

## RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# Digital Taboo: A Qualitative Study on Pacific Male Experiences of and Attitudes to Pornography in Aotearoa New Zealand

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## ABSTRACT

Pornography use among young Pacific males in New Zealand remains an under-explored and culturally sensitive issue. This qualitative article explores how Pacific men view and experience porn use, with a focus on how their cultural values and spiritual beliefs influence those experiences. Employing the Talanoa research method, we conducted six kava-based focus groups with 50 Pacific males (18–30 years), fostering relational spaces for open dialogue grounded in Pacific worldviews. Thematic analysis identified three major themes amongst young Pacific adults. The themes identified include: (i) deep-rooted taboos that reinforce silence and shame, (ii) the quiet acceptance of addictive behaviours within peer networks, and (iii) tension between digital identities and traditional responsibilities. Findings underscore the urgent need for culturally responsive sexual-health education and intergenerational conversations to support Pacific youth wellbeing. By centring Pacific voices, this research fills a critical gap and informs community-led strategies addressing pornography use.

## 1 | Introduction

The digital age has ushered in unprecedented access to online content, including pornography, significantly impacting the sexual development of youth. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Pacific youth are encountering pornography at increasingly younger ages, often without seeking it out. The [Classification Office \(2020\)](#) reports that one in four young New Zealanders first view pornography by the age of 12, highlighting the early onset of exposure. This early exposure is often accidental, facilitated by the ubiquity of internet-enabled devices and the lack of effective content filters. Pacific youth exhibits higher rates of regular pornography consumption compared to their Māori and non-Pacific peers. A study by [Pearson et al. \(2018\)](#) found that 72% of Pacific youth aged 14 viewed pornography regularly, indicating a significant prevalence within the

young Pasifika demographic. This trend of increasingly early exposure to pornography is concerning, given the potential implications for sexual development and behaviour.

The early and frequent exposure to pornography among Pacific youth is compounded by a lack of comprehensive sexual education. In the absence of accurate information, pornography often becomes a primary source of sexual knowledge, shaping perceptions and expectations about sex and relationships. This reliance on pornography for sexual education can lead to misconceptions and unrealistic standards, as the content typically portrays exaggerated and often aggressive sexual behaviours ([Idoiaga-Mondragon et al. 2025](#)). Furthermore, the passive consumption of pornography without critical engagement can normalise harmful attitudes and behaviours like distorted views on sex

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and relationships. The Classification Office (2018) notes that 89% of young people believe pornography can influence the way individuals think and act, with 86% acknowledging its potential negative impacts, such as promoting unrealistic expectations about sex, reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes, encouraging aggressive or nonconsensual behaviour, and impacts on mental health and body image. Despite this awareness, the lack of alternative sources of information and discussion leaves many youths ill-equipped to navigate these influences.

## 2 | Background

### 2.1 | Cultural and Religious Influences

Pacific cultures are deeply rooted in values of respect, communal responsibility, and spiritual beliefs, often guided by Christian teachings (Anae 2010; Tiatia 2012). These cultural and religious frameworks significantly influence attitudes toward sexuality, and by extension, pornography. Within many Pacific communities, discussions about sex are considered taboo, leading to a culture of silence and secrecy (Mila-Schaaf and Hudson 2009). This cultural reticence about addressing sexual topics creates a challenging environment for Pacific youth, who may struggle to reconcile their personal experiences with community expectations. The internal conflict between private behaviours and public values can result in feelings of guilt, shame, and confusion (Tamasese et al. 2005). As a result, many young individuals may avoid seeking guidance or support, further isolating them and reinforcing the taboo.

Religious teachings often emphasise abstinence and moral purity, framing sexuality within the confines of marriage (Lewis and Macpherson 2007). Exposure to pornography, therefore, is not only seen as a personal failing but also as a spiritual transgression. This perspective can exacerbate feelings of shame and hinder open conversations about sexual health and development (Privara and Bob 2023). The lack of culturally sensitive sexual education within Pacific communities further compounds these challenges. Without appropriate resources and support, youth are left to navigate their sexual development in isolation, often relying on pornography as an informal educator. These dynamics underscore the need for culturally responsive interventions that respect traditional values while providing accurate and comprehensive sexual education.

### 2.2 | Impact on Attitudes and Behaviours

The consumption of pornography among Pacific youth has profound implications for their attitudes and behaviours regarding sex and relationships. Regular exposure to pornographic content can shape expectations about sexual encounters, often promoting unrealistic and potentially harmful norms. For instance, the frequent depiction of aggressive or nonconsensual acts in pornography can desensitise viewers to such behaviours, potentially influencing their perceptions of acceptable sexual conduct (Peter and Valkenburg 2016). A study by Newman (2023) highlights the risk of pornography reinforcing misogynistic and violent behaviours among youth. The normalisation of such content can lead to the internalisation of harmful gender stereotypes and power dynamics, affecting how young individuals approach

relationships and consent. This influence is particularly concerning within Pacific communities, where traditional values emphasise respect and mutual care.

Moreover, the reliance on pornography as a primary source of sexual education can result in a distorted understanding of sex. Without critical engagement or alternative perspectives, youth may develop misconceptions about sexual health, consent, and emotional intimacy (Gassó and Bruch-Granados, 2021). This gap in knowledge can lead to risky behaviours and negatively impact mental health, as individuals grapple with the disparity between their experiences and the portrayals in pornography. The internal conflict arising from these influences can manifest in various ways, including anxiety, depression, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships (Gassó and Bruch-Granados, 2021; Ybarra et al. 2010). The stigma surrounding discussions of sexuality within Pacific communities further exacerbates these issues, as youth may feel unable to seek support or express their concerns. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes culturally appropriate education, open dialogue, and community engagement to foster a more supportive environment for Pacific youth.

### 2.3 | Pornography in New Zealand

Pacific peoples have a long history of migrating to New Zealand in search of better opportunities, becoming an integral part of the country's social, cultural, and economic fabric over time. The first significant wave of migration occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, as many sought improved living conditions and employment prospects. Since then, the Pacific population in New Zealand has grown substantially, with over 440,000 Pacific people now residing in the country, as reported by the 2023 Census (Statistics NZ 2023). While pornography is legal and widely accessible in New Zealand, its social and cultural impact varies across different communities. For Pacific peoples, whose cultural and religious values often emphasise modesty, family cohesion, and traditional gender roles, exposure to pornography may present unique challenges, particularly among youth.

The prevalence of violence against women and children in New Zealand is still startlingly high and concerns about how pornography contributes to gendered violence are frequently voiced (Keene 2019). A study by Henry and Talbot (2019) found that the quantitative analysis of young New Zealanders' use of pornography reveals important complexities, including conflicting responses, mixed emotions, and a variety of motivations. These themes are further examined to gain a deeper understanding of the complex meanings and effects of pornography engagement.

This study explored how Pacific male young adults in New Zealand experience and interpret pornography within their unique cultural and social contexts. By focusing on Pacific male young adults voices, the study aimed to uncover how cultural expectations, digital environments, and emotional wellbeing intersect with pornography consumption. Through qualitative analysis, the research revealed deeper insights into how shame, silence, identity, and normalisation shape the way Pacific young people navigate their sexual development and mental health in an era of unprecedented digital access.

### 3 | Methods

#### 3.1 | Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in Pacific Indigenous methodologies, specifically the talanoa research method and faikava circles. These approaches prioritise relationality, cultural authenticity, and communal knowledge-sharing, making them particularly suited for exploring sensitive topics such as pornography use among Pacific male youth (Vaiotele 2006; Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba 2014). The research was part of a broader project funded by the Health Research Council (HRC) examining the strengths and harms associated with digital wellbeing among Pacific communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

#### 3.2 | Participants and Recruitment

A total of 50 Pacific male youth, aged 18–30 years, participated in the study. Participants were recruited from three urban centres: Auckland, New Plymouth, and Dunedin (see Table 1). Recruitment strategies included community outreach through Pacific youth networks, churches, cultural organisations, and social media platforms. Recruitment messages included inviting Pacific men aged 18 years and over in Aotearoa New Zealand to take part in a confidential, culturally grounded talanoa exploring experiences and attitudes toward relationships, culture, and pornography. Purposive sampling ensured a diverse representation of Pacific ethnicities, including Sāmoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, Fijian, and Tokelauan backgrounds. All participants provided informed consent and received a \$50 participant gift card in recognition of their time and contribution.

#### 3.3 | Data Collection

Data were collected between June 2023 and February 2024 through two primary methods: individual talanoa sessions and group faikava circles. The talanoa sessions, lasting between 45 min and 1.5 h, facilitated open-ended, empathetic dialogues that allowed participants to share personal experiences and reflections on pornography use in a culturally safe environment (Vaiotele 2006). Talanoa is a Pacific research approach grounded in Indigenous values of respect, reciprocity, and relational connection, where storytelling and dialogue occur without a fixed agenda, allowing knowledge to emerge naturally through trust and shared understanding. These sessions were conducted in settings chosen by the participants to ensure comfort and confidentiality. All sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Faikava circles, serving as an alternative to traditional focus groups, were conducted in community settings familiar to participants, such as churches and community halls. These gatherings, averaging 3–5 h, incorporated the cultural practice of kava drinking, creating a relaxed atmosphere conducive to open discussion (Ka'ili 2005; XXXX 2014). The faikava approach facilitated collective storytelling and knowledge-sharing, aligning with Pacific communal values and enhancing the depth of data collected.

#### 3.4 | Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021), was employed to identify, analyse, and report patterns within the data. This method allowed for a rich, detailed, and nuanced

**TABLE 1** | Sample demographic and pornography patterns of use (n, %).

Variable	Categories	n = 50 (%)
Age group	18–19 years	8 (16%)
	20–22 years	38 (76%)
	23+ years	4 (8%)
Location	Auckland	14 (28%)
	New Plymouth	16 (32%)
	Dunedin	20 (40%)
Ethnicity	Tongan	13 (26%)
	Samoan	4 (8%)
	Fijian	32 (64%)
	(Niuean/Māori/Tokelauan/Other)	1 (2%)
Religious affiliation	Christian (all denominations)	50 (100%)
	None/Agnostic	0 (0%)
First porn use (age)	≤12 years	3 (6%)
	13–15 years	34 (68%)
	≥16 years	13 (26%)
Perception of pornography	Good	18 (36%)
	Bad	22 (44%)
	Mixed/Unsure	10 (20%)
Frequency of porn use	Daily	15 (30%)
	Weekly	20 (40%)
	Occasionally	13 (26%)
	Never	2 (4%)
Preferred device	Mobile phone	35 (70%)
	Laptop/Desktop	10 (20%)
	Tablet/Smart TV	5 (10%)

understanding of participants' experiences of and attitudes toward pornography use. The analysis was conducted iteratively, with initial codes generated independently by XX, XX, and XX and then discussed collaboratively with XX, XX, and XX to develop a thematic framework. In the presentation of the results, below, a small number of participant quotes are intentionally used across multiple subthemes. This repetition is not an oversight, but a deliberate methodological choice to emphasise the multidimensional impact of digital sexual content on young Pacific men's identities, relationships, and cultural values. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo, enabling systematic coding, organisation, and retrieval of data across all transcripts. NVivo's functions supported the identification of key themes and patterns, ensuring a rigorous and transparent analytical process grounded in the research questions.

#### 3.5 | Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (Reference

Number: 22/295). Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study, with all data securely stored and accessible only to the research team. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. As XX is a Pacific male researcher with shared cultural background and lived experience, he approached the analysis with an awareness of my positionality, recognising how his values, assumptions, and relationships could shape interpretation. Throughout the process, XX engaged in ongoing reflexivity, critically reflecting on his role, maintaining cultural humility, and ensuring that participant voices remained central to the findings.

## 4 | Results

The analysis identified three key themes shaping Pacific youth experiences with pornography: (i) cultural silence and shame, where participants described a lack of open dialogue about sex in Pacific households, often resulting in feelings of secrecy and stigma; (ii) addiction and normalisation, reflecting how pornography use is simultaneously viewed as harmful, and sometimes likened to substance addiction, and yet normalised among peers as a coping mechanism or alternative to real-life intimacy; and (iii) digital influence, highlighting how platforms like TikTok, Discord, and OnlyFans (a digital platform that allows content creators to share subscription-based material, often including adult or sexually explicit content) shape perceptions of sex, relationships, and self-expression, often clashing with traditional cultural values. These themes underscore the complex interplay between online exposure, personal behaviour, and cultural expectations. Figure 1 represents a thematic map illustrating these findings and their subthemes that had emerged as a sub-questions from the research questions, which are further elaborated in the following sections.

### 4.1 | Theme 1: Cultural Silence and Shame

Participants emphasised how cultural norms greatly influence how they perceive sexuality. Discussions of sex and intimacy are often clouded by a long-standing silence in many Pacific

communities, which contributes to a sense of shame and a reluctance to express sexual desires openly. The impact of this silence often results in emotional disconnection, where individuals felt isolated and unable to discuss their feelings or experiences, with one participant stating:

*“I felt embarrassed to talk about it with anyone, especially in my family ... there was no space for that conversation.”*

#### 4.1.1 | Stigma Around Sexual Expression

Significant stigma and shame are sometimes the result of cultural silence over sexuality. Emotional walls are created, and feelings of loneliness are reinforced by this lack of open communication. Participants reported feeling ashamed and alone since they were unable to discuss their sexual experiences because of cultural taboo within Pacific people.

*“We were not allowed to talk about those things, because in our culture, it’s seen as something that’s bad. And so, we just didn’t, you know.”*

This quote demonstrates how discussions regarding intimacy and sexual expression are frequently avoided or ignored because they are perceived as intrinsically ‘bad’ or humiliating. This illustrates how deeply rooted cultural norms can influence views about sexuality, preventing open discussion and establishing a taboo around sexual expression. Another participant emphasised the difficulty of discussing sexual topics in their culture:

*“I think a lot of choices we make today it’s not always about how we were raised, we just make it because for ourselves. I think that’s why a lot of us boys do nowadays, I think we’ll kind of push aside our culture, identity, who we are, just for this, ‘cause it’s a few minutes.”*

This comment emphasises how traditional cultural ideals can be subordinated to the urge to fit in with one’s own preferences and modern influences. It highlights the internal struggle that many young people experience as they attempt to balance their urge to act in ways that may go against the cultural norms of their upbringing. The stigma associated with sexual expression can

#### Thematic mapping and subthemes

How does cultural silence around sexuality affect individual's views on pornography?	<b>CULTURAL SILENCE AND SHAME</b>
	Stigma around sexual expression
	Emotional disconnection and isolation
How does the normalisation of pornography contribute to addiction?	<b>ADDICTION AND NORMALISATION</b>
	Desensitisation of pornography
	Cultural Normalisation
How do digital spaces influence cultural beliefs about sexuality?	<b>DIGITAL INFLUENCE</b>
	Impact of pornography on self perception
	Tension between digital and tradition cultural values

**FIGURE 1** | Thematic mapping and subthemes.

cause people to conceal or give up their cultural identity in favour of momentary satisfaction. This demonstrates how taboos and cultural silence surrounding sexuality hinder candid communication and exacerbate feelings of guilt and uncertainty. Another participant shared their experience of the challenge of discussing sexuality within their community:

*“I think it’s a big thing for us, especially all of us the Christian boys. Our upbringing impacts the way we were brought up, and we see it as a negative thing. It’s addictive, and something we use as stress relief, but then it conflicts with the way we were raised by our parents.”*

This reflection captures the tension between religious teachings and personal experience. The participant’s description of sexuality as both ‘negative’ and ‘addictive’ demonstrates that internalised conflict that arises when faith-based values and personal behaviours collide. These opposing forces produce feelings of guilt and shame, emotions that signal the presence of cultural and religious stigma. Because open discussion is discouraged, these tensions remain unspoken, reinforcing a cycle where sexuality is both sought and condemned. This dichotomy illustrates the deep-rooted cultural and religious stigmas that shape individuals’ relationship with sexuality.

#### 4.1.2 | Emotional Disconnection and Isolation

The frequent consumption of sexual content online commonly results in an emotional detachment from reality. Pornography serves as a private opportunity for many young Pacific men to explore urges that are otherwise suppressed in their cultural contexts. They become emotionally isolated because of this secrecy and lack of communication, which separates them from their sense of cultural identity and self-worth, in addition to isolating them from other people. One participant emphasised the impact of pornography’s virtual nature compared to real-life intimacy:

*“They’re just doing too much in porn, like, it’s not realistic.”*

This quote highlights the gap between virtual fantasy and actual experiences. This emotional disconnection is compounded by the taboo surrounding pornography consumption, as cultural silence on sexuality in Pacific communities prevents open discussions. Without the opportunity to seek support or guidance, individuals navigate their struggles alone, further isolating themselves from their cultural identity, relationships, and self-worth. This isolation reinforces the difficulty of reconciling cultural values with personal experiences, deepening the emotional divide. One participant reflected on the emotional impact of pornography, expressing how the initial excitement of discovering it shifted over time into feelings of uncertainty and detachment:

*“I know what you mean but, ahhh, oh, yo, at the start it’s, like, oh yeah, like it’s just exciting when you first find it out. Then when you do it and after you, oh yeah, all good but, I feel like I never categorise it, like, I just do it but, like, yo. But I kind of see it now. But when I do, it kinds of play with my head, when I have a relationship, like, I don’t want to be with that person, or am I just there for the sex or that?”*

*“That’s what I thought, like, porn, a new thing, like, what it’s done to my mind.”*

This quote illustrates the internal conflict caused by pornography, where the individual becomes confused about their intentions in relationships and their emotional connection to others. It emphasises how pornography can alter the user’s mindset, blurring the lines between physical and emotional intimacy, and leaving them unsure of whether they truly desire a meaningful relationship or are only seeking sexual satisfaction. This emotional disconnection further deepens the sense of isolation, as the individual struggles to make sense of their own desires within the context of their cultural and personal values. Another participant described how frequent exposure to pornography shifted their perception about women:

*“Yup, ahh, like, after I watched I just started seeing girls in a different way and started sexualising them in a different way. Even teachers and stuff.”*

This quote reflects how the consistent consumption of sexual content can lead to changes in how women are viewed, resulting in objectification. Instead of seeing people as whole individuals, the participant began to associate them with sexual thoughts and fantasies in all contexts of life, including in an educational setting at school. This shift not only alters interpersonal dynamics but also contributes to an emotional detachment, making genuine, respectful connections and relationships more difficult. Furthermore, it reinforces isolation by skewing how Pacific male youth relate to others on an emotional level.

## 4.2 | Theme 2: Addiction and Normalisation

This theme focuses on how the consumption of sexual content, particularly pornography, becomes second nature or normalised over time, often leading to addiction-like behaviours. The participants reflected on the complex relationship between addiction and normalisation, and the emotional and psychological consequences of this behaviour within Pacific communities. One participant emphasised how consuming porn has the same effect as a drug:

*“It’s like drugs when you take it you can get addicted to it. So, if you watch porn, you will get addicted to it.”*

This participant emphasises the link between porn and drug addiction, noting that frequent use distorts perceptions of intimacy and relationships. As pornography becomes a regular coping mechanism, it can objectify women and the way they are viewed. Frequent pornography consumption isolates individuals emotionally, creating confusion about desires and self-worth. This normalisation conflicts with cultural and religious values in Pacific communities, fostering guilt and shame. Such experiences led to the development of the two subthemes: 1. desensitisation of pornography and 2. cultural normalisation.

### 4.2.1 | Desensitisation of Pornography

Many young Pacific men became desensitised to sexual content after being exposed to pornography on a regular basis: what was once shocking or exciting had become normal and emotionally neutral. Their perceptions of intimacy, relationships, and

self-worth are all impacted by this acclimation, in addition to their sexual expectations. Their psychological reactions change throughout time as excessive or unreal representations of sex become more prevalent, undermining the emotional significance that has historically been attributed to sexual relationships. One participant described how pornography became a form of sexual education, revealing a disconnect between what is online and what is experienced in real life:

*“You can watch porn to learn how to do it, to make it easier for you.”*

This comment reflects how pornography can become normalised as a trusted guide for sexual knowledge, particularly in the absence of open discussion or comprehensive education. Such normalisation suggests a gradual desensitisation, where repeated exposure reduces critical awareness of its unrealistic or performative nature. Over time, pornography can shift from a source of curiosity to a framework that informs how some young men perceive intimacy and approach relationships, often privileging physical technique over emotional or cultural understanding. When asked about differentiating how they act in real life and what they see in porn, a participant said that

*“I never categorise it ... but, like, yo. I kind of see it now ... I don't want to actually be with that person, or am I just there for the sex?”*

This participant's emphasis on self-awareness signals the physiological effect of desensitisation, where the boundary between meaningful connection and physical gratification becomes unclear. The participant acknowledged that porn has reshaped how they evaluate relationships, creating a situation where emotional connections are secondary to sexual interest.

Another participant extended this idea, noting:

*“Yeah... porn is always there for you.”*

This comment encapsulates the habitual nature of reliance on pornography, how it can evolve from a form of entertainment to an emotional fallback. Over time, such dependency can reinforce the blurring of intention, distancing individuals from the relational and moral values often grounded in family or faith. Returning to a quote from a participant cited earlier, there is an emphasis on pornography changing the way some individuals perceive others:

*“I just started seeing girls in a different way and started sexualising them in a different way. Even teachers and stuff.”*

The quote demonstrates how the objectification of women in nonsexual contexts can result from the normalised consumption of sexual material. It appears that young people find it difficult to retain respectful and realistic views of women due to desensitisation, which blurs the lines between private fantasy and real social interactions.

#### 4.2.2 | Cultural Normalisation

While pornography is often regarded as taboo within Pacific cultures, particularly within Christian households. Pornography

has increasingly become normalised among young Pacific men through casual conversation, peer bonding, and humour. Despite cultural teachings that frame pornography as shameful or immoral, many participants spoke about its common presence in their daily lives, thus, revealing a generational shift where, amongst current Pacific men, access to porn and discussion about porn does not carry the shameful ambience it used to have. During the talanoa, this normalisation of pornography was often accompanied by open admissions of porn viewing, mocking, and laughter. A participant stated.

*“Cause when you feening [craving] for sex and you have nowhere to go ... like porn is always there for you.”*

There was cheering and laughter in response to this comment in the Talanoa faikava, demonstrating how sharing experiences with pornography has become normal and even a source of humour and solidarity among friends. Pornography is morphing into a light-hearted way to satisfy natural desires, separating it from the stigmatisation that has traditionally been attached to it. In addition to being a coping strategy, humour obscures the cultural nuance that pornography holds. It seems that humour is morphing pornography consumption amongst Pacific youth into a site of solidarity. Furthermore, the dissociation between culture and pornography seems to discourage critical thinking where there is now an emphasis on a conformity opposed to cultural values. The notion that pornography is ‘always there’ further illustrates how its normalisation has been aided by its accessibility via digital platforms. At a deeper level, this comment may also reflect an implicit comparison to women's availability, suggesting how pornography becomes a consistent and controllable outlet in contrast to real or relational intimacy. This highlights a gendered dimension within participants' narratives that connects accessibility with agency and desire. Additionally, young people today view porn as a readily available option, as opposed to people of prior generations, who might have had limited access. With pornography becoming increasingly available, it may become more difficult to have an open conversation within conventional cultural frameworks. When discussing whether participants would talk to younger siblings about porn, one participant joked:

*“Wait, I'll tell him to do it and have fun 'til he becomes wise.”*

This statement demonstrates how porn use is presented as a stage of maturing, an anticipated rite of passage rather than a significant problem, despite being immediately criticised by others. The advice's informal tone minimises the possible negative effects of porn and supports the idea that using porn to discover oneself is not only common but also unavoidable. This normalisation was further explored through a conversation around OnlyFans. When asked whether they viewed it as pornography, the group responded collectively. Despite acknowledging that OnlyFans fits within the realm of pornography, its popularity and social acceptance seem to override traditional judgments. The participants noted that many in their age group know people who are on the platform or subscribe to it:

*“In a business point of view, it's a good thing, but culturally it's wrong.”*

This contradiction illustrates the conflict between cultural norms and modern-day realities. Although the participants' cultural upbringing emphasised the moral taboo of using pornographic material, it appears that it is becoming increasingly difficult to enforce such values due to the widespread accessibility of porn and concurrent financial gain. The idea that porn is 'normal' is no longer purely a product of Western influence, but rather of a change in peer culture in the area, where even activity that is considered culturally wrong is reframed by reference to social media trends and economic opportunities. This tension is further complicated by cultural double standards. When asked about how they would react to a Pacific Islander woman on OnlyFans versus a white woman, the group responded:

*"I'll judge them and feel bad for the family."*

Cultural norms are gendered in this context; Pacific men may normalise their own porn viewing while condemning women in their community more severely for engaging in it. The limited use of cultural standards, where men are given more leeway in managing sexual expression, and the permanence of societal shame, are both reflected in this double standard.

These contradictions suggest that while porn is becoming normalised socially, it is not fully accepted within the deeper frameworks of Pacific culture. Instead, what emerges is a silent conflict in a space where traditional values are acknowledged but often bypassed, creating internal confusion and communal contradictions.

### 4.3 | Theme 3: Digital Influence

Technology is largely responsible for the rising consumption and normalisation of pornography, which has changed how young Pacific men access and interact with it in the digital age. Unlike earlier generations, when access to sexual materials was either restricted or concealed, today's youth are constantly exposed to explicit content through online communities, streaming services, and social media (Minihan et al. 2025). Pornography is a nearly inevitable aspect of their online experience due to the combination of passive exposure and active participation caused by this digital overload. A participant emphasised how easy and convenient porn is to access:

*"Fast and easy, there and driving somewhere else and finding. Just go on the bed and finish it off."*

This quote reflects how pornography has become integrated into everyday life through digital platforms. The convenience and privacy of smartphones, laptops, and tablets allow individuals to engage with sexual content without leaving their environment, reducing the barriers that once made porn taboo or difficult to access. This ease of access also reinforces impulsive behaviours, encouraging habitual or compulsive use that is disconnected from emotional or relational contexts. The influence of social media platforms and digital trends also plays a key role in shaping young people's perceptions of sex, intimacy, and self-worth. When asked why younger generations might be drawn to platforms like OnlyFans, participants reflected on the power of social media influencers and changing norms:

*"It's kind of become the social norm in a way with the amount of influencers that do it. ... To them it's just social norms."*

*"They just go straight in ... they just see the money ... and then after, the actions."*

These reflections highlight how the digital environment fosters new cultural scripts where online visibility, quick money, and perceived fame are valued. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram often blur the lines between personal branding and sexual content, leading many young people to view participation in adult content creation as aspirational or empowering. This digital narrative clashes with traditional Pacific values such as respect, faith, and humility, leaving youth caught between online acceptance and cultural expectations. Another participant raised concern about AI and catfishing.

*"If you post a lot on Facebook, people can take your photos and create digital fakes ... use it to blackmail or steal your identity."*

This understanding of the risks associated with technology indicates that some young people are starting to have doubts about the digital world they live in. Even so, the lure of digital influence is still powerful, particularly when paired with financial constraints and lack of alternatives. In the direct words of one participant:

*"Easy source of money."*

#### 4.3.1 | Impact of Pornography on Self-Perception

The impact of pornography goes beyond how people behave and perceive others; it also has a big impact on how people see themselves. This effect is frequently shaped for many young Pacific men by the conflict between personal identity, masculinity, and cultural ideals. As individuals interact with sexual content in private online, their image of themselves is warped by false representations and morally contradictory ideas. Participants reflected on how pornography had changed the way they thought and behaved. One described the conflicting feelings it produced between emotional connection and physical satisfaction:

*"Like, after you watch porn, you're relaxed ... but during sex it still feels good."*

This reflection highlights a separation between emotional fulfilment and physical release. While pornography offers immediate gratification, it lacks the emotional reciprocity that gives intimacy its meaning. Another participant reinforced this notion, remarking:

*"Porn is...there for you... fast and easy... just go on the bed and finish it off."*

Together, these comments illustrate how pornography can normalise a transactional view of sex, where satisfaction is achieved without emotional involvement. Over time, this may shape how individuals perceive themselves as partners, reinforcing the idea that emotional connection and pleasure are entirely separate experiences. Another participant emphasised the pattern of behaviour that made them question their self-control:

*“It’s like drugs ... when you take it, you can get addicted to it. So, if you watch porn, you will get addicted to it.”*

The participant compares pornography to substance abuse, which might take priority over one’s own beliefs or goals. Young men’s increasing understanding that frequent exposure to pornography can affect their agency and their perception of their capacity for deliberate, socially responsible choices is reflected in this analogy to drugs. It presents a story of dependency that might erode one’s sense of value and confirm shame or guilt. There was also a strong link between pornography use and how participants perceived themselves in relation to cultural expectations:

*“We were not allowed to talk about those things, because in our culture, it’s seen as something that’s bad.”*

This demonstrates how young men’s perceptions of their own actions are influenced by internalised shame, which is affected by the societal silence surrounding sex. People who use pornography frequently do so in secret because it is rarely mentioned in Pacific homes or communities. This can cause feelings of insecurity and a negative self-perception by reinforcing a sense of moral failure. Given that discussions of both sex and pornography are culturally restricted, addressing this silence may require culturally grounded, intergenerational conversations or education that frame sexual topics in ways consistent with Pacific values of respect and relational wellbeing.

#### 4.3.2 | Tension Between Digital and Traditional Cultural Values

The conflict between digital exposure and traditional Pacific cultural values emerged as a key tension in the talanoa. While pornography and sexual content are easily accessible online, they remain taboo in many Pacific households, leaving young men to navigate these influences without guidance.

*“You never see it in Pacific families. I think it’s just because everyone goes through it, so it brings shame to you. Like, I know I’m not supposed to be doing it but I be doing it anyway.”*

This reflects how social guilt and collective silence underpin young men’s understandings of sexuality. Ideas about what is considered ‘appropriate’ sexual behaviour are often shaped not through direct discussion but through cultural and religious values that emphasise modesty, respect, and moral restraint. Because both sex and pornography are rarely discussed within Pacific homes, young men internalise these expectations indirectly while navigating a digital environment that normalises sexual content. This dissonance between cultural ideals and lived experience contributes to internal conflict, shame, and secrecy. The normalisation of platforms like OnlyFans further complicates this tension. While some participants acknowledged it as a means of financial survival, others expressed concern about how it misrepresents Pacific identity, raising questions about how cultural values are negotiated in digital spaces:

*“It makes us Pacific people look bad.”*

There is a deeper cultural unease in this statement. Family, honour, humility, and respect for the body are frequently upheld values in Pacific cultures. These ideals are in sharp contrast to the earnings from displays of sexuality through internet platforms, which causes anxiety and feeds the belief that digital displays of sexuality damage cultural reputation. The discrepancy between Pacific youth’s private porn consumption and their public judgement of people who produce or distribute sexual content was brought to light by another participant:

*“That’s someone’s daughter ... but it [explicit content] would’ve never been exposed if they never did it in the first place.”*

The passage demonstrates the moral conundrum, those who create or are exposed to sexual content are nonetheless stigmatised, even while consumption is accepted and even justified. This double standard highlights persistent societal tensions and inconsistencies in attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and accountability.

## 5 | Discussion

This study explored how Pacific male youth in New Zealand experience and interpret pornography within their unique cultural and social contexts.

Three major themes emerged from the findings: (i) cultural silence and shame around sexuality, (ii) addiction and normalisation, and (iii) digital influence. The findings from this study are consistent with existing research that explores the impact of cultural norms, religious teachings, and digital media on young people’s sexual behaviours and perceptions.

The findings support and extend existing literature by showing how deeply entrenched cultural and religious values within Pacific communities contribute to a sense of shame and taboo around sexuality, which often leads to emotional isolation and disconnection. Participants frequently described the inability to discuss sexual matters openly with family due to cultural taboos, consistent with XXXX (2020) observations about silence in Tongan families and the discussions of Moeke-Pickering and colleagues (2018) on the tension Pacific youth face between traditional values and modern realities. This silence creates a void where pornography becomes an accessible, private outlet, one that is felt with guilt, stigma, and confusion. Furthermore, participants likened pornography consumption to drug use, indicating compulsive and habitual engagement that aligns with Binnie (2024), who discussed how frequent exposure leads to desensitisation and changes in emotional and relational expectations. As pornography becomes normalised through humour, peer bonding, and digital accessibility, it also distorts perceptions of sex and relationships, reinforcing problematic views such as the objectification of women and emotional detachment, as shown in similar findings by Laumann and colleagues (2006). The tension between cultural identity and modern digital behaviour was heightened by the influence of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and OnlyFans, which not only normalise sexual content but also frame it as a form of economic opportunity and self-expression. This was consistent with Carlson and Dreher’s (2018) work on the generational gap

in digital literacy and the ways digital platforms influence cultural expression.

These findings align with how deeply embedded cultural and religious silences around sexuality in Pacific communities create barriers to open dialogue, leaving pornography as a private yet harmful space for sexual exploration among youth (Tuesday et al. 2024; Cammock et al. 2023). The contradiction between traditional expectations (e.g., respect, humility, and family honour) and the appeal of financial independence and fame through explicit content highlights the ongoing identity conflict faced by Pacific youth. Many participants noted that digital influences created unrealistic standards, blurred boundaries between intimacy and gratification, and challenged their sense of masculinity and self-worth. Such experiences are also echoed by Twenge and Campbell (2018), who found digital media increases mental distress in minority youth.

### 5.1 | The Way Forward

While open discussions about sexuality may not be universally desired, participants' reflections point to the importance of culturally safe spaces where such conversations can occur if and when youth feel comfortable. Pacific frameworks such as talanoa and veivosaki-yaga offer approaches that respect collective values of humility, reciprocity, and trust (Tagicakiverata and Nilan 2018). Through these methods, dialogue does not necessarily mean full disclosure but instead relational engagement through sharing stories, humour, and experiences in ways that uphold cultural integrity.

Future initiatives could build on these traditions to foster digital literacy, healthy masculinity, sexual education, and emotional wellbeing. By codesigning programmes with Pacific youth, churches, and families, communities can address pornography and sexuality in ways that honour both faith and modern realities. This study therefore highlights not only the challenges faced by young Pacific men navigating digital environments but also the potential for culturally grounded, youth-led responses that balance respect, belonging, and open-minded learning.

### 6 | Limitation

The current study provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of young Pacific men in relation to cultural silence, pornography consumption, and digital media's influence. However, there are several limitations. One key limitation is the study's exclusive focus on male participants, which limits the generalisability of the findings to the broader Pacific community, especially considering the potential for differing experiences and perceptions among Pacific women and gender diverse individuals. Additionally, Fijian youth dominate at 64% which is not representative of the Pacific youth population in New Zealand. The study's reliance on qualitative talanoa methodology, while rich in context and cultural relevance, does not allow for quantifiable analysis of the extent of digital harm or its mental health impacts across the wider Pacific youth population. The subjective nature of the data means that the experiences captured may not reflect the full spectrum of viewpoints within the community. Additionally, the study did not explore intergenerational

perspectives, and examining how older Pacific generations view digital media and sexual expression could offer a deeper understanding of shifting cultural dynamics. Future research could expand on these findings by including participants of all genders, employing quantitative methods to assess the broader implications of digital media use, and investigating how these issues affect Pacific youth over time through longitudinal studies. Integrating culturally grounded approaches, such as community-led interventions or peer education models, could also provide valuable insights into strategies for promoting digital well-being within Pacific communities.

### 7 | Conclusion

In conclusion, the study's findings showcase the complex connection that exists between digital media, cultural norms, and young Pacific men's sexual health. The results emphasise the important role that cultural shame and silence about sexuality play in fostering emotional detachment, stigma, and loneliness. Furthermore, young Pacific men's perceptions of intimacy, relationships, and self-worth are significantly impacted by the normalisation of pornography and the ease of access to digital content. The study emphasises how traditional cultural norms and the modern world are at odds, and how young people must balance these opposing forces despite a lack of healthy guidance. Although the results are insightful, they also highlight the need for more study with a variety of perspectives, especially from women and older generations, to give a more thorough picture of digital harm and how it affects Pacific communities.

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#### Conflicts of Interest

The authors report there are no competing interest to declare.

#### Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, E.F., upon reasonable request.

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