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Am I a Porn Addict, or Am I Just Lonely? A Feminist Exploration for a Framework for Ethical Internet Pornography & Cybersex Work in South Africa.

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AM I A PORN ADDICT, OR AM I JUST LONELY?

A Feminist Exploration for a Framework for Ethical Internet Pornography & Cybersex Work In South Africa

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of a Master's in Critical Diversity Studies

By

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2025

DECLARATION

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

School of Arts and Social Science

SENATE PLAGIARISM POLICY

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DEDICATION

This is for all the women, girls and enbies in pursuit of body-connectedness. The patriarchy was not built to last.

ABSTRACT

In a country where inequality is as visible as desire is invisible, South Africa confronts a crucial question: What does it mean to consume sex online ethically? This study examines the meanings of ethics, harm and violence in the consumption of internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa, as understood by consumers themselves. As internet access increases, so does the consumption of explicit material, raising urgent concerns about its impact on gender dynamics and the normalisation of harm. Grounded in African Feminism(s), this study draws from and constructs a framework for ethical pornography, combining philosophies that emphasise understanding power relations and agency. The study addresses the lack of comprehensive research on the types of pornography consumed in South Africa, exploring the distinctions between harmful and non-harmful pornographic content and their broader social and cultural consequences.

By using a mixed-methods approach, combining a questionnaire survey with qualitative methods, this study explores how consumers navigate and interpret how pornography can be decoupled from exploitative practices and reimagined as a medium that prioritises mutual respect, informed consent, and sexual autonomy. The findings highlight the potential of a framework on ethical pornography and cybersex work consumption in serving as an educational tool that challenges patriarchal norms, empowers individuals, and fosters healthier sexual representations.

The study concludes by offering contextually grounded recommendations for ethical guidelines that promote transparency, agency, and harm reduction in the consumption of internet pornography and cybersex work. In centring South African experiences and African feminist philosophies, this research contributes meaningfully to global feminist debates on digital sexuality and the possibilities of ethical pornographic media.

Keywords: Ethical Pornography, Internet Pornography, Cybersex work, African Feminism(s), Ethical Guidelines

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GLOSSARY

Pornography/ Porn: Explicit material intended to arouse consumers sexually. It depicts sexual acts or erotic content and varies widely in style and intensity.

Internet Pornography/ Porn: Any material (including videos, images, live streams, and written erotica) distributed through the internet that explicitly depicts sexual acts or behaviour with the primary intention of arousing sexual desire. It is easily accessible through websites, social media, and other digital platforms.

Cybersex Work/ Cyber-prostitution: A form of internet pornography wherein there is an exchange of sexual services or interactions via digital platforms, where individuals engage in sexually explicit acts or communication in virtual settings. Examples of digital platforms include: webcam performances, online escorting, and other virtual interactions.

Street Sex Worker/ Prostitute: A person who exchanges sexual services (through physical contact) for money or goods. This is commonly known as prostitution.

Erotic Violence: The depiction or enactment of violent acts intertwined with sexual arousal.

Violence: The use of physical force or power to harm, abuse, or dominate others. It can be physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual and can occur on individual, communal, or systemic levels.

Body-Connectedness: A state of awareness and positive relationship with one's own body. It involves being in tune with bodily sensations, needs, and emotions, and feeling comfortable in one's physical self.

The Erotic: An inner strength that connects individuals to their truest desires, feelings, and sense of self. It is an expansive, empowering force that transcends traditional notions of pleasure and intimacy, serving as a means of liberation, self-expression, and resistance against societal oppression.

Deadening Experience: A deadening experience suppresses one's true self, silences one's voice, or disconnects a person from their emotions, creativity or power. It makes you feel numb, uninspired, or disconnected from your senses.

Hard-core Pornography: Pornographic content that explicitly depicts sexual acts in graphic detail, often showing penetration and intense sexual activities without censorship.

Soft-core Pornography: Less explicit pornographic material that suggests sexual activity without showing explicit penetration or genitalia. It is often more stylised and narrative-driven than hardcore porn.

Purity Culture: A cultural or religious belief system that emphasises sexual abstinence before marriage, often linking a person's moral worth to their sexual behaviour, particularly for women.

Just-World Fallacy: The cognitive bias or mistaken belief that the world is inherently fair, so people get what they deserve. Good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people.

Rape Myth: False beliefs about rape that excuse sexual aggression, blame victims, and minimise the seriousness of sexual violence. Examples include "victims provoke rape by their clothing" or "men can't control their sexual urges."

Patriarchy: A social system where men hold primary power and dominate roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control over property. It often enforces traditional gender roles and reinforces male dominance.

African Feminism(s): A movement that advocates for gender equity within the specific socio-cultural and historical contexts of African societies. It addresses issues such as colonialism, traditional practices, economic empowerment, and intersectionality in the experiences of African women.

1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Pornography is like a mirror through which we can take a look at ourselves. And sometimes, what we see doesn't look pretty, and it can make us feel very uncomfortable. But how beautiful to take that look, to see truth, and to learn. The answer to bad porn is not no porn, but to make better porn!"

- Annie Sprinkle, Hardcore from the Heart: The Pleasures, Profits and Politics of Sex in Performance, 2006

"We all watch porn; we don't acknowledge it. Porn exists in a parallel universe, a shadowy, otherworldly realm. When you force anything into the shadows and underground, you make it a lot easier for bad things to happen, and a lot harder for good things to happen."

- Cindy Gallop, *MakeLoveNot Porn TedTalk*, 2014

"The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticised sensation."

- Audre Lorde, Uses of the Erotic, 1984, p. 54

"The normal fuck by a normal man is taken to be an act of invasion and ownership undertaken in a mode of predation: colonializing, forceful (manly) or nearly violent; the sexual act that by its nature makes her his."

- Andrea Dworkin, 1987, p. 79

The contents of pornography and our responses towards it act as a mirror, reflecting our cultural attitudes towards sex, power, and gender. Pornography can provoke discomfort, forcing us to confront issues of representation, agency, and exploitation. Anti-pornography feminist scholars such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mackinnon (1997) have long argued for its ban due to its inherently objectifying nature. In contrast, pro-pornography feminist scholars like Annie Sprinkle (2006) assert that the solution to problematic pornography is not its elimination but the creation of ethical, empowering alternatives centred on human connection. Despite its

widespread consumption, pornography remains shrouded in secrecy. Cindy Gallop (2014) highlights how this silence allows harmful norms to persist unchecked. When sexual representation is forced into the shadows, exploitative and unethical practices thrive, while conversations about healthier, ethical alternatives remain stifled. This secrecy also distorts understandings of the erotic, stripping it of its transformative potential.

Lorde (1984) argues that mainstream pornography misrepresents the erotic by reducing it to a purely physical sensation, detaching it from joy, self-awareness, and empowerment. In a podcast inspired by Lorde's essay, Ayanda[1] (2023) describes "deadening experiences" in which societal structures, especially those affecting marginalised groups, actively limit the pursuit and potential of joy (4:48). These structures prioritise profit over human needs (Lorde, 1984, p. 55). Thus, a "deadening experience" can be described as one that suppresses one's true self, silences one's voice, or disconnects a person from their emotions, creativity, or power. "Deadening experiences" leave you feeling numb, uninspired, or disconnected from your senses. Both Lorde and Ayanda emphasise that activism and social justice should be about fostering "enlivening experiences," with the erotic serving as a crucial tool for achieving this. Lorde describes the erotic as encompassing physical, emotional, psychic, and intellectual joy (Lorde, 1984, p. 56), extending beyond sexual gratification to all areas of life that make one feel fully alive. Without embracing this inner connection, Lorde argues, individuals are forced to conform to structures that do not prioritise human needs (Lorde, 1984, p. 58).

Sylvia Tamale (2005) further highlights the deeply embedded role of the erotic in African life, stating that sexuality is linked to nearly every aspect of existence, from "pleasure, power, politics and procreation, but also to disease, violence, war, language, social roles, religion, kinship structures, identity, and creativity" (p. 9), African eroticism is not limited to physical pleasure; it is also a site of identity, power, and resistance. However, Western and colonial perspectives have historically distorted African sexualities, portraying them as deviant, hypersexualised, or shameful (Erlank & Klausen, 2023, p. 87). Mainstream pornography continues to perpetuate these colonial narratives. This raises a crucial question about how the

[1] Ayanda is the host of the podcast *Soul Salon with Ayandastood*. She is a South African media personality and the creator of the show, where she engages in conversations centered on personal growth, spirituality, and decoloniality. She intentionally uses "Ayanda" without a surname as a purposeful move away from traditional naming structures and toward something deeply personal and expressive.

development of an African ethical pornography model could dismantle these harmful perspectives and reclaim African eroticism.

1.1.PORNOGRAPHY, POWER, AND ETHICAL ALTERNATIVES

Feminist debates on pornography are deeply divided. Some critics frame pornography as a tool of male domination that reinforces structures of violence and oppression (Dworkin, 1987). Dworkin argues that pornography is a "deadening experience" that reduces women to subhuman creatures, reinforcing male supremacy (Dworkin, 1985, p. 28). She goes further, labelling pornography producers as "the secret police of male supremacy" (Dworkin, 1985, p. 29). Similarly, pornography often contributes to the commodification of bodies by framing them primarily as objects for consumption and profit. Women of colour, in particular, are frequently fetishised and stereotyped, reduced to eroticised or hypersexualised archetypes that cater to specific fantasies (Fritz et al., p. 103). Miller-Young (2010) describes pornography as an illicit erotic economy that provides Black women, who are marginalised in the formal market, a means to survive and prosper, despite mainstream pornography historically representing Black bodies as sites for enacting forbidden sexual desires, fantasies, and practices (p.224). Mainstream pornography not only reinforces racial and gender hierarchies but also transforms lived human experiences into marketable commodities, perpetuating cycles of exploitation and objectification for financial gain.

Both Lorde's and Dworkin's critiques highlight systems that exploit the erotic for profit, stripping it of its potential for joy and self-connection. However, Lorde's concept of the erotic challenges exploitation as status quo by emphasising the pursuit of joy in all aspects of life. Applied to pornography, this perspective shifts the purpose of pornography from being a purely sensational experience to one that fosters human connection, autonomy, and pleasure. Ethical pornography, in Lorde's framework, would be evaluated not by its profitability or shock value but by the amount of joy and empowerment it brings to both performers and viewers. On the other side of the debate, scholars like Mintz and Guitelman (2020) argue that pornography has the potential to be a platform for empowerment and education, particularly in addressing disparities such as the "orgasm gap" in heterosexual encounters. Ethical pornography, therefore, emerges as a critical alternative—one that prioritises consent, mutual pleasure, and the portrayal of sexuality as a site of agency rather than subjugation.

Ethical pornography is generally understood to exclusively include consenting adults, transparent production practices, and the portrayal of sexuality free from gratuitous violence or coercion (Macleod, 2020, p. 9). Srinivasan (2021) offers a compelling definition wherein she defines ethical pornography as:

> An alternative form of sex education, which seeks to reveal, and revel in, the sexiness of bodies, acts and distributions of power that do not conform to heterosexist, racist and ableist erotic standards (p. 68).

Sally-Jean Shackleton (as cited in Artz, 2012) raises a key question: whether there is a difference between internet pornography that is not good and internet pornography that is harmful (p. 10). This distinction highlights the complexity of defining harm in pornography, emphasising the need to separate moral disapproval from actual harm. One of the objectives of this research is to explore how South African consumers perceive ethical pornography and how these perceptions influence broader understandings of sexuality and representation. The cultural and social contexts of pornography consumption play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards internet pornography, particularly given the lack of detailed studies on the types of pornography consumed in South Africa.

Feminist discourses in South Africa, as discussed by Artz (2012), reflect a divided perspective on pornography, ranging from it as inherently harmful to interpretations of its potential for empowerment (p. 16). Artz concludes that "the porn debate is complex and that pornography is good and bad", while also being liberating and harmful to women (p. 17). The complexity of defining good versus bad pornography lies in its dual nature; it can be both liberating and harmful. Something may be perceived as good yet be exploitative, or perceived as bad while being ethically produced. This nuanced view underscores the need to develop a framework for ethical pornography consumption – one that equips consumers with the tools to distinguish between exploitative, harmful content and content that is liberating and empowering, regardless of their perceptions of what is good or bad. African feminism(s), with its focus on systemic gender and power imbalances, offers a valuable lens for analysing how harmful pornography perpetuates these structures. Developing ethical pornography could serve as an educational tool for promoting a healthy understanding of sexuality, consent, and mutual respect—elements often absent in mainstream pornography. Furthermore, ethical pornography has the potential

to challenge the colonial gaze on African bodies and empower women by portraying them as active, consenting participants rather than passive objects.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Existing discourses surrounding internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa often focus on explicitly illegal activities, child pornography or the shame and stigma associated with their consumption (see Koba 2017, Chetty & Basson 2006, Bhana 2023). These discussions largely overlook the reality that South Africans derive joy, pleasure, and guidance from pornography. This is a crucial consideration, as research suggests that internet pornography and cybersex work influence individuals' sense of body-connectedness and their relationships with others. For example, Villines (2023) found that pornography consumption can offer several psychological benefits, including sexual empowerment, the destigmatisation of sex, increased acceptance of non-traditional sexual practices, and improved sexual communication. In a country where gender dynamics are deeply intertwined with issues of power, violence, and harm, this study highlights the importance of exploring the possibilities and challenges of developing a framework for ethical internet pornography and cybersex work consumption.

Despite South Africa's socio-political progress in advancing human rights and individual freedoms, the regulation of internet pornography and cybersex work remains minimal. Mainstream internet pornography and cybersex work are frequently criticised for prioritising profit over human connection, pleasure, and a deeper understanding of consent (Dworkin, 1987, p. 57; Liberman, 2025, p. 187). This profit-driven model often leads to exploitation, dehumanisation, and in some cases, content that fosters addictive consumption behaviours (Scott, 2016, p. 120). Without ethical guidelines, the risks associated with pornography, such as addiction, objectification, and unhealthy relationship dynamics, persist unchecked. Developing such a framework could promote ethical production practices that align with consumer expectations and foster a more responsible and informed approach to internet pornography and cybersex work consumption within the South African context.

1.3. PURPOSE OF STUDY

1.3.1. CONTEXTUALISATION

The digital transformation of internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa has radically increased its accessibility, interactivity, and impact on how it is consumed. At the start of 2025, it was recorded that 50.8 million South African's use the internet (DataReportal, 2025). Similarly, Koba (2017) writes that the Internet has become the medium of choice for viewing pornography in South Africa and worldwide for several reasons, including accessibility, perceived privacy, variety of content and affordability (p. 112). This accessibility raises urgent questions about the content consumed. Dlamini and Nzama (2019) write that despite the gap in the study of South Africa's growing online population, the national measures to address internet pornography and cybersex work are scarcely addressed and almost exclusively limited to addressing concerns of street sex work (p. 140). *The National Cybersecurity Policy Framework* does not make mention of topics like cybersex work or internet pornography. In the Conclusion and Recommendations section of their article, Dlamini and Nzama state that, alongside *the National Cyber-security Policy Framework* of 2015, "More primary research should be done to understand the existence and prevalence of cyber prostitution in SA" (2019, p. 144). *The National Cyber-security Policy Framework* focus on explicitly illegal activities like street sex work and child pornography and fails to address the broader landscape of adult pornography, which significantly shapes sexual norms and behaviours. This narrow approach overlooks how mainstream pornography often normalises violence, harm, and unethical production practices. An ethical pornography framework could encourage consumers to critically engage with the content they consume, fostering a deeper understanding of consent, pleasure and human connection. By recognising these ethical considerations, consumers can advocate for and demand pornography that prioritises transparency, mutual respect, and harm reduction in its consumption, production, and representation of sexuality.

Despite the significant consumption of internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa, there is a notable lack of comprehensive studies on its consumption. This results in limited information on how to characterise harm, ethics and the positive possibilities of internet pornography and cybersex work consumption. When exploring the definition of internet pornography, Artz (2012) notes that the:

> Developments in technology where pornography is digital, downloadable, interactive, mobile, blogged and easily accessible introduce new dimensions to the question of how we define pornography, how it is consumed and the degrees to which we tolerate it (p. 10).

This quotation by Artz is a point of inspiration and motivation for why I believe it is important to conduct research into the consumption of internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa. As Artz highlights in her article, pornography is no longer an image of a naked body in a magazine secretly tucked away under your uncle's bed. Through the internet, pornography has morphed into so much more. It has become more easily accessible, downloadable, interactive, and mobile. This makes the study of internet pornography and cybersex work consumption habits in South Africa critical for understanding its far-reaching effects on social norms, ethical practices, legal structures, and public sex education. Addressing these factors can help create a foundation for a more ethically informed approach to internet pornography and cybersex work consumption in the South African context.

Conversely, there is a significant divide among feminists about the role of internet pornography and cybersex work in society— some view it as inherently harmful and objectifying (see Mackinnon & Dworkin 1997 and Dines 2010), while others recognise its potential for sexual empowerment and liberation (see Sekyiamah 2014, Liberman 2015). This divide complicates the development of widely accepted guidelines distinguishing harmful from ethical consumption practices. Through an African feminist lens, this research explores the complexities of internet pornography and cybersex work consumption in South Africa. It examines the country's current consumption practices, the legal history on societal perceptions of pornography and how these factors might inform a framework for ethical pornography consumption. By grounding the study in African feminism(s), this research acknowledges South Africa's unique cultural and societal context, contributing to a localised understanding of feminism and its application to issues of internet pornography and cybersex work.

1.3.2. RESEARCH RATIONALE

I remain deeply moved and inspired by Xaba's (2021) essay *The Music of My Orgasm*, where she powerfully traces the roots of her feminism to her mother's lessons that enabled her to claim bodily autonomy and sexual freedom in a South African society that often denies women

the right to embrace and own such liberties (p. 257). When I watch the news and hear stories about rampant revenge porn, recorded and widely circulated sexual assaults, gender-based violence and how these crimes are used to scare and shame women out of accessing and embracing their desires and right to bodily autonomy, I find myself returning to Xaba's essay. She writes, "masturbation gave me many gifts: free, solitary, self-controlled and self-led pleasure. It gave me thrills I did not have to pay for. It gave me individual joy I did not have to share with anyone" (Xaba, 2001, p. 261). Xaba highlights that because her mother taught her about the importance of her body-connectedness, she was able to practice feminism long before she knew it by name.

Xaba's story links to Tamale's (2005) essay on the use of a Ssenga among the Baganda people in Uganda. Throughout history, Ugandan society had a maternal figure who would tutor girls and women on sexual matters, including pre-marriage preparation and erotic instruction – they are known as an Ssenga (p. 9). Tamale writes about how, despite the development of a patriarchal model, Ugandan women have found a way to continue this tradition and subvert patriarchal power by taking control of their sexuality and exercising their erotic power (p.12). It is the existence of the patriarchy that prevents women from realising and exercising their erotic autonomy. Not everyone has access to mothers who teach them the importance of body-connectedness, self-rooted pleasure and the power of masturbation. Many South African women and girls are not as fortunate as Xaba and instead turn to pornography to learn these lessons. As Bhana (2023) writes in her book on girls negotiating pornography in South Africa, the issue of girls' sexual desires and online curiosity remains a "domain of secrecy and shame within an underground sexual culture where girls are left with no opportunity to talk to adults about, gain leverage from, or access resources to address what they see, hear, feel, fear and desire" (p.10). Women and girls are watching pornography to explore their desires and to learn. In many ways, these readings have challenged me to consider how a framework on ethical internet pornography and cybersex work consumption could help address and alleviate this issue.

I love Döring's (2000) statement that "from a feminist viewpoint, sexual empowerment is an individual learning process as well as a political emancipation process, directed toward positive female (and male) sexualities" (p.873). This quotation effectively captures the feminist

perspective on boundaries and desires in the internet pornography debate. Grounded in an African feminist thought, this research aligns with the pro-pornography feminist stance that views sexual empowerment as both a personal and political process, as Döring (2000) articulates. As a Critical Diversity student and feminist advocate, I am committed to challenging power structures and advancing gender justice, guided by Melissa Steyn's Critical Diversity Framework. My earlier work explored African feminism(s) in South African protest theatre, revealing how Black women's bodies are often sites of gendered oppression. Influenced by scholars like Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Pumla Dineo Gqola, I now look to expand African feminist discourse by redefining pornography through this lens. My focus on South Africa, one of the top consumers of internet pornography and cybersex work, reflects both personal connection and broader commitment to shaping local and global conversations on sexuality and justice.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1. PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

Using an African feminist lens to analyse the consumption of internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa: What are the possibilities and challenges of developing a framework for ethical internet pornography and cybersex work consumption?

1.4.2. SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How do South African consumers understand the meaning of harm, violence and ethics in internet pornography and cybersex work?
2. What do South African consumers consider essential in a framework for ethical internet pornography and cybersex work consumption?
3. What practical measures and guidelines can African feminism(s) propose to inform the development of ethical guidelines and practices for the consumption of internet pornography and cybersex?
4. What recommendations might this study offer to guide South African consumers towards making more informed, ethical choices about the internet pornography and cybersex work content they engage with?

1.4.3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Explore the different understandings and meanings of violence, harm, and ethics concerning the consumption of internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa.
2. Investigate a willingness amongst South African consumers to shift consumption behaviours toward ethical pornography.
3. Determine the necessary conditions to decouple internet pornography and cybersex work from exploitation and foster content creation that emphasises consent, pleasure, and human connection, thereby promoting healthier sexual norms.
4. Draw on African feminism(s) to aid in the establishment of ethical guidelines and necessary conditions to decouple internet pornography from exploitation by fostering content creation that emphasises consent, pleasure, and human connection.

2. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is divided into six sections, each focusing on a key aspect of internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa: Part One contextualises pornography and cybersex work broadly. Part Two discusses studies on South African internet pornography and cybersex work consumption patterns and motivations. This section concludes with the demographic trends and user perceptions of internet pornography and cybersex work as a tool for sexual education (Koba, 2022). Part Three discusses the perceived harms associated with internet pornography and cybersex work consumption. This includes moral policing, censorship under apartheid and the transition to a more open yet regulated framework post-1996, aligning with constitutional values of dignity and freedom. An understanding of these shifts reveals what ethical standards need to be included in an ethical framework to align with South Africa's democratic principles (Nevondwe, 2013).

Part Four dives into feminist perspectives on pornography, highlighting the polarisation between anti-pornography feminists, who view it as degrading, and pro-pornography feminists, who argue for its potential as a platform for sexual empowerment (Artz, 2012; Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1988). Part Five addresses the need for an ethical framework tailored to South Africa's unique socio-political landscape. Particularly, exploring how this framework would need to emphasise inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and protection from exploitation while promoting ethical consumption and production practices that align with African feminist principles (Sekyiamah, 2014; Strossen, 1993). Part Six explores existing frameworks internationally and in South Africa. Ultimately, this literature review seeks to create a balanced perspective acknowledging the potential harms of pornography without undermining the freedoms and rights of individuals.

2.1. PART ONE: CONTEXTUALISING PORNOGRAPHY AND CYBERSEX WORK

In 1964, a local Ohio theatre owner was taken to court for screening a French film titled *The Lovers*, which featured a sex scene in which the main character has an affair (Gerwirtz, 1995, p. 1024). The state ruled that the film violated Ohio's obscenity law, which prohibited the possession and distribution of obscene materials. The ruling sparked significant controversy, leading to the case being escalated to the U.S. Supreme Court, where the Court ultimately ruled in favour of the theatre.

In his verdict, Justice Potter Stewart famously stated that while he could not precisely define obscenity and its connection to pornography, he understood obscenity in pornography to mean hard-core pornography. However, when asked to define hard-core pornography, he simply declared, "I know it when I see it" (Gerwirtz, 1995, p 1026). This statement from the Jacobellis v. Ohio case has since become widely used as an expression to illustrate the subjectivity of moral and legal judgments. This case highlights the complexities of defining pornography. Notably, *The Lovers* was ultimately protected under the First Amendment, which safeguards freedom of speech.

In South Africa, the creation and distribution of pornography for adults are primarily governed by the Films and Publications Act of 1996 (as amended), along with constitutional protections, similar to the U.S. First Amendment, that uphold freedom of expression. The Act regulates pornography and cybersex work under broader categories of prohibited or restricted materials. It differentiates legal adult content from illegal forms such as child pornography, violent material, and content involving bestiality or the exploitation of vulnerable groups, with legal content subject to controlled distribution (Venter, 1996, p. 74). In practice, obscenity in the South African context often follows the logic of "I know it when I see it". If the content avoids the aforementioned illegal elements, its classification as pornography remains largely subjective. This ambiguity in defining pornography sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how pornography and cybersex work are conceptualised both globally and within the specific socio-legal context of South Africa.

2.1.1. Moral Policing, Censorship and Ethical Shifts in Pornography Regulation in South Africa

The regulation of pornography in South Africa has long been shaped by moral policing and censorship, particularly during apartheid, when strict laws like the Undesirable Publications Acts (1954-1957) banned all sexual content considered offensive (Boonzaier, 2014). As Stemmet (2005) notes, censorship extended beyond explicit material to suppress all forms of sexual oppression, including educational discourse, reinforcing a moralistic and restrictive environment. Post-apartheid reforms brought significant change. Adopting a new constitution emphasising human rights, freedom of speech, and dignity led to the 1996 Films and Publications Act, which relaxed censorship and opened public debate on pornography

(Nevondwe, 2013). The shift encourages re-evaluation of pornography regulation through a rights-based lens aligned with democratic values. The historical context and ongoing moral debates highlight the need for culturally sensitive, ethical frameworks that promote inclusive, consensual, and non-exploitative practices. An African feminist perspective further supports context-specific approaches that balance free expression with protection from harm.

"Porn is the theory; rape is the practice" is a phrase coined by the Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media, which has become synonymous with the anti-pornography movement. The phrase encapsulates the moral belief that all pornography is a tool of patriarchal oppression that inherently perpetuates misogyny and violence (Srinivasan, 2021, p. 38). Moral arguments remain a significant aspect of South Africa's pornography debates. Religious groups and conservative factions argue for the continued prohibition of pornography on moral grounds. They frame pornography as a threat to social values, maintaining that the majority of South Africans are "decent" and should not be exposed to such material (Stemmet, 2005, p. 141). These groups often mobilise around campaigns advocating for "moral purity," as evidenced by the Junior Rapportryers' campaigns (Mouton, 2000, p. 164). The Rapportryers are a Christian Afrikaans foundation founded in 1949, which believes they are the "carriers of the message" of god (Rapportryer, 2020). The Junior Rapportryers are the youth cohort of the foundation. Similarly, Feris and Bonthuys (1998) argue that pornography's portrayal of sexuality as detached from love devalues human relationships. They further assert that, "Antipornography legislation promotes the constitutional values of democracy, human dignity, equality and freedom by preserving several constitutionally guaranteed rights of women" (p.64). These perspectives advocate for the state's role in protecting public morals by maintaining restrictions on pornography. These arguments draw from inherited laws, like the Undesirable Publications Acts, and further solidify the perpetuation of historical patterns of censorship and control over bodies.

However, other scholars challenge the anti-pornography stance. For instance, Denise Meyerson opposes the arguments of Feris and Bonthuys, contending that moral policing is unconstitutional as it imposes one group's values on the entire society, infringing on individual freedoms (Stemmet, 2005, p. 147). Stefan Sonderling (1996) critiques censorship, arguing that it suppresses diverse expressions and fails to prove a clear causal link between pornography

and violence against women. Instead of legal restrictions, some scholars, such as Raymond Louw, advocate for community-led responses to address pornography issues, arguing that censorship is ineffective and infringes on free speech rights (Stemmet, 2005, p. 146). The moral policing of pornography and cybersex work, expressed through phrases such as “porn is the theory; rape is the practice”, and the characterisation of pornography consumers as indecent or deviant, is problematic because it not only perpetuates shame and stigma but also obstructs harm reduction efforts. By treating all pornography as harmful, moral policing overlooks the spectrum of content and the potential for ethical porn, produced with consent, fair pay, and empowerment. Hence, the current state of pornography legislation in South Africa must be open to the potential of ethical pornography, whilst also condemning and prosecuting unethical content.

2.1.2. THE CURRENT STATE OF PORNOGRAPHY LEGALISATION

The current legal framework in South Africa attempts to strike a balance between freedom of expression and community values. While the Films and Publications Act, 1996 (Act No. 65 of 1996) permits the distribution of adult material, it is heavily regulated.

Pornography is permitted but must include an age restriction of 18 years old or older, and it is not allowed on television, ensuring that those who oppose it are not exposed unwillingly (Le Roux, 2010, p. 4). This is supported by the South African Criminal Law on Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act 32 of 2007, which criminalises child pornography. (Terblanche & Mollema, 2011, p. 295). Specifically, section 24B criminalises the possession, production, distribution, importing or accessing of child pornography is illegal (Terblanche & Mollema, 2011, p. 303). It also prohibits the grooming and sexual exploitation of minors (Terblanche & Mollema, 2011, p. 299). This calls into question in what ways adults are protected from this. The Films and Publications Amendment Act No.28 of 2022 attempts to tackle this by criminalising any act of sexual exploitation, including forced participation in online pornography or cybersex work (Watney, 2006, p. 233). The act also seeks to prevent coercion or abuse by controlling who may engage in the creation or distribution of explicit material.

The Films and Publications Amendment Act No.28 of 2022 states that it is required that all commercial online distributors of films and games register with the Film and Publications Board (FPB) and submit content for classification (Watney, 2006, p. 233). The Cybercrimes Act No. 19 of 2020 targets cyber exploitation and allows authorities to prosecute individuals sharing content without consent, especially when it involves coercion and exploitation (Mabeka & Cassim, 2023, p. 21). Cell phone and internet pornography remain challenges due to their accessibility and the difficulties in regulating digital content. The rise of modern technologies indicates that while legal frameworks attempt to manage pornography, enforcement and regulation must evolve continuously. Together, these laws aim to protect individuals' rights while enforcing responsible distribution and access to online adult content. They focus heavily on preventing abuse, unauthorised distribution, and ensuring that only adults access pornographic materials. South Africa's pornography debate reflects broader tensions between freedom of expression, moral policing, and the protection of societal values. Historical shifts highlight the struggle to balance these competing interests, particularly in a society emerging from a highly controlled, censorial past. Moving forward, sustained interdisciplinary research is crucial for developing an inclusive and effective approach to pornography regulation that respects constitutional freedoms while addressing concerns about harm and public morality.

2.2. PART TWO: INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY AND CYBERSEX WORK CONSUMPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.2.1. CYBERSEX WORK CONSUMPTION

As South Africans increasingly engage with digital intimacy, the urgent need for an ethical framework reveals tensions between progressive rights, cultural conservatism, and digital capitalism. Dlamini and Nzama (2019) attribute the rise in cybersex work in South Africa to the perceived increased safety and control for both the producer and consumer. They argue that cybersex workers experience less victimisation than street-based sex workers as they are less vulnerable to violence, including intimidation, harassment and severe physical harm (p. 139). Cybersex workers also have greater autonomy over their work, making them less likely to "experience psychological or physical victimisation due to their work" (p. 143). While this increased safety and control may offer certain advantages, it does not eliminate all risks. As Döring (2000) highlights, online victimisation takes on a different form due to the anonymity of cyberspace (p. 868). She identifies online harassment and virtual rape as key manifestations

of this victimisation, emphasising that sexual harassment, an existing and growing societal issue, is equally prevalent in online spaces. Döring provides the example of online forums where any user with a feminine-coded name is bombarded with sexist comments like "How large are your boobs?", "What are you wearing?", "Are you horny?" and "Need a fuck?" (p. 869). Adjacently, she discusses how women engaging in cybersex are degraded to mere sex objects by men seeking sexual gratification (Döring, 2000, p. 869). This form of online harassment not only attacks the personal dignity of women who consume or produce cybersex but also reinforces the notion that the internet is a male-dominated space where women's voices are marginalised.

This underscores the importance of fostering an internet culture, particularly within internet pornography and cybersex work, that is feminist. Döring (2000) advocates for an empowerment approach, which encourages individuals to educate themselves about the conditions, characteristics, and consequences of sexual activities in cyberspace and, most importantly, to learn from positive experiences (p. 880). Applying an empowerment model to internet pornography would not only challenge patriarchal norms but also dismantle the myth that women's sexuality is inherently distinct from and opposed to men's sexuality (p. 880). A framework for ethical internet pornography and cybersex work consumption could offer individuals the opportunity to engage in more feminist-informed consumption practices.

However, beyond online sexual harassment and misogyny, cybersex work also raises concerns about cybersex trafficking. Unlike traditional sex trafficking, cybersex trafficking does not require physical interaction between victims and consumers; instead, victims are coerced into performing sexual acts via webcams (Prakash, 2023, p.1105). While sex trafficking is a global issue, the limited regulation against cybercrimes makes cyberspace a particularly effective tool for traffickers. Maweni et al. (2023) argue that as internet access grows in Africa, more research is needed to investigate the recruitment strategies traffickers use online. According to Sundani (2023), social media platforms like chat rooms, dating apps, escort sites, and various websites are increasingly being exploited by traffickers to advertise, buy, and find victims of trafficking for pornographic sex trafficking (p.198). Sundani emphasises the need for South Africa to implement awareness campaigns similar to those of A21, which educate people on human trafficking crimes. He asserts that "campaigns that take place online could reach a majority of Facebook users, and they could help them be aware of human trafficking crimes" (p.202).

South Africa's increasing engagement with digital intimacy raises the urgent need for an ethical framework that reveals the tensions between progressive rights, cultural conservatism, and digital capitalism. As Sundani (2023) suggests, public education on ethical pornography consumption could equip individuals with the skills to recognise when the content is a product of cybersex trafficking and provide them with tools to combat it (pp. 200-201). However, this raises an important question about how much influence consumers have over the type of content that is produced, and whether a decrease in consumer demand is sufficient to reduce exploitative content production. Alan McKee (2016) argues that consumers do play a role in shaping the content produced within the pornography industry. He contends that pornography is often treated as a separate and independent media culture, yet it operates under the same commercial strategies as other audio-visual landscapes (p. 3 & 11). McKee illustrates this point by comparing pornography industries to iTunes, which continuously adapts its accessibility and affordability to meet consumer demand; an approach similarly adopted by internet pornography and cybersex work industries (p.12). Nina Power (2009) makes a similar argument, critiquing the assumption (particularly among anti-pornography feminists) that sexism has existed across all cultures throughout history, yet pornography is uniquely blamed as the primary cause of sexism (p.47). She highlights that the content produced within internet pornography and cybersex work is directly connected to its consumers (p. 48). Pornography and cybersex work are not inherently exploitative; their content is, in part, a reflection of society. If addressing sexism within society is possible, then challenging and reforming the pornography industry to reduce its sexist elements should be equally possible.

2.2.2. PORNOGRAPHY CONSUMPTION IN SOUTH AFRICA: GAPS, CHALLENGES, AND THE CASE FOR ETHICAL EDUCATION

Research on pornography consumption in South Africa has historically focused on child exposure and addiction, with much of the discourse (during the time of conducting this research) centring around highly publicised cases like the 2023 trial of Darren Wilken and Tiona Moodley for possession and distribution of child pornography (Luhengo, 2025). Some research reveals alarming statistics, such as 45% of children reportedly viewing pornographic films regularly (Chetty & Basson, 2006, p. 24). However, this narrow focus leaves critical gaps in understanding how pornography shapes attitudes toward sex and human connection

across the lifespan. Questions remain around how early exposure affects adult behaviour, whether it leads to addictions, and how individuals, particularly those with limited sex education, make sense of their sexuality and ethical consumption of pornographic content.

Theron (2013) highlights that the average age of initial exposure to pornography is decreasing due to widespread digital access via smartphones, gaming consoles, and iPads (p. 20). Research by Seigfried-Spellar and Rogers (2013) suggests early, unwanted exposure may be linked to later consumption of "deviant pornography", although this does not include children who actively seek it (p. 1997). Koba (2017) raises a legal and ethical contradiction: in South Africa, the age of consent is 16, yet those same individuals can be criminalised for creating or possessing pornographic content featuring themselves. This legal ambiguity further underscores the need for ethical frameworks that acknowledge the realities of youth digital engagement. Bhana et al. (2019) write that research overwhelmingly positions children as passive victims of pornography, often overlooking broader social failures such as inadequate sex education, societal secrecy around sex, and a lack of safe, affirming spaces to discuss sexuality (p. 10). Chetty and Basson (2006) list five potential harms of early exposure, ranging from imitative behaviour to distorted values, but these are often symptoms of societal neglect, not pornography alone. As they note, habitual pornography consumption among child molesters may be a tool for grooming, but banning pornographic content does not address the root causes of abuse. Similarly, Francis (2024) argued that South African sex education is framed as a domain of danger and power, excluding discussions of pleasure, desire, and queer experiences, thereby not equipping learners with nuanced understandings of sex and sexuality (p. 6).

Research by Koba (2022) revealed that 75% of his participants reported using pornography as an educational tool for sex techniques. Yet, the study lacks detail on content type, which is essential to understanding how pornography shapes ideas about consent, intimacy, and ethics. If individuals are using pornography for education, we must question what they are learning and how this informs a sense of self and others. Despite its potential value, research into women's and girls' sexuality, including teenage girls' engagement with online pornography, remains stigmatised and underexplored. Bhana (2022) argues that lumping youth into one category ignores social and economic disparities in access to education and digital media.

Additionally, the persistent myth that women and girls are sexually inexperienced allows purity culture to flourish, reinforcing rape culture through victim-blaming and the marginalisation of sexual agency. Klement et al. (2022) found direct cognitive links between purity culture and rape myth acceptance, showing that harmful attitudes around sex often pre-exist pornography and manifest in classrooms, workplaces, and broader society.

Against this backdrop, the role of sex education becomes vital. While South Africa's Department of Basic Education offers a Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) program, its disclaimer of not being sex education and its avoidance of explicit discussions around masturbation, queer relationships, or ethical pornography consumption undermine its efficacy (Department of Basic Education, 2024). The curriculum also relies heavily on rigid gender binaries and avoids critically engaging with alternative relationship models. Scholars like Francis (2024) point out that the CSE fails to support LGBTQIA+ learners or equip teachers to handle these subjects sensitively and accurately (p. 1, 6-7). Meanwhile, teachers often omit or selectively teach sex education content based on personal beliefs, creating inconsistent experiences across schools (Naidoo 2006; Meehan 2024). Importantly, young people are not just passive consumers of pornography; they are active participants in shaping its discourse and its digital evolution. Meehan (2024) argues that excluding pornography from the classroom infantilises youth and ignores their agency. When students are denied the opportunity to critically engage with sexual content, they often feel unsupported or turn to the internet for answers, sometimes with damaging consequences.

A growing body of educators and researchers advocate for the inclusion of pornography in sex education, not through showing explicit content, but through guided discussions that foster media literacy and ethical awareness (Hunt 2015; Crabbe 2015). Ethical consumption frameworks can offer both adults and young people the tools to navigate digital intimacy with intention, highlighting themes of consent, representation, and healthy sexual expression. The anti-pornography stance of the CSE and its limited scope does more harm than good. A shared responsibility among parents, educators, and society is necessary to ensure that individuals of all ages are equipped to understand and engage with pornography in ways that are ethical, informed, and reflective of diverse lived realities. By integrating discussions of cybersex work, consent, body-connectedness, and pleasure into educational frameworks,

South Africa can move beyond fear-based models of sex education towards a more empowering and holistic approach.

2.3. PART THREE: AM I A PORN ADDICT OR AM I LONELY: CONTEXTUALIZING PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION AND HARM

There are several studies conducted on the psychological and social impacts of pornography among consumers. In psychology, addiction is generally defined as a chronic dysfunction of the brain characterised by compulsive patterns or behaviour in which an individual engages in a substance or activity despite experiencing negative consequences (van Schoor, 2024). Pornography addiction, while sometimes often described using similar criteria, differs in that it is not formally recognised as a distinct clinical diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). Instead, it could be classified as a sexual behaviour disorder (Grant et al., 2017, p. 301-320). Pornography addiction can be described as a compulsive need to consume pornography. However, research on the subject has found that pornography consumption and pornography addiction are sometimes conflated. For example, Cline and Wilcox (2002) compare pornography consumption to a raccoon caught in a trap by a shiny piece of metal – suggesting that, like the raccoon, the consumer must "let go" to escape the trap (pp. 10-11). They present pornography as inherently harmful, arguing that the only way to prevent addiction or psychological harm is through complete abstinence (p. 10). In the same work, they outline four progressive stages of pornography use: addiction, escalation, desensitisation, and acting out (pp. 11-13). Building upon this, D'Orlando (2009) offers a more nuanced exploration of these patterns, referred to as four implications, which detail a decline in consumer well-being as they shift from softer to harder pornography (p. 72). D'Orlando defines soft-core pornography as content involving nudity or implied sexual acts, while hard-core content explicitly depicts penetrative sex, genitalia, or intense sexual activity (p. 53). He maintains that while soft-core pornography may not harm viewers, hard-core pornography contributes to increased consumption, escalation, and even behavioural changes. As users seek out more explicit material to achieve the same arousal, they often increase their consumption time and eventually shift from viewing to acting out these behaviours in real life (D'Orlando, 2007, pp. 61-72). He likens this shift to drug addiction, with escalating tolerance leading to riskier behaviours in pursuit of the same neurochemical rewards.

These findings suggest the urgent need to establish ethical consumption frameworks and teach responsible pornography use. Without such measures, patterns of escalation may continue unchecked, resulting in greater psychological or relational harm. However, defining what is soft-core versus hard-core remains a challenge. As Theron (2023) explains, the distinction is subjective, often shaped by cultural norms and individual interpretation. Theron suggests that pornography should be understood along a spectrum rather than as two rigid categories. She notes that some content considered soft-core may still contain explicit acts like clothed grinding or partial nudity, while some hard-core pornography includes violent or aggressive scenes (pp. 13-14). The ambiguity in categorising content complicates attempts to link specific types of pornography to harm or addiction. This contextual understanding of the harms of pornography provides a foundation for examining how feminist debates have shaped, and continue to challenge, the narrative surrounding pornography, its consumption, and its perceived harms.

2.4. PART FOUR: FEMINISM AND PORNOGRAPHY

2.4.1. CONTEXTUALISING FEMINIST DEBATES

Whilst consolidating the discussions during the *Porn Talk and Tea* session, Artz notes three feminist attitudes towards pornography. These divisions are anti-pornography feminists, anti-censorship feminists, and pro-pornography feminists. These divisions underscore the ongoing debates within feminism about the role and impact of pornography on society and individual rights. Anti-pornography feminists argue that pornography contributes to the objectification and subordination of women. Notoriously known for their anti-pornography stance, Dworkin and MacKinnon defined pornography as:

> "the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women, whether in pictures or in words and further elucidate this definition by stating that sexual subordination might include the sexual objectification of women as conquered, dominated, or servile; as enjoying pain, humiliation, rape, mutilation, or physical abuse; or otherwise violated by objects or animals" (quoted in Scholz, 2010, p. 22).

Later in their works, Dworkin and MacKinnon go further to specify that this definition extends to anyone subject to the degradation, including men and children. The problem with this definition is that it asserts that pornography inherently requires the subordination of women and that any picture or collection of words that depicts the sexually explicit subordination of women is pornography. This raises the issue of whether sexually explicit

content that does not subordinate women should still be classified as pornography. If it is no longer considered pornographic, this reclassification has significant implications for how such content is censored and regulated by feminists.

Anti-censorship feminists in groups like the Campaign against Pornography and Censorship (CAPC) are critical of the misogynistic elements of pornography but oppose legal regulations or censorship of pornography (Rodgerson & Semple, 1990, p. 21). They argue from a free-speech perspective or a concern that censorship can be misused to suppress broader sexual freedoms (Artz, 2012, p. 8). Their views reflect a concern about the implications of censorship for freedom of expression and the complexities it introduces, especially when considering the diversity within pornography consumption and production. During the *Porn Talk and Tea* session, Sally-Jean Shackleton had the following to say on pornography and censorship:

> "Although there is already some kind of censorship, for instance, Google filtering [content] out, the difficulty is that you end up limiting people's individual sexual content and what they decide to do with that. And that's where a fundamental difficulty comes" (quoted in Artz, 2012, p. 10).

Here, Shackleton is highlighting the pornography dichotomy that feminists face. The initial challenge is the patriarchal nature of pornography, and its production is centred on the male gaze. The second challenge is the right, desire and possibilities pornography offers women to explore their sexualities in a world that either denies or fetishizes the sexuality of women (Mulvey, 2006, p. 348).

Young (2014) writes the following on her task as a pro-pornography feminist: "To create change within any capitalist structure or industry, there are two primary strategies: infiltrate the industry and create change within its existing structure, or create a movement and structure of our own that operates separately from the existing model" (p. 186). Pro-pornography feminists seek to challenge patriarchal productions of pornography and create a feminist pornography. They see pornography as a potential medium for feminist expression and sexual liberation. They argue that pornography can challenge traditional gender norms and empower women by embracing sexual agency and pleasure. Artz stated that:

> "pornography was seen as an important tool in promoting the expression of women's sexuality, in a way that allowed women to take control of their sexuality, where phrases like 'educational', 'empowering' and 'mutually pleasurable' were used. References to 'alternative porn' and 'porn made by women, for women' dominated the discussion. As with all good conversations, we began with *context*" (Artz, 2012, p. 14)

Artz goes on to write that pornography can be good for women and advocates for the consumption of alternative (Alt.) pornography that challenges the heteronormative paradigm that we operate within (Artz, 2012, p. 15). Additionally, Pamela Ramlagun's article on the experiences and relationships girls have with pornography highlights how young African girls perceive pornography as both a pleasurable and educational resource and highlights the potential of pornography to fill gaps left by traditional sex education (Ramlagun, 2012, p. 187). These perspectives highlight the possibilities of pornography as an educational tool and a source of sexual empowerment.

2.4.2. PRO-PORNOGRAPHY VS ANTI-PORNOGRAPHY FEMINISM

Rachael Liberman (2015) defines feminist pornography through its production and reception, emphasising ethical practices and the promotion of sexual subjectivity. Feminist pornography is distinguished by its commitment to ethical production processes, ensuring fair working conditions and respect for performers. This ethical approach is central to its definition as a genre that opposes the often-exploitative practices of mainstream pornography (p. 180). However, concerns persist regarding violence and the central critiques of anti-pornography feminists. Violent depictions of sex in which women are the subject raise ethical questions and prompt ongoing debate about whether such portrayals inherently reinforce patriarchal values.

The core argument of anti-pornography feminists is that because we operate under a system of patriarchy, pornography will always be in favour of the male gaze. The male gaze is the heterosexual male gaze in which the female figure is stylised and presented to satisfy male fantasies (Mulvey, 2006, p. 346). From this gaze, the spectator takes on the position and identification of the male protagonist or director. Thus, his ownership, sexualisation or power over the female body is shared with the spectator (Mulvey, 2006, p. 248). Women become valued and rated based on their "to-be-looked-at-ness", which refers to the level at which they

meet these male fantasies. Scholz (2010) writes that if "technology remains in the hands of men, then women's social position remains unchanged or even becomes more oppressive" (p. 20). This means that if the majority of technology companies, pornography producers, and internet censorship authorities continue to be controlled by men or by individuals who have internalised patriarchal ideologies, women will continue to be subjected to oppression. Thus, pornography can never be feminist because it exists within a patriarchal world system.

Power (20090) disrupts this thinking and writes that both pro-pornography and anti-pornography feminists: "take as their model a debased, one-sided representation of desire and thus treat porn as if it were a historical invariant, one which always has the same kind of content" (p. 47). The main argument of anti-pornography movements implies that men will always nurture a violent desire towards women and that pornography is merely a reflection of this. Power is critical of the presupposition that men's desires are inherently violent, and pornography is merely a mirror reflecting this nature. Power suggests that both sides of the debate often base their arguments on a limited understanding of human sexuality and desire.

Power critiques both pro- and anti-pornography perspectives for treating pornography as static, ignoring how it has evolved with changing societal norms, technologies, and artistic expressions. She is particularly critical of anti-pornography feminists who view men's desires as inherently violent and pornography as a fixed reflection of that violence. Power argued that if masculinity can be reimagined apart from violence, so too can pornography. This perspective aligns with feminist pornography, which challenges the notion that all porn is oppressive. Instead, it promotes ethical consensual representations of desire that centre agency, pleasure, and diversity, offering a more nuanced and empowering view of sexual expression.

2.5. PART FIVE: WHY IS AN ETHICAL PORNOGRAPHY FRAMEWORK ESSENTIAL?

Establishing a framework on ethical internet pornography and cybersex work consumption would entail establishing a set of ethical guidelines, principles and considerations that inform responsible and conscientious engagement with online adult content and services. For several reasons, such a framework is vital for South Africa, including concerns around gendered power

dynamics, representation, rights, and safeguarding vulnerable groups. Koba (2017) also argues that people will always seek to fulfil their sexual desires and needs, and internet pornography is merely a vessel to meet that demand. Pornography is temporal, with new methods for fulfilling sexual needs constantly developing, as shown by the recent innovations of sex robots and sex dolls (Belk, 2022, p. 522). Additionally, according to internet pornography statistics conducted by Jerry Ropelato, South Africa ranked number one globally in 2006 for searching the term "porn" online (Ropelato, 2006, p. 3). The high prevalence of internet pornography and cybersex work consumption in South Africa brings ethical concerns that require systemic regulation, especially when considering the dynamics of global inequalities, localised cultural contexts, and the specific history of South Africa.

Unequal power relations in cultures of difference manifest in pornography through the exploitation and objectification of marginalised groups based on race, gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity. Pornography often reinforces and perpetuates stereotypes, portraying people of colour, women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and other marginalised communities in ways that cater to dominant groups' desires and fantasies. This has resulted in the hyper-sexualisation, fetishisation, and dehumanisation of these groups, portraying them as exotic, submissive or deviant. For example, in his research on how the South African magazine *QueerLife* uses text to (de)legitimise certain accounts of queerness, Vanyoro (2020) explores the link between sex and pornography within communities of gay men. He notes that this connection is often conflated to suggest that gay men are obsessed with pornography, even though non-queer individuals also consume pornography (p.53). This perspective portrays gay men as sexually deviant, using their consumption of pornography to justify this perspective. In Miller-Young's article on the labour marginalisation of black women performers in the pornography industry in the US, Miller-Young found that pornography's hierarchical marketplace devalues black women's bodies compared to others, despite the erotic diversification of the industry (2010, p. 220). The industry privileges whiteness and white beauty standards, pressuring black women to either conform to these standards or be marginalised (Miller-Young, 2010, p. 227). The article highlights the complex realities faced by black cybersex workers, who navigate discrimination while seeking autonomy and self-care. Miller-Young notes how some black actresses become directors and producers, creating representations that challenge stereotyped black sexuality. They strive to maintain ethical practices, fair pay, and respect for performers' boundaries (2010, p. 230).

2.5.1. PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND COMBATING EXPLOITATION

The internet offers a space for expression, but without ethical guidelines, it risks perpetuating exploitation, abuse, and human rights violations, especially in South Africa, where issues of inequality and gender-based violence are prevalent. Ramlagun (2012) writes that sexuality education programs taught in South African schools almost exclusively focus on health dangers, reproduction, and abstinence (p. 32). She argues that this is a problem because watching mainstream pornography becomes a "means through which girls actively participate in cultures of subordination where women are not only complicit but actively promote their own oppression and sexual violation" (Ramlagun, 2012, p. 32). Conversely, as argued by Strossen in her critique against anti-pornography feminists who are pro-censorship, discrimination and violence against women is a societal problem that is mimicked through pornography (Strossen, 1993, p. 1153). She writes that censoring pornography diverts attention from the root causes of discrimination and violence. The censorship of pornography will not eradicate violence and discrimination against women – it will merely manifest somewhere else. Strossen argues that the consequences of censoring pornography only push pornography further underground, where addressing any problematic practices becomes significantly more difficult (Strossen, 1993, p. 1186). For Strossen, there is room to reimagine pornography as a space for the free expression of feminist sexual imagery (Strossen, 1993, p. 1189). An ethical framework could help prevent harmful content that objectifies or discriminates against marginalised groups such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and ethnic minorities, ensuring that online spaces respect the dignity of all individuals. In areas like pornography and cybersex work, ethical standards would prioritise consent, fair labour practices, and worker empowerment, protecting individuals from exploitation and allowing for informed decisions about participation.

2.5.2. INCLUSIVITY, CULTURAL SENSITIVITY, AND ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

An ethical framework tailored to South Africa would address the country's need for inclusive representation, combating the dominance of Western perspectives that often misrepresent African identities. Drawing on Edward Said, McKee argues that Western societies construct their own versions of "the other" to fit Western logic (McKee, 2017, p. 6). This dynamic is evident in pornography discourse, where those who consume pornography are often positioned

as “the other” McKee likens this to Christian attempts to eradicate homosexuality, acknowledging that while homosexuality may not be completely prevented, strategies of shame and self-loathing can encourage or pressure people to suppress their identities (McKee, 2017, p. 9). This “othering” in pornography appears in two primary ways. The first, as McKee suggests, is through positioning pornography as something that harms individuals and distorts their views on relationships, violence, and crime (McKee, 2017, p. 5). The second is through the content itself, where societal ideas of “the other” are reinforced by reproducing these systemic narratives within pornography (Miller-Young, 2010, p. 229). If pornography remains largely Western-produced, these narratives persist, underscoring the need for African-produced pornography that authentically reflects African experiences and cultural understandings of sexuality.

Lindfors (1973), in her exploration of African pornography, notes that while African pornography may have origins in European and American models, it possesses its unique expressions of sensuality (p. 70). She emphasises that African portrayals of pleasure allow for genuine enjoyment without self-punishment or guilt, stating that “they do not have to mutilate their livers or agonise over their ecstasies” (Lindfors, 1973, p. 71). Sekyiamah echoes this view, advocating for African feminist pornography. She humorously challenges mainstream pornography companies to make a film in Ghana, suggesting they would encounter an entirely different perspective of how Ghanaians see themselves in pornographic content compared to how Western producers often depict them (Sekyiamah, 2014). Both authors highlight that African pornography has its distinct soul and should reflect local cultural experiences, rather than simply mirroring Western perspectives.

2.5.3. An Aid for Minimising Pornography Addiction

The absence of clear, universal definitions of pornography addiction complicates research. D’Orlando offers a framework for harmful consumption patterns, but definitions of harm and addiction vary. Voros (2009) argues that the concept of pornography addiction stems more from moral, psychological, and sociocultural discourses than medical evidence. A framework on ethical pornography and cybersex consumption offers us the opportunity to define and guide the definitions and interventions of pornography addiction in a way that is true to the South African context. Koba (2017) found that most users reject the “porn addict” label due to its

stigma, with many reporting manageable use – typically around one hour per session – without signs of compulsion (p. 251; 253). Understanding addiction requires examining frequency, context, and impact on daily life and mental health. In contexts with limited sex education, like South Africa, pornography often fills that educational void (Ramlagun, 2012). This kind of exposure to and reliance on pornography can contribute to an increased likelihood of pornography addiction (Theron, 2023, p. 42). Thus, an ethical pornography framework could help reduce addiction by encouraging mindful and responsible consumption. By promoting transparency in production and empowering users to critically assess content, such a framework may reduce compulsive viewing driven by guilt, taboo, or exposure to unethical material.

2.6. PART SIX: EXISTING FRAMEWORKS

The pursuit of ethical and feminist internet pornography and cybersex work is not new. Feminist discourse has long engaged with debates around sex work and pornography, leading to the development of various frameworks and guidelines that address ethical and feminist approaches to these industries. Ethical pornography focuses on content that prioritises respect, consent, fairness, and the well-being of all participants. In contrast, feminist pornography specifically aligns with feminist principles, such as gender equality, sexual empowerment, and the dismantling of patriarchal norms (Eaton, 2017, p. 235). This section explores existing frameworks, both internationally and within South Africa, that can inform the development of a guide on ethical pornography and cybersex work. While these frameworks and guidelines each have their merits and limitations, the focus here is to identify and refine key aspects that can contribute to an effective and contextually relevant framework for ethical pornography and responsible consumption of cybersex work.

2.6.1. INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK ONE: MAKELOVENOTPORN (MLNP)

MakeLoveNotPorn (MLNP) is an erotic website that curates and promotes ethical pornography. The platform's Our House Rules section outlines its commitment to ensuring that all featured content is consensual, contextualised, and free from pornographic clichés. The MLNP curation team, an all-women group of six members—including founder and CEO Cindy Gallop—hand-selects each video, retaining the right to reject content at any time, with or without notice. MLNP operates on a revenue-sharing business model, where 50% of proceeds go to content creators whose submissions have been vetted and approved for the site. The

platform allows consumers and producers to submit content anonymously, with the option to request its removal at any time. MLNP emphasises that its mission is to showcase real-world people sharing their love, in contrast to the often exaggerated and performative nature of mainstream pornography (MakeLoveNotPorn, 2024).

The platform includes a Terms of Service agreement that sets clear guidelines for ethical content creation. Some key highlights include that every individual appearing in a video or involved in its production must be at least 18 years old, with proof of age and ID verification required before submission. All videos must depict consensual acts in a "contextualized, cliché-free, real-world way." This means content should reflect how the creator authentically experiences sex, rather than imitating traditional mainstream pornographic tropes. MLNP strictly prohibits content that promotes racism, bigotry, or hate; depicts bestiality, rape, or child pornography; includes age-inappropriate-looking performers (whether AI-generated or real); harasses or advocates harassment; promotes criminal activity; or impersonates individuals, including deep fakes. Additionally, all content must comply with copyright laws, ensuring that music, logos, or third-party material are used with proper permissions.

MLNP serves as a valuable reference for consumers seeking ethical pornography platforms. By explicitly outlining the types of content it does not endorse, MLNP educates users on ethical criteria they should consider when selecting a pornography website. What sets MLNP apart is that its restrictions go beyond merely banning illegal content, such as bestiality and child pornography. The platform also rejects harmful stereotypes, patriarchal representations, and any material that promotes violence or criminal activity. A key strength of MLNP is its emphasis on shared pleasure, aligning itself with feminist principles such as erotic agency and body-connectedness. Unlike many mainstream platforms, MLNP does not shy away from acknowledging its commercial model but is transparent about its fair compensation system. It offers clear channels for communication regarding concerns over payment, content removal, and general inquiries, reinforcing its commitment to ethical practices. MLNP stands as a model example of a pornography website that offers inclusive, educational, and feminist-aligned content. While it does provide some free content, full access to the site requires a subscription or a one-time payment for specific videos. This paywall may deter some consumers; however, other free sites also uphold feminist principles. One such example is Erika Lust, a Swedish

adult entertainment filmmaker and a leading figure in ethical and feminist pornography. Her websites provide educational resources, guidelines, and access to a range of ethically produced films.

2.6.2. INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK TWO: LUST FILMS

Concerned with the problematic norms of the adult entertainment industry, Erika Lust founded her own production company, Lust Films, in 2006 (Moreland, 2010, p. 4). She later expanded her work by establishing XConfessions and Lust Cinema (p. 4). Lust aims to challenge harmful industry standards by advocating for a more inclusive, consensual, and respectful approach to adult content. Acknowledging that pornography reflects the complex interplay between masculinities and femininities, she engages with these dynamics through a feminist lens (Moreland, 2010, p. 6). The bio on her website describes Lust as an indie erotic filmmaker who "creates sex-positive adult cinema by portraying relatable characters and realistic sex, going beyond gender stereotypes and harmful fetishization" (ErikaLust.com, 2024). In her productions, she actively incorporates feminist principles such as gender equality, ethical production, representation, and diversity. She also believes that the execution of these values should not be static but must be continuously questioned and analysed (Moreland, 2012, p. 9). Lust openly identifies as an ethical and feminist adult entertainment filmmaker, actively choosing to collaborate with content creators, performers, and consumers who align with her values.

A key feature of Lust's commitment to ethical production is the Performer's Bill of Rights, a document she created and widely distributes. This bill outlines the rights that performers should expect in a production space, detailing necessary working conditions before, during, and after a shoot (Lust, 2020, p. 1). These include knowing in advance who their co-performers will be, understanding the concept and context of the film, receiving timely payment through an agreed-upon method and providing two forms of identification to verify age and identity. This document also serves as a contract between directors and performers, ensuring that both parties have clear expectations before filming begins. In addition to XConfessions, Lust founded Lust Cinema, whose team consists exclusively of women and queer filmmakers who are dedicated to reshaping adult entertainment through ethical storytelling and inclusive representation (ErikaLust.com, 2024). Through her various projects, Lust has positioned herself as a leading

figure in ethical and feminist pornography, demonstrating how adult content can be both commercial and socially responsible. Overall, Erika Lust and Lust Films adhere to feminist and ethical pornography standards by ensuring fair compensation for content creators and providing consumers with a range of content, both free and paid. However, it is important to acknowledge that in 2019–2020, Lust faced criticism for failing to publicly support erotic performer Hello Rooster, who reported being sexually assaulted by one of Lust's guest directors, Olympe de G (Ohara, 2020). During this time, Lust issued a public apology to Hello Rooster and subsequently cut ties with Olympe de G (Ohara, 2020).

Following this controversy, Lust made two significant contributions to the discourse on ethical and feminist pornography. The first was the creation of The Erika Lust Guidelines for a Lust-Approved Shot, a document designed to guide directors and performers in producing ethical pornography. The document, developed in collaboration with a diverse group of performers and directors—including LGBTQ+ and BIPOC individuals—remains in continuous development (Lust, 2021, p. 1). The guidelines emphasise prioritising women's pleasure and diverse representation, ensuring clear communication and enthusiastic consent, fostering intimacy and connection rather than focusing solely on explicit acts and upholding high production quality, including thoughtful aesthetics, lighting, and camera work, to create an artistic and empowering experience for both performers and viewers

The Erika Lust Guidelines for a Lust-Approved Shot serve as a valuable resource for pornography consumers, offering insight into ethical production practices and values such as transparency, equitable compensation, and safe working conditions. By understanding these principles, consumers can make more informed choices, supporting content that aligns with their values and promotes a healthier, more respectful approach to adult entertainment.

2.6.3. INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK THREE: THE PORN CONVERSATION AND THE FEMINIST PORN AWARDS

Initiatives like The Porn Conversation and The Feminist Porn Awards offer complementary approaches to reshaping how pornography is produced, consumed, and understood through ethical and feminist lenses. The Porn Conversation provides educational tools to help parents, educators, and young people critically engage with pornography, focusing on topics often ignored in traditional sex education, such as consent, representation, and diversity (Davis,

2019, p. 84). Central to its approach is the concept of porn literacy, a form of media literacy that equips users with five core concepts guiding questions designed to decode and challenge the exploitative messages embedded in mainstream pornography (thepornconversation.org, 2025). These tools encourage consumers to recognise how capitalist and patriarchal systems co-opt progressive values, enabling more conscious and ethical engagement with adult content.

Similarly, the Feminist Porn Awards have recognised and celebrated adult films that prioritise ethical production, inclusivity, and genuine sexual expression (Feminist Porn Awards, 2024). Judged on criteria like quality, inclusiveness, innovation, and attractiveness, the awards highlight content that resists stereotypes and embraces diverse sexualities (Fritz & Paul, 2017, p.641). However, while the awards promote progressive values, their acknowledgement of the porn industry's "niche-based" limits on representation reveals an unresolved tension. By treating inclusivity as optional rather than essential, the awards risk reinforcing the same marginalising norms they seek to challenge. As McKee (2016) argues, pornography is not separate from broader media discourses and should be held to the same standards of accountability and representation. Both The Porn Conversation and the Feminist Porn Awards underscore the need for a robust ethical pornography framework – one that not only promotes critical consumption but also demands systemic change within the industry.

2.6.4. AFRICAN FRAMEWORKS: SOUTH AFRICAN AND PAN-AFRICAN NGOS

The decriminalisation of sex work in South Africa has been a subject of extensive debate, with discussions spanning human rights, public health, and social justice. In 2022, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Bill was proposed as a legislative initiative aimed at reforming the legal status of sex work in South Africa. However, at the time of this research, the bill had not yet been passed. The bill seeks to protect human rights by safeguarding sex workers from discrimination, violence, and exploitation, while formally recognising their rights and dignity. Additionally, it aims to improve access to healthcare and social services, contributing to better public health outcomes and enhanced social integration. By removing criminal penalties, the bill would enable sex workers to operate in safer environments, seek legal protection, and report abuse without fear of arrest. Unsurprisingly, the bill has been met with strong support from sex workers and advocacy groups. Leading organisations such as the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT), which

also played a key role in founding the Sisonke, Asijiki Coalition for the Decriminalisation of Sex Work and the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA), continue to champion the rights of sex workers and advocate for the bill's passage (sweat.org.za, 2024).

SWEAT is a South African organisation dedicated to advocating for the rights of sex workers, with a primary focus on the decriminalisation of sex work (sweat.org.za, 2024). Established in 1994, it is the oldest sex worker advocacy group in the country. SWEAT provides legal, health, and social support services to sex workers while actively campaigning for legislative reform (sweat.org.za, 2024). Founded in 2003, Sisonke is a national movement led by and for current and former sex workers in South Africa (sisonke.org.za, 2024). Created with the support of SWEAT, Sisonke is the country's primary sex worker-led advocacy group, ensuring that sex workers have a direct voice in legal and policy discussions that impact their lives (sisonke.org.za, 2024). In 2009, the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) was established as a continent-wide advocacy organisation (aswaalliance.org, 2024). ASWA aims to decriminalize sex work at a continental level, lobbying policymakers and promoting the rights of sex workers across multiple African countries. The organisation works closely with SWEAT and Asijiki in South Africa, providing regional solidarity and mobilising resources for advocacy efforts. Finally, the Asijiki Coalition was formed in 2015 as a collaboration between SWEAT and Sisonke (sweat.org.za, 2024). Acting as a steering committee, Asijiki brings together various advocacy organisations, ensuring that efforts to decriminalize sex work remain unified and strategically aligned.

All these organisations are united in their advocacy for the full decriminalisation of sex work. According to the Asijiki Coalition, their collective goal is to decriminalize sex work to reduce violence, discrimination, and health risks faced by sex workers (asijiki.org.za, 2024). They emphasise the need for sex work to be recognised as legitimate work, ensuring that sex workers have access to legal protections and labour rights. Their advocacy also focuses on including sex workers in HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment efforts, changing public perceptions of sex work, and challenging harmful stereotypes that contribute to social and legal marginalisation (asijiki.org.za, 2024). Additionally, the ASWA website outlines its guiding principles and values, which include the following:

1. Accountability and Transparency: We are accountable to our members and our partners, and are always professional, committed, and transparent in our work
2. Equality and Justice: We treat all our members equally and ensure that all our members are treated fairly and justly.
3. Voice and Agency: We ensure that our members have voice and agency, and they are all able to inform and guide ASWA's activities.
4. Respect: We respect all sex workers and understand respect as critical in building a strong and diverse community of African sex workers.
5. Diversity and Inclusion: Working alongside other movements that agitate/aim to disrupt oppression
6. Solidarity: We are a united community of diverse sex workers living and working in Africa.

The guiding principles and values outlined by these organisations provide a solid foundation for understanding what is essential in ethical pornography. They serve as a valuable guide for consumers, helping them recognise key factors when making informed decisions about their pornography consumption choices. While these organisations primarily advocate for sex workers' rights in the physical world, their principles are equally applicable to ethical digital sex work, including internet pornography and cybersex work. By upholding these values in the digital space, consumers and creators can contribute to a more ethical, respectful, and empowering representation of sexuality online.

3. CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on Critical Diversity Studies, African feminism(s), and theories of ethical and feminist pornography to develop a theoretical framework for exploring ethical internet pornography and cybersex work consumption in South Africa. Critical Diversity Studies provide tools for interrogating power, difference, and systemic inequalities, allowing the research to foreground how race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect within digital sexual economies. There is not one definitive version of feminism rooted in African contexts. African feminism(s) cannot be reduced to a single ideology and instead highlight different struggles against patriarchy, colonial legacies, and neo-imperialism (Amaefula, 2021, p. 295). African feminism(s), with their critiques of patriarchy, colonial legacies, and socio-economic injustice, offer a vital lens through which to examine the localised experiences of digital sex workers and consumers. These frameworks challenge Western-centric feminist narratives and centre African epistemologies that recognise agency, relationality, and survival within oppressive systems. Lastly, ethical and feminist pornography theories contribute to understanding how consent, representation, and equitable production practices can reframe pornography not as inherently exploitative but as a potential site for empowerment, pleasure, and resistance. Together, these frameworks inform the study's critical and contextually grounded approach to ethics in online sexual economies.

3.1. CRITICAL DIVERSITY STUDIES AND PORNOGRAPHY: THE PROBLEM OF THE PATRIARCHY

Melissa Steyn's (2014) Critical Diversity Literacy (CDL) framework lays the foundation for critically analysing dominant power structures, particularly through highlighting how privilege is normalised and maintained in social institutions. She writes that a common tool for reproduction used by systems of power like the patriarchy or capitalism is to "invisibilise the norm, naturalise the status quo, construct ambiguities, promote patterns of forgetting and remembering, render some things unthinkable, discourage envisaging other possibilities" (p. 382). In other words, systems of power position themselves as the natural or organic ways in which humans operate – the classic "it's human nature" argument. Critical diversity challenges these arguments and does the work of revealing invisibilised systems of power.

In the case of pornography, patriarchy informs much of its consumption and production, shaping who gets to produce pornography, whose pleasure is prioritised, and how bodies are represented. The status quo of pornography production has largely been informed by white-male-owned companies that determine whose gaze we consume pornography from, whose sexuality is commodified and under what conditions. As Lorde (1984) suggests, the erotic landscape is shaped by capitalist patriarchy, where profit is maximised at the expense of ethical considerations (p. 54). Under patriarchy, women in pornography are objectified for both the male director and the male spectator. The fetishisation of women of colour, the normalisation of violent sexual scripts and the erasure of genuine consent and pleasure emerge from the patriarchal logic that treats women's bodies as sites of consumption rather than agents of eroticism. CDL exposes how these exploitative conditions are presented as natural or inevitable, making ethical pornography seem idealistic or unattainable. I maintain Power's (2000) argument that if feminists can conceptualise a world removed from patriarchy and put mechanisms in place to achieve this goal, the same can be said for pornography.

3.2. THE CONTRADICTIONS OF PATRIARCHY VERSUS ETHICAL PORNOGRAPHY AND THE FEMINIST PARALLEL

This study is informed by feminist theory and Critical Diversity Studies, particularly as they relate to the intersections of patriarchy, representation, and sexual agency. Patriarchy functions not only as a structural force in the production of pornography but also as a moral authority that stigmatises it. Klement and Sagarin (2016) highlight how purity culture constructs a paradox: women are both objectified and punished for sexual expression. This duality reinforces broader societal narratives that vilify sex workers and porn performers while profiting from their labour. Rape myth acceptance and the normalisation of coercion in mainstream pornography, as expressed by Edwards et al. (2011), further reveal how patriarchal discourses shape dominant sexual scripts. These scripts often present sex as transactional and male-driven, marginalising mutual pleasure, emotional intimacy, and consent. Feminist media theorists Reiss and Dahlman (2024) posit that feminist pornography challenges this by reclaiming sexual representation through the female gaze, centring agency, diversity, and emotional authenticity.

Drawing on Critical Diversity Studies, this research views pornography not as an isolated genre but as part of a broader media ecosystem that reflects and reinforces societal norms. Central to the development of this framework is the inclusion of concepts such as porn literacy, defined as a critical understanding of how pornographic messages are constructed and received (Dawson et al., 2020, pp. 2-3). The CDL framework and Porn literacy models enable consumers to deconstruct hegemonic narratives and interrogate the values embedded in pornographic content. Additionally, this study draws from feminist critiques of sexual education policy in South Africa. Scholars like Ngabaza and Shefer (2019) argue for a curriculum grounded in lived experience, inclusivity, and media literacy (p. 429). The exclusion of pornography from South Africa's Comprehensive Sexuality Education program reveals a disconnection between youth realities and educational content, undermining efforts to promote informed, ethical consumption. Ultimately, the theoretical framework situates pornography at the intersection of media, gender dynamics, and power relations. It contends that ethical pornography is not only possible but necessary in the context of ongoing struggles against patriarchal oppression, exploitative media practices, and insufficient sexual education. This framework informs both the analytical lens of the study and its normative orientation toward justice, equity and sexual agency.

3.3. AFRICAN FEMINISM(S)

In African contexts, sexuality and the erotic are deeply rooted in cultural, historical, and social frameworks. Dominant Western patriarchal perspectives have long misrepresented African sexuality, either hypersexualising it or portraying it as repressed (Erlank & Klausen, 2023, p. 87). Tamale's (2005) exploration of the Ssenga tradition, specifically the practice of labia stretching, highlights how this custom simultaneously reinforces and subverts gender norms. She describes it not only as sexual education but as an embodied form of women's agency, pleasure and resistance – where knowledge of sexuality, power, and identity is inscribed on and through the body (pp. 12, 29). The body becomes a site of both resistance and autonomy. McFadden makes similar claims, framing sexual pleasure as a revolutionary feminist act (p. 8). She argues that patriarchal and heteronormative systems repress, overlook, underrepresent and deliberately silence women's sensual instincts, creating "socio-sexual anxiety" and what she describes as a "muted feminist sexual memory" (p.2). In other words, McFadden is calling to attention the way that patriarchal systems have not only controlled women's bodies, but have actively erased women's knowledge and memory of their sexual autonomy. Drawing on Audre

Lorde (1984), McFadden envisions feminist sexual autonomy as the reclamation of erotic energy as a deeply spiritual and political resource (pp. 7, 8).

Erlank and Klausen (2023) also emphasise the importance of reclaiming African sexual histories, centring joy, intimacy, and emotional connection rather than viewing sexuality through colonial pathologisation. They note how rare it is to find the word joy in African historical discourses on sex and bodies and stress the importance of restoring emotional and erotic narratives to the historical record (pp. 91, 94). Together, these scholars affirm that African women's bodies are not solely sites of suffering or resistance but also memory, power, pleasure, and knowledge. Through embodying traditions like Ssenga, feminist assertions of sexual autonomy, and the recovery of erotic histories, African women can reclaim their sexualities. Thus, when I speak of body-connectedness in this research, I refer to a holistic and empowering feminist stance – one that honours the integration of mind, body, and spirit, and reclaims agency through lived, felt, and remembered bodily experiences. The development of ethical African pornography and cybersex work offers a pathway to achieving such body-connectedness. It must challenge colonial narratives by portraying African sexuality as authentic, diverse, culturally rooted, and filled with joy.

Erotic agency and body-connectedness serve as significant sources of empowerment for African women. Audre Lorde's concept of the erotic as a form of power is particularly relevant here. Women's ability to connect with their bodies and their sexual desires allows them to resist patriarchal control and reclaim autonomy. As McFadden (2003) writes, erotic agency "lies at the heart of female freedom and power" (p. 2). She argues that embracing sexual pleasure is a feminist choice that disrupts the patriarchal suppression of women's bodies and desires (p. 3). This idea of feminist choice reinforces the idea that ethical pornography should prioritise consent, agency, and the celebration of women's desire rather than reinforcing patriarchal structures. Ethical pornography in Africa should be developed in ways that respect bodily autonomy, combat harmful stereotypes, and promote diverse, consensual expressions of eroticism. It should serve as a tool for empowerment rather than oppression, challenging the stigma surrounding African sexualities while ensuring dignity and agency for all involved.

3.3.1. JUSTIFYING THESE AFRICAN FEMINIST MANIFESTOS AND CHARTERS

Foundational documents like the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists, the African Young Women B+25 Manifesto, and the South African Women's Charter offer a robust framework for critiquing and reimagining the consumption and production of pornography. Each centre's African feminist values are grounded in lived realities, cultural diversity, and historical struggle, offering context-specific insights into gender justice and body autonomy. These texts provide a blueprint for ethical pornography that is rooted in liberation and cultural relevance.

3.3.2. INTERSECTIONALITY AND INCLUSIVITY

Intersectionality refers to the ways different forms of oppression intersect and overlap. These intersections create unique experiences for marginalised individuals who belong to multiple oppressed groups. (Crenshaw, 2013, pp. 1242, 1244, 1262). All three documents centre intersectionality, acknowledging that African women's experiences are shaped by a range of identities—race, class, age, sexuality, and ability. The Charter envisions an inclusive feminism that accounts for these intersections (African Feminist Forum, 2006, p. 3), while the African Young Women B+25 Manifesto calls for education that challenges patriarchal norms and empowers marginalised voices. Addressing pornography's impact requires an intersectional lens that examines how different groups are affected differently, especially as digital access expands and young people increasingly engage with explicit content (Chetty & Basson, 2006, p. 15). Ethical frameworks must respond to these layered dynamics and support critical, informed engagement.

3.3.3. AFRICAN FEMINISM(S) AND DECOLONISING AFRICAN SEXUALITIES

These feminist frameworks also advocate for decolonising approaches. The Charter calls for indigenous feminist ideologies that affirm African cultural knowledge (African Feminist Forum, 2006, p. 3). The Africa Young Women B+25 Manifesto resists global inequality while staying rooted in local contexts, and the South African Women's Charter insists on policies reflecting South Africa's unique socio-political history. African feminist thinkers like Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah envision pornography that centres African performers, aesthetics, and desires, breaking away from Eurocentric, exploitative narratives (Sekyiamah, 2014).

3.3.4. AUTONOMY AND SELF-DETERMINATION

Across all three documents is a shared emphasis on self-determination. The Charter urges African women to define their futures. The Africa Young Women B+25 Manifesto demands youth representation in decision-making, including digital justice, emphasising internet freedom and safety (African Feminist Forum, 2006, p. 11). Similarly, the South African Women's Charter calls for participation in national policy, reinforcing the need for frameworks that empower women to navigate digital spaces and sexual content with autonomy (South African Women's Charter, 2021, p. 7).

3.4. APPLYING CRITICAL DIVERSITY LITERACIES AND AFRICAN FEMINIST PRINCIPLES TO AN ETHICAL PORNOGRAPHY FRAMEWORK

Considering the ideas of African feminists and the principles outlined in The Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists, the Africa Young Women B+25 Manifesto, and the South African Women's Charter, the following principles can be applied when determining what constitutes ethical pornography and its role in the lives of its consumers. These principles include, but are not limited to:

1. Rooted in African Feminism(s) and Liberation: created by and for individuals committed to dismantling patriarchal, colonial, and oppressive structures.
2. Celebrates Diverse African Bodies: Portrays a diverse range of African identities, embracing different body types in ways that affirm African beauty, sensuality, and self-ownership.
3. Grounded in African Cultural and Historical Realities: Respects and engages with the complexity of African erotic traditions, languages, and histories while challenging harmful colonial and patriarchal narratives about African sexuality.
4. Upholds Ethical Labour and Mutual Respect: Ensures fair compensation, safe working conditions, and informed participation for all involved, rejecting exploitation, coercion, and patriarchal objectification.
5. Centres the Erotic as a Source of Power: Prioritises equal and authentic expressions of pleasure, emphasising self-discovery, bodily autonomy, and intimacy as revolutionary acts of self-ownership and resistance.

6. Practices Explicit, Ongoing Consent and Open Dialogue: Actively demonstrates affirmative, enthusiastic consent, fostering a culture where sexual agency is respected and continuously reaffirmed.
7. Encourages Pleasure, Body-Connectedness, and Self-Love: Affirms erotic joy as a fundamental human right, promoting self-acceptance, connection and a holistic understanding of sexuality beyond reproduction.
8. Critically Engages with Power and Oppression: Acknowledges and disrupts harmful power dynamics, including gender, race, class and heteronormativity, ensuring portrayals resist domination, coercion, and harmful stereotypes.
9. Clearly Defines Its Purpose: Explicitly distinguishes between entertainment, education, and advocacy, ensuring audiences engage with erotic content in ways that align with their personal and political values.

The intersection of Critical Diversity Literacy and African feminist thought provides a vital framework for reimagining pornography as an ethical, emancipatory practice rather than a patriarchal tool of domination. By exposing how systems of power naturalise and perpetuate inequality, CDL challenges us to interrogate the cultural narratives that normalise exploitative sexual representations. African feminism(s) further deepen this analysis by centring body-connectedness, erotic agency, and decolonial resistance, offering alternative visions of sexuality rooted in joy, dignity, and autonomy. Ethical pornography, when grounded in these principles, becomes more than a media genre – it becomes a political project of cultural transformation. It asserts that African sexualities are not to be demonised or commodified but to be celebrated as complex, embodied, and empowered expressions of self. Just as feminist movements have fought for suffrage, education, and reproductive rights, the push for ethical porn is not idealistic – it is necessary. It calls on us to imagine and create a world where sexual expression is consensual, inclusive, and just.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. REACTIVATING FEMINIST SEXUAL MEMORY THROUGH METHODOLOGY

Understanding women's experiences with pornography is critical to challenging the patriarchal silencing of women's sexual agency. Ashton et al. (2018) underscore the need to foreground women's voices in pornography research, noting that despite women's active roles as both consumers and producers, existing studies remain overwhelmingly male-focused (p. 335). This exclusion contributes to the muting of feminist sexual memory and instinct by failing to capture how women navigate and interpret sexual content within a sociocultural matrix that often delegitimises their pleasure and autonomy. Ashton et al. argue that women's engagements with pornography are shaped by intersecting social, relational, and cultural forces – precisely the kind of nuance that qualitative methods are designed to uncover (pp. 335, 347). A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies allows for a richer exploration of how pornography consumption interacts with internalised gender norms and self-perception, pushing beyond reductive binaries of harm versus empowerment.

Attwood (2005) notes the limitations of quantitative research, which often pathologises pornography and reduces it to measurable outcomes like frequency of use or assumed psychological effects (pp. 64, 67). In pornography studies, the use of quantitative research methods alone reinforces dominant moral panics and contributes to a culture of surveillance that disciplines women's sexuality, echoing McFadden's critique of heteronormative repression. By contrast, qualitative methodologies enable exploration of pornography as a site of negotiation, where women's interpretations, pleasures, and resistances unfold concerning broader power structures (Attwood, 2005, pp. 68-69). This aligns with a feminist subjectivity. Framing this study through a feminist lens using both quantitative and qualitative methods, my research seeks not only to explore the different understandings and meanings of violence, harm, and ethics concerning the consumption of internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa, but to situate women's experiences within the broader politics of media, gender and power.

4.2. REFLEXIVITY

Dodgson (2019) explores the concept of reflexivity in qualitative research, emphasising its role in ensuring the quality and trustworthiness of research findings. She asserts that "This transparency and clarity is a minimum requirement for quality in published qualitative studies" (p. 220). Reflexivity involves researchers being aware of their positionality and recognising how their background, beliefs, and biases may influence the research process and its outcomes (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023, p. 244). The article discusses the researcher's role as either an insider or outsider and highlights the critical decision of whether to share personal experiences with study participants (p. 220). Reflexivity requires continuous internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's positionality (p. 222). Additionally, researchers must remain conscious of unconscious biases, such as racism and sexism, which can influence their interpretations. This study employs an online questionnaire survey with pornography consumers and producers to understand their preferences, their definitions of violent or harmful pornography, and how they reconcile their personal ethics or feminist views with the practice of watching internet pornography. These are deeply personal questions that necessitate an interrogation of any internalised biases that may influence both the formulation of questions and the interpretation of findings. Dodgson (2019) goes on to write that an integral component of qualitative research is the researcher identifying and naming who they are compared to the participants so that readers can consider this as they are reading the researcher's work. For example, in her research on breastfeeding practices among Ojibwa women, it was important for her to explicitly name and identify herself as a middle-aged white woman, who is a doctoral student in pursuit of a doctorate, thus, was an outsider of this community, and to some extent, her findings would reflect that (p. 221).

At the time of writing this research report, I am a black queer woman in my 20s, pursuing a Master's degree in Critical Diversity Studies. Through and through, I identify as a feminist and actively seek ways to incorporate feminist ideologies into both my life and research. This research serves as a testimony to that commitment. Additionally, much like the target participants of this study, I have a personal and academic interest in internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa. In Chapter One, I explicitly state that I am a pro-pornography feminist, a stance reflected in the primary research question: Using an African feminist lens to analyse the consumption of internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa: What are the possibilities and challenges of developing a framework for ethical internet pornography

and cybersex work consumption? Although this question explores the possibilities and challenges of creating such a framework, it inherently suggests that pornography (both in its consumption and production) can be ethical. Consequently, when respondents expressed beliefs that pornography is inherently exploitative, harmful or linked to societal issues such as gender-based violence or paedophilia, my focus was not on accepting these views as objective truths. Rather, I was more interested in identifying how these perspectives inform the challenges of introducing an ethical framework for pornography consumption. As a Critical Diversity Student, criteria 3 and 7 of the CDL framework[2] teach me that because we live within a patriarchal system, all institutions under this system inevitably reproduce and sustain patriarchal practices (Steyn, 2014, pp. 383, 386). However, this does not mean that these institutions cannot be reimagined as emancipatory or restructured in ways that promote human flourishing. I believe that pornography has the potential to be empowering.

McCabe and Holmes argue that "Critical qualitative research is simultaneously hermeneutic and emancipatory; it aims to prevent misunderstanding, empower new ways of seeing and emancipate, by disruption of the status quo" (McCabe & Holmes, 2009, p. 1523). Here, they suggest that critical qualitative research serves a dual function: It interprets the world while challenging existing power structures. It empowers people by offering new perspectives and exposing alternative truths. In this research, I aim to challenge traditional views on pornography consumption and explore the potential for ethical pornography production. I analyse the online questionnaire survey responses through this lens while remaining transparent about the realities and limitations of pornography consumption, including issues like addiction and problematic representations of sexuality.

4.3. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

4.3.1. RATIONALE FOR USING AN ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Guided by a mixed-methods approach, this study employed an online questionnaire survey that integrated both closed-ended questions for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions for qualitative insights. This design was used to explore the possibilities and challenges of

[2] CDL Framework Criterion 3: Analytic skill at unpacking how these systems of oppression intersect, interlock, co-construct and constitute each other, and how they are reproduced, resisted and reframed. (Steyn, 2014, p. 383) CDL Framework Criterion 7: The ability to 'translate' (see through) and interpret coded hegemonic practices. (Steyn, 2014, p. 386)

developing a framework for ethical pornography within the context of internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa. The survey designed to investigate three key objectives: (1) exploring different understandings and meanings of violence, harm, and ethics concerning the consumption and production of internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa; (2) exploring consumers' perceptions and definitions of ethical internet pornography and cybersex work; and (3) investigating whether internet pornography consumers can be swayed towards more ethical forms of pornography.

The questionnaire survey collected 107 responses, of which 103 of the responses were usable. However, as respondents could choose which questions to answer, the total number of responses varies for each question. *Figure 1* provides an example of the survey format presented to respondents, while the full survey can be found in *Appendix A.*



Figure 1: Example of Questionnaire Survey

A questionnaire survey is defined as a structured set of questions used to collect statistically useful data, though they are not limited to quantitative research (Roopa & Rani, 2012, p. 273). Taherdoost (2022) identifies four survey types: Contingency, Matrix, Closed-ended, and Open-ended (pp. 10–11). This study employs a mixed-method approach, using both closed-ended questions, which provide set response options (such as yes, no) and open-ended questions, which allow for detailed, unrestricted insights (Taherdoost, 2022, p. 10). McKim (2017) emphasises that the integration of qualitative and quantitative data enhances the credibility of findings (p. 203). Braun et al. (2021) highlight that qualitative surveys are ideal for sensitive

topics, offering a broad perspective (p. 651). This is particularly relevant to this study, which explores internet pornography and cybersex work consumption. To encourage openness, the survey was anonymous. Closed-ended questions were effective in gathering standardised, comparable data on public attitudes toward ethical pornography, ensuring consistency across responses. By combining both question types, this research used structured analysis to understand public perceptions of ethical pornography and the potential for shifting consumer behaviour toward ethical consumption.

4.3.2. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

To recruit participants, the survey was shared on social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram. These platforms facilitated targeted advertisements aimed at individuals who consume or produce adult content.



Figure 2: Respondent Recruitment Poster

Figure 2 displays the recruitment poster that was distributed online, which included a QR code directing respondents to the survey. While I conducted primary recruitment, snowball sampling was also employed, allowing respondents to share the survey within their network to reach a broader audience.

4.3.3. RESPONDENT NUMBERS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey collected 103 responses from South African adults (18–65+) who consume and/or have an interest in internet pornography or cybersex work. Following Marshall et al. (2013), a minimum of 20-30 participants suffices for thematic analysis, though larger samples enhance generalisability. With 103 responses, this study offers a robust dataset. To comply with ethical and legal requirements, respondents under 18 or those who did not consent were automatically excluded. Three participants declined consent, and no data were recorded from minors. Respondents included consumers (internet users engaging with such content), public respondents (individuals offering broader societal perspectives) and, to a smaller extent, producers (pornography or cybersex service providers). Most participants were consumers, with five involved in cybersex work production.

The opening questions of the survey consisted of closed-ended questions focused on demographic information such as age, gender, location, education level, and socioeconomic status. These responses were crucial in categorising participants into predefined strata for stratified random sampling for quantitative analysis (see Patwari 2013 and Data Analyst 2025). Gender, sexuality, and age were key strata categories, as this research operates through the lens of African feminism(s), which centres on themes of identity, power, and agency, particularly as they relate to gender and sexuality. For instance, in Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion, I use direct quotations from respondents, selected randomly based on their fit within a specific stratum, primarily gender, sexuality and age. The aim of analysing these demographic details was to ensure that participant selection maintained proportional representation across key groups, thereby achieving a balanced sample. However, this approach had its limitations. Many respondents were reluctant to answer certain demographic questions, often leaving them blank. While questions on age, gender, and sexuality were generally well-received, questions regarding socioeconomic status, level of education, and community area faced greater

reluctance. These findings are discussed further in Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion. *Table 1* below is a summary of the demographic information collected from respondents.

Demographic Variable	**Categories**	**N**	**%**
Age Group (N=103)	18-24	65	63%
	25-34	36	36%
	55-64	2	2%
Gender Identity[3] (N=101)	Woman/Female	48	47%
	Non-Binary	4	3%
	Gender Fluid	3	2%
	Agender	1	0.9%
	Man/Male	45	44%
Race[4] (N=101)	Black	32	31%
	Mixed	2	1%
	Coloured	17	16%
	South Asian (Indian)	6	5%
	White	40	39%
	African	4	3%
Sexual Orientation (N=99)	Gay	14	12%
	Bisexual	14	14%
	Lesbian	5	5%
	Pansexual	8	8%
	Questioning	1	1%
	Queer	4	4%
	(Bi)Curious	3	3%
	Heterosexual	47	46%
	Asexual	3	3%
Disability (N=101)	No	95	94%

[3] In this survey, I use gender as a broad and inclusive term. Some respondents explicitly identified as cisgender women or men, while others used terms such as female and male instead of woman or man, which was interpreted as an indication of a cisgender identity. No respondents explicitly identified as transgender women or men. Nonetheless, expressions such as woman and female or man and male were grouped as singular gender identities, regardless of whether the respondent intended to express a transgender identity – unless they stated otherwise (e.g., identifying as non-binary, gender-fluid, agender, etc.).

[4] South Africa has a complex history of racial categorisation, where coloured and mixed identities are understood differently. Coloured may refer to someone born to a Black and white parent, someone embedded in the cultural and historical South African Coloured community, or simply as a chosen identity (Pirtle, 2023, pp. 392–393, 406). In contrast, mixed often denotes a multiracial background that may not include Black or white heritage or align with coloured identity (Metcalfe, 2022, pp. 1, 21). To reflect these distinctions, respondents who identified as mixed or coloured were categorised separately.

	Yes	6	5%

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Information Summary

4.4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION TECHNIQUES:

I chose thematic analysis and coding for qualitative analysis. This choice was rooted in a need to capture and interpret the nuances and perspectives of the participant responses. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes related to patriarchy, gendered power structures, and the social implications of pornography consumption, aligning with the African feminist and critical diversity lenses (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013, p. 400). The process of coding further enabled the identification of patterns, enabling me to examine how participants' experiences and views intersected with the theoretical frameworks of African feminism(s) and Critical Diversity Studies. Cross-tabulation was used to explore the relationship between various demographic and thematic variables. Cross-tabulation assists in revealing how one variable differs from another (Husser 2020). This method facilitated a deeper understanding of how different factors, such as age, gender, and sexuality, influence participants' views on ethical pornography consumption within the context of patriarchal structures and African feminists' ideas. Overall, these data analysis and interpretation techniques helped to ensure that the research remained aligned with the core principles of the theoretical framework, promoting a deeper, contextually aware understanding of the research topic.

4.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Addressing ethical considerations was essential in conducting a responsible and respectful study on such a sensitive topic. Ethical integrity not only protects participants but also ensures the production of valuable insights while upholding their dignity and rights. Arifin (2018) emphasises that ethical considerations are fundamental in all research, especially when working with vulnerable groups. The researcher bears the responsibility of protecting respondents and ensuring transparent reporting (p. 32). In this study, participant protections included guaranteeing survey anonymity, with no identifying information collected, stored or reported. Participants were informed of the nature of the research and had the option to withdraw at any time by leaving responses blank or choosing not to submit the survey. However, due to anonymity, withdrawing a submitted response was impossible. No such request was made during and after the survey release. Additionally, participants were informed about data storage and who accessed it, as detailed in *Appendix A*. Lastly, the

survey was conducted only after receiving an ethical clearance certificate from the University of Witwatersrand School of Social Science Ethics Committee.

4.5.1. INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent can be defined as the voluntary agreement of a participant to take part in a study after being fully informed about its purpose, procedures, potential risks and their rights (Varnhagen et al., 2005, p. 37). It is essential in research as it ensures participants understand what their involvement entails, protects their autonomy, and upholds ethical standards by preventing coercion or deception (J. Knight, personal communication, May 15, 2024)[5]. At the start of the survey, respondents were fully informed about the nature, purpose, and aims of the study, including the sensitive topics covered. They were provided with clear details on what participation entailed, how their data would be used, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. *Figure 1* illustrates how this information was presented to participants, and a full version is also available in *Appendix A.* To ensure informed consent, the survey's opening page required respondents to tick a box confirming their agreement to participate. If they did not provide consent, the survey automatically prevented them from proceeding, ensuring that no data was recorded from those who did not wish to take part. This consent page also served as a formal consent form, detailing key information about the study and how the collected data would be utilised. Additionally, it included a participant information paragraph outlining the criteria for ideal participants. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, respondents are made aware of any psychological risks associated with recalling or discussing their experiences or opinions on internet pornography and cybersex work. To address any concerns or queries, the consent page provided contact details of the university ethics department, me and my supervisors. However, no such queries or concerns were received during the study.

4.5.2. ANONYMITY, DATA PRIVACY, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Data collection was conducted using Microsoft Forms, and all information was securely stored on Microsoft OneDrive, which offers encryption and controlled access to maintain privacy. Microsoft OneDrive was chosen for its security, automatic backups, and compliance with the Wits Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Non-Medical) Standard

[5] Before applying for an Ethics Clearance Certificate from their faculty, Wits Postgraduate students must attend an Ethics Training Workshop, during which they are required to complete a test. Upon passing the test, they receive a Certificate of Competence in Research Ethics, which is then used to apply for an Ethics Clearance Certificate.

Operating Procedures, which require research records to be archived for at least 15 years. Secure storage and restricted access ensured the integrity and confidentiality of the data throughout the research process. Only I had full access to the anonymised data for analysis, while supervisors had limited access for oversight and data management. Extra precautions were taken to prevent indirect identification of participants, particularly when reporting detailed qualitative responses. For example, detailed personal recollections of specific memories or traumas were omitted from the findings and discussions report.

This study was classified as low-risk by the School of Social Science Ethics Committee, with the primary ethical concern being the potential discomfort some participants might experience when responding to sensitive survey questions. To mitigate this, the survey was fully anonymised, allowing respondents to freely express their views without fear of judgment or repercussion. It was also designed to promote autonomy and inclusivity, ensuring all perspectives were valued, even those that did not align with the research objectives. Given the study's theoretical foundation in African Feminism(s) and Critical Diversity Studies, a key goal was to amplify the voices of LGBTQ+ individuals and gender minorities of colour, who are often underrepresented in discussions on ethical pornography and cybersex work. By centring these perspectives, the research aimed to contribute to a more inclusive and intersectional understanding of the topic. This is exemplified by the use of gender and sexuality as core and recurring themes in the findings and discussion.

4.5.3. EXPOSURE TO EXPLICIT CONTENT AND RESEARCHER MENTAL HEALTH

Researching pornography – especially its violent and degrading forms- posed significant risks to my mental health as a researcher. The continuous exposure to explicit and disturbing content resulted in what I can only describe as a deep emotional numbness, often making me reluctant to return to my work. As part of my research, I had to examine various pornography websites to assess their ethical standards. In doing so, I encountered deeply troubling content, including what appeared to be non-consensual, violent, and degrading material. Witnessing these graphic and exploitative representations was not only distressing but also undermined my initial optimism about the potential for erotic empowerment and ethical pornography. As stated in my rationale, I am very passionate about the transformative potential of ethical pornography, particularly in empowering women. However, it was deeply disheartening to

see how few respondents were aware of ethical pornography, and even more troubling, how some failed to recognise that much of what they consumed was far from ethical. This realisation left me concerned about the extent to which problematic aspects of pornography and cybersex work have been internalised by audiences.

Additionally, some respondents shared harrowing personal experiences, including stories of forced exposure to internet pornography that led to sexual assault. Reading these accounts was emotionally devastating, particularly because I was unable to offer direct support or refer them to organisations that could provide help. The sense of helplessness that came with the aspect of the research was particularly difficult to process. Despite these challenges, I believe I managed the emotional toll effectively by reaching out to friends and family for support when I felt overwhelmed. However, this research serves as a stark reminder of the psychological burden that can accompany studies on sensitive and distressing topics.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. SETTING THE SCENE: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

This section presents an analysis of specific findings related to the demographic data collected through the survey. Here, I address key research gaps and points of importance identified by scholars such as Koba (2017) and Bhana (2022), as discussed in the literature review. By focusing on age, education, economic class, community area, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and race, the analysis highlights how these different social positions shape access to, preferences for, and critical engagement with pornography and cybersex work.

5.1.1. AGE

Respondents aged 35-44, 45-54, and 65+ were absent from the survey. This may be due to several factors, including the sensitive topic, the survey's online-only distribution via social media, and my age as the researcher, which may have limited its reach to certain demographics... Koba (2022) faced a similar limitation, with most respondents falling within the 18-27 and 28-26 bracket (p. 67). He links this trend to D'Orlando's argument that internet pornography and cybersex work consumption declines with age, and younger adults make up a significant portion of South Africa's population (p. 67). This gap highlights the need for more research on older age groups, whose consumption habits remain largely unexplored. Despite a common stereotype that consumers of internet pornography and cybersex work are predominantly older, this research suggests that younger people are, in fact, primary consumers. This raises an important question of whether young people are genuinely the majority of consumers, or if the lack of data on older demographics skews our understanding. This question is crucial in the context of South Africa's issues with child pornography. Given the high number of young respondents consuming internet pornography and cybersex work, some may also engage with illegal content, challenging traditional notions of what a predator looks like. It is crucial to acknowledge that predators can be young people themselves. Therefore, education on ethical pornography consumption must reflect this reality. Implementing a progressive, age-appropriate framework, taught throughout schooling and into university, could be a vital step toward addressing the issue.

5.1.2. EDUCATION, ECONOMIC CLASS AND COMMUNITY AREA

In Bhana's (2022) research, she critiques the tendency to group all children and youth in studies on internet pornography and cybersex work consumption, arguing that this approach neglects critical factors such as social and economic conditions and access to education (p. 33). The questions on education level, economic class and community area were designed to address this concern. *Table 2* presents the responses to these. The survey revealed a reluctance among respondents to disclose their economic class and community area. This may stem from fears of moral judgments, such as assumptions that poorer individuals engage in cybersex work out of desperation or that wealthier ones exploit the system (Yang, 2016, p. 1007). In South Africa, poverty, particularly poverty experienced by people of colour, is often seen as a personal failing rather than a systemic inequality (Nussey, 2021, p. 62). This stigma, alongside the just-world fallacy, may explain the discomfort in revealing economic status. Even with guaranteed anonymity, data leak fears persist, especially given the sensitive matter. Disclosing socioeconomic details could exacerbate the stigma of consuming pornography or participating in cybersex work. Nonetheless, such data would have been valuable for understanding how class and social context influence access, perceptions, and ethical views on these practices.

Demographic Variable	**Categories**	**N**	**%**
Level of Education (N=101)	Secondary School	9	8%
	Diploma/ Certificate	8	7%
	Bachelor's Degree	59	58%
	Honours Degree	5	4%
	Postgraduate Degree (Master's/PhD)	19	18%
	No Formal Education	1	0.9%
Economic Class (N=7)	Low	1	14%
	Lower-middle	5	71%
	Upper-middle	1	14%
	High Income	0	0
Community Area (N=7)	Rural	2	28%
	Suburban	4	57%

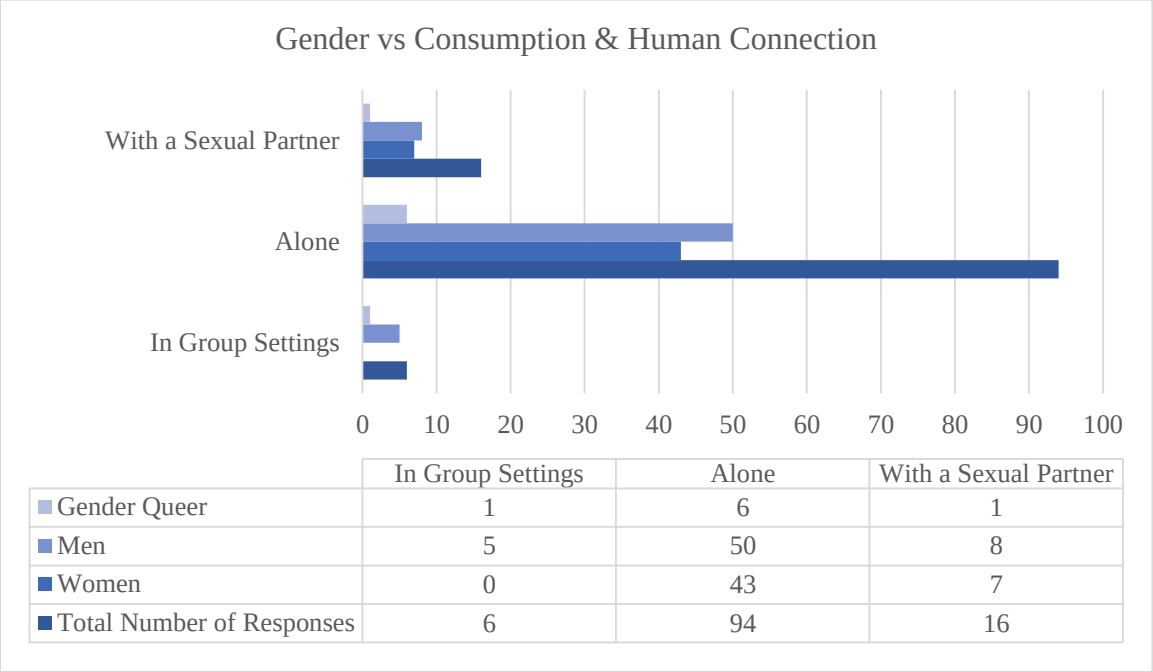
	Urban	1	14%

Table 2: Respondents' Level of Education, Economic Class and Community Area

Table 2 shows that most respondents have some form of formal education. However, later in the findings, it is found that there are discrepancies between how respondents understand ethical pornography and cybersex work and habits around its consumption. This reveals that currently, access to education in South Africa does not guarantee an awareness of ethical consumption habits, knowledge on avenues to find ethical sites or an ability to critically engage with the relationship between ethics and pornography and cybersex work consumption. This makes it all the more pertinent that South Africa has a framework for ethical pornography consumption introduced in educational programs like the CSE.

5.1.3. GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Contrary to Koba's (2017) findings, which reported a majority of man-identifying respondents compared to woman-identifying respondents (p. 78), this survey revealed an almost even split between men and women. This suggests that, among this sample, internet pornography and cybersex work consumption are relatively evenly distributed between woman-identifying and man-identifying individuals. Notably, LGBTQIA+ individuals made up the majority of the survey's respondents. However, while most participants identified as queer, the difference between queer respondents and heterosexual respondents was not significantly large. This supports Vanyoro's (2020) argument, challenging the stereotype that gay men, in particular, are disproportionately obsessed with pornography, whereas heterosexual men are not. The data suggest that sexuality is not a determining factor in pornography consumption or obsession (p. 53). Rather, internet pornography and cybersex work consumption appear to be fairly evenly consumed across different sexual orientations. Among respondents who use pornography and cybersex work for education, sexual exploration, and to enhance sexual performance (N=65), men and women are evenly represented. This highlights that in this study, both binary gender identities in this study engage with pornography and cybersex work as tools for learning and sexual development. Additionally, Koba (2017) notes that a gap in his research is "female collaborative consumption", wherein he poses the question of whether women share and bond over pornography in the same way men reportedly do (p. 264). *Figure 3* reflects respondents' answers to the question of whether they consume pornography alone, with a sexual partner or in group settings (N=99).



	In Group Settings	Alone	With a Sexual Partner
Gender Queer	1	6	1
Men	5	50	8
Women	0	43	7
Total Number of Responses	6	94	16

Figure 3: Gender vs Consumption, and Human Consumption

No women in the study reported watching pornography in groups, which partially answers Koba's question about women and collaborative practices and whether they align with the patterns observed among men in his research. However, given the small sample size, these findings may not accurately reflect the broader population of consumers across South Africa. Interestingly, both men and women reported watching pornography with their sexual partners at nearly equal rates. This aligns with Walter's (2010) observation that many women's initial exposure to pornography occurs through a sexual partner, sometimes under coercion or through initially consensual mutual viewing that later feels difficult to refuse (p. 109, 114). Therefore, this study raises the question of whether women are engaging in shared pornography consumption with their partners out of genuine curiosity and personal choice or whether, as Walter suggests, such experiences may be linked to sexual coercion.

5.1.4. DISABILITY

The inclusion of disability in this survey is particularly valuable, as Thorneycroft and Smilges (2022) highlight how mainstream able-bodied performers dominate pornography, while disability is primarily represented through fetishised categories such as "midget" and

"amputee" (p. 100). It is crucial to amplify the voices of people living with disabilities, as they are often overlooked in conversations about sex and sexuality. Van der Heijden et al. (2019) argue that societal stigma frequently portrays individuals with disabilities as asexual and devoid of sexual desire (p. 338). Unfortunately, the survey consisted of a very small number of respondents with disabilities; thus, meaningful analysis could not be conducted. Disability and sexuality remain contentious topics in South African society, where people living with disabilities often face varying degrees of stigma and social exclusion (ver der Heijden, 2019, p. 339). As van der Heijden et al. (2019) emphasise, greater accessibility and relevant sexual education are essential to support healthy and safe intimate relationships, particularly for women with disabilities (p. 348). Therefore, research into internet pornography and cybersex work consumption among people living with disabilities could play a vital role in challenging stigma, correcting misconceptions, and promoting more inclusive and informed discussions around sexuality.

5.1.5. RACE

Race was an important consideration in this survey because, as Koba (2017) argues, "the porn industry often thrives and capitalises on racially-centred body differences" (p. 197). This point highlights how pornography often exploits marginalised groups, with race having historically been used to fulfil these exploitative practices (Miller-Young, 2010, pp. 222-224). Nationally, Black South Africans make up 81% of the population (Alexander, 2025), yet in this survey, only 31% of the respondents are black. By contrast, White South Africans make up 7% of the population (Alexander, 2025), yet they accounted for 39% of responses. This underrepresentation of black people could indicate several barriers, ranging from access, stigma, and survey design. As the survey was conducted online, South Africa's digital divide means wealthier and urban populations (which are disproportionately white and coloured) are likely to have more reliable internet and privacy to participate (Data Reportal, 2025). It is likely that urban residents (often occupied by white, coloured, and middle-class Black South Africans) are more likely to encounter and respond to such surveys than rural populations. This is a point supported by Sundani (2023), who writes that, "young people from [South African] households with higher socioeconomic status are more exposed to sexual material online than those from lower-income families due to their higher access to technology platforms" (p. 199). Conversely, respondents from marginalised groups may fear judgment, moral condemnation, or even legal repercussions, reducing their willingness to self-identify and participate. Overall,

the racial makeup of respondents likely reflects a combination of digital access, inequalities, socio-economic privilege, cultural taboos, recruitment strategies, and comfort levels with sexual discourses – rather than the actual distribution of pornography consumption in South Africa.

Respondents were asked to identify the categories of pornography that they consume, and only 7% reported engaging with race-related pornography. At face glance, this may suggest that most respondents are uninterested in race-related pornography. However, it could also imply that many respondents are not critically reflecting on the racial dynamics and representations in the pornography they consume or may not perceive these representations as problematic or in need of challenge. For instance, 75% of respondents (N=92) reported predominantly watching pornography produced in the United States of America, a country whose mainstream pornography is widely known for its problematic racial representations (see Dworkin 1987; Miller-Young 2010; Whisnant 2016). Only 5% of respondents reported consuming locally produced pornography.

These findings suggest that there is a need for greater awareness and discussion around the racial dimension of pornography consumption, as well as the existence of locally produced pornography and cybersex work. This highlights how the framework must not only challenge harmful racial stereotypes but also encourage a more critical and responsible engagement with the content consumed.

5.1.6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The findings from the demographics highlight the importance of inclusive discussions on internet pornography and cybersex work consumption, particularly concerning age, education, economic class, community area, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and race. While the data suggests that consumption is fairly evenly distributed across different social positions, it also underscores the need for greater representation and ethical considerations within the industry. People with disabilities remain largely overlooked in conversations about sexuality, reinforcing harmful stereotypes of asexuality, while racial dynamics within pornography continue to reflect broader societal inequalities. Addressing

these gaps through further research and comprehensive sex education, rooted in inclusivity and ethical consumption, can help challenge stigmas and create a more nuanced understanding of the evolving digital sex industry.

5.2. CONSUMPTION AND PERCEPTION OF INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY AND CYBERSEX WORK

Section 3 of the survey focused on gaining insights into the consumption and perception of internet pornography and cybersex work. It consisted of 18 questions, a mix of open- and closed-ended questions. The findings from this section are divided into two parts: consumption habits and perceptions. The consumption habits segment explores what types of internet pornography and cybersex work South Africans engage with and how frequently they do so. The perceptions segment examines how South Africans understand, experience, and process the pornography they consume.

5.2.1. CONSUMPTION HABITS

5.2.1.1. FREQUENCY AND PURPOSE

Figure 4 presents the frequency of respondents' pornography and cybersex work consumption. The data reveals that consumption is fairly evenly distributed, with 31 respondents identifying as weekly consumers and 32 as rare consumers. Meanwhile, daily consumers account for 33 respondents, while monthly consumers make up 22 respondents.

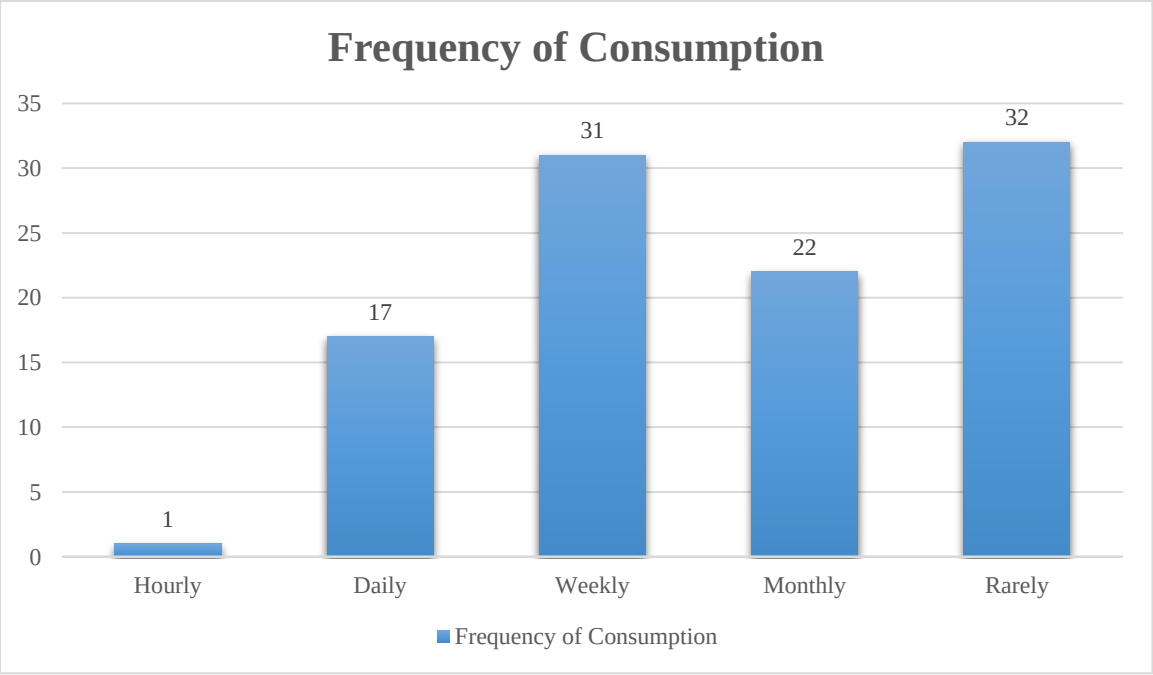


Figure 4: Frequency of Respondent Consumption Habits

A valuable question to have asked is the time spent consuming content. To approximate the amount of internet pornography and cybersex work consumed, I have chosen to make use of

the arithmetic mean. The arithmetic mean is calculated by summing all the observations and then dividing them by the total number of observations (Martinez & Bartholomew, 2017, p. 5). In this case, all the observations are the number of respondents who reported consuming pornography either hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, or rarely, and the total number of observations is the total number of respondents in the survey. I assigned the following numerical values to the frequency categories: hourly = 24 hours per day, daily = 1 hour per day, weekly = 1 hour per week, monthly = 1 hour per month, and rarely = 1 hour per year. The average frequency formula is as follows:

$$Average\ frequency = \frac{sum\ of\ respondent\ frequency\ data}{total\ number\ of\ respondents}$$

$$Average\ Frequency = \frac{\left((1 \times 24) + (17 \times 1) + \left(31 \times \frac{1}{7}\right) + \left(22 \times \frac{1}{30}\right) + \left(32 \times \frac{1}{365}\right)\right)}{103}$$

Based on these calculations, the total average consumption equates to 0.45 hours per day, meaning that, on average, South Africans consume internet pornography and cybersex work approximately once every two days, totalling 2–3 times per week. This finding aligns with Koba's (2017) research on consumption frequency, where he notes that pornography is a weekly indulgence for South Africans (p. 165). Further, he states that one in three consumers watches pornography for 30 minutes per session, while one in nine watches for over an hour (p. 250). Applying these statistics to this study suggests that, on average, South Africans engage with 30 minutes to an hour of internet pornography per session every two days. This is a valuable finding as it provides quantifiable insight into national consumption patterns, reinforcing previous research and offering a clearer picture of how frequently and for how long South Africans engage with internet pornography and cybersex work. Such data can be useful in discussions on media literacy, ethical consumption, and the broader societal impact of digital sexual content.

5.2.1.2. CONSUMPTION, HUMAN CONNECTION, AND BODY-CONNECTEDNESS

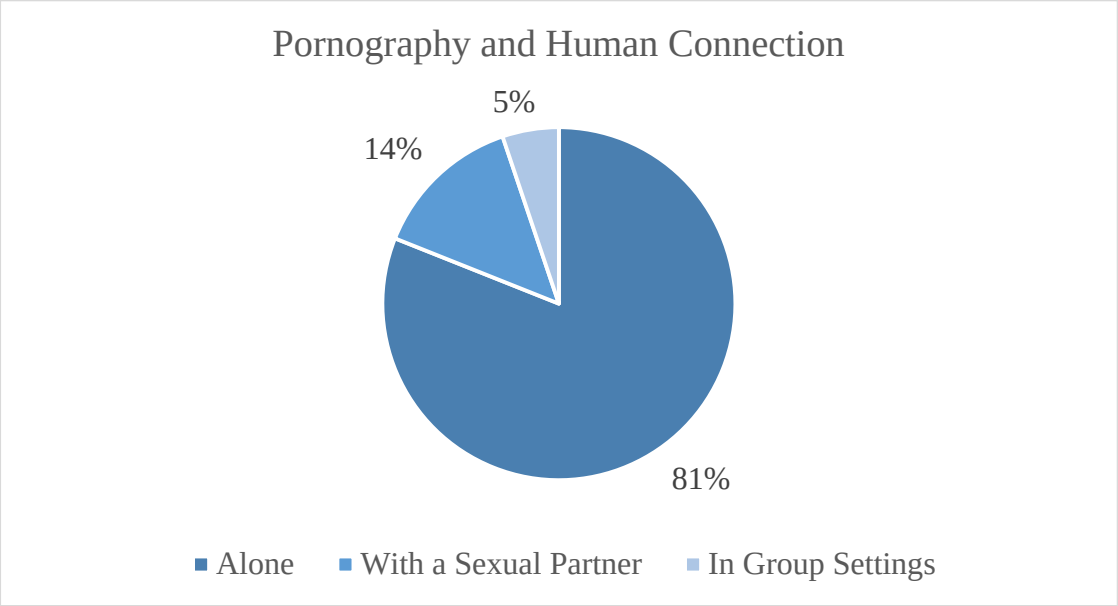


Figure 5: Respondents' Pornography Consumption and Human Consumption Choices

Figure 5 represents respondents' choices on whom they consume pornography and cybersex work with. The vast majority of respondents (n=99) consume internet pornography alone, with significantly fewer individuals engaging in consumption with a sexual partner or in group settings. This suggests that pornography consumption among respondents is primarily a private and individual experience, reinforcing the idea that it serves personal needs such as sexual gratification, arousal, stress relief, and exploration rather than being a shared activity.

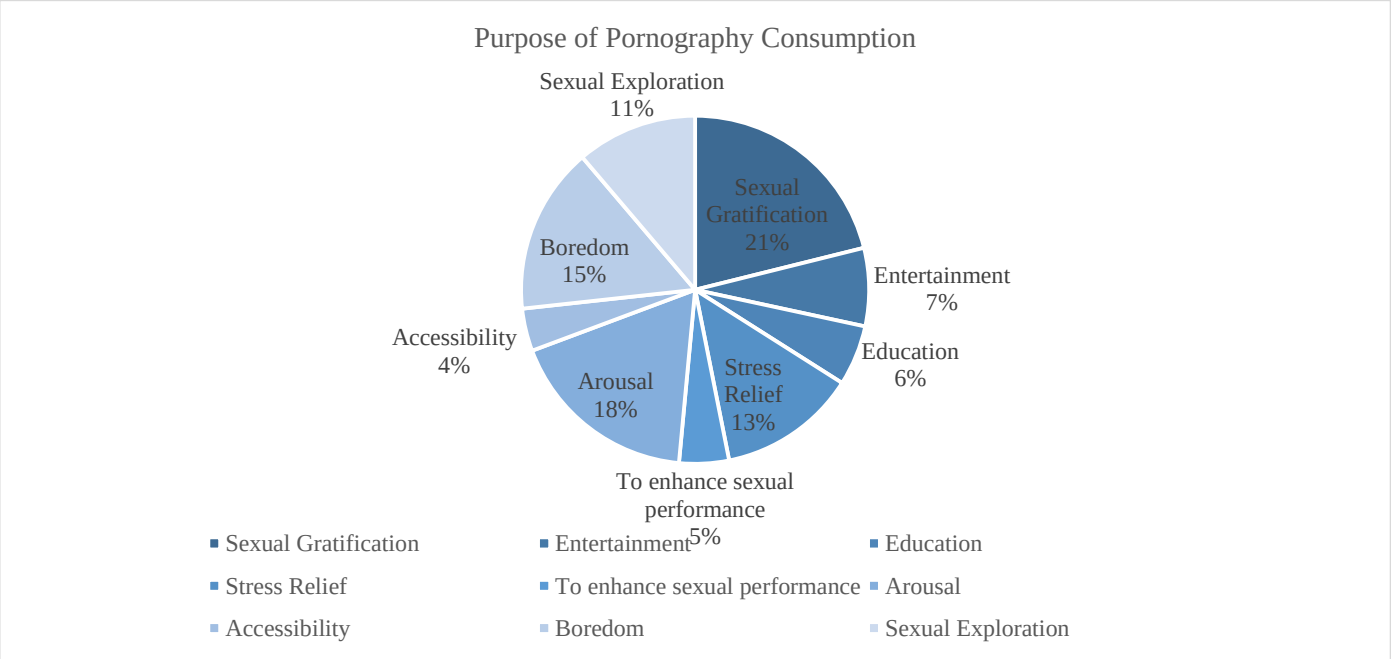


Figure 6: Respondents' Purposes of Pornography Consumption

However, what does the solo consumption of pornography mean for the pursuit of body-connectedness, and how might this influence general human connection.

Figure 6 reveals that a majority of respondents reported using internet pornography and cybersex work for sexual gratification, followed by stress relief, arousal, and boredom. This finding brings to mind Koba's (2017) observation that pornography viewed alone provides the greatest arousal effect, sexual pleasure, and temporary stress relief (p. 259). As mentioned in the problem statement of this research report, these positive uses and effects of pornography consumption are connected to individuals' sense of body-connectedness and their relationship with others (Villines, 2023). Despite respondents reporting to largely consuming pornography alone, the finding that respondents use pornography for sexual pleasure, stress relief, and arousal highlights how sexual empowerment is a deeply personal journey wherein access to and an understanding of ethical pornography consumption habits can bolster sexual empowerment, destigmatise sex, increase an acceptance of non-traditional sexual practices, and improve sexual communication. This is especially pertinent in South Africa, where studies have shown a connection between gender based violence and problematic sexual practices with pornography consumption (see Chetty & Basson, 2006; Kheswa & Notole, 2014; Bhana, 2022). Similarly, it can be argued that, for the respondents, pornography consumption is an embodied experience that fosters greater awareness of their physicality and desires rather than a passive or compulsive act. To some extent, this more targeted engagement with pornography contrasts with dominant narratives of addiction, which are typically framed as automatic, detached, or beyond one's control (see D'Orlando 2009; Voros 2009; Taylor 2019).

As mentioned in the literature review, 75% of Koba's (2022) respondents reported using pornography as a form of sex education (p. 73). In comparison, this study found that 22% of respondents cited pornography and cybersex work as tools for education, enhancing sexual performance, and exploring sexuality. While these two studies present different figures, both point to a shared insight: there is a relationship between the desire to improve one's erotic experiences and the use of internet pornography and cybersex work as means to achieve that goal. This further underscores the role these mediums play in fostering erotic autonomy and body-connectedness – experiences that often begin with solo exploration. In contrast, the finding that South Africans primarily engage with internet pornography and cybersex work

for self-arousal, gratification, and exploration resonates with the research rationale of this study. This is particularly evident in Xaba's (2001) essay, in which she argues that self-led pleasure is essential to developing a deeper understanding of oneself and, ultimately, others (p. 257). Reflecting on her time at the Women's Health Project, Xaba recalls a woman who panicked after experiencing an orgasm during sex with her husband, fearing she had been bewitched. Having never explored her sexuality, she could not recognise that it should have been a moment of joy (p. 270). This anecdote powerfully illustrates the consequences of lacking body-connectedness and erotic autonomy – namely, confusion, shame, and negative experiences with sex, intimacy, and self-understanding. A framework for ethical pornography and cybersex work consumption could play a valuable role in addressing these gaps.

5.2.1.3. CONSUMPTION, ADDICTION, AND HUMAN CONNECTION

In the literature review, pornography addiction is characterised in two primary ways. The first aligns with D'Orlando's (2009) view, which associates addiction with content – specifically, the consumption of hard-core pornography is used as an indicator of addictive behaviour (p. 65, 71). The second, from Koba (2017), who defines pornography addiction in terms of frequency and compulsion (p. 253). Respondents in this study reported low levels of compulsive pornography use, as evidenced by the few respondents consuming pornography hourly and daily basis. This finding supports Koba's (2017) conclusion that individuals are generally able to regulate their consumption habits (p.250). Based on this definition, where addiction is tied to frequency and compulsion, respondents in this study do not appear to meet the criteria for addiction. However, D'Orlando's definition raises a more complex issue. The data collected in this study does not indicate whether respondents are consuming hard-core or soft-core pornography. The categories and types of content listed by respondents are not easily classified without directly viewing and evaluating the material. For instance, as shown in *Figure 7*, while respondents provided their category preferences, these cannot definitively be

categorised as hard-core or soft-core. This ambiguity highlights the subjective and context-specific nature of defining pornography addiction.

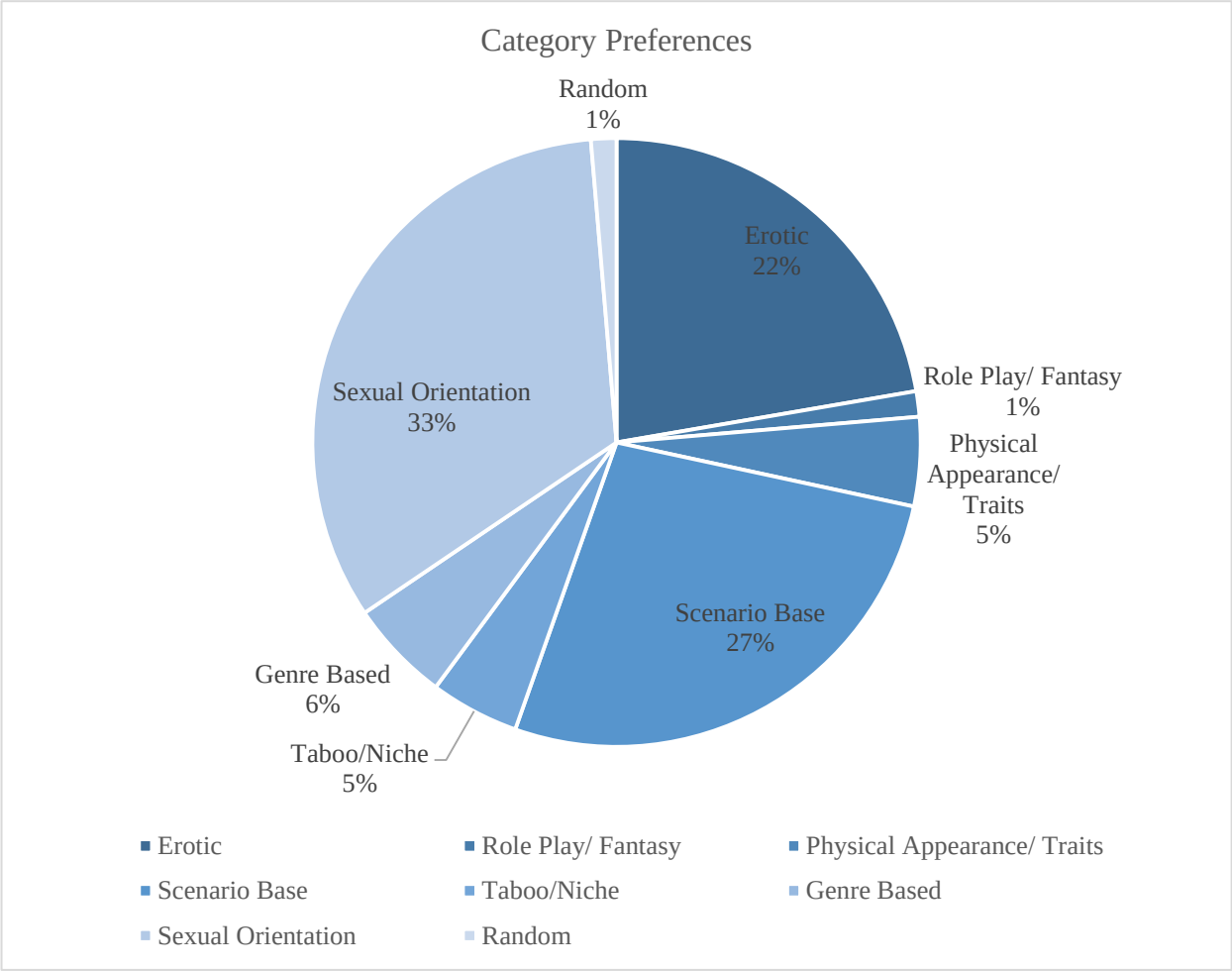


Figure 7: Respondents' Pornography Category Preferences

Later in this chapter, I delve into respondents' interpretation of what distinguishes hard-core pornography from soft-core pornography. These findings reveal a notable uncertainty and variation in how respondents define and understand this distinction. This raises further questions about the criteria individuals use when making consumption choices, and whether perceived risk of addiction is one of those considerations.

5.2.1.4. FACTORS INFLUENCING PORNOGRAPHY CONSUMPTION CHOICES

Koba (2017) writes that internet access in South Africa remains a luxury (p. 64), making it more likely that consumers will opt for content that is more accessible and cost-effective. *Figure 8* illustrates the factors influencing respondents' pornography consumption choices. While accessibility is a key factor, the type of content appears to be an even greater priority.

In contrast, risk-related considerations, such as price, privacy, and representation factors like the diversity of performers, are among the least cited. This is particularly interesting given the finding that only 7% of respondents reported consuming race-related content. Although a majority did report consuming queer content, it's worth noting that about half of the respondents identified as queer. This raises questions about what respondents mean when they say they value representation and diversity in performers. Notably, addiction was not mentioned at all as a consideration.

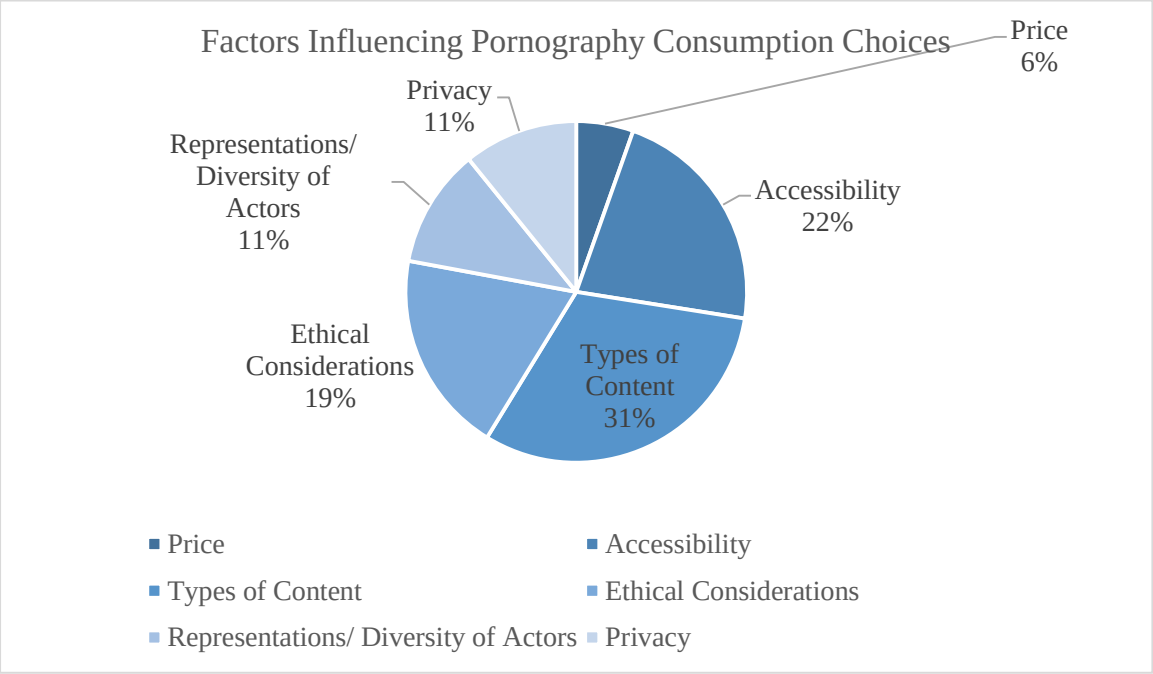


Figure 8: Factors Influencing Respondent Consumption Choices

The third most significant factor influencing consumption choices is the ethical nature of content genres, indicating a strong interest in consuming ethical internet pornography and cybersex work. An overwhelming 95% of respondents (N=100) stated that they would be willing to change their consumption habits to support ethical pornography if it were readily available. This finding is particularly noteworthy when compared to the actual websites that respondents reported using—most of which are not recognised as ethical platforms or, at the very least, are not categorised as feminist pornography by the Feminist Porn Awards. This disconnection between consumer values and actual consumption practices is possibly due to a lack of awareness or limited availability of ethical alternatives.

5.2.1.5. WEBSITE CHOICES AND RESPONDENT ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Respondents were asked to name the sites they frequent when consuming internet pornography and cybersex work. Respondents reported 44 different sites, ranging from social media sites to online pornography streaming sites. Using the criteria for ethical pornography websites outlined in the Existing Frameworks section of the literature review, I have compiled a table categorising these sites as ethical (✓) because the criteria is present, non-ethical (×) because the criteria is absent, or in a grey area (±) because the criteria is either ambiguous or partially fulfilled—where sites meet some ethical standards but lack others. The table below highlights the 20 most-used websites, where at least two respondents reported using the platform. Additionally, I excluded social media sites, television streaming platforms, and search engines that respondents mentioned, as these platforms are not designed specifically for pornography consumption, making it difficult to assess them based on ethical criteria. The excluded platforms include Discord, X/Twitter, Tumblr, Google Images, and Netflix. These platforms require a different type of ethical intervention, which I explain further under the limitations section of this chapter. Nonetheless, this raises an important area for future research: understanding how users engage with pornography on these non-pornography assigned platforms and how platform policies address this practice.

Additionally, to determine whether a site met the ethical pornography criteria, relevant information needed to be easily accessible and presented on the website. Some sites, such as BoyfriendTV.com, required extensive external research to assess their business models, compensation structures, and content policies. In contrast, other sites immediately provided tabs outlining their terms of service, privacy policies, and content guidelines, making the assessment process more straightforward. Websites that did not make this information readily available could not be definitively categorised as ethical or non-ethical. Additionally, some sites appeared to meet some ethical criteria (including a Digital Millennium Copyright Act[6] notice, general terms of use, a privacy and content policy), but were unclear about vetting processes for content creators and consumers, like forums or explicit advocacy for rights and advocacy organisations, which made it difficult to classify them with certainty.

[6] The Digital Millennium Copyright Act is a U.S. law enacted in 1998 that protects copyrighted material on the internet (Digital Millennium Copyright Act, 1998).

	Clear Consent and Agency	Fair Compensation	Diversity and Inclusion	Mental and Physical Well-Being of Performers	Transparent Business Practices	No Exploitation or Coercion	Respectful and Consent-Focused	Transparency About Business and Ownership	Community Engagement and Feedback	Advocacy for Rights and Advocacy Organisations
XVideos	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	✓	×
Porn Hub	×	×	×	×	✓	×	×	✓	✓	×
Literotica	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Gay Male Tube	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Only Fans	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
HD Porn Comics	±	±	±	±	±	±	±	±	±	±
Archive of Our Own	±	±	±	±	±	±	±	±	±	±
Hentai Haven	±	±	±	±	±	±	±	±	±	±
Boyfriend TV	±	±	±	±	±	±	±	±	×	±
Bellesa	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
XXX Videos	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	✓	×
XNSS	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
XHamster	×	×	✓	×	×	×	×	✓	✓	×

Table 3: Pornography and Cybersex Work Sites and their Ethical Ratings

Most respondents consume pornography from unethical pornography sites or ambiguous pornography sites. This contradicts the finding that asked respondents whether or not they believe they consume ethical pornography. 78% of respondents (N=100) reported believing that they do consume ethical pornography; however, the above table suggests otherwise. This finding is particularly concerning because the aforementioned questions provided respondents with a definition of ethical pornography: Ethical pornography can be defined as sexually explicit content that is produced and distributed in a consensual, respectful, and socially responsible manner. Despite the provision of a definition of ethical pornography, respondents still believed they consumed ethical pornography. This false connection could be an indication of consumers not truly understanding what ethical pornography is, a refusal to accept their complicity in unethical pornography consumption habits, or a skewed perception of ethical. The third consideration is particularly disturbing because it highlights how much work needs

to be done in disrupting and dismantling problematic internalisations of sexual relationships and practices learnt through pornography consumption.

Conversely, a significant issue I observed was the unauthorised distribution of ethical content on non-ethical sites. For example, Lust Cinema content (known for its ethical production practices for both content creators and consumers) could be found on PornHub and XVideos, despite being an independent company with no public record of selling its content to third-party platforms. Problematic mainstream sites such as PornHub, XVideos, and OnlyFans did meet all the criteria of an ethical pornography site, yet contained pirated ethical pornography content on their feed. This could mean that respondents might be consuming ethically made content, but consuming the content through unethical sites. The commodification of ethics itself, where platforms market content as ethical without structural accountability, can create false confidence among consumers. The contradiction may reflect how capitalist platforms manipulate ethical narratives, obscuring exploitative practices behind marketing language. This supports Steyn's (2014) point that capitalist patriarchy thrives through selective and performative ethics (pp. 383-384). The following quotations from respondents highlight their own suspicions of consuming ethical pornography and cybersex work despite indicating yes to the question:

Respondent ID. 52, man, 25-34 years old:

> They state it is, and I guess we are just supposed to believe that it is.

Respondent ID 69, non-binary, 25-34 years old:

> Ethical porn usually labels itself as such. But in other contexts, I look out for signs of unethical things, like actor looks too young, the recipient of violence's acting is "too real", but it's hard to tell sometimes.

Respondent ID 86, woman, 25-34 years old:

> It's hard to know for sure if IRL porn is ethical, and many arguments could be made about economic and social problems that would make porn unethical.

Similarly, this finding reveals aspirational ethics, where individuals see themselves as ethical consumers without fully engaging with the implications of their actions. This mirrors broader practices in consumer culture, where ethical labels are embraced more as identity markers than as standards guiding behaviour. The contradiction points to the influence of performative ethics, where ethical consumption is claimed for social or moral capital, even when it does not align with actual practices. Similarly, respondents may associate ethical consumption with intention or outcomes, such as non-exploitative content, diverse representation, and consent, rather than with the means of access, like paying creators and avoiding pirated platforms and content. This disconnection between ethical values and ethical behaviours highlights the need for clearer public understanding of what ethical pornography entails in practice.

These contradictions highlight the difficulties consumers face in determining which platforms align with their ethical values. This emphasises the importance of intersectional ethical frameworks that consider not just content and representation, but also labour practices, distribution models, platform accountability, and accessibility. A regulatory or vetting body, potentially operating through NGOs like SWEAT, SASWA, or a dedicated independent organisation, could provide clearer guidance for consumers on which sites uphold ethical standards. Without these, ethical consumption becomes an empty label that fails to challenge exploitative systems in meaningful ways.

5.2.1.6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The consumption habits of the respondents are riddled with nuance and contradiction. Most respondents reported consuming pornography either weekly or rarely, suggesting that issues of addiction or compulsivity are not a central concern. As Koba (2017) suggests in his findings, the definition of pornography addiction appears to be more closely tied to self-identification rather than the nature of the content (e.g., soft-core vs. hard-core), as D'Orlando (2009) suggests. Some respondents indicated a connection between pornography use and increased body-connectedness, highlighting that pornography consumption for the survey respondents is

a more embodied experience as opposed to a passive one. Further, content type, accessibility, and ethical considerations were identified as the main factors influencing pornography choices. However, a notable contradiction emerged: although many respondents claimed that ethical considerations were necessary, the sites and platforms they use to access pornography do not reflect these values.

5.2.2. INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY AND CYBERSEX WORK PERCEPTIONS

South Africa, often referred to as the "rainbow nation", is a melting pot of diverse cultures, religions, and societal norms. These factors significantly shape public perceptions of sexuality and related topics, including internet pornography and cybersex work. This survey included questions designed to gain an understanding of respondents' perceptions of pornography and cybersex work.

5.2.2.1. TALKING ABOUT INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY AND CYBERSEX WORK

Understanding how comfortable people are in discussing these subjects provides insight into general societal openness or restriction in engaging on the topic, which is crucial for ensuring that a framework on ethical pornography and cybersex work consumption is culturally sensitive, engages sincerely with context-specific content and examples, and above all else does not inadvertently alienate or stigmatise any groups.

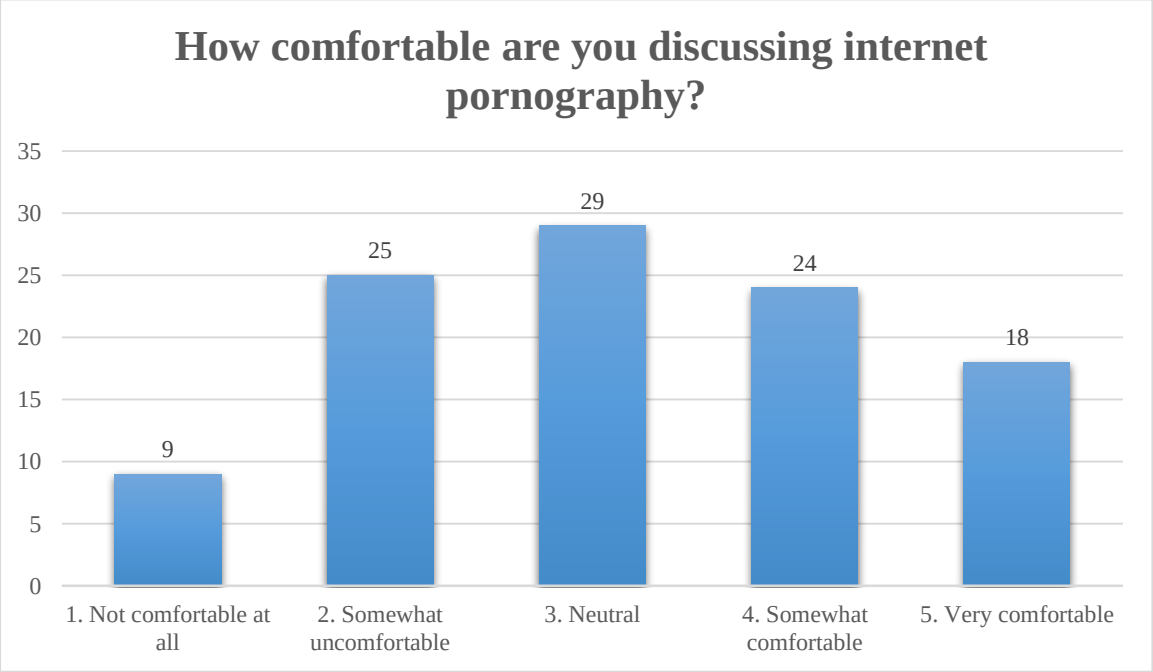


Figure 9: Respondents' Comfort in Discussing Pornography

As shown in *Figure 9*, the responses are fairly evenly distributed among "somewhat uncomfortable," "neutral," and "somewhat comfortable". When combining the responses of those who identified as neutral, somewhat comfortable, and very comfortable, the findings suggest that, on average, respondents are relatively open to discussing pornography. This is

particularly interesting given that, in the demographic section, many respondents were reluctant to disclose their socio-economic class and community living area. This contrast implies that, although sexual content is often considered taboo, conversations around sexuality, especially in digital, anonymous, or academic spaces, may be shifting toward greater openness. Meanwhile, the hesitation to disclose class information indicates that entrenched sensitivities around socio-economic status may be more persistent than those related to sexuality. This suggests that, among these South African respondents, attitudes toward sexuality and sexual practices may be evolving more rapidly than attitudes toward class and structural inequality.

There may be more openness to engaging critically with issues such as pornography and cybersex work than previously assumed, particularly when these topics are framed through the lenses of ethics, personal experience, body-connectedness, and self-awareness as opposed to shame and addiction alone, as was the case with the survey. Additionally, the reluctance to discuss class highlights a significant relationship between socio-economic position and access to experiences of pornography and cybersex work. The lack of research on this intersection in the South African context allows these dynamics to remain largely unspoken. Not everyone experiences pornography or cybersex work in the same way. People with more privilege (more money, access, and education) might benefit from or safely explore these spaces, while others (from more disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds) might face greater harm, exploitation, or have less agency. For any framework to be truly ethical and inclusive, it must address how class positionalities and perceptions shape access to and vulnerability within these contexts.

5.2.2.2. PERCEPTIONS AND EMOTIONS

Despite the general comfort in discussing the topic, the emotions experienced during pornography consumption also tell a different story. Most respondents reported experiencing more negative emotions than positive ones. To analyse these responses, I applied Parrott's (2001) classification of emotions, as illustrated in *Figure 10.*[7].

[7] This table was designed as an adaptation of Parrott's Emotion Classification. See Murgia et al. (2014) and Johnson et al. (2010) for more.

	Primary Emotion	Secondary and Tertiary Emotions
Positive Emotions	Love	Adoration, Affection, Fondness, Desire, Liking
	Joy	Happiness, Enthusiasm, Contentment, Pleasure
	Surprise	Amazement, Astonishment
Negative Emotions	Anger	Frustration, Hatred, Jealousy, Dislike
	Sadness	Displeasure, Depression, Unhappy, Shame, Regret
	Fear	Shock, Panic, Fright, Apprehension, Mortification

Figure 10: Parrott's Emotion Classification

Figure 11 reveals that negative emotions (fear, sadness, and anger) account for 45% of the emotional states respondents experience during pornography consumption, whereas only 20% report experiencing positive emotions (joy, surprise, and love). Notably, many respondents struggled to articulate their emotions, often describing biological responses such as feeling horny or aroused, which made up 21% of the responses. Additionally, 14% expressed feelings of numbness or neutrality.

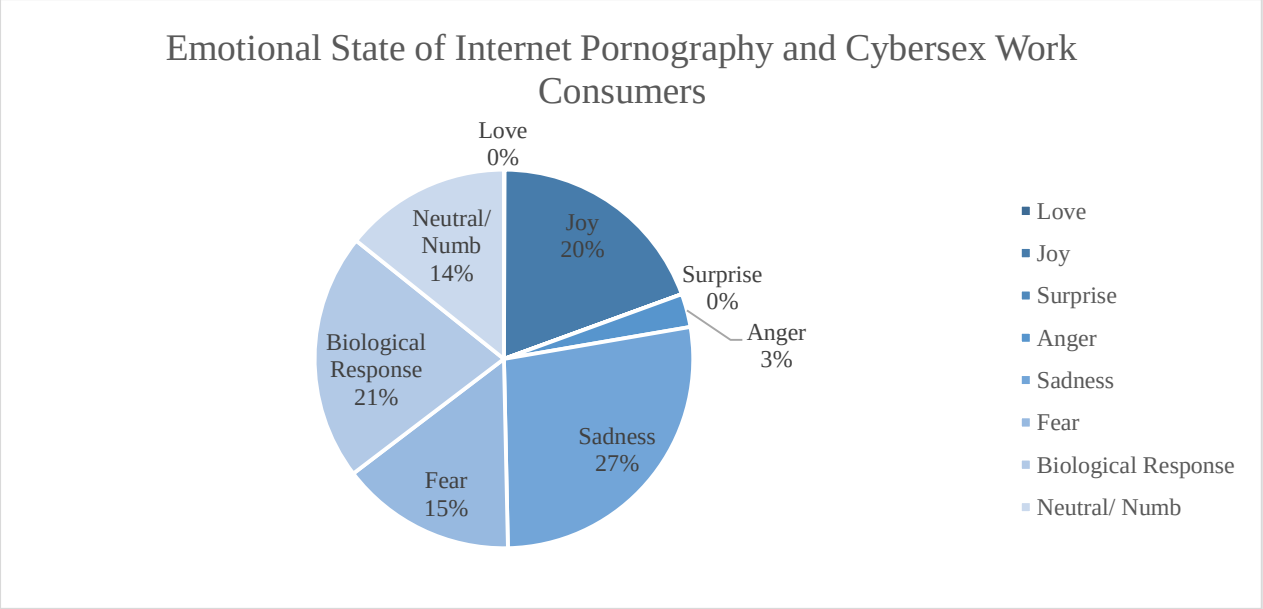


Figure 11: Emotional State of Respondents When Consuming Pornography

The expression of numbness reported by some respondents is particularly significant when considered through the lens of Ahmed's affective economies. Ahmed (2004) argues that emotions do not reside within individuals but circulate between bodies, objects, and signs, gaining meaning through repetition and social attachment (p. 117). In this context, numbness complicates the idea of an embodied, pleasurable experience of pornography consumption. It raises the question of whether one can feel emotionally disconnected or numb and still experience positive outcomes such as body-connectedness, joy, or pleasure. Rather than indicating a simple disapproval of pornography, these responses suggest that consumption is shaped by broader social norms, power relations, and ethical tensions. As Ahmed would suggest, emotions like shame, guilt, and embarrassment are "sticky words" or sticky emotions that have tied themselves to pornography consumption, affecting how individuals relate to their desires and bodies (p. 123). Notably, several respondents reported experiencing a mix of conflicting emotions, joy, relief, guilt, and shame, revealing the complex emotional landscape tied to pornography. These affective contradictions demonstrate how moral and cultural narratives circulate and attach themselves to sexual consumption practices, shaping not only what is felt but also what can be acknowledged or expressed. Below are direct quotations from the survey, illustrating the emotional and psychological complexity that respondents navigate when engaging with pornography and cybersex work:

Respondent ID. 26, woman, 18-24 years old:

> Perhaps I have a void, like if I'm horny and I want to turn myself on, I would try arouse myself by watching it, although whenever I do I'm not entirely turned on. I think it's better when I imagine then when I watch, also I feel uncomfortable like why did I just watch that.

Respondent ID. 15, woman, 18-24 years old:

> Usually, my emotional state is completely fine. Nothing bad or super good has to be happening in my life. It is more closely linked to my ovulation patterns than my emotional state. But I don't ever watch porn when I am feeling sad/lonely. I think at most it can operate as an indirect stress reliever.

Respondent ID. 103, man, 18-24 years old:

> Confused. I know I do not want to watch it because the feeling that comes with watching it is uncomfortable.

Respondent ID. 59, man, 18-24 years old:

> Firstly I became happy, then after consuming it, I feel bad

Additionally, the feeling of numbness is especially alarming because when individuals become desensitised, they may engage in passive consumption, making them less critical of the content they are exposed to. Herein lies another contradiction in that this uncritical engagement increases the risk of internalising problematic media portrayals. For example, Fanti et al. (2009) discuss how repeated exposure to violent media leads to desensitisation, where individuals become less emotionally responsive to violence or even begin to view it as pleasurable (p. 186). Initially, exposure to media violence often triggers fear, discomfort, and physiological reactions such as increased heart rate and perspiration, but these responses diminish over time (p. 179). Thus, this calls into question why respondents are reporting feeling numb whilst consuming pornography. Several respondents expressed feeling guilty, ashamed, and embarrassed about consuming pornography, which might explain this feeling of numbness. Conversely, later in the findings, it is found that a majority of respondents perceive pornography and cybersex as harmful to society. This view could also explain why negative emotions are heavily associated with its consumption.

Similarly, boredom was a common term used in this section to describe emotion. This is particularly troubling given that many respondents reported using unethical pornography websites, where violent content and intrusive pop-up ads featuring aggressive acts are often prominently displayed on the front pages. As a researcher, I worry that the combination of Fanti et al.'s (2009) arguments, respondents' feelings of boredom when consuming pornography, and respondents' problematic choices on the website might suggest consumers are either actively or passively consuming violent forms of pornography, not because they enjoy it, but because they are numb and completely desensitised to it. Thus, if it is already the

case that consumers might be desensitised to violent pornography, a framework on ethical pornography and cybersex work consumption needs to assist in exposing this, challenging it, and offer consumers the tools to rectify this. Additionally, the framework must illustrate the relationship between mere disapproval of pornography and cybersex work consumption and how this affects people's experiences of pornography and cybersex work consumption, and an exploration of their sexualities.

5.2.2.3. RESPONDENT PERCEPTIONS OF HARM IN PORNOGRAPHY

On a scale of 1 (not harmful at all) to 5 (extremely harmful), respondents were asked to rate how harmful they perceive pornography. *Figure 12* illustrates that the majority of respondents view pornography as harmful. This finding contrasts with earlier observations about respondents' comfort and willingness to discuss pornography and cybersex work, as well as the perceived progression in public discourse surrounding these topics.

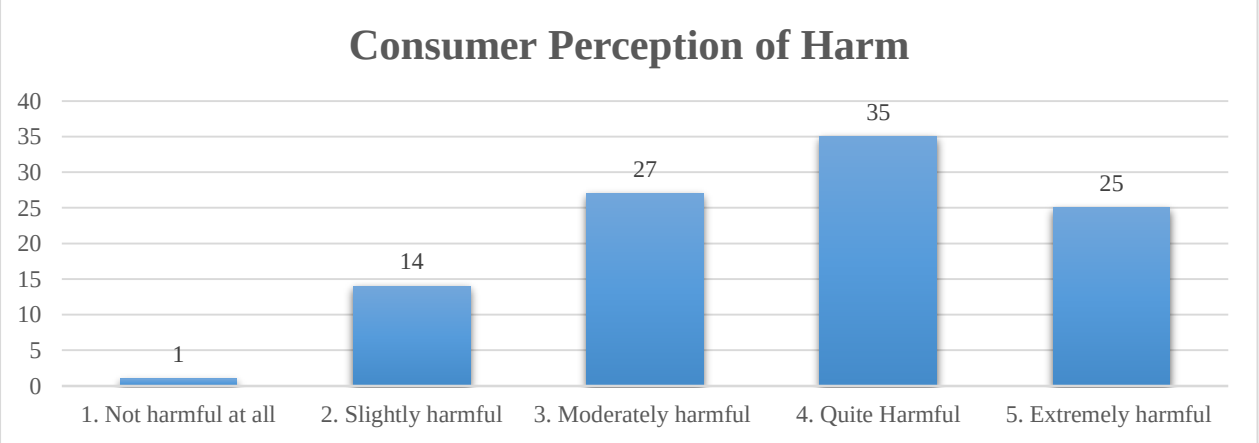


Figure 12: Consumer Perception of Harm

A notable limitation of the survey is the absence of a follow-up question exploring why respondents perceive pornography as harmful. The perception could stem from varying interpretations of what pornography entails. For instance, some may associate pornography with inherently violent, non-consensual, or exploitative content; therefore, content that does not reflect these characteristics might be viewed as non-harmful or even ethical. Importantly, the willingness to discuss pornography and cybersex work does not necessarily equate to the absence of stigma. Respondents may still harbour internalised stigmatisation around pornography consumption despite their openness in discussion. If this is the case, any

proposed framework for ethical consumption may face resistance, as it could be perceived as legitimising pornography itself, which is a problem if it is considered to be inherently harmful. This clash brings to mind Erika Lust's (2024) incorporation of media literacy and porn literacy in her educational initiative *The Porn Conversation*, as discussed in the Literature Review. Media literacy is an essential tool for helping consumers understand and analyse how messages on pornography and cybersex work are constructed, how these messages contribute to stigma, and how these embedded values and viewpoints influence individual perceptions and behaviours. Furthermore, the perception of pornography as harmful may also reflect a lack of awareness about ethical alternatives or misinformation about the adult industry more broadly. This is supported by survey responses indicating a gap between respondents' belief that they consume ethical pornography and the sites they reported visiting, which do not align with established ethical standards.

As Koba (2017) argues, consumers often contend with moralistic and ideological narratives that frame pornography as sinful or harmful (p. 60). This raises the question of whether respondents perceive harm based on risks like addiction, exposure to problematic content, or misinformation, or if they are repeating dominant ideological messages they have been taught. Perhaps it is a combination of all these factors. One of the ways harm was explored in the study's literature review was through its association with violence. A central concern among anti-pornography feminists is the perpetuation of patriarchal violence, with pornography often perceived as a blueprint for gender based violence (see Strossen 1993; Russell 1998; Döring 2000; Prakash 2023). To explore this further, respondents were also asked to provide examples of violence in the context of internet pornography. Their responses, alongside how they defined bad pornography, were used to gauge what they considered to be harmful content.

5.2.2.4. DEFINING VIOLENT AND BAD PORNOGRAPHY

An important question that emerged from the literature review is whether violent pornography is inherently bad pornography. Is bad pornography also harmful pornography, or is bad simply a matter of personal taste rather than ethical concern? According to the

findings, respondents strongly associate violent pornography with bad pornography. *Figures 13* and *14* are word clouds[8] that illustrate the recurring terms used to describe both categories.

Notably, the term "non-consensual" appears frequently in descriptions of both violent and bad pornography, indicating a perceived connection between the two. This suggests that a lack of consent is a key factor in how consumers define harmful content. Respondents also used a consistent set of terms to describe both types of pornography, including "rape," "non-consensual", "aggressive," "violent", "no disclaimers", "no communication," "exploitation, "illegal," "minors," and "sex trafficking". The linguistic overlaps reveal that violence and badness are conceptually intertwined for many respondents. However, while this association is clear, it is less certain whether respondents equate violence with harm in a broader ethical sense. Although many respondents view pornography as generally harmful to society, it is not clear that they consider violence as the primary and most obvious maker of harmful content. Furthermore, respondents rarely used language that reflects invisible or systemic issues in adult content production, such as labour exploitation, profit-driven practices, or structural inequality. This aligns with the finding that respondents' beliefs and perceived practices of ethical consumption may be performative. It also suggests that harm is more readily recognised and articulated when it is overt and visually depicted, such as in violent scenes, whereas more subtle forms of harm often go unnoticed or unnamed.

This is where Steyn's (2014) CDL Framework, Criterion 7, becomes relevant, as it emphasises the importance of being able to recognise and see through hegemonic systems and normalised power structures (p. 386). This finding underscores the need for an ethical pornography consumption framework that equips consumers to identify hidden practices within the adult content industry and to recognise their complicity in sustaining these practices through consumption. In this way, productive shame can be used not to stigmatise sexual desire but to motivate individuals to shift away from harmful or unaccredited platforms and toward ethically produced content.

[8] Word clouds condense large volumes of text by representing the most frequently used words in varying sizes, where larger words appear more frequently (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014 p. 39). This method provides a holistic and accessible representation of key themes, making it easier to assess points of agreement and strong opinions among respondents (Ramlo, 2011, p. 101).



Figure 13: Respondents' Descriptions of Violent Pornography



Figure 14: Respondents' Descriptions of Bad Pornography

In summary, the strong linguistic and conceptual association between violent and bad pornography among respondents reveals that harm is primarily understood through the lens of

visible violence and lack of consent. This provides a useful entry point for ethical discourse, but it also exposes a limitation in the current public vocabulary around pornography ethics. An effective ethical consumption framework in the South African context must go beyond addressing overt violence; it must also cultivate critical awareness of more systemic, hidden harms embedded in adult content production. By expanding consumers' capacity to name and resist the forms of harm, such a framework can foster a more reflective, just, and ethical engagement with pornography.

5.2.2.5. DEFINING HARD-CORE VS SOFT-CORE PORNOGRAPHY

D'Orlando (2007) describes the potential harm of pornography consumption concerning pornography addiction. He argues that soft-core pornography is unlikely to lead to addiction until there is a desire to escalate, either through seeking greater variety in content or transitioning to hard-core pornography (p. 64). This escalation can result in increased difficulty in achieving the same level of arousal or satisfaction, leading to desensitisation to violent or extreme content, which ultimately contributes to addiction (p. 62). A persistent challenge within this argument lies in clarifying what is meant by soft-core versus hard-core pornography, and which types of content effectively distinguish the two. To explore this further, respondents (N=103) were asked: "Do you know what soft-core and hard-core pornography are?" Of those surveyed, 64% responded yes, 13% said no, and 22% indicated they were unsure.

The majority reporting familiarity with the distinction suggests a baseline level of porn literacy among respondents. Interestingly, when analysed by gender, of those who reported understanding the difference, 6% identified as gender diverse, 37% as women-identifying, and 53% as men-identifying. Given that the survey gathered an almost equal number of men and women-identifying respondents, it is noteworthy that less than half of the women-identifying respondents reported this form of literacy. Fritz and Paul (2017) argue that women's exposure to mainstream pornography, known for its objectifying nature and normalisation of the harm against women in sexual interactions, has contributed to the internalisation of an objectifying gaze (p.640). This internalisation may help explain why many women-identifying respondents were unable to differentiate between soft-core and hard-core pornography. This disparity suggests a gendered divide in the understanding and

familiarity with these categories. However, recognising the difference between soft-core and hard-core pornography does not necessarily equate to an understanding of ethical consumption. This is particularly evident in the definitional ambiguity respondents expressed when asked to define these terms.

As discussed in the Literature Review, Theron (2023) argues that definitions of soft-core and hard-core pornography are inherently ambiguous and subjective (p. 14). Despite this, exploring how respondents personally define these terms remains useful, especially since existing research suggests a correlation between hard-core pornography consumption and an increased likelihood of pornography addiction. *Figures 15* and *16* are word clouds illustrating the most commonly used terms respondents used to define soft-core versus hard-core pornography, respectively.



Figure 15: Respondents' Definitions of Hard-Core Pornography



Figure 16: Respondents' Definitions of Soft-Core Pornography

These visualisations show that respondents typically made content-based distinctions. Generally, soft-core pornography was described as censored or non-explicit portrayals of sex, characterised by sensual or gentle scenes. In contrast, hard-core pornography was associated with uncensored sexual acts, often described as violent or aggressive. Respondents used terms that pointed to specific content types – terms which partially align with global media classifications (Theron, 2023, p. 13). For example, in descriptions of soft-core content, terms such as partial nudity, no penetration, images, intimacy, and connection appear frequently. In contrast, for hard-core pornography, descriptors like penetration, kink, shock factor, full nudity, and fetish were repeatedly used. However, relying on these descriptors as the primary means of categorisation creates complications. Some content may include features typically associated with one category but not the other. For instance, the presence of kink does not automatically classify content as hard-core, and a solo act does not necessarily indicate soft-core content. An example is the practice of gaping[9], which can be a solo act yet is often perceived as hard-core due to its explicit nature (Fritz & Paul, 2017, p. 648). This complexity

[9] Gaping: The excessive stretching of the rectum or vagina with the hands, other objects, or due to recent penetration depicted/displayed for the
Camera. (Fritz & Paul, 2017, p. 644).

supports Theron's (2023) claim that definitions of soft-core and hard-core pornography are fluid and subjective.

In conclusion, while there appears to be a shared understanding among respondents that soft-core pornography involves less explicit, more emotionally intimate content and that hard-core pornography is defined by its explicitness, aggression, and intensity, these distinctions remain fluid. The findings highlight not only the variability in how individuals conceptualise these categories but also reveal broader cultural and gendered dimensions of porn literacy. Ultimately, this suggests that any framework for ethical pornography consumption must grapple with the ambiguity and contextual nuance embedded in these definitions, recognising that ethical engagement with pornography cannot be guided solely by surface-level content classifications. Instead, it requires deeper engagement with intent, consent, representation, and impact.

5.2.2.6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Like the findings on the consumption habits of respondents, the findings on respondents' perceptions reveal a complex and often contradictory relationship between respondents and internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa. While many respondents expressed a willingness and comfort in discussing pornography, their reports of negative emotions during consumption, such as guilt, numbness, or emptiness, suggest that this comfort may be more performative or detached, reflecting a broader societal discourse rather than personal ease. The emotional response also points to a possible desensitisation to violent content, likely exacerbated by the widespread use of unethical pornographic platforms. Although a majority of respondents perceive pornography as harmful, the underlying reasons for this perception remain unclear, highlighting a critical gap in the data that would benefit from further exploration. Notably, respondents indicated having a foundational concept of porn literacy, evident by their ability to provide definitions of soft-core and hard-core pornography. However, this knowledge of foundational porn literacy had a gendered nuance in that most women-identifying respondents struggled to make the distinction between the two, potentially reflecting the pervasive objectification and normalisation of violence against women in mainstream pornography. This suggests that the internalisation of the male gaze may obscure the boundaries of what constitutes acceptable or soft-core content for some viewers. Overall,

these findings underscore the need for a nuanced, context-specific framework for ethical pornography consumption – one that accounts for emotional, social, and gendered dynamics in both consumption and discourse.

5.3. UNDERSTANDING ETHICAL PORNOGRAPHY

The primary question of this research is what the possibilities and challenges of developing a framework for ethical pornography and cybersex work consumption in South Africa are. The findings thus far make it clear that such a framework is not only necessary but holds the potential to significantly transform public perceptions and behaviours around pornography and cybersex work in positive ways. Specifically, an ethical framework could provide education on topics we are not seeing often enough in public discourses and educational institutions, such as body-connectedness, how to access ethical platforms, understanding and managing addiction, identifying harmful practices within the adult industry, and taking action to challenge those practices. I view the development of such a framework as a collaborative effort between both consumers and producers. Producers have already begun this work - either by creating their platforms of ethical content consumption or by advocating for ethical practices within the industry (see Make Love Not Porn 2024; Lust 2020; thepornconversation.org 2024; sisonke.org.za 2024; sweat.org.za 2024). This research adds to the growing body of work by highlighting the perspectives of consumers and exploring how their advocacy can contribute to meaningful shifts in the industry. Therefore, a secondary question guiding this research is: What do consumers consider essential in a framework for ethical online pornography and cybersex work consumption? To initiate this question, the survey asked respondents to describe what they perceived as good pornography. This served as a jumping-off point for identifying the types of acts and performances that respondents value and how these elements may inform or align with ethical principles.

5.3.1. WHAT IS GOOD PORNOGRAPHY?

The word cloud, as shown in *Figure 17*, reveals that respondents most frequently used the term consensual the most to describe what they consider good pornography. Respondents also referred to aspects of production practices and legal considerations, such as the presence of performers of legal age, flexible working hours for performers, the inclusion of disclaimers indicating who produced the content and its origin, and assurances that the production environment is safe. This finding is significant, as the strong emphasis on consent reflects a clear disinterest among respondents in viewing content where performers appear to be, or report being, coerced. This insight contrasts with the findings of Kheswa and Notole (2014), who reported that some consumers deliberately seek out pornography as a means to learn coercion and assault tactics (p. 2836). While their study examined the intentional consumption

of abusive content, respondents in this research primarily engage with pornography for sexual gratification, arousal, or to relieve boredom. This distinction is crucial as it suggests that pornography itself is not inherently the source of gender-based violence or illegal content; rather, it often reflects and reinforces existing societal issues. Individuals who hold harmful beliefs may intentionally seek out content that aligns with those ideologies already embedded in society. Ethical pornography, in contrast, positions itself as a deliberate alternative to mainstream, male-centred content (Fritz & Paul, 2017, p. 641). Respondents in this study demonstrate an awareness that coercive or non-consensual pornography is harmful, which is also evident in their descriptions of what constitutes bad pornography.



Figure 17: Respondents' Descriptions of Good Pornography

Moreover, *Figure 17* shows that respondents value formal aspects of production, including cinematography, the presence of engaging storylines, entertainment value, and realistic-looking interactions. The term ethical also appears frequently in their descriptions of good pornography. This indicates that respondents are drawn to content that portrays authentic human connection. This is an encouraging finding as it suggests a preference beyond performative or exaggerated deceptions of sex, which often contribute to unrealistic expectations around bodies and sexual experiences. However, a notable gap in the survey is the absence of questions probing how respondents define or assess what is realistic or authentic in pornography. This is a critical point for future inquiry, especially because Fritz and Paul

(2017) argue that many consumers may have already internalised distorted portrayals of sex and body standards, mistakenly accepting them as the norm.

Respondents appear to desire pornography that mirrors aspects of film or movie productions with content that not only includes high production value and engaging storylines but also offers access to performers beyond the scenes. This included behind-the-scenes content where performers could share their experiences of the production process and provide insight into how content was made. Ethical platforms such as Make Love Not Porn, Lust Cinema and Bellesa already incorporate these practices, suggesting that there is an alignment between what respondents describe as good pornography and the values upheld by existing ethical pornography sites. These parallels reinforce the idea that ethical pornography is not only viable and capable of replacing the mainstream but already meets the desires of more critically aware consumers.

5.3.2. GOOD PORNOGRAPHY IS ETHICAL PORNOGRAPHY

5.3.2.1. RESPONDENTS' AWARENESS OF ETHICAL PORNOGRAPHY

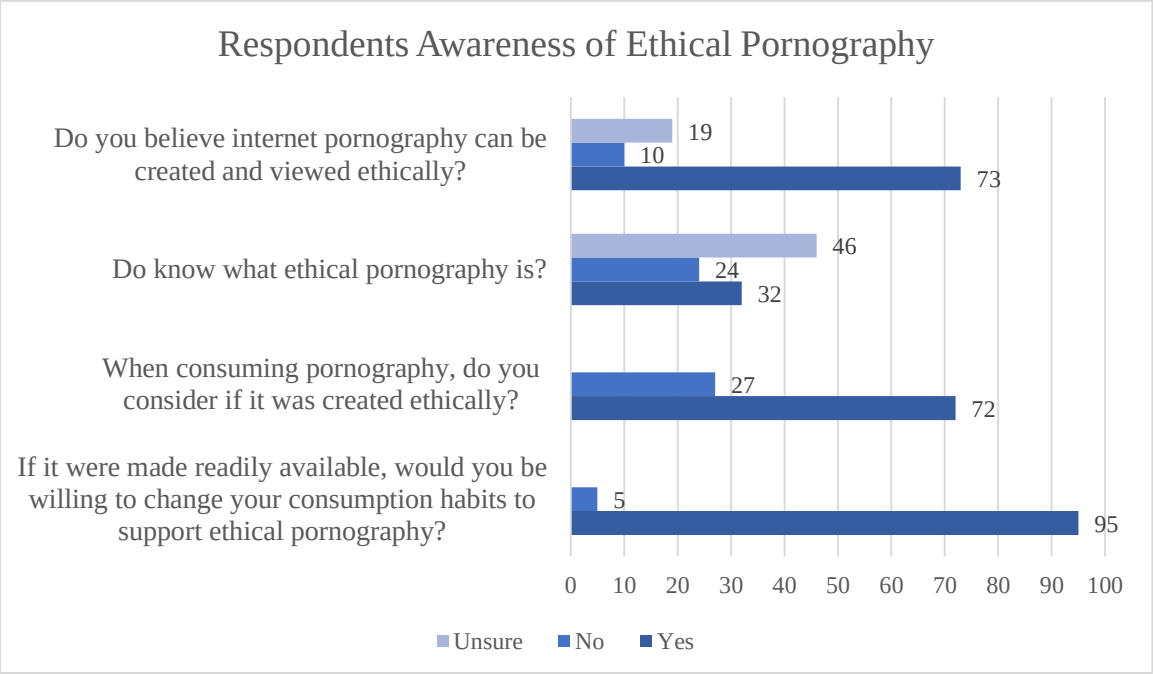


Figure 18: Respondents' Awareness of Ethical Pornography

As shown in *Figure 18*, *r*espondents (N=102) were asked whether they know what ethical pornography is and whether they believe internet pornography can be created and viewed ethically. A majority of respondents reported believing that ethical internet pornography is both possible to produce and consume. This is a significant finding, as it suggests that despite many respondents also perceiving pornography as harmful to society, there remains a strong belief in the potential for change within the adult industry – change that could reduce harm and promote more intentional forms of engagement. In this context, the shift from mainstream to ethical pornography can be understood as a crucial first step in this transformation. Moreover, this belief in the possibility of ethical pornography supports both the feasibility and potential positive reception of developing a framework for ethical consumption. It reflects an encouraging level of public openness to ethical practices within the industry. Personally, I find this particularly compelling, as it indicates that consumers are not only receptive to the idea of ethical consumption but may also be meaningful collaborators in shaping the standards and practices of ethical pornography in the South African context.

However, responses were divided when it came to an understanding of what ethical pornography entails. Most respondents reported feeling unsure. Interestingly, at first glance, the data shows minimal gender variation in this uncertainty (see *Figure 19*). Among those who answered “yes” (N=32), 14 identified as women, 15 as men, and 3 as gender diverse. This suggests that familiarity with ethical pornography is not strongly gendered among these respondents. This contrasts with earlier findings related to porn literacy—specifically, knowledge of the difference between soft-core and hard-core pornography—where most women-identifying respondents reported limited understanding. This points to a lower baseline of porn literacy among women-identifying participants overall. This trend is further reflected in the number of women who reported being unsure or who answered "no" when asked about their awareness of ethical pornography. Collectively, these results suggest that while beliefs about the possibility of ethical pornography may be evenly distributed across genders, women-identifying respondents may have slightly lower baseline knowledge of the broader pornography landscape compared to their men-identifying counterparts. This gendered discrepancy in porn literacy could be attributed to social dynamics. As Koba (2017) notes, men tend to be more open in discussing their pornography and cybersex work consumption with peers (pp. 262, 264). This makes them more likely to encounter and engage with pornography-

related discourse, whereas women are less likely to consume pornography socially, or openly discuss their consumption habits with others at the same rate.

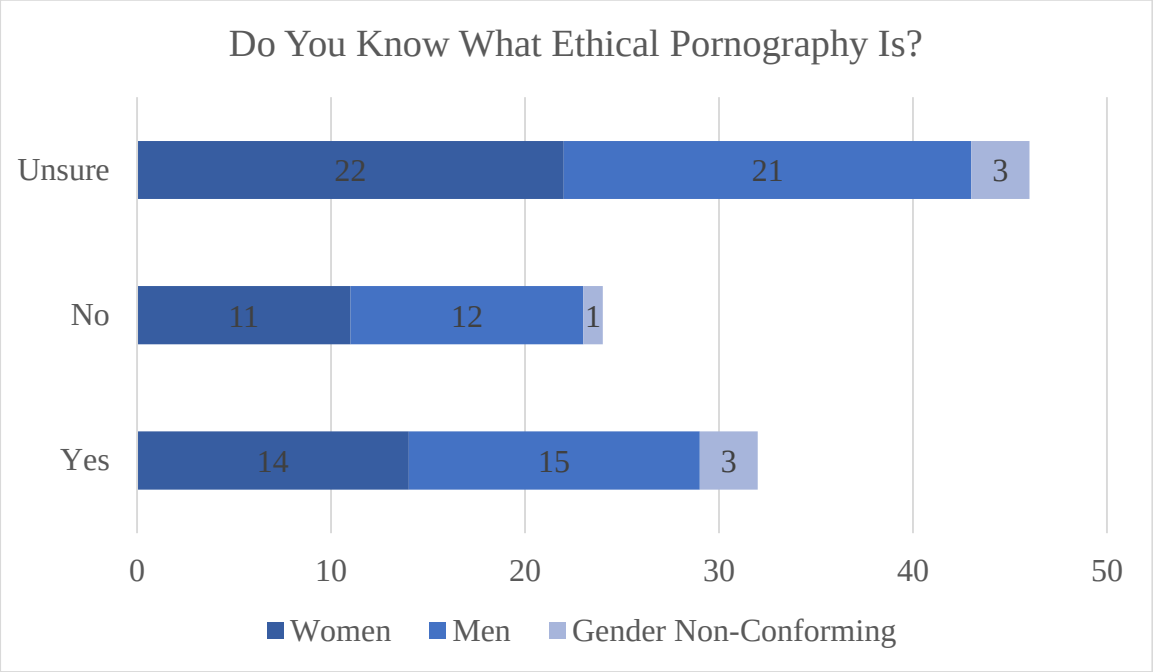


Figure 19: Gender Analysis of Respondents' Knowledge of Ethical Pornography

More concerning, however, is that higher levels of porn literacy among men may not necessarily lead to more ethical consumption. Instead, it may indicate an awareness of violent content and its impacts on themselves and society while still actively seeking it out. This is consistent with findings by Kheswa and Notole (2014), who reported that some young men deliberately seek out rape and coercion-themed pornography as instructional content on how to manipulate and entrap victims (p. 2836). This deeply disturbing behaviour calls into question the extent to which a framework for ethical pornography and cybersex work consumption can meaningfully address this pressing societal issue. Kheswa and Notole also emphasise that these young perpetrators often come from communities and families where sex education is limited or absent, and where harmful behaviour from boys and young men is normalised (pp. 2835–2837). Therefore, for an ethical consumption framework to be effective, it must be made readily accessible to young people, particularly through youth programs led by NGOs or digital initiatives spearheaded by search engines and social media platforms like Google, Tumblr, and X/Twitter. If such a framework appeared as a first result when terms like “porn” are searched, it could help educate youth about what ethical engagement with pornography and cybersex

work entails, filling the gap where families, communities, and governments often fail to provide comprehensive sex education.

Conversely, a significant challenge contributing to the limited consumption of feminist or ethical pornography is a lack of awareness that such content exists (Fritz & Paul, 2017, p. 643). To explore this, the survey included a question on respondents' willingness to change consumption habits to support ethical pornography, conditional on such content being readily available. The vast majority of respondents answered yes to this question. This finding highlights the existence of a moral or values-based foundation upon which an ethical pornography framework can be developed. Importantly, this reinforces the argument that sex education must shift away from shaming individuals for having sexual desires and curiosities. Instead, it should emphasise healthy, informed expressions of sexuality and offer clear guidance on ethical consumption. This finding also positions ethical pornography consumption as part of a broader transformative justice agenda, where consumers are not merely passive viewers but active participants in the movement to decriminalise sex work and ensure performers' rights and dignity are upheld.

Further, responses to a follow-up question, designed to prompt respondents to articulate the core components of ethical pornography, offered deeper insights. The question asked: What would you need to see in pornographic content that would make you believe the content creators prioritise content, pleasure, and human connection? These three elements are widely recognised as central to ethical pornography (see Feminist Porn Awards, n.d.).



Figure 20: Content of Ethical Pornography Crafted by Respondents

As shown in Figure 20, the word cloud illustrates recurring themes such as behind-the-scenes content, foreplay, after-care, communication and the use of disclaimers. These elements also appeared in responses to the question about what constitutes good pornography, suggesting that many respondents already associate ethical pornography with positive sexual representation and production practices. Moreover, under the description of good pornography (*Figure 17)*, respondents mentioned specific ethical production standards such as flexible working periods for performers, the presence of performers of legal age, fair compensation, and safe working environments. These are all factors that could be monitored by an independent regulatory body, particularly in future where sex work is decriminalised in South Africa. In line with this, some respondents explicitly suggested the creation of such a body or the implementation of a verification system, similar to Instagram's verification badge or PETA's Cruelty Free Verification Check, which could certify platforms as "qualified ethical pornography sites". This also indicates a demand for educational resources such as courses or training programs on ethical pornography production, accessible not only to producers but also to the general public.

5.3.2.2. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

These findings suggest that there is both a willingness and a conceptual readiness among consumers to engage with ethical pornography. However, for this potential to be realised, the emerging framework must be guided by context-specific perspectives, particularly African feminism(s). These feminist frameworks challenge dominant, often Western-centric,

understandings of sexuality, pleasure, and power and centre the lived experiences of African people. By grounding the framework in African feminism(s), the approach to ethical pornography in South Africa can be both transformative and culturally relevant, offering not only ethical alternatives but also a critical reimagining of sexual representation, labour rights, and justice in line with local realities and values.

5.4. CONCLUSION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FINDINGS SUMMARY

This section considers the study's limitations and summarises the findings of the study. These limitations and findings highlight the urgency and complexity of developing a framework for ethical pornography and cybersex work in South Africa.

5.4.1. STUDY LIMITATIONS

One of the key limitations of this study lies in its demographic scope and depth. Notably, the survey did not collect data from respondents aged 35–44, 45–54, and 65+, which restricts the ability to make any conclusions about these age groups' experiences or perspectives. The survey being online and distributed through social media could explain why this demographic was absent. There was also a limited response to questions regarding economic class and community living areas, as well as minimal participation from people living with disabilities, which further narrows the representativeness of the findings. Additionally, respondents did not report on their use of local pornography and cybersex work platforms, making it difficult to understand the dynamics of local consumption in the South African context.

The survey also did not inquire about the amount of time respondents spend consuming pornography and cybersex work, so estimations had to be drawn from existing literature, potentially limiting the accuracy of conclusions regarding addiction or usage patterns. Moreover, respondents were not asked to define what pornography addiction means to them; thus, I defined addiction based on time estimates and literature instead of participant-driven understanding. While most respondents claimed to know what ethical pornography is, many were unable to articulate how they determined its ethicality. A significant portion associated homemade pornography is associated with ethical consumption, which is not categorically accurate, as it can also include exploitative content such as revenge pornography. Others expressed that they "just know," or that they believed the content was ethical because it was labelled as such—an assumption that is especially concerning given the widespread use of platforms known for unethical practices. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insight into the perceptions and habits surrounding pornography and cybersex work consumption, especially among South African youth.

An additional challenge arose when categorising the preferred sites listed by respondents according to the criteria for ethical pornography: several respondents named broad social media and content platforms such as Discord, X (formerly Twitter), Tumblr, Google Images, and even Netflix. Unlike dedicated adult content platforms like PornHub or Bellesa, these platforms are not designed specifically for pornography consumption. For example, while explicit content can be accessed through Google Images, the content is hosted by third-party sites, not produced or curated by Google itself. This ambiguity complicates the classification of such platforms within an ethical pornography framework.

This raises important considerations regarding the ethical responsibilities of mainstream platforms. These platforms should be held accountable, at least in part, for the adult content accessed through their services, even if they are not the original producers. Moreover, they ought to be held to ethical standards comparable to those applied to explicit-content platforms, particularly when they indirectly facilitate access to pornography. Given that porn is one of the most frequently searched terms online in South Africa, these platforms are in a unique position to influence user behaviour. Just as searches for mental health often trigger referrals to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), platforms like Google, Meta, and X could implement similar interventions by promoting ethical pornography guidelines or directing users to verified ethical content providers when relevant keywords (e.g. porn, ethical porn, cybersex work) are searched.

Furthermore, with the increasing use of AI chatbots in search engines, there is potential for these tools to play an educational role, automatically suggesting ethical pornography criteria or resources when users engage with topics related to sexuality and adult content. In this way, tech companies, especially those that serve as gatekeepers of information, have a responsibility not only to moderate content but also to actively support and disseminate ethical standards around pornography and cybersex work consumption.

5.4.2. FINDINGS SUMMARY

Since the majority of participants were young, the proposed framework must align closely with youth experiences, as highlighted in the literature review (see Francis 2024; Naidoo 2006;

Meehan 2024). It should also address the pressing issue of youth exposure to and potential consumption of child pornography, requiring a specific and targeted intervention. Findings suggest that existing sex education programs in schools are insufficient in fostering porn literacy, revealing a gap that the framework could help address. The survey achieved a near-equal gender distribution, shedding light on the fact that respondents who are women are engaging with pornography at rates similar to men. However, it did not explore how individuals were introduced to pornography, which could have uncovered gendered differences in initiation. Respondents appear to overlook race-related content in their consumption choices, suggesting a limited engagement with racial representation in pornography. On average, participants reported consuming pornography two to three times a week, primarily for sexual gratification and educational purposes. Their choices are most influenced by accessibility, content type, and ethical considerations. Encouragingly, most respondents expressed a willingness to transition to ethical platforms, content, and habits. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that women respondents generally display lower levels of porn literacy compared to men. There is also notable ambiguity around the distinction between hard-core and soft-core pornography, suggesting this binary may not effectively predict addiction risk. Importantly, many respondents recognised that the harm in pornography is not only in the content itself but also in the systemic violence embedded in exploitative or non-consensual production practices. Considering the limitations of the study and the insights gained from the findings, the next chapter will offer recommendations that are grounded in Critical Diversity Literacies and African feminist principles to guide the development of a framework that addresses the current gaps in knowledge, representation, and ethical awareness among South African pornography and cybersex work consumers. It will also reflect on the broader implications of the research and conclude the study by outlining potential pathways for future work and policy development in this field.

6. CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1. INTRODUCTION: BUILDING AN ETHICAL PORNOGRAPHY FRAMEWORK FOR AFRICA

This research sought to explore the possibilities and challenges of developing a framework for ethical internet pornography and cybersex work consumption in South Africa. The findings make it clear that such a framework is not only necessary but urgent. Several significant challenges were noted through both the findings and the literature review. These include the tension between pornography and cultural taboos, the lack of formal education on ethical consumption and porn literacy, and the harmful practices often associated with mainstream pornography—particularly content produced in the U.S. Respondents voiced concerns about exploitation, consent, and misrepresentation, yet many lacked an understanding of African feminism(s) and how they could inform alternative, ethical approaches to pornography.

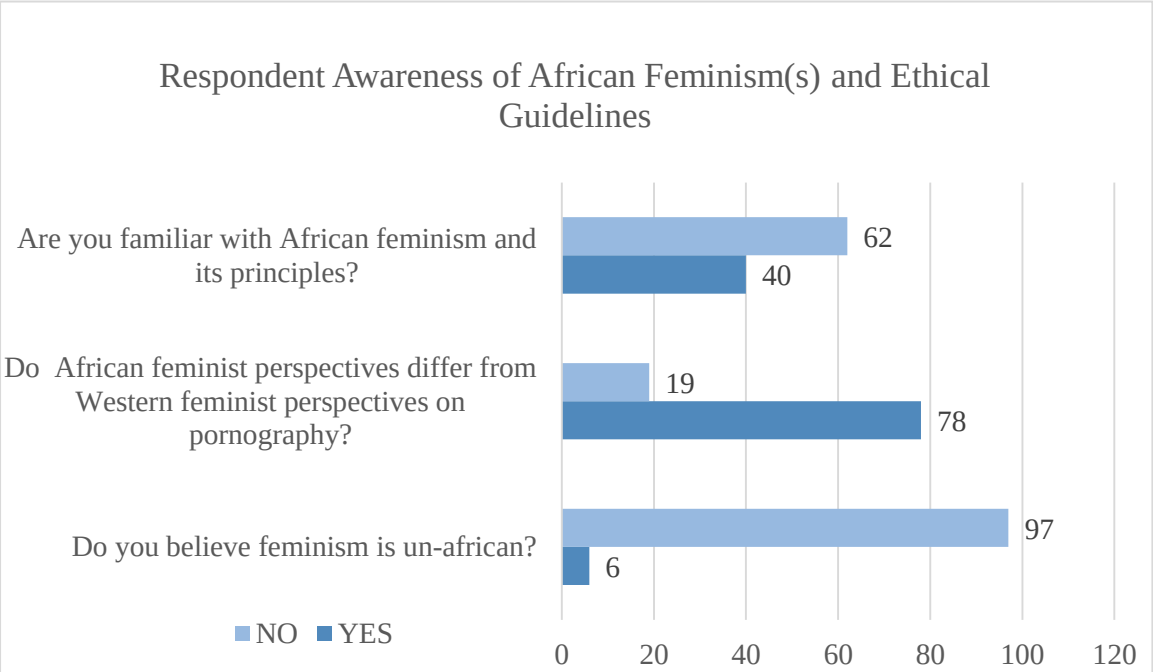


Figure 21: Respondent Awareness of African Feminism(s)

Toward the end of the survey, participants were provided with a general definition of African feminism(s): a movement that seeks to create pornography that is inclusive, decolonial, and consciously designed with African audiences in mind. They were then asked whether they believe African feminism(s) can offer unique insights into ethical issues in the pornography industry. As illustrated in *Figure 21*, the majority of respondents viewed feminism as inherently

African and capable of contributing valuable insights to the development of an ethical pornography and cybersex work framework. Many participants believed that African feminism(s) could help dismantle dominant Western patriarchal stereotypes. This supports Erlank and Klausen's (2023) argument that the "decolonization and diversification of scholarship on African sexualities" is crucial for reclaiming African narratives (p. 95). Respondents also highlighted a desire for a framework grounded in African feminist principles, particularly those promoting erotic agency, inclusivity, and realistic depictions of human connection. This reflects McFadden's (2003) argument that expressions of erotic agency, especially for women, serve as a feminist resistance to patriarchal attempts to suppress and control erotic autonomy (p. 3). Additionally, several respondents expressed a strong desire to engage with internet pornography and cybersex work that reflects African identities and lived experiences. This was exemplified through the following direct quotes that emphasised the need for content rooted in African personhood, rather than imported representations that fail to capture local realities:

Respondent ID. 84, woman, 18-24 years old:

> Yes, every day you learn that there are issues in the industries, and we need to acknowledge them and deal with them. African people have a lot to say and it'll be unique because it's from experience. A lot of them have kept things private for years.

Respondent ID. 97, woman, 18-24 years old:

> Yes because representation, not just in the way that people look but the customs and etiquette, can be good.

Respondent ID. 104, woman, 18-24 years old:

> Definitely. I think that it is important to create content for African viewers, as this may be far more enjoyable for them than Westernised content that is more readily available.

The research demonstrates a clear appetite for the development of an ethical, Africa-centred pornography and cybersex work framework, rooted in African feminist thought. While challenges such as cultural resistance, educational gaps, and dominant Western influences persist, these are not insurmountable. They present an opportunity to foster dialogue, raise awareness, and construct a framework that prioritises autonomy, representation, and decolonial values. By drawing on African feminist philosophies, this emerging framework can promote a more ethical, inclusive, and culturally resonant approach to sexuality in digital spaces.

6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The insights drawn from the research findings, literature review, and identified limitations directly informed the development of the recommendations section, which speaks particularly to the contents needed in the framework. The recurring themes—such as the lack of porn literacy, limited understanding of African feminist perspectives, and the dominance of Western norms—highlighted the need for educational interventions, culturally grounded frameworks, and inclusive representation. These findings underscore the importance of centring African feminist values in ethical pornography discourse, shaping recommendations that advocate for community-based education, policy development, and support for alternative media production. The limitations, particularly around respondent knowledge gaps and cultural taboos, further guided the call for awareness campaigns and stakeholder engagement to ensure the proposed framework is both effective and culturally resonant.

6.2.1. ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT REGULATORY BODY FOR ETHICAL PORNOGRAPHY

Respondents indicated that they would benefit from the creation of an independent, African-based regulatory body that certifies pornography platforms as ethical, similar to a verification badge. This body should be led by African feminist organisations, sex worker advocacy groups such as SWEAT, ASWA, Sisonke, and the Asijiki Coalition, alongside legal experts and mental health professionals. Organisations like SWEAT, ASWA, Sisonke, and the Asijiki Coalition already conduct critical research on patriarchy, gender-based violence, and race, centred on sex work in South Africa. Their extensive expertise makes them ideally suited to help guide the development of an ethical framework for both the consumption and production of pornography and cybersex work. This framework should prioritise vetting content for clear and enthusiastic consent, fair labour practices, and diverse and inclusive representation.

6.2.2. INCORPORATE ETHICAL PORNOGRAPHY EDUCATION INTO COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION (CSE)

South African sex education curricula should move beyond the abstinence-only model and address ethical pornography consumption, sexual autonomy, and body-connectedness. The following statements are taken from the final thoughts section of the survey. These responses

emphasise the importance of a comprehensive sex education program that includes a framework for ethical internet pornography and cybersex work consumption:

Respondent ID. 20, man, 18-24 years old:

> Education in pornography should not seek to shame or preach abstinence. Ethical and mindful consumption of pornography is not harmful, but is unlikely to become mainstream without education, as unethical pornography is mainstream and widely available to adults and children with Internet access.

Respondent ID. 65, woman, 18-24 years old:

> I think pornography can be good, as if it is done ethically, it can be educational, especially for women, as it is taboo for women to want to watch porn or masturbate, and pornography can make them comfortable in their sexuality.

Respondent ID. 93, gender-fluid, 18-24 years old:

> We should be doing everything to educate people on the dangers of impulsive sexual behaviour, pornography, and the impact of these on all.

Schools and universities should collaborate with sex-positive organisations and feminist scholars to develop inclusive educational material that emphasises porn literacy, helping consumers differentiate between exploitative and ethical content. These programs should educate consumers on how their viewing habits impact industry practices and empower them to choose ethical platforms over exploitative ones. Conversely, the findings on gender disparities in porn literacy skills highlight the need for further research into the relationship between masculinity formations and pornography consumption. Such studies should investigate how pornography might be leveraged as a tool to inform and (re)construct positive, non-toxic masculinities, rather than reinforcing harmful ones. Additionally, this research could contribute to reframing the concept of the male gaze in more progressive terms or potentially render it obsolete altogether.

6.2.3. STRENGTHENING LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR PERFORMERS AND CONSUMERS

Sex work must be fully decriminalised in South Africa. In addition, legal reforms are needed to specifically protect cybersex workers and pornography performers from exploitation, coercion, and unsafe working conditions. While current laws address some issues, such as revenge porn, unauthorised distribution of intimate content, and certain forms of cyber-exploitation, they do not go far enough in safeguarding the rights and well-being of sex workers. Stronger legal protects should ensure that both consumers and producers are shielded from harm: for producers this means laws guaranteeing safe and supportive working environments, equitable and timely payment, protection against harassment and abuse, and access to mental health services; for consumers, it means being assured that the content they engage with is ethically produced, with the full, informed consent of all performers. Furthermore, legislation should require ethical pornography platforms to uphold and be accountable to these standards.

6.2.4. ENCOURAGING CONSUMER ACTIVISM AND ETHICAL CONSUMPTION PRACTICES

South African consumers of internet pornography and cybersex work must prioritise encouraging and pressuring adult content creators to develop and promote African-centred ethical pornography that celebrates diverse sexualities, body types, and narratives. Ethical pornography platforms already exist and offer a wide range of content, making it crucial for South African consumers to boycott harmful sites and transition to ethical alternatives. Most importantly, ethical consumption requires more than platform choice – it demands robust porn literacy. All adult content consumers must be able to distinguish between erotic violence (consensual expressions of power) and systemic violence (industry exploitation and abuse), and to recognise the role of patriarchy in shaping harmful norms within the adult industry. A strong context-based porn literacy framework should also centre African feminist perspectives, equipping consumers to challenge patriarchal and colonial structures that perpetuate exploitation.

While South African laws evolve to better protect sex workers and consumer rights, we must act now: providing consumer guides to ethical pornography, identifying red flags for unethical

content, offering tips for responsible engagement, and creating a reporting mechanism for exploitative material. Eroticism is woven into every aspect of our lives – by educating ourselves and shifting our practices, we can protect it from Western, colonial, and patriarchal distortions, and build a future of ethical, decolonised erotic expression. This form of activism and promotion of ethical consumption practices has the potential to position South Africa as the leading nation of ethical adult content consumption and production practices globally. This framework has the potential to pave the way for new standards that are truly in the service of human flourishing.

6.3. CONCLUSION

The patriarchy was not built to last. Its ongoing efforts to suppress, control, and distort expressions of sexuality, especially the sexuality of women and gender-diverse individuals, are neither sustainable nor just. Pornography, as Annie Sprinkle (2006) reminds us, reflects society's truths. The answer is not attempting to eradicate porn, but to create better, feminist, and ethical pornography and cybersex work. Cindy Gallop's warning that secrecy breeds harm reinforces the urgent need for transparency, rights protections, and the destigmatisation of sexual expression. As Audre Lorde and Andrea Dworkin reveal, patriarchal narratives have long corrupted the erotic into scripts of domination and violence. Ethical porn must reject these scripts in favour of consent, mutual pleasure, and resistance to patriarchal norms.

McFadden (2003) argues that, as feminists, we must "embolden ourselves with the lessons and wisdoms of decades of struggle, because we now know that as women who yearn for a liberated tomorrow, yesterday lurks not very far behind us" (p. 8). In reimaging pornography and cybersex work ethically, South Africa can honour the feminist sexual memory that has long been muted. It can offer air and light to a space that has too often been left windowless and dark. The vision is not only for better porn, but for a more liberated society – one where all people can explore and express their sexuality freely, safely, and joyously.

The patriarchy was not built to last – and neither must its old blueprints for sexual expression.

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APPENDIX A

Section 1: Participant Consent

Title of Research:
Am I a Porn Addict or Am I Just Lonely? A Feminist Exploration for a Framework for Ethical Internet Pornography & Cybersex Work in South Africa

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1. Introduction and Purpose of the Study
This master's project titled *Am I a Porn Addict or Am I Just Lonely? A Feminist Exploration for a Framework for Ethical Internet Pornography & Cybersex Work in South Africa* aims to investigate the potential and difficulties of creating a framework for the ethical production and consumption of online pornography and cybersex work. As a participant, you will be asked about your understanding and meanings of violence, harm and ethics concerning the creation and viewership of internet pornography in South Africa. By taking part in this study, you will help us understand the opportunities and difficulties of creating ethical online pornography that respects and empowers people.

2. Description of the Research
When participating in the survey you will be asked to answer 42 questions about internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa. This will include closed-ended questions where you will be required to select a response or answer open-ended questions where you can briefly type in your opinion. If you do not have an opinion on a question you can leave the question blank or mention that you do not have any opinions on the topic.

3. Target Participant
You must be at least 18 years and older to participate in this survey and have access to the Internet. You must have either engaged with or have an interest in internet pornography and/or cybersex work. You must live in South Africa. This survey is open to people of all genders and sexual orientations.

4. Potential Risks and Discomforts
This is an anonymous self-administrated online questionnaire survey thus, is considered low-risk for participants. Among the objectives of this research project is to determine the necessary conditions needed to decouple internet pornography from harm and foster content creation that emphasises consent, pleasure, and human connection, thereby promoting healthier sexual norms. This objective requires that participants comment openly and candidly about their views and experiences of internet pornography and cybersex. These topics can be sensitive and vulnerable to share thus, the following is recommended to mitigate any feelings of distress:

- A pause in the participation of the survey and either:
    - A pause in answering the survey questions.
    - Return to the survey at a later stage.
    - Submit the survey as is.
    - Leave the survey incomplete.

5. Potential Benefits
You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study. Participating in this research project allows participants to contribute to:

- A better understanding of the production and consumption of internet pornography in South Africa.
- The development of a framework for ethical internet pornography production and consumption.
- African feminism.

6. Confidentiality and Anonymity

- **Personal Information:** No names or other identifying information will be used in the discussion or reporting of the data. The researcher will safely keep all files and data collected in a secured digital file only available to the researcher and her supervisors.
- **Anonymity:** Your responses are completely anonymous. No personal identifying information or IP addresses will be collected. Your responses will be made into qualitative findings featured in the findings section of the research project.
- This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.
- If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to

contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

- Primary researcher: Masilo Silokazi (masilo@silokazis.co.za)
- Supervisors: Jamie Martin (Jamie.martin@wits.ac.za) & Dr Kudzaiishe Vanyoro (Kudzaiishe.vanyoro@wits.ac.za)

1. **Authorization**

   By signing this form, you consent to the voluntary choice to participate in this research project and authorize the use of your anonymous responses gathered from this survey

   - **I Agree**
   - **I Disagree**

Section 2: Demographic Information

2. Age*
   What is your age?

   - Under 18
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65+

3. Gender Identity*
   What is your gender identity?

   [FILL IN THE BLANK]

4. Nationality*
   What is your nationality?

   [FILL IN THE BLANK]

5. Race*
   What is your race?

   [FILL IN THE BLANK]

6. Sexual Orientation*
   What would you describe your sexual orientation as?

   [FILL IN THE BLANK]

7. Disability*
   Do you have a disability?

   Yes

   No

   If Yes – please specify

   [FILL IN THE BLANK]

8. Level of Education*
   What is your highest level of education?

   - No formal education
   - Primary school
   - Secondary school
   - Diploma/Certificate
   - Bachelor's degree
   - Postgraduate degree (Master's/PhD)
   - Other [please specify]

9. Economic Class*
   What is your economic class?

   - Low
   - Lower-middle
   - Upper-middle
   - High income

10. Community Area*
    What type of community area do you live in?

    - Rural
    - Suburban
    - Urban

Section 3: Consumption and Perception of Internet Pornography and Cybersex Work

11. Frequency of Consumption
    How often do you consume internet pornography?

- Hourly
- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Rarely

12. Preferred Internet Pornography format: Select what applies to you.
    - Video
    - Image
    - Text (erotica)
    - Audio
    - Other [Please Specify]

13. Perception of Internet Pornography
    On a scale of 1-5, how comfortable are you discussing internet pornography?

- 1 (Not comfortable at all)
- 2 (Somewhat uncomfortable)
- 3 (Neutral)
- 4 (Somewhat comfortable)
- 5 (Very comfortable)

14. Pornography Consumption and Connection
    Select what applies to you: Do you consume pornography…

    - Alone
    - With a sexual partner
    - In group settings
    - Other (please specify)

15. Internet Pornography Preferences
    What categories of internet pornography do you enjoy watching? (E.g. queer, BDSM, homemade, etc.)

    [FILL IN THE BLANK]

16. Purpose of Pornography Consumption
    Select what applies to you: What reasons do you watch pornography?

    - Sexual gratification
    - Entertainment
    - Education
    - Stress relief
    - To enhance sexual performance
    - Arousal
    - Accessibility
    - Boredom
    - Sexual exploration
    - Other (please specify)

17. Factors Influencing Consumption Choices
    What factors influence your choice when consuming internet pornography? (Select what applies to you)

    - Price
    - Accessibility
    - Type of content
    - Ethical considerations
    - Representation/diversity of actors
    - Privacy
    - Other [please specify]

18. Pornography Websites
    Which websites do you use to view pornography?

    [FILLIN THE BLANK]

19. Region of pornography creation
    Where about is the pornography you usually consume created? (E.g. is it mostly made in the US, Africa, in the global south?)
    [FILL IN THE BLANK]

20. Pornography & Emotions
    What emotional state are you in when you view pornography?

    [FILL IN THE BLANK]

21. Understanding of Good Pornography
    In your opinion, what is good pornography?

    [FILL IN THE BLANK]

22. Understanding Bad Pornography
    In your opinion, what is bad pornography?

    [FILL IN THE BLANK]

23. Understanding soft-core and hard-core pornography
Do you know what soft-core and hard-core porn is?

- Yes
- No

24. Understanding soft-core pornography
In your opinion, what is soft-core pornography?

[FILL IN THE BLANK]

25. Understanding hard-core pornography
In your opinion, what is hard-core pornography?

[FILL IN THE BLANK]

26. Experience with Cybersex Work
Have you ever participated in cybersex services such as webcamming, VRChat, tinysex, etc.?

- Yes
- No

27. Experience of Cybersex Work
If you do consume cybersex work, what types of cybersex services have you made use of?

[FILL IN THE BLANK]

28. Production of Pornography
Have you ever been involved in the creation or production of internet pornography?

- Yes

- No

Section 4: Internet Pornography and Content

29. Perception of Harm
    On a scale of 1-5, how harmful do you think internet pornography is to society?

    - 1 (Not harmful at all)
    - 2 (Slightly harmful)
    - 3 (Moderately harmful)
    - 4 (Quite harmful)
    - 5 (Extremely harmful)

30. Understanding of Violence in Internet Pornography
    In your opinion, what are examples of violence in the context of internet pornography?

    [FILL IN THE BLANK]

31. Do you know what ethical pornography is?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Unsure

32. Ethics in Internet Pornography and Cybersex Work
    Do you believe internet pornography can be created and viewed ethically?

    - Yes
    - No
    - Unsure

33. Ethical pornography can be defined as sexually explicit content that is produced and distributed in a consensual, respectful and socially responsible manner. Based on this definition, do you watch ethical pornography?
    - Yes
    - No

34. When consuming internet pornography, do you consider if it was created ethically?
    - Yes
    - No

35. Content of Ethical Pornography
    What would you need to see in pornographic content that would make you believe that the content creators prioritize consent, pleasure, and human connection?

    [FILL IN THE BLANK]

36. Willingness to Shift Behaviour
    Would you be willing to change your consumption habits to support ethical pornography if it was readily available?

    - Yes
    - No

Section 5: African Feminism(s) and Ethical Guidelines

37. Awareness of African Feminism(s)
    There is a common belief that feminism is un-African. Do you believe feminism is un-African?
    - Yes
    - No

38. Awareness of African Feminism(s)
    Do you think African feminist perspectives differ from Western feminist perspectives on pornography?
    - Yes
    - No

39. Awareness of African Feminism(s)
    Are you familiar with African feminism and its principles?
    - Yes
    - No

40. Awareness of African Feminism(s)
    African feminism(s) seeks to create pornography that is inclusive, decolonial and advocates for pornography that is created with African viewers in mind. In your opinion, do you believe that African feminism can offer unique insights into ethical issues in the pornography industry? Please elaborate.
    [FILL IN THE BLANK]

Section 6: Final Thoughts

41. Additional Comments
    Did any of the questions in this survey cause you discomfort?

    If yes – Which question(s) caused discomfort and why?

42. Additional Comments
    Is there anything else you would like to add about your views on internet pornography and cybersex work in South Africa?

    [FILL IN THE BLANK]