What policies and guidelines do New Zealand organisations have for supporting parents, caregivers and educators in facilitating discussions with young New Zealanders about online pornography? A textual document analysis

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Abstract

Online pornography represents a contemporary cultural reality for young people, many of whom have expressed a desire for open discussion on the topic. This study examines the guidelines provided by New Zealand organisations to support parents, caregivers, and educators in facilitating conversations with young New Zealanders about online pornography. This study examines educational resources designed to assist parents, caregivers, and educators in this essential discussion. New Zealand based websites were systematically searched to identify relevant policies and guidelines. These materials typically provide informative resources, toolkits, and discussion guides, assisting parents and educators in engaging young people in conversations about pornography. Textual analysis was employed for this research, guided by Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Systems theory as an analytical framework.

The key findings from this research demonstrate how (i) discussions about pornography are considered a crucial component of parenting, emphasising how these conversations are framed and viewed as essential for protecting young people from pornography, and (ii) discussions about pornography are considered necessary to help reduce its impact, highlighting how perceived effects and strategies for mitigation are the main focus of resources designed to assist adults in their conversations with young people about the topic.

My findings highlight that honest, open communication about pornography is deemed as an essential part of parenting. Notably, the resources validify to parents, caregivers, and educators that they should be concerned about the impact and easy access to pornography. These resources therefore demonstrate how to initiate conversations with children and young people, boosting confidence and encouraging discussions about online pornography at home and in schools. I conclude by discussing the potential value in shifting from the prevalent

harms-based and adult-centric mindset in resources to a more holistic approach to healthy relationships and sex education, placing the perspectives of young people at the centre of the discussion.

Acknowledgements

As I begin writing this acknowledgment, I remind myself how much of a rollercoaster this journey has been. There have been many highs and a fair share of lows, and the process from start to finish has been a painstaking labour of compassionate love. While the goal has been several years in the making, the fact that I can now tick it off my list brings me immense satisfaction. However, I couldn't have done it without countless individuals who have supported me throughout this journey, which has been both academic and deeply personal, and it's impossible to thank everyone individually.

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Lastly, to the only wise God—Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omnibenevolent. You made the impossible possible; to you, I dedicate this thesis!

Preface

I wrote my master's thesis, "What policies and guidelines do New Zealand organsiations have for supporting parents, caregivers, and educators in facilitating discussions with young New Zealanders about online pornography?" to fulfil my graduation requirements for the Master of Public Health at Massey University in Manawatū, New Zealand. I conducted research and completed this thesis from January 2024 to February 2025.

In my previous studies, I avoided stepping outside my comfort zone. Last year and this year, I aimed to try something different; I chose to undertake this thesis by selecting a topic that required skills I hadn't yet developed. I have explored educational websites, engaged in text analysis, explored Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model, and learned how to write a thesis overall. Additionally, I've realised that struggle is part of the process. Consequently, this thesis has provided valuable lessons, both professionally and personally.

I sincerely thank my supervisor, Dr Siobhan Healy-Cullen, for her exceptional guidance and support throughout the process. I also thank Associate Professor Tracy Morison and Associate Professor Linda Murray for recommending her as my primary supervisor. This has maximised my learning opportunities, for which I am truly grateful. Finally, I thank my family and friends for their unwavering support. I'd also like to express my appreciation to you, dear reader: I hope you enjoy this research piece.

Elizabeth Kalsakau

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1. Introduction

There are numerous challenges when facilitating young people's learning about sex and sexuality, particularly sensitive topics such as online pornography, desire, pleasure, sexual diversity, gender equality, and sexual violence (Fine & McClelland, 2006; 2012; Cense, 2018; Gardland-Levett & Allen, 2018; Ingham, 2013; Ollis, 2016; Quinlivan, 2014). In previous years, pornography was restricted to printed resources and adult-only venues only (Becker & Stein, 1991; Roe, 1987), but the increase in the Internet has brought unprecedented accessibility, particularly amongst young people (Flander et al., 2009; Food, 2007).

In New Zealand, most young people aged 11-14 age can access online pornography, and for some, it is their primary source of sex education (Office and Film and Literature Classification (OFLC), 2020; Flood, 2010; Ollis, 2016). Young New Zealanders are active and frequent participants in these digital spaces, using online media at a rate higher than the OECD average and one of the highest in the world (OECD, 2018; Netsafe, 2018). In New Zealand, research has shown that 77% of young people in New Zealand have seen pornography by the age of 17 (Henry & Talbot, 2019). Young people aged 11-14 access online pornography, and for some young people, it is reportedly a primary source of sex education (OFLC, 2020; Flood, 2010; Ollis, 2016). A survey including more than 2000 teenagers aged 14-17 conducted by the New Zealand Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC) (2018, 2019, 2020) investigated young individuals' use of pornography, reporting on (1) how and why young people view pornography online, (2)

commonly viewed pornography, and (3) insights from young people in watching pornography, and its potential impacts such as negative influence on body image, young people watching pornography tend not to struggle with how frequently or how much they view it, and young people think pornography has negative influence on sex. According to the findings, the most common five reasons young people view online pornography are curiosity (76%), accidental exposure (58%), entertainment (57%), sexual pleasure or arousal (57%), and boredom (56%) (OFLC, 2018, 2020).

Easy access to online pornography has the potential to affect how young New Zealanders learn about sex and conduct their sexual lives, creating new opportunities but also bringing new risks (Gordon, 2022; Kirby et al., 2002). Therefore, it is a priority to support young New Zealanders to navigate pornography in a way that is youth-centric and resonates with their lived realities. Responding to young people's online pornography engagement is a complex process; adults' responses will inevitably be shaped by gendered beliefs about their children's sexuality and interest in online pornography within a socio-cultural climate that stigmatises conversation about sex (Healy-Cullen et al., 2024). Davis et al. (2021) reported that parents and caregivers need help keeping up with changing technology and a lack of school information and involvement, affecting their ability to engage in conversations with their children. New Zealand parents and caregivers report experiencing difficulties facilitating discussions on online pornography with their children (Healy-Cullen et al., 2021; Rothman et al., 2017).

Moreover, *how* to respond to young people's use of online pornography is a complex issue dividing many educators, parents, young people, and broader social groups (OFLC, 2019; Crabbe & Flood, 2021; Ollis, 2016). Nonetheless, pornography is a new cultural reality for youth and one that they have indicated they would like to talk about (Jhe et al., 2023). Further research is needed to investigate how parents, caregivers, and educators understand their

role in talking with young people about pornography. My research responds to this need, examining educational resources intended to guide parents, caregivers and educators in these vital discussions with young people (Healy-Cullen, 2022). Specifically, my study explores what guidelines New Zealand educational organisations have in place to support parents, caregivers, and educators in discussions of online pornography with young New Zealanders about online pornography.

1.2 A Short Note on Terminology for Pornography

Definitions of "pornography" have always been complicated due to its highly political nature. Thus, despite more than decades of debate and scholarship, attempts to define pornography remain contested and, therefore, inconsistent within the literature. For my research, I found Tarrant's (2016) definition most appropriate:

> "Pornography" refers to visual depictions that are intended to be sexual around the viewers, such as still photos, magazines, adult cable television channels, or VHS movies. Today, pornography is more likely to mean online video, and in the future, technological changes may again shift how these visual depictions are delivered to the consumer. (p.3).

Concerning terminology, I decided that "pornography" (rather than "porn") is most likely the best-suited term, as it signals a "more scholarly…approach" (Williams, 2014, p. 34). Thus, I have used both "online pornography" and "pornography" in this research; online pornography indicates that the relevant research has been exclusively on online pornography, whereas pornography reflects that the research was nonspecific.

1.3 Layout of the Thesis

The framing and shaping of a research project are crucial to ensuring robust and ethical research. In the introductory section, I set the scene for my inquiry, outline the purpose of the investigation, and explain why this research topic is essential. I have also outlined the structure of my thesis below.

In section two, I provide an overview of the literature concerning the global debates around online pornography and young people—the harmful effects of online pornography on young people, in particular, in a New Zealand context. I explore literature that is central to understanding the assumption about young people, sex, gender and parental involvement in sex education. Next, I consider the uncertain research landscape of communication pornography, what young people say they want versus how adults respond to young people engaging with pornography. Next, I discuss current policies in Zealand and other countries, sex education and online pornography in New Zealand. I concluded this chapter by exploring literature on the sociocultural context of online pornography in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

In section three, I outline my methodological approach. I set out the research design, strategies, and analytic conclusion throughout the research process. I outline the research questions. I then explain how I position the inquiry through a textual analysis approach, a qualitative design, and Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model as the analytic framework. I then focus on my research design, discussing the essentials of addressing ethical issues. In this section, I explain the process undertaken to explore websites as a means of data collection. After presenting the design, I finally discussed how I organised and analysed the websites through a thematic analysis informed by Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model.

In section four, I present my analysis. Here, I draw from Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model that interprets findings that impact young people's sex and their

engagement with online pornography. This model explores complex social issues, making it suitable for this research.

Section five finally provides a final discussion, showing how I pull all the threads from my analysis chapters. Firstly, my overall findings are discussed and considered about the research question. I discuss the importance of my findings and analyse their contribution to the academic world and health education community. I then discuss the limitations of the research and future research possibilities. Finally, parents, caregivers and educators should embrace the uncertainty of this new online pornography and sex education and the subject-ness of young people.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Understanding Online Pornography: The Social Context

Discussing online pornography can be challenging for parents, caregivers, and educators alike. Responding to young people's engagement with pornography is a complex process. The responses of parents, caregivers, and educators are inevitably shaped by factors such as gendered beliefs about young people's sexuality and interest in pornography, all within a socio-cultural climate that stigmatises discussions about sex.

Social media and digital spaces are integral to the lives of most young individuals today. Concerns about the effects of social media, access to online pornography, and sexualised music videos have intensified this issue (Albury & Bryon, 2018; Goodyear et al., 2019). Findings from the State of the Generation Report 2021 revealed that the potential impacts of social media on mental health are a significant concern for children and young people across all ages and demographic groups in New Zealand (Youthline, 2021; Nasier et al., 2021). In New Zealand, the sexualisation of children, particularly girls, is common in media discourse, where girls are often described as "growing up too soon" (Sanjakdar et al., 2015; Vares & Jackson, 2015). In this context, young people's engagement with online pornography and discussions surrounding related education represent a complex issue that divides many parents, caregivers, and educators (OFLC, 2018; Healy-Cullen et al., 2021).

Pornography has long been a source of public discomfort, generating significant concern about the sexuality of young individuals (Meehan, 2023). As the epitome of explicit content, it has fostered cultural anxieties, leading to the rise and persistence of protective policies and educational efforts to safeguard young people from its influence. This concern is understandable, as the term "pornography" encompasses a wide range of content, from erotica to extremely violent and non-consensual depictions of rape, bestiality, and child exploitation (Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2020). Therefore, it is no surprise that young people's

encounters with online pornography have sparked global worries about healthy sexual socialisation (Scarcelli, 2015; Tomic et al., 2017).

In Western cultures, popular discourse and opinion frame pornography as a risk to the sexual quality and the emotional and mental well-being of young people (Flood, 2009; McKee, 2010). Online pornography is considered risky, and young individuals are described as being "at risk" due to its damaging effects. Consequently, online pornography is seen as a threat from which young people should be protected (Scarcelli, 2015). The extent of harm and the type of pornography deemed "most harmful" have been, and continue to be, hotly debated (Bridges et al., 2010). There is a notable difference between young children exposed to pornography and older youths who engage with it for pleasure. Therefore, the necessity for a nuanced inquiry involving young individuals is evident (Meehan, 2023).

Young people's engagement with pornography occurs within a context characterised by significant educational and communication gaps between them and their parents, caregivers, and educators. The social stigma and discomfort surrounding online pornography have led to silence or avoidance of the topic, unintentionally compelling young people to navigate these issues without adequate support (Davies et al., 2021). These findings underscore the need for a more open and balanced conversation about pornography. In this context, Healy-Cullen et al. (2022) highlight the disparity in perception between young people and adults regarding the effects of online pornography, proposing recommendations for improving sex education, fostering critical thinking, raising awareness, and encouraging open discussions.

2.2. Young People's Engagement with Online Pornography

Up to now, the research community has mainly concentrated on the adverse effects of pornography on the psychology and behaviour of young individuals—especially regarding

violence and addiction (Tsaliki et al., 2014). It's comprehendible that studies show regular exposure to pornography can create concerns among adults (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). Adults worry that young people might develop hypersexualised behaviours, suffer harm from pornography, and need protection from unrealistic perceptions of physical appearance and sexual performance (Crabbe & Flood, 2021).

For example, pornography showing violence against women, including rough anal sex and choking, has raised concern. For instance, Crabbe and Corlett (2011) question whether repeatedly engaging with such online pornography can undermine young people's ability to engage in sexual relations with others safely. They maintain that although young people often claim to understand that pornography is, to an extent, fictional, they still may apply what they see depicted in online pornography videos to their sexual interactions in real life. Harrison and Ollis (2015) build on this by reporting that internationally, 59% of young people who have watched pornography within the last six months had tried to re-enact something they had seen with a sexual partner.

However, there is limited understanding of how, if any, adverse effects unfold over time or how pornography interacts with social connections and interpersonal relationships (Stubbing et al., 2023). Moreover, some scholars argue that online pornography designed to arouse is not necessarily problematic for young individuals and can serve as a source of information (McKee et al., 2022; Byron et al., 2021). The limitations of effects-focused and harm-oriented research have been highlighted, which forms the basis for many official responses. These are summarised by Buckingham and Braggs (2003, p. 10):

> It [effects-focused scholarship] focuses almost entirely on adverse effects; it relies on simplistic assumptions about the relationships between media use, attitudes and behaviour; it fails to explain why effects arise in some cases and not others; it isolates media use from other social variables, or accounts for those variables in unduly

> simplistic ways; it does not adequately consider how people relate media to other sources of information; and it tends to oversimplify complex questions to do with the meanings and pleasures people derive from the media.

This body of research guides our responses to youth and is quite shaky. Importantly, it seldom considers what young people desire or express about their experiences with online pornography.

In response, scholars have started exploring how young people engage with online pornography as a way of making sense of their sex, desires and experiences (Attwood et al., 2018). Some studies have sought to document what young people may *learn* from pornography and what this may mean for their well-being and relationships with themselves and others (Goldstein, 2020). Some research in New Zealand has also situated young people's engagement with pornography within a complex social framework, considering how young people negotiate pornography and construct their own sexual identities (Healy-Cullen et al., 2024).

According to Spišák and Paasonen (2017), young people's views on online pornography are more diverse now than what is reflected in public policy and debates. These views range from mundane to challenging interplays between young individual's body, sex and imagination (Attwood et al., 2018; Setty, 2022). A developing body of research illustrates that young people have various views when it comes to online pornography, in addition to excitement, nonchalance and resistance (Setty, 2022). Meehan (2023) highlights how young people consume, experience and understand pornography within the social-cultural contexts in which they live. Young people negotiate with pornography as an expression of their agency, and some researchers highlight that young people recognise online pornography as a vital part of their sexual meaning-making (Spišák, 2016)

Research with young people in New Zealand indicates that online pornography shapes youth's sex meaning-making, presenting youth with varied portrayals of sex, relationships and consent (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022). Further findings include young people normalising online pornography, whether watching it or not; lack of communication between parents, caregivers, educators and young individuals about pornography; the desire for better sex education, including resources about pornography; and various views on filters or age verification (Meehan, 2023). This aligns with international studies (Bale, 2011; Sabina et al., 2008). Studies have also shown that New Zealand young people are active consumers of pornography, cynically and critically engaging with its content rather than passively consuming it. Matthew and Nain (2020) reported that audiences viewing New Zealand TV welcome sexual content and graphic nudity if they find them entertaining and educational and convey positive body images.

According to Meehan (2023), young people interpret and interact with online pornography resources and engage with them in their sociocultural contexts, thereby challenging traditional views of victimisation. In addition, Healy-Cullen et al. (2023) described two specific identities taken up among young people in New Zealand, "Proficient Internet Pornography Users" and "Astute Internet Pornography Viewers", – illustrating active discernment and challenging common perceptions of vulnerability to influence by pornography. Overall, the engagement of New Zealand's young people with pornography suggests a sophisticated plane of engagement that calls for mature, informed conversation about sex in this digital age—highlighting the need for educational plans to respond to the realities of young people's experiences, improving critical understanding of pornography and its broader implications on sex health and relationships.

2.3 Responding to the Issue of Young People's Engagement with Pornography

Young people engaging in online pornography has emerged as a hot-button topic and critical issue for educators, policymakers, and researchers in New Zealand. With the increase in Internet access, youth are increasingly engaging with pornography resources, whether by choice or chance (Crabbe & Flood, 2021). In addition to a broader understanding of young people's sexuality and engagement with online pornography, it is also essential to understand how parents, caregivers and educators perceive young people's sexuality and engagement with online pornography and what support and guidance are given to them in supporting young people in the home and school environment.

2.3.1 The Role of Parents/Caregivers and Educators

Limited research contributes to an understanding of how parents and caregivers perceive their role in young people's engagement with online pornography, particularly how parents and caregivers perceive and understand youth engagement with pornography more generally and what this means for their communication with young people about online pornography (Livingstone & Bober, 2004; Rothman et al., 2017). Research in New Zealand and internationally indicates that parents and caregivers perceive young people engaging with online pornography as inherently harmful and are fearful and embarrassed about discussing the issue with them, even if they would like an open discussion on the topic (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; Davis et al., 2019;Dawson et al., 2024; Tsaliki, 2011; Widman et al., 2021; Zurcher, 2017). However, parents and caregivers are influenced by gender when communicating with young people about online pornography, with fathers reportedly less likely to engage in discussion than mothers (Boniel-Nissim et al., 2020). Double standards also exist in gender socialisation, as parents and caregivers may also be more likely to

condone online pornography viewing among young men than women, attributing male interest to natural sexual urges (Gesser-Edelsburg & Arabia, 2018; Tolman, 2012).

In the context of parenting, Flood (2009) argued that although online pornography is effortlessly accessible to young individuals, there is uncertainty among parents about monitoring or communicating about it with young people. Recently, Davis et al. (2021) reported on pornography with parents who had children aged 10-16. While pornography was thought of as an issue for young people, parents in that study did not perceive it as an issue for their children – "not my child" (p. 578). Some parents have indicated a preference to talk to their children about pornography instead of regulating it through filters (Davis et al., 2021); other factors influence their education practices. Specifically, parents talked about their difficulty keeping up with changing technology, lack of resources and school involvement, all of which affect their perceived ability to discuss this topic with their children (Clelland, 2023). Research by Dawson et al. (2024) illustrates that parents feel ill-equipped to talk about online pornography with their children due to discomfort and/or insufficient materials.

However, there remain limited studies about New Zealand parents' approach to conversations around online pornography with their children. Sexual desire, love, consent, pleasure, gender inequality, and pornography are topics children and young people want to investigate in sex education (Allen, 2005; OFLC, 2020; Family Planning Association, 2019). As numerous young individuals class pornography as a poor sex educator (OFLC, 2020), they keep highlighting limited sources to learn about what consensual, pleasurable, and equitable sex looks like (Allen, 2013; Education Review Office (ERO), 2018; New Zealand Family Planning Association (NZFPA), 2019; Fitzpatrick et al., 2021). Young people in New Zealand believe that parents are uncertain of how to discuss pornography with them and that

they may have limited avenues to discuss, critique and make sense of what they are viewing (OFLC 2020).

Educators are another critical group of adults who play a pivotal role in young people's lives. Numerous parents lack confidence or feel uncomfortable about sex and leave sex education to the school, as they perceive educators as having expert pedagogical skills. Nevertheless, studies highlight that health education teachers feel as uncomfortable as parents (Dixon, Clelland, et al., 2022; Dixon et al., 2023; Johnson et al., 2014; Ollis, 2016). Within the New Zealand context, Quinlivan (2014) drew tension between acknowledging young people's sex agency and educators who feel uncomfortable.

Individual educators may be reluctant to provide instruction on sexually contentious topics (such as pornography, abortion, and masturbation), which in some instances may be borne out of apprehension of caregiver's responses or the values and ethos of the school (Shtarkshall et al., 2007; Weaver et al., 2001). Whether and how schools approach the issue of online pornography in sex education will shape the sexual socialisation of students in many ways, yet little is known about how educators perceive young people's engagement with online pornography. Overall, there is limited research on parents, caregivers, and educators' perceptions of young people's engagement with online pornography. Given that online pornography is under-researched in New Zealand, it is also unclear how sociocultural factors shape these youth-adult perspectives, such as the understanding of Māori young people and adults regarding online pornography and the diversity of school-based sexuality education.

2.3.2 Young people's views

In New Zealand, young people reportedly want honest discussions about sex and pornography with adults (OFLC, 2020; NZFP, 2019). According to the OFLC (2020), young people feel that the sex and pornography messages from home and school are negative and simplistic and do not fit with "their feelings and experiences" (p. 40). While current New Zealand studies highlight that young people access online pornography out of curiosity or a desire to learn about sex (OFLC, 2018; 2020), the silence of numerous adults or parents on the topic leads to limited avenues to discuss the extensive socio-cultural factors shaping sex. In addition, youth stress that it is essential to understand consent, identify healthy relationships and critique the misleading portrayals of sex in pornography (Ollis, 2016).

Evidence shows that they desire accurate and relevant information in an easily digestible format, highlighting a solid preference for peer-led discussions and resources that resonate with their experiences (Davis et al., 2021). They value media literacy that promotes critical thinking regarding online resources and their impact on sex attitudes and behaviours (Crabbe & Flood, 2021). Parents and educators, however, view pornography as a potential threat to young people's development, prompting calls for restriction and/or censorship (Davis et al., 2021). Adult "experts" must value young people's viewpoints, which must be crucial in shaping educational policies, as well as ensuring discussions about sex are inclusive, culturally informed, and responsive to their needs.

Adults often respond to young people's involvement with online pornography with concern and a protective instinct. Many parents and educators view pornography as a potential threat to youth development, prompting calls for restrictions or even censorship (Davis et al., 2021). However, this protective mindset can hinder open discussions because adults may feel unprepared to navigate the complex topics of sexuality and pornography with young people (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022). Research shows a range of reactions, from

avoidance and denial to attempts at fear-based guidance (Ollis, 2016). Although adult responses are often motivated by a desire to protect youth, adopting a strategy that encourages open dialogue could provide better support for young people navigating their digital experiences (Jearey-Graham & Macleod, 2017; Goldstein, 2020).

Although young people are calling for better sex education from adults and parents around them, it is unclear how contemporary debates regulate parents' thoughts, feelings and practices in New Zealand. Limited current peer-reviewed studies focus on New Zealand parent's experiences with sex education (Clelland, 2023; Allen, 2020). Further, fewer studies exist on how parents take up and disrupt debates on sex, gender and parenting (Clelland, 2023). There is comparatively less research, critical or otherwise, on adult understandings of young people engaging with online pornography (Livingstone & Bober, 2004). Qualitative research suggests that parents and caregivers generally view their children engaging with pornography as unfavourable.

Several studies found that, as with sexuality in general, parents and caregivers are hesitant, fearful, nervous, and/or embarrassed to discuss the subjects of online pornography with their children (Martellozzo et al., 2017; Zurcher, 2019). Although there are contradicting findings related to the outcome of online pornography usage within the research literature, public opinion regarding online pornography has primarily remained consistent – with a large majority believing online pornography presents serious harm to the children who view it. Parents and caregivers worry that online pornography will contribute to a distorted view of sex and relationships, desensitise children to violence, negatively affect their understanding of consent, impact body image and self-esteem and lead to online pornography addiction (Internetmatters.org, 2019).

Research indicates that while some adults in the Global North converse about pornography with young people, these discussions tend to be informal and lack structured

guidelines (Pound et al., 2016; Beyers, 2013). This leads to inconsistent messaging focusing on deterrence instead of encouraging critical thinking (Livingstone & Mason, 2015). Personal beliefs can influence these conversations, which may fail to enhance media literacy or provide a nuanced viewpoint effectively. Likewise, educators encounter difficulties stemming from insufficient training and resources in sex education, hindering their ability to address the topic thoroughly (Martino et al., 2008). The lack of clear guidelines results in varied interpretations and missed opportunities for constructive discussions on consent, media literacy, and healthy relationships.

2.4 Guidance and Support for Engaging with Young People

As discussed, parents and educators in Zealand feel ill-equipped to discuss these subjects. This disconnection is exacerbated by insufficient policies and guidelines, leaving parents, caregivers and educators uncertain about how to converse online pornography in ways that encourage critical thinking about sex amongst young people (Meehan, 2023). Thus, in New Zealand and globally, there is an increased need for structured support to help adults discuss online pornography with youth.

2.4.1 Sex Education and Online Pornography in New Zealand

Sex education for students in New Zealand has attracted political and media coverage with an amalgamation of calls for more, better and more comprehensive education. In New Zealand, sex education is frequently taught by both teachers and external educators (Meehan, 2023). Moving from traditional private sex education to the public space, particularly the digital world, causes much anxiety and panic for parents and caregivers (Charteris et al., 2016; Ollis, 2016), which can lead to risk-based sex education (Albury & Aryon, 2018; Kehily, 2012). Some young individuals reportedly prefer external experts because they are

confident, not embarrassed, and unknown to them (O'Higgins & Gabhainn, 2010). Additionally, there may be variations in the ability and willingness of in-school educators to cover sex education (Setty, 2022). In their research, Formby and Wolstenholme (2012) noted that educators recognised that they needed to appear credible and experienced to be taken seriously by the students. Educators' approach is indeed fundamental to the effectiveness of sex education, particularly their openness (Kontula, 2010), being direct (Smith et al., 2011), and approachability (Pound et al., 2016).

Sex education is not just sex education; it is a required component of the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2023b) and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (Ministry of Education, 2023a) – this curriculum statement for Māori-medium schools up to the end of year 10 (13-14 years). Sex education is in the broader learning area of Health and Physical Education. Since 2015, the Ministry of Education has published guidelines for principals, boards of trustees and educators to teach sex education based on broad consultation with stakeholders (Ministry of Education, 2015). The sex education curriculum continues to evolve, and the most recent secondary school version, *Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE): A Guide for Teachers, Leaders and Board of Trustees: Years 9-13* (Ministry of Education 2020 – outlines sex education as integrated across a range of subjects (Graham et al., 2022).

It is crucial to note that sex education is the only subject on the boards of trustees; schools must consult with the school community about the content (Education Review Office, 2021). As a result, each school in New Zealand has the potential to influence its strategy for sex education – what is taught and how. There is a potential conflict between the inclusive and integrated objectives of the curriculum and the members of the school community. This has resulted in inconsistent strategies that differ in values, contributing to

some students' exclusion (Ellis & Bentham, 2021). This is also important, for example, when considering whether pornography is discussed in school-based sex education.

In addition, guidance on incorporating pornography discussion into school curricula is sparse, leading to variable educational support for students (Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa, 2025; Healthify, 2025; Just the Facts, 2025; and BodySafe, 2025). Some teachers hesitate to tackle the issues directly, concerned about potential backlash from parents or the school community. Others feel unequipped due to insufficient training in fostering critical thinking among youth regarding online content. A lack of official guidelines and resources leaves educators without a solid framework to address students' inquiries about pornography (Davies et al., 2021).

Dixon et al. (2022) state that there are disparities in how RSE is implemented, with schools not achieving the recommended 12-15 hours annually. This leads to a condensed presentation of vital topics, leaving little room to address emerging matters like online pornography effectively before the subject is elective. In addition, the effectiveness of RSE is frequently hindered by the inconsistency amongst the different schools and regions, compounded by teacher's beliefs and biases, influencing their comfort and proficiency in covering specific subjects. Dixon et al. (2022) highlighted the need for more significant support and resources to ensure students receive comprehensive and consistent sex education across New Zealand.

Current scholarships into primary and secondary school educators' perspectives of sex education still highlight the need for adequate pre-service training and ongoing professional development for educators in this area (Dixon, Clelland et al., 2022; Robertson, Beliveau et al., 2022; Dixon et al., 2023). Moreover, while schools desire to deliver sex education better, a whole-school approach to sex education is required to ensure its priority (Beres, 2022). New Zealand studies (Dixon, Clelland, et al., 2022; Dixon et al., 2022) stressed the

significance of collaborating between schools, parents and the wider school community to create and provide quality sex education and, in addition, building partnerships with parents to temper tension over misunderstandings about sex education and possible clashes in values (Clelland, 2023).

At the same time, it happens that insufficient professional development, low priority of sex education in schools, and concern about potential parents' concern limited the capability of many educators to deliver quality sex education – education that reflects more evidence-based contemporary discourses of sex education (Clelland, 2023). The central point of the 2020 guide is a whole school method to sex education, enabling sex education grounded in exploring the power relations and local contexts shaping young individuals' lives. The guide states that a whole method involves "active leadership, quality teaching and a strong reciprocal relationship between school, families and community" (MOE, 2020b, p.18).

Furthermore, a report, *Relationship and Sexuality Education – Ministry of Education (2020: Analysis for Parents/Caregivers*, by Family First (2020a, p. 5), recognises five problems with the Ministry's RSE curriculum – "dangerous misinformation; the injection of sexuality education into the rest of the curriculum; the implementation of controversial and divisive policies; and the risk of schools becoming ideological and indoctrinatory spaces". To add to this, they also suggested that the curriculum is normalising pornography for students (Family First, 2021 a, b). In sum, it is a thorny topic; ultimately, it is unclear how parents make sense of sex education in New Zealand (Clelland, 2023).

2.4.2 Policies in New Zealand and Abroad

In New Zealand, research indicates that reactions to young people's engagement with online pornography vary and are often influenced by personal beliefs and societal norms

(Healy-Cullen et al., 2022; Ross (2022). Parents may employ censorship tools, i.e. parents' controls and content filters; this strategy falls short of meaningfully supporting youth, as young individuals circumvent these limitations. In addition, censorship can unintentionally hinder open discussion between parents and children (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022). Nonetheless, national discourse often centres on whether the government should limit access to harmful content or promote open discussions and education

The arrival of the Internet raised new challenges to the sovereignty of nation-states in presiding over media standards and regulations (Beattie, 2009; Flew, 2016; Kohl et al., 2012), specifically in regulating sales, exhibition and distribution of online pornography. Since then, lawmakers have looked to Internet service providers (ISPs), Internet content hosts (ICHs), and navigation providers to block citizens from accessing non-compliant content (Keen et al., 2020). The current approach to Internet content regulation allows for ready accessibility to online pornography images, which many would be subjected to state laws if they were to appear in print form (Keen et al., 2020). National-level discourses often focus on whether the government limits access to harmful content or promotes open communication and education (Classification Office, 2019).

Policy and guidelines are essential parts of assisting parents and educators as young people increasingly access online pornography (Office of Film and Literature Classification, 2019). Furthermore, various educational institutions offer impromptu digital safety workshops, outlining other censorship measures like content filtering and digital monitoring, for example, Network for Learning (N4L) by the Ministry of Education, cyber safety initiatives such as Safer Technologies for Schools (ST4S) (Education Gazette, 2023; Interface Online,2024). Healy-Cullen et al. (2022) indicate that young people often bypass these restrictions, highlighting the importance of parents, caregivers and educators promoting open discussions rather than relying solely on censorship.

Most democratic countries have not tried to prohibit pornography completely; however, they have tended to prevent only certain forms, for example, “child” and “extreme” pornography (Nair, 2019). The United Kingdom’s age verification law prompted governments in Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Poland to consider similar measures (Finn, 2019; Radio New Zealand, 2018; Taylor, 2020; Yagielowicz, 2019). In July 2020, France passed a similar law (Braun & Kayali, 2020) – a private bill aiming to restrict young individuals from accessing online sexually explicit resources September 2020 by the Canadian Senate (Parliament of Canada, 2020). Authorities in Germany are attempting to force Internet Service Providers to block legal online pornographic websites that do not comply with age verification controls (Geiger, 2020).

In New Zealand, the regulation of sex material has historically been driven by concerns over morality and social order. New Zealand’s censorship laws were initially influenced by Victorian-era- moral codes, reflecting concern about the impact of sex content on public decency (Glayworth, 2014). Over time, these regulations evolved to accommodate changing societal norms and technologies. Two statutes regulate content in New Zealand. Firstly, the Broadcasting Act 1989 sets standards for traditional media “broadcasters”, but some standards are employed online (Broadcasting Act 1989 N.Z). Secondly, the Films, Videos and Publications Classifications Act generates a consumer advisory system for age-appropriate warnings for content in “films”. It also specifies which “publications” are illegal for distribution across mediums in New Zealand and has been in force for 30 years (Films, Video, and Publications Classification Act 1993 N.Z). The Harmful Digital Communication Act 2015 regulates cyberbullying, harassment, and harmful online behaviour (Harmful Digital Communications Act of 2015 N.Z). This defines harmful digital conversations as threatening, intimidating or harmful to another person, made using a digital communication

device, for example, a computer, smartphone or social media platform (Harmful Digital Communication Act 2015 N.Z).

To enforce these rules and settle disputes with organisations, the Act has an "approved agency" that receives and investigates complaints about harmful digital conversations (Harmful Digital Communication Acts of 2015 N.Z). However, the proliferation of online materials has outpaced these regulatory frameworks. Therefore, New Zealand needs help to update its policies to address specific challenges in digital media. These tools are planned to prevent harm to people, even young people watching unwanted suitable materials, protecting freedom of expression (Internal Affairs, 2021).

New Zealand has adopted a multifaceted approach to education about pornography, allowing the exchange of free and frank ideas, joint development and delivery of resources, coordinating of message and policies responses across various agencies, including the Classification Office, In the Know, The Light Project and the Ministry of Education, which offer advice to adults about how to talk with young people about pornography (OFLC, 2018). The initiative "Keep It Real Online" employs humour to encourage parental discussion about pornography (Gerrad et al., 2023). This intervention reflects a broader shift from strict censorship towards empowering young people with the knowledge and skills to engage critically with online content. Netsafe is a non-profit agency that receives funding from the Ministries of Justice and Education to assist people, such as young people, who are exposed to harmful digital content or online pornography (Netsafe, 2023). Netsafe operates closely with technology companies to resolve complaints and with the Police and the Department of Internal Affairs.

Nevertheless, New Zealand has had a relatively narrow focus, mostly tackling overarching digital safety issues without explicitly addressing the distinct challenges of pornography (Healy-Cullen et al., 2023). In the absence of specialised resources, parents,

caregivers, and educators must manage complex discussions independently, frequently without the confidence to discuss subjects like consent, the differences between realistic and fictionalised sexual relationships, and how pornography may shape views on body image and self-esteem (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022). There are no cohesive guidelines, consistent materials are scarce, and a lack of comprehensive media literacy education in the school curricula, alongside different values across educational institutions and in the family context (Clelland, 2023).

2.5. The Sociocultural Context of Pornography in New Zealand

Comprehending the sociocultural contexts of online pornography is essential for understanding its place in society. In New Zealand, as in many other nations, the digital revolution has altered how people engage with media, including adult materials. Previously, pornography was mainly available in print and physical formats, making it harder for (young) people to access it. With the emergence of the Internet, online pornography has become easily accessible and nearly omnipresent (Lamb et al., 2018). Online pornography is now a substantial part of the contemporary bricolage of cultural material accessible for young individuals to learn sex, construct sex identities, and navigate sex experiences, desires, relationships and practices (Scarcelli, 2015). This substantial change in availability has shaped how society thinks about young people's engagement with pornography and has renewed concerns about how young people acquire knowledge about sex and relationships (Crabbe & Flood, 2021; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022).

New Zealanders hold various attitudes toward sex and, relatedly, pornography. Findings from Healy-Cullen et al. (2023) highlight that perspectives on pornography are deeply intertwined with culture, religion, and generational values e.g., Māori and Pacific Islander society's ways of approaching and conversing about sex differ from European New

Zealanders and other ethnicities, frequently reflecting greater emphases on collective values and protective stand toward young people. These cultural distinctions influence how communication on pornography is framed within families and schools, with some communities prioritising values of modesty and respect, whilst others may take a more open, liberal approach (Meehan, 2023).

The diverse cultural composition of New Zealand's population highlights the importance of local research. Māori and Pacific Islanders societies possess unique perspectives and values around family, communities and sex that contrast with mainstream Western views (Pihama et al., 2020; Moewaka Barnes, 2010; Anae, 2016; Tiata-Seath, 2014). Understanding cultural subtleties is crucial for developing adequate educational materials that engage young people from various backgrounds and equip them with the help needed to navigate pornography, which is a sensitive and complicated issue (Ollis, 2016). Ongoing, anxious and public discussions about youth's online sex practices and the danger created by online pornography have substantially risen with the arrival of the Internet (Naezer and Ringrose, 2018).

Research from the NZ Youth and Porn report that many youths in New Zealand have seen pornography before 18 years, while many accidentally encounter pornographies, and several youths are regular viewers. In addition, young people are indicating that online pornography was a site of sex learning and influenced their offline sex lives. Many young people were concerned that pornography promotes false expectations of sex and relationships, as well as normalising violence and aggression (OFLC, 2018). Researchers concentrating on New Zealand can develop culturally appropriate frameworks and policy suggestions catering to local needs. This will ensure that educational responses effectively address the specific requirements of New Zealand's young people.

2.6 The Present Research

Current studies on young people's engagement with online pornography in New Zealand have advanced, but significant gaps still exist. While current research emphasises exposure's psychological, social, and educational "effects", several facets of these complicated issues remain underexplored. For example, there is insufficient understanding of how effective current interventions are in aiding parents and educators in addressing young people's engagement with online pornography. While some resources exist to help parents and educators talk about pornography with children, often, these do not cater to the New Zealand context, and rigorous evaluations of their effectiveness are lacking (Davies et al., 2021). Therefore, my thesis primarily investigates how guidelines in New Zealand support parents, caregivers and educators in facilitating online pornography with young people. This research fills a crucial gap in the literature, as previous studies primarily focused on the *effects* of pornography on young people without adequately exploring policy frameworks intending to guide parents, caregivers and educators in these essential conversations. Consequently, in the present research, I examine the current policies and guidelines provided by New Zealand organisations in supporting parents, caregivers, and educators to engage in discussions with youth about online pornography.

3. Aims and Objectives

In this study, I investigate the policies and guidelines New Zealand organisations have for supporting parents and educators in facilitating discussions with young New Zealanders about online pornography. I identify currently available resources and examine how they:

(i) construct youth sexuality and youth engagement with online pornography

(ii) offer support and guidance to parents, caregivers, and educators.

The following sections outline a proposed methodology for addressing the aim of my research, including its theoretical underpinnings, data selection and generation procedures, analytical procedures, and ethical considerations.

4. Methodology

Textual analysis is a suitable methodology for my research, for it enables an in-depth examination of how guidelines communicate support strategies for parents, caregivers, and educators regarding young people engaging with online pornography. Guidelines are a valuable object of inquiry, as they reflect cultural assumptions, in this case, about youth sexuality and pornography. Guidelines can, therefore, be viewed as social artefacts that are shaped by and are shaping public and private discourses. For that reason, I chose to do a textual analysis to examine explicit and subtle assumptions that underpin guidelines about how parents, caregivers and educators should discuss online pornography with young people (Willig, 2013). Parents, caregivers and educators in New Zealand access websites such as *Netsafe*, In the *Know, The Light Project* and *Classification Office*. Such websites aim to deliver targeted guidelines and support on matters related to online safety and how young people engage with digital media, including pornography. Commonly, these sites include informative resources, toolkits, and discussion guides that help parents and educators foster discussion about online behaviour and media literacy. Indeed, the reality that these guidelines exist already suggests there is an expectation that "good" parents will have these discussions with young people in their care.

While textual analysis is a common approach in education, policy studies, and social sciences, its relevance in evaluating digital and sexual health guidelines remains less common. I employed textual analysis, applying Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model (explained in the following section) as a theoretical lens within a broader sociocultural context to explore how macro-level policies influence micro-level interactions. This approach is suitable for addressing the research question, allowing me to explore how educational guidelines function or, at times, limit frameworks for parents, caregivers and educators who wish to engage young people in conversation about pornography. Overall, a textual analysis

of these guidelines provides an opportunity to interrogate how such guidelines portray young people, their sex lives, and their engagement with online pornography within a broader social and cultural context.

4.1 Analytical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model serves as the analytical framework for this research. This theory posits that human development is influenced by the interplay of various systems: individual, family, community and policy contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). The model emphasises the importance of environmental and social influences in shaping development and behaviour (Evans, 2024). These systems are the micro-system, meso-system, exosystem, macro-system, and chrono-system; each of these layers presents different levels of varying, from intimate surroundings (e.g., family) to broad societal (e.g., culture), influencing an individual's growth (Evans, 2024).

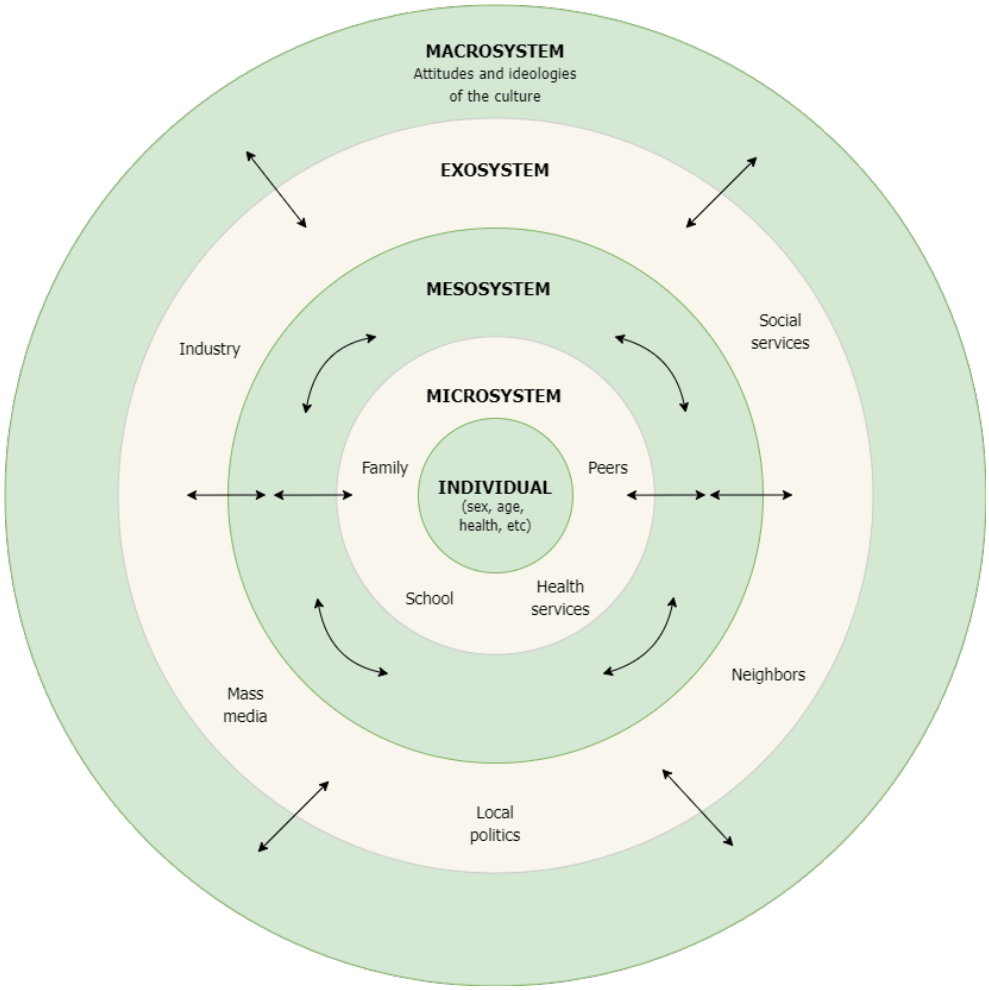

Figure 1. **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory – Five Systems**

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4.1.1 The micro-system

The microsystem refers to interactions with families, friends, and educators. The microsystem comprises the immediate environments where young people engage in discussions at home and school. These discussions, or their absence, between parents and children around sex and media come to bear on young people's views on online pornography.

4.1.2 The meso-system

The mesosystem entails interactions amongst various microsystems, such as family dynamics and school regulations. In New Zealand, for example, guidance around online pornography in schools is notably inconsistent, and there are difficulties linking family conversations with educational frameworks regarding online materials (Dawson et al., 2024). Therefore, the mesosystem is a crucial area where home and school environments connect to support young individuals better.

4.1.3 The exo-system

The exosystem refers to external factors indirectly affecting children and young people, meaning, children and young people may not be directly participating in the setting, however these external factors still impact their immediate surroundings and consequently their development. For example, workplace policies concerning parental leave, flexible working hours, work-from-home does remarkably impact children and young people's development. A flexible working hour allows parents more time with children and young people, positively affecting children and young people's emotional development and stronger family relationships. On the contrary, a stressful work environment, limited flexibility leads to parents being more irritable at home, indirectly affecting young individuals. Mass and social media influences content, values and norms through these mediums indirectly influencing young individual's development by shaping their worldviews, relationships and themselves (Guy-Evans, 2024). In New Zealand, the perception of parents and educators around online pornography is shaped by how it is portrayed in the media or communicated publicly (usually taboo or harmful). Crabbe and Flood (2021), for example, observed typically that the press offers polarised views on young people and online pornography, evoking fear rather than encouraging constructive communication. The outcome is that adults might feel compelled to limit or entirely avoid talking about pornography, reinforcing the

absence of open communication. The exosystem is crucial in moulding parents', caregivers and educators' perspectives when talking with young people.

4.1.4 The macrosystem

The macrosystem captures the cultural norms, societal values, and overarching policies that shape someone's socialisation. In New Zealand, without clear national policies about online pornography education, there is a disjointed approach among different communities (Healy-Cullen et al., 2023; Crabbe & Flood, 2021). Unlike other nations implementing broad media literacy programs, New Zealand has yet to establish a standard, government-mandated initiative for addressing pornography in education settings (Dixon et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2014; Dixon, 2023). New Zealand has social norms about pornography watching and expectations for discussing pornography with young people. These norms acknowledge young people watch pornography and that it is appropriate to support them in understanding the difference between online pornography and sex. Accordingly, there are resources developed by the Ministry of Education and the OFLC to help parents and educators talk about pornography (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2019).

4.1.5 The chronosystem

Lastly, the chronosystem factors in time and explores how history and digital developments influence young individuals' engagement with online pornography. In the context of this study, while the previous generation has restricted access to online pornography, today's young people have easy access to online content (OFLC, 2020; NZHEA, 2020). Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem highlights the need to consider how the present educational response plans have evolved alongside the ever-changing digital

space, aligning with today's young people's challenges. By employing this framework, my analysis elucidates how guidelines provided by organisations in New Zealand shape family and education conversations concerning pornography. Exploring these interconnected systems facilitates an exploration of how these guidelines can either foster or impede open dialogues around online pornography.

4.2 Data Collection

The primary research methodology employed was textual analysis. I reviewed various documents, such as educational materials and online safety guidelines from critical organisations, including the *Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Internal Affairs, NetSafe, In the Know, The Light Project,* and the *OFLC*. This research's data collection followed particular selection criteria, namely: (i) recency (published within the last ten years), (ii) relevance to the research questions (i.e., documents purport to support parents, caregivers and educators talk to young people), and (iii) were New Zealand organisations (independent or governmental). Given the confines of a small-scale project, this criterion was chosen, enabling a detailed yet concentrated textual analysis. This systematic data collection method utilises established protocols for qualitative data collection, enhancing the research outcome's relevancy and rigour (Braun & Clarke, 2006). See Table 1 for the final sample.

Table 1 Texts Analysed

Website Title	**Agency**	**URL**
Tāhūrangi – New Zealand Curriculum	Ministry of Education	https://newzealandcurriculum.tahurangi.education.govt.nz
Teaching and Learning about Pornography in Health Education: for students in Years 9-13	NZ Health and Education	https://healtheducation.org.nz
Keep It Real	Ministry of Internal Affairs	https://www.keepitrealonline.govt.nz
NetSafe	NetSafe	https://netsafe.org.nz
In the Know	In the Know	https://www.intheknow.co.nz
The Light Project	The Light Project	https://thelightproject.co.nz
Classification Office	The Classification Office (OFLC)	https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz

Each of these sites in Table 1 provides distinct insights into how educational initiatives address young people's engagement with online pornography.

1. *Ministry of Education* – Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, bords of trustees, and teachers (2015).

2. *NZ Health and Education* – is an incorporated society representing the interest of teachers and educators in New Zealand (2021).

3. *Keep It Real Online* — is a New Zealand government public awareness and sexual health promotion campaign to support children and "tweens" in being safe online. Led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (2020).

4. *Netsafe* – is important for promoting digital safety. It provides guidelines that focus on protecting young people online (Netsafe, 2025).

5. *In the Know Project* – developed with input from educational specialists, assisting parents, caregivers and educators in tackling challenging discussion about online pornography and digital literacy (In the Know Project, 2025).

6. *The Light Project* – a non-governmental organisation that provides resources to help young individuals cultivate healthy understanding of sexuality in the digital world (The Light Project, 2025)

7. *The Classification Office* – outlines New Zealand's legal regulations regarding media content. It focuses on age-appropriate access and ethical considerations surrounding explicitly materials, crucial for guiding discussion between adults and youth (Classification Office, 2025).

Examining these sites, I explored the resources available to parents, caregivers, and educators. I investigated how these tools promote and facilitate discussion about online pornography within the context of New Zealand.

4.3 Data analysis method

This research employed an inductive thematic analysis to explore the selected texts (see Table 1). An inductive approach allows themes to be developed from the data, facilitating an analysis founded in each document's specific language and context. This analysis method avoids imposing preconceived categories, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how these resources address young individuals' engagement with online pornography, digital literacy and adult guidance. Following Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-step guide, the process began by immersing myself in the gathered information, reading and rereading each text while noting first impressions and recurring patterns. After this, I created initial codes by highlighting essential phrases, sentences, or sections that aligned with the research questions and sorted them into topic categories such as "media literacy", "parents as experts," and "online safety".

Next, I generated broader themes by grouping these codes into more fine-tuned categories, concentrating on patterns that reflected societal attitudes and underlying assumptions of youth sex and educational strategies around online safety. Each theme was reviewed to verify coherence, alignment with research goals, and distinction from others. I crafted a thematic narrative using Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory as a theoretical overlay to contextualise findings within the broader socio-cultural landscape. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner's systems theory allowed me to consider cultural context and the macrosystem. New Zealand's multicultural environment, specifically Māori, Pacific Islander, and immigrant communities, each have unique cultural norms and beliefs related to sex and

relationships. These cultural variances can come to bear on how young individuals make sense of online content and their willingness to converse with parents, caregivers and educators. For instance, Māori perspectives frequently emphasise holistic approaches to sex education that incorporate community and family values, contrasting with individualistic viewpoints (Le Grice & Braun, 2018). I tried to recognise and consider these cultural factors in my analysis.

Bringing Bronfenbrenner's framework into the thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) enables me to interpret the guidelines within a broader social context, paying attention to how multiple interconnected layers beyond individual parenting strategies shape adult-child discussion about pornography. This provided a theoretical lens to explore how social and cultural factors collectively come to bear on the kinds of resources that are developed for adults to address young individuals engaging with pornography. This analytical approach follows other scholars who have used the socio-ecological model to analyse data (e.g.,(Willis & Jozkowski, 2018; Henderson & Baffour, 2015). This analytical method allowed for an in-depth exploration of how New Zealand-based resources construct youth sexuality and youth engagement with online pornography and offer support and guidance to parents, caregivers, and educators.

4.4. Ethics

When researching sensitive topics like young engagement with online pornography, ethical consideration holds great importance. The data I collected did not violate any individual's privacy, and there were no issues regarding participant confidentiality. Collaborating with my supervisors, Dr Siobhán Healy-Cullen and Dr Tracy Morison, I thoroughly discussed the ethical protocols required for this research. Consequently, a low-

risk notification was submitted to the Massy University Human Ethics Committee, and the study was approved on 2 February 2024 (Application number: 4000028492).

4.4.1 Reflexivity

This research is based on textual analysis and recognises the pivotal role of personal experience in interpreting data (Willig, 2013). Braun et al. (2017) point out that while personal backgrounds can enhance understanding, they can also limit it. My 13 years as a Plunket nurse in New Zealand, during which I witnessed young children unwittingly exposed to adult content and their parents' distress, have profoundly shaped my interest in this topic. These experiences have inspired me to explore how societal views on pornography affect children and young people. This background fuels my dedication to examining these issues, specifically within the context of New Zealand. This professional experience guided my research trajectory, drawing my attention to various educational resources to support parents, caregivers and educators, some of which I had previously overlooked. As Finlay (2002a, 2002b, 2006) highlighted, reflexivity is crucial in qualitative research. Personal and social facts motivated me to deepen my understanding of this issue. Finlay's research underscores the importance of reflecting on one's influence in the research process to ensure credible and ethically sound findings. I return to my reflections in the concluding section of this thesis.

4.4.2 Beneficence and Non-maleficence

Beneficence involves positively impacting the well-being of participants and the broader community. The primary aim of this research is to evaluate publicly available resources supporting parents, caregivers and educators in communicating about online pornography with young individuals. By identifying practice guidelines, the study seeks to improve understanding and foster healthy dialogue about sex, eventually benefiting young people. In contrast, non-

maleficence emphasises the duty to prevent harm. This research adheres to this principle by relying solely on publicly accessible textual data from websites, thereby reducing the risks associated with privacy violations. This research upholds a solid commitment to ethical standards while expanding knowledge in this delicate field (Beauchamp & Childless, 2013; Flicker & Guta, 2008).

5. Findings

I developed two primary themes through the analysis: (1) "Conversations about Pornography are an Integral Part of Parenting" and (2) "Conversations about Pornography serve as 'Impact' Mitigation". These two themes illustrate how conversations about online pornography are framed and understood, that is, as a necessary protection of youth in the face of the harmful effects of pornography. The two themes I developed, and associated subthemes are represented in Figure 1. In the following analysis, I demonstrate how perceived effects and developing strategies for mitigation are the primary focus of resources that aim to support adults in having conversations with young people about pornography.

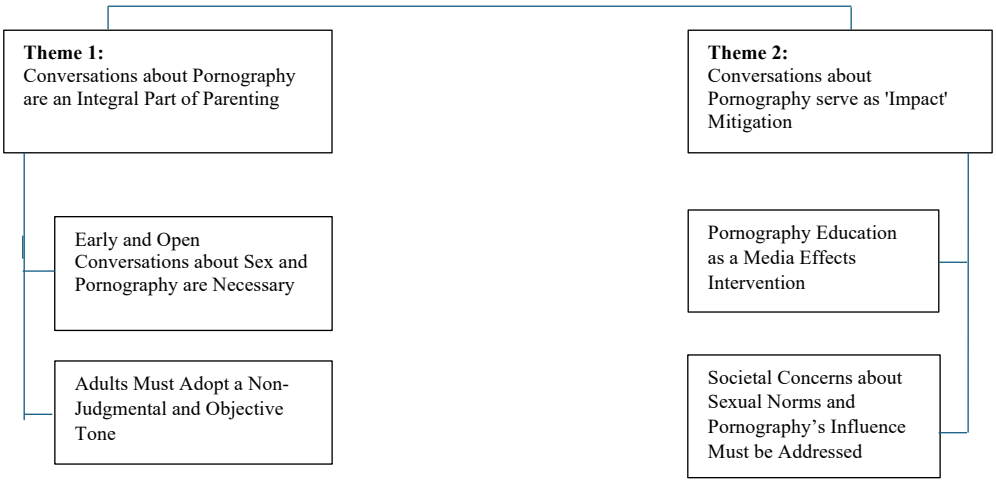


Figure 1. **Two Key Themes and Related Subthemes**

5.1 Theme 1: Conversations about Pornography are an Integral Part of Parenting

In this theme, I demonstrate how talking with young people about pornography is situated as a moral imperative of "good" parenting. This understanding is mainly in the microsystem, whereby parents purposefully "educate" their child. However, the parent-child relationship is embedded in broader social and environmental systems that shape how these conversations unfold. Parents are represented as "experts", but this expertise exists within a cultural context

that influences the framing of pornography and its impacts (e.g., the macrosystem). There were two subthemes within this overarching theme, which I discuss in turn.

5.1.1. Early and Open Conversations about Sex and Pornography are Necessary to Protect Vulnerable Youth

In Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model, the microsystem is the immediate environment where direct interactions occur, such as family discussions about pornography. In the microsystem, parents are seen as crucial in guiding young people and teaching them about the artifice behind pornography. These conversations have the potential to shape children and young people's understanding of sex and their attitudes towards pornography. The assumption is that young people cannot navigate pornography independently. Parents, therefore, must act as the primary gatekeepers of information by engaging in early, open conversations. This reflects Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on the immediate environment (family) as central to a young person's development.

The microsystem directly and significantly impacts young people's development by providing opportunities for interaction and learning (Bronfenbrenner & Evan, 2000). Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner and Evan (2000) indicated that young people establish relationships, receive support, and create identities within the microsystem, which influences their development. Parents and caregivers, therefore, are portrayed as key actors in *protecting* youth from pornography. This protection, parents and caregivers are warned, is time-sensitive, as they are told that interventions and conversations about pornography must happen early before young people are "taken in" by pornography as "real" (Johnson & Bridges, 2018; Bragg, 2015; Byron et al., 2021). For example, in the below extract, we see advice for adults about talking with "tweens":

Extract 1. *In the Light Project* – Talking with children/"tweens":

Talking with Tweens

Teens need more in-depth conversations about pornography; parents can ask the following questions

Here are some conversation starters to get you underway -

- Have you heard of "porn" before? What do you think it is?
- If you have seen porn already, how did it make you feel?
- Should tweens watch porn?
- If you see porn, you might feel like you want to watch more. What are some ways to make healthy choices when you see porn?
- What could we do as a family to keep our technology use healthy?

(https://thelightproject.co.nz/whanau/talking-with-children/)

Extract 1, "Talking with Tweens", by The Light Project, shows how words such as "healthy" and "should" are value-laden. Here, there is an underlying assumption about who "should" watch pornography and what kinds of pornography are "healthy". This is important because young people may be a bit awkward talking about pornography but frequently still consider parents "the experts" on sex and are more open and receptive to parental input than later in their teen years. Hence, it would be helpful to know the underlying assumptions of these resources or how parents interpret these conversation starters. Additionally, other resources signpost for parents that it is vitally important for parents to start having these early conversations early:

Extract 2. *Netsafe* – Online safety conversations starters:

Parents can talk to children aged 10-years and under

Here is how to start talking to under 10's about online safety

- Where you are: Look for a time when children isn't going to be distracted by things
- Keeping it natural: In the car on the way home from school or informally works better
- Asking open-ended questions: Use questions which invite conversation rather ones which ask for yes and no answers
- Leading with a request for help: Starting the conversation with a request for help about a platform or app can show children recognises their knowledge leading to great engagement in further conversation
- Reserving judgement: Listen and focus on what children is saying, no matter how hard this might be. Showing interest in what they are doing makes it easier to have more difficult conversation if a challenge arises.

(https://netsafe.org.nz/parents-and-caregivers/conversation-starters)

Extract 2, "Talking to children aged 10 years and under" by *Netsafe,* are guidelines supporting parents, suggesting it's never too early to start discussing online safety with youth. Again, it is reported that adults must act fast before it's "too late", and youth become less receptive to conversations with adults about pornography (Netsafe, 2025). Notably, adults are encouraged to "Listen and focus on what children are saying, no matter how hard this might be", assuming that what youth have to say will be "hard" to listen to or hear. As most of the research in sex education with children and young people in New Zealand illustrates, young people are not always constructed or understood as agentic sexual citizens, and this seems to be the case in the above extract to some extent (Allen, 2007a; OFLC, 2020; Quinlivan & Roberts, 2018).

National and international studies highlighted many parents want to talk with their children more openly about sex (Dyson & Smith, 2012; NZFP, 2020). But, as demonstrated in the extracts above, guidelines for talking with tweens and with children as early as 10 years old are grounded in assumptions about who "should" view porn, what is "un/healthy", and what deserves judgement or to be taken seriously. The risk is that youth deem these conversations with adults to be patronising and infantilising, and a discourse of disconnect is established where adults see youth as vulnerable, with at-risk views of online pornography, requiring parent's intervention and protection, rather than having sexual agency (Jearey-Graham & Macleod, 2017).

5.1.2. Adults Must Adopt a Non-Judgmental and Objective Tone

Though parents are encouraged to adopt a non-judgmental approach, the *exosystem* (e.g., cultural norms and media) reinforces implicit moral judgments about pornography. The conversations are not happening in a vacuum but are shaped by societal views of

pornography as dangerous and harmful. Even with the best intentions, parents may perpetuate moralisation, often shaped by broader societal discourses. The resources I analysed also perpetuated moralisation; although well-intentioned, it is apparent they are not objective or neutral-free, despite being ostensibly neutral and appealing to adults to remain non-judgmental. For example, as demonstrated in Extracts 2, parents are advised to talk empathetically. Still, underlying societal messages about the dangers of pornography (from schools, government policies, and media) infiltrate these guidelines.

Extract 3. *The Light Project* - Talking with Children/Tweens

Talking with children

Firstly, great work for starting this important conversation for parents with their children

First porn talk with children

- When to bring it up? – when deciding what age to have this first talk, we recommend for most children around 10 years is a good age.
- What is porn? – we suggest that parents explain what is pornography, for children in very simple words. We recommend the use of photos, videos or naked people in a cartoons form.
- Why is porn not made for children – when children see pornography, it can be very confusing, We suggest parents to explain why pornography is not healthy for children using simple terms. We recommend avoiding words such as "bad" and "wrong", instead using words such as "unhealthy" and "harmful". **(https://thelightproject.co.nz/whanau/talking-with-children/)**

Extract 3, "First porn talk with children", by The Light Project. This resource advises and educates parents that most children come across pornography now – it is as simple as entering the wrong search word, seeing a pop-up during a game, being curious about bodies or sex and searching for answers online. Therefore, parents must build trust and rapport, this is the beginning of establishing lifelong discussions about pornography and healthy sex. Before starting this conversation, parents need to be as prepared as possible. Parents need to start having this awkward but crucial discussion with young people for them to have healthy,

respectful and vibrant skills and knowledge of online pornography, relationships and sex (The Light Project, 2025).

Extract 4. ***New Zealand Health Education Association*** **(NZHEA)**

> Social and Ethical Issues in Sexuality Education uses the definition: Pornography …. is defined as sexual action which depicts harm towards another human being, i.e. degrades, violates, connects violence with sex, or involves the use of power over another individual or a group (p. 163, https://healtheducation.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/NZHEA_Teaching-and-learning-about-pornography-in-health-education_2020.pdf)

Here, it is apparent that NZHEA is explicitly locating pornography as harmful, and the *Light Project* is explicitly moralising pornography as "bad" and simply hiding these sentiments as "unhealthy". These extracts from "The Light Project" emphasise how crucial it is for parents, caregivers, and educators to "Reserve Judgment" during discussions about online pornography. However, this falls short if resources for pornography are explicitly value-laden. Although parents, caregivers and educators are encouraged to take time to listen and keep judgment and criticism out of the online pornography talk, it is apparent that these resources are premised on adult-centric understandings of pornography as inherently "bad".

Extract 5. ***The Classification Office***

> **How to talk with young people about pornography**
>
> **How to get started**
>
> Many parents find it challenging to start the conversation. Here are some questions you can ask:
>
> - Ask what they think is important in a healthy relationship. It's a great way to discuss fantasy vs reality in pornography.
> - Ask whether how people look and act in pornography reflects what they see in the real world: at school, at home and in the community.
> - Ask what they think the impacts of watching porn are. Try to respect their points of view, even if you disagree with them.

- Ask what they think the impacts of viewing pornography might be for a younger brother or sister or family friend. This helps them to share without it being about them.
- Ask how pornography makes them feel. It's important to really listen to what they think.

  (https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/resources/items/how-to-talk-with-young-people-about-pornography/)

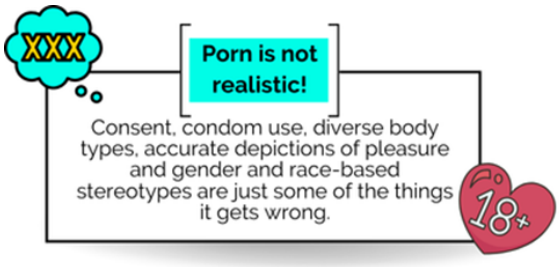
In Extract 5 again, discussing pornography is positioned as challenging but necessary for parents. However, these questions are more about confidence for adults and a desire to protect young people rather than adopting a strategy of genuine curiosity and interest in young people's lives and how they are navigating their digital experiences (Jearey-Graham and Macleod, 2017; Goldenstein (2020). Again, in the following extract, it's apparent here that "healthy sex" and its potential impacts are the forefront concern.

Extract 6. *Keep It Real* – Educators:

Having healthy conversations about porn

Advice and resources on having healthy conversations with young people about porn.

It's normal to be curious about sex and this can lead to curiosity about porn. But it can be challenging to talk to ākonga about porn. It's important to remind students that porn is a product for adult entertainment and isn't intended for young people.



- Learning modules
  To support teachers to talk about pornography when delivering Relationships and Sexuality Education in class, the Ministry of Education and the Classification Office have developed a module about pornography.

  Ministry of Education - Ka huri i te kōrero - Changing the conversations(external link),

- Education programmes
  Talking about sex can feel awkward for many and porn even more so. Te Mana Whakaatu Classification Office have created a video that empowers adults who may feel anxious or stuck and not know where to begin. It is packed with tips and tools and practical advice on how to have these conversations with young people.

  Te Mana Whakaatu Classification Office(external link) – Resources for Educators

  The Ministry of Education provides helpful guidance to support Relationships and Sexuality Education for years 9–13. This programme focuses strongly on consensual, healthy and respectful relationships as being essential to student wellbeing.

  The Ministry of Education - Guidance for Relationships and Sexuality Education(external link)

- Websites
  The Light Project have developed a series of resources to support educators with discussions about pornography, its impact and how to talk about pornography with youth.

  The Light Project - Educator resources (external link)

  In The Know is a youth website (R13) with information, tools, tips, videos and support services for a wide range of porn-related and online sexual issues. It is also a great tool for educators to learn about relevant porn-related youth issues, strategies to respond and services to point students to.

  In The Know(external link)

- Poster and factsheets

  Sometimes young people might feel pressure to watch online porn from peers, friends, older siblings, adults, or a partner. We've developed a factsheet you can use to talk to young people about how to navigate situations where they are being pressured to watch porn.

- Video
  Young people may not realise it, but porn can negatively impact their life – especially watching hardcore porn and/or viewing porn often. The below video can be used to initiate conversations with young people about pornography.

  https://www.keepitrealonline.govt.nz/info-for-educators/intermediate-secondary-school-students/having-healthy-conversations-about-porn#videos

  Te Mana Whakaatu Classification Office have collected the thoughts and experiences of more than 50 diverse young people across Aotearoa New Zealand about with porn:

  https://www.keepitrealonline.govt.nz/info-for-educators/intermediate-secondary-school-students/having-healthy-conversations-about-porn#videos

  The Eggplant(external link) is a drama-crime-comedy online web series to help young Kiwis safely navigate the Internet. This episode can be used discuss the unrealistic expectations that can arise from pornography.

  https://www.keepitrealonline.govt.nz/info-for-educators/intermediate-secondary-school-students/having-healthy-conversations-about-porn#videos

  In The Know have video by rangatahi for rangatahi where they share their experiences with porn.

  In The Know - Feeling uncomfortable about something you've seen in porn?(external link)
  https://www.keepitrealonline.govt.nz/info-for-educators/intermediate-secondary-school-students/having-healthy-conversations-about-porn

The resource reflects a health promotion strategy where open dialogue is encouraged to mitigate potential harms associated with pornography consumption. The text positions

pornography consumption as inherently problematic, drawing on health-related moral imperatives. Pornography is situated as an issue that requires intervention, framing it as a potential threat to the well-being of youth. Again, we see an appeal to objectivity, where "healthy relationships" are compared with the "fantasy" presented in pornography. This implies that pornography is inherently disconnected from real-world relational norms and values, which is something that youth themselves have critically reckoned with (Healy-Cullen et al., 2023). The resource also subtly reinforces parental authority in guiding moral and psychological development, positioning parents as responsible for mitigating the harms of media consumption. Notably, the resource neglects systemic issues such as the influence of broader societal norms around sex and relationships and the lack of good comprehensive sex education. A more nuanced approach might integrate discussions of systemic power, intersectionality, and the diversity of experiences with pornography, allowing for a more nuanced and truly dialogical conversation rather than "trying" to respect their views or assuming that their opinions would not be worthy of respect in the first instance.

5.2 Theme 2: Communication about Pornography as "Impact" Mitigation and Behavioural Modification

Conversations about pornography were framed as necessary to manage its perceived adverse effects on young people. This "effects" focus isolates pornography as the singular cause of social ills, ignoring broader contextual factors. That is to say, young people's sexual socialisation is situated within a broader social context and is therefore shaped by the mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem levels of Bronfenbrenner's model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). I developed two subthemes, which I will discuss in turn: (i) Pornography education as a "media effects" intervention and (ii) Pornography education as ameliorating societal concerns about "sexual norms".

5.2.1. Pornography as a "Media Effects" Intervention

Across the resources, young people were seen as particularly vulnerable to pornography's "effects". The assumption is that young people are at heightened risk compared to adults, requiring parental intervention to manage and mitigate potential harm. This emphasises the interconnectedness between home and external environments. For example, as illustrated in Extract 6, parents are encouraged to intervene in their children's exposure to pornography to prevent confusion, harm to self-esteem, or mental health impacts, highlighting young people's perceived inability to navigate these influences independently.

> **Extract 7. *The Light Project***
>
> **Porn and Young People – What Do We Know?**
>
> **Porn Shaping Attitudes and Behaviours**
>
> Many providers told us that they were seeing changes in young people's sexual attitudes and behaviours, which they believe are influenced by the normalisation of porn and high porn usage. Some providers noted changing sexual attitudes and beliefs, particularly towards women and girls including:
>
> • A diminished respect for females
>
> • Sexism and objectification of women and girls
>
> • Gendered sexual expectations
>
> • Casual attitudes towards consent
>
> • Increased acceptance of coercion
>
> • An acceptance of violence within sex
>
> • Casual attitudes towards rape culture
>
> https://thelightproject.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/TLP-Youth-Stakeholder-Survey-2018.pdf

> ***Extract 8. The Light Project* – Youth:**
>
> **Can Porn Affect Us**
>
> **Short Answer, Yes!**
>
> Porn can affect us in a few different ways, and the more we watch the more we might be affected. Here's what the research shows:

- Porn and Behaviour – watching porn can change our sexual behaviour

- Porn and Sex – watching lots of porn can make our sex lives worse, not better – at least that's what the research is showing.
- Porn and Sexual Violence – a lot of mainstream porn is now sexually aggressive.
- Porn and Shame – some young people talk about feeling "ashamed" about their porn use.
- Porn and Body Image – porn can make some young people feel negative about their bodies and this can lower their self-esteem.
- Porn and Shame, Feeling "Uncomfortable" and Trauma – watching porn can feel great for some people, but for others, it can make them feel confused, upset or uncomfortable.
- Porn and Sexual Attitudes and Beliefs – most studies say porn is the biggest sex ed teacher for this generation – so it has a big role in shaping ideas about sex.
- Porn and Mental Health – finally, watching heaps of porn can affect our mental health.

  So, watching porn can feel good in the moment because, as humans, our hormones kick in and we feel sexual pleasure when we see nudity and watch sex**.** Porn can also be used to manage negative emotions, to learn or as a stress release. But the reality is, for some people, the consequence of long-term porn viewing on our sex lives isn't great.
  https://thelightproject.co.nz/youth/can-porn-affect-us/

The message to adults in Extract 8 is clear and straightforward: watching online pornography can change young people's sexual behaviour. In this resource, adults are presented with "facts" about young people who watch online pornography, namely, that they are most likely to have sex earlier, have risker sex or sex where the other partner gets physically hurt, are also more likely to put more pressure on their partners to have sex even when said no; they also more likely to try sexual practices seen on online pornography sites. This is despite there being no evidence to suggest that pornography in any causative or linear manner makes sex lives worse (Martellozzo et al., 2016; Lim et al., 2017; Owen et al., 2012; OFLC, 2018). In a recently published report, *What Do We Know About the Effects of Pornography After Fifty Years of Academic Research?(*McKee et al*.,* 2022b*)* The authors concluded that there is no established relationship between the consumption of pornography and the understanding or practice of consensual sex.

Extract 9. *Netsafe* – Pornweek:

Juicy Tips

- Tip One:
  Is watching porn okay?
  Watching porn is a personal choice, and lots of young people watch it! Some are all good with it and don't think it affects them – but others can struggle. The experts tell us that the more porn we watch, the more it can affect our expectations and ideas about sex, and our relationships, body image and mental health. Like anything, it's great to have the lowdown on porn before you work out what's okay for you, so click the link below to learn more. LEARN MORE

- Tip Two:
  Can porn affect me?
  Yes and no. Most young people believe porn can influence them (positive and negative) and the experts tell us that porn can impact some people's mental health, expectations in real life sex, and sexual attitudes and behaviours. This depends on things like how much porn you watch, the type of porn, your age and sexual experience, and whether you think porn is realistic. To learn more, click the link below. LEARN MORE

- Tip Three:
  If porn's just fantasy, what's wrong with watching it?
  Being aroused to the fantasy in porn is different to trying it out in real life – but some young people say that even though they know it's 'fantasy', porn still influences their ideas and expectations around sex. In Aotearoa, 48% of young people look at porn 'for information and ideas about sex' and 73% of regular youth-users 'use porn as a learning tool'. So, things can get tricky with porn if the fantasy is starts to affect real life sex. See "Great sex vs porn sex" at the link below. LEARN MORE

- Tip Four:
  How do you know if you're addicted to porn?
  Some people talk about 'porn addiction' as a way to describe different and often stressful experiences around porn. For example, feeling shame or anxiety about watching porn, thinking about porn all the time, finding porn is affecting real life sexual relationships, or difficulty controlling or cutting down on porn. Any concerns or negative experiences with porn are valid – and need support. Check out In The Know at the link below. LEARN MORE

- Tip Five
  I feel confused about my own reaction to porn
  It's really normal to have all sorts of different reactions to porn. For example, young people tell us they can feel turned on, grossed out, curious, guilty or excited – or a mix of these, all at the same time! Some of the aggressive content in porn can make us feel uncomfortable, and this can be confusing when our body does its thing and gets turned on to it! If you're worried about how you feel, that's valid too, so check out "Feeling uncomfortable with porn?" at the link below. LEARN MORE

- Tip Six:
  Is ethical porn okay?
  Ethical porn is made consensually, with no underage actors, everyone's paid fairly, and it generally shows more real sex, body types, diversity and pleasure. Most sites

have ‘ethical’ content, but some can still include aggressive themes. Ethical porn is not targeted at under 18 yr olds and isn’t a ‘recommended way’ for young people to learn about and explore healthy and respectful sex. LEARN MORE

- Tip Seven:
  How do I cut back on porn?
  If you’re worried about your porn use – it can help to talk to someone to work out what’s causing you the most stress, as there’s lots of different things that can make us feel stressed around porn. Try reaching out to a trusted adult, friend, counsellor or support services. If you’re keen to cut down, check out "Want to cut down porn?" for some great tips and tools at the link below. LEARN MORE

- Tip Eight:
  How do I watch porn in a healthy way?
  If you watch porn, it’s important to think critically about what you see (i.e. the messages in porn around consent, pleasure, aggression etc), as something that looks fun or normal in porn might not be fun or safe in real life. If you want to try out something you’ve seen in porn, make sure you and your partner/s agree on it and consent to every act (and that consent can be withdrawn if anyone’s not into it). Check out In The Know for info on porn and relationships at the link below. LEARN MORE
  https://www.pornweek.nz/#porn-week

In this Extract 9, by Netsafe, the message here is porn is everywhere, it’s a fact of life now, and the key conversation points are about cutting back, addiction, confusion, and the potential effects. While these topics may be of youth interest, the focus on managing pornography’s impact and possible change in behaviours often overlooks more significant societal issues, such as inadequate sexual education, the heteronormative and patriarchal context in which youth negotiate sexual relationships, or the commodification of sex in media more broadly.

5.2.2. Societal Concerns about Sexual Norms and “Healthy” Sex

In the macrosystem, societal beliefs about sexuality, gender, and morality influence how pornography is constructed as a social issue. Conversations about pornography are framed within a broader cultural discourse that emphasises its negative impact on youth. However, these concerns often stem from societal anxieties about changing sexual norms, as evidenced in the extract below.

Extract 10. *The Light Project*. Porn and Young People – what do we know?
New sexual norms
Many providers told us they were observing new sex norms amongst young people that they believed were influenced by porn usage. They noted that these norms were becoming accepted and expected by young people, and included:
• The view that sex is something transactional and separate to a relationship
• A lack of contentment with 'normal' sex
• An entitlement for sex amongst boys
• The expectation of oral and anal sex on first sexual encounter
• Pressure to be more open sexually and engage in sex earlier
• Increased heterosexual anal and group sex
•Increased use of sexual aggression such as hair pulling
• An acceptance that pain and sexual violence during sex (especially for females) is normal
• The erosion of a female's right to sexual pleasure
• Poor knowledge of foreplay
• Sending sexts, dick pics and porn links as a sexual tool
https://thelightproject.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/TLP-Youth-Stakeholder-Survey-2018.pdf

The concerns about sexual norms here ("sending sexts, dick pics and porn links") reflect fears in New Zealand about the sexuality of children, especially girls, and can be viewed through media discussion that girls are 'growing up too soon' (Sanjakdar et al., 2015; Vares & Jackson, 2015). A study by Vares and Jackson (2015) on how tween girls in New Zealand make sense of sex materials in magazines argued that media focus on the sex of girls has increased since the early 2000s. Girls are labelled through discourses of "too sexy too soon" and "growing up too fast". Understandably, adults hold concerns about violent action against women and images that reinforce gender and racial stereotypes and an imbalance of power in relationships (OFLC, 2018; 2019; Crabbe & Flood, 2021). There are multiple challenges, obstacles and limitations when facilitating learning in the space of online pornography, desire, pleasure, sex diversity, gender equality and violence (Cense, 2018; Ingham, 2013; Ollic, 2016; Quinlivan, 2014), including parental rights and values (OFLC 2020; Ringrose, 2016), uneducated/anxious educators (Cushman et al., 2015; Frances, 2016; Sanjakdar, 2019), contested political spaces about the primary sex education, specifically the

inclusion of desire and pleasure (Ingham, 2013), and usage of explicit sex imagery and gender violence in education (Flood, 2009; 2010; Ollis, 2016).

However, online pornography is an integral part of the modern bricolage of cultural resources accessible to young people to build sexual identities. Resources must locate young people's accounts within their social context, rather than moralising particular sexual norms, which are now a reality for young people (e.g., sexting, as in extract 10). Critical scholars' research demonstrates that youth enact their agency to navigate technological and social contexts (Spišák, 2016; Attwood et al., 2018). Online pornography is also shown to act as a site of sex empowerment and agency (although in highly gendered ways) (Taylor & Jackson, 2018; Ashton et al., 2020). The following extract from NZHEA also demonstrates a focus on the negative impact of watching pornography which creates "norms" and "unrealistic" expectations:

> **Extract 11. *NZHEA* – Teaching and learning about pornography from a curriculum perspective**
>
> **The concerns we are responding to**
>
> Current concern about the viewing of pornography by young people is in response to NZ research data that shows…
>
> • That much of the easily accessed online pornography shows sexual acts that are violent, demeaning, dehumanising, or exploitative (especially of women, children, and young people), and with no consideration of consent, or pleasure for all involved.
>
> • The negative impact on relationships and overall wellbeing as a consequence of viewing this type of pornography as it creates new unhealthy 'norms' and unrealistic expectations of sexual behaviour
>
> https://healtheducation.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/NZHEA_Teaching-and-learning-about-pornography-in-health-education_2020.pdf (p. 5/6/)

Given the concerns outlined, it is not surprising that parents are encouraged to provide explanations about what "real" sex is before distorted depictions of sex in pornography corrupt them. The primary concern motivating this early intervention is that young people are more likely to endorse and imitate online pornography behaviours in their own lives.

Extract 12. *The Classification Office* – Guides for Parents:

What to say about porn

When talking with rangatahi about pornography, there are some important things you can discuss with them, including:

Real sex

- Is between real people.
- Involves intimacy: there's kissing, hugging, caring.
- Is about pleasure.
- Involves positive communication and interaction.

(https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/media/documents/Talking_with_young_people_about_pornography.pdf)

Extract 12, "What to Talk About", by the New Zealand Classification Office, encourages parents and caregivers to talk about what real sex is – real people, intimate, kissing, hugging, and caring; it is about pleasure, having positive communication and interaction. Parents are also advised to talk about what online pornography involves, i.e., pornography is performed by actors, fantasy (not "real people"), and offers unrealistic expectations of sex and relationships. Aggression is another topic that parents are advised to talk about – the resource goes on to inform adults that young people will likely see violence and aggression in pornography; most frequently, the resource states that pornography represents men controlling or dominating another person or woman, and so adults are advised to speak to young people about the importance of the equal balance of power in intimate relationships and that violence is never okay. Finally, adults are advised that consent is crucial when it comes to sex, and this is something adults should also talk with youth about (OFLC, 2023).

6. Discussion

My analysis presented two primary themes, describing how adult youth conversations about pornography are constructed in online resources in Aotearoa, New Zealand. The first theme, *Conversations about pornography are an integral part of parenting,* highlights how conversations about online pornography are framed and understood as a necessary protection of young individuals given their developmental stage. The second theme, *Conversations about pornography serve as "impact" mitigation*, highlights how perceived effects and developing strategies for mitigation are the focus of some resources aiming to support adults in having a conversation with young people about pornography. I summarise my findings in this closing discussion before situating them in the broader literature base. I then reflect on the limitations of the research, suggestions for future research on this topic, and my role in the study.

6.1 Conversations about pornography are an integral part of parenting

Theme one illustrates that having early conversations with young people about online pornography is represented as a moral imperative of "good" parenting. I considered the microsystem dynamics by which parents purposefully "educate" their children. Nonetheless, returning to the socio-ecological framework underpinning my research, the parent-child relationship is implanted in greater social and environmental systems, which shape how these discussions unfold (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Parents are designated as the "experts" but exist within a cultural context, influencing the framing of pornography and its impacts. Two subthemes were included in this theme, summarised in turn.

6.1.1 Early and open conversations about sex and pornography are necessary to protect vulnerable youth.

This subtheme positioned early and open parent-child conversations in the microsystem as crucial. The assumption is that young people cannot navigate pornography independently. While this may be the case for some youth, positioning parents as experts and gatekeepers creates a power dynamic that disadvantages young people and limits their agency. Yet, parents are positioned as the key gatekeepers of information and are encouraged to engage in early conversations with youth. The main concern that motivates this early intervention is that young people are more likely to endorse and imitate online pornography behaviour in their own lives. The resources included in my analysis resoundingly warned adults, and parents in particular, that conversations with youth about pornography are time-sensitive and that interventions and conversations about pornography must happen early before young people are "taken in" by pornography as "real". Critical scholars have also reported that "literacy" resources are preoccupied with teaching youth the differences between "real sex and "porn sex" to protect against negative influences on behaviour and harmful consequences (Healy-Cullen et al., 2023; Byron, 2024).

The microsystem has the potential to significantly impact young people's development through opportunities for interaction and learning (Bronfenbrenner & Evan, 2000). Within the microsystem, young people establish relationships, receive support, and create identities, which shape their development. The resources I analysed show that adults are the key actors in protecting young individuals from pornography by having conversations with them while they are young. Programmes that involve listening to young individual's voices and exploring their lived experience of gender and sexuality are more likely to aid young people in critiquing underlying assumptions and power balances (Albury, 2014; Albury & Bryon, 2018; Cense et al., 2020; Naezer & Ringrose, 2018). Although *talking to*

young people is one form of communication, parental discussions about online pornography must happen *with* young people, who are already legitimate sexual subjects in their own right (Clelland, 2023).

6.1.2 Adults must adopt a non-judgemental and objective tone

This second subtheme highlights that though parents are encouraged to endorse the non-judgemental method, inevitably, friends, social media (ecosystem), social norms, and political rhetoric (macrosystem), reinforce implicit morals about online pornography. This early conversation between young people and parents does not only occur within the microsystem but is shaped by societal views of pornography as dangerous and harmful. My analysed resource perpetuated moralisation: although unintentionally, it is apparent that they are not neutral-free, despite being ostensibly neutral, the appeal to adults is to remain non-judgemental. As other scholars noted, this appeal to objectivity is misguided (Healy-Cullen & Morison, 2023). For example, as demonstrated in Net Safe (Guides for Parents), The Light Project (Talking with Tween), and NZHEA, parents are advised to speak empathetically and objectively.

However, underlying societal messages about the danger of online pornography (from school, government policies and social media) infiltrate these conversations. NZHEA is explicitly locating pornography as harmful, the Light Project moralising pornography as "bad" and hiding these sentiments as "unhealthy". Net Safe emphasise how crucial it is for parents, caregivers and educators to "reserved judgment" during discussions of online pornography. Nevertheless, this falls short of resources, for pornography is implicitly value-laden. Although parents, caregivers and educators are encouraged to take time to listen and keep judgment and criticism out of the online pornography talk, it is apparent that these

resources are premised on adult-centric understandings of pornography as inherently "bad" (The Light Project, 2025).

According to the OFLC (2020), young individuals feel the messages about sex and pornography from both home and school are hostile and straightforward and do not fit with "their own feelings and experiences" (p. 40). Goldstein (2019) argues most discussion centres around pornography as problematic. Because of this prevailing discussion, responses to youth engagement with pornography centre around the premise that youth should be inoculated against pornography's harmful effects through porn literacy – an approach that often ignores the nuances and complexity of youth's engagement with pornography. Having patronising discussions with young people will only further foster a disconnect (Spišák, 2020, Scarcelli, 2015). Notably, some of the resources I analysed helpfully foregrounded the importance of actively listening to youth rather than simply "teaching" them about "impacts". Programs that involve listening to young individuals' voices and exploring their lived experience of gender and sexuality are more likely to aid young people in critiquing underlying assumptions and power balances (Albury, 2014; Albury & Bryon, 2018; Cense et al., 2020; Naezer & Ringrose, 2018).

6.2 Conversation about pornography as "impact" mitigation and behavioural modification

Theme two highlights that online pornography discussions were framed to manage its perceived harmful effects on young people. The "effect" focus isolates online pornography as the single cause of social ills in society, such as sexual aggression or misogyny, ignoring broader contextual factors. This effects-focused perspective fails to consider that young people's sexual socialisation is situated within a broader social context and, therefore, shaped by the mesosystem, ecosystem and macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner's model. I developed two

sub-themes, namely (i) pornography education as a "media effects" intervention and (ii) pornography education as ameliorating societal concerns about "sexual norms".

6.2.1 Pornography as a "media effect" intervention

Across the resources, young people were seen as specifically vulnerable to online pornography's harmful "effects". The assumption is that young people are at heightened risk compared to adults, requiring parental interventions to manage and mitigate potential harm. This reinforces interconnectedness between the home and the external environment. For example, in the Light Project resource "Porn and Young People – What Do We Know", parents are encouraged to intervene in children's "exposure" to online pornography to prevent confusion, self-esteem or mental health impacts, reinforcing young people's perceived inability to navigate these influences independently.

Within the exosystem level, societal concerns about media effects play a specific role in shaping conversations about pornography. Online pornography is framed as the source of sexual aggression, unrealistic expectations, and poor mental health results, with little attention to how broader social structures (for example – gender norms, sex education or internet regulation) contribute to these issues. The focus on managing pornography's impact often overlooks more significant societal problems, such as inadequate sex education or the commodification of sex in media more broadly. Yet, across the resources I analysed, adults are advised to address pornography as a media influence, focusing on the impact on mental health and body image without fully considering the broader societal and systemic factors that also shape young people's understanding of sex. In some instances, clear direction is given for adults to encourage youth to disengage with online pornography (e.g., The Light Project, 2025).

Byron (2024) shows how porn literacy research to date mainly focuses on school-based pornography education, seeks to warn youth about online pornography and to inoculate them against its perceived harms. However, this approach fails to consider pornography literacies that youth already have and rarely explores youth's digital cultures, which is central to their porn engagement.

6.3 Societal Concerns about Sexual Norms and Pornography's Influence Must be Addressed

The macrosystem refers not to a particular environment in a youth's growth but to societal and cultural beliefs about sex, gender, and morality influencing how online pornography is constructed during one's childhood development. One's beliefs about gender roles, individuality, family settings, and societal issues affect the norms and values in a young individual's microsystem. In the macrosystem, societal beliefs about sexuality, gender, and morality influence how online pornography is constructed as a social issue. Conversations about pornography are framed within a broader cultural discourse that emphasises its negative impact on youth. Therefore, conversations about pornography are framed within a broader cultural discourse, emphasising the negative impact on young people. This "effects" focus isolates pornography as the singular cause of social ills, ignoring broader contextual factors. That is to say, young people's sexual socialisation is situated within a wider social context and is therefore shaped by the mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem levels of Bronfenbrenner's model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). How the texts I analysed positioned the parental role as critical reflects Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on the immediate environment (family) as central to a young person's development.

6.4 So what? The importance of the present research

Online pornography is easily accessible to all young New Zealanders – on smartphones and other devices. There is no overarching mechanism to prevent accessibility in New Zealand (Schroder et al., 2020). We learn from the findings of this research that New Zealand is progressing ahead in this new online pornography landscape. Notably, New Zealand has the potential to be the world leader in every aspect of responding to online pornography. Globally, New Zealand pornography research won gold on the world stage in responding to online pornography. The three-part research series NZ Youth and Porn, 2018; Breaking Down Porn, 2019; and Growing up with Porn (2020) – highlighted young people's experiences and views about pornography. New Zealand is doing well regarding its regulatory setting and public resources. The OFLC provides various educational resources for parents, caregivers, and educators. These resources encourage positive discussions with young people (OFLC, 2020).

Websites such as The Light Project are also an essential contributor to supporting young people to navigate online pornography, aiding them with tools, information and supportive pathways. Notably, resources from The Light Project include resource for Māori and Pacific young people. The significance of a "porn week" campaign run by Netsafe also highlights the attention that this topic has garnered in New Zealand. Resources from the Keep It Real Online campaign also aimed to raise awareness of young people's digital lives, including pornography. The New Zealand national curriculum guideline for health and sex education has improved – including information about pornography and conversation starters. However, although these resources for on online pornography are useful, schools across New Zealand require a holistic, cultural, whole-school community and connection approach to respond to online pornography effectively. Culturally, changes begin mainly with school leadership.

Allen (2007a. p. 221) suggests that the “official culture" of a school serves as a discursive strategy that promotes a preferred student identity that is “non-sexual." This preference is explored through the conflicting discourses and practices that define the "official school culture” concerning student sexuality; for instance, acknowledging students’ sexuality— Beres’s (2022) concept of sexual consent is not designed to resolve issues of sexual assault but rather to demonstrate knowledge of sexual consent through verbal agreements, which is sometimes seen as essential and at other times deemed unnecessary. Once school leaders, staff, and the wider school community are adequately resourced, they can effectively begin communicating with their students about pornography. Once school leaders, staff and the wider school community are resourced, schools can successfully start to communicate with their students about pornography. When students know that school staff and the wider school community have some understanding, they’re more likely to readily connect with adults (parents and educators), disclose porn concerns or problematic usage and be open to conversation. Through connecting, adults can help students develop porn literacy skills through the school health curriculum, presentations from outside speakers and in-the-moment conversations (The Light Project, 2025).

In the broader global context, policies, guidelines, documents and resources about online pornography vary widely across international scholarship (most studies are from Europe, North America and Australia). While I may not be able to compare my findings directly with other studies, this indicates that there is space for qualitative research on this topic to grow nationally and internationally.

6.5 Limitations and Future Research

The primary limitation of this study is its textual focus, which, although useful for scrutinising policy documents and guidelines, may fail to capture the complexities of young people’s experience with online pornography, and their needs and desires regarding sex

education that addresses pornography. This method risks missing the subjective views of young people and their direct engagement with online content, thus limiting insights into their perceptions of sex and relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Although not a limitation, the focus on specific New Zealand-based resources restricts the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Policies and guidelines vary widely across different regions and cultures; thus, the conclusions drawn from New Zealand-specific resources cannot be applied elsewhere. These limitations highlight the need for further socially located research using various methods – especially methods that centre the voices of young people themselves – to improve understanding in this field.

This research points to several essential directions for future research and practices. First, this research offers insight into the frameworks intended to guide adults in these vital discussions, which may guide future efforts to develop guidelines about online pornography. Second, this research's dependence on textual document analysis alone, although helpful for my research purposes, does not centre or capture the complexities of youth experience with pornography. It is the voices of young people themselves that must be foregrounded when considering resources that are intended for them. Third, New Zealand's policies and guidelines vary widely. Resources such as *Net Safe* do provide valuable online safety advice, yet their focus is more on general cyber safety rather than a precise conversation about online pornography. This may not be a limitation, but future research might consider New Zealand resources and resources in other cultural contexts that focus specifically on pornography.

6.6 Cultural Considerations

From a Māori perspective on sex - historical representations of Māori savagery and associated notions of exoticism and promiscuity continue to inform colonising deficit assumptions about Māori sexuality (Le Grice & Braun, 2018) and explanations for Māori sexual and reproductive health outcomes (Reid, 2004). Māori sexual subjectivity, well-being

and health thus occur within a historical, social, and cultural context informed by Indigenous and Western knowledge and colonising influence (Le Grice & Braun, 2018). Sexual education offers a significant opportunity, as a site of intervention and praxis, to legitimate Māori concepts and meanings of sex and sexuality. Rimene et al. (1998) noted that some Māori families reported difficulty providing informal sexuality education to young people. Some mothers' worry that discussions about contraception with daughters promote promiscuity or early sexual relationships (Manihera & Turnbull, 1990), which is unsurprising in the context of negative discourses of Māori sexuality. When compared to other ethnicities in New Zealand, Māori young persons exhibited higher rates of risk factors such as substance abuse, family criminality, victimisation of physical abuse and family violence (including pornography) at various contextual levels (i.e., individual, family and school/community) (Grey et al., 2024).

There are no resources in te reo Māori tailored to support Māori parents, caregivers, and educators in an open discussion about online pornography with rangatahi (young Māori). However, Māori families and young people can access the resources mentioned previously. Instead, in New Zealand, there are health models worth noting and applying to this new pornographic landscape. Relational connectedness is investigated by Huriwai et al. (2001. p. 1034) in how " a sense of belonging to an iwi ("tribe") contributes to the recovery process'. Regarding addiction treatment (including online pornography), the very concept of whānau (family and relationships) is a methodical way of achieving changes that situate young people within the context of their extended families (Huriwai et al., 2001). I mention one Māori health model for this thesis – a model of health and well-being that has metamorphosed and focuses on connection as a way of being. Durie's health model, Te Whare Tapa Wha (Purdy, 2020) illustrates a holistic approach to health and well-being, balancing between physical,

mental, spiritual, and family connection as interdependent facets, bringing holistic well-being into conversations about online pornography.

Bronfenbrenner's systems theory allows me to consider cultural context and the macrosystem. New Zealand's multicultural environment, including Māori, Pacific Islander, and immigrant communities, brings a unique tapestry of cultural norms and beliefs related to sex and relationships. These cultural variances can shape how youth make sense of online content and their willingness to converse with parents, caregivers and educators. To give an example, Māori views often emphasise holistic approaches to sex education that incorporate community and family values, contrasting with individualistic, western approaches to sex education (Healy-Cullen et al., 2023).

I tried to recognise and consider these cultural facts in my analysis. Le Grice & Braun (2018) report that Indigenous Māori knowledge is beneficial for good sex and health psychologies for all. A holistic approach to sex education is further drawn from Mātauranga Māori and Māori ontologies, ways of knowing, and the connection of materiality, psychology and spirituality (Smith et al., 2016). In the OFLC (2020) report, Pacific Islander youth reported religion plays a role in how young individuals feel about pornography. Youth from religious backgrounds also report feeling shame, guilt, or fear of discovery when watching pornography, and some reported being less likely to approach an adult for support if concerned about their pornography usage.

6.7 Personal Reflection

As previously mentioned, this research is based on textual analysis and recognises the pivotal role of personal experience in interpreting data (Willig, 2013). I am currently working as a Telehealth nurse at Plunket Awhina call centre. As mentioned, for the past 13 years, I have worked as a Plunket nurse in New Zealand. During these 13 years, I witnessed young

children exposed to adult content and their parents' distress, which profoundly shaped my interest in this topic. These experiences inspired me to explore how societal views on pornography affect children. This background fuels my dedication to examining these issues, particularly within the context of New Zealand. This research matters to me because of the uncertainty and anxiety of parents, caregivers and educators' around the new online pornography and social media landscape. Aligned with Dixon et al.'s (2023) results, this thesis considers how all parts of the "village" give us insight into bettering sex education for young people. Right now, this is crucial.

I have worked for over 13 years as a Well Child Tamariki Ora nurse. Choosing to research online pornography, I felt resistance, stigmatisation, and unwillingness to discuss online pornography in my workspace – it is a complex and challenging issue to discuss openly, even amongst colleagues. This means managing tensions produced through the powerful moral undertones surrounding sex and the judgement attached to open discussion on a topic many deemed a private matter. I could escape it, but I wonder how people view me if I openly discuss this subject. However, this is not where my passion lies. My love of working with mothers and children in the community interested me in this sexuality space. With this passion came years of uncertainty and anxiety about discussing sexuality (including online pornography).

This means I kept reflecting on and questioning the way unequal power relations created knowledge systems that perpetuated simple "truth" about sex. It was a pivotal turning point for me, fostering a shift from a long-time Well Child Tamariki Ora nurse to a master's in public health student started with what I saw in the community setting. I internalised how to respond or not. I reflect on what to say and why I say it, with the goal of finding an answer for my son and myself. I wonder what parents would say and what this might produce when positioned in a parenting role. As I took on and placed myself within this new role as a

mother, this role transformed me and came with gendered expectations. My new role is wife, mother, parents, and mother of one boy.

This reflection continues with frustration when recruiting participants for this research (initially I hoped to run focus groups). It was challenging to seek help from the management team at my work. This frustration means I continue to reflect on and question how the management team handles the recruitment process within Plunket. With the advice of my clinical leader, I sent an email to the leader of the Education Team. The content of my email was to discuss my research and how to recruit participants among my colleagues. The reply was that it was not her role; she referred me to another person, from one person to another, and so forth. Waiting for an answer was daunting and frustrating. The management team let me down. I believe they were ashamed of the title I chose for this research. Facts from the OFLC (2022), Flood (2010) and Ollis (2016) show most young people aged 11-14 years old can access online pornography. The age of children and young people accessing online pornography is getting younger. The Internet is widely accessible anywhere in New Zealand. In addition, a colleague overheard me discussing my research with my clinical leader. She shared her experience. The management team did not support her, and she had to make drastic changes to complete her master's. While still waiting for a reply/answer, the recruiting timeframe overlapped; as a result, I pivoted to online text because of this.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe in the Bible wholeheartedly. My parents firmly believe in its practice, beliefs, and values. Somehow, I reflected on how many of my faith community, even my mother and siblings, viewed me choosing to research pornography among young people. Despite how sensitive and taboo it is, sexuality in general, including pornography – I am determined to research into it. Most of my upbringing was in the Cook Islands. Therefore, growing up, my parents did not take the role of discussing "sex" and "sexuality" with me. I learned about "sex" and "sexuality" from school – teachers were

known to be highly qualified and educated; therefore, it is their role to teach us all that pertains to sex. If teachers were not the ideal person to teach me about my sexual identity, I turned to my friends, which they learned from watching movies or TV. Braun et al. (2017) noted that personal factors can provide helpful insight and limit what I see. Although every aspect of who I am will have shaped my choice of research topic, how I approached conducting the research, and the insights I developed, I identified these aspects of my identity as particularly relevant to this project.

Through this thesis, I realised the urgency for health professionals, including myself or any sector working with children and young people, to be trained and re-educated about pornography in general. I am glad there is a shift from "harmful" to "experience" – I am hoping for more research within this area, particularly involving children and young people in New Zealand. I am passionate about working with children. My way of thinking and attitude toward online pornography has changed, and I am willing to support and help young people, parents, caregivers, and educators critically engage with and access ready-made resources online.

7. Conclusion

Online pornography acts as a cultural resource for young people to shape their sexual identities and navigate their sexual experiences, desires, and healthy relationships (Scarcelli, 2015). Critical scholars like Spišák (2016) and Attwood et al. (2018) have demonstrated that young people's approaches to sexual socialisation are vital and meaningful, underscoring their agency in engaging with technology, including pornography. Furthermore, online pornography serves as a platform for sexual empowerment and agency for some youth, though this occurs in a highly gendered way (Taylor & Jackson, 2018; Ashton et al., 2020).

Importantly, these nuanced perspectives are often overlooked in resources aimed at protecting and arguably civilising young people's sexual practices.

So, what's next? I would argue that a paradigmatic shift is necessary. However**,** it is evident from the scholarship that the use of pornography and related sex education remains a complex issue, dividing parents, educators, and broader social norms (OFLC, 2018; Crabbe & Flood, 2021; Ollis, 2016). It is crucial to acknowledge the roles of parents, caregivers, and educators in sex education. The advent of the internet, social media, and easy access to pornographic materials has intensified this debate around sex (Albury & Bryon, 2018; Goodyear et al., 2019). Therefore, to transform the harms-based and adult-centric mindset that dominates the resources I analysed, adults must adopt a more holistic approach to healthy relationships and sex education (MOE, 2020a). In doing so, we need to shift from the prevailing emphasis on what online pornography does—specifically, the impact of online pornography on young people—to what young people do with online pornography and why, focusing on their perspectives and experiences navigating online pornography, its meaning, and its significance in their lives (Attwood, 2005; et al., 2018; Goldstein, 2021).

Clelland (2023) demonstrates how parents and children often bring their histories and ongoing meaning-making about their life realities into educational encounters. Every parent-child interaction constitutes "a doing, a circuit" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 14). Suppose we fail to recognise that parents and children are in continual transformation. In that case, we risk relegating sex education back to a moralistic, risk-based, adult-centred, and individualistic approach (including discussions about online pornography), treating it as a health intervention instead of viewing it as an opportunity to learn and shift focus away from sex to explore the uncertainties surrounding healthy relationships and living in a complex world. Rather than narrowly defining and dictating the conversations adults *should* have with youth, we should strive to provide parents and children with opportunities to actively engage

in a shared process of constructing and deconstructing knowledge about gender and sex (Clelland, 2023).

Biesta (2022) reminded us:

> "This means the point of educational scholarship is not to tell educators what they should do, but to provide them with resources that may inform their educational artistry…that is, their own educational judgment and inventiveness." (p. viii).

As Biesta (2022) noted, this isn't meant to dictate to parents, caregivers, and educators what to do; instead, it encourages viewing sex education (including online pornography) as a shared journey and providing various ways to navigate it. While many may reach a common destination, there are always alternative routes available.

The value of dialogue allows young people and adults to discuss and be heard and recognised as legitimate subjects within various discursive fields in which they place themselves. Drawing from Dixon & Robertson, (2022) recent work, they present a contemporary conceptualisation of the health education paradigm, which consists of three perspectives: moralistic, democratic, and socio-critical. These three paradigms serve as a valuable heuristic for critiquing and examining school-based health education. I concur that this heuristic is also beneficial when collaborating with parents to interrogate and critique what, how, and why they approach their roles as sex educators.

Throughout the process of this thesis, scholars, parents, caregivers, and educators discussed the adverse effects of a moralistic approach to pornography and sex education by parents on children and young people. As this health education paradigm keeps shaping aspects of sex education (including online pornography), the socio-critical paradigm offers more potential for meeting the needs of both parents and young people in the sex educational space. A socio-critical paradigm would focus on sex education and pornography discussion

as an opportunity for learning rather than health behavioural change. This aligns with the works of (Jearey-Graham & Macleod, (2017) *Mutual Dialogues* in sex education, which suggest that what young people need are not merely educational lessons on sex but instead engaging *dialogues*. *Shifting the Line* highlights this new model for working with boys and young men towards the primary prevention of gendered violence.(Gavey et al., 2021).

I hope this thesis repositions the notion that online pornography and sex education are shared experiences for many young people. I aim for this thesis to incorporate perspectives from those who understand the established ways of engaging with young people affected by social media, the internet, and access to pornography, as well as from parents, caregivers, and educators, in a new light. The pressures faced by parents and young people have real-life effects, such as stress, feelings of inadequacy, and incompetence, which create environments that discourage critique of dominant discourses surrounding sex, gender, and childhood, including online pornography. This suggests that parents, caregivers, and educators can focus on the individuality of young people during these discussions, providing opportunities to explore and critique the contexts in which they operate and how online pornography and sex are constructed and portrayed without reinforcing feelings of inadequacy. By reframing this discussion, online pornography and sex education can embrace the uncertainty that comes from recognising young people as subjects in their own right, allowing them access to online pornography and fostering a sense of sexual citizenship.

Notably, it is also crucial to consider the use of age-aware technologies accessible to online pornography. It is imperative to consider the needs and opinions of parents, caregivers, educators, and young people in implementing and using these technologies—a message to policymakers. For example, a co-design and prototype refinement are needed to understand better the user acceptability and comfortability of these new technology interventions (Turvey et al., 2024). Sex education could provide fertile ground to explore the structural

contexts and dominant discourses that impacted the meanings young people attached to their experience with online pornography and interactions with peers about pornography (Meehan, 2025). Ultimately, this thesis promotes a collaborative and integrated approach that includes regulation, education, tools, and information tailored for young New Zealanders.

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