are heightened for younger adolescents due to their

immaturity which means they are less likely to reflect and engage in complex decision making (Behun & Owen, 2019; Bonnie & Scott, 2013; Eleuteri et al., 2017; Santrock, 2016; Woolard & Scott, 2009).

The number of participants was guided by the idea that "the larger information power the sample holds, the lower N is needed" (Malterud et al., 2016, p. 1754). Information power is determined by the study aim, sample specificity, use of established theory, quality of dialogue and analysis strategy, which overlap with one another. Fewer participants are needed when little is known about their experience being explored and when gaining rich information about their understanding. Based on these guidelines, the current study required fewer participants because the study's aim was explorative and targeted a specific age group's understanding of SEIM use. The sample specificity was further increased due to only young men 14 to 15 years of age volunteering. Moreover, the information was collected by an experienced interviewer who is capable of engaging in high quality dialogue and eliciting rich information. The last consideration relates to the data analysis. Fewer participants are required when the analysis is aimed at single case analysis, as opposed to cross-case analysis. I wanted to explore participant perspectives about SEIM use while understanding how these perceptions relate to other participants' perceptions, which meant having only a few participants would make this difficult. After considering the five dimensions above, the current study aimed for ten participants. This is supported by studies collecting rich information to identify common themes across participants often using fewer than ten participants (e.g., Smith, 2004). Moreover, given this is an immensely personal topic and recruitment was expected to be difficult then adding participants for the purpose of generating data numbers is not ethically justifiable.

The thirteen adolescents who agreed to participate were interviewed between January and August 2018. Twelve participants were 15 years of age, and one was 14 years old.

Twelve participants self-identified as male, and one responded as queer. Nine identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual and four participants identified as bisexual, gay, or undecided. All participants were enrolled in State-owned schools with ten from a same-sex school and three from co-ed schools. All participants were actively engaged in school activities from sports to theatre, and self-reported to be doing average to above average academically. Participants described having good peer relationships and communication with parents, although not necessarily around sexual issues. Their interest in participating included having their opinions heard, having adults understand their perspective, being curious, helping others, and for one participant, because their friend was participating. One participant identified as Christian, and the others identified no religion. Participants identified as New Zealand European, Māori, East Asian, and South Asian. Several identified as being multi-cultural. No participants reported having had sexual intercourse, but some had initial physical experiences with relationships, such as kissing and dating. Participants were given pseudonyms using current popular movie character names.

**Data analysis**

I did not assume harm exists due to pornography use but, rather, remained open to exploring how adolescents made sense of SEIM use and how this is embedded within the adolescents' social contexts. I sought to maintain an open mind whilst undertaking the analysis, drawing on Tolman and McClelland's (2011) recommendation of exploring positive and negative aspects of adolescent SEIM use within context through a youth centred lens. My analysis interpreted how adolescents made sense of SEIM use through considering surface (explicit) level interpretations and underlying (implicit) processes that are confined to the context that gives rise to them (Bhaskar & Lawson, 1998). Hence, themes were abstracted

from the data and both implicit and explicit relations within and between themes were considered.

To bring order to the data, I used Braun and Clarke's (2013) 'analytic sensibility' approach to thematic analysis. Analytic sensibility means reading and interpreting data through your chosen theoretical paradigm to go beyond surface-level content. My initial attempt at using Braun and Clarke's (2013) guidelines was to code the data. Therefore, the data was initially grouped into topics, which was shaped by the interview topics and questions. This rudimentary grouping was then broken down into codes, with explanations for when the code should be used or not used. For example, one code from the topic question, how does SEIM feature in their world, was given the label "first viewings". This label was then defined to include any data discussing the first time they viewed or were shown SEIM, any thoughts and reactions to this viewing, and where and how this happened (e.g., peers, popup ads). Any subsequent experiences with SEIM were coded elsewhere. The transcripts were scanned for examples that fitted the codes across participants. I also identified key words and used a tally system to work out how prevalent the topics were across participants.

While I initially tried to use codes and to determine the prevalence of a topic, I found this to be problematic. For example, I found the codes too restrictive and important relational qualities were difficult to capture, such as how participant's first experience was understood based on their relationship with peers and sexual knowledge. How their base sexual knowledge was used to interpret what they had viewed and how this then shaped future understanding of SEIM use, which ebbed and flowed. Hence, I dropped my formal coding process, which upon reflection was driven by my desire for structure but limited my flexibility. This then allowed me to prioritise themes based on flexible judgements of quality as well as how dominant they were within participant conversations and across participant transcripts. I considered the themes quality based on how well they answered the research

question, how well they captured the interpreted intent from the data and how well they captured meaningful relational qualities.

From here the analysis became more flexible and common themes were connected by shared meanings within the topic. I generated numerous themes using this more flexible approach of analysis. Thematic maps were used to help organise important themes, to highlight their relational aspects, and to aid discussions within the research team about how themes might relate to each other or how they could be melded together. Figure two outlines an example of a thematic map used to organise themes. The judgemental rationality principles described above were used when abstracting multiple themes. I then determined which themes were the most essential. How I prioritised dilemmatic themes and the strategies used to manage SEIM use is outlined below.

This abstraction process started with the notion of agency which was observed across several themes. I initially prioritised agency because it held important relations between perceived control and the participant's sense of responsibility. Participants expressed a desire to be in control, to be responsible for their choices, and mostly positioned themselves to have acted intentionally around their SEIM use. Although active control over viewing was often not the case for their first exposure to SEIM it was for subsequent viewing of SEIM. The ideas of being responsible for their choices (an explicit interpretation) were further embedded in many dilemmatic tensions (a latent interpretation). This led to prioritising the themes of agency and dilemmas.

**Figure 2**

A Thematic Analyses Map Showing the Key Themes for How Adolescents Made Sense of SEIM and How They Managed SEIM Use


Within these themes I identified factors that were outside the participant's control (e.g., social influences) and instances where they were able to take control. Factors outside of their control included peers freely showing SEIM, industry advertising, communications with educators, websites, and sexual urges. I also noticed that the participants held themselves accountable for how they managed reminders about SEIM and expected themselves to do the

right thing. These explicit explanations of responsibility reflected underlying values about who they were as a person and how they thought others (educators, parents, society) expected them to behave. While I observed a complex interplay between participants reported choices and external factors that exerted forces on their choices, the participants predominantly focused on the choices they made and their responsibility for these choices. Hence, I prioritised dilemmatic themes and how they managed what they viewed because: I observed participants spent a large proportion of their interviews going back and forth between what they did and what they thought they should do; they all explained how they managed what they viewed, which held strong relational qualities with their dilemmas; I considered these two dominant themes answered the question, "how do adolescents make sense of SEIM use", well; and the themes reflected meaningful processes that participants engaged in which could be used by others and to extend our understanding of the current risk models of SEIM use. In view of this, dilemmas were further broken into subthemes that helped explain participants conflicting ideas.

Discussions within the research team were also used to enhance interpretive depth of the developing themes and reflexivity. The reiterative process described above for developing themes is reminiscent of Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (2019; 2021; 2022) method that emphasises reflexivity and moves away from coding that relies on inter-rater agreement used in earlier versions of thematic analysis (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013; Braun et al., 2014; 2015). Braun and Clarke describe reflective thematic analysis as a flexible approach that uses the researcher's subjectivity as a tool for reflexive practice during analysis. A single coder is required, and themes are developed organically to "capture the researcher's developing and deepening interpretation of their data" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 9). This brings me to the importance of considering researcher positionality as part of reflexivity.

**Researcher positionality and reflexivity**

Methodological integrity in qualitative research calls for transparency of the researchers' perspectives or positionality and its influence upon the research process (e.g., Holmes, 2020; Levitt, 2020; Levitt, et al., 2017; Perry et al., 2004). Positionality refers to "an individual's world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context" (Holmes, 2020, p. 1). Reflexivity is discussed in terms of how I located myself in relation to pornography; how I locate myself in relation to the participants; and how I locate myself within the research process. While I have discussed these perspectives here, it is noted that my reflexivity was a continuous process used throughout my study.

My interest in the topic came from my experiences as a Clinical Psychologist and mother of three teenage daughters. As a Clinical Psychologist I see people who have problems that have included adolescents being sexually harassed or assaulted and on occasion people who use SEIM to escape life hassles. I have also worked on occasion with people who consider their pornography use to be problematic and on rare occasions vulnerable women being coerced to copy what their partners had viewed online. My Clinical Psychology training and profession has a strong focus on assessing risk and problems. These experiences shaped my initial assumption, that SEIM was risky and potentially damaging.

My literature review showed that many negative assumptions about pornography use, and its associated harm for adolescents, could not be verified. Furthermore, this cause-and-effect model of harm did not inform me about how adolescents engage with the material, what it means to them and how their perception may change over time. Numerous concerns about harm were reflected in online educational material that was reportedly taken from the empirical literature. For example, a key concern is that adolescents are viewing increasingly violent content, which they will find acceptable and adopt similar scripts (e.g., Wright, 2011, 2014). However, it is unknown how much young people view violent material or if they find

violence arousing in the first instance. If they do find it arousing, given this is the purpose of pornography, it is unclear how they think about their arousal and if arousal is interpreted as liking what they are viewing. An alternative is that they may experience different emotions to arousal or have a developed sense of self that is incongruent with what they have viewed leading to alternative interpretations. Consequently, my position on pornography was one of caution given complex issues are oversimplified in the literature and risks are promoted to reinforce a particular societal viewpoint of preventing harm. Yet harm from pornography use is also evident for some people and thus I do not want to dismiss negative impacts that individuals report. Hence, I held a flexible position about pornography use that was determined by the person viewing it.

My position held about adolescents is similarly complex in that I consider them to be both vulnerable and resilient. I conceptualised adolescents as occupying the space between adulthood, where they are responsible for their decision making, and children who are dependent on adults. Adolescents were thus considered in terms of their vulnerabilities while also developing their independence and autonomy. Accordingly, consideration was given to both ideas of adolescent immaturity and maturity when abstracting themes to prevent foreclosing on either idea during the research process. Therefore, vulnerability is not a fixed idea but rather is shaped by such factors as prior experiences, exploitation, personality, and social support networks. There is good evidence that adolescents are capable of holding mature conversations about pornography (e.g., Arrington-Sanders, et al., 2015; Doornwaard et al., 2017; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010) and are able to determine a healthy pathway to maturity (Bonnie & Scott, 2013; Santrock, 2016).

I consider sexuality to be a normal developmental task that adolescents go through, and acquire skills around, as part of being human. I have assumed sexual health is fluid and open ended (McKee et al., 2023; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Therefore, my assumption

was that participants will provide their best account of their experiences with SEIM through their own personal lens of the world and need for self-preservation, while underlying influences or structures will implicitly shape their responses. It is also assumed that the version that participants present at the time of the interviews may not reflect that person in the future, given all experiences reshape who we are, and adolescence is a pronounced stage of sexual growth and learning.

My positionality within the research process can be considered though reflecting on my role as an insider and outsider. An insider is when I have lived familiarity with and prior knowledge of the group being researched, whereas an outsider does not have knowledge of this group (Holmes, 2020). Holmes (2020) argues there is no clear dichotomy between being an insider or outsider due to researchers occupying multiple positions along flexible continuums. Therefore, I would argue that I straddled both insider and outsider positions. For example, I would consider myself an outsider because of I am middle aged, female, and a different ethnicity (for Māori and Asian participants). But I could be considered to hold insider knowledge based on having conversations with adolescents about sexuality, listening to my own teenagers and their natural conversations with peers, familiarity with sexuality education, and being middle class. Holding prior knowledge about adolescent sexuality may serve as an advantage in that I have familiarity with the topic. Equally being an outsider can allow me the opportunity to ask naïve questions that acknowledges the expertise of youth. In addition, given my position as an outsider to their school environment it gave participants the added confidence around privacy.

This brings me to my position of power which is inherent to all adult/youth research relationships (Graham et al., 2013; Lobe et al., 2008). A power imbalance is constructed between the researcher and participants when the researcher has greater control over the participant that shapes their responses. Power relations are constructed through various

interviewing processes such as the language used, how this language is delivered (e.g., talking down to people), institutional affiliations and sociocultural positions. I held positions of power via being significantly older, holding the position of a researcher, my affiliation with the University, and my psychological knowledge. Power imbalances can be addressed through a researcher's ability to build relationships with adolescents that enhance engagement (e.g., Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Freeman et al., 2021; Turner & Almack, 2017). Well established strategies that contribute to therapeutic engagement include showing empathy, being non-judgemental, openly listening to the interviewees' perspective and showing an understanding and acceptance of their perspectives (Gibson & Cartwright, 2013; Knight et al., 2018; Noyce & Simpson, 2018).

Holding an egalitarian relationship (e.g., talking to adolescents as an equal or as an adult) helps create conditions where adolescents' authority is preserved and maximises their agency (Graham et al., 2013). In addition, being respectful and collaborative, discussing participants' rights, giving adolescents control of the interview's pace and permission to both speak up and to say no are all aspects that are pertinent to enhancing an adolescent's sense of empowerment (Brown et al., 2014; Gibson & Cartwright, 2013; Knight et al., 2018) and are discussed further in Chapter Five. Likewise, therapist self-disclosure has been used by clients to judge their therapist's authenticity and trustworthiness, especially among adolescents (Noyce & Simpson, 2018). Hence, my position as a mother of teenagers was included into the information letter (see Appendix C) and in my introductions. Appropriately timed self-disclosure was also used during the interviews. For example, I shared how I came across pornography as a teenager through finding a pile of discarded playboy magazines on a bush walk, which was laughed about given the changes in technology.

In view of the importance of being reflexive throughout the research process my role and assumptions were purposefully reflected on. Before starting the interviews, time was

given to reflect on my values and their potential influence. After each interview I asked myself "Did I make assumptions or suggestions?" "Did I understand SEIM from their viewpoint or mine?" and "Am I either over or under identifying with participants viewpoint?" Points of interest or unexpected responses were also noted. I used open reflections within the research team to notice and expand limitations, and to pay particular attention to emotional responses as recommended by others conducting sexuality research (e.g., Perry et al., 2004). Furthermore, projecting adult worldviews of harm and negative judgement onto youth can create shame around sexual experiences (Lamb et al., 2018), which reiterates the importance of remaining open when talking with youth and reflecting on how my worldview may differ from theirs, such as my propensity toward risks.

I was aware of my own discomfort that was due to my high sense of responsibility to do no harm and uncertainty about the depth of information about pornography that could be collected for this age group. I did not want to project expectations about what they could talk about or how much. The tension between being confident in their ability to converse about the topic versus not wanting to be too intrusive or over-step their level of knowledge, was considered throughout the data collection and was recorded in my research journal.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

# STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
# DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the student and the student's main supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the student's contribution as indicated below in the Statement of Originality.

| | |
|---|---|
| Student name: | Robyn Vertongen |
| Name and title of main supervisor: | Dr Clifford van Ommen |
| In which chapter is the manuscript/published work? | Chapter Five |

Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work:[1]

The article has been led by Robyn Vertongen with Dr van Ommen and Prof Chamberlain contributing to discussions and refinements.

Please select one of the following three options:

| | |
|---|---|
| ○ | The manuscript/published work is published or in press<br>Please provide the full reference of the research output: |
| ◉ | The manuscript is currently under review for publication<br>Please provide the name of the journal:<br>Journal of Adolescent Research |
| ○ | It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student's signature: | Robyn Vertongen Digitally signed by Robyn Vertongen Date: 2023.08.16 09:44:45 +12'00' | Main supervisor's signature: | Clifford van Ommen Digitally signed by Clifford van Ommen Date: 2023.08.16 08:20:23 +12'00' |

*This form should be placed at the beginning of each relevant thesis chapter.*

[1] Refer to the Massey University Publishing and Authorship guidelines (OneMassey for staff, Stream for students) and/ or Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) guidelines for guidance.

# Chapter Five: Lessons Learnt from Researching Pornography Use with Adolescents

Chapter Five describes the lessons learnt from conducting in-depth individual interviews with 14 to 15 year old adolescent men. Ethical considerations and risk management protocols are outlined as part of the initial planning process. Threats to participants are expected when discussing a topic traditionally considered taboo. I discuss how this threat was managed by incorporating practical strategies to enhance trust and decrease discomfort. I also outline my researcher positionality, which grounds my approach of valuing all options and underpins the integrity of the research findings. I discuss the pitfalls in my initial recruitment process and how these were managed. The obstacles encountered are outlined followed by a discussion about how I engaged the gatekeepers in this research. Finally, the practicalities of how the conversational-style interviews were conducted are detailed. This chapter is presented in the form of a research article which has been submitted for publication to the Journal of Adolescent Research.

Vertongen, R., van Ommen, C., & Chamberlain, K., Sensitive Engagement: Lessons Learnt from Researching Pornography Use with Adolescents (Under Review).

## Sensitive Engagement: Lessons Learnt from Researching Pornography Use with Adolescents

## Abstract

Researching adolescent engagement with sexually explicit internet material (SEIM), or pornography, is a sensitive topic that requires careful and thoughtful consideration regarding ethical concerns. Adolescent perspectives are imperative to consider as they differ from adults and provide important insights into their complex viewpoints about SEIM. To explore this topic in depth, researchers need to gain access to adolescents' private and often guarded ways of making sense of their experiences with SEIM. This article offers guidance on how to navigate this topic effectively and ethically with adolescents. It discusses learnings from a study that involved in-depth individual conversational-style interviews with 13 male adolescents aged 14 to 15 years about their understandings of their SEIM engagements. Young men have typically engaged superficially when interviewed about pornography. We offer some practical suggestions for engaging adolescents more deeply in open dialogues about SEIM use, and identify and discuss some unproductive approaches to researching this area.


**Key words:** pornography; SEIM; adolescence; qualitative interviews; sensitive topics; ethics; interview engagement

## Introduction

Pornography is readily available to youth through the Internet, and this has raised significant concerns about the potential negative impacts of viewing such material (Massey et al., 2021; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Rostad et al., 2019). Pornography most commonly refers to the depiction of sexually explicit material or sexual activity that is intended for sexual arousal (e.g., McKee et al., 2020; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). The terms, pornography and Sexually Explicit Internet Material (SEIM) are used interchangeably in the literature, as

we also do in this article (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Vertongen et al., 2022a). Pornography content ranges from sexually suggestive material to hard-core material that depicts aggression and violence (Carrotte et al., 2020; Miller & McBain, 2022). Yet these diverse genres are often discussed as the same thing, obscuring our understanding of the research findings (Ashton, et al., 2019; Kohut et al., 2020; McKee et al., 2020) and heightening public concern (Attwood et al., 2018).

Proposed harms from pornography use are thought to be particularly pertinent to adolescents due to their immaturity and claimed acceptance of negative sexual scripts (Behun & Owen, 2019; Wright et al., 2023). This perceived immaturity also deters undertaking in-depth interviews with adolescents about pornography, with this type of research typically using surveys (e.g., Alexandraki et al., 2018; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016) and engaging with older adolescents (e.g., Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; 2023a). Anonymised surveys have been argued to reduce potential threats from self-disclosure (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). However, surveys with adolescents are typically framed around adult concerns about risk, such as the relationship of pornography to sexual violence (e.g., Rostad et al., 2019). This unfortunately limits the scope for uncovering adolescents' understanding of pornography from their perspective.

Importantly, adolescent perspectives have been found to differ from adult perspectives with adolescents emphasising their agency alongside their capacity to reflect on the inauthentic production of pornography (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022, 2023a; Vertongen et al., 2022b). However, when adolescent perceptions do not align with adult perspectives of harm then these differences are attributed to the adolescents' poor judgement due to various forms of distorted thinking (e.g., Lo et al., 2016; Wright, 2014; Wright et al., 2023). Adolescents are thought to be unaware of the negative messages due to pornography permeating teenage culture, making it their new reality (e.g., Pearson et al., 2018) and leading

to an indifference about their pornography use (Olmstead et al., 2023). This is complicated by what is considered healthy sexuality, which is heavily embedded in dominant norms and contemporary morals (Attwood et al., 2018; Byron et al., 2021; Chmielewski et al., 2017) that all too often position sexual behaviours deemed outside the mainstream as abnormal (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007; Le Grice & Braun, 2018; Morison & Herbert, 2019). Researchers have repeatedly argued for engaging with youth to explore how they interact with and interpret pornography and to capture the complex interactions between youth and society (Alexandraki et al., 2018; Doornwaard et al., 2017; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022, 2023a).

Understanding adolescent perspectives will inform policies and porn literacy practices when working alongside adolescents. Hence, if we are to respond to the appeals to understand adolescent perspectives, we need more personal and nuanced research methods that can fruitfully engage adolescents around this topic (Carboni & Bhana, 2017). Further, we need some discussion around how we might manage the various complexities involved in undertaking this type of research. This article offers a contribution toward such a discussion.

The focus of this article is on sharing insights and methods used to address the complexities of engaging youth in open discussions about pornography. These insights come from our research that explored how adolescents made sense of their experiences with pornography (Vertongen et al., 2022b). The study included 13 participants, aged 14 to15 years, recruited over a ten-month period. Each participant completed two in-depth individual interviews two weeks apart, averaging 100 minutes across the two interviews. After each interview, participants were provided with a $25 voucher to compensate for their time and travel. During the interviews participants openly discussed their experiences with pornography, how they made sense of these experiences, and how they managed what they viewed.

In this article we begin by outlining our ethical considerations, which permeated all our research decisions. This includes examples of ethical issues and how we managed these. We then discuss research design decisions, between choosing individual interviews or focus groups, and comment on the importance of utilising a second interview to build trust with participants, deepen data quality, and enhance the genuineness of the data. Next, we discuss our recruitment strategies, which were grounded in the ethos of giving adolescents autonomy over their decision to engage with the research topic. Initial recruitment was tried using an online format (Facebook), but it became apparent that we needed to alter this approach due to lack of engagement. Hence, we shifted our focus to engaging gatekeepers and discuss how we managed this process. Finally, we discuss how the lead author, as interviewer, engaged with these adolescent males to optimise the sharing of information during interviews. Engaging adolescent men in conversations about pornography is especially important given they have previously been found to be less likely to participate, to offer fewer details, provide less explanation, and show less self-reflective insight about their pornography viewing compared with female participants (Carboni & Bhana, 2017; Doornwaard et al., 2017; Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010; Office of Film & Literature Classification, 2016; Rothman et al., 2015; Smith, 2013).

## Ethics and risk management protocols

In this section we discuss ethical considerations and how these were managed. Ethical considerations underpinned all decisions with the goal of allowing participants to remain in control and ensuring their safety and trust. This research was guided by the Ethical Research Involving Children document (Graham et al., 2013) and adhered to the key ethical principles of consent, confidentiality, usefulness, and minimisation of harm. Ethical reflection was facilitated by consulting with the University Ethics Committee, which required a clear risk

management protocol (see Appendix D) to ensure the researcher had strategies to address potential risks. Hence, we brainstormed "what if" scenarios, followed by clear risk management strategies for each scenario. A summary of various local services that could be contacted, such as school guidance counsellors and online resources, was established alongside this risk management protocol. While the detailed guideline provided practical solutions and was instrumental in gaining ethics approval, we also considered several other ethical matters including inclusivity, risks, and researcher positionality throughout the research process.

**Inclusivity**

The code of ethics for psychologists working in Aotearoa/New Zealand (New Zealand Psychological Society et al., 2012) requires psychologists to avoid any form of discrimination and show sensitivity to diversity, which lead to the researchers consulting with those with sexuality and cultural expertise. Consultation with the programme leader from the Peer Sexuality Support Programme, with expertise on sexual diversity, was particularly helpful to ensure inclusive language was used during interviews. The recommendation was to keep language neutral regarding sexuality and to ask what gender and sexual identity participants use to ensure this was acknowledged rather than ignored or assumed. This approach of acknowledging sexual diversity, being interested in participant experiences, and affirming their experiences is used in affirmative practice in working with diversity (Pachankis, 2018).

We also acknowledge our research inherently has potential significance to Māori, as tangata whenua (indigenous people of the land), as all research conducted in Aotearoa, New Zealand may impact on Māori people, culture, and society (Hudson et al., 2010). The current project was designed to be responsive to Māori. Responsivity to Māori meant we applied Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles of partnership, participation and protection when working with

Māori participants and interpreting data. We also aligned with the concept of self-determination which was conveyed through providing participants with the freedom to direct the conversations about pornography in unexpected directions. Advice from the cultural consultant aided responsivity to Māori participants through establishing whakawhanaungatanga (relational connections), which is considered fundamental (Carlson et al., 2022). The lead author also asked the two participants who identified as Māori if they would like to open with a karakia (prayer), and more time was spent on introductions, places of connection, whānau (family) and self-disclosure from the interviewer to establish ties and trust.

Ethical consideration was also given to how their information was interpreted. Tipene and Green (2017) recommend avoiding colonial representations of sexual health, where sexual health is often problematized, to allow space for Māori perspectives to be heard. According to the Department of Justice (1989), Māori perspectives of sex cannot be scrutinised in isolation because sex and relationships exist as part of Māori cosmology and hold spiritual significance that are interwoven with life, love, and death. Therefore, ethically it was important to conceptualise sex as being woven into wellbeing and as part of life rather than being problematized, so that all participants could self-determine their explanations of sexuality and pornography. This led to a validating and flexible approach to discussing sexuality and pornography. The cultural advice provided important insight into practice for engaging with all participants in the research.

**Risks for participants**

Barriers to participation are wedded to potential risks that participants may experience by volunteering for this study. Two key barriers were considered: participant risks from engaging in the study and mistrust of the research process. We considered the risk to

participants, as adolescents were 14 to 15 years of age, from discussing the sensitive topics of pornography and sexual matters. Sensitive questions have been described as questions that are considered “intrusive” by the respondent and pose a “threat of disclosure”, where there is a potential cost from giving honest answers (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007, p. 860). Furthermore, sensitive questions can lead participants to provide answers that align with the moral ideals expected within society to prevent unfavourable impressions being formed of them (Krumpal, 2013; Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). Thus, questions about pornography use are considered both intrusive, due to its taboo nature, and threatening, given the need for self-disclosure of highly personal information. Pornography also elevates this sensitivity, due to a social-political history that associates it with strong negative moral overtones (Attwood et al., 2018).

To address this, we planned to directly talk about discomfort in the interviews (see below ‘collecting the data’) to both acknowledge this and to plan how to manage any discomfort that arose. There is ample evidence that threats to self-disclosure can be mitigated through using private, distraction-free settings and helping participants feel at ease through building rapport (Dempsey et al., 2016; Krumpal, 2013; Lobe et al., 2008; Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). Consequently, our interviews were conducted in private rooms within the participants’ chosen setting, either at their school or the university. Consent to participate is an ongoing process within qualitative interviews (Moriña, 2021). For example, participants can become uncomfortable about retracting consent or withholding sensitive information as interviews progress which researchers need to monitor (Bahn & Weatherill, 2012). Therefore, we reflected about potential discomfort that could arise from participants setting limits on how much they disclose about SEIM, especially for adolescents where a power imbalance is inherently present.

Power imbalances are inherently present, due to participants being 14 to 15 years of age, and can present in subtle ways. For example, one participant reported their reason for

consenting was only for the $25 voucher. In this case special care was given to what was collected and the depth to which this was explored, given their motivation for money subtly changed the relationship between the researcher and participant. In contrast, most participants volunteered to help others by sharing how they made sense of SEIM, and thus wanted their perspectives heard. Power imbalances pertinent to working with youth were addressed using well-established therapeutic alliance strategies that the lead researcher has refined through working as a clinical psychologist. These included being collaborative, providing choices, being respectful, being genuinely interested in their perspectives and active listening, all of which empower adolescents and reduce discomfort (e.g., Fuzzell et al., 2016; Knight et al., 2018) and are expanded on below. Although these various strategies were used to maintain adolescents' authority, the lead author still held the position of power by being associated with seniority and the University. Consequently, monitoring the power imbalance throughout the entire research process was essential (Graham et al., 2013), and included intuitive reflections during interviews, journaling and reiterative reflections within the research team.

Mistrust of the research process has been well documented for vulnerable or hard to reach groups (e.g., Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). These have included mistrust of the academic process or concerns about studies being non-beneficial to their group (e.g., Pachankis, 2018) and more specifically for this topic, concerns about being stigmatised, misunderstood, or embarrassed when sharing sexual issues (Rose et al., 2021). To manage these concerns, we focused on building trust through being open and transparent about the study's explorative nature and providing reassurance and information about how their privacy would be maintained. The tensions between respecting adolescent and caregiver rights were complex. Obtaining caregiver consent risks undermining adolescent autonomy but equally parental consent for participants under 16 is normally required. To operate within the parameters of privacy and maximising adolescent autonomy, adolescents requested caregiver consent on

our behalf. This ensured the researcher had no contact with their caregivers, unless a safety concern was raised. In engaging with adolescents, we allowed an open amount of time to explain the purpose of the research, to answer questions, and to share the lead author's position of holding the ethos that all opinions about pornography use were acceptable.

**Researcher positionality**

Consideration of researcher positionality throughout the research process is essential in establishing authenticity and building genuine rapport during interviews (Hewitt, 2007; Holmes, 2020). How we position ourselves regarding sexuality, pornography, and adolescence is important as it shapes interactions with participants and their parents or caregivers. This reflexivity is also used to enhance the trustworthiness of the information collected (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Levitt, 2020; Levitt et al., 2017).

Although adolescents' immaturity has been proposed to heighten their risks (e.g., Behun & Owens, 2019), we shared the stance of others who consider adolescents as capable of determining what is good or bad according to their values (e.g., Byron et al., 2021). The lead author held a complex perspective on pornography through working with vulnerable youth, which was discussed within the research team. We considered how adolescents' vulnerability and resilience come together. It was decided that adolescents fitted a cohort who are hard to reach rather than a cohort that was vulnerable. Essentially, we agreed on a stance of respecting diverse opinions about pornography and sexuality, and accepting that adolescents have both authority and expertise about their own experiences. Indeed, participants who volunteered for our research were found to be well-adjusted and were engaged in community activities.

In addition, researchers' personal qualities (e.g., age, gender, and social status) have been raised as factors that influence the relationship between the researcher and participant

(Catania et al., 1996; Hewitt, 2007). A researcher's ability to build relationships with participants has been found to be important for enhancing self-disclosure, improving engagement, and addressing power imbalances that are inherent to the research process (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Freeman et al., 2021; Graham et al., 2013; Turner & Almack, 2017). The lead researcher, who carried out all engagements with participants, is a middle-aged woman, that brought the potential drawback of belonging to a different generation and gender. However, both matters were discussed during interviews. For example, participants described a generational divide, whereby pornography is seen as an everyday thing in their teenage culture, in contrast to their parents who did not have the Internet while growing up and were less likely to understand adolescent perspectives of pornography use as an everyday activity. The first author addressed this through acknowledging the differences and validating their perspectives. Being a middle-aged woman also had the advantage of minimising any possible contact with participants in the future.

We also reflected on the language used during interviews, given that unsupportive wording implying that something is abnormal or associated with disapproval leads to less disclosure of personal information (Catania et al., 1996; Tourangeau & Yan, 2007) and a greater sense of being judged. For example, a probe framed as "Did you feel guilty about that?" assumes guilt as a response and is easily reframed to, "How did you feel about that?" Avoiding such assumptions is important as they can appear both judgemental and indicate expected responses. Ethical deliberations continued throughout the duration of the project as it is important to act ethically in the field, and not just seek to comply with procedural ethics approvals and requirements (Moriña, 2021).

## Research design

In this section we discuss why we settled on individual interviews and how they were undertaken. All decisions were taken to optimise participants' ability to share personal details while maintaining their sense of security in line with our guiding ethical principles.

The positive association between sensitive questions and responding in a socially desirable manner has raised concerns about the trustworthiness of interview data (e.g., Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). However, Levitt and associates (2017) have argued that in-depth interviews allow intimate connection and empathic immersion with the topic, both of which improve the trustworthiness of findings. And while recruitment of participants is more difficult for face-to-face interviews, as shown when discussing our recruitment process, they have been found to lead to a greater disclosure of sensitive information (Haghdoost et al., 2013; Mashumba, 2023). Others have found administration modes have not influenced the quality of information (Dodou & De Winter, 2014; Durant & Carey, 2000; Rutherford et al., 2016), while friendly, motivating interviewers can provide therapeutic value through raising participants' self-awareness (Rossetto, 2014). Moreover, establishing a relationship is considered pivotal for working in a culturally responsive way with Māori (Carlson et al., 2022) and reaching minority groups (Abadie et al., 2018; Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2022; Freeman et al., 2021) who require trust to be established before openly engaging with researchers.

Additional support for using interviews comes from adolescents who have described appreciating the opportunity to speak openly about pornography and enjoying the interview process (Fuzzell et al., 2016; Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010). Hence, we decided that interviews had a significant advantage in collecting in-depth and nuanced information provided it was undertaken in a collaborative manner that is accepting of all opinions.

We did consider using focus groups but decided against that method for the following reasons. First, there is some dispute about the amount of detail that can be obtained about sensitive topics in focus groups rather than in individual interviews (e.g., Guest et al., 2017; Kruger et al., 2019). Second, focus group responses can be shaped through adolescents valuing peer acceptance (Peter & Valkenburg, 2011) and by dominant voices, leading to important opinions being missed (Cameron et al., 2005). Third, the topic matters; adolescent men can experience disapproval from peers about viewing sexually explicit material, and this can restrict open discussions about such material in focus group settings (Agbebiyi, 2013). Fourth, the depth of information can be limited when conducting focus groups with adolescent men (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2016; Wight, 1994). In addition, confidentiality in focus groups can be difficult to ensure with this age group. These challenges led us to use individual interviews as a better option for promoting open and safe discussions, consistent with Lobe and associates' (2008) recommendation.

Another design question was about how much engagement with youth is appropriate for this highly sensitive topic. First, this involved considering how many interviews should be completed with adolescents without being too imposing on their time and their day to day lives. We could not find any literature about how many interviews is appropriate for adolescents when discussing pornography. There is support for using multiple interviews to build trust (e.g., Freeman et al., 2021; Vincent, 2013), but there are also limits to what is appropriate contact. For highly personal topics, having the researcher as an outsider can be advantageous. Therefore, if participants believe they will have minimal future contact with the researcher, then revealing sensitive information is easier (Holmes, 2020). Hence, we balanced the need to build rapport with not being overly intrusive, given both the topic and participants age range, leading to the decision to have two interviews. We found this process highly useful for building rapport and adding depth to the data.

The second consideration was how involved participants should be in reviewing their transcripts. This is based on the idea that interviewee transcript reviews, often referred to as member checking, empowers participants, respects their role in interpreting their data, validates the content and elicits feedback (Birt et al., 2016; Hewitt, 2007; Rowlands, 2021), albeit with reservations about how this is applied (e.g., Motulsky, 2021; Thomas, 2017). Reviewing transcripts can range from returning verbatim transcripts through to edited transcripts to participants. In our research we decided to use an interpretative summary, as reviewing transcripts in detail risked overburdening the 14 to 15 year olds with time demands. Consequently, the lead author presented an interpretative summary before the second interview and participants were invited to provide feedback about the researcher's understanding of how they experienced, and made sense of, pornography and how they managed what they viewed. The aim of the second interview was to collaboratively reflect on the researcher's understanding, provide participants the opportunity to correct any misunderstandings or alter their comments and to expand on ideas. We found this interpretative summary acted as a springboard to show that the researcher was trustworthy and represented their ideas reasonably, without burdening them with a verbatim transcript review. We considered that this process also aided in equalising power relationships between the researcher and participants. Once these background decisions on methods were made it brought us to the all-important process of recruitment and establishing relationships with gatekeepers.

## Recruitment and gatekeeping

In this section, we discuss the advantages and disadvantages of recruitment approaches, how recruitment evolved over the project, and how we engaged with gatekeepers. Our original recruitment began with Facebook advertisements that targeted

youth in a New Zealand city. Facebook has been used to recruit members of groups that are hard to reach with success, and is deemed appropriate for younger age groups (Pedersen & Kurz, 2016). This approach was also selected to allow adolescents to self-determine whether to engage in the research, because respondents who are given more control and choice have been associated with greater self-disclosure regarding sexual problems (Catania et al., 1996). Facebook data revealed over 22,000 unique user views of our advertisement within the first month but no uptake of the opportunity to talk to the lead researcher directly. Interactions on Facebook, such as the 'like' response, can generate social networking to alert others to the study (Pedersen & Kurz, 2016). However, minimal likes (total of five) were given to the page indicating reluctance to publicly acknowledge interest in this study about pornography. Consequently, Facebook proved an unproductive recruitment option for face-to-face interviews about pornography for this age group, despite others' success with different projects.

However, we did obtain two participants who agreed to participate because their parents heard about the project through word of mouth. These parents contacted the researcher to clarify their concerns about the research. It was then decided with the adolescents that they could pilot the process and also provide feedback on the recruitment process and interview questions, with no obligation to participate directly in the research. We interpreted this process as reflecting their need to check the trustworthiness of the researcher, to assess the potential threat of being negatively judged, and to determine how the information was intended to be used. Feedback from these two adolescents indicated that Facebook would be an ineffective route as it was not considered a secure platform and its use was discouraged by their school. The avoidance of Facebook was also indicated by other participants during the interviews for the same reasons. The two participants strongly recommended engaging other adolescents through trusted adults, such as teachers and

parents, who could provide reassurance of the project's legitimacy. We also considered recruitment through snowballing, where participants would recruit peers through word of mouth, which has been used successfully for recruiting hard-to-reach young people (Couch et al., 2015) albeit with limitations around privacy (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). However, when this idea was suggested to our pilot participants, they were uncomfortable sharing with others because pornography felt "too private". This concern for privacy may also account for the limited likes on Facebook. Hence, snowballing was not used as a recruitment technique based on this initial participant feedback.

Instead, it became clear that we should work through relevant gatekeepers, people who could provide and control access to participants (Lamprianou, 2022). Hence, building relationships with gatekeepers was essential in conducting this research. Others have also recommended this approach because of the value gained through engaging relevant gatekeepers (Dempsey et al., 2016; Lamprianou, 2022; Sparrman, 2014; Turner & Almack, 2017). Gatekeepers can aid research by creating a bridge between the researcher and participants but can also be over-protective of participants and deny opportunities for them to exercise their choice to participate (Agbebiyi, 2013; Ahern, 2014; Carboni & Bhana, 2017). As recommended by Dempsey and colleagues (2016), discussions with key gatekeepers (in our case, with school Principals, school Guidance Counsellors, Chairs of Secondary Schools Principals Association, and Educational Psychologists) allow them the opportunity to verify the researchers' positionality and intent, and to raise any concerns. It was equally important to be considerate of the gatekeeper's role and positionalities in relation to research about pornography with their adolescents (Carboni & Bhana, 2017).

However, despite using these considered approaches, and the lead author's history of working with youth who experience mental health issues, the societal stigma around pornography and the perception that adolescents needed shielding from such matters meant

that many of the gatekeepers we engaged with erred on the side of caution, and most prevented access to either students or parents. The gatekeepers' concerns included potential misuse of information, potential negative impacts on their teenagers, how involvement in the project might be perceived by the public and parents, and what benefits would result for the school and teenagers. Unfortunately, these meetings almost all ended with agreement that the topic was important, but not in their school. These responses were not unexpected given the experiences of other researchers with gatekeepers when investigating topics related to sexuality in schools (Carboni & Bhana, 2017; Sparrman, 2014).

In contrast, contacting gatekeepers within individual schools, rather than providing information to a group of principals, was found to be more productive. Such contact led to one school allowing the researcher access to their students. Consent was obtained from the School Board of Trustees and the Principal, followed by consent from those adolescents who volunteered, which was then confirmed by parents. No direct contact was made with parents to reassure the adolescents of their privacy, and parents could ask questions about the project via email or phone before it started. The project was announced at the school assembly by the Head of Department (Dean) and information was provided during class from the school Guidance Counsellor. This gave participants a trusted source that provided legitimacy of the project. This was the most productive pathway and provided additional privacy as the first author could move around the school without other students knowing she was the researcher because she had not presented the project. Another recruitment avenue was found through the Peer Sexuality Support Programme, a programme that provides specialised training for students around sexuality, diversity, and peer support, delivered into 24 local high schools. This pathway proved less productive and resulted in only one adolescent volunteering for the research, possibly because the information was presented by the lead researcher who was

unknown to participants. Hence, a key ingredient was having the information presented by someone they know and trust.

We reflected on what role parent gatekeepers played in this research. Parents who agree to their teenager participating are likely to have a different outlook on sexuality matters and to have more liberal perspectives. For example, Moilanen (2016) found that parents who consented for adolescent participation in sexual research were motivated by perceived benefits and limited risks, whereas parents who did not consent were uncomfortable with the topic and considered discussion about sexual matters to be inappropriate for *'sexually naïve'* adolescents. In our study we did not engage directly with parents as we believe this would increase threat for participants around privacy and trust, which we weighted highly given the potential for these to be barriers to participation. This is consistent with interviewing guidelines and practice that recommend researchers prioritise building rapport and gaining the young persons' trust for sensitive topics (Dempsey et al., 2016; Freeman et al., 2021; Lobe, et al., 2008), which we next consider.

## Collecting the data: Engagement and the interview process

This section discusses the practicalities of engaging with the adolescents to build rapport and trust, and how interviews were conducted. We developed the following insights through reflecting on participant responses to talking about pornography, researcher observations, participant feedback, recommendations from other researchers and post-research analysis of how the process worked. Previously we considered ethical issues faced by self-disclosing highly personal information; here we focus on how we managed participants' discomfort and fears of being judged negatively, and the interview process.

Various strategies have been proposed for engaging youth (e.g., Cook & Monk, 2020; Knight et al., 2018) and to reduce socially desirable responding when researching sensitive

topics (e.g., Tourangeau & Yen, 2007). After making introductions, we sought to normalise concerns about negative judgements and discomfort rather than waiting for these to emerge during the interview. These open discussions about judgements helped to reinforce to participants that their perspectives were valued, and to validate their possible discomfort. This was beneficial in providing insights into how each participant wanted to approach the topic, such as changing the subject for a while or going straight into the central topic. Others have also reported this variability, with adolescents wanting to gradually ease into topics through to those wanting to get straight into the topic to alleviate their anxiety (Cook & Monk, 2020). Thus, participants were invited to let the interviewer know if they were becoming uncomfortable and at what pace they wanted to approach subjects.

Providing a definition of pornography to participants has been recommended (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Lobe et al., 2008) to provide a shared language between researcher and participant. We followed this recommendation and used Braun-Courville and Rojas' (2009) definition of pornography because it was constructed by adolescents for adolescents. This produced a definition of pornography as "pornographic Web sites that either: describe people having sex, show clear pictures of nudity or people having sex, or show a movie or audio that describes people having sex" (p. 157). This definition was provided verbally at the beginning of the interview to open the conversation about what pornography is and to avoid placing this burden on the young person. Given there is no agreed definition of pornography (McKee et al., 2020), we gave participants the opportunity to modify or add to the definition to make it as idiosyncratic as needed. This invited their engagement with the topic early in the interview and passed authority back to the participants. Two participants broadened the definition to include sexually explicit literature in eBooks and movie scenes.

It is also important to note here the differences between using the terms sexually explicit internet material (SEIM) and pornography. We elected to use SEIM over pornography in our research because, within New Zealand, the term pornography has a long history of being associated with pejorative assumptions whereas SEIM is considered to hold more neutral connotations (Department of Justice, 1989). The language used in the interview was deliberately chosen to raise the topic with participants in a matter-of-fact manner, without negative social-cultural assumptions. In addition, parental approval for the topic required sensitivity to these issues. However, during the interviews, participants used a variety of labels (porn, pornography, sexual material, that stuff) and did not use the term SEIM, nor did they find some terms more acceptable than others. This meant that our prediction of the term pornography being associated with negative judgements was largely driven by researcher expectations.

After initial introductions, clarifying what pornography covered and how we would manage any discomfort if appropriate, participants were then involved in decision making by asking them where they would like to start. For example, Phil naturally moved into talking about pornography after introductions.

R: Is there anything you want to ask me before we get started?

Phil: What are you looking for in the study, is it just perspectives?

R: Yes perspectives, the main purpose is to hear your story and there is no right or wrong. Everything exists on a continuum from one end to another for what people view, the amount they view, how they think about it and their thoughts or ideas about it (yeah), there's not a right or wrong thing. I don't know what happens in your world so I will just let you go so I can hear about it (Phil: yeah, that's cool), so what happens in your world around sexually explicit material?

Unexpectedly, when participants were asked if they would like to start by talking about what they noticed in their peer group, a normative technique used to reduce the threat of talking about oneself (Krumpal, 2013), they were reluctant to talk about peers. Although confidentiality was explained during the consent process it was important to reassure participants about confidentiality and explain that other peoples' names would not be used during interviews. Nonetheless, participants wanted to respect their friends' privacy, stating their "friends did not ask for their stuff to be shared".

During the interviews, the first author also relied heavily on her expertise as a clinical psychologist while being careful not to conflate qualitative research interviews with therapeutic interviews (see Rossetto, 2014). She used fundamental interpersonal factors that have been found to increase engagement, including being attentive, collaborative, curious, and validating, and good pattern recognition skills (Knight et al., 2018; Mozdzierz et al., 2014). What did this look like during the interview? Being attentive required being fully present to what the participant was expressing through both verbal and nonverbal communications and providing frequent summaries to verify or clarify understanding. Showing curiosity meant holding a genuine desire to know about, and learn from, participants. This openness was reflected in the phrasing of questions, such as "I'm curious about …" or "I'm just wondering …". Collaboration included inviting participants into decision making about which topic they would like to talk about, how much they wanted to talk about a topic, and to self-determine any other relevant areas of interest, akin to Lobe and associates (2008) guidelines for engaging youth.

Validation meant showing compassion and acknowledging when participants found things unclear or difficult. It also involved high empathy and acceptance of their perspectives about pornography without challenging their perspectives. The interviewer avoided adopting polarized positions that cast people as advocates who then need to affirm their enjoyment of

pornography, or as opponents who then need to reject pornography as immoral or damaging. Instead, the interviewer spoke about not having an opinion about pornography as being good or bad, to remain open and accepting of their opinions. This fitted with our ethical approach and avoided imposing adult viewpoints onto how adolescents made sense of their experiences, which is especially important given youth and adult perspectives can be incongruent (Doornwaard et al., 2017; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2023).

During the interviews, the interviewer relied on recognizing participant doubts and binds they found themselves in and reflecting these back to understand how participants made sense of resulting discrepancies. During interviews it was noted that most participants were ambiguous about pornography use and it was important to avoid resolving their conflicting views as this would shift the role from researcher to therapist (Mozdzierz et al., 2014). For example, Dan described his conflicting thoughts about viewing porn:

Dan: I shouldn't be watching it.

R: what are your thoughts about not watching it?

Dan: I do think I shouldn't be watching it but I kind of just do.

R: okay so you don't want to, but you keep going back how does that leave you feeling?

Dan: it feels bad after you watch it (pause)

R: because you are breaking your rule (yeah) of saying you don't want to (yeah) so what makes you go back?

Dan: attraction, just yeah.

R: have you done anything to try to not watch it?

Dan: I could probably try to not watch it, but it seems easier to just watch it than not, it’s just stupid.

R: hmm, what is stupid?

Dan: like, it’s kind of stupid that I don’t want to watch it so I should just not watch it, but I do. It should be easy, and I should just stop watching it and it probably is, I think it probably is, I 've heard of people that have just stopped watching it (yeah) and yeah, but I have never put my mind to it.

R: if you stopped watching it why do you think that would be helpful to you

Dan: umm it kind of just, (pause) I'm not sure (pause) I'm not too sure why it would be helpful (hmm), maybe that just in general it would help, I'm not too sure, I don't know.

R: that sounds difficult, you don’t seem to know why you would want to stop.

Dan: yeah, cause if I'm not sure why I should stop if it’s not going to improve anything. I don't know any of the benefits of stopping.

R: it sounds like you are left with a tension between questioning yourself and yet enjoying what you watched (yep).

From this example, the interviewer noted the opposing ideas, validated the associated uncertainty, and then explored why this existed and what it meant to the participant. This was aided by observing their body language and how they communicated their ideas, such as pauses, slowing of speech, changes in their tone of voice, and the like.

Using good pattern recognition skills also meant identifying complex and non-linear patterns within conversations (Mozdzierz et al., 2014). Therefore, knowing peers use porn was not seen as having a direct relationship to personally using porn, and instead the interviewer focused on patterns and interactions, asking questions such as what it means if their peers view porn, how this interacts with their own perspectives, what internal and external processes and interactions are attached to this meaning, and the like. For example, an explorative conversation with Nick went as follows.

R: Let’s go back to at the beginning, your viewpoint was it was confusing (yeah), and it was bad and your viewpoint on it now?

Nick: It’s still bad its umm (pause) it’s still not healthy for me but yeah, it’s hard to just not use it sorry I am not giving you the best answers.

R: You are doing good, what I can hear from you is you going backwards and forwards in your own head (yeah) and that is really common, and others are telling me similar things that sex and masturbation are normal and good but the porn just becomes part of it.

Nick: Yeah, I know that they are two different things, and I don’t try any of the actual porn stuff when I am actually doing anything sexual with a girl or anything because I know they are two different things (yeah), and it would be weird to do that stuff. It is the self-control idea that bothered me a lot because I felt like I should have been disciplined enough to control myself (pause) it was definitely a bit of uhm (pause) like mental back and forth then by telling myself, "What are you doing (mhm), this is ridiculous, this is stupid (Ok) and yeah I told myself I was stupid for watching it and just shouldn't have done that”, yeah.

R: And is that the two different people you talked about last time. You talked about one that wants to enjoy it and one (aww yeah, cuts in).

Nick: Yeah one that, when you watch porn and then afterwards it’s like you switch the personality for a couple of seconds, like from no consequences mentality to just guilt and sadness I guess but that has kind of changed now, it’s kind of less, it doesn’t turn from no consequences to that it turns to more like "what I'm doing tomorrow" mentality, which is usually playing [sport] so that kind of takes me off school and puts me into [my sport] I think (yeah) so more likely to concentrate on that instead.

Another recommended strategy is to use forgiving introductions for sexual topics to reduce discomfort and facilitate self-disclosure (Doornward et al., 2017; Krumpal, 2013; Peter & Valkenburg, 2011; Tourangeau & Smith, 1996). In our research using forgiving introductions meant participants were given a range of behaviours and an explanation that everything in between can exist. For example, "Teenager's report viewing sexually explicit internet material from not at all to daily viewing and everything in between. How would you describe your own viewing?" These statements normalised all responses without privileging any position over another and elicited informative responses.

We followed the practice of engaging in conversational style interviews rather than following an ordered plan of questioning, which opens assigning expertise on the topic to the young person (e.g., Couch et al., 2015; Lobe et al., 2008). However, promoting adolescents as experts comes with a word of caution. Adopting a naïve enquirer position by the researcher did not mean lacking familiarity about sexual matters. Young people have indicated they want sexual matters to be discussed by non-judgemental people who are familiar and comfortable with the topic (Fuzzell et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2021). Hence, being a naïve enquirer meant being familiar with sexuality issues but being naïve and unassuming about the adolescent world, about which the participants were the experts.

We sought feedback at the end of all interviews, enquiring about the interview process and any impacts from being interviewed. Participants indicated a clear preference for individual interviews and believed it was easier to share their thoughts privately. They stated that they would "hold back" on what they would share if another participant was present. This is consistent with researchers who recommend individual interviewing to put participants at ease (e.g., Dempsey et al., 2016; Kruger et al., 2019; Lobe et al., 2008). During this feedback, two participants spontaneously said they had taken the interviews more seriously as they usually "make stuff up for a laugh" during surveys, which has been noted by

others during data cleaning (e.g., Wright et al., 2023). Similar to other researchers' findings (e.g., Rothman et al., 2015; Rossetto, 2014), participants described to gaining clarity around their pornography use and better understanding their decisions. For example, Jack described the interviews as a way of understanding their decision-making processes:

> I think it is more about while I am explaining it that I am thinking about it and I have never thought about it, ... I never really realised I did that [management strategies] and after explaining it I realised I did do that and that has been really helpful in that respective.

To summarise, interviews included the following key components that were used in a flexible manner. Interviews started with introductions and were opened in a culturally appropriate way. Discomfort was normalised and reassurance provided as needed throughout the interview. A definition of pornography was shared, and input was requested regarding the scope of the definition. Participant choices were maximised throughout, such as asking where they would like to start, to proactively reduce power imbalances and increase engagement. The lead author followed participants' ideas, validated their perceptions, and explored how they made sense of pornography. Highly sensitive topics were introduced using a continuum to show all responses were acceptable. Each interview closed with checking that topic areas had been fully explored and seeking feedback about the interview process.

## Conclusion

Exploring adolescent perspectives about pornography is imperative if we are to understand these fully and include them into policies and practices. Given adult and adolescent perspectives about pornography use differ (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022, 2023; Wright et al., 2023), it is unreasonable to give adult perspectives priority and to exclude adolescents from research into pornography on the grounds that it is too challenging. This

risks adolescents being estranged from current debates and from policy and educational material that is intended to benefit them. In this article, we have discussed the methods and strategies we have used in working with adolescents in research about their pornography use. We seek to share our understandings of what worked well and what did not to enable other researchers in this field to consider and negotiate these complexities and challenges within their own contexts.

We developed our risk management protocol that received ethics approval after an in-depth discussion with the university ethics committee (see Appendix D). Discussions focused on how we negotiated ethical issues through principles of trust, usefulness, privacy, and inclusivity, whereby relational issues were prioritised over rigid research procedures. Interviewing adolescents about pornography is considered both intrusive and to pose a threat from self-disclosure (Krumpal, 2013; Tourangeau & Yan, 2007), and these issues are heightened if participants perceive a discrepancy between their perspective and the researcher's perspective. To aid this process special attention was given to researcher positionality throughout the research process (e.g., Holmes, 2020; Levitt et al., 2017) to uphold the adolescents' expertise. We held the position of valuing and respecting diverse opinions about sexuality and pornography and that adolescents held the expertise on these matters (e.g., Byron et al., 2021; Freeman et al., 2021).

As found by others (Carboni & Bhana, 2017; Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Pachankis, 2018; Rose et al., 2021), our participants raised various concerns about privacy, how their data would be used, their confidentiality, and their most common fear, of being judged negatively by the researcher. These concerns were addressed by adopting a transparent and genuine approach in recruitment and in engaging both participants and gatekeepers, who shared similar concerns to the adolescents. Once engaged, we found non-judgemental, conversational face-to-face interviews with adolescents were highly productive in eliciting

personal information about their experiences with pornography and how they made sense of, and managed, their pornography use. Interviews allowed greater capacity for uncovering sophisticated dilemmatic positions due to the interviewer's opportunities to ask about the same issue from different angles, at different time points, and to explore the reasoning behind responses (see Authors, 2022b).

Finally, in line with other research reports (e.g., Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010; Rossetto, 2014; Rothman et al., 2015), our adolescents found the research process to be cathartic, to increase their self-awareness and, most importantly, to serve as an opportunity to help others. Overall, our research has demonstrated that adolescents are willing to share their understanding of this highly personal topic, and we would encourage others to utilise the approaches we have presented in undertaking further research into adolescent perspectives on pornography.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

# STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION
# DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the student and the student's main supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the student's contribution as indicated below in the Statement of Originality.

| | |
|---|---|
| Student name: | Robyn Vertongen |
| Name and title of main supervisor: | Dr Clifford van Ommen |
| In which chapter is the manuscript/published work? | Chapter Six |

Describe the contribution that the student and members of the supervisory team have made to the manuscript/published work:[1]

The article was written Robyn Vertongen with Dr van Ommen and Prof Chamberlain contributing to discussions and refinements.

Please select one of the following three options:

- (●) **The manuscript/published work is published or in press**

  Please provide the full reference of the research output:
  Vertongen, R., van Ommen, C., & Chamberlain, K. (2022). Adolescent dilemmas about viewing pornography and their efforts to resolve them. Journal of Adolescent Research, Epub ahead of print. https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584221133307

- ( ) **The manuscript is currently under review for publication**

  Please provide the name of the journal:

- ( ) **It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student's signature: | Robyn Vertongen Digitally signed by Robyn Vertongen Date: 2023.08.16 09:48:28 +12'00' | Main supervisor's signature: | Clifford van Ommen Digitally signed by Clifford van Ommen Date: 2023.08.16 08:21:17 +12'00' |

*This form should be placed at the beginning of each relevant thesis chapter.*

[1] Refer to the Massey University Publishing and Authorship guidelines (OneMassey for staff, Stream for students) and/ or Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) guidelines for guidance.

# Chapter Six: Findings

This chapter presents an article that documents the current research findings about how 13 adolescents, aged 14 to 15 years, made sense of their experiences with SEIM use, entitled "Adolescent dilemmas about viewing pornography and their efforts to resolve them".

This is an original manuscript of an article published by Sage in *Journal of Adolescent Research* on 1 November 2022, available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584221133307

## Adolescent dilemmas about viewing pornography and their efforts to resolve them

### Abstract

Concerns have been raised about how viewing sexually explicit internet material (SEIM) shapes adolescents' understanding of sexual relationships and has potentially negative impacts. However, research frequently takes a narrow view of adolescent SEIM use and excludes their understandings. The present study explored how 13 participants, aged 14 to15 years, made sense of their experiences with SEIM. In-depth individual interviews were conducted, and five dominant dilemmas faced by participants were abstracted using interpretive analysis. We discuss how these dilemmas were negotiated by adolescents using various strategies. The analysis provides new understandings on how adolescents interpret their SEIM experiences and highlight the limitations of understanding SEIM use solely through risk models. On a practical level, these findings can inform youth, parents and

caregivers, and professionals as to how they might understand and help young people navigate the complex area of SEIM.

**Keywords** pornography, adolescence, sexually explicit material, dilemmas, control, management of risk

## Introduction

Viewing sexual material is not new to adolescents, who experience normal curiosity about sexuality as they go through puberty. However, the moral alarm and debate over the effects of sexually explicit internet material (SEIM), commonly referenced as pornography, on young people has been reignited with the introduction of the Internet and mobile devices. It has been proposed that the accessibility, affordability, and anonymity of SEIM, referred to as the Triple-A engine, accelerates SEIM viewing and intensifies its impacts (Cooper & Griffin-Shelley, 2002). However, debate is ongoing over the harmful effects of SEIM exposure (e.g., Peter & Valkenburg, 2016) and, for some, whether concerns based on inconsistent findings are overstated (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018; Kohut et al., 2020). Concerns have included adolescents experiencing emotional difficulties and developing sexually permissive attitudes and risky behaviors, such as sexual coercion or victimization, unprotected sex, early sexual activity, compulsive pornography use, promiscuity and increased interest in sex (Baams et al., 2015; Doornwaard et al., 2016; Hald et al., 2013; Ma, 2019; Owens, et al., 2012; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Peter & Valkenburg, 2008a; Rostad et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2018; Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011; Tsitsika et al., 2009). Despite regular public debates about SEIM, Behun and Owens highlight “the dearth of literature that examines the impact of pornography and SEIM on minors” (2019, p. 5).

Research documents that adolescents, predominantly males, watch pornography (e.g., Alexandraki et al., 2018), but how they make sense of these experiences usually remains unclear or is conceptualized as risky. Anxiety around risk is enhanced through conflating unlawful or abusive pornography with legal pornography (e.g., see Dworkin, 1989). Exploration of negative impacts have been heavily weighted toward surveys using predetermined questions aimed at verifying risks (Döring, 2009; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). While looking for risk is important to help reduce harm, this research has been criticized for its narrow focus (Arrington-Sanders, et al., 2015; McVey et al., 2021), and for missing nuances from adolescent perspectives (Attwood et al., 2018; Hare et al., 2015; Rothman et al., 2015). This has led authors to call for broader approaches that prioritize young peoples' perspectives and move away from sexuality being conceptualized as problematic without also considering its positive aspects (Attwood & Smith, 2011; Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010; Tolman & McClelland, 2011).

SEIM is thought to be harmful because adolescents believe it is a realistic depiction of sexual behavior (Baams et al., 2015; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006) and thus want to enact the negative sexual scripts shown (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Doornwaard et al., 2015; Owens et al., 2012; Vandenbosch & van Oosten, 2018; Vandenbosch et al., 2018). Additionally, arousal models propose that SEIM will be rewarding and consequently will be repeatedly viewed. It has been proposed that sexualized media becomes integrated into adolescents' lives and becomes their reality, which then raises questions about their ability to show insight into how SEIM can permeate their lives and to critically reflect on its content (Cameron et al., 2005; Kammeyer, 2008). Indeed, studies have shown SEIM has become integrated into adolescents' daily lives and accepted amongst peers; however, the same participants have also been critical of the negative sexual scripts portrayed in SEIM (Doornwaard et al., 2017; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). Consequently, there is

considerable ambiguity about how adolescents understand SEIM and whether it is passively accepted as offering realistic depictions of sexual relationships.

Furthermore, how adolescent perspectives are assessed needs careful consideration. Adolescent opinions can either be considered legitimate representations of reality that incorporates both negotiation of risks and positive aspects of sexuality (Tolman & McClelland, 2011) or they can be distrusted due to adolescent immaturity and inexperience. Underpinning the latter consideration are ideas of harm based on notions of adolescents as impressionable and naïve, differentiating them from adults and raising concerns for their wellbeing (Behun & Owen, 2019; Cameron et al., 2005; Giordano et al., 2022; Peter & Valkenburg, 2008a, 2008b). Understandings of their immaturities in cognitive abilities and their dependency on adults motivates a need to regulate adolescent behavior. However, important cognitive, emotional, and social growth also occurs during puberty, which are linked to adolescents developing critical reflective skills, the ability to consider complexities during decision-making, and increased self-control (e.g., Bonnie & Scott, 2013; Holt et al., 2021). This is supported by findings that adolescents actively determine what SEIM they view and can critically reflect on SEIM content through age-appropriate lenses (e.g., Arrington-Sanders, et al., 2015; Vandenbosch & van Oosten, 2018).

The perception of adolescents as vulnerable has often resulted in researchers eschewing direct discussions with adolescents about SEIM, resulting in research offering one-sided, essentially adult, perspectives (Hare et al., 2015; Henry & Talbot, 2019). Yet, the few studies that have used interviews or focus groups have found that adolescents are willing and able to share their thoughts about SEIM, with some participants questioning why researchers are not looking into this (Braun-Courville & Roja, 2009; Office of Film & Literature Classification, 2018). Furthermore, youth who have completed qualitative interviews about SEIM have described enjoying the process and being able to speak openly

about the topic (Fuzzell et al., 2016; Lofgren-Martenson & Mansson, 2010), thus justifying their inclusion in the debates around SEIM.

When adolescents are included in the dialog, they tend to view SEIM from angles distinct from adult notions of risk. Preliminary research indicates that young people perceive and engage with SEIM in varied ways that include both positive and negative aspects (Doornwaard et al., 2017). This resembles Tolman and McClelland's (2011) proposal of conceptualizing sexuality from a normative development framework, whereby sexual behaviors are an expected part of adolescent development. Normative does not refer to conforming to normative standards within one's culture but rather sexuality is considered a development task as part of being human. Tolman and McClelland's (2011) extracted three key developmental domains from their review. These included, sexual behaviors and what counts as sexual behavior, sexual selfhood, and sexual socialization, with each domain overlapping and working in tandem. Sexual socialization highlights the context that shapes adolescent sexuality, such as peer networks, religion, media, and the role of culture, which SEIM is embedded. Tolman and McClelland (2011, p. 251) propose incorporating "both positive aspects and risk management and how they develop in tandem or dialectically at the individual, relational, and cultural levels into the overarching concept of sexuality development in adolescence." This developmental framework was utilized in the present study, allowing open exploration of adolescent perceptions of SEIM through a broader approach.

## The Present Study

This study explored how New Zealand adolescents made sense of their experiences of SEIM. We drew on Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis through a critical realist framework. Critical Realism, as used here, draws on the work of Bhaskar and Lawson (1998) and Danermark and associates (2019). The design allowed space for exploring

participants' verbal understandings of SEIM and the underlying individual and social-cultural influences that participants may not be aware of, but which nevertheless can shape their explanations of their experiences. We recruited adolescents from 14-to-16 years of age due to the likelihood that they had reached puberty and held an interest in sexuality. Puberty has a long-established relationship with increased sexual interest (e.g., Rutter, 1971), irrespective of SEIM exposure, and is consistent with the finding that SEIM use significantly increases in middle to late adolescence (Doornwaard et al., 2015). In addition, in New Zealand most 14- to 15-year-old students have completed sexuality education within schools that would provide them with a language to discuss their experiences. The New Zealand health education curriculum promotes positive sexuality and includes a wide range of content including a focus on potential harms from exposure to pornography (NZHEA, 2020).

**Procedure**

Ethical approval for the project was obtained from the University Human Ethics committee. Initial recruitment was attempted through Facebook and Instagram but was largely unsuccessful, leading to only two participants. Recruitment then targeted schools and adolescents were recruited through a school-based sexual education program. The lead researcher or school guidance counselor provided participants with information through a group presentation. Consent was obtained from both participants and their parents, and where necessary, through the school Board of Trustees and principal. Further recruitment was not required as the themes became repetitive after the initial analysis, consistent with Malterud et al.' (2016) idea of information power whereby fewer participants are required when richer information is obtained. To maximize participation, we encouraged all genders and sexual orientations to participate, with no exclusion criteria applied other than age. However, no females volunteered to participate.

The lead author conducted interviews in a private room, either at the school or the university, according to participants' preference. Interviews were carefully planned based on recommended guidelines for interviewing young people (Lobe et al., 2008). The lead researcher held the position during interviews that there were many diverse opinions and that anything they said was unlikely to surprise. The ethos of no right or wrong opinions was held throughout the interviews. Interviews were audio recorded, an interview guide was employed, and a conversational interview style adopted. Interviews were open and flexible with participants' ideas shared with subsequent participants to clarify commonalities and differences in perspectives. These procedures allowed for a detailed exploration of experiences and elicited a rich dialog from participants. Given the long history of pornography being associated with indecency and the need to be non-judgmental when talking with adolescents, we elected to refer to this material as 'sexually explicit internet material' (SEIM), as others have done when exploring SEIM use among adolescents (e.g., Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). The lead author provided a definition of SEIM at the beginning of the interview to open the topic as an acceptable area to discuss without placing this burden on the young person. This definition was taken from Braun-Courville and Rojas (2009), who conducted a focus group with adolescents to identify the terminology that reflected their peer group's understanding and language. SEIM was defined as "X-rated or pornographic Web sites that either: describe people having sex, show clear pictures of nudity or people having sex, or show a movie or audio that describes people having sex" (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009, p. 157). Participants were also invited to modify or add to the idea about how SEIM was defined.

We interviewed all participants twice 1 to 2 weeks apart, with total interview times ranging from 82 to 120 minutes. The lead author summarized the key ideas from the first interview and presented a synopsis to the participant prior to starting the second interview.

Participants were asked if their key ideas had been adequately captured and if any information needed altering or extending. After each interview, we provided each participant with a $25 voucher to compensate for their time and travel.

## Participants

Thirteen adolescents were interviewed between January and August 2018. Twelve participants were 15 years old, and one was 14 years old. Twelve participants self-identified as male, and one identified as queer. Nine identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual and four participants identified as bisexual, gay, or undecided. All participants were enrolled in State-owned schools, with ten from a same-sex school and three from co-ed schools. All participants were from middle income families, actively engaged in school activities from sports to theater, and reported doing average to above average academically. Participants described having good peer relationships and communication with parents, although not necessarily around sexual issues. Their interest in participating included having their opinions heard, having adults understand their perspective, being curious, helping others and, for one participant, because their friend was participating. One participant identified as Christian, and the others identified no religion. Participants identified as New Zealand European, Māori, East Asian and South Asian. Several identified as being multi-cultural. No participants reported having had sexual intercourse, but some had initial physical experiences, such as kissing.

## Data Analysis

Audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim after each interview and identifiable personal data was removed. Points of interest, overall impressions, field notes, observations, and reflections were recorded in a journal while collecting and analyzing data. Drawing on the critical realist framework, we drew inferences about participants' interpretations of their

experiences, looking for both what was experienced and potential underlying processes that could be identified by their avoidance of topics, body language, observed tensions, and the like.

To ensure methodological integrity and the trustworthiness of interpretations (see Levitt et al., 2017), we reviewed all interview content to confirm that key topics had been covered, interview protocols around matters such as not assuming meanings were followed, and an in-depth picture of how adolescents made sense of SEIM had been obtained. The lead author used her experience of working as a clinical psychologist with adolescents to inform her approach. For example, this meant being familiar with adolescent sexuality issues and their language while also being able to naively inquire about their experiences from an outsider perspective. The lead author's position regarding pornography and adolescents was complex given her prior work with trauma and (self-reported) pornography addiction. The lead author reflected on, and discussed with the co-authors, her positionality in relation to pornography, to the participants, and within the research process, to ensure that themes were not value laden with the lead author's perspectives (see Holmes, 2020). Hence, as a team we reflexively considered positionalities and the process of thematic abstraction.

We abstracted themes using Braun and Clarke's (2013, 2021) principles of flexible and open coding. We used thematic maps to highlight interactions and relations between themes and to aid meaningful inferences. We considered how themes related to adolescent development, decision making, and context, looking for both latent and explicit meanings. We identified dominant themes within the data based on repetition within, and across, transcripts, and relations between thematic concepts The lead author organized themes, and regularly discussed these with the co-authors to reflect on the trustworthiness of themes, as recommended by Levitt and associates (2017) and Braun and Clarke (2021). This iterative process led to identifying that all participants experienced dilemmas about viewing SEIM and

used various approaches to manage their dilemmas. This led us to identify five dominant dilemmas encompassing the competing tensions that these adolescents experienced about viewing SEIM. Our findings are presented in two sections below: (1) the dilemmas faced by adolescents and (2) how they managed these dilemmas.

## Findings

All participants had watched SEIM and were able to describe how their experiences changed over time and how they made sense of the material viewed as they matured. Overall, the participants described a diverse range and patterns of viewing that fluctuated across time. Some described higher levels of viewing prior to learning about the pornography industry from various sources that explicitly outlined risks, which led to their reduced viewing. Others described levels of viewing that were reduced due to their decision to take control of the amount they viewed prior to learning about risks from adults. Yet others described a gradual increase in viewing or infrequent viewing that remained constant, while a couple described experiencing SEIM as disturbing and off-putting at the outset and subsequently having stopped viewing after initial experimentation. Frequency of viewing ranged from daily to no further viewing. All participants, except one, reported attending school-based presentations to learn about the effects of pornography and/or engaged in discussions about its role in society. Hence, participants were well placed to be able to share their perspectives on SEIM.

### Dilemmas Faced by Adolescents

SEIM presented all participants with many dilemmas and complex decisions. Dilemmas were created through participants being presented with different messages from different sources. For example, the adult pornography industry conveys the message that sex is carefree and viewing as only entertainment or harmless fun meant for pleasure and fantasy.

In contrast, participants had been informed that the pornography industry exploited performers and conveyed negative messages about sex, given its potential themes of male dominance and aggression. These conflicting ideas were grouped into five key dilemmas about viewing SEIM, discussed in turn below.

***I should be interested in sex but not pornography***

First, participants described how their sexual interest was a natural part of puberty and growing up and that they should be interested in sex. Adults confirmed these messages through puberty and sexuality talks or discussions about when the adolescent might have a relationship in the future. Their peers were interested in sex and participants stated a desire to learn about sex as a natural developmental progression of maturing. For example, Ivan explained how his levels of interest would naturally change as he matured:

> Yeah, relevance is important there are kind of stages it's hard to explain but, 'is that relevant to what I am learning or what I want to learn at this age?' and then it will slowly change as I grow older.

SEIM then provided sexual material that allowed them to learn about sex and to satisfy their innate curiosity about sex. However, participants wondered if they should view SEIM given adult messages that pornography is not natural and as such should not be viewed or used as a guidance for learning about sex. Consequently, participants were left in the bind that they should be interested in sex but not SEIM. For example, when Bruce was asked how he made sense of his experiences of viewing SEIM, this conversation followed:

> R: Okay so when you come across it do you switch out or continue to view it
>
> Bruce: It depends like once a month I will use it and then I stop … I think it is just kind of we realize it is kind of normal (mhm) so that takes off the guilt

R: And what helped you reach the conclusion that it is normal?

Bruce: Well, cause a lot of people do it (right) a lot of people do it and as teenagers we have a lot of hormones, yeah its natural in a way, you kind of don't feel as guilty, you still feel a bit guilty but not as much.

R: So, lots of people use it, is this the biggest reason for viewing?

Bruce: I think the biggest one is because it is natural, and I think sex is like a lot of people do it so you're not alone, so you don't feel as ashamed as much because there are so many people

R: … then you say on the other side there is some guilt can you expand on that one as well?

Bruce: Just because you know if your mother found out about it you would feel embarrassed so you kind of feel guilty kind of and you don't talk with your parents about that so it's kind of you know … I think most adults would say you shouldn't view. I just think I don't want to do it, I just think I should be wholesome and stuff

In this example, Bruce struggles between his desire to know about sex that he perceives as a biological drive but possibly not through SEIM. He believes his interest in it is expected given sex is natural and SEIM viewing is normalized. However, the use of SEIM to explore sexuality was not carefree and increased his feelings of guilt compared with masturbation without SEIM. Bruce, like others, also considered increased sexual interest to be encouraged by others, such as parents and doctors, but that adults would disapprove of SEIM. This perceived disapproval appears to be superimposed on his own beliefs that SEIM is not the best way to satisfy his sexual interest. Typical of most participants, engagement with sexual

material was thought to be innate and justifiable as part of maturing but was complicated by the idea that using SEIM contradicts a moral representation of oneself as decent.

***Is it fake or real?***

The second dilemma emerged from tensions between understanding sex as being something real but the production of SEIM making it "fake." SEIM provided participants with access to material that showed sex and looked enjoyable but created uncertainty about how real it was, given it was a performance. This created uncertainty about what they should or should not follow as scripts. All participants described how SEIM did not represent healthy sexual relationships given its themes of dominance and a carefree approach to sex. Participants questioned how SEIM could represent real sex given it was a "performance" or "show" but thought it was still "as close as it gets" to sex. Although the sexual acts looked real, participants would refer to SEIM sex as fake and exaggerated whereas real sex was something special, emotional, and meaningful. They described not wanting to follow fake SEIM scripts as they did not want their own sexual experiences to lack intimacy and emotional connection. However, sometimes the line between real and fake was difficult to differentiate. For example, while discussing how Zac made sense of SEIM, Zac described it as being both fake and real: The following dialog explored the idea of SEIM as fake and then raised the question about it being real based on an earlier dialog when Zac said SEIM held real aspects.

> Zac: Cause it's obviously fake and things like that, umm so, like I always hear adults talk about it like it's not what actually happens and that it's just the way people act (mhm) it's really fake and it's not genuine in anyway
>
> R: Okay so on one hand you can see it is fake and on the other hand

> Zac: Umm well I guess it is real in a way ‘cause it is sort of what people do, ahh, I think the way people act is the fake part but I know it is real otherwise… Yeah, it is kind of a bit confusing but umm sort of the way people act and then how it’s no consent thing then that’s fake but then what to do is kind of real.

Zac described watching the “soft end” of the spectrum and found it difficult to draw the line between real and fake sexual material. Although, in principle he understood the production of SEIM rendered it fake from the outset.

Participants also pondered whether their presumed reality and the fantasy portrayed within SEIM could overlap. For example, Sam explained:

> I know they are actors, I know it is not real, that’s why I see it all as fantasy so I don’t see any porn as reality because you don’t have that sense of communication, like you know, are you okay with this, do you want to do this, like what type of boundaries, there is not like that talk you have in a relationship, in porn they just get straight into it and there is no communication, yeah.

Sam could clearly reflect on how SEIM did not represent relationships but then questioned if fantasy can also be part of reality:

> Ahh sometimes they say oh that’s interesting but I would never do that so I think it can be in their mind, but they aren't going to necessarily try it. If it can be tried in reality, then maybe it’s that kind of reality but also fantasy sort of thing because sometimes in fantasy there is also reality and if there is that then they might try it but if it is completely fantasy then they won’t.

The blurring of fantasy and reality was not surprising given participants actively restricted content to material they considered more closely represented how they would like

their own sex to look like. Like other participants, Sam did not think viewing would automatically equate to re-enacting scripts, which may explain the challenges to establishing evidence that supports theories based on socialization principles. For example, sexual scripting and social learning theories postulate that adolescents adopt stereotypical attitudes and expected behaviors represented in SEIM (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Doornwaard et al., 2015; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016) but the current participants presented a more complex dilemmatic understanding.

***Everyone views SEIM but is it my new normal?***

The third dilemma was constructed through the perceived idea that it was normal to view SEIM but questioned if they should make it their normal. Participants understood normal as meaning that everyone viewed SEIM as noted through various observations of their peers and media content. Many participants mentioned their peer groups would make sexual references during social interactions or online posts, drawing their attention toward sex. Participants described enticements through "pop up ads" and online links. They perceived no online barriers to accessing SEIM and used this easy access and the opinion that most people view SEIM to validate their perception of its normality. Participants reflected that SEIM was everywhere and could be easier to view than not view. For example, Adam talked about SEIM being normal due to its accessibility but not normal due to its content:

> Umm I'm not sure about pornography being normal, but it's hard for people to stop watching porn, it's so easy to get…it kind of feels like, it's weird like how people like watching people get hurt umm during sex (mhm), yeah, I don't feel like it is right, yeah, I don't find it normal.

While participants believed that most adults thought teenagers should not view SEIM at all, some reflected on how statistics provided evidence for their conclusion that it was normal to watch. For example, when asked about viewing, Clint said:

> Aww no I don't feel like too uncomfortable about watching it `cause statistics do say 90% of people or 90 something percent of people have seen it, and just a little bit less watch it weekly or monthly so like most people are good people and then most people have watched it as well so put two and two together.

Inflated perceptions of how much others use SEIM is taken from Clint's idea that most people watch it regularly. Clint equated any use to mean frequent use. This corresponds with how educational websites report the highest prevalence rates found in research, such as It's Time We Talked (Crabbe, 2022) which states more than 60% of girls and 90% of boys have been exposed to pornography. Although these websites may be emphasizing how widespread viewing is, this data was reinterpreted by some participants as everyone views SEIM regularly. This raises the question about how media education intercepts or influences adolescent perceptions of how common it is to view SEIM. Research has found adolescents overestimate levels of pornography use within their peer groups, especially for boys (Flood & Hamilton, 2003; Henry & Talbot, 2019). Therefore, participants appeared to shape their behaviors based on what they thought was normal amongst their peers and media messages were used to reinforce ideas of normality, such as statistics that are commonly used to emphasize how widely viewed SEIM is.

Nevertheless, despite the widespread perception that SEIM was commonly viewed by teenagers, participants wrestled with the idea about continuing to view SEIM and what this meant for them individually. They wondered if too much viewing of SEIM could turn something pleasurable "into a job" without satisfaction or turn sex into something that was

"meaningless." Hence, the perception of SEIM being commonly used was complicated by their own judgments and uncertainty about what viewing meant for them personally and if it would become lackluster.

***Harmful or harmless?***

The fourth dilemma was that viewing SEIM was potentially harmful, but participants were unsure how it affected them personally. They interpreted ideas of harm into two categories, risks to self and harm to others. They understood the concerns provided by trusted adults, such as parents and teachers, that SEIM was harmful. Harm from exposure to SEIM meant it could spoil future intimate relationships, change their expectations of sex, lead to them objectifying people as sexual "objects," make them "dirty minded" or tainted, turn sex "into a chore," increase their anxiety, and become a "habit." While participants could describe potential harms, when delving into what harm meant for themselves as opposed to what they had learnt about it, they did not believe they had experienced harm themselves. Although some participants questioned whether they would really know if they had experienced harm as they had no true way of knowing if it had changed them. For example, when Clint was asked about negative effects, this conversation followed:

> Clint: I think it can be bad just `cause it messes with your dopamine reward system and that sometimes it is just used as an escape if you are feeling down and you just do that and it can make you so you can't control it sometimes but I haven't experienced the negative effects I have just heard about them so yeah… I might be just saying it doesn't affect me `cause I might be using it too much and I don't even know, I still try to watch it less and not all the time just because of the possibilities of what it could make you know.

R: It sounds like you are trying to rein it in because you could experience negative effects, but you haven't had any of these, but you know what they are.

Clint: Yeah, and if I noticed I had them then yeah, I haven't really noticed them, but I could have had them without noticing it, yeah, I am just saying like maybe I could have had them (negative effects) so I would be like maybe addicted but I don't know I'm addicted. It's hard since there is no second opinion on it, it's not really talked about so it's hard to know if it has changed me or anything (mhm) `cause you don't know, Yeah, I don't know, I don't have the second opinion telling me if I've changed or anything so it's sort of hard to notice it myself, yeah.

Clint understood the possibility of negative impacts through educational talks but did not believe he experienced these impacts, although uncertainty remained about this as he questioned if he had enough insight to know what was true. Like others, he used his knowledge of negative impacts as motivation to avoid perceived risks through limiting the content and exposure as discussed below. The lack of experienced harm contradicted what most participants had learnt about possible harm from viewing SEIM, which meant the reasons for not viewing were not observed by participants. This lack of observable harm created ambiguity about viewing SEIM. In addition, within some peer groups SEIM was positioned as harmless fun. Peers partly legitimized the idea of harmless fun through referencing porn within, albeit, brief conversations, wrapping it in humor and positioning SEIM, at least at a superficial level, as nothing too serious.

In contrast, all participants expressed concern for others. They wondered if more naïve consumers, especially children, may think the nasty side of SEIM was a true representation of sex and might want to try it out. For example, Sam talked about concerns of

sexual violence being normalized, which had been discussed in their classroom debate. Sam said:

> People need to know the difference between sexual violence and rape and that is not really shown in porn it is just seen as another option or category in porn, it puts ideas into people's head that that's normal and it's not… and the other side of argument was that people would know that it is part of a fantasy and not real and it went back and forth. People knew it was not real but there was a lot of concern that younger people don't know it's not real and will think that it is normal.

Similarly, a distinction was drawn between their current and younger self, whereby the latter was regarded as more naïve or vulnerable compared to their current self that knew it was false and unrealistic. This distinction of a younger self was related to the ideas of possible harm to others who were younger, especially children. Participants also identified potential harm toward the performers, highlighting the dark side of the industry which exploited people or led to suicides. This was in direct contrast to the perspective of the pornography industry, which tries to construct a different reality of sex being merely harmless entertainment. Thus, participants were left contemplating if SEIM was harmless or harmful given its potential negative impacts.

***Good or bad?***

The fifth dilemma emerges from the positioning of SEIM, in varying ways, as good or bad. SEIM was often described, contradictorily as being good in terms of sexual pleasure, aiding the release of sexual tensions and satisfying curiosity, but also as "wrong," "bad," going against trusted adult judgments, and "tainting" oneself. The idea of SEIM being bad was linked to it being forbidden and promoting messages about casual, easy, or rough sex. Participants described hiding SEIM from adults because it was considered forbidden.

Furthermore, SEIM content was described as comprising both wanted and unwanted sexual material that could be both good and bad, creating conflicted viewing.

All participants grounded what was good in their values, whereby their sense of what was bad arose from breaking their rules or going against their values. For example, Bruce described the tension between being a "wholesome" person and viewing SEIM:

> I just try to see myself like as a wholesome kind of person and I wouldn't need to watch porn to satisfy my needs in a way … (but) you just sometimes give in, sometimes you just do… Yeah porn portrays like a different kind of view, it often portrays one person as being dominant and the other not experiencing as much and if you want to be a good person you should respect other people as well so it's two conflicting ideas you know what I mean.

Bruce then went onto describe how he was a good person and sometimes he viewed SEIM, but this did not make him a bad person, so viewing SEIM and being bad did not necessarily go together.

The idea of SEIM being "bad" or "not good" conflicted with how participants viewed themselves, leading to emotional and cognitive incongruence when trying to understand SEIM in relation to their own sexual interests. For example, Dan said:

> It doesn't feel right but it feels good to watch it at the time but afterwards you question yourself why you're watching and stuff, like when you go to watch it, you kind of not really thinking about what other people are thinking you're just focused on what you're doing, it seems okay but after you have watched it you kind of feel guilty about what you've watched but you think if someone was watching you do it and you think what they would think and that makes you feel bad.

Dan then went onto talking about not wanting his parents to know as he worried about changing their perception of him being good:

> … just `cause you want them thinking differently of you or you want to keep the same image they have of you, like you don't want them to think less of you if you watch that stuff.

This impression of not wanting adults to think of them differently or to judge them was shared by all participants, irrespective of the amount they viewed. It was also connected to believing adults viewed all SEIM as "bad" which overshadowed their own ideas of SEIM being both good and bad. How they constructed the idea of good or bad waxed and waned depending on their experiences and acquired knowledge from websites, peers, teachers, parents, and the like. Most participants described greater skepticism as they matured.

All five dilemmas gave rise to emotional tensions, which were especially apparent when participants discussed ideas of harm and conflicted feelings that ranged from excitement and pleasure to disgust, sadness, and guilt. Guilt often followed from breaking their rules about what they thought they should view or from going against adult advice. Going against adult advice left participants with concerns about disappointing trusted adults who promoted ideas of risk or harm from SEIM. And while adults encouraged autonomous decision making, participants believed they were expected to make the right decision that aligned with adult ideas that SEIM was harmful and should not be viewed. Ideas of exploiting performers clearly fueled their cognitive and emotional conflict but there was also the possibility that "porn star" could be a credible line of work. Participants who had viewed abusive porn also felt confused about why something pleasurable like sex would be paired with hurting people. They questioned why the industry would make this material that felt intimidating and cruel. Therefore, the right to pleasure was not free from cognitive and

emotional predicaments of SEIM being associated with unwanted aggressive images, possible negative effects, and emotional uncertainty. It was also interesting to note that negative emotional reactions, such as guilt or disgust, were often interpreted as positives as they helped participants make decisions about the sort of content they viewed.

## Negotiating the Dilemmas

Participants accepted they were in the position of needing to choose whether to view SEIM or not. This choice was intercepted by societal expectations that they should not view SEIM and by industry proclamations that such viewing was merely harmless entertainment. Participants considered themselves to be in control of their choices while simultaneously needing to make the right choices. Hence, they favored self-governing perspectives when discussing SEIM viewing, which left them negotiating what were acceptable opinions and practices regarding SEIM and sexuality. When making decisions, participants described three key strategies they used to clarify their dilemmas about viewing SEIM: they restricted their viewing to what was deemed "acceptable content"; they controlled their frequency of viewing; and they used their reactions to tell them whether they had crossed their ethical line of what they perceived as acceptable. Each of these is discussed in turn below.

### *Restricting the content*

Restricting the content relied on judging what constituted acceptable content, followed by strategies to restrict content. The type of SEIM content viewed was considered important to all participants. The participants identified SEIM content as being either "soft porn" or "hard porn." The judgment between hard and soft was important in determining where to draw the line of acceptability. Hard porn was judged as "weird", "aggressive", or "abusive" and unacceptable. Participants described aggressive SEIM as "intimidating" and not something they wanted to view or re-enact. Abusive material was considered potentially

harmful to others and themselves and was shunned by all participants. For example, Nick described his reactions to abusive material and how he avoided coming across it:

> Yeah, I feel sad and turned off, not just disgusted… there's not really much stuff that I would accidentally see because there is like previews, titles and then the general key words you type in so if I type in certain keywords then you can get the bad stuff.

The dichotomy between hard and soft was used to help identify "bad" SEIM and this was connected to a lack of pleasure, as Beau stated, "Yeah you feel bad about it, and you can't really enjoy it when you are feeling bad about it." Interestingly, no participants reported experiencing harm from aggressive SEIM as they framed their reactions of being "turned off" and feeling bad as helpful in restricting content, and thus achieving positive outcomes.

In contrast, soft porn was typically described as material that was judged as "normal sex." Participants described looking for content that was more closely aligned to relational type sex whereby both performers were seen to be "enjoying themselves" with reciprocal participation. Soft porn was often called "normal porn," with these two terms being used interchangeably. Normal porn was considered more agreeable given it portrayed qualities of mutuality and was seen to be closer to how participants envisaged actual sexual relationships. For example, Phil described how if he went straight to soft porn then he could avoid unwanted sexual material:

> Yeah, like there are heaps of different ones (right), you can go like soft core or something and it's like not as, like it's right on the bottom bit. If I watch anything, then it's going to be that so I just go I might as well go onto that, so I don't accidentally go onto anything else.

Like other participants, Phil then went onto describe how he wanted to separate SEIM from "a thing" he had with someone and how thinking about this helped put the brakes on viewing SEIM:

> I have a real close friend and we have a thing going on and that's helping me stop because then I feel bad cause, its' hard to explain (mhm), I wouldn't want anything like that, because I don't want to be like, I want it like this, like what I've seen, I want it more like agreeable, it's hard to explain, more emotion I guess…

If participants could differentiate soft porn from hard porn and only view the former, then this brought their viewing behavior closer to what was socially expected. They also described less guilt if the content aligned more closely to relational style SEIM as they thought this meant they were less likely to be going against adult wishes. A similar method for restricting the content was trying to draw a line between fake and real. Participants attempted to uncover what made SEIM different to real world relationships by relabelling performances as "exaggerated," "bad comedy," "meaningless," "fake" and "theatrical." They argued that if they could see why SEIM was fake then they would not re-enact the fake scripts. They used this distinction to select SEIM that more closely represented real sex and avoided the exaggerated performances.

Finally, participants described restricting the content by being able to determine the type of content before entering online websites, which meant they could avoid unpleasant material. They could tell what they would see before opening it through "thumbnails," "titles," "peoples' comments" left at the bottom of online video clips, and the types of words used in their search. No participants suggested that they wandered around aimlessly or passively viewed whatever SEIM came their way.

***Controlling the amount***

Limiting the amount of SEIM viewed was important to all participants as they claimed it helped them to feel in control and to manage any negative effects. They thought controlling the amount reduced their likelihood of developing a "habit," becoming "addicted," or being "out of control." Although participants knew they wanted to avoid losing control, most were unsure how they would know if this was happening. Taking account of how often they personally viewed SEIM, and sometimes how often they perceived their peers to view SEIM, helped participants anchor the appropriate amount of SEIM to view. For example, Jack, a participant who viewed SEIM daily, believed that was acceptable because it did not interfere with his relationships, schoolwork, or other activities, and the content was restricted to material that he could imagine himself doing. Jack considered himself in control and he had potential markers for knowing when this changed:

> As soon as I started to prioritize it over other things then that would become a problem and if it stopped me from doing things, so if I was doing that rather than doing other things then I would probably think that it was a problem.

In contrast, another participant was disappointed whenever he viewed, which was every couple of months, as his ideal was to never view. If participants overstepped what they considered to be appropriate levels of viewing, then they expressed disappointment, anger, and/or doubt about their viewing behaviors. They described using this disappointment to change their behavior to align with their self-imposed rules. Participants described fluctuations in their ability to control their use of SEIM which was also dependent on reminders during the day, such as peers talking about SEIM, and if they actively thought about the negative impacts before viewing.

***Emotions and the moral line***

Participants described using their emotional reactions to the material they viewed to help determine if they were making the right choice. Negative emotional reactions included feelings such as “sad,” “guilty,” “disgust,” “scared,” and “intimidated,” wrapped into thought processes that were embedded in social, cultural, and familial norms and discourses. Strong negative emotions such as disgust and sadness were easy to identify and more difficult to ignore. These strong reactions appeared incompatible with pleasure, which in turn defeated the purpose of viewing SEIM. Instead, participants described using their strong negative emotions as a way of knowing they had crossed the line of what was considered acceptable or the right thing to do. These strong emotions were associated with setting limits, such as avoiding unpleasant or intimidating material or, for a couple of participants, not viewing at all. The avoidance of “hard porn” helped them to lower their emotional discord.

For most participants, strong emotional responses were simply acknowledged and followed, without much reflective thought; if it felt wrong or they were disgusted by something then it should be avoided. However, some participants engaged in more complex thought processes about navigating these emotional responses. Some participants put themselves in the performer’s role to judge if they would be happy to do the same sexual acts in their own life. If they could see themselves doing the same sexual acts, then they considered the content to be acceptable. Jack used this strategy to determine if he would do the same thing:

> I think, how do I like to see myself in that position, and I think that I would not want myself to be in that position then I would stay away from it… If I understand that it’s unrealistic, I'd try to keep it disconnected from what I see as my values and my personal goals but for the most part I feel comfortable as long as I would feel happy in

> that situation then I would feel happy if that situation, you know, that was what my relationship was like.

A few participants showed empathetic engagement through personalizing the SEIM performers. If they imagined someone whom they cared about being in the performance, such as a family member or potential future partner, then this heightened their negative emotional reaction, and they could no longer enjoy what they viewed. This empathetic engagement with the performers led to the performer being re-humanized and could lead to participants restricting or avoiding the use of SEIM.

In comparison to strong emotional responses, feelings of guilt were more complex and were accompanied by internal debates that did not necessarily resolve. Guilt was primarily driven by concern that they were going against adult advice or compromising their values. They managed their guilt through either justifying their viewing or restricting the content and amount. Guilt fluctuated alongside pleasure and their reasons to view SEIM. Guilt was reduced if they followed their self-imposed limits and increased if they broke their expected rules about viewing. As Dan explains:

> Yeah, but I don't think the guilt is completely bad because the guilt means that you know that it's not, like you know what you have heard of people saying to you that it's not good to watch and stuff and guilt kind of makes you keep that in the back of your mind like what they have said.

All participants believed they were responsible for regulating what they viewed on the Internet. They believed blanket external controls, such as blocking their Virtual Private Network (VPN) or parental controls, would be "ineffective" or "impossible" given they could use a different VPN, mobile data, incognito apps, or something similar. Hence, they perceived the responsibility for making choices was their own. While strong negative emotional responses connected to unwanted SEIM resulted in all participants backtracking

from unwanted material and setting limits, many remained in a quandary about viewing SEIM. Most participants saw these dilemmas as evolving as they matured, alongside their changing patterns of use, although two participants had made clear resolutions about never viewing SEIM in the future.

## Discussion

The consumption of pornography has predominantly been coupled with negative impacts and pathology for adolescents, although there are difficulties in establishing consistent findings on these issues (Castro-Calvo et al., 2018; Landripet et al., 2019; Milas et al., 2020; Wright & Štulhofer, 2019). The present study explored how adolescents made sense of SEIM and how they managed their viewing using a broad developmental framework that allowed space for both positive and negative aspects. The findings show that viewing SEIM presented participants with several complex dilemmas which positioned SEIM as both natural and unnatural, fake and real, harmful and harmless, and good and bad. Although these dilemmas were given binary labels, most participants explained how SEIM fitted both ideas rather than being either/or concepts. They described viewing SEIM to satisfy their curiosity, while seeking to resolve the tensions that these dilemmas produced through managing potential risks, such as restricting content and self-control. However, the use of these strategies by adolescents is typically overlooked in most research into pornography.

Drawing on Tolman and McClelland's (2011) framework, the dilemmas reflected tensions between social ideals constructed from adult perspectives and adolescent's perspectives of self-discovery and normal curiosity. Adolescent perspectives included tensions between differing messages that came from their self-values (e.g., I'm a good person), biological expectations (e.g., puberty is natural), peers (e.g., just a bit of fun), media (e.g., commodifying pleasure), parents (e.g., sex is healthy but not porn), and school

educators whose messages focus on potential risks. The adolescents were interested in understanding sexual behaviors and what counts as sexual behavior, alongside their right to sex-positive notions of pleasure, while negotiating what they thought were adult expectations of not viewing SEIM.

Participant dilemmas reflected the tensions between sex-positive ideals and adult socialization toward risk. While New Zealand education encourages positive approaches toward sexuality and supports diversity, it typically uses a top-down approach that focuses on educating youth about risks and preventing unhealthy lifestyles (Fitzpatrick, 2014). Health education is often embedded within precautionary ideals that emphasize protecting society and individuals from potential harm, even if the harm may not come to realization (Byron et al., 2021). This risk perspective permeates society, and school values replicate these societal values (Fitzpatrick, 2014). For example, the sexuality education model advanced by Crabbe and Flood aligns with this approach, offering a curriculum they describe as an "education to address pornography" (Crabbe & Flood, 2021, p. 1).

At an individual level, participants engaged in self-control strategies and reflected on their own values when making decisions. Sexuality was considered an extension of themselves as good and participants tried to select material that represented good sex. All participants considered themselves responsible for their choices in viewing, despite external social, and marketing cues. They believed control played an important part in negotiating their dilemmas and managing potential risks. This is consistent with findings that show adolescents with good self-control are less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors (e.g., Holt et al., 2021). Consequently, self-control practices and perceived agency were important processes that developed in tandem with their dilemmas.

The participants' ability to critically reflect on their decisions is consistent with other findings (e.g., Arrington-Sanders, et al., 2015; Doornwaard et al., 2017; Tsaliki, 2011) and

challenges the perspective that adolescent immaturity and unlimited access to the Internet is harmful (e.g., Behun & Owen, 2019; Brown & Wisco, 2019). More importantly, the findings show caution is needed when interpreting adolescents' critical reflections. The current participants described SEIM as a source of information that showed them what sex looked like and was used for gratification. They also criticized SEIM and did not consider it represented real life sex in terms of intimacy and emotional connectedness. Furthermore, nuanced findings showed participants interpreted experiences that contradict current explanations. For example, viewing aggressive SEIM was considered a positive experience due to the learning opportunity. This positive spin could easily be interpreted as being harmful, given others have equated learning something from SEIM or perceiving it as useful as representing negative impact (e.g., Baams et al., 2015, Peter & Valkenburg, 2010). In addition, ambivalence and discomfort were not considered problematic, as framed in other research (e.g., Peter & Valkenburg, 2008a, 2008b), but rather as offering useful learning processes they could engage with. The dilemmatic complexities exposed in this research may well account for the inconsistencies found in attempting to link SEIM to harm through widely used cause and effect models.

Most participants expressed fluctuating ambivalence and did not hold an all-or-nothing stance about SEIM being good or bad. Their changeable viewpoints wavered depending on how much they questioned SEIM and how they saw its relevance to their sexual exploration, akin to Tolman and McClelland's (2011) idea that the different domains of sexuality development are both overlapping and fluid. SEIM was considered less realistic and approached with increased skepticism as participants matured. Other research has also shown adolescents do not consider SEIM to represent realistic sex, with perceived realism declining with age (Wright & Štulhofer, 2019). The idea of learning about sex through experience as a normal part of maturing rather than being problematized is consistent with

developmental perspectives (Boislard et al., 2016; Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Research has found that failure to negotiate one's sexual identity or learn about intimate relationships during adolescence can hinder adult intimate relationships (Rossi et al., 2021). If exposure to SEIM is reconceptualized as a learning experience, then it allows more open discussions, that move away from judging which sexual acts are morally indecent to trusting adolescents to make good decisions grounded in prior learning experiences and social values.

The present study has both strengths and limitations. The study placed importance on capturing an in-depth picture of SEIM viewing from an adolescent perspective rather than pursuing statistically identified cause and effect relationships, as prior research has primarily done. The use of in-depth interviews allowed participants' experiences to be interpreted within their social and interpersonal interactions and to explore both what was experienced and potential underlying sense-making processes. This allowed consideration of what was important for the adolescents to share and to further our understanding of what is happening for them when they try to make sense of SEIM. However, we need to keep in mind that individuals who volunteer in research on sexual issues have been found to be more confident and broad-minded around sexuality (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). The participants in the present study openly shared their ideas and wanted to help others through sharing. They presented with robust attributes, such as achieving average to above average academically, having good relationships with others, and being engaged in extra-curricular activities. They all attributed responsibility to themselves for their actions and were accepting of peoples' sexual differences and allowing others the freedom to make their own choices. Furthermore, both their sexuality education and the interview process have acted as a reflective exercise that promoted reflections that other adolescents may not be mindful of normally. We are

cognizant that no young women volunteered to participate in this study, and further research is needed to explore their perspectives.

## Conclusion

The present study explored adolescent sense-making processes about SEIM use through a developmental framework that allowed space for both positive and negative viewpoints. The adolescents discussed various tensions about viewing SEIM, and our analysis abstracted dominant dilemmas that they continue to navigate in the context of social influences and maturing understanding of sexuality. Our analysis highlights strategies used by adolescents for managing risks they associated with SEIM use. We recommend future research should take the focus beyond the harms associated with SEIM use and include both negative and positive aspects of SEIM viewing. Future research should also consider SEIM viewing within a broader framework of adolescent sexuality to include the changes of puberty and maturing sexual development. This approach requires trusting adolescents' ability to engage in reflections and hold mature conversations about their SEIM use.

# Chapter Seven: Discussion

How pornography is researched is shaped by the social and historical context in which the research is conducted, currently linking the quest to understand the risks to youth and seeking to protect those who are regarded as easily corrupted by the presumed indecencies of pornography. Adolescents are considered to be a developmentally sensitive age group which amplifies the claims about their susceptibility to harm from exposure to pornography (e.g., Behun & Owen, 2019; Brown & Wisco, 2019; Giordano et al., 2022). The need for further research has been well supported by preliminary evidence showing that adolescents do view pornography, especially male youths, and that it is integrated into their daily lives (Alexandraki et al., 2018; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a, 2022b; Massey et al., 2021). Initial claims that the Internet turbo charges online sexual activity (Cooper, 1998; Cooper & Griffin-Shelly, 2002) have resulted in mixed conclusions (e.g., Marshall & Miller, 2019; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Štulhofer et al., 2019).

The findings of the current study outlined in Chapter Six discussed how adolescents negotiated SEIM use, drawing on Tolman and McClelland's (2011) framework that acknowledges both positive and negative aspects of sexuality as a normal part of adolescent maturing. These findings showed that viewing SEIM presented participants with several complex dilemmas that evolved as they matured and that they acquired new perspectives on their SEIM use. SEIM use was positioned by these adolescents as being both natural and unnatural, fake and real, harmful and harmless, and good and bad. Participants straddled these opposing ideas and did not come to firm conclusions. Whereas Chapter Six discussed these themes directly, this chapter aims to discuss how these findings relate to the three underlying assumptions discussed in Chapter Three (see Vertongen et al., 2022a). These assumptions were that: once adolescents view pornography they will continue to view

pornography; pornography is harmful; and pornography provides a template for (unhealthy) sexual practices. This chapter closes with my final reflections and concluding thoughts about exploring adolescent perspectives on SEIM use.

## Adolescent perspectives on continued SEIM use

The first assumption, that once exposed to pornography adolescents will continue to view it, is based on several contentious issues. First, this assumption is often based on exposure rates (e.g., Alexandraki et al. 2018; Lim et al., 2017; Nieh et al. 2020), which are reflected in reports and online educational materials that regularly use the highest prevalence rates (e.g., Quadara et al., 2017; The Light Project., n.d; Crabbe, 2022). Second, the research is largely based on surveys, often using single time points, that convey current pornography use as indicative of stable ongoing use and ignore how consumption may vary over time and how the material is interpreted (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018; Healy-Cullen et al., 2023; Kohut et al., 2020; Vertongen et al., 2022a). The current findings showed a more complex picture, whereby SEIM use waxed and waned over time as participants negotiated their dilemmas about viewing it. This is consistent with other studies that explore pornography use across time (e.g., Doornward, van den Eijnden et al. 2015; Henry & Talbot 2019; Taylor, 2021; Willoughby et al., 2018).

The current participants reported their first exposure to SEIM occurred between the ages of nine and fourteen and were instigated through various pathways. Several participants described it as an unexpected experience that was facilitated through peers or through “popup” advertisements while viewing other entertainment, such as online sports or movies. Another common pathway to initial viewing was through curiosity or wanting to know the unknown. For example, Sam explains how they experienced knowledge about SEIM from peers before viewing it.

> It's not easy to avoid [knowing about porn] cause people bring it up or parents might have talked about it and when they bring it up at school it spreads around quickly... at school I guess it's a new idea to people and it's, oh wow what is it, what happens in it, check it out, that sort of thing, it's the unknown people want to know the unknown.

This curiosity has been found to be an important reason for adolescents to explore pornography (e.g., Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; Henry &Talbot, 2019). Following on from the participant's first exposure, there were differing responses and fluctuating patterns of SEIM use that are missed in static measurements and often ignored when unravelling what SEIM use means. This research has shown that participants' subsequent engagement with SEIM was a complex process that was attributed to ongoing curiosity, wanting to understand what sex was about, and to experience pleasure and humour, aligning with other studies that find adolescents engage with pornography for diverse reasons (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018; Castro-Calvo et al., 2018; Doornwaard et al., 2015; Lofgren-Mårtenson and Månsson 2010; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022b; Peterson et al., 2023; Willoughby et al., 2018).

Furthermore, adolescents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus (LGBTQ+) have reportedly used pornography to understand their sexual identity in a space that is safe to explore their sexuality (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Dawson et al., 2020; Pavanello Decaro et al., 2023). This safe space for exploration is important for adolescents who do not see themselves represented in heteronormative culture. Within this study, one participant from the four who identified as bisexual, gay, or undecided (questioning), used SEIM to specifically explore their sexual identity. This opportunity was an important process for them as they used SEIM to explore which actors they identified with through relatable material, although they also challenged the negative misrepresentations of their sexuality within SEIM. The relatable material served to validate their sexual interests

which they believed were often misrepresented or absent in their school sexuality education, such as anal sex. Educational discourses were described as focusing on heterosexual narratives that inadvertently marginalised their sexual interests. This issue of alienating marginalised youth resonates with those contesting binary concepts of sexuality (Allen, 2011; Stardust et al., 2022) and the promotion of sexuality as being fluid and open ended (e.g., Sullivan & McKee, 2015). The other three sexually diverse participants did not consider SEIM helpful for clarifying their sexual orientation and relied mostly on their friendships for such discussions. Therefore, how SEIM was used within this small LGBTQ+ cohort for self-discovery and identity was diverse.

Interestingly, this study's findings could align with the assumption that exposure equals continued viewing. Therefore, if I simplified my analysis to produce overly simplified findings then I could clearly state the participants had easy access to SEIM, which supports the notion that most adolescent men have viewed pornography (Flood, 2007; Flood, 2009; Lim et al., 2017; Quadara et al., 2017; Sabina et al., 2008; Walker et al., 2015). Furthermore, half the current participants would meet the Office of Film and Literature Classification (2018) survey criteria of being frequent users (i.e., they used SEIM more than once a month). Hence, it could be concluded that the current findings, in their simplest form, support the assumption that viewing SEIM is both easy to access and leads to further viewing, with half the participants being frequent users.

Conversely, the in-depth discussions with participants about how SEIM use developed and changed over time challenges the assumption that SEIM use leads to further problematic use. Increased use of pornography has been explained by reinforcement models that theorise SEIM use is highly rewarding and thus leads to increased use (e.g., Klein et al., 2022; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). While many participants found SEIM use to be pleasurable, their engagement in dilemmatic processes challenge the idea that this reward

system equates to increased use that is passively enjoyed and unquestioned. Participants described a range of reactions from feeling awkward or sad, to confused or curious, to excited and aroused. Their enjoyment was more evident when they controlled the content they viewed, normalised SEIM use amongst their peers, and considered SEIM use as part of their maturing physical development. However, this pleasure was also constrained through their internal dilemmatic debates. Most participants held conflicted views, and their decisions were often voiced around how they saw themselves as a person, how they made sense of SEIM not being real, how SEIM impacted on them, and how they thought others looked upon their SEIM use. Thus, pleasure was wrapped into disputable narratives that participants described as becoming increasingly sophisticated as they matured. Risk management strategies, such as controlling the content and frequency of viewing, were also woven into their dilemmas and were evident through their narratives that emphasised the importance of choices and agency in managing how often they viewed SEIM. The hazards of equating frequency rates to problematic use has also been highlighted by others (e.g., Kohut et al., 2020; Marshall & Miller, 2019), with some finding problematic users actually report lower rates of pornography use (Bőthe et al., 2020). Hence, how often SEIM is used did not relate to problematic use and caution is needed when drawing these types of conclusions.

Additionally, some participants raised the prospect that they would stop viewing SEIM in the future for two reasons. First, they believed their desire for sexual pleasure would be met through having sex, which aligns with Owen and colleagues (2012) proposed idea for why some adolescents decreased their use of SEIM overtime. Second, some participants wondered if viewing SEIM would be akin to cheating on their future partner if they were in a relationship. Unfortunately, these contextual and temporal considerations of how adolescents understand pornography use are often not acknowledged. This is made more complicated in that many factors can mediate how pornography is interpreted, including media literacy

(Dawson et al., 2020), pre-existing levels of sexual preoccupation (Bőthe et al., 2020; Doornwaard, Eijnden et al., 2016; van Oosten et al., 2017), involvement in religion (Grubbs & Perry, 2019; Rasmussen & Bierman, 2016), peer approval of SEIM use (Eleuteri et al., 2017; van de Bongardt et al., 2017), parent relationships (van de Bongardt et al., 2014), impulsivity (Rousseau et al., 2020), and the like. Therefore, if SEIM use is interpreted without considering its context it risks misinterpreting SEIM use as problematic through mere exposure.

In summary, both contextual and temporal processes around SEIM use were important when considering how to interpret participant's exposure to SEIM. Exposure rates could not be simplified to reward mechanisms leading to increased SEIM use. Instead, SEIM use was grounded in the participant's ideals of being entitled to pleasure and learning about sex but equally, being unsure how pornography fitted into this process. Hence, there is a clear need to move beyond simplifying SEIM use into merely whether it is used and how often. This reiterates the call from other authors for a broader exploration of the meaning behind adolescent pornography use (e.g., Alexandraki et al. 2018; Attwood & Smith 2011; McKee, 2014; Healy-Cullen et al., 2002a, 2002b; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; Wright & Štulhofer, 2019) and to explore how adolescents process and manage their SEIM use.

## Adolescent perspectives on risks and harm from SEIM use

Risk is about the possibility of something being harmful, where harm is the negative outcome from the event. Although harm from pornography is difficult to define (e.g., Kohut et al., 2020; Naezer 2018; Spišák, 2016), it is often framed around the negative impacts on adolescents' wellbeing and the undermining of social morality (e.g., Efrati & Amichai-Hamburger, 2019; Papadopoulos, 2010; Pearson et al., 2018; Quadara et al., 2017; Rostad et al., 2019). The merging of abusive or "hard core" pornography with other types of

pornography further cultivates fear regarding the possible negative impacts on youth (Gorman et al., 2010) and these fears are played out in the media which amplifies the perceived risks (Jeffery, 2018; Livingstone & Haddon, 2012; Rohloff et al., 2013). Yet, what constitutes harm and risks from pornography use are framed around adult concerns shaped by contemporary moral standards, with adolescent perspectives being marginalised (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; McKee, 2021; Peterson et al., 2023; Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012). This section discusses how adolescents in this study perceived negative impacts and risks from a youth-centred approach which allowed participants to say what bothered them. In particular, this expands on the participant's dilemmatic debate about SEIM being harmful and harmless, and how it relates to existing research.

The current findings showed adolescent ideas about what constitute negative impacts and harm was multifaceted and dependent on the context. The participants clearly described possible risks from SEIM use which reflected adult perspectives. The adolescents in this study were aware of SEIM's potential to: corrupt their minds; negatively influence ideas about sex and relationships; become out of control and be overused; impair their sexual performance; be harmful to the actors; create unrealistic expectations about sex; and marginalize populations in society. Nonetheless, while the participants were concerned about these risks, they did not believe they experienced negative impacts from SEIM use. This aligns with a growing body of evidence that shows adolescents are capable of reflecting on both risks and pleasures regarding pornography use, alongside making good decisions online which takes into account the inauthentic production of pornography (e.g., Healy-Cullen et al., 2023a, 2023b; Naezer & Ringrose, 2018).

Nevertheless, when adolescents perceive no harm from pornography use then this has been attributed to their inability to show good judgement for various reasons, such as their

underdeveloped cognitive capacity (e.g., Behun & Owens, 2019; Brown & Wisco, 2019; Giordano et al., 2022) or from negative messages in pornography permeating teenage culture making it their new reality (e.g., Papadopoulos, 2010; Pearson et al., 2018; Smith, 2013; Wright, 2014) which leads to an indifference about pornography use (Olmstead et al., 2023). The discrepancies between adult and adolescent viewpoints about pornography use have been framed differently between studies. For example, Healy-Cullen et al. (2022b; 2023a) describe the discrepancies as valid constructions of reality, whereby adults focus on young peoples' innocence and vulnerability while adolescents acknowledge risks but simultaneously focused on their agency and positioned adults as potentially naïve or misguided. In contrast, Wright et al. (2023) described the parent's underestimation of their children's pornography use as being dangerous due to the significant learning adolescents take from pornography scripts.

I would argue that the reported absence of personal harm for the current participants is a valid perspective which needs to be interpreted through a contextualised understanding of harm and their perceived sense of control. For example, while the participants had been warned that SEIM use could impair their sexual performance, none of the participants were having sex and thus they could not confirm this. Participants repeatedly raised how they could manage risks and limit their exposure to the offensive side of pornography through self-determined responses. This ability to deconstruct pornography content and negotiate perceived risks through proactive choices has been found by others (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; 2023a; Spišák, 2017; Taylor, 2022).

Furthermore, factors reported as negative effects by other studies, such as sexual uncertainty, were repeatedly re-spun into positive interpretations. Sexual uncertainty has been used to indicate harm (e.g., Peter & Valkenburg, 2008b; van Oosten, 2016), yet the current participants did not attribute their uncertainty to SEIM use but rather believed it was developmentally appropriate given their inexperience. This re-spinning of the dominant risk

narrative into one of choice allowed the adolescents to position themselves as being in control and resilient to the industry's lures. Parallels can be drawn between these outcomes and those found by Healy-Cullen et al. (2022b) who identified participant's use of 'resistant talk'. Resistant talk counteracted the construction of youth as vulnerable to being critical and savvy consumers, with this alternative narrative more likely to come from adolescents than adults.

Similarly, negative emotional responses have been used to show negative impacts from SEIM use (e.g., Doornwaard et al., 2016; Efrati & Amichai-Hamburger, 2019; Grubbs & Perry, 2019; Lim et al., 2017; Ma, 2019; Spišák, 2016). Indeed, this study's participants expressed negative emotions such as feeling upset, guilty, disappointed, sad, and disgusted. However, these negative emotions were short lived and were not reported as harmful. This is consistent with others who have found adolescents who were upset by sexual material largely recovered straight away or within a few days (Rovolis & Tsaliki, 2012). The current participants framed their negative emotions as positive learning opportunities which helped them decide where to put boundaries around the SEIM content. This raises the question about how well negative emotions equate to harmful outcomes from SEIM use, given the nuanced interpretations of negative emotions.

Another difficulty in defining harm is determining what exemplifies good judgements about sexual health (Byron et al., 2021; McKee, 2021; Peterson et al., 2023). Adolescents are expected to navigate what it means to be sexual beings, however, what represents a 'good' judgement is embedded in broader social norms which privilege certain types of sexual activities as being good (McKee et al., 2010; Rubin, 1984). Some argue that what constitutes healthy (good) sex denies positive aspects and too often frames sexual activity as being innately risky, leading them to advocate for more balanced perspectives (e.g., Lamb et al., 2018; McKee et al., 2021; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). This study's participants raised similar questions about what constituted good sex and what was

the right thing to do as they developed their understanding of sex and how SEIM moved toward or away from their ideals.

The role of values was important when participants deliberated over possible harms. The participants evaluated risks and pleasure through their self-identified ideals of sex and how they wanted to ethically treat others. They considered adult perspectives and used their values of being a 'good', ethical, or 'wholesome' person to make decisions about their SEIM use. The use of values is an important factor in developmental models but is typically abandoned when SEIM use is being explored. Adolescence is considered a pivotal stage for identity development, where they negotiate who they are through making sense of their social experiences (Erikson, 1988). Erikson proposes the formation of values is multifaceted and is connected to identity formation that develops over one's lifespan (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Erikson, 1988). Therefore, adolescent experiences, including SEIM use, were based on their prior understandings of the world, self, and others that were not formed in isolation. The adolescents in this study constructed their current understanding of pornography based on acquired messages from trusted adults that were assimilated into their pre-existing view of oneself. For example, Bradly explained how they used their own identity to make choices about SEIM use:

> It was a lot about making sure you are respecting yourself and you are fitting your own sort of morals, like think to yourself, is this something that you can sit easy with yourself doing, yeah so it was more that side of things, like the respect and integrity kind of thing.

Hence, while many participants raised concerns about the possibility of SEIM corrupting their mind or impacting their ideas about sex they could equally disqualify this risk through the belief that they were a good person and were not at risk of losing their personal values. Their identity of being a 'good' person was used to manage and filter what SEIM was viewed

and in doing so they believed harmful effects were negated. This highlights the importance of bringing developmental considerations and adolescent narratives together when exploring and understanding their SEIM use.

Another key concern is adolescents' inability to be discerning about risks through immaturity or a lack of awareness (Behun & Owens, 2019; Brown & Wisco, 2019; Cameron et al., 2005; Eleuteri et al., 2017; Owens et al., 2012; OFLC, 2018; Papadopoulos, 2010; Wright, 2014). This concern was mirrored by some participants who questioned whether they had unwittingly experienced negative impacts. They wondered whether they had inadvertently been corrupted by pornography because of the gap between their educational material that emphasised risks from SEIM use and their belief they had not been negatively affected. This self-doubt was connected to the discrepancy between adult and youth perceptions of harm and has been raised by authors as a factor leading to shame (Lamb et al., 2018). The importance of reducing shame has been recommended in porn literacy programs that encourage student led initiatives rather than focusing solely on risks (e.g., Dawson et al., 2019; Rothman et al., 2020).

Young peoples' poor judgement has been highlighted by the mismatch between adolescent perspectives that downplay the importance of pornography and adult perspectives that focus on the dangers from pornography. In the current study SEIM was described as being 'just a bit of fun', 'entertainment', 'no big deal' and 'shouldn't be taken too seriously', similar to other studies (Attwood et al., 2018; Healy-Cullen et al., 2023; Spišák, 2016). This mismatch in perception can be either understood as youth downplaying the dangers of pornography or adults' overemphasising the perils of pornography, depending on whose lens is employed.

When pornography is embedded in young peoples' sexual culture they have been described as being desensitized (Massey et al., 2021), expressing indifference (Olmstead et

al., 2023), being unknowing (Pearson et al., 2018) and being detached or turning a blind eye (Antevska & Gavey, 2015). Alternatively, if adolescent sexual culture is de-pathologised then ideas of entertainment, fun, and not being a big deal are constructed as a human right (WHO, 2010), normal developmental experiences (Tolman & McClelland, 2011), healthy sexual pleasure (McKee et al., 2021) and humour (Goldstein, 2021). The current participants understood pornography to include both. For example, the current participants viewed SEIM as harmless entertainment but also challenged what harmless meant through using multiple sources that showed contradictory messaging. This is exemplified by one participant who described the cruelty inflicted on the porn actress, August Ames who suicided following cyberbullying, as an example of how the porn industry was not merely harmless entertainment. Like others, this participant then renegotiated how SEIM could be both horrible and enjoyable or entertaining.

As noted, this inability to be discerning about risks to oneself is commonly framed within the 'third-person effect', whereby negative media effects are overestimated for others while being underestimated for oneself (Lo et al., 2016) or harms are overestimated for other children but underestimated for one's own children (Wright et al., 2023). This imbalance in perceived negative effects leads to two outcomes. First, individual perceptions are assumed to be inaccurate and distorted (e.g., Wright et al., 2023). These one-sided perspectives have numerous names within psychology, such as cognitive distortions, minimisation, overgeneralisation, self-serving bias, bias optimism, and the like, which are all used to explain why the individual's perception of reality is distorted. Second, any such distortions need to be reframed to align with healthy lifestyles as determined by contemporary norms to inoculate the young person against the harmful effects of pornography (Peterson et al, 2023). Alternatively, I propose the supposed distortions could be reframed as a strength that moves away from the risk ideology. Therefore, participants who show greater concern for the

wellbeing of others can be interpreted as representing compassion for others rather than a distorted reality, which I expand on below.

Compassion can be conceptualised using various constructs but in a rudimentary form it involves concern or caring for someone's unmet needs or suffering (Goetz & Simon-Thomas, 2017). The development of compassion toward oneself and others has been used to improve well-being and social connectedness (Goetz & Simon-Thomas, 2017), and has been related to children holding a prosocial orientation (Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2017). Indeed, parents encourage their children to be compassionate or caring about others, as this contributes to social connectedness. Furthermore, the development of compassion has led to whole therapies dedicated to enhancing this attribute for wellbeing (e.g., Gilbert & Simos, 2022). Caring about how a partner experiences sex has also been connected to healthy sex (Carmody & Ovenden, 2013; Dawson et al., 2020; Rothman et al., 2021). However, greater concern for others wellbeing from SEIM use is all too often framed as a distortion of reality or as being highly questionable due to minimising their own risks while overestimating others based on a highly subjective notion of harm.

If we move away from categorising this discrepancy between self and others as a distorted perception of reality to representing compassion, then the discussion could go something like this. All participants in this study showed compassion for others and demonstrated caring attributes through raising concerns about others, especially younger or naïve consumers. They hypothesised if younger, naïve, or vulnerable youth did not know SEIM was fake then they could suffer through believing sex is devoid of intimacy or, worse still, re-enact aggressive sexual content believing it to be normal. Hence, all participants assumed others would benefit from understanding that SEIM is fake and knowing ways to manage risks to counteract potential harmful effects. Adolescents also believed they were less at risk due to being in control of their choices and their critical unravelling of media content.

This helps clarify how harm is understood by adolescents without labelling their perception as distorted when compared to adults, who often position adolescents in the category of the 'vulnerable other' and thus assume they are at greater risk. Likewise, adults who reflect on their youth experiences with pornography dismiss potential harms as they attribute greater agency toward their younger self than they afford present-day youth (Taylor, 2021).

In addition, the differentiation of harm to oneself versus harm to others is important to unpack to prevent conflating the two perspectives when studying perceptions of harm. In this study, the adolescents predominantly focused on how they experienced harm rather than wondering how others experienced harm. Therefore, while adolescents have shown clear concerns about the negative influences of pornography (e.g., Attwood et al., 2018; Dawson et al., 2020; Doornwaard et al., 2017; Mulholland, 2015; Walker et al., 2015), there are differences between studies in how adolescents describe these negative impacts and how they position themselves in relation to the impacts. For example, when reviewing Walker and associates (2015) study, the participant quotes showed their concerns were mostly about others and not directly related to themselves. Because youth have considerable concerns for others, they then conclude harm is evident. In contrast, Davis and associates (2020) study asked participants to directly discuss how pornography influenced their lives, which lead to a more balanced perspective of risks and useful aspects. Hence, it is important to distinguish between harm to others, where harm is more likely to be reported, compared to harm to oneself to prevent conflating the two dimensions together, which will misrepresent what harm means.

The second issue of reforming perceived distortions to align with healthy sexuality is also fraught as it leads to those who are in positions of power attempting to restrict media content to minimise potential harm (Lo et al., 2016). This precautionary principle of protecting others against potential harms can be seen through attempts to regulate SEIM use

and, rightly or wrongly, within educational programs that use a top-down approach to teach students about the risks (Byron et al., 2021; Livingstone & Haddon, 2012; Peterson et al., 2023; Sunstein, 2005). These concerns are further heightened by the perceived immaturity of adolescents (Bonnie & Scott, 2013; Eleuteri et al., 2017; Reniers et al., 2016; Santrock, 2016; Woolard & Scott, 2009), which translates into adults being responsible for keeping them safe, especially for younger adolescents. However, while the current participants held concerns for others who were more vulnerable, they believed they did not need their access restricted or regulated. They considered regulating SEIM was likely to be ineffective in managing risks given they had numerous ways around restrictions, which echoes concerns raised by organisations (e.g., Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018; Day, 2021). The current participants believed they should be responsible for their choices and believed being tech savvy deemed them capable of managing potential risks, which resembles other youth perspectives (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022b).

This then brings me to the importance of risk management strategies which were identified by the participants, and how these are framed as part of their resilience. Positive developmental frameworks have focused on identifying adaptive tasks used by adolescence to negotiate sexuality, including risk management strategies and strength-based attributes such as self-regulation (e.g., McKee et al., 2010; Peterson et al., 2023; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; WHO, 2010). Self-control practices and perceived agency were important processes that developed in tandem with the participant's dilemmas and were used to explain how they minimized risks from SEIM use. Participants prioritised remaining in control of their SEIM use and proactively managed what they viewed and how often, but what control looked like was highly individualised. For example, one participant gradually increased their SEIM use to daily and considered this acceptable given it did not interfere with their friendships, activities, and schooling. Two participants described a brief period of daily SEIM

use which then decreased because it became a chore that lacked excitement and thus, they reduced their viewing to weekly and monthly, respectively. Another participant enjoyed the "holding out" and building anticipation, thus they limited their viewing of SEIM to monthly to maximise the anticipation. Yet another participant believed their SEIM use every three months represented good self-control. All participants considered what was an appropriate level of SEIM use, which varied depending on their own judgements. This is consistent with findings that show adolescents with good self-control are less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours (e.g., Holt et al., 2021) and perceived self-control is related to less self-reported problematic pornography use (Efrati, 2020).

In general, participants did not relate the amount or frequency of SEIM use with being problematic or harmful. Although, as noted, they did adjust their consumption based on their belief of what was appropriate use, which then negates the idea that it is problematic. Similarly, Bőthe and associates (2020) found participants who identified as non-problematic users were 3-6 times more frequent in their pornography use than self-identified problematic users, leading them to conclude that frequency rates should not be used to indicate problematic pornography use. Hence, I propose exploration of perceived self-control over SEIM use is important to consider, given the frequency of SEIM use did not equate to perceived harm for the current participants.

If being in control is important then the inverse also holds true, whereby being out of control has been associated with harm from SEIM use (e.g., Davis et al., 2020). The notion of being out of control was relevant for the current participants who judged how SEIM use impacted their relationships, activities, and schoolwork to indicate whether they had maintained control. Consequently, while staying in control was a central theme in mitigating perceived risks the inverse can also be used to indicate subjective judgements of problematic use, as recommended by others (e.g., Efrati, 2020). However, while perceived loss of control

has been associated to both problematic pornography use and compulsive sexual behaviours (e.g., Klein et al., 2022), care needs to be taken when considering how being 'out of control' is determined and assessed. Taylor (2019) cautions turning the pornography viewer into a pornography patient that requires treatment as part of the new public health crisis. Participants in the current study who were concerned about losing control of their SEIM use were also unsure how to judge if this had happened. Efrati (2020) has used negative impacts on daily functioning as an important marker to aid the decision of determining whether pornography use is problematic. It is likely the current participants would have benefited from discussions about how to determine when SEIM use is in their control and likewise out of their control, which could easily be included in peer discussions in porn literacy programs.

Finally, the idea that harm did not exist for the current participants could be attributed to how it was constructed. Therefore, what does harm really mean when many of the suggested risk factors rely on socially embedded ideals and contemporary morals which transform alongside what society sanctions as acceptable? This parallels the argument about defining what good sexuality looks like that considers how these are constructed through social ideals (Attwood et al., 2018b; Byron et al., 2021; Chmielewski et al., 2017; Lamb et al., 2018; Le Grice & Braun, 2018; Morison & Herbert, 2019). For example, concepts such as permissiveness or promiscuity are constructed on social and cultural norms that are acceptable to the dominant groups and are different for each generation. What was considered sexually permissive by my grandparents will be different to how my parents construct permissiveness, which will be different to how many youth construct permissiveness. Furthermore, Māori sexual practices have been marginalised through colonisation, whereby indigenous practices and beliefs were reframed as promiscuous and falling short of Pākehā standards (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007; Le Grice & Braun, 2018). Hence, given ideas about

what constitutes harm are socially constructed and historically specific, then this explains why determining harm from pornography continues to be elusive.

In summary, I would caution dismissing adolescent conclusions of being unharmed as equating to poor judgement or a distorted perception of reality. The current participants deliberated over possible harms and considered adult perspectives alongside their values of being a good and ethical human being. They showed concern for others but did not consider themselves harmed as any effects were short-lived and were often framed as learning opportunities. Their nuanced interpretations of harm show why harm is difficult to identify. Instead, I propose trusted adults can capitalise on adolescent ambiguity as an opportunity that can be expanded upon and openly explored rather than being regarded as distortions that need correcting to conform to dominant social expectations.

### Adolescent perspectives on pornography providing a template for sexual practices

The notion that adolescents are easily corrupted through following online sexual scripts underpins concerns about harm from pornography use (e.g., Owens et al., 2012; Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Vera-Gray et al., 2021). These theories propose that sexual behaviours and values are shaped through various sexualised media content, including pornography that leads to the adoption and acceptance of the negative sexual scripts portrayed in pornography (e.g., Peter & Valkenburg, 2016; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; Wright, 2011, 2014; Wright et al., 2023; Wright & Štulhofer 2019). Contentious constructs, such as perceived realism, have been used as evidence that pornography scripts are accepted by youth (e.g., Baams et al., 2015; Peter & Valkenburg, 2010; Wright, 2014). These concerns are then heightened when abusive pornography is conflated with, what the current participants described as, normal pornography. The following discussion highlights from a youth perspective how acceptance of SEIM content does not equate with the passive acceptance of sexual scripts.

Wanting to try sexual acts found in pornography (e.g., Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006; Lim et al., 2017; Rothman et al., 2015; Tsitsika et al., 2009) or finding the material useful (e.g., Vandenbosch et al., 2018) has been used to support the assumption that adolescents want to adopt sexual scripts found in pornography. According to Wright, pornography provides consumers with scripts that provide new ideas, can activate existing sexual scripts that have been internalized, and can "encourage the utilization of scripts (application) by portraying behaviors as normative, acceptable, and rewarding" (2014, p. 308). The current study highlights the importance of contextual considerations in interpreting the desire to follow scripts. In addition, the critical dilemmatic deliberations indicated individualized pathways for making sense of SEIM use.

Overall, the current findings showed that when adolescents were engaged in conversations about SEIM, they were able to critically reflect on the functionality of SEIM and the unrealistic nature of the sexual scripts. The adolescents used SEIM for pleasure and to understand what sex could look like, however, they did not consider it to be a realistic informant for how they wanted their own sexual activity to take place. This contradicts the notion that perceived realism equates to the adoption of pornography scripts as proposed by others (e.g., Baams et al., 2015; Peter & Valkenburg, 2010; Wright et al., 2022), which somehow can be evaluated through abstract concepts, such as perceived enjoyment and utility (Vandenbosch et al., 2018). The current findings align with adults who have nuanced and contradictory ways for judging the realness of pornography that are complicated through moral and ethical concerns (e.g., Taylor, 2022). Critical reflections regarding the realness of pornography are found to become increasingly sophisticated as adolescents mature (Wright & Štulhofer, 2019). The current study extends these findings to younger adolescents, who also showed nuanced and contradictory ways for judging the realness of pornography. Moreover,

these findings raise important questions about how well perceived realism can be quantified and how well it represents adolescent's adoption of pornography scripts.

The pleasure from SEIM use was bound to the content participants judged as being morally and socially acceptable and as such their pleasure was coupled with the rejection of abusive pornography. All participants held abusive SEIM as being unacceptable. Several participants were confused about why something that is supposed to be pleasurable would be paired with aggression and generally did not make sense of this content. Thus, participants did not necessarily make sense of what they viewed. Instead, they drew a clear boundary that reframed 'abusive' pornography as abnormal and uncomfortable and as something that should be avoided. Although viewing it was still a matter of choice for others, they positioned people who viewed abusive material as being 'weird' and 'strange' and they did not want to become 'one of those people'.

Furthermore, although several participants thought they would like to try some things they viewed, this was constrained by what they envisaged as healthy sex. Similarly, others have found adolescents hold complex relationships with pornography and pleasure, and what should be considered pleasurable is woven into notions of respectability (Mulholland, 2015). The current participants described sex as an extension of themselves as being good and tried to select material that represented good sex. Therefore, the passive adoption of SEIM scripts was rebuffed through the adolescents using their established values, as discussed in the previous section on harm. This aligns with findings that health communication with parents and educators, and pre-existing sexual scripts being discordant from the negative scripts found in pornography, lead to adolescents being less likely to follow pornography scripts (Wright, 2018; Wright et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2023).

Participants selected media content that fitted their own sexual values and because of this some participants described the content as informative and something they might re-

enact. In contrast the exaggerated performances or ‘bad acting’ was identified as humorous, fake, unrealistic, and not something they wanted to re-enact. Most of the current participants were critical about how consent and condom use were mostly absent. Hence, care needs to be taken in reinterpreting trying something without knowing what the adolescent’s reference point is. Furthermore, participants wondered if adults over-estimated pornography’s influence on their choices around sexual activities and underestimated their sensibility. For example, Dan stated:

> I think that is where a lot of adults get it wrong, they think teenagers they see this stuff on the Internet and they think that is how it is, and they assume that they think we think that is how it is in real life, but we know that's not how it is in real life.

Similar sentiments were shared about adults assuming the worst about adolescents, which aligns with those who have found adults focus on youth’s vulnerability to harm while youth consider themselves capable of navigating pornography spaces (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022b). The current participants trusted their own decisions and wanted adults to do the same. The adolescents were critical of how SEIM portrayed sexual interactions and drew distinctions between SEIM content and intimate relationships. This distinction between sexual acts and sexual interactions aligns well with Tolman and McClelland (2011) sexual behaviours (sexual acts), sexual self-concepts, and sexual socialisation domains. The current participants naturally drew a distinction between sexual acts and perceived sexual interactions to help differentiate the important differences between pornography and how sex might look in real life. Hence, while the participants found the content could show helpful information about what sex looked like (sexual acts), this did not directly transfer into how they thought sexual interactions should occur, given the latter was associated with communication, caring, emotional connectedness, and consent. Others have also found adolescents can critically reflect on sexual media messages (Arrington-Sanders et al.,

2015; Davis et al., 2020; Dawson et al., 2020; Doornwaard et al., 2017; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a, 2022b; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Rothman et al., 2020; Spišák, 2020; Tsaliki, 2011) and become increasingly sceptical of pornography content as they mature (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Lofgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2013; Wright & Štulhofer, 2019).

Furthermore, the current adolescent's engagement with dilemmatic processes fits well with educational programs that encourage critical thinking (e.g., Goldstein, 2020; Peterson et al., 2023; Rothman et al., 2020). The participants described learning about SEIM experientially and through discussions within their education settings that helped them reflect and negotiate what SEIM meant to them. In New Zealand, the education system promotes reflective learning models that are student centred with the goal of developing critical reflective skills to enhance the generalizability of learning processes for students. The New Zealand Health Education Association (NZHEA, 2020) has also recently updated the sexuality curriculum to incorporate teaching and learning about pornography. Although there is much debate about how to deliver such programs (e.g., Byron et al., 2021; Crabbe & Flood, 2021; Goldstein, 2020; Healy-Cullen & Morison, 2023; McKee et al., 2023), they are considered fundamental in supporting adolescents to reflect on sexual health and pornography.

It is also important to note that while 12 of the 13 participants had engaged in discussions about pornography in their school setting this may not be the case for other adolescents. Within New Zealand, each school has autonomy over their sexuality curriculum which is determined collaboratively through consultation with their board of trustees and communities to determine how or if pornography is discussed within their education setting. Sexuality education often avoids discussions about pornography and sexuality education has focused on physical aspects and risk management. Therefore, while almost all the current

participants had been involved in discussions about pornography, this may not be the case for many other adolescents.

In countries that have mandates to provide sexuality education, such as the Netherlands and Sweden, adolescents have been found to regard school as a good source of information about sexuality while pornography was not a main source of information about sex for adolescents under 18 years (Rothman et al., 2021). Others have found young adults report using pornography as a source of information about sex irrespective of whether they were satisfied with the sex education provided at school (Dawson et al., 2019). Rothman and associates (2021) recommend exploring why adolescents find pornography to be a useful source of information, rather than drawing conclusions based on negative pornography scripts. How SEIM is helpful may depend on the type of sexual images viewed and how adolescents think about such images, as found in the present study. Many of the current study's participants were selective about the type of sexual material they viewed and found it useful for explaining sexual acts but not sexual interactions such as consent or communication.

Furthermore, SEIM use has been criticised for changing sexual practices that are linked to behaviours that sit outside heteronormative sexual practices, such as anal sex (e.g., Lim et al., 2017; Marston & Lewis, 2014). Yet one participant repeatedly described how mainstream sexuality education marginalised their perspective. Contemporary heteronormative sexual practices are determined by dominant (or popular) cultural ideals of what constitutes healthy sex, whereby other non-normative sexual practices are considered to sit outside these parameters (Mulholland, 2015; Rubin, 1984). While others emphasise that sexual health requires a respectful and positive approach that is free from discrimination (e.g., McKee et al., 2010; 2023; WHO, 2010), the narrative of deeming non-heteronormative sexual acts as unacceptable or risky marginalises LGBTQ+ groups who have used

pornography to find relatable material (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2015; Davis et al., 2020; Dawson et al., 2020). Albeit with similar complexities as other cohorts, in that they also raise concerns about the negative misrepresentations of LGBTQ+ sexuality (Pavanello Dacaro et al., 2023).

In summary, learning something or wanting to adopt sexual acts viewed during SEIM use did not equate to a passive adoption of unhealthy sexual scripts for the current adolescents. The adolescent's demonstrated an ability to critically reflect on their viewing habits and selected material that created less cognitive incongruence between the content viewed and their values. They described using their values as being good human beings and selecting material that represented good sex, with all participants condemning abusive SEIM which they considered crossed the line of acceptability. While it remains unclear what adolescents consider useful when viewing SEIM and what sexual acts they want to re-enact, these adolescents were found to draw distinctions between sexual interactions that involved caring responses and the sexual acts portrayed in SEIM.

## Conclusion

Adolescent pornography use has been framed within society as deeply problematic and harmful, which is rooted in the context of historical and political debates about the indecencies of pornography (e.g., Fine & McClelland, 2006; Mulholland, 2013). These debates are further fuelled by conflating violent with non-violent material or unlawful pornography with legal pornography, which leads to different perceptions of what pornography means. Simplified terms, such as '*pornification'*, are used to overstate the power that pornography holds over society, which is predominantly negative and limit alternative perspectives (Attwood et al., 2018b; Gill, 2012; Healy-Cullen et al., 2023). These concerns are then played out in the media well before scientific enquiry, making it difficult to separate

worry from actual impacts (Anastassiou, 2017; Egan, 2013; Jeffery, 2018). Considerable pressure then exists over how pornography should be addressed with adolescents who are commonly framed as an impressionable cohort that can be directly influenced by pornography in a linear way. The younger age band of 14 to 15 years has scant research due to the heavier burden of gaining informed consent. Yet concern for younger teens amplifies the fears about their vulnerability and ability to engage in complex decision making (Behun & Owen, 2019; Bonnie & Scott, 2013; Eleuteri et al., 2017; Santrock, 2016; Woolard & Scott, 2009). Unfortunately, this leads to adolescent perspectives about how they understand pornography being, all too often, absent. The concern about negative impacts and the lack of adolescent perspectives were key catalysts for the current study that explored how adolescents made sense of SEIM.

My final reflections recapitulate the importance of moving away from linear cause and effect assumptions that oversimplify adolescent pornography use as being harmful through the passive acceptance of negative sexual scripts. This is based on my findings that the adolescents in this study critically reflected on their SEIM use through drawing on their interactions with peers, parents, teachers, and sociocultural aspects that were internalised into ongoing debates about pornography use. These findings serve as a useful reminder that adolescent sexuality is an active and fluid process that is constructed through numerous sources of information across time, to which pornography is only one of these many sources. Adolescent perspectives encompassed tensions amidst differing messages that came from self-values (e.g., I'm a good person), biological expectations (e.g., puberty is natural), peers (e.g., just a bit of fun), media (e.g., commodifying pleasure), parents (e.g., sex is healthy but not porn), and school educators.

The findings challenge the idea that adolescents uncritically adopt negative messages found in pornography scripts. The current adolescents engaged in critical reflections about

pornography that led them to make choices that they believed aligned with their underlying value of being a ‘good’ human being. This parallels others who claim adolescents can determine what is good or bad according to their values (e.g., Byron et al., 2021) and aligns well with developmental models that position sexuality as a normal task that includes agency, pleasure, and taking risks (McKee et al., 2010; Peterson et al., 2023; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; WHO, 2010). Accordingly, developmental frameworks emphasise the importance of prior knowledge, values, and identity that develop through ongoing experiences (e.g., Erikson, 1988; Bandura, 1997) and consider learning about sex to be a normal part of maturing rather than being problematized (e.g., Boislard et al., 2016; McKee et al, 2010; Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; Healy-Cullen et al., 2023a, 2023b). The adolescent engagement in dilemmatic processes directly challenges the idea that SEIM is uncritically accepted by adolescents, with their viewpoints often remaining open ended.

Balancing both risk taking and risk mitigation is important. Positive developmental frameworks focus on identifying adaptive tasks to negotiate sexuality that includes adolescence taking risks and risk management strategies (e.g., McKee et al., 2010; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; WHO, 2010). However, this also requires de-pathologising adolescent sexuality by not assuming enjoyment and learning something from pornography is dangerous and associated with immorality. Instead, taking sexual risks in the current study was considered an important aspect of normal growth which was balanced by the adolescent’s proactive choices to mitigate possible risks and their maturing cognitive debates. The adolescents drew distinctions between sexual acts portrayed in pornography and perceived sexual interactions to help differentiate the important differences between pornography and how sex might look in real life, given the latter was associated with communication, caring, emotional connectedness, and consent. Pleasure was wrapped into disputable narratives and

risk management strategies, such as controlling the content and frequency of viewing, were woven into their dilemmas as evident through their narratives that emphasised the importance of choices and agency in managing how often they viewed SEIM.

Remaining in control was a particularly important proactive strategy. The perception of remaining in control of the content and amount held an important association with judging harmful effects. Although staying in control was important there was some uncertainty about how to judge what being out control would look like. While frequency rates have been used as an indicator of problematic pornography use this was not a useful indicator for the current participants. This indicates a need to move beyond simplifying SEIM use into whether it is used and how often. It is likely other adolescents may benefit from exploring the role of control in SEIM use. Equally, knowing when something is out of control will help inform their future choices around SEIM use and the need for support. Therefore, future exploration of the role of control within SEIM risk management strategies is recommended.

Furthermore, I have challenged the notion that adolescent perspectives about SEIM use are faulty or distorted. When adolescent perspectives do not align with adult concerns of harm that are embedded in dominant socio-cultural perspectives then adolescent perspectives have been reframed as distorted, with the assumption that they underestimate risks. The discrepancies between self and others regarding sexual practices has been labelled as moral incongruence (e.g., Bandura, 1989; Grubbs & Perry, 2019), moral panic (e.g., Jeffery, 2018; Livingstone & Haddon, 2012), and third-person effects (e.g., Lo et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2023), and the like. These distortions are used to describe why adolescent perceptions are inaccurate, and provide the justification for reframing such inaccuracies to align with healthy lifestyles through educational programs that inoculate adolescents against pornography and sexual risks (Peterson et al., 2023). I have proposed that these differences in perception could equally be conceptualised as showing compassion for others, whereby, compassion for others

is often desirable for well-being and social connectedness (Goetz & Simon-Thomas, 2017; Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2017) and healthy sex (Rothman et al., 2021).

Moreover, while SEIM was used by the current adolescents as part of their journey in understanding sex, it should not be automatically equated with harm. Many constructs used to assess harm are heavily grounded in contemporary social norms, making this a highly contentious construct to assess. SEIM use did not equate to ongoing frequent SEIM use that was considered harmful nor did it lead to condoning sexual behaviours or interactions that were considered socially unacceptable or outside socially sanctioned sexual practices, such as violence. Therefore, SEIM scripts served the function of understanding sexual mechanics but were not naïvely accepted as representing reality. The adolescents imposed limits around what was considered enjoyable and abusive material was considered off limits by all participants.

Ideally, future research needs to incorporate both negative and positive aspects of SEIM within the broader construct of sexuality, and to expand on how adolescents negotiate these dilemmas through various self-management strategies. This reiterates the call from other authors for a broader exploration of the meaning behind adolescent pornography use (e.g., Alexandraki et al. 2018; Attwood & Smith, 2011; McKee, 2014; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; Wright & Štulhofer, 2019). It is recommended SEIM use be conceptualized as a learning experience to help move away from judging which sexual acts are morally indecent to trusting adolescents to make good decisions grounded in prior learning experiences and social values. This is supported by recent changes in porn literacy programs that encourage student-centred discussions on pornography that allow them to hold complex viewpoints (e.g., Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; McKee et al., 2021; Peterson et al., 2023), and New Zealand's initiative to include pornography discussions into the school curriculum (NZHEA, 2020).

Likewise, the New Zealand relationships and sexuality education guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2021) describes the ākonga (student) as a learner who arrives with pre-existing ideas that can be built on (or disrupted) and education should not represent one world view or be bound by a political perspective. The guidelines encourage values of inclusivity, acceptance and tolerance through critical and creative thinking. In future, it is pivotal to acknowledge the active role adolescents play in selecting and understanding sexualized material (Alexandraki et al. 2018; Attwood & Smith 2011; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022a; McKee, 2014; Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Additionally, being student-centred provides opportunities for marginalised ethnic groups to self-determine what sexual health means in a respectful manner (Le Grice & Braun, 2018).

As noted, this study's participants showed many robust (or prosocial) characteristics, such as achieving average to above average academically, being well connected socially, and being engaged in extra-curricular activities. They all attributed responsibility to themselves and tended to hold socially liberal ideas about accepting peoples' sexual differences and allowing others the freedom to make their own choices. Nearly all participants had been involved in discussions about pornography with various adults which they made use of when unpacking their choices around SEIM use. However, many other youth may not be afforded with such open and direct discussions about pornography. Therefore, it would be helpful to know how adolescents without porn literacy compare to those with porn literacy when navigating and making sense of SEIM use.

Many youth have different experiences which may shape how they navigate and understand pornography. Studies involving more vulnerable youth have shown clearer evidence supporting negative impacts associated with pornography use (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Rostad et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2018). It is also important to consider how young women understand SEIM use as these have been purportedly different to adolescent

men (e.g., Johansson & Hammarén, 2007). Studies have found young women have felt pressured to use pornography (Dawson et al., 2020) and face different expectations and stigma (Carboni & Bhana, 2019; Rothman et al., 2015; Setty, 2022). Others have found young women present complex discourses that position pornography as a source of information but not necessarily enjoyed (Goldstein, 2021). Hence, it is recommended to explore how different cohorts understand the role of pornography in their development of sexual self and sexual expectations.

To conclude, the current study provided insights into how 14 to 15 year old New Zealand adolescents make sense of their SEIM use through using in-depth individual interviews that allowed all perspectives to be valid, both positive and negative. This provided a fuller understanding of the underlying dilemmas that adolescents engage in when making choices about their SEIM use and the context that these judgments are woven into. Furthermore, this study extended our understanding to younger adolescents, who are scarcely involved in direct conversations about pornography due to their age. The adolescent's clearly engaged in risk mitigating strategies and self-determined their limits about what type of pornography was acceptable to view. They critically reflected on their choices, and these evolved as they learnt more about the pornography industry through various sources. In future, it is important to understand the diverse ways that adolescents encounter, experience, and interpret their experiences with SEIM. This requires shifting away from evaluating the accuracy of adolescent insights based on how well they align with risk-focused frameworks to recognizing adolescent perspectives as holding validity and diverse perspectives.

## Postscript: Final reflections on my research practice

My final reflections are drawn from my experiences as I come to the endpoint of my current enquiry into adolescent perspectives on SEIM. My preliminary reflections about my researcher positionality and methodology discussed in Chapter Four are expanded here as these are inherent to my conclusions. I reflect on how I found using critical realism (CR) to expand my perspective on adolescent SEIM use. I then share my thoughts about my abstracted themes and acknowledge the pluralistic interpretations of my data. Finally, I briefly reflect on my uncertainties and reservations in doing this research.

I found CR useful to broaden my conceptualisation of adolescent SEIM use. As a clinical psychologist my training has focused on explanatory mechanisms for an individual's pathology using a bio-psycho-social framework with little consideration of how socio-political positions influence the construction of knowledge. This influence changed how I approached the topic from the outset and my reflections about the questions I posed. Instead of critiquing the identified problems from SEIM use, I considered the importance of how adolescence, sexuality, pornography, and harm have been constructed into contemporary opinions. This was helpful for understanding the diversity in opinions and the current debates about how adolescent SEIM use is harmful. Holding these various concepts in mind meant I could explore the participant's diverse perspectives when inquiring about their perspectives during the interviews. Exploration of who I am within the research process also required me to set aside my perception of objective neutrality (not that this is achievable but rather it is often a goal within clinical psychology) to engage in reflexive thought about the questions I asked and my role in constructing the findings.

This stance meant I remained open to multiple perspectives about adolescent SEIM use that considered varied interpretations of my data. For example, the current participants' rejection of abusive pornography while accepting others right to choose what they view can

be theorised through various frameworks. Attributing aggressive themes as something other men can view has been interpreted as ignoring problematic gendered differences as an extension of patriarchal inequalities (e.g., Antevska & Gavey, 2015; Keene, 2019), as symbolizing the pornification of society (e.g., Tyler & Coy, 2022), or as individual cognitive distortions (e.g., Grubbs & Perry, 2019). While these various perspectives offer insights into how pornography can guide sexual practices for adolescents through various socialisation processes, I have declined from claiming any one theory as being more essential than another. Instead, different models fitted better under different circumstances for different individuals. This notion of multiple interpretations that are flexible was seen in the adolescent narratives which also held multiple and shifting perspectives about SEIM use that they adapted to fit their situation.

I found exploring how adolescent perspectives aligned or differed from the current societal debates around SEIM use challenging on a number of fronts. Making sense of how individual agency sits within their background experiences and socialisation of normative practices was complex. When adolescents made statements about pornography being harmless entertainment, I wanted to be able to say that their perspectives had legitimacy rather than challenging its accuracy based on their naivety or being oblivious to the social cultural practices they were immersed in. However, I was aware that accepting this perspective can be challenged through various ideas, such as those proposed through 'pornification' of society. Therefore, the idea of pornography being harmless, no big deal, or entertainment could be thought of as being culturally engineered through the saturation process of pornography and neoliberal ideology that places freedom of choice up front. I could restructure adolescent perspectives as being slanted or reflecting poor judgement due to the saturation process of pornography. Nevertheless, reinterpreting adolescent perceptions to align with dominant adult viewpoints is problematic and raises more questions. Is it ethical to

reframe adolescent perspectives as being passive consumers of negative media messages? Does this then disempower them? Does this reinforce the message that adolescent perspectives are inauthentic and naïve? What would the adolescents I interviewed think about this? Why should my middle-aged feminine perspective be privileged over their perspective about pornography? These questions were imperative to taking appropriate "measures to ensure that harm is not caused to children, families or communities in the dissemination of the research findings" (Graham et al., 2013, p. 30). My conclusion from reviewing the various intersections between the individual, others and society was that reframing adolescent perspectives as being distorted or questionable would marginalise the validity of their perspective.

I also wanted to acknowledge that internal processes (thoughts, emotions, reflections and the like), were more accessible by participants than external or social activities. This meant I was faced with the decision of placing the individual centre stage but also needing to consider the social context. For example, the participants discussed how peers either accepted and normalised their SEIM use or rejected SEIM use which confirmed their idea that it should be avoided. Whilst peer approval has been reported to shape adolescents' perspectives on SEIM use, the current participants did not think they used SEIM because of their peers and they considered peers to be irrelevant to their decisions made in private. The participant's reflections about their peers were brief. They were unexpectedly reluctant to talk about peers because they did not want to hypothesise about other people's experiences as they considered this speculative and not factual. Consequently, I prioritised individualistic perspectives on SEIM use.

Whilst the participants focused on their own responsibility, I also reflected on what it meant to attribute this agency to participants. The participants held themselves responsible for their choices and for managing any negative outcomes. I wanted to take care in attributing

all choices to the individual given this individualistic ideology can be interpreted as overlooking environmental influences. Attributing choices to individual agency has led some authors to equate this as removing responsibility from the pornography industry, which is interpreted as condoning their unethical practices (e.g., McVey et al., 2021; Tyler & Coy, 2022). However, there is a fine line between taking responsibility and control over one's actions versus the neoliberal intersections that promote the commodification of sex. Hence, I would like to also acknowledge that the pornography industry has agency and as such holds responsibility for how they produce and distribute their work.

Overlapping the idea of agency is the relationship between the individual and social ideologies that underpin how pornography is talked about. For example, I considered how society values the notion of freedom of choice or conversely endorses banning pornography, with much of society sitting somewhere between these two ideas. For the participants, consideration of SEIM use was determined by 'it depends'. Consequently, my interpretations were applied to specific situations rather than generalised statements of pornography being all bad or all good. I moved away from using generic labels to focus on their fluctuating perspectives that adapted to their context and developed as they increased their sexual knowledge and began to grasp what pornography meant to them. Using generic or 'umbrella' terms downplays the complexities and messiness found in the adolescent choices and how they make sense of sexuality and pornography (see Chapter Two). The participant ideas were far from homogenous replicas of pornography scripts or passive acceptance of the so called pornification of society. Hence, a key objective during this study was to maintain context specific meaning that reflected the nuanced and contradictory ways adolescents made sense of SEIM use.

The last reflections are about my personal reservations in researching pornography and the pressures I experienced. From the outset I felt apprehension for how I would be

judged by peers, parents, and others who have an interest in this area. As a parent of three teenagers, I had uncertainties about how this would impact on them. Evidence for this concern came from comments made by parents when they discovered what I was researching. Some parents were interested but some parents threw disapproving glances and just quietly stopped inviting my teenagers to their home. Experiencing this judgement parallels how adolescents may feel about adult judgments when sharing their private viewpoints. This concern for being judged negatively was then used to enhance my empathy for teenagers. It confirmed the importance of taking a non-judgemental stance and valuing all perspectives based on the underlying philosophy that the world might be a better place if we could see things from different perspectives.

Finally, given the polarised views about pornography, I was aware that I could be labelled as being either pro-porn or anti-porn irrespective of my belief that neither perspective captures how or what it means to use pornography. I hold my middle-aged feminine ideology, that society has much work to do to remedy gender inequalities, alongside other social inequalities. Exploitation of women through positions of power, such as sex trafficking and coercion, is never acceptable but typically does not occur during the consumption of pornography. Therefore, while the production and consumption of pornography are two sides of the same coin (united by their dependency on each other), they are not the same. Moreover, degradation of pornography performers through negative judgments about their career can also be damaging. This then brings me back to the need for specificity to help address my apprehension regarding how my intentions can be misinterpreted. For example, I drink coffee and I know that workers are exploited in the production of coffee. However, if I choose to drink fair trade coffee then I remove the exploitation during its production. Similarly, if we discuss pornography in a mature manner then we can discuss ethical pornography options as well, such as determining criteria for

pornography that supports healthy sexuality (e.g., McKee et al., 2023) or online sex positive platforms that destigmatise sex and dismantles structural oppressions that marginalise minority groups (Stardust et al., 2022).

## References

Abadie, R., Goldenberg, S., Welch-Lazoritz, M., & Fisher, C. (2018). Establishing trust in HIV/HCV research among people who inject drugs (PWID): insights from empirical research. *PLoS ONE, 13(12),* e0208410. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208410

Agbebiyi, A. (2013). Tiers of gatekeepers and ethical practice: researching adolescent students and sexually explicit online material. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 16(*6), 535-540. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2013.823290

Ahern, K. (2014). Gatekeepers: people who can (and do) stop your research in its tracks. Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/978144627305014536673

Albury, K. (2014). Porn and sex education, porn as sex education. *Porn Studies, 1(1–2),* 172–181. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2013.863654

Alexandraki, K., Stavropoulos, V., Anderson, E., Latifi, M., & Gomez, R. (2018). Adolescent pornography use: a systematic literature review of research trends 2000-2017. *Current Psychiatry Reviews, 14*(1), 47–58. https://doi.org/10.2174/2211556007666180606073617

Allen, L. (2006). "Looking at the real thing": young men, pornography, and sexuality education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 27*(1), 69–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300500510302

Allen, L. (2007). Doing 'it' differently: relinquishing the disease and pregnancy prevention focus of sexuality education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 28*(5), 575–588. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690701505367

Allen, L. (2011). *Young people and sexuality education: rethinking key debates.* Palgrave MacMillan.

Allen, L. & Quinlivan, K. (2016). A radical plurality: re-thinking cultural and religious diversity in sexuality education in Aotearoa, New Zealand. In V. Sundaram., & H. Sauntson (Eds.), *Global perspectives and key debates in sex and relationships education: addressing issues of gender, sexuality, plurality and power* (pp. 115-129). Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: 10.1057/9781137500229.0012.

American Psychological Association. (2007). *Report of the APA task force on the sexualization of girls*. American Psychological Association. http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html

Anastassiou, A. (2017). Sexting and young people: a review of the qualitative literature. *The Qualitative Report, 22* (8), 2231-2239. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.2951

Antevska, A., & Gavey, N. (2015). "Out of sight and out of mind": detachment and men's consumption of male sexual dominance and female submission in pornography. *Men and Masculinities, 18*(5), 605-629. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X15574339

Arrington-Sanders, R., Harper, G., Morgan, A., Ogunbajo, A., Trent, M., & Fortenberry, J. (2015). The role of sexually explicit material in the sexual development of same-sex-attracted Black adolescent males. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 44*(3), 597-608. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0416-x

Archer, M. S. (1998). *Critical realism: essential readings*. Routledge.

Ashton, S., McDonald, K., & Kirkman, M. (2019). What does 'pornography' mean in the digital age? Revisiting a definition for social science researchers. *Porn Studies, 6*(2), 144-168. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2018.1544096

Aspin, C., & Hutchings, J. (2007). Reclaiming the past to inform the future: contemporary views of maori sexuality. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 9*(4), 415–427. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050701195119

Attwood, F., & Smith, C. (2011). Investigating young people's sexual cultures: an introduction. *Sex Education, 11*(3), 235-242. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2011.590040

Attwood, F., Smith, C., & Barker, M. (2018). 'I'm just curious and still exploring myself': young people and pornography. *New Media and Society, 20*(10), 3738-3759. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1461444818759271

Attwood, F., Maina, G., & Smith, C. (2018b). Conceptualizing, researching and writing about pornography, *Porn Studies, 5*(1), 1-5, https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2018.1444008

Baams, L., Overbeek, G., Dubas, J., Doornwaard, S., Rommes, E., & Van Aken, M. (2015). Perceived realism moderates the relation between sexualized media consumption and permissive sexual attitudes in Dutch adolescents. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 44*(3), 743–754. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0443-7

Bahn, S., & Weatherill, P. (2012). Qualitative social research: a risky business when it comes to collecting 'sensitive' data. *Qualitative Research, 13*(1), 19-35. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112439016

Bandura, A. (1989). Human agency in social cognitive theory. *American Psychologist, 44*(9), 1175-1184. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.9.1175

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: the exercise of control*. NY: W.H. Freeman.

Bandura, A. (2002). Selective moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency. *Journal of Moral Education, 31*(2), 101-119. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305724022014322

Barnett, P., & Bagshaw, P. (2020). Neoliberalism: what it is, how it affects health and what to do about it. *New Zealand Medical Journal, 133*(1512), 76-84.

Barton, B. (2021). *The pornification of America: how raunch culture is ruining our society*. NYU Press.

Behun, R., & Owens, E. (2019). *Youth and internet pornography: the impact and influence on adolescent development*: Routledge.

Bellis, M., Downing, J., & Ashton, J. (2006). Adults at 12? Trends in puberty and their public health consequences. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, *60*(11), 910-911. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2006.049379

Beyers, W., & Seiffge-Krenke, I. (2010). Does identity precede intimacy? testing Erikson's theory on romantic development in emerging adults of the 21st century. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *25*(3), 387-415. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558410361370

Bhaskar, R. (2008). *A realist theory of science.* Routledge

Bhaskar, R. (2009). *Scientific realism & human emancipation*. Routledge

Bhaskar, R. (2011). *From science to emancipation: alienation and the actuality of enlightenment* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Bhaskar, R., & Lawson, T. (1998). Introduction: basic texts and developments. In M. Archer., R. Bhaskar., A. Collier., T. Lawson., & A. Norrie (Eds.), *Critical realism: essential readings* (pp. 3-15). Routledge.

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: a tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research*, *26*(13), 1802-1811. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870

Boislard, M-A., van de Bongardt, D., & Blais, M. (2016). Sexuality (and lack thereof) in adolescence and early adulthood: a review of the literature. *Behavioral Sciences*, *6*(1), 8. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs6010008

Bonnie, R., & Scott, E. (2013). The teenage brain: adolescent brain research and the law. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*(2), 158-161. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721412471678

Bőthe, B., Tóth-Király, I., Potenza, M. N., Orosz, G., & Demetrovics, Z. (2020). High-frequency pornography use may not always be problematic. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 17*(4), 793-811. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2020.01.007

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: a practical guide for beginners*. Sage.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 18* (3), 328-352, https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative Psychology, 9*(1), 3–26. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000196

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Rance, N. (2014). How to use thematic analysis with interview data (process research). In A. Vossler & N. Moller (Eds.), *The counselling & psychotherapy research handbook* (pp. 183-197). Sage.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Terry, G. (2015). Thematic analysis. In P. Rohleder & A. Lyons (Eds.), *Qualitative research in clinical and health psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 95-113). Palgrave MacMillan.

Braun-Courville, D., & Rojas, M. (2009). Exposure to sexually explicit web sites and adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviors. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 45*(2), 156-162. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2008.12.004

Brickell, C. (2017). *Teenagers the rise of youth culture in New Zealand.* Auckland University Press, New Zealand.

Bridges, A., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E., Sun, C., & Liberman, R. (2010). Aggression and sexual behavior in best-selling pornography videos: a content analysis update. *Violence Against Women, 16*(10), 1065-1085. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1077801210382866

Brown, J., Holloway, E., Akakpo, T., & Aalsma, M. (2014). "Straight up": enhancing rapport and therapeutic alliance with previously-detained youth in the delivery of mental health services. *Community Mental Health Journal, 50*(2), 193–203. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-013-9617-3

Brown, J., & L'Engle, K. (2009). X-Rated: sexual attitudes and behaviors associated with U.S. early adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit media. *Communication Research, 36*(1), 129-151. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0093650208326465

Brown, J., & Wisco, J. (2019). The components of the adolescent brain and its unique sensitivity to sexually explicit material. *Journal of Adolescence, 72*(1), 10-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.01.006

Byron, P., McKee, A., Watson, A., Litsou, K., & Ingham, R. (2021). Reading for realness: porn literacies, digital media, and young people. *Sexuality & Culture, 25*(3), 786-805. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-020-09794-6

Cameron, K., Salazar, L, Bernhardt, J., Wingood, G., DiClemente, R., & Burgess-Whitman, N. (2005). Adolescents' experience with sex on the web: results from online focus groups. *Journal of Adolescence, 28*(4), 535-540. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2004.10.006

Carboni, N., & Bhana, D. (2017). Forbidden fruit: the politics of researching young people's use of online sexually explicit materials in South African schools. *Sex Education, 17*(6), 635-646. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2017.1344629

Carboni, N., & Bhana, D. (2019). Teenage girls negotiating femininity in the context of sexually explicit materials. *Sex Education, 19*(4), 371-388. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2019.1577730

Carlson, T., Calder-Dawe, O., & Jensen-Lesatele, V. (2022). 'You can't really define it can you?' Rangatahi perspectives on hauora and wellbeing. *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand, 52*(4), 409-425. https://doi.org/10.1080/03036758.2022.2074060

Carmody, M., & Ovenden, G. (2013). Putting ethical sex into practice: sexual negotiation, gender and citizenship in the lives of young women and men. *Journal of Youth Studies, 16*(6), 792–807. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.763916

Carrotte, E. R., Davis, A. C., & Lim, M. S. (2020). Sexual behaviors and violence in pornography: systematic review and narrative synthesis of video content analyses. *Journal of Medical Internet Research, 22*(5), e16702. https://doi.org/10.2196/16702

Carver, C. S., & Harmon-Jones, E. (2009). Anger is an approach-related affect: evidence and implications. *Psychological Bulletin, 135(2),* 183–204. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013965

Castro-Calvo, J., Giménez-García, C., Gil-Llario, M., & Ballester-Arnal, R. (2018). Motives to engage in online sexual activities and their links to excessive and problematic use: a systematic review. *Current Addiction Reports, 5*(4), 491-510. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-018-0230-y

Catania, J., Binson, D., Canchola, J., Pollack, L.M., Hauck, W., & Coates, T.J. (1996). Effects of interviewer gender, interviewer choice, and item wording on responses to

questions concerning sexual behavior. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, *60*(3), 345-375. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2749741

Chamberlain, K. (2014). Epistemology and qualitative research. In P. Rohleder & A. Lyons (Eds.), *Qualitative research in clinical and health psychology* (pp. 9-28). Palgrave MacMillan.

Chamberlain, K., & Hodgetts, D. (2022). Challenges in designing qualitative research when working with and for hard-to-reach groups. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research Design (Vol. 2.*, pp.1000-1014). Sage.

Chmielewski, F., Tolman, L., & Kincaid, H. (2017). Constructing risk and responsibility: a gender, race, and class analysis of news representations of adolescent sexuality. *Feminist Media Studies*, *17*(3), 412–425. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2017.1283348

Christoffel, P. (1989). *Censored: a short history of censorship in New Zealand*. Department of Internal Affairs: Wellington.

Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2016). Thematic analysis. In E. Lyons & A. Coyle (Eds.), *Analysing Qualitative Data in Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 84-103). Sage.

Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2018). Thematic analysis. Retrieved from https://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/our-research/research-groups/thematic-analysis.html

Classification Office. (2020). *Growing up with porn: insights from young New Zealanders*. Wellington, NZ: Classification Office.

Connolly, J.A. & McIsaac, C. (2009). Romantic relationships in adolescence. In R. M. Lerner & L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology: contextual influences on adolescent development* (Vol. 2, 3rd ed., pp. 104-151). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470479193.adlpsy002005

Cook, D., & Monk, L. (2020). 'Being able to take that mask off': adolescent clients' experiences of power in person-centered therapy relationships. *Person Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies, 19*(2), 95-111. https://doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2020.1717982

Cooper, A.L. (1998). Sexuality and the Internet: surfing into the new millennium. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior, 1*(2), 187-193. DOI:10.1089/cpb.1998.1.187

Cooper, A., & Griffin-Shelley, E. (2002). Introduction: the Internet: the next sexual revolution. In A. Cooper (Ed.), *Sex and the Internet: a guidebook for clinicians* (pp. 1-15). Brunner & Routledge.

Couch. J., Durant, B., & Hill, J. (2015). Uncovering marginalised knowledges: undertaking research with hard-to-reach young people. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches, 8*(1), 15-23. https://doi.org/10.5172/mra.2014.8.1.15

Coy, M., & Horvath, M. (2018). Young people, pornography, and gendered sexual practices. In S. Lamb & J. Gilbert (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sexual development: childhood and adolescence* (pp. 462-482). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108116121.024

Crabbe, M. (2022). *It's time we talked.* Retrieved from https://itstimewetalked.com/young-people/

Crabbe, M., & Flood, M. (2021). School-based education to address pornography's influence on young people: a proposed practice framework. *American Journal of Sexuality Education, 16*(1), 1-37. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2020.1856744

Cram, F. (2001). Ma Te Wa e Whakaatu Mai: time will tell. *Feminism and Psychology, 11*(3), 401-406–406. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353501011003011

Crawford, M., & Popp, D. (2003). Sexual double standards: a review and methodological critique of two decades of research. *The Journal of Sex Research, 40*(1), 13-26. doi:10.1080/00224490309552163

Danermark, B. (2019). Applied interdisciplinary research: a critical realist perspective, *Journal of Critical Realism, 18*(4), 368-382, DOI: 10.1080/14767430.2019.1644983

Danermark, B., Ekström, M., & Karlsson, J. C. (2019). *Explaining society: critical realism in the social sciences* (2nd ed). Routledge.

Davis, A. C, Carrotte, E., Hellard, M. E., Lim, M. S. C., & Temple-Smith, M. J. (2020). A descriptive analysis of young women's pornography use: a tale of exploration and harm. *Sexual Health, 17*(1), 69-76. https://doi.org/10.1071/SH19131

Dawson, K., Gabhainn, S., & MacNeela, P. (2019). Dissatisfaction with school sex education is not associated with using pornography for sexual information. *Porn Studies, 6*(2), 245-257. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2018.1525307

Dawson, K., Gabhainn, S., & MacNeela, P. (2020). Toward a model of porn literacy: core concepts, rationales, and approaches. *Journal of Sex Research, 57*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2018.1556238

Day, E. (2021). *Digital age assurance tools and children's rights online across the globe: a discussion paper*. UNICEF

Dempsey, L., Dowling, M., Larkin, P., & Murphy, K. (2016). Sensitive interviewing in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing and Health, 39*, 480-490. https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.21743

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (8 February 2022). World-leading measures to protect children from accessing pornography online https://www.gov.uk/government/news/world-leading-measures-to-protect-children-from-accessing-pornography-online.

Department of Internal Affairs. (n.d.). Films, Videos, and Publications Classifications Act 1993. Retrieved 4 April, 2017, from https://www.legislation.govt.nz/

Department of Justice. (1989). *A summary of pornography: report of the ministerial committee of inquiry into pornography*. New Zealand Government.

Dines, G. (2010). *Pornland: how porn has hijacked our sexuality*. Beacon Press Books.

Dodou, D., & De Winter. J. (2014). Social desirability is the same in offline, online, and paper surveys: a meta-analysis. *Computers in Human Behavior, 36*, 487–495. https://doi-org.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/10.1016/j.chb.2014.04.005

Donevan, M., & Mattebo, M. (2017). The relationship between frequent pornography consumption, behaviours, and sexual preoccupancy among male adolescents in Sweden. *Sexual Reproductive Healthcare, 12*, 82–7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.srhc.2017.03.002

Doornwaard, S., Bickham, D., Rich, M., ter Bogt, T., & van den Eijnden, R. (2015a). Adolescents' use of sexually explicit internet material and their sexual attitudes and behavior: parallel development and directional effects. *Developmental Psychology, 51*(10), 1476-1488. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dev0000040

Doornwaard, S., den Boer, F., Vanwesenbeeck, I., van Nijnatten, C., ter Bogt, T., & van den Eijnden, R. (2017). Dutch adolescents' motives, perceptions, and reflections toward sex-related internet use: results of a web-based focus-group study. *Journal of Sex Research, 54*(8), 1038-1050. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2016.1255873

Doornwaard, S., van den Eijnden, R., Baams, L., Vanwesenbeeck, I., & ter Bogt, T. (2016). Lower psychological well-being and excessive sexual interest predict symptoms of compulsive use of sexually explicit internet material among adolescent boys. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 45*(1), 73-84. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-015-0326-9

Doornwaard, S., van den Eijnden, R., ter Bogt, T., & Overbeek, G. (2015b). Differential developmental profiles of adolescents using sexually explicit internet material. *Journal of Sex Research, 52*(3), 269-281. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2013.866195

Döring, N. (2009). The Internet's impact on sexuality: a critical review of 15 years of research. *Computers in Human Behavior, 25*(5), 1089-1101. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2009.04.003

Döring, N., & Miller, D. J. (2022). Conceptual overview (portrayals of sexuality in pornography). *DOCA - Database of Variables for Content Analysis*. https://doi.org/10.34778/5k

Draucker, C., Martsolf, D., & Poole, C. (2009). Developing distress protocols for research on sensitive topics. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 23*(5), 343-350. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnu.2008.10.008

Durant, L., & Carey, M. (2000). Self-administered questionnaires versus face-to-face interviews in assessing sexual behavior in young women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 29*(4), 309-322. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1001930202526

Dworkin, A. (1989). *Pornography: men possessing women*. Penguin.

Efrati, Y. (2020). Problematic and non-problematic pornography use and compulsive sexual behaviors among understudied populations: children and adolescents. *Current Addiction Reports, 7*(1), 68-75. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-020-00300-4

Efrati, Y., & Amichai-Hamburger, Y. (2019). The use of online pornography as compensation for loneliness and lack of social ties among Israeli adolescents. *Psychological Reports, 122*(5), 1865-1882. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294118797580

Egan, R.D. (2013). *Becoming sexual: a critical appraisal of the sexualization of girls.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Eleuteri, S., Saladino, V., & Verrastro, V. (2017). Identity, relationships, sexuality, and risky behaviors of adolescents in the context of social media. *Sexual & Relationship Therapy, 32*(3/4), 354-365. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2017.1397953

Ellard-Gray, A., Jeffrey. N., Choubak, M., & Crann, S. (2015). Finding the hidden participant: solutions for recruiting hidden, hard-to-reach, and vulnerable populations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 14(5), 1-10. https://doi.org/1609406915621420

Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2023). The Britannica Dictionary. https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/harm

Enough Is Enough. (n.d.). Pornography. Retrieved 30 November, 2022, from Enough Is Enough: Pornography

Erikson, E. H. (1988). Youth: fidelity and diversity. *Daedalus, 117*(3), 1–24. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20025167

Evans, A., & Riley, S. (2014). *Technologies of sexiness: sex, identity, and consumer culture*, sexuality, identity, and society. Online edition, Oxford Academic. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199914760.001.0001

Family First. (2021, May 14). UNICEF report says pornography is not always harmful to children. https://familyfirst.org.nz/2021/05/14/unicef-report-says-pornography-not-always-harmful-to-children/

Fight the New Drug. (2018). Porn harms in three ways. Fightthenewdrud.org https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-watching-porn-changes-your-brain/

Fine, M., & McClelland, S. (2006). Sexuality education and desire: still missing after all these years. *Harvard Educational Review, 76*(3), 297-338. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.76.3.w5042g23122n6703

Fisher, W., & Kohut, T. (2020). Reading pornography: methodology considerations in evaluating pornography research. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 17*(2), 195-209. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2019.11.257

Fitzpatrick, K., (2014). Critical approaches to health education. In K. Fitzpatrick & R. Tinning (Eds.), *Health education: critical perspectives* (pp. 173–189). Routledge.

Flood, M. (2007). Exposure to pornography among youth in Australia. *Journal of Sociology, 43*(1), 45–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783307073934

Flood, M. (2009). The harms of pornography exposure among children and young people. *Child Abuse Review, 18*(6), 384-400. https://doi.org/10.1002/car.1092

Flood, M. (2020, January 5). *Pornography has deeply troubling effects on young people, but there are ways we can minimise the harm.* The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/pornography-has-deeply-troubling-effects-on-young-people-but-there-are-ways-we-can-minimise-the-harm-127319

Flood, M., & Hamilton, C. (2003). *Youth and pornography in Australia: evidence on the extent of exposure and likely effects*. Discussion Paper Number 52. The Australia Institute: https://eprints.qut.edu.au/103421/

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality.* Penguin.

Freeman, S., Skinner, K., Middleton, L., Xiong, B., & Fang, M. (2021). Building relationships with hard-to-reach, hidden, and seldom-heard populations in research. In A. Sixsmith, J. Sixsmith, A. Mihailidis, & M. Fang (Eds.), *Knowledge, innovation, and impact* (pp.107-115). Springer, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34390-3_15

Fukui, A., & Westmore, B. (1994). To see or not to see: the debate over pornography and its relationship to sexual aggression. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 28*, 600-606. doi:10.3109/00048679409080783

Fuzzell, L., Fedesco, H., Alexander, S., Fortenberry, J., & Shields, C. (2016). "I just think that doctors need to ask more questions": sexual minority and majority adolescents' experiences talking about sexuality with healthcare providers. *Patient Education and Counseling, 99*(9), 1467–1472. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2016.06.004

Garland-Levett, S., & Allen, L. (2019). The fertile, thorny, and enduring role of desire and pleasure in sexuality education. In S. Lamb, & J. Gilbert (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sexual development: childhood and adolescence* (pp. 521–536). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108116121.027

Gavey, N. (2012). Beyond "empowerment"? sexuality in a sexist world. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 66*(11–12), 718–724. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-0069-3

Gibson, K., & Cartwright, C. (2013). Agency in young clients' narratives of counseling: 'It's whatever you want to make of it'. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 60*(3), 340–352. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033110

Gilbert, H. (1992). So long as it's not sex and violence: Andrea Dworkin's *Mercy*. In L. Segal, & M. McIntosh (Eds.), *Sex exposed: sexuality and the pornography debate* (pp. 216-229). Virago.

Gilbert, P., & Simos, G. (Eds.). (2022*). Compassion focused therapy: clinical practice and applications* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi-org.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/10.4324/9781003035879

Gill, R. (2012). Media, empowerment and the "sexualization of culture" debates. *Sex Roles, A Journal of Research, 66*(11–12), 736–745. DOI 10.1007/s11199-011-0107-1

Giordano, A.L., Schmit, M.K., Clement, K., Potts, E.E., & Graham, A.R. (2022). Pornography use and sexting trends among American adolescents: data to inform school counseling programming and practice. *Professional School Counseling, 26*(1), 1-11, http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2156759X221137287

Goetz, J. L., & Simon-Thomas, E. (2017). The landscape of compassion: definitions and scientific approaches. In E. Seppälä, E. Simon-Thomas, S. Brown, M. Worline, C. Cameron, & J. Doty (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science* (pp. 3-16). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190464684.013.1

Goldstein, A. (2020). Beyond porn literacy: drawing on young people's pornography narratives to expand sex education pedagogies. *Sex Education, 20*(1), 59-74. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2019.1621826

Goldstein, A. (2021). Learner, laugher, lover, critic: young women's normative and emerging orientations towards pornography. *Porn Studies, 8*(1), 5-20, https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2020.1736608

Gorman, S., Monk-Turner, E., & Fish, J. (2010). Free adult Internet web sites: how prevalent are degrading acts? *Gender Issues, 27,* 131–145. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-010-9095-7

Gorski, P. S. (2013). "What is critical realism? and why should you care?". *Contempory Sociology, 42*(5), 658-670. DOI: 10.1177/0094306113499533

Graham, A., Powell, M., Taylor, N., Anderson, D. & Fitzgerald, R. (2013). *Ethical research involving children.* UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti.

Graham, J. (1987). Child employment in New Zealand. *The Historical Journal, 30,* 62-78. http://www.nzjh.auckland.ac.nz/docs/1987/NZJH_21_1_09.pdf

Grant, M., & Booth, A. (2009). A typology of reviews: an analysis of 14 review types and associated methodologies. *Health Information & Libraries Journal, 26*(2), 91-108. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-1842.2009.00848.x

Grebowicz, M. (2013). *Why Internet Porn Matters*. Stanford University Press.

Grubbs, J.B., & Perry, S.L. (2019). Moral incongruence and pornography use: a critical review and integration, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 56(1), 29-37, https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2018.1427204

Grüning, D. J., & Schubert, T. W. (2022). Emotional campaigning in politics: being moved and anger in political ads motivate to support candidate and party. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.781851

Guest, G., Namey, E., Taylor, J., Eley, N., & McKenna, K. (2017). Comparing focus groups and individual interviews: findings from a randomized study. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 20*(6), 693-708. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2017.1281601

Haddon, L., & Livingstone, S.M. (2012). Theoretical framework for children's internet use. In S. Livingstone, & L. Haddon (Eds.), *Children, risk and safety on the Internet: research and policy challenges in comparative perspective* (pp. 1-14). Policy. https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781847428837.001.0001

Häggström-Nordin, E., Hanson, U., & Tyden, T. (2005). Associations between pornography consumption and sexual practices among adolescents in Sweden. *International Journal of STD and AIDS, 16*(2), 102–107. https://doi.org/10.1258/0956462053057512

Häggström-Nordin, E., Sandberg, J., Hanson, U., & Tydén, T. (2006). “It’s everywhere!” Young Swedish people’s thoughts and reflections about pornography. *Scandinavian*

*Journal of Caring Sciences, 20*(4), 386–393. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6712.2006.00417.x

Haghdoost, A., Baneshi, M., Eybpoosh, S., & Khajehkazemi, R. (2013). Comparison of three interview methods on response pattern to sensitive and non-sensitive questions. *Iranian Red Crescent Medical Journal, 15*(6), 500-506. https://doi.org/10.5812/ircmj.7673

Hald, G., Kuyper, L., Adam, P., & de Wit, J. (2013). Does viewing explain doing? Assessing the association between sexually explicit materials use and sexual behaviors in a large sample of Dutch adolescents and young adults. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 10*(12), 2986–2995. https://doi.org/10.1111/jsm.12157

Hald, G., Malamuth, N., & Yuen, C. (2010). Pornography and attitudes supporting violence against women: revisiting the relationship in nonexperimental studies. *Aggressive Behavior, 36*(1), 14-20. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20328

Hald, G., Seaman, C., & Linz, D. (2014). Sexuality and pornography. In D.L. Tolman & L.M. Diamond (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology: contextual influences on adolescent development* (Vol. 2, 3rd ed., pp. 3-35). Wiley. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/14194-001.

Hansson, S. O. (2010). Risk: objective or subjective, facts or values. *Journal of Risk Research, 13*(2), 231–238. https://doi.org/10.1080/13669870903126226

Hare, K., Gahagan, J., Jackson, L., & Steenbeek, A. (2015). Revisualising 'porn': how young adults' consumption of sexually explicit internet movies can inform approaches to Canadian sexual health promotion. *Culture, Health and Sexuality, 17*(3), 269-283. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2014.919409

Healy-Cullen, S., Taylor, J., Ross, K., & Morison, T. (2022a). Youth encounters with internet pornography: a survey of youth, caregiver, and educator perspectives. *Sexuality and Culture,* 26, 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-021-09904-y

Healy-Cullen, S., Morison, T., Ross, K., & Taylor, J. E. (2022b). How do youth, parents, and educators use discursive sexual scripts to make sense of youth engagement with internet pornography? *Porn Studies, 9*(4), 445-463. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2022.2125898

Healy-Cullen, S., Morison, T., Taylor, J. E., & Taylor, K. (2023a). Performing smart sexual selves: a sexual scripting analysis of youth talk about internet pornography. *Sexualities,* 1–17. Epub ahead of print. https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607231152596

Healy-Cullen, S., Morison, T., Taylor, J. E., & Taylor, K. (2023b). What does it mean to be "porn literate": perspectives of young people, parents and teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 1–17. Epub ahead of print. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2023.2194355

Healy-Cullen, S., O'Rourke, T., O'Higgins, S., McIvor, C., Achteresch, E., Bharath, A., ... MacNeela, P. (2023). Using communication stories to explore how young people draw on sexual scripts when making sense of sexual consent. *Sexuality & Culture,* 1-22. Epub ahead of print. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-023-10078-y

Henry, C., & Talbot, H. (2019). The complexities of young New Zealanders' use and perceptions of pornography: a quantitative survey in context. *Porn Studies, 6*(4), 391–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2019.1656544

Hewitt, J. (2007). Ethical components of researcher-researched relationships in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Health Research,* 17(8), 1149–1159. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732307308305

Holliday, S.B., Ewing, B.A., Storholm, E.D., Parast, L., & D'Amico, E.J. (2017). Gender differences in the association between conduct disorder and risky sexual behaviour. *Journal of Adolescence, 56*(1), 75-83. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.01.008

Holmes, A. (2020). Researcher positionality – a consideration of its influence and place in qualitative research – a new researcher guide. *International Journal of Education, 8*(4), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v8i4.3232

Holt, K., Holt, T., Cale, J., Brewer, R., & Goldsmith, A. (2021). Assessing the role of self-control and technology access on adolescent sexting and sext dissemination. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *125*, 106952. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.106952

Hudson, M., Milne, M., Reynolds, P., Russell, K., & Smith, B. (2010). *Te Ara Tika: guidelines for Māori research ethics: a framework for researchers and ethics committee members.* Health Research Council of New Zealand on behalf of the Pūtaiora Writing Group. https://www.hrc.govt.nz/resources/te-ara-tika-guidelines-maori-research-ethics-0

Hunt, L. (1993). *The Invention of Pornography: obscenity and the origins of modernity, 1500-1800.* Princeton University Press.

Hyde, J. S. (2014). Gender similarities and differences. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *65*(1), 373-398. doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115057

Jeffery, C. (2018). Too sexy too soon, or just another moral panic? Sexualization, children, and "technopanics" in the Australian media 2004–2015. *Feminist Media Studies, 18*(3), 366-380. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2017.1367699

Jensen, R. (2016). Pornographic values: hierarchy and hubris. *Sexualization, Media, & Society, 2*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2374623815627787

Johansson, T. & Hammarén, N. (2007). Hegemonic masculinity and pornography: young people's attitudes toward and relations to pornography. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 15* (1), 57-70. https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1501.57

Kammeyer, K. (2008). *A hypersexual society. Sexual discourse, erotica, and pornography in America today.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Kassel, G. (2020, September 3). What does it actually mean to be 'sex positive'? https://www.healthline.com/health/healthy-sex/sex-positive-meaning

Keene, S. (2019). *Pleasure, pain and pornography: a gendered analysis of the influence of contemporary pornography on the lives of New Zealand emerging adults,* Victoria University of Wellington [Doctoral dissertation].

Kendrick, W. (1987). *The secret museum: pornography in modern culture*. University of California Press.

King, P., & Robertson, N. (2017). Māori men, relationships, and everyday practices: towards broadening domestic violence research. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples, 13*(4), 210–217. https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180117729850

Klaassen, M., & Peter, J. (2015). Gender (in) equality in internet pornography: a content analysis of popular pornographic internet videos. *The Journal of Sex Research, 52*(7), 721–735. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2014.976781

Klein, S., Krikova, K., Antons, S., Brand, M., Klucken, T., & Stark, R. (2022). Reward responsiveness, learning, and valuation implicated in problematic pornography use — a research domain criteria perspective. *Current Addiction Reports, 9*(3), 114-125. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-022-00423-w

Knight, K., Gibson, K., & Cartwright, C. (2018). "It's like a refuge": Young people's relationships with school counsellors. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research, 18*(4), 377–386. https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12186

Kohut, T., Balzarini, R., Fisher, W., Grubbs, J., Campbell, L., & Prause, N. (2020). Surveying pornography use: a shaky science resting on poor measurement foundations. *The Journal of Sex Research, 57*(6), 722-742. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1695244

Kraus, W., Rosenberg, H., & Tompsett, J. (2015). Assessment of self-efficacy to employ self-initiated pornography use-reduction strategies. *Addictive Behaviors, 40,* 115–118. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2014.09.012

Kruger, L., Rodgers, R., Long, S., & Lowy, A. (2019). Individual interviews or focus groups? interview format and women's self-disclosure. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 22*(3), 245-255. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2018.1518857

Krumpal, I. (2013). Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: a literature review. *Quality and Quantity: International Journal of Methodology, 47*(4), 2025-2047. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-011-9640-9

Lamb, S., & Koven, J. (2019). Sexualization of girls: addressing criticism of the APA Report, presenting new evidence. Sage Open, 9. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019881024

Lamb, S., White, L., & Plocha, A. (2018). Are children sexual? who, what, where, when, and how? In J. Gilbert & S. Lamb (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sexual development: childhood and adolescence* (pp. 17-34). Cambridge University Press.

Lamprianou, I. (2022). Surveying through gatekeepers in social research: methodological problems and suggestions. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 25*(6), 783-795. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2021.1940775

Landripet, I., Buško, V., & Štulhofer, A. (2019). Testing the content progression thesis: a longitudinal assessment of pornography use and preference for coercive and violent

content among male adolescents. *Social Science Research, 81*, 32-41. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2019.03.003

Larkin, M. (2015). Choosing your approach. In J.A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to research methods* (3rd ed., pp. 249-256). Sage Publications Ltd.

Le Grice, J., & Braun, V. (2018). Indigenous (Māori) sexual health psychologies in New Zealand: delivering culturally congruent sexuality education. *Journal of Health Psychology, 23*(2), 175-187. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105317739909

Levitt, H. (2020). *Reporting qualitative research in psychology: how to meet APA style journal article reporting standards* (Revised ed.). American Psychological Association.

Levitt, H., Motulsky, S., Wertz, F., Morrow, S., & Ponterotto, J. (2017). Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology: promoting methodological integrity. *Qualitative Psychology, 4*(1), 2–22. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000082

Lim, M., Agius, P., Carrotte, E., Vella, A., & Hellard, M. (2017). Young Australians' use of pornography and associations with sexual risk behaviours. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 41*(4), 438-443. https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12678

Lo, V-H., Wei, R., Zhang, X., & Guo, L. (2016). Theoretical and methodological patterns of third-person effect research: a comparative thematic analysis of Asia and the world. *Asian Journal of Communication, 26*(6), 583-604. https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2016.1218902

Lobe, B., Livingstone, S., Olafsson, K., & Alberto, S. (2008). *Best practice research guide: how to research children and online technologies in comparative perspective*. EU Kids Online Network.

Lofgren-Mårtenson, L., & Månsson, S.-A. (2010). Lust, love, and life: a qualitative study of Swedish adolescents' perceptions and experiences with pornography. *Journal of Sex Research, 47*(6), 568-579. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490903151374

Love, T., Laier, C., Brand, M., Hatch, L., & Hajela, R. (2015). Neuroscience of internet pornography addiction: a review and update. *Behavioral Sciences, 5*(3), 388–433. http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/bs5030388

Ma, C. (2019). Relationships between exposure to online pornography, psychological well-being and sexual permissiveness among Hong Kong Chinese adolescents: a three-wave longitudinal study. *Applied Research in Quality of Life, 14*(2), 423-439. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-018-9604-5

Maas, M. K., Bray, B. C., & Noll, J. G. (2019). Online sexual experiences predict subsequent sexual health and victimization outcomes among female adolescents: a latent class analysis. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 48*(5), 837-849. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-00995-3

Maas, M. K., Gal, T., Cary, K. M., & Greer, K. (2022). Popular culture and pornography education to improve the efficacy of secondary school staff response to student sexual harassment. *American Journal of Sexuality Education, 17*(4), 435-457. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2022.2076757

MacKinnon, C. A. (1989). Sexuality, pornography, and method: "pleasure under patriarchy. *Ethics, 99*(2), 314–346. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2381437

Maheux, A., Roberts, S., Evans, R., Widman, L., & Choukas-Bradley, S. (2021). Associations between adolescents' pornography consumption and self-objectification, body comparison, and body shame. *Body Image, 37*, 89-93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2021.01.014

Malterud, K., Siersma, V., & Guassora, A. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1753-1760. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444

Marshall, E., & Miller, H. (2019). Consistently inconsistent: a systematic review of the measurement of pornography use. *Aggression & Violent Behavior, 48,* 169-179. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2019.08.019

Marston, C., & Lewis, R. (2014). Anal heterosex among young people and implications for health promotion: a qualitative study in the UK. *British Medical Journal Open, 4*(8), 10.1136/bmjopen-2014-004996

Martyniuk, U. & Štulhofer, A. (2018). A longitudinal exploration of the relationship between pornography use and sexually permissiveness in female and male adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence, 69,* 80-87. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2018.09.006

Mashumba, L., (2023). Ethical considerations: "it's about going an extra mile with high-risk sensitive populations" - reflections on using semi-structured interviews with male sex workers. In *Sage Research Methods Cases Part 1*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529630428

Massey, K., Burns, J., & Franz, A. (2021). Young people, sexuality and the age of pornography. *Sexuality & Culture, 25*(1), 318-336. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-020-09771-z

Massey University (2017). *Code of ethical conduct for research, teaching, and evaluations involving Human participants*. Retrieved from http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms/Human%20Ethics/Documents/MUHEC%20Code.pdf?2F3CBE296DD2345CC01794BF9CFCA13A

Matković, T., Cohen, N., & Štulhofer, A. (2018). The use of sexually explicit material and its relationship to adolescent sexual activity. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 62*(5), 563-569. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.11.305

Mattebo, M., Larsson, M., Tydén, T., & Häggström-Nordin, E. (2013). Professionals' perceptions of the effect of pornography on Swedish adolescents. *Public Health Nursing, 31*(3), 196-205. https://doi.org/10.1111/phn.12058

Mattebo, M., Larsson, M., Tydén, T., Olsson, T., & Häggström-Nordin, E. (2012). Hercules and Barbie? reflections on the influence of pornography and its spread in the media and society in groups of adolescents in Sweden. *European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care, 17*(1), 40-49. https://doi.org/10.3109/13625187.2011.617853

McClelland, S.I., & Fine, M. (2014). Over-sexed and under surveillance: adolescent sexualities, cultural anxieties, and thick desire. In L. Allen, M. Rasmussen, & K. Quinlivan (Eds.), *The politics of pleasure in sexuality education* (pp. 12–34). Routledge.

McCormack, M., & Wignall, L. (2017). Enjoyment, exploration and education: understanding the consumption of pornography among young men with non-exclusive sexual orientations. *Sociology, 51*(5), 975–991. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038516629909

McKee, A. (2012). Pornography as entertainment: continuum. *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, 26*(4), 541–552. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2012.698034

McKee, A. (2014). Humanities and social scientific research methods in porn studies. *Porn Studies, 1*(1-2), 53-63. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2013.859465

McKee, A., Albury, K., Dunne, M., Grieshaber, S., Hartley, J., Lumby, C., & Mathews, B. (2010). Healthy sexual development: a multidisciplinary framework for research.

*International Journal of Sexual Health*, *22*(1), 14-19, https://doi.org/10.1080/19317610903393043

McKee, A., Byron, P., Litsou, K., & Ingham, R. (2020). An interdisciplinary definition of pornography: results from a global Delphi panel. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *49*(3), 1085-1091. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-019-01554-4

McKee, A., Dawson, A., & Kang, M. (2023). "The criteria to identify pornography that can support healthy sexual development for young adults: results of an international Delphi panel." *International Journal of Sexual Health*, *35* (1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2022.2161030

McKee, A., Litsou, K., Byron, P., & Ingham, R. (2021). The relationship between consumption of pornography and sexual pleasure: results of a mixed-method systematic review. *Porn Studies*, *8*(3), 331-344. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2021.1891564

McVey, L., Gurrieri, L., & Tyler, M. (2021) The structural oppression of women by markets: the continuum of sexual violence and the online pornography market. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *37*(1-2), 40-67. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1798714

Milas, G., Wright, P., & Štulhofer, A. (2020). Longitudinal assessment of the association between pornography use and sexual satisfaction in adolescence, *The Journal of Sex Research*, *57*(1), 16-28. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1607817

Miller, D. J., & McBain, K. A. (2022). The content of contemporary, mainstream pornography: a literature review of content analytic studies. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *17*(2), 219–256. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2021.2019648

Ministry of Education (2020). Relationships and sexuality education years 9-13: a guide for teachers, leaders, and boards of trustees. Author: NZ. *Relationships and Sexualty Education - A Guide for Teachers, Leaders and Boards of Trustees - Years 9-13 (tki.org.nz)

Ministry of Education (2021). *Effective pedagogy in relationships and sexuality education; relationships and sexuality education guidelines years 1-13 resource for teachers*. New Zealand Government.

Moffitt, T., Caspi, A., Rutter, M., & Silva, P. (2001). The Dunedin multidisciplinary health and development study. In s*ex differences in antisocial behaviour: conduct disorder, delinquency, and violence in the Dunedin longitudinal study* (Cambridge Studies in Criminology, pp. 10-22). Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511490057.003

Moilanen, K. (2016). Why do parents grant or deny consent for adolescent participation in sexuality research? *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 45*(5), 1020-1036. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0445-y

Moriña, A. (2021). When people matter: the ethics of qualitative research in the health and social sciences. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, *29*(5), 1559-1565. https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13221

Morison, T., & Herbert, S. (2019). Rethinking 'risk' in sexual and reproductive health policy: the value of the reproductive justice framework. *Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy, 16*, 434–445. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-018-0351-z

Motulsky, S. (2021). Is member checking the gold standard of quality in qualitative research? *Qualitative Psychology*, *8*(3), 389–406. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000215

Mozdzierz, G., Peluso, P., & Lisiecki, J. (2014). *Principles of counseling and psychotherapy: learning the essential domains and nonlinear thinking of master practitioners* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Mulholland, M. (2013). *Young people and pornography: negotiating pornification*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mulholland, M. (2015). Walking a fine line: young people negotiate pornified heterosex. *Sexualities, 18*(5–6), 731–749. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460714561721

Naezer, M. (2018). From risky behaviour to sexy adventures: reconceptualising young people's online sexual activities. *Culture, Health and Sexuality, 20*(6), 715-729. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2017.1372632

Naezer, M., & Ringrose, J. (2018). Adventure, intimacy, identity, and knowledge: exploring how social media are shaping and transforming youth sexuality. In J. Gilbert, & S. Lamb (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of sexual development: childhood and adolescence* (pp. 419–438). Cambridge University Press. DOI:10.1017/9781108116121.022

Netsafe. (2018, February 27). New Zealand teens' digital profile: a factsheet. Wellington, NZ: Netsafe. https://www.netsafe.org.nz/youth-factsheet-2018

New Zealand Health Education Association. (2020). *Teaching and learning about pornography in health education: for students in Years 9-13*. Author. https://healtheducation.org.nz/

New Zealand Psychological Society, New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists, & New Zealand Psychologists Board. (2012). *Code of ethics for psychologists working in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. https://www.psychology.org.nz/journal-archive/code-of-ethics.pdf

Nieh, H., Chang, L., Chang, H., Chiang, T., & Yen, L. (2020). Pubertal timing, parenting style, and trajectories of pornography use in adolescence: peer pornography use as the mediator. *The Journal of Sex Research, 57(1),* 29-41. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1623163

Nigussie, T., Legese, T., Abebe, L., Getachew, S., & Alemayehu, D. (2020). Magnitude of risky sexual behaviors, determinants, and consequences among high school and preparatory school students in Mizan Aman Town, Ethiopia. *Journal of Midwifery & Reproductive Health*, *8*(1), 2096–2104. https://doi.org/10.22038/jmrh.2019.40248.1450

Noyce, R., & Simpson, J. (2018). The experience of forming a therapeutic relationship from the client's perspective: a metasynthesis, *Psychotherapy Research, 28*(2), 281-296. https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2016.1208373

Office of Film and Literature Classification (2015). *Balancing Freedom of Expression with Public Safety in a Digital Age*. OFLC. Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) Submission (D-0634020).PDF (mch.govt.nz)

Office of Film and Literature Classification. (2016). *Young New Zealanders viewing sexual violence discussion group findings*. YOUNG NEW ZEALANDERS VIEWING SEXUAL VIOLENCE (classificationoffice.govt.nz)

Office of Film and Literature Classification. (2017). *Young New Zealanders viewing sexual violence stage 3 research report. Interviews with young New Zealanders.* OFLC. Young_New_Zealanders_Viewing_Sexual_Violence_-_Stage_3.pdf (classificationoffice.govt.nz)

Office of Film and Literature Classification (2018). *NZ youth and porn: research findings of a survey on how and why young New Zealanders view online pornography.* OFLC.

https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/2292/49407/NZYouthPorn-OFLC-December2018-PrintVersion.pdf

Office of Film and Literature Classification: Te Tari Whakaropu Tukuata, Tuhituhinga. A brief history of censorship. A brief history of censorship in New Zealand: About NZ Classification: OFLC (webweaver.co.nz)

Office of the eSafety Commissioner. (2018). Parenting and pornography: finding from Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Australian Government.

Olmstead, S., Anders, K., & Billen, R. (2023). Complexity in emerging adults' emotional reactions to pornography use: it is not all good or bad. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 1-27. Epub ahead of print. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2023.2224122

Owens, E., Behun, R., Manning, J., & Reid, R. (2012). The impact of internet pornography on adolescents: a review of the research. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, *19*(1-2), 99-122. https://doi.org/10.1080/10720162.2012.660431

Pachankis, J. (2018). The scientific pursuit of sexual and gender minority mental health treatments: toward evidence-based affirmative practice. *American Psychologist,* 73(9), 1207-1219. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000357

Papadopoulos, L. (2010). *Sexualisation of young people review.* UK: Home Office Publication. http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http:/www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/sexualisation-of-young-people.pdf

Pavanello Decaro, S., Portolani, D. M., Toffoli, G., Prunas, A., & Anzani, A. (2023). "there is no one way to be transgender and to live sex": Transgender and non-binary individuals' experiences with pornography. *Journal of Sex Research.* Epub ahead of print. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2023.2215228

Pearson, L., Powell, M., Denholm, N., Robertson, J. (2018). *Porn and Young People - what do we know? NZ Youth Stakeholder Survey.* The Light Project.

Pedersen, E., & Kurz, J. (2016). Using Facebook for health-related research study recruitment and program delivery. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 9, 38-43. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.09.011

Perry, C., Thurston, M., & Green, K. (2004). Involvement and detachment in researching sexuality: reflections on the process of semistructured interviewing. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(1), 135-148. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732303255853

Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. (2006). Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit online material and recreational attitudes toward sex. *Journal of Communication, 56*(4), 639-660. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00313.x

Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. (2008a). Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit internet material and sexual preoccupancy: a three-wave panel study. Media Psychology, 11(2), 207–234. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213260801994238

Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2008b). Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit internet material, sexual uncertainty, and attitudes toward uncommitted sexual exploration: is there a link? *Communication Research, 35*(5), 579-601. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0093650208321754

Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. (2009). Adolescents' exposure to sexually explicit internet material and sexual satisfaction: a longitudinal study. *Human Communication Research,* 35(2), 171-194. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2009.01343.x

Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. (2010). Processes underlying the effects of adolescents' use of sexually explicit internet material: the role of perceived realism. *Communication Research, 37*(3), 375-399. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0093650210362464

Peter J., & Valkenburg, P. (2011). The impact of "forgiving" introductions on the reporting of sensitive behavior in surveys: the role of social desirability response style and developmental status. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 75*(4), 779-787. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfr041

Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. (2016). Adolescents and pornography: a review of 20 years of Research. *Journal of Sex Research, 53*(4-5), 509-531. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2016.1143441

Petersen, J. L., & Hyde, J. S. (2010). A meta-analytic review of research on gender differences in sexuality, 1993–2007. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*(1), 21-38. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017504

Peterson, A. J., Silver, G. K., Bell, H. A., Guinosso, S. A., & Coyle, K. K. (2023). Young people's views on pornography and their sexual development, attitudes, and behaviors: a systematic review and synthesis of qualitative research. *American Journal of Sexuality Education,18*(2), 171-209. https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2022.2096163

Pilgrim, D. (2019). *Critical Realism for Psychologists*. Routledge. https://doi-org.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/10.4324/9780429274497

Quadara, A., El-Murr, A. & Latham, J. (2017). *The effects of pornography on children and young people: an evidence scan.* Australian Institute of Family Studies. https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/effects-pornography-children-and-young-people-evidence-scan

Rasmussen, E.E., Rhodes, N., Ortiz, R.R., & White, S.R. (2016). The relation between norm accessibility, pornography use, and parental mediation among emerging adults. *Media Psychology, 19*(3), 431–454. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2015.1054944.

Rasmussen, K., & Bierman, A. (2016). How does religious attendance shape trajectories of pornography use across adolescence? *Journal of Adolescence, 49*(1), 191-203. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.03.017

Reniers, R.P., Murphy, L., Lin, A., Bartolomé S.P., & Wood, S.J. (2016). Risk perception and risk-taking behaviour during adolescence: the influence of personality and gender. *PLoS ONE 11*(4): e0153842. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0153842

Robertson, G. (1979). *Obscenity: an account of censorship laws and their enforcement in England and Wales.* Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Rosa, E., & Tudge, J. (2013). Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development: its evolution from ecology to bioecology. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 5*(4), 243–258. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12022

Rose, S., Garrett, S., McKinlay, E., & Morgan, S. (2021). 'Be nice to us, we're still learning': an online survey of young people in Hawkes Bay, New Zealand, about unmet need for sexual health care and improving access to services. *Sexual Health, 18*(5), 394-404. https://doi.org/10.1071/SH21092

Rossetto, K.R. (2014). Qualitative research interviews: assessing the therapeutic value and challenges. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 31*(4), 482–489. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407514522892

Rossi, E., Poulin, F., & Boislard, M. (2021). Sexual trajectories during adolescence and adjustment in emerging adulthood. *Emerging Adulthood, 9(4),* 281-291. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2167696819893550

Rostad, W., Gittins-Stone, D., Huntington, C., Rizzo, C., Pearlman, D., & Orchowski, L. (2019). The association between exposure to violent pornography and teen dating violence in Grade 10 high school students. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 48*(7), 2137-2147. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-019-1435-4

Rothman, E., Beckmeyer, J., Herbenick, D., Fu, T-C., Dodge, B., & Fortenberry, J. (2021). The prevalence of using pornography for information about how to have sex: findings from a nationally representative survey of U.S. adolescents and young adults, *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 50*(2), 629–646. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-020-01877-7

Rothman, E., Kaczmarsky, C., Burke, N., Jansen, E., & Baughman, A. (2015). "Without porn … I wouldn't know half the things I know now": a qualitative study of pornography use among a sample of urban, low-income, Black and Hispanic youth. *Journal of Sex Research*, *52*(7), 736-746. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2014.960908

Rothman, E. F., Daley, N., & Alder, J. (2020). A pornography literacy program for adolescents. *American Journal of Public Health, 110*(2), 154-156. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305468

Rousseau, A., Bőthe, B., & Štulhofer, A. (2020). Theoretical antecedents of male adolescents' problematic pornography use: a longitudinal assessment. Journal of Sex Research, 58(3), 331–341. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2020.1815637

Rovolis, A., & Tsaliki, L. (2012). Pornography. In S. Livingstone, & L. Haddon (Eds.), *Children, risk and safety on the Internet: research and policy challenges in comparative perspective* (pp. 165-176). Policy. https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781847428837.003.0013

Rowlands, J. (2021). Interviewee transcript review as a tool to improve data quality and participant confidence in sensitive research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211066170

Rubin, G (1984). “Thinking sex: notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality.” In C. S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and danger: exploring female sexuality*. (pp. 267–93). Pandora.

Rubin, G. (2011). Blood under the bridge: reflections on “thinking sex”. *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, 17* (1), *15-48. https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2010-015*

Rush, E., & La Nauze, A. (2006). *Corporate paedophilia: sexualisation of children in Australia*. Canberra: Australia Institute.

Russell, S.T. (2005). Conceptualizing positive adolescent sexuality development. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy, 2*(3), 4-12. https://doi.org/10.1525/srsp.2005.2.3.4

Rutherford, C., Costa, D., Mercieca-Bebber, R., Rice, H., Gabb, L., & King, M. (2016). Mode of administration does not cause bias in patient-reported outcome results: a meta-analysis. *Quality of Life Research, 25*(3), 559–574. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11136-015-1110-8

Rutter, M. (1971). Normal psychosexual development. *The Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry, 11*(4), 259-283. https://doi-org.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1970.tb01044.x

Santrock, J.W. (2016). *Adolescence* (Sixteenth Edition). McGraw-Hill Education.

Segal, L. (1998). Only the literal: the contradictions of anti-pornography feminism. *Sexualities, 1*(1), 43–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/136346098001001003

Setty, E. (2022). Pornography as a cultural resource for constructing and expressing gendered sexual subjectivities among students in a co-educational boarding school, *Porn Studies, 9*(2), 159-175. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2021.1875028

Ševčíková, A., Vazsonyi, A. T., Širůček, J., & Konečný, Š. (2013). Predictors of online and offline sexual activities and behaviors among adolescents. *CyberPsychology,*

*Behavior & Social Networking*, *16*(8), 618-622. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0552

Shek, D., Dou, D., Zhu, X. & Chai, W. (2019). Positive youth development: current perspectives. *Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics 10*: 131-141.

Shek, D., & Ma, C. (2016). A six-year longitudinal study of consumption of pornographic materials in Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. *Journal of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology, 29*(1), S12-S21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpag.2015.10.004

Shor, E., & Seida, K. (2019). "Harder and harder"? Is mainstream pornography becoming increasingly violent and do viewers prefer violent content? *Journal of Sex Research, 56*(1), 16-28. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2018.1451476

Simon, W., & Gagnon, J.H. (1986). Sexual scripts: permanence and change. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 15*(2), 97–120. https://doi-org.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/10.1007/BF01542219

Smiler, A. P. (2008). "I wanted to get to know her better": adolescent boys' dating motives, masculinity ideology, and sexual behavior. *Journal of Adolescence*, *31*(1), 17-32. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2007.03.006

Smith, C., & Attwood, F. (2011). Lamenting sexualization: research, rhetoric and the story of young people's "sexualization" in the UK Home Office review. *Sex Education*, *11*(3), 327–337. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2011.590314

Smith, C., & Attwood, F. (2014). Anti/pro/critical porn studies. *Porn Studies*, *1*(1–2), 7-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2014.887364

Smith, J. A. (2004). Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 1*(1), 39-54. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088704qp004oa

Smith, M. (2013). Youth viewing sexually explicit material online: addressing the elephant on the screen. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy, 10*(1), 62-75. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-012-0103-4

Sparrman, A. (2014). Access and gatekeeping in researching children's sexuality: mess in ethics and methods. *Sexuality and Culture, 18*(2), 291-309. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-013-9198-x

Spinrad, T. L., & Eisenberg, N. (2017). Compassion in Children. In E. M. Seppälä, E. Simon-Thomas, S. L. Brown, M. C. Worline, C. D. Cameron, & J. R. Doty (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science* (pp. 53-64). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190464684.013.5

Spišák, S. (2016). 'Everywhere they say that it's harmful but they don't say how, so I'm asking here': young people, pornography and negotiations with notions of risk and harm. *Sex Education, 16*(2), 130-142. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2015.1080158

Spišák, S. (2017). Negotiating norms: girls, pornography and sexual scripts in Finnish question and answer. *Forum.Young, 25*(4), 359-374. https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308816660482

Spišák, S. (2020). The intimacy effect: girls' reflections about pornography and 'actual sex'. *Sexualities, 23*(7), 1248–1263. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460720902719

Stanley, N., Barter, C., Wood, M., Aghtaie, N., Larkins, C., Lanau, A., & Overlien, C. (2018). Pornography, sexual coercion and abuse and sexting in young people's intimate relationships: a European study. *Journal of International Violence, 33*(19), 2919-2944. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516633204

Stardust, Z., Nagel, E. v. d., Tiidenberg, K., & et al. (2022). *Manifesto for sex-positive social media:* ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society. https://sexpositivesocialmedia.org/ DOI: 10.25916/vnkc-zn96

Štulhofer, A., Kohut, T., & Tafro, A. (2019). The dynamics of adolescents' pornography use and psychological well-being: a six-wave latent growth and latent class modeling approach. *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 28*(12), 1567-1579. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-019-01318-4

Subrahmanyam, K., & Šmahel, D. (2011). *Digital youth: the role of media in development.* Springer.

Sullivan, R., & McKee, A. (2015). *Pornography: structures, agency and performance*. Polity.

Sunstein, C. R. (2005). *Laws of fear: beyond the precautionary principle*. Cambridge University.

Taylor, K. (2019). Pornography addiction: the fabrication of a transient sexual disease. *History of the Human Sciences, 32*(5), 56-83. https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695119854624

Taylor, K. (2021). 'Accessing something that's meant to be inaccessible': pornography viewers' reconciliation between early pornographic memories and pornography's perceived risk, *Porn Studies, 8*(1), 39-57, https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2020.1736609

Taylor, K. (2022). "I've got to put one side aside if I want to enjoy it": pornography, perceived reality, and pornography viewers' negotiated pleasures. *Sexuality and Culture, 26*(4), 1215-1234. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-021-09939-1

Testa, G., Mestre-Bach, G., Chiclana Actis, C., & Potenza, M. (2023). Problematic pornography use in adolescents: from prevention to intervention. *Current Addiction Reports, 10,* 210–218. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-023-00469-4

The Light Project. (n.d.). Porn: the facts for adults. Retrieved 22 July, 2020, from The Facts for Adults-Youth Sex Resources-School Porn Resources (thelightproject.co.nz)

Thomas, D. (2017). Feedback from research participants: are member checks useful in qualitative research? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *14*(1), 23–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2016.1219435

Thorne, S.E. (2014). Applied interpretative approaches. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research* (pp.99-115). Oxford University Press.

Tipene, J. & Green, A. (2017). *He He Pūkenga Kōrero Rangatahi and sexually transmitted infections in the Waikato*. http://tewhariki.org.nz/assets/He-Pukenga-Korero-Final-Report-31-Aug-2017.pdf

Tolman, D., & Diamond, L. (2014). Sexuality theory: a review, a revision, and a recommendation. In D. Tolman & L. Diamond (Eds.), *APA Handbook of Sexuality and Psychology*: *Vol. 1. person-based approaches* (pp. 3-27). American Psychological Association. DOI:10.1037/14193-001.

Tolman, D., & McClelland, S. (2011). Normative sexuality development in adolescence: a decade in review, 2000-2009. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 21*(1), 242-255. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00726.x

Tourangeau, R., & Smith, T. W. (1996). Asking sensitive questions: the impact of data collection mode, question format, and question context. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 60*(2), 275-304. https://doi.org/10.1086/297751

Tourangeau, R., & Yan, T. (2007). Sensitive questions in surveys. *Psychological Bulletin, 133*(5), 859-883. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.133.5.859

Tsaliki, L. (2011). Playing with porn: Greek children's explorations in pornography. *Sex Education, 11*(3), 293-302. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2011.590087

Tsitsika, A., Critselis, E., Kormas, G., Konstantoulaki, E., Constantopoulos, A., & Kafetzis, D. (2009). Adolescent pornographic internet site use: a multivariate regression analysis of the predictive factors of use and psychosocial implications. *Cyber Psychology & Behavior, 12*(5), 545-550. https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2008.0346

Turner, N. & Almack, K. (2017). Recruiting young people to sensitive research: turning the 'wheels within wheels'. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 20*(5), 485-497. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1207943

Tyler, M., & Quek, K. (2016). Conceptualizing pornographication: ways forward for feminist analysis. *Sexualization, Media & Society, 2*(2),1–14. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2374623816643281

Tyler, M., Coy, M. (2022). Systems of prostitution and pornography: harm, health, and gendered inequalities. In D, McCallum (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of the history of human sciences* (pp.1897–1919). Palgrave Macmillan.

van de Bongardt, D., de Graaf, H., Reitz, E., & Deković, M. (2014). Parents as moderators of longitudinal associations between sexual peer norms and Dutch adolescents' sexual initiation and intention. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 55*(3), 388-393. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2014.02.017

van de Bongardt, D., Reitz, E., Overbeek, G., Boislard, M.-A., Burk, B., & Deković, M. (2017). Observed normativity and deviance in friendship dyads' conversations about sex and the relations with youths' perceived sexual peer norms. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 46*(6), 1793-1806. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-016-0763-x

van de Bongardt, D., Yu, R., Deković, M., & Meeus, W. (2015). Romantic relationships and sexuality in adolescence and young adulthood: the role of parents, peers, and partners. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology, 12*(5), 497-515. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2015.1068689

van Oosten, J. (2016). Sexually explicit internet material and adolescents' sexual uncertainty: The role of disposition-content congruency. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 45,* 1011-1022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10508-015-0594-1.

van Oosten, J., Vandenbosch, L., & Peter, J. (2017). Gender roles on social networking sites: investigating reciprocal relationships between Dutch adolescents' hypermasculinity and hyperfeminity and sexy online self-presentations. *Journal of Children and Media, 11*(2), 147-166, https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2017.1304970

Vandenbosch, L. (2015). Antecedents of adolescents' exposure to different types of sexually explicit internet material: a longitudinal study. *Computers in Human Behavior, 50,* 439-448. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.04.032

Vandenbosch, L., & Eggermont, S. (2013). Sexually explicit websites and sexual initiation: reciprocal relationships and the moderating role of pubertal status. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 23,* 621–634. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12008

Vandenbosch, L., & van Oosten, J. (2018). Explaining the relationship between sexually explicit internet material and casual sex: a two-step mediation model. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 47*(5), 1465-1480. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-017-1145-8

Vandenbosch, L., van Oosten, J., & Peter, J. (2018). Sexually explicit internet material and adolescents' sexual performance orientation: the mediating roles of enjoyment and perceived utility. *Media Psychology, 21*(1), 50-74. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2017.1361842

Vangeel, L., Eggermont, S., & Vandenbosch, L. (2020). Does adolescent media use predict sexual stereotypes in adolescence and emerging adulthood? associations with music television and online pornography exposure. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 49*(4), 1147–1161. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-020-01677-z

Vannier, S. A., Currie, A. B., & O'Sullivan, L. F. (2014). Schoolgirls and Soccer Moms: a content analysis of free “teen” and “MILF” online pornography. *Journal of Sex Research, 51*(3), 253-264. DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2013.829795

Vertongen, R., Chamberlain, K., & van Ommen, C. (2022a). Pornography and adolescents: unravelling dominant research assumptions. *Porn Studies, 9*(4), 430-444. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2022.2114532

Vertongen, R., van Ommen, C., & Chamberlain, K. (2022b). Adolescent dilemmas about viewing pornography and their efforts to resolve them. *Journal of Adolescent Research,* Epub ahead of print. https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584221133307

Vincent, K. A. (2013). The advantages of repeat interviews in a study with pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers: piecing together the jigsaw, *International Journal of Research and Method in Education, 36*(4), 341-354. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2012.705276

Vout, C. (13 March 2013). The shock of the old: what the sculpture of Pan reveals about sex and the Romans. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/mar/23/pan-sculpture-sex-and-romans

Wagenaar, C., Florence, M., Adams, S., & Savahl, S. (2018). Factors influencing the relationship between alcohol consumption and risky sexual behaviour among young people: a systematic review. *Cogent Psychology, 5*(1), Article 1483049. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2018.1483049

Walker, S., Temple-Smith, M., Higgs, P., & Sanci, L. (2015). ‘It’s always just there in your face’: young people’s views on porn. *Sexual Health, 12*(3), 200-206. https://doi.org/10.1071/SH14225

Wallis, C. (2011). Performing gender: a content analysis of gender display in music videos. *Sex Roles, 64(*3), 160-172. doi:10.1007/s11199-010-9814-2

Weeks, J. (1985). *Sexuality and its discontents: meanings, myths and modern sexualities*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

West, C. (2012). *Pornography and Censorship*. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University. https://plato.stanford.edu/search/r?entry=/entries/pornography-censorship/&page=1&total_hits=17&pagesize=10&archive=None&rank=0&query=pornography%20and%20censorship

Wight, D. (1994). Boys' thoughts and talk about sex in a working class locality of Glasgow. *Sociological Review*, 42, 703–737. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1994.tb00107.x

Willis, M., Bridges, A., & Sun, C. (2022). Pornography use, gender, and sexual objectification: a multinational study. *Sexuality & Culture, 26,* 1298-1313. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-022-09943-z

Willoughby, B.J., & Busby, D.M. (2016). In the Eye of the Beholder: exploring variations in the perceptions of pornography. *Journal of Sex Research, 53*(6), 678-688.

Willoughby, B.J., Young-Petersen, B., & Leonhardt, N.D. (2018). Exploring trajectories of pornography use through adolescence and emerging adulthood. *Journal of Sex Research, 55*(3), 297-309. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2017.1368977

Wilson, D. (2002). Censorship in New Zealand: the policy challenges of new technology. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand, 19*, 1-13.

Wingood, G.M., DiClemente, R.J., Harrington, K., Davies, S., Hook, E.W.III, & Oh, M.K. (2001). Exposure to X-rated movies and adolescents' sexual and contraceptive-related attitudes and behaviors. *Pediatrics, 107(5),* 1116-1119. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.107.5.1116

Woolard, J.L., & Scott, E. (2009). The legal regulation of adolescence. In R.M. Lerner, & L.D. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 345-371). John Wiley & Sons.

World Health Organization. (2010). Measuring sexual health: conceptual and practical considerations and related indicators. https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/70434

Wright, P.J. (2011). Mass media effects on youth sexual behavior assessing the claim for causality. *Annals of the International Communication Association, 35(1),* 343-385. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2011.11679121

Wright, P.J. (2014). Pornography and the sexual socialization of children: current knowledge and a theoretical future. *Journal of Children and Media, 8(3),* 305–312. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2014.923606

Wright, P.J., Herbenick, D., & Paul, B. (2020). Adolescent condom use, parent-adolescent sexual health communication, and pornography: findings from a U.S. probability sample. *Health Communication, 35(13),* 1576–1582. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2019.1652392

Wright, P. J., Herbenick, D., & Paul, B. (2022). Casual condomless sex, range of pornography exposure, and perceived pornography realism. *Communication Research, 49*(4), 547-566. https://doi.org/10.1177/00936502211003765

Wright, P.J., Herbenick, D., Paul, B., & Tokunaga, R. (2023). U.S. parents underestimate their children's pornography use and learning. *Archive of Sexual Behavior, 52*(1), 373–383. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-022-02449-7

Wright, P.J, & Štulhofer, A. (2019). Adolescent pornography use and the dynamics of perceived pornography realism: does seeing more make it more realistic? *Computers in Human Behavior, 95,* 37-47. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.01.024

Ybarra, M.L., Mitchell, K.J., Hamburger, M., Diener-West, M., & Leaf, P.J. (2011). X-rated material and perpetration of sexually aggressive behavior among children and adolescents: is there a link? *Aggressive Behavior, 37(1),* 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20367

Zahn-Waxler, C., Shirtcliff, E. A., & Marceau, K. (2008). Disorders of childhood and adolescence: gender and psychopathology. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 4*(1), 275-303. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.3.022806.091358

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Interview Guide

*Introductions, definition of SEIM provided, and an opportunity to provide their own definition*

***Experiences with SEIM***

How does SEIM feature in your world?

How and when did you come across SEIM?

Has the way you engage with the material changed, if at all?

What did you think about it at the time and how do you think about it now?

What reactions did you have, and have they changed over time?

How did you decide about viewing something?

What do your peers say or think about SEIM? (Interactions with others)

How do others talk about SEIM? (Open, private, groups, not at all, parents, teachers, online forums, etc...)

Were you able to talk to someone about SEIM, and if so, who and what was the outcome? (Interactions: How did the other person react, adults versus peers, how did they experience the other persons responses)

***Making sense of SEIM experiences***

How did you make sense of the SEIM?

What ideas or messages did you take from the SEIM?

Were the ideas helpful, unhelpful or both and why?

How did what you viewed fit, or not fit, with your ideas about sexuality?

How did these ideas fit or not fit with your ideas of who you are as a person?

How does it fit with other peoples' views? (Family, school, peers, porn industry)

***Impacts on self, others, and relationships***

Were there any positive or negative effects from viewing SEIM immediately and/or down the line?

If viewed, how do you think it effects how you think about sex and relationships and if so, how?

How do you think watching porn changes how young people in general think about sex? (Consideration about others and social influence)

How does it shape your own ideas about what you would like to try in the future? (Future)

One idea is that what we watch online creates a sexual script for what is expected and then adolescents follow the sexual script seen in pornography, what are your thoughts about this idea? (Theorised risks)

Another idea is that people get bored with material and need more extreme porn, what are your thoughts about this idea? (Theorised risks)

***Advice about SEIM***

Do you think it is helpful to talk about SEIM and how would you suggest doing this?

What advice would you give to someone viewing SEIM?

**Appendix B: Facebook Advertisement**

*"Porn, it's everywhere you can't avoid it"*


We want to hear from young people between the ages of 14 and 16, who live in Auckland, what they think about the sexually explicit material online. How you make sense of what you see can be taken from adult viewpoints, but we won't truly understand until we listen to your stories.

# Research Study: How do young people make sense of sexually explicit internet

If you are interested in finding out more about this study, you can contact Robyn Vertongen by email r.c.vertongen@massey.ac.nz or Txt [redacted] or [redacted]

Asking questions does not mean you have agreed to take part. If you decide to take part, we also need your parent/caregiver(s) to know you are taking part in the study. This does not mean we share your information with them, but they have a right to ask questions about the study as well.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY

School of Psychology, Level 3 North Shore Library Building, 229 Dairy Flat Highway,

**Appendix C: Information Sheets and Consent Forms**


**How do Young People Make Sense of Sexually Explicit Internet Material?**

**INFORMATION SHEET**

**Researcher Introduction**

*My name is Robyn Vertongen, I am a Doctoral student and staff member at Massey University, School of Psychology. I am a Registered Clinical Psychologist who has practiced for the past 20 years. During this time, I have seen increased concerns about sexually explicit internet material (SEIM), often referred to as pornography, that enters into young peoples' lives. However, what this all means for young people is hotly debated and taken from adult viewpoints rather than asking young people. As a parent of three young people, I am very aware that this has increasingly become part of life that can't be avoided but rather needs to be navigated.*

**What is the study about?**

The project aim is to provide a voice to you, as our young people, about SEIM rather than relying only on adult opinions. What you have to say is important. I am interested in hearing from ten young people, between the age of 14 and 16 years, to learn how you have come across SEIM, your experience with this and what it means to you.

**What do I have to do?**

Should you wish to get involved in the study you will be asked to talk about your experiences with SEIM and what it means to you. You will talk directly with Robyn in a suitable private place within a public location in the Auckland area or in rooms at the Massey University Centre for Psychology in Albany. The interview will take about 1 hour and will be audio-recorded to accurately capture the information. A second interview will take place usually within two weeks. It will provide you a chance to discuss any insights, concerns and/or change information. This interview should be briefer than the first interview. If you don't want to go ahead with the two interviews, you don't need to do anything more. If you decide you want to share your experiences, then I need you to pass an information sheet and consent form to your parent or caregiver so they know you have volunteered to participate. This does not mean your information will be shared with them. It just means they know you are taking part and may need help with transport. A Westfield gift voucher of $25 will be provided at the end of each interview to compensate you for your time and travel.

**What happens to the information?**

All information you share is kept safe at all times. No one else has access to this information and it will be password protected. When the project is finished, a summary report will be provided to you. Your identity will be protected and no names used. Audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project and written non-identifiable information will be kept safe and destroyed at the end of 10 years.

**My Rights**
If you decide to take part you have the right to

- *Not answer questions or stop the interview;*
- *Withdraw from the study at any time within one month of finishing the second interview;*
- *Choose what to share and how much;*
- *Ask as many questions about the study as needed;*
- *Provide information knowing your name will not be used;*
- *Be given a summary of the things I find out when finished;*
- *Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview*

Your information will not be shared with your parents/ caregivers. However, if you tell me you want to hurt yourself or someone else, or if someone is hurting you then I have a duty of care to find a trusted adult in your life to help keep you safe.

**What happens if I have other questions?**
All questions are good so feel free to ask myself if you have any questions. This does not mean you are agreeing to take part but may help you decide.

**Making Contact**
If you would like more information or have any questions you are welcome to contact the researcher Robyn Vertongen, at r.c.vertongen@massey.ac.nz 4140800 ext 43112 or txt [redacted] And/or the supervisors
Clifford Van Ommen C.VanOmmen@massey.ac.nz 4140800 ext 43114
Kerry Chamberlain K.Chamberlain@massey.ac.nz 4140800 ext 43107

***Additional Support***
If reading or discussing this information has brought up any concerns for you the following contacts may be useful:

*Youthline* 0800 376 633 Free TXT 234 or email talk@youthline.co.nz
24 hours, teens helping teens

*Whatsup* 0800 942 8787 http://www.whatsup.co.nz/teens
Trained counsellors, phone line or online chat for youth, 1pm to 10pm Monday to Friday and 3pm to 10pm Saturday and Sunday

*Lifeline Helpline* 0800 543 354 info@lifeline.org.nz 24 hours 7 days a week counselling

*Netsafe* 0508 638 723 https://www.netsafe.org.nz/aboutnetsafe/
Helps people keep safe online by providing education, advice and support.

***Committee Approval Statement***
*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 17/44. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Ralph Bathurst, Acting Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.*

Massey University
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Te Kura Pūkenga Tangata

**How do Young People Make Sense of Sexually Explicit Internet Material?**

**PARENT/CAREGIVER INFORMATION SHEET**

**Researcher Introduction**

*My name is Robyn Vertongen, I am a Doctoral student and staff member at Massey University, School of Psychology. I am a Registered Clinical Psychologist who has practiced for the past 20 years. During this time, I have seen increased concerns about sexually explicit internet material (SEIM), often referred to as pornography, that enters into young peoples' lives. However, what this all means for young people is hotly debated and taken from adult viewpoints rather than asking young people. As a parent of three young people, I am very aware that this has increasingly become part of life that can't be avoided but rather needs to be navigated.*

**What is the study about?**

The project aim is to provide a voice to young people and clarity about how they make sense of SEIM rather than relying only on adult opinions. What young people have to say is important. The study will involve ten young people, between the age of 14 and 16 years, to learn how they have come across SEIM, their experience with this and what it means.

**What would my teenager have to do?**

Should you agree to your teenager participating in the study they will be asked to talk about their experiences with SEIM and what it means to them. They will talk directly with Robyn in a suitable private place within a public location in the Auckland area or preferably in rooms at the Massey University Centre for Psychology in Albany, Auckland at a time outside of school hours. The interview will take about 1 hour and will be audio-recorded to accurately capture the information. A second interview will take place usually within two weeks. It will provide your teenager a chance to discuss any insights, concerns, and to clarify responses. This interview should be briefer than the first interview. Your teenager will receive a $25 Westfield gift voucher at the end of each interview to compensate for their time and travel.

**What happens to the information?**

It is important to know we will treat your teenager's information with respect and ensure confidentiality. Hence, their information will not be shared with you. All information provided will be kept safe at all times. No one else has access to this information and it will be password protected. When the project is finished, a summary report will be provided. At no time will participants be identifiable. Audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project and written non-identifiable information will be kept safe and destroyed at the end of 10 years.

A key concern of adults is that young people may become embarrassed or uncomfortable while talking about sensitive information. To help with this feedback will be sought to monitor progress and your teenager will choose what they share and how much.

**My Rights**
If you decide to agree to your teenager taking part, you have the right to

- *Ask as many questions about the study as needed but not about what your teenager shared;*
- *Provide information knowing that your name will not be used;*
- *Be given a summary of the things I find out when I'm finished;*

**What happens if I have other questions?**
Please feel free to ask any questions you have about this study before you agree to your teenager taking part.

**Making Contact**
If you would like more information or have any questions you are welcome to contact the researcher Robyn Vertongen, at r.c.vertongen@massey.ac.nz 4140800 ext 43112 or txt [redacted] And/or the supervisors
Clifford Van Ommen C.VanOmmen@massey.ac.nz 4140800 ext 43114
Kerry Chamberlain K.Chamberlain@massey.ac.nz 4140800 ext 43107

***Additional Support***
If reading or discussing this information has brought up any concerns for you the following may be useful

*Netsafe* 0508 638 723 *https://www.netsafe.org.nz/aboutnetsafe/*

Helps people keep safe online by providing education, advice and support for young people and parent/ caregiver alike.

***Committee Approval Statement***
*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 17/44. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Ralph Bathurst, Acting Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.*

Massey University
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Te Kura Pūkenga Tangata

## Participant Consent Form

## How do Young People Make Sense of Sexually Explicit Internet Material?

This consent form will be held for a period of 10 years as required for research purposes to verify the research honesty

- I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered and I understand that I may ask further questions as needed.
- I have been given contact details to use in case I have future questions about the study.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time but no later than one month after the data is collected.
- I understand that my information will be kept private and my name and identity will be disguised
- I understand that I will receive $25 Westfield gift voucher at the end of each interview for compensation for my time and travel.
- I have had the opportunity to use whanau support or a friend to help me ask questions and understand the study.
- I have had adequate time to consider whether or not to take part in this study.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

I agree to the interview being sound recorded.

**Signature** ..... **Date:** .....

**Full Name printed** .....

Massey University
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Te Kura Pūkenga Tangata

## Parent/Caregiver Consent Form

## How do Young People Make Sense of Sexually Explicit Internet Material?

This consent form will be held for a period of 10 years as required for research purposes to verify the research integrity

- I have read the Information Sheet and understand that my teenager has agreed to participate in this study and that they have a right to withdraw at any time.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions as needed.
- I have been given contact details to use in case I have future questions about the study.
- I understand my teenager will have their rights to privacy respected and the researcher will not discuss content from the interviews with others outside of the research team including myself. Confidentiality will be upheld in accordance with Massey University Human Ethics Code of conduct. As such, if my teenager tells the researcher they want to hurt themself or someone else, or if someone is hurting them, then the researcher will find a trusted adult in their life to help keep them safe.
- I understand no material that could identify my teenager will be used in any reports on this study.
- I understand my teenager will receive $25 Westfield gift voucher at the end of each interview for compensation for their time and travel.

I give consent for my teenager _____ (name) to participate in this study as per the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature** ..... **Date:** .....

**Full Name printed** .....

**Contact number:** .....

**Contacts for the Researcher to take to interviews:**

***Information Sheet Contacts***

*Youthline* *0800 376 633 Free TXT 234 or email talk@youthline.co.nz*
24 hours, teens helping teens

*Whatsup* *0800 942 8787* *http://www.whatsup.co.nz/teen*
Trained counsellors, phone line or online chat for youth, 1pm to 10pm Monday to Friday and 3pm to 10pm Saturday and Sunday

*Lifeline Helpline* *0800 543 354 info@lifeline.org.nz*
24 hours 7 days a week counselling

*Netsafe* 0508 638 723 *https://www.netsafe.org.nz/aboutnetsafe/*
Helps people keep safe online by providing education, advice and support.

***Contacts related specifically to sexuality issues:***

*Rainbow youth* 376 4155 *https://www.ry.org.nz/about-us/contact-us/*
*Auckland Sexual Health Clinics* 0800 739432 *http://www.ashs.org.nz/sexual-health-clinics.html*

***Community Mental Health Services (Urgent day appointments or CMHC referrals)***

| | |
|---|---|
| Marinoto North and West | 0800 489 555 |
| Kari Centre (Auckland Central) | Greenlane: 623 4646 or General 367 0000 |
| Whirinaki Manukau | 265 4000 |

***Crisis services: (after hours)***

| | |
|---|---|
| North Shore | 486 8900 |
| West Auckland | 486 8900 |
| Auckland Central | 0800 800 717 |
| Counties Manukau | 270 9090 |

Child Youth and Family Services (Oranga Tamariki) 0508 326 459

## Appendix D: Risk Management Protocol

Although participants have engaged with an age restricted activity of viewing online SEIM, it is not deemed a risk that needs to be managed by the researcher because participants' parent/caregiver(s) are aware that they have viewed SEIM and the responsibility for managing this remains with them. However, the following have been identified as unlikely but potential risk factors:

| Identified Risk | Follow-up questions | Risk level Rate 1-10<br>(1 = low; 10 = immediate certain risk) | Action plan as determined by level of risk. |
|---|---|---|---|
| If an adult is supplying the young person with SEIM or the young person discloses harm from others | Stop the interview and assess the level of risk.<br>Tell me what you are experiencing (what is the danger)? Has anything physical happened?<br>Who is the person and what role do they have in your life?<br>How unsafe do you currently feel?<br>How do you keep yourself safe?<br>Have you told anybody and what was their response?<br>Are you worried about it happening again? | Low risk: Historical abuse but no current or future risk. Abuser has no access and adults are aware.<br><br>High risk:<br>Clear disclosure of abuse. Abuser still has access and is likely to offend again. Young person feels threatened/ unsafe. | Stop and validate the young person, offer empathy and support. Provide an opportunity to stop the interview, regroup, or continue. Ask if they want the audio recorder switched off. The participant can decide to continue with the interview or not.<br><br>As above and for ongoing risk, inform the trusted caregiver identified by the young person about the ongoing risk and recommendations. Provide a letter of referral/ notification to Oranga Tamariki (Ministry for Children)<br><br>If the perpetrator is within the family determine who is safe to disclose to for the young person. Ensure the young person has a trusted adult they can go home with and notify Oranga Tamariki.<br><br>At the end of the interview encourage the young person to use support people or trusted adults for additional help or anonymous contacts provided on the information sheet. |
| If the young person is supplying SEIM to a younger peer | Stop to process their insight into this behaviour. What happened for you to share SEIM? (one off/ frequency, unintentional or intentional) What | What level of insight do they have that this behaviour is illegal? | Questions can be used to provide insight into how exposure for younger peers may carry risk and is illegal. Inform them it is illegal if they did not know or were unclear. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | were your reasons for sharing SEIM with younger kids? What impact might this have on them? How did you deal with this situation? Are adults aware of this (may need to go to question above). How likely do you think it will happen in the future? Are they involved in Sexting? | | Refer the young person to Netsafe.co.nz for clearer guidance around safe online behaviours. |
| If the young person shows high levels of distress beyond expected levels while discussing sensitive issues (e.g., unable to talk, withdrawn, crying, incoherent speech, verbally expresses high levels of distress, agitation) | Allow time to process their distress and assess level of wellbeing.<br>What is going through your mind right now? How are you feeling? Does this distress happen at other times? Is it affecting what you do or your day-to-day life?<br>What might be helpful right now? Sometimes when things are stressful, people have thoughts of hurting themselves. Does anything like this come up for you? If yes, go to questions below. | Low risk: High levels of emotions but able to maintain control and reflect on their reactions.<br><br>High risk: Ongoing high levels of distress with an inability to calm down or regulate emotions. Emotional distress is affecting day to day functioning. | If the distress level is unexpectedly high then validate, offer support, and provide an opportunity to stop the interview, regroup, or continue. Ask if they want the audio recorder switched off.<br><br>Encourage the young person to use support people or trusted adult for additional help (e.g., school guidance counsellor) or contacts provided on the information sheet.<br><br>If unduly distressed, remain with the young person until they are calm and composed. Do not exit the interview quickly. The participant may then decide to continue with the interview or not. Wherever the interview ends, ask if they would like the researcher to call someone to spend time with them, such as a family member or friend. |
| If the young person discloses intent to self-harm | Stop interview and assess level of risk.<br><br>What types of thoughts are you having?<br>When was the last time?<br>How distressed at time of thoughts (0-100)?<br>How do you intend on harming | Lower risk: Non-specific ideation with no intent to act on it. Clear reasons for living. | Stop the interview and discuss with the young person what would be helpful and an appropriate level of support. If low risk, the young person will be encouraged to use trusted adult for additional help (e.g., school guidance counsellor) or contacts provided on the information sheet.<br><br>With their consent the parent/ caregiver will be informed of concerns and recommendations, such as a referral to |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | yourself?<br>When do you intend to harm yourself?<br>How likely are you to act on this plan (0-100)?<br>Do you have the means to carry out the plan?<br>Have you ever acted on the thoughts?<br>What would make it more likely for you to act on your thoughts?<br>What would make it less likely for you to act on your thoughts?<br>What stops you from acting on these thoughts/ plan? | High imminent risk: Clear plan and means to carry plan out. High risk factors (e.g., alcohol use, isolation, irrational thinking, past attempts) | their General Practitioner. What will be shared with the parent/caregiver will be discussed with the young person first.<br><br>If imminent risk/ clear intent to self-harm, then ensure the young person can be transported to Community Mental Health Team for a crisis assessment or contact/ handover will be made with Crisis Assessment Team if after hours. Stay with the young person until another responsible adult arrives (e.g., caregiver who will transport them to hospital or mental health team or a crisis team member).<br><br>Ask with permission, for the researcher to contact the young person the next day to see if they are alright and have accessed appropriate care. |
| If the young person discloses intent to harm someone else | Stop interview and assess level of risk.<br><br>What types of thoughts are you having?<br>Do you intend to harm someone else and who?<br>How do you intend to harm him/her/them?<br>When do you intend to harm him/her/them?<br>Do you have the means to harm him/her/them? | Lower risk: Non-specific ideas with no intent to act on it but rather a wish the other person would go away.<br><br>High imminent risk: Clear plan and means to carry the plan out. Check for high risk factors. | Stop the interview and discuss with the young person what would be helpful to support them through the current problem that is leading them to arm themselves against threats.<br>If low risk the young person will be encouraged to use a trusted adult for additional help (e.g., school guidance counsellor) or contacts provided on the information sheet.<br><br>Higher levels of risk (e.g., carrying knife on them) then discuss potential risks/ consequences of this behaviour and need to inform appropriate adults. This may include the school counsellor, parent/caregiver(s), and a referral to Community Mental Health Centre.<br><br>What will be disclosed to the parent/ caregiver/ counsellors and alike will be discussed with the young person first so they are aware of what will be disclosed. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | They will be encouraged to attend any such meetings, so they are fully informed and involved in the process.<br><br>Ask with permission, for the researcher to contact the young person the next day to see if they are alright and have accessed appropriate care. |

*Note: Our risk management protocol used Draucker and associates' (2009) distress protocol as an initial starting point. Any safety concerns were discussed within the research team.*